



# NEWSLETTER

Issue 7: January 2010

<http://fotsm.org.uk>

Two thousand and nine proved to have been an exceptionally good year for the Friends and the [museum](#). Membership is up and visitor numbers have repeatedly broken monthly record figures. Lets hope that 2010 will be even better, as you can see by the line up of events up to summer we are off to a good start.

Due to changes in how future accounts are to be reported we need to change our constitution. Any change needs to be approved at a General Meeting, following 28 days notice to all members. It thus seems a perfect time to bring the whole constitution up to date. Once updated it will, of course, be made available to all members of the Friends. Watch out for more information in the next couple of issues.

Matt writes in 'In [Curator's Corner](#)' what could be his last article as curator of the Salt Museum!

Robert Marshall, Editor.

## **Forthcoming Events**

### **Lost Buildings of West Cheshire**

Launch night Jan. 14 and runs 15 January - 14 March.

An exhibition exploring local buildings from the last 2,000 years that have now vanished. Why did they disappear? A wealth of photographs and archaeological artefacts will be on display with information on the importance of preserving buildings and their stories for the future.

Feb. 4 **[Vale Royal Abbey](#) - a failed enterprise**, an evening Talk with Tony Bostock. Tony, aka '[The History Detective](#)', will be telling us about the history of this well-known Cheshire Abbey - from its foundation to its eventual demise.

Feb. 16 **All the fun of the Orbit - an evening talk with Hugh Beggs**. This is a light-hearted talk about the many ways that orbiting the Sun affects our everyday lives.

Mar. 11 **Not So Solid Ground** with Colin Edmondson. An illustrated talk based on a guided walk from the [Lion Salt Works](#) along the Trent & Mersey Canal to Marbury Lane.

**Never Had It So Good?** Launch night Mar. 18. and runs 19 March - 6 June.

An exhibition portraying everyday life in Northwich during the 1950s. With original artefacts, images and music from the period.

**Mar. 28 Guided Walk with Colin Edmondson**. Starting from the Lion Saltworks, at 10:30 a.m. Colin will take us on a tour around the area discussed in the talk on 'Not So Solid Ground.' See flyer for details.

Apr. 27 **Growing up in Liverpool in the 1950s** - an evening talk with Jim Finn.

Jim was a pupil at Liverpool Collegiate School and at the age of thirteen had a job, as an errand boy, with Sampson's the butchers in Prescott Road. Come along to find out what life was like for a young teenager in Liverpool during the fifties.

**May 12 Visit to [Blackden Trust](#)**.

Blackden is in the shadow of Jodrell Bank, a place where ancient history sits next to modern technology. Blackden is the home of Alan Garner, author of *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* - based on local legend to do with Alderley Edge. The tour will start at 2 p.m. and finish with tea and biscuits at 4 p.m. The cost will be £6. Details to follow around March.

## **Previous Events**

### **'A Poor Man's Heritage'**

(Minstrels Meet Museum's Ghosts)

Report by Angela Jones

Friends of the Salt Museum were given a second chance to see 'A Poor Mans Heritage' on Thursday 24 September, when Roy Clinging's compilation of songs and music of the nineteenth century lower classes was re-created in the historic setting of the meeting room of the Northwich Union Workhouse Board of Guardians, known today as the Salt Museum!

It being our (Barrie, my husband, accompanied me) first experience of this performance, we were not disappointed, and both of us thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Its unique blend of narrative, rhyme, music and drama were informative, entertaining and above all most enjoyable.

How aptly we were transported back in history to such difficult times when the



'Enclosures Act' drove so many farmers and cottagers off their lands (1760-1840), the hardships and oppression suffered by workers in the mines and factories, and the failure of the now infamous 1834 'Poor Law Amendment Act', which, although intended to relieve poverty, resulted in driving more and more people into the workhouse.

Whilst the subject is of course sad, we were treated to songs which ranged in tone from calm and contemplative, to optimistic and stoic, to those with much humour injected, which to me attested to the power of the human spirit to overcome hardship. Concertinas, fiddles, bouzouki, mandolin, guitars and percussion instruments were all adeptly played by Roy Clinging, Dave Russell, Neil Brookes and Mary Clinging, with Nick Mitchell narrating.

Songs included such traditional songs as 'Rigs of the Times', 'The Poacher's Fate' - no sympathy for them from the landowners, 'The Song of Edward Lambourn' - a first hand account from workhouse inmates, 'Picking Oakum' - and many other broadside ballads.

Barrie particularly enjoyed Mary Clinging's song about the abuse of two women by the Warden but his taste is questionable. I liked the song which described workhouse punishments rendered appropriate for such crimes as 'neglect of work' - a missed meal, 'swearing and abusive language' - being locked up, and for anyone who dared to 'abscond' - a whipping. I think these were put to the tune of 'Oh Dear What Can the Matter Be', which provided just the right touch of irony for the plight of the inmates! Optimistic 'Hope for the Best' and the more downcast 'Out in the Cold', along with the determination to make the best of a bad job in 'The Days when I was Hard Up', to the hugely enjoyable 'Women Flogger's Lament of Marylebone Workhouse', the whole experience was richly rewarding. We were reminded of when bread was 4 pence a loaf (now equivalent to 1½ new pence), the life of

penury for the labourers and the hunger of poverty, which if insufficient to kill, then the cold was. Not least of course, the fact that children were working long hours in the mines without any thought given to the damage this did to their health, (no Health and Safety Act then!).

The clothes and props were fittingly and appropriately deployed to represent what might have been created by a nineteenth century village, with flat caps, bowlers, boaters, and of course the top hats of the gentlemen farmers. I particularly liked the image of the narrator's top hat and coat as he stood on the lectern and the ragged peasant clothes worn by the minstrels. In the austerity of the workhouse setting, everything gelled perfectly, providing a picture of the day-to-day life, conditions, work and punishments for those within such establishments, with historical facts, contemporary accounts and music. A superb performance.



Thanks to Tom Hughes for organising this event. Thanks also to Matt Wheeler for his ongoing work as curator, and a special mention for his work on the exhibition on Mallory and Irvine's ascent of Everest. It was absolutely superb and one of the best we have attended.

Ed. Find out more at:

[http://royclinging.com/documents/poor\\_mans\\_heritage.pdf](http://royclinging.com/documents/poor_mans_heritage.pdf)

### Eleventh AGM, 20 October

Report by Rita Lamb

Due to family illness our Chair, Jenny Tyson, was unavoidably absent: the Secretary read her summary of the year's achievements, ending with a strong appeal for Friends to actively publicise Museum events. For the Museum and the Friends the general trend is up – the Museum had six months of breaking its own attendance records, while membership of the Friends is, at 284, its highest ever.

Treasurer Lorna Simm presented the financial report, thanking corporate member Voisey and Co. for preparing it and supplying printed copies. Total fund balance at 30 April 2009 was £1127.



The meeting formally thanked retiring Membership Secretary Katy Percival and voted to make her and her husband Bob - also a long term committee stalwart - lifelong Honorary Members. Barry Jones and Nora Dolphin were formally elected, and there was an appeal for Friends to consider candidacy for the remaining committee vacancy. Suggested date of next AGM: Thursday, 21 October, 2010.

The meeting closed at 7.50 p.m. and was followed by a talk from our guest speaker, **Julie Summers**, on **'Mallory, Irvine and Everest.'**



Everyone knows the story of the 1924 Everest expedition, the most romantic mountaineering mystery of all. Two climbers making a final desperate attempt were seen only a short distance from the summit before the cloud came down and they were lost from view. Those two men, Mallory and Irvine, did not return from the mountain. Ever since the question lingers – did they reach the summit before they were lost? This was one of the aspects Julie Summers, the great-niece of one of those lost climbers, covered in her fascinating talk.

A packed room listened enthralled as Julie gave not only the story of that doomed attempt but also a portrait of two very different Cheshire men. Mallory was 38, the best climber of his generation and vastly experienced: Irvine was a cheerful university student who had never climbed at such a height before. He was however as strong as an ox and a very good practical engineer – the kind of young man who can take anything apart and put it back together again, working. That was one of the reasons Mallory chose him for the final push for the summit. They knew they would need oxygen equipment for the ascent but the technology was in its infancy. Irvine had already rejigged the basic design to make it more suited to

mountaineering. If anything went wrong with the oxygen on the ascent of Everest, he was the man to fix it.

Something did go wrong, though not necessarily with the oxygen. Neither man returned. Despite the discovery of George Mallory's body some ten years ago the tantalising mystery endures – did he reach the summit before he fell to his death? Author Julie Summers, whose great-uncle's body has not yet been found, feels that is a question best left unanswered. Let Everest keep her greatest mystery.

The applause of a packed room showed how much we enjoyed both her well-illustrated talk and the almost equally gripping tale of how she tracked down, often in family deed boxes not looked at in years, letters and sketches that cast new light on Sandy Irvine. At the end of the night she answered many questions from the floor and kindly signed some copies of her book on the subject, 'Fearless on Everest.' Altogether one of the most memorable and enjoyable talks we have had.

Ed. Find out more at:

<http://www.juliesummers.co.uk/fearless.php>

### Exhibition Launch, Northwich Shops on 12 November.

Report by Robert Marshall

This was a well attended launch night with the exhibition room packed by both Friends and Northwich shopkeepers. So great were the numbers that the official opening took place in the Board Of Guardians' Room, it being the only room big enough.



Matt gave an introduction and commented on how topical the exhibition had become, given the recent news on the 'Northwich Vision.' He then handed over to Clr. Mrs H Burder, Mayoress of Northwich for the formal opening.

The exhibition contains a wealth of photographs and information on the shops and business owners both past and present. In addition the Regalette ran a feature on the shops, which in itself was a reminder of the days when Norwich had not one but two cinemas.



## Behind The Scene At Sainsbury's Northwich

Report by June Hindley

Who would believe that an evening in the supermarket could be informative & fun but that was exactly what Monday 16 November proved to be for thirty Friends.

Pauline Mills, store host, greeted us with Old Fashioned Still Lemonade & nibbles & once all thirty of us had gathered--Pauline's biggest group ever--we were off.

Well, at least Pauline was, "My husband can't believe I am being paid to talk", Pauline told us.



Her talk was interesting, informative & often amusing. She even had references to salt, salt trade & the old mine shaft that still lurks beneath the store. Apparently, if you park your trolley by the bakery & turn to a shelf, when you turn back your trolley will have taken itself off for a little runabout. So next time you lose your trolley in Sainsbury's, don't worry!

Pauline also gave us some "insider" information--the store is having a £1.3 million refit in January as the Northwich Vision has suffered a setback & the new store is on hold for the moment. The refit will add a salad bar, a hot food counter & children's clothes.

It was interesting to learn that out of 871 stores (I think) nationwide, Northwich is number 4 for wine sales.

A quick tour of a few aisles let us into the secret of flowers, fruit & veg. first to give colour, freshness & a feel good factor to the shopper. Now who would have thought that Ready Meals give the largest profit margin; there was I thinking they were for the benefit of the cook in a hurry!

It was good to hear that Sainsbury's strive to keep wastage to a minimum with flowers going to local old people's homes & food to the Salvation Army & Petty Pool Trust. Other perishables which cannot be passed on are processed into oil (not for human consumption).

We went through to the warehouse which only holds stock as it passes onto the shop floor. Stock is delivered on a 24 hour basis in regulated time slots. A clever hand held machine (looking like the first brick-size mobile phones) known as the RSS deals with stock control.

Upstairs we saw the staff quarters with canteen & relaxation areas--it must be a relief to get away from the shop floor.

The offices, as Pauline said, were surprisingly small & in the cash office--locked!--money is counted stacked & bagged by machine & placed in the safe all untouched by human hand!

The evening ended with a food and wine tasting which included cheeses, ham, chutneys, red & white wine, port & Baileys, and some seasonal products.



Thanks to Pauline Mills for an excellent evening, several Friends were inspired to pick up a trolley and head for the aisles straight away.

Thanks also to Lorna Simm for organising the event.

There are two more of these evenings to come as the demand was so great.

9 Dec. **Friends Christmas Social** with a talk by Sid Bailey on **Growing up in the Workhouse.**

Report by Robert Marshall



Sid started his talk with the line 'I always held my mother and

father responsible for being brought up in the workhouse.' By the end of the night though, we knew he was proud of it. Both his parents came from Tunstall, in the potteries. His father had worked in the collieries but after World War I he got a job as a porter in the workhouse at Snell, where his wife had trained to be a nurse.



They moved to Oxford, where Sid was born and shortly after his birth took up positions at the [workhouse in Morda, Oswestry](#). His father was the Master and his mother the Matron, both worked hard to make life for the inmates better. Sid spent his youth here during the 1920s & 1930s, a time of change in how workhouses were seen and run.

His father managed, by devious means, to get the gas lighting improved. He convinced the Guardians, by presenting them with scrap pipes and lamps that he scrounged, that work was needed. The Guardians agreed, fearing that if not done the building could be blown up! Another time his father managed to acquire enough paint from local people and traders for the inmates to repaint the walls - brown and 'workhouse' green being the standard drab colours.

His mother raised money by organising whist nights and putting on concerts in the big hall. His parents even used their own piano, until it was dropped and broken - to Sid's delight as he had had to learn to play it. Often, the arrangements for these events, which were for the local towns people, was the only thing of interest for the inmates. Eventually they had raised so much money that they had enough to pay for the able bodied inmates to have a day out to Rhyl. Many had never seen the sea nor even, in the case of the children, a donkey. They had two good meals that day, served up in a restaurant - what an experience that must have been for them. Some managed to scrape a few coppers together for the day and bought souvenirs, which they took back and gave to those unable to go.

In the 1930s they introduced wireless radio to the workhouse, putting speakers in the main rooms and headphones in the hospital wards. One woman, after having headphones fitted and being asked what she thought replied

'I'm sorry but I can't see any better!' Which demonstrates how little they had and how poorly educated they were.

At Christmas his mother would go in to town and beg for toys and gifts for the children. Both his parents always made sure they were up on Christmas day in time to see the children in the nursery open their presents. For many of these children it would be the first time in their lives that they had presents to open.

Sid also told us of the many characters he met, such as 'Methylated Martha', and of how he used to play on the roof - seventy feet up on sloping slates!

Sid kindly donated his fee to the Methodist Homes for the Aged - Claybourne. This home is built on the site of the workhouse his mother trained in to be a nurse.

### News & Notices

Jan. 28 **Cheshire shipyards** - a talk by Tony Barrett for **the River Weaver Navigation Society**. Admission is free but booking is essential. The talk will start at 7:30 p.m.

### Curator's Corner



#### Salt Museum - All Change!

This may be the last column I write as Curator of the Salt Museum. Plans are currently underway to transform the [Lion Salt Works](#). As many of you are aware the Salt Works is now part of Cheshire West & Chester and is one of four museums sites in our service - the other two being the [Grosvenor Museum](#) and [Stretton Watermill](#). Because we are now confident that the Lion will develop into a visitor attraction, we can press ahead with our plans for the Salt Museum. One of the main elements of this is changing the name. Having a Salt Museum and a Lion Salt Works already confuses many visitors to the area - this will undoubtedly increase as the Lion begins to attract more visitors.

We will therefore be changing the name of the Salt Museum to 'Weaver Hall Museum & Workhouse'. We decided on this name

because of its strong historical connotations:- it is the former name of the building (and indeed it was known as 'Weaver Hall Museum' before it was the Salt Museum), it is a workhouse which we know does attract visitors and also mentions the Weaver which plays such an important role in the history of this area. We think this will allow us to achieve our full potential and aspiration to be the museum which reflects the wider history of the area. This is the direction in which we have been steadily moving over the past few years and is clearly a popular step as demonstrated by record-breaking visitor numbers (we attracted over 20,000 visitors in 2009 for the first time in our history). This will also pave the way for the Lion Salt Works to become the main salt-related attraction for the area. It will allow the Marston site to explore the subject in a more detailed and dynamic way than we currently offer - we know that some of our visitors would prefer more information on salt than is currently reflected in our displays. Some of our displays and artefacts will therefore move over to the Lion.

We will begin a phased programme of changing round our permanent displays on the first floor over the next two years. Our 'Salt of the Earth' gallery at the top of the stairs has already been altered. The next step is to change the 'Made From Salt' gallery into one which explores the history of transport in the area - railways, rivers, roads and canals. The Weaver Gallery will then become a gallery exploring domestic and community life over the ages and, finally, the salt-making galleries will become one focusing on working life. Many of the temporary exhibitions we have undertaken in recent years (farming, WW1, WW2, manufacturing, railways, floods, shops) will help with this process.

Despite these major changes, it will still be business as usual with our programme of events - changing exhibitions, afternoon and evening talks, holiday activities and film nights.

We hope you continue to support us and are excited as I am about the prospect of having three dynamic visitor attractions (if we include the [Anderton Boat Lift](#)) in the area. Perhaps one day we can link all three with a boat trip!

Matt Wheeler, Curator.

## Calendar of Events

### Friends Events in bold

#### **Jan. 14 Exhibition Launch: Lost Buildings of West Cheshire**

Jan. 27 Tea & Talk 'Time Traveller', with author Paul Hurley

Jan. 28 *Cheshire shipyards* by Tony Barrett (Arranged by the River Weaver Navigation Society)

Jan. 28 Film Show: Moon (cert 15)

#### **Feb. 4 Evening Talk: Vale Royal Abbey - a failed enterprise with Tony Bostock**

#### **Feb. 16 Evening Talk: All the fun of the Orbit with Hugh Beggs**

Feb. 17/18 Haunted Houses - Holiday Event: make your own model of an ancient, and haunted, house.

Feb. 18 Film Shows: 'Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs' (cert U) and at 7pm 'Creation' (cert PG)

Feb. 24 Tea & Talk 'Cheshire's Windmills', with Arthur Townsend

#### **Mar. 11 Evening Talk: Not So Solid Ground with Colin Edmondson**

#### **Mar 18. Exhibition Launch: Never Had It So Good?**

Mar. 25 Film Show: Bright Star' (cert PG)

Mar. 26 at 11 a.m. Why not join us for a tea or coffee and share your memories of the 50s with others. There is no charge for this event.

#### **Mar. 28 Guided Walk with Colin Edmondson.**

Mar. 31 Tea & Talk 'The Miller's Tale' with Tom Hughes

Mar. 31/Apr. 1 Tales and Tiles - Holiday Event: take inspiration from the medieval abbey tiles on display and create your own to take away.

Apr. 7/8 Down the High Street - Holiday Event: create your own street scene mini theatre.

#### **Apr. 27 Evening Talk: Growing up in Liverpool in the 1950s with Jim Finn**

Apr. 28 Tea & Talk 'Post War Blues' with Matt Wheeler

Apr. 29 Film Show: TBC

#### **May 12 Visit to Blackden Trust**

May 15 Film Show: Night at the Museum 2

May 26 Tea & Talk 'Brit Chic: Fashion on Film, 1946-89'.

May. 27 Film Show: TBC

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