

May 2020

## From the Chairman

What strange times we are living in.

We have had to postpone the Emsworth Maritime and Historical Trust's Annual General Meeting. A set of accounts, approved by our independent Examiner Richard McMillan, is available. These can be sent to anyone who would like a copy.

As you know, our original plan was to open the Museum on 4th April. As I write, we now know that this did not happen. Even worse, we do not know when we will be able to open. When I was last in touch with him, Rear Admiral John Lippiett, former Chief Executive of the Mary Rose Trust who had agreed to open our 2020 exhibition season was stuck on a cruise boat on the Nile.

Your committee are particularly sad about not opening the Museum for the summer of 2020, because so much work has been put in during the winter.

- We celebrated the arrival of the new cabinet.
- There is now a brand-new display in the cabinet curated by Phil Magrath with help from Steve Miller. Centred round the Museum's Free French uniform, it includes WW II material that the Museum has never put on display before.
- As reported in the last Newsletter, the boat cabinet has been re-arranged to focus on Emsworth boats; it has been cleaned for the first time in many years; and Tony Stimson has now arranged power for the lights.
- The Rudkin room has been re-decorated – a project led by Tony Stimson, supported by many members.

- When Jane Weeks launched the re-built Terror in 2006, she was given a Marian Forster watercolour of Terror, framed in wood removed during the restoration.

Jane has now generously donated this picture and it is hanging in the Oyster gallery.



I hope we will be able to open soon, so that you can see these displays for yourselves.

In February, we were told that the Havant Borough Council had awarded us £12,400 from the Community Infrastructure Fund to purchase a second new cabinet. I am very grateful to all our local councillors who lobbied on our behalf. We have also received a grant from Waitrose and a substantial donation collected at Sheila Lonsdale's funeral. So, there is work to do now to plan the activity to be undertaken during winter 2020/21.

I am delighted to welcome Julie Thain-Smith to our committee as the representative of Havant Borough Council, replacing the late Rivka Cresswell. She visited the Museum in January and has a particular interest in disability access.

Financially, this will not be a great year for the Museum. While we have had to cancel many fund-raising events, many of our expenses continue at the same rate whether we operate or not. The Museum should have sufficient reserves to weather the storm, but it will be prudent to re-build those reserves. We will have to adapt our plans for the coming winter accordingly.

Please look after yourselves.

*Trevor Davies*

## A Jacket in Search of a Mannequin

If the Museum had opened on schedule on Saturday, the 4th of April, pride of place in the main room of the Museum would have been given to our new display cabinet.

The 'state of the art' cabinet was delivered and installed in December 2019. But what part of Emsworth's rich history would grace the cabinet for our annual opening?

As 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE Day), it was decided that the contents of the cabinet would focus on 'Emsworth at War'. So, the search began and gradually suitable artefacts came to light. Among those selected was a Free French naval uniform that had belonged to Kleber Desgris.



*Steve Miller, right, at H&H Sculptors in Dartford searching for the right mannequin*

Kleber had been stationed during WWII at the Bir Hakeim camp located in North Emsworth. In 2018, a chance phone call from Lynda Desgris, Kleber's daughter-in-law, led to a special evening in the Museum when the family donated several items, including the uniform, to the Trust.

But how best to display the jacket in our new cabinet? After much debate about the spelling of the word, it was decided that a textile conservation grade 'mannequin' was required – a new challenge! Our search led us to H&H Sculptors who are based in Dartford.

H&H was started by Garry Hall in 1984. Early successes with specialist ranges of figures developed for the Museum of London and the National Army Museum paved the way for H&H Sculptors to become one of the world's leading suppliers of textile conservation grade mannequins.

In January Trust Chairman, Trevor Davies, and I travelled to H&H to select a torso of suitable proportions for the Free French jacket. Although there is some doubt about Kleber's height, he was certainly a man of substantial girth (around a 44 inch chest).

By mid-March 2020, the Museum was the proud owner of their very own conservation grade mannequin. All that remained was for Trevor and I to bedeck the dummy in shirt, tie (which took a while to accomplish) and naval jacket and our new cabinet display was complete.

**Steve Miller**

---

### Curator's Corner or

## What Happened Next?

Several Trust members have asked me over recent weeks how the new cabinet has been progressing. Now is the perfect time to update everyone.

The original idea was for the cabinet to have an Emsworth at War related theme and this prevailed when it was realised how much potential material there is – not all of it directly related to Emsworth though!

The monochrome back drop, organised and executed by Chairman, Trevor Davies, features a montage of wartime pictures from the Free French camp situated just off Southleigh Road and known as Caserne (Barracks) Bir-Hakeim. The jacket was that worn by Kleber Desgris, Barracks Commander – much to the delight of Paul Desgris, his son, and wife Lynda.

On the top shelf from left to right may be seen a naval 2-pounder (pom-pom) cartridge dated 1915; an *HMS Penelope* Christmas Day menu dated 1939; an Admiralty pattern Morse Code Key; a 1939 National Service booklet; The Battle of Britain booklet, dated 1941 recounting what it describes as the great days between the 8th and 31st August 1940; a Croydon Fighter Fund badge; a powder compact with an RAF crest and an Air Raid Wardens Whistle as used by David Rudkin (Founder of the Emsworth Maritime & Historical Trust in 1975).

The middle shelf shows from left to right, a Local Defence Volunteers' armband – the LDV became the Home Guard in May 1940; a silk cord from a German parachute mine; a scarf knitted from the same



material – an excellent example of local ingenuity; a piece of shrapnel from a German air-dropped bomb; a post-Second World War ration book, 1953-54, and a Stand Down Supper menu in Westbourne, dated 9th December 1944 for the 1st Sussex Battalion.

The lower shelf is entirely dedicated to George Borsberry RN who served as a Petty Officer Cook aboard *HMS Hood* in 1940 to 1941. The Trust has 50 letters he wrote to his wife (and baby) in Victoria Road, Emsworth, two of which are shown. Uniquely perhaps, as well as the letters are also a dozen or so cards and letters of condolence following his death on 24th May 1941 when *HMS Hood* blew-up during the Battle of the Denmark Strait.

At the lower level can be seen a Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) hat worn by Molly Way (one of the Museum's Founder Members) and what remains of a Lewis Gun that was found in Emsworth Harbour.

I am quite happy with the way the cabinet display has developed and there is a plan with a minor addition or two to fill the space at the base of the tailor's dummy. I may, for example, be able to



*Emsworth at War*

acquire a handful of spent 0.303 cartridges! All that remains is a Bir-Hakeim location plan and description – currently being compiled – that will be positioned on the wall to the right of the cabinet, formerly occupied by the 'Sea Shore Life' chart. Let us hope it will not be too long before you and our visitors will be able to see this new display.

*Philip A. Magrath*

---

## Annual Holiday: 8th to 12th September 2020

With Woods Travel, I have planned a five-day visit to Yorkshire, staying at The Best Western Plus Craiglands Hotel at Ilkley. The itinerary is as follows:

**Day 1:** Travel to Yorkshire, visiting Canons Ashby (National Trust) a Jacobean property en route. **Day 2:** Morning: Saltaire Village, a World Heritage Site named after Sir Titus Salt. Afternoon: to Oxenhope for a diesel-hauled journey to Keighley, on the line synonymous with the 1970's film "The Railway Children" then on to the famous Ilkley Toy Museum. **Day 3:** Morning: East Riddlesden Hall (National Trust), a 17th Century manor house and gardens. Afternoon: a cruise on the Leeds-Liverpool Canal with cream tea on board. **Day 4:** Morning: to Kettlewell and then to the Dales Museum at Hawes and the Wensleydale Creamery with lunch and an introduction to cheese-making. Afternoon: to Garsdale where we board the diesel-hauled service to Skipton (Carlisle Railway-Ribblehead Viaduct). **Day 5:** Leaving our hotel after breakfast, we make our way home stopping at the National Memorial Arboretum for lunch.

**Accommodation and Costs:** (Minimum of 30 passengers travelling)

12 twin/double rooms to be used as sole use rooms. Sole Use Supplement £48

7 twin rooms (including one accessible twin room for Jan Butler + friend) plus 7 double rooms

**Cost £469** per person sharing a twin or double room, including £10 administration fee.

I have circulated details to those people who went with me to Wales in 2019 and I have interest from 16 people so far. We are, of course, all concerned about the present situation with Coronavirus and cannot travel unless there is a change in Government policy. I have not collected forms or paid any money yet. We must decide with Woods by Mid-July whether this trip is feasible. If not, I propose to organise the trip for 2021, with similar dates and activities.

Full details are available from me, **Jan Butler, by email at [jan\\_butler@outlook.com](mailto:jan_butler@outlook.com) or by telephone on 01243 430926.** If you are interested in going on this trip, please contact me together with your room request. I will contact you in July to confirm arrangements.

I think that it is likely that this trip will be postponed until 2021 when I will circulate details again.

## Sinking of *HMS Royal George*

The last of the winter series of talks was held in Emsworth Community Centre on 19th February.

*'Informative, descriptive, filled in the details from different angles.'* That phrase, from an appreciative audience member, completely summed up Denise Bennet's talk on the sinking of *HMS Royal George* off Spithead on the 29th August in 1782.

Over 900 lives were lost when the ship foundered close to Ryde on the Isle of Wight. It was an entirely preventable accident. Denise's illustrated talk was based on her extensive research into the tragedy which she told in a series of poems. The poems, in both formal and free verse, looked at the disaster from the viewpoint of the ship's carpenter, Thomas Williams, ship's visitors, survivors, the dead and onlookers.

The naval fleet was anchored in the Solent getting ready to depart for Gibraltar. Repairs and victualling were taking place and ships were open for families to visit. About 1400 men, women and children were on board the *Royal George* when it capsized.

Sixty children were among the dead and it was an exhibition in Portsmouth City Museum which included 60 dolls' heads that was the inspiration for this talk. Denise used a skipping chant as an illustration in a couple of poems.

*'Plum, Peach, Apple Pie.  
How many years before I die.  
1, 2, 3, 4, Jump, Skip,  
Jump, Rope, Jump, Ship.'*

A little boy, three years old, survived. He was on the back of a lamb and both were plucked from the sea by a local wherry man.

Most of the women and children on board came from Portsea. They drowned along with many sailors when a sudden squall hit the ship as it was heeled to allow the repair of a water cock. The accident occurred because simultaneously supplies were being ferried on board through open gun ports and deposited by those ports instead of being distributed around the ship. Water flooded in and the vessel foundered. There are memorials in Ryde and St Mary's churchyard in Portsmouth.

Elements of the wreck are still off Ryde. There were three attempts at salvage, including one which moved the ship by 40 feet, as the vessel was a major hazard to shipping. Divers went down and removed guns and cannon. Salvaged timber was reused in items as diverse as snuffboxes and fences. Three thousand tons of explosives were used to break up the ship.

Denise has published three collections of poetry and the poems she used to illustrate her talk are published in her book, *Parachute Silk*. She has an MA in Creative Writing and has won several literary prizes. Much of her work is in response to local historical events and is inspired by her research in Portsmouth's City Museum, Historic Dockyard and History Centre.

**Christine Bury**



*Applause for the NHS and other key workers*

*Collage by John Tweddell of neighbours in Victoria Road on Thursday, 9th April*

The views expressed by contributors to this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the General Committee. All rights are reserved. Please contact the editor for permission to use any material.

Hon. Secretary: Dorothy Bone  
01243 373780  
dorothybone@btinternet.com

Membership: Shelagh Standen  
shelaghstanden@hotmail.co.uk

Website: [www.emsworthmuseum.org.uk](http://www.emsworthmuseum.org.uk) Newsletter Editor: Christine Bury  
01243 377870 [christine.bury@ntlworld.com](mailto:christine.bury@ntlworld.com)

If you would like to provide a news article or illustration, please send it to the editor, preferably on disk or by email.

Printed by SRP Design & Print, Leigh Road, Chichester, PO19 8TU Tel: 01243 782988

© Emsworth Maritime and Historical Trust