

THORNEY SOCIETY

Charity number: 298235

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 118 – APRIL 2011

The Settlers of the Fens: an animated film Written, Directed and Produced by Sean Riches Created by local people 9 to 69



The film is finally completed! No-one had envisaged the quantity of work and time necessary. Sean has finished editing and hopes those who were involved like what has been done with their work.

It is about 4 minutes long. See it on

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3OJ3_9Fap8

or at Thorney Library by request.

Thanks to the Greater Fens Museum Partnership for Renaissance funding and to North level drainage Board for their help with the venue.

Copies are available in most formats from Sean, 270282.

Sean has also made a 3 minute edit to show some of the behind-the-scenes activities, efforts and people involved in the making of our film: see this on

www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV2elUPX23I

Society AGM

Thursday 5th May 2011
Bedford hall, 7.30pm.

Observers and prospective members are welcome, too, so try to bring a friend. There will be drinks and nibbles, then the AGM will be followed by the

Hugh Cave Memorial Lecture

Rex Sly, local author, talking on his latest researches on Fenland families and history. This will be the third Hugh Cave Memorial Lecture: you may remember that the late Hugh Cave was the main founder of the Thorney Society and our one-time President. There is no charge and everyone is welcome.

Nominations are invited for the Thorney Society Committee:

The current Committee is willing to stand for re-election, which speaks well for the members' determination and enthusiasm. If you would like to be part of this team there is space for you! Please ring Dorothy Halfhide on 270634 and volunteer; if you would like to nominate someone, drop in your written nomination, with a seconder, into the Post Office to Jill or Jaquie, as soon as possible.



Museum

Displays

Following expert advice (under the Renaissance SHARE scheme mentioned in a previous issue) **the old map of Thorney Village** which local people particularly liked, has been moved to a more appropriate location among the Victorian displays. This involved moving an electric heater so that the extra heat didn't cause any damage. We are grateful for Mark Harris's help and support in fitting in the job of moving and re-configuring the display boards.

Expert advice (again the much appreciated SHARE scheme) also led to hours of work on **fabric conservation**: a check in December showed early evidence of moth damage so 3 uniforms were sent for freezing at St Albans through our conservator contacts. When they were returned to us Dorothy Halfhide, Jayne Sheraton and Irene Brookes used a



(Netting removed for photograph)

special vacuum cleaner and netting to clean all the clothing before checking for and documenting any problems. Miss Pywell's nurse uniform dress was home-made, and in excellent condition, with a hospital-issue apron. Mr Batterbee's naval uniform was very small, but then we noticed that he joined the Navy when only 15 and was 17 when at the battle of



Jutland. Betty Spridgeon's Women's Land Army Uniform was in very good shape – the hat looked absolutely new! This work is the beginning of reorganisation of the War displays. Unfortunately when you go into the room you will hardly be able to see a difference, but it is important background work which does maintain general museum standards.

Spitfire and Dornier Bomber: still involving improvements in the War room, by the time we open there will be two new models, both of the type of plane that would have flown over Thorney in the Second World War. Thank you to Ray Walker and Steve Ross's son, who have spent many hours perfecting these.

Training

Last Autumn members took part in more excellent Share training schemes, on marketing and education links to Museums.

Outreach workshop

The education link followed on in February with a day's workshop with children from the Duke of Bedford School led by Sally Austin, Education Officer of Ely Museum. This time the focus was on creative writing, linking with life in Thorney in the days of drainage – conflict between the Adventurers and the Fen Tigers, comparisons between the way of life now and in centuries past. Two classes were split into groups and were welcomed in turn in the Drainage Board, the Museum, and to a debate in the Bedford Hall led by Cornelius Vermuyden (in costume), while at school they were treated to various activities including handling drainage tools, a balladeer and a visiting ghost. Thorney Society volunteers were observers, picking up tips and gaining experience for extending our own educational activities later. (The adults involved managed to link with the local café to have delicious lunch!)

Education boxes

We can now supply items for “Life in 17th Century Thorney – Vermuyden, the Earls of Bedford, Drainage and Settlers”, “Wise Woman - old medical remedies”, “Victorian Thorney”, “Farming in Grandad's Day”, “War in Thorney”. There is some overlap, but all items in boxes have been listed and will be computerised in a way that people can use them easily in the future, either within the Museum for enquiries or a visiting group or on outreach visits.

The Duke of Bedford School borrowed some material about evacuees; Bob Dewing was interviewed by children at school about what it was like to be at school in Thorney when it first opened during the second World War, describing the air-raid shelters at school, using gas masks, and rationing.

Opening at Easter: 24th April

Carol Fuller is preparing the Rota for Museum volunteers. We couldn't open without you and your help is really appreciated and eagerly sought once more. Don't worry if you have never done this before as you would be partnered by an experienced person, or shown the ropes beforehand. Volunteers -old and new - please contact Carol on 270234 or handfuller@aol.com



Your Memories of Schooldays in Thorney:

How are school memories getting on? What were YOU like? Who was your best friend? Was the school dinner any good and what was your favourite food?

We are expecting lots of anecdotes very soon – don't forget! Drop your jottings at the Post Office, into the Museum, or at 108 Wisbech Road.

Abbey Christmas Tree Festival

It is pleasing that the Society took part again this year and contributed to its success. The theme was Giving. Many thanks to Jayne and Ken Sheriton for providing the tree for the Festival, and to Steve Halfhide and another member for all the decorating.

Recent Fund Raising Events.



The snowy weather was beautiful but made life difficult for organisers, stall holders and visitors, but thanks to everybody's support the profit was nearly £800, which is excellent in these cash-strapped times.

The Chairman, Michael Sly, says this was a true team effort with everyone pulling together, and the link with the local business at Pigeons Farm remains strong, thanks to Linda and Bob

Moore. A special thank you to the children from the Abbey Singers who sang so engagingly and entertained everyone, with their leaders of course.



The Thorney Society Dinner

March 5th 2011 at the Bedford Hall

You can see it was fun, and we managed to raise nearly £850 from the raffle, capably arranged by Carol and Howard Fuller.

This time we had whole spit roasted pig, with crackling that can only be described as mouth-wateringly gorgeous! The younger element danced the night away, while the more senior amongst us retired to the lounge to chat over coffee.

Thank you all the supporters, and we hope to welcome you again next year.



Planning the Summer Fayre already!

Sunday, July 10th, Bedford Hall.

There will be stalls inside and out again this year. Stalls, games and rides for children outside, and special Victorian Afternoon Teas inside, with exhibitions and displays. People in Victorian costume specially welcome!

The Society members will already be aware of the loss of two well known members. Last Autumn Roy Marriott died after a long and brave fight against cancer: he was Treasurer of the Society for some years and had retired to live nearer close family with his wife Pearina in Coates. Jane Flint died suddenly after a short illness this winter. Our sincere condolences to their families.

Thorney Abbey booklet reprinted

This well-researched and popular short history of Thorney Abbey by Dorothy Halfhide is for sale at £1.50. The reprint was sponsored by the Thorney Society as a community link with the Abbey and was just in time for the Snowdrop Festival. If you would like to send one to someone abroad who used to live here, for instance, they are attractive informative and light to post – ring 270634 or buy in the Abbey.



Broadway Cemetery, Peterborough

The Friends of Broadway Cemetery invite you to contact them if you have an interesting story to tell of relatives or friends who are buried there. They are willing to help with research if necessary.

Contact: John Thompson, 22 William Nichols Court, Huntly Grove, PE1 4DW



Horrible History

Quotes from “Wicked Words”, part of “Horrible Histories” by Terry Deary.

This series is primarily intended for children but adults may find the books funny and sometimes informative!

“In the late 1600s you could escape being hanged if you could read aloud the first verse of the 51st psalm. This proved you were “educated” and you could get away with murder....or to be accurate you got away with having your left thumb branded. (Though if you committed a second hanging crime then you went to the gallows even if you could read the whole of the Bible backwards.)

Reciting this ‘neck verse’ was scrapped in 1705 when it was realized uneducated villains learned the words by heart!”

DR SAMUEL JOHNSON published the first important dictionary of the English language in 1755 after nine years of work with the aid of six assistants. He wasn’t a very tactful man, as shown in his snide definition of oats: “A grain which is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.” He later said “The most beautiful sight a Scotsman can see is the road that will lead him to England!” The dictionary did not contain the rude words of the time, though.

“In 1623 the English Parliament passed a law making it illegal to swear. You were fined for saying shocking things like, *by my troth*, or the unspeakably rude, *upon my life*. It couldn’t last, of course. In 1649 the laws were changed. After that swearing was punishable by death!”

Before the Earls of Bedford....?

Geoffrey de Montmorency, sometimes styled “the rich” was the second son of Herve de Montmorency, Grand-butler of France, and came into England at the time of William the Conqueror. One source says that when appointed Chamberlain to the Conqueror’s daughter-in-law, Matilda, the wife of Henry I, the king granted to Geoffrey de Montmorency the Lordship of Thorney, in the Isle of Ely. (Another source says that Thorney was in Somerset.)

However, Geoffrey’s third son Robert, “was Lord-Paramount of the Isle of Ely, Lord of Marisco, of Grimesby, of Walsoken, of Thorney, of Holbeach, of Newton, of Tydd-St-Giles, of Walton, etc.”

Can anyone else shed any light on this point in history?



Bodies in the Bank

As told by Trevor Bevis

We have heard the tales of the back-breaking work involved in digging the drainage channels to transform the Fens into the bread-basket of Britain - but not without loss of life.

The work involved not only Englishmen but thousands of foreigners, many religious refugees, and prisoners from the English Civil War.

It is not generally realised that the prisoners were members of Scotland’s Northern Foot Regiment from Dunbar and Worcester and Dutch sailors captured at the sea battle off Portland Bill, Dorset. Hundreds of prisoners were marched to the Fens and set to work cutting the drains, improving natural rivers, building embankments and erecting the wind engines.

Many hardy Highlanders and sailors were no match for the Fens and hundreds died of their labours. The Drainage commissioners clothed the living, but those who died from malarial related diseases and exhaustion could not be conveyed to proper burial grounds. The money would not stretch to that and Fen Parishioners would not have them interred in local churchyards. The bodies were buried where the prisoners died, in the river banks and beside the rivers and drains.

Happily, on the advent of peace, some prisoners married Fen girls and helped to maintain the drains. When we look at the embankments, our eyes see a burial ground of the men who gave us the bountiful Fens. The debt is entirely ours.



Will you, won’t you....

Have you ever thought of including a donation to the Thorney Society or the Heritage Museum in your Will? Our founder Hugh Cave left some money which funds an annual lecture, for example.

There are several projects in the background at the Museum. If you are interested in sponsoring anything, please contact Howard Fuller, the Treasurer, on 01733 270234.



Railway Enthusiast?

Have a look at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kJDxUrnMEo> for a surprise!

Subscriptions – and Handling Appeal!

Thank you to the many members who have been helpful and prompt and have already sent payments in (£10 or £5 seniors). Don't forget you can see Jill or Jackie at Thorney Post Office, or send to Sue Squires at
3 The Meadows, Market Deeping, PE6 8PE.
Subs fall due in February. Due – you can pay through www.charitychoice.co.uk

We are urgently looking for a new Membership Secretary and eager for a volunteer. This is a job that can be done from your home if necessary, but if you wanted to get out and meet people and canvas for members, that would be fine too! If you would like to know more, please ask Sue Squires on 01778 346792, or just leave your name in the Post Office.



DIARY DATES 2010–2011

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| May 5th
(Thursday) | Society AGM, 7.30pm at the Bedford Hall. Observers welcome.
Illustrated talk by: Rex Sly, local fenland author, as seen on TV!
All welcome at no charge, wine and nibbles included. |
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| April 24th | Easter Sunday - Museum opens for the new season.
Volunteers for rota – Please ring Carol Fuller on 270234.
Carol has managed to increase the pool of volunteers who do a duty in the Museum in the past few years, and would like to do the same again. In this way no-one has too many Sundays taken up – but you can volunteer for as many as you like! We really do need you! |
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| May 28th
(Sunday) | Opening of Peterborough Green Festival in Cathedral Square.
We will be presenting a stall this year and will need manning help. |
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| June 11th/12th
(Sat and Sun) | Park Farm Vintage and Open Week-end. |
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| June 25th/26th
(Sat. and Sun) | Peterborough Heritage Weekend, part of the Peterborough Festival, again in the centre of Peterborough and promises to be even bigger than last year. Lots of re-enactments going on in the Cathedral Precincts; Dorothy Halfhide will be giving a talk.
Great stalls – again we will need help with manning. |
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| July 10th
(Sun) | Summer Fayre at the Bedford Hall. Our aim is to make the Fair even more child friendly, without forgetting the entertainment for adults.
We shall need your support so please put the date in your diary! |
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| Aug 27/28th
(Sat and Sun.) | Abbey Flower Festival.
The theme is “This Green and Pleasant Land” and luckily for us Anne Looker has again offered to produce the Thorney Society Display.
Details are still being planned – thank you Ann. |
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New Members

The Society is delighted to welcome Joyce and David Jones of Thorney; Margaret and Eric Rayner of Thorney; John Snushall of Peterborough.