



Members' News

February 2022 Issue 1.

Welcome to Whitstable Museum's Members' News, updating you on the latest developments at the Museum as we begin, tentatively, to emerge from Covid.

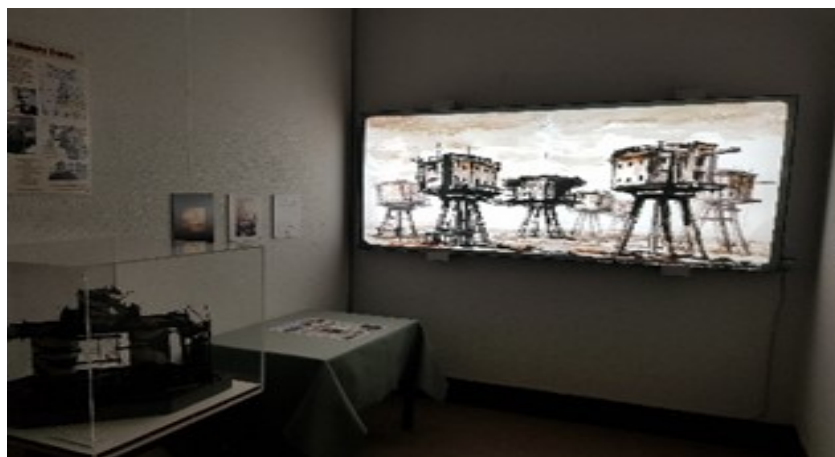
Despite all the restrictions, the Museum has achieved a lot over the past two years, improving our displays with restoration of our whelk boat in the front courtyard, Invicta now presented in its full glory, and a new community focused exhibition space. Even with the need to wear masks and apply hand gel, our visitor numbers have stayed pretty strong but we can't wait to fully open up, when the time is right.

Martin Prestage membership@whitstablemuseum.org

Small is beautiful

A year ago, the Trustees decided to open up a specific space in the Museum for exhibitions by local organisations. This has proved to be hugely popular and has so far included displays by Timescape Kent (Nelson and the East Swale Squadron) and most recently artworks by the local artist Anna Keen.

Steve Keeler, lead trustee for exhibitions at the Museum, is really pleased with the response and is now planning future displays for 2022. "We have been approached by a number of



Illuminated artwork in our compact exhibition space

organisations including Whitstable Yacht Club, Whitstable Historical Society and Birdwise East Kent. Other small exhibitions are in the pipeline."

Any organisation wishing to use the space should contact Steve at steve.keeler@whitstablemuseum.org

School visits re-start

We were delighted that school visits have re-started with 50 pupils from Westmeads Infant School attending over two days. Their learning theme was "Inventions and Discoveries", with one group trying to understand how Invicta worked and what it was made of. The other half explored the museum and looked at fossils and stone age tools until 'swap over.' In the days after the visit, we have been impressed that several pupils have brought their families to the museum, including two pupils that missed the school visit due to illness.



Admiral Horatio Nelson

A flourishing future for *Floreat*

Three Museum volunteers are leading the restoration of an 80-year-old Whitstable whelk boat called *Floreat*. Out in the front courtyard in all weathers, what exactly are they doing? Dick, Phil, and Mike can explain all.

Why are you repairing a land-locked whelk boat?

“*Floreat* is part of the rich history of whelk fishing in Whitstable. Owned by Derrick West, whose family have been fishing in Whitstable for more than 120 years, it was commissioned in 1948, and is now one of the few remaining traditional whelk boats. The design of the boat, clinker built with steamed oak frames and overlapping pitch pine planking, fastened with copper nails (rivets), has hardly changed in centuries.”

She was constructed at the Whitstable shipyard of Anderson, Rigden and Perkins. Whelk boats were brought to Whitstable from Sheringham, North Norfolk, when several families including the Wests, migrated south in the 1900s, bringing with them new whelk fishing techniques.

How did you come together?

“I met Mike when working at the RSPB reserve in Blean”, says Dick. “My working life was spent with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, then Lloyds of London, so the *Floreat* project continues my nautical connections and my love of engineering and wood working. Phil Begent agreed to join us when we realised the scale of what we had taken on”.

How long has the Museum had *Floreat*?

She was given to us in 1997 and was hidden away behind the Museum shop after being craned in over the roof tops. The challenge was then to move a 3 ton boat into a new position in our new front courtyard.

What special features does a whelk boat have?

Floreat has a stern reinforced with oak strips and steel rail caps to allow the heavy whelk pots to be hauled over the sides. The broad beam means whole strings of weighted whelk pots, laid on the



Dick Church at work

seabed, can be brought aboard.

So what needs doing to the *Floreat*?

“Restoring *Floreat* is taking many hours of patient work”, says Dick : “scraping the flaking paint from her hull took almost a year, amidst other jobs such as dealing with rot. Now *Floreat* is in position in the courtyard, we have had to create a waterproof ‘shell’ from scaffolding and tarpaulins to protect the boat from the elements,

Have you kept the West family updated on the project?

“Yes, Derek West himself has been to see *Floreat* and he was said that he was pleased with the work in progress.”

First catch your whelk

Whelks are carnivorous predators and of the same family as land snails. When the whelk pots are laid on the seabed, they are baited with crab or fish parts. The whelk pot has only a small entrance hole surrounded by a ‘crinny’ net (from crinoline). Once the whelk enters the pot it is trapped.

Handle with enthusiasm

Touch and museums can be difficult bed fellows. Whilst touch is invaluable in helping us relate to objects, those same objects may be irreplaceable, thousands of years old, or extremely delicate. This is where 'handling objects' come in, again relevant as covid restrictions reduce.

'Handling objects' can be either replicas or sufficiently robust or commonplace to allow frequent handling. Indeed, a whole industry has developed manufacturing replicas for museums, schools and exhibitions. Whitstable Museum is increasing its range, which now includes larger objects such as a replica stone age axe, an ancient fossil (genuine) which could be mistaken for a cannon ball, an ammonite (genuine), and a replica tool made from an antler. For some time, we have also had a 'lucky dip' where children find objects amidst the wood shavings, and a box where children try to identify objects like bullet cartridges and bottle stoppers.



Some of the Museum's handling objects on display

"Handling objects are a great way of leading children on a journey. We ask them what they think the object is and encourage them with gentle prompts to tell us the story," says Trustee Peter Banbury.

Peter is keen for Museum Guides to encourage children to try out the new handling objects. They are displayed on the research desk opposite the Shop, complete with questions for Guides to ask and background information.

Record Museum Visitors!

Visitor numbers have been rising since we reopened in May. Whitstable Museum had record numbers of children in August and we broke the monthly record in October, December and January. Whilst overall we are about three quarters of our best year in 2019, confidence is clearly returning.

The Heritage Open Days in September and the Nelson launch, Fun Palace and Halloween events in October created good interest. Visitors and volunteers say they feel safe as we have retained most of our covid precautions.

Heritage print sales this year are already the best ever, with two months to go! Gordon Lewns' beach scene, the aerial panoramas and Tankerton Estate maps being the most popular.



Membership cards

Whenever you come into the Museum as a member entry is free. All you need do is tell the volunteer at reception that you are a member. You will be warmly welcomed.

Our membership year runs from the beginning of April and occasionally I am asked by members or prospective members if they will get a membership card. We do provide a 'cut out and keep' version which appears on your renewal letter but to be honest, we prefer to trust people and not issue individual cards.

You can always contact me on this or anything else, at membership@whitstblemuseum.org. I would love to hear from you.

Martin Prestage , WCM&G Membership Secretary.