



Newsletter – January 2019

Firstly, let me start this newsletter by wishing all members of our History Group a very happy and healthy New Year. The purpose of writing this newsletter is twofold. One, I felt it important to mark our five years of existence and secondly, and perhaps more importantly to say something about the year ahead.

The History Group is now 5 years old

We celebrated our first 5 years at a party held in the British Legion Hall on The Quay on Thursday 20th December 2018. It was attended by about 25 people who heard me deliver a talk based on a slide presentation which covered all that we have achieved since our inaugural meeting held in the Nottage on Thursday 25th April 2013. At that meeting Michael Smither also gave a presentation about the heroic act of Wivenhoe-man William Oakley who earned the US Congressional Medal of Honour in 1898 during the US – Spanish War at that time. Michael has said he would write up the story for the web site.

The slide presentation which I created is on the web site. If you cannot see the relevant entry on the Home page, use the Search function and look up 'First 5 Years' and you will then see the page I have created together with a link to the presentation which you can download.

We have achieved a lot since 2013

I think you will agree we have done a lot since April 2013. We have held over 20 meetings with a guest speaker each time; organised 7 annual talks in St Mary's Church; Ian Valentine has arranged 8 outings to various places; Gill Strudwick led the grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund to get the money we needed for the WW1 Project and to pay Community Sites the £7,000 they needed to enable us to set up and establish the community archive in which to hold all of the information about WW1 which we were researching. HLF provided a grant of £9,000 which covered the cost of the WW1 project, including the Roll of Honour. In this are recorded the names of all those people who were engaged in that terrible conflict and who were researched by Ian. It paid for half the cost of the community archive; the balance of £3,500 came from grants from:

- two Wivenhoe Mayor's Charity funds (Cllrs Penny Kraft and Andrea-Luxford Vaughan)
- grants from CBC's Locality Fund (Cllrs Cyril Liddy, the late Steve Ford, Jon Manning and Mark Cory)
- a generous grant from the Wivenhoe Society
- and a major grant of £1,800 resulting from the winding up of the Wivenhoe Preservation Trust of which Len Horner and I were the remaining trustees.

A valuable source of knowledge about Wivenhoe

The web site will be our lasting legacy. Since its launch in April 2015, between us all, we have created over 900 pages on a great many topics covering such subjects as people, events, organisations, Wivenhoe streets, shops and other businesses and of course many topics relating to the river. One of the people who has contributed lots of research to our community archive is Pat Marsden who works quietly from home transcribing deeds, researching maps and writing up all the details she has found.

It would be lovely to have more people like Pat working to research all of the many parts of the Wivenhoe history jig-saw puzzle. Pat would be very interested in hearing from anybody who might work with her on

undertaking more research. Please let me know if you are interested in digging deeper into Wivenhoe's past and be willing to create entries on the web site as Pat does and I will put you in touch with her. There is so much more that needs researching – people who have lived here, buildings and their history, events that have shaped Wivenhoe and lots more.

The High Street 100 Years Ago Project

Like most projects, this started out as a simple idea, some two years ago now. With a lot of hard work by Gill Strudwick and Helen Polom who have led this project assisted by a team of people which included Sue Glasspool, Joan Sawyer, Mike Downes, Frances Belsham, Ian Valentine, John Foster, Mike Harrison, Chris Snow, Jenny Heaps, Jane Stanway, Mike Smither and myself. John Stewart was also a member of this team until his early and tragic death part way through the project.

The High Street 100 Years Ago Trail was launched on Saturday 15th September 2018. The High Street was full of people that day looking at boards outside many of the properties which had on it a picture of the property as it used to look and some text about the property to detail its history. These boards all tied into the web pages listed in a specially created section of our web site as well as mentioned on a printed pamphlet available on the day. A digital copy of that pamphlet is available on our web site and so people can still follow this Trail which has been created. Of the 500 copies of this pamphlet which we had printed, we had only few left at the end of the day. We must record our thanks to Vince Rayner, Alison Stockmarr and Eric Strudwick for all their help in preparing this pamphlet and local councillors (Cyril Liddy, former Cllr Rosalind Scott, Mark Cory and Cllr Mike Newton, then Mayor of Wivenhoe) for supporting the project with grants from CBC's Locality Budget and the Mayor's Charity Fund. Together with the sunny weather that day, the pamphlet made the day perfect. Well done everybody who was involved in the project, and especially Gill and Helen who led it and put so much time in.



Will we do it again?

Judging by the vast numbers of people who turned out on the 15th September and the many appreciative comments we received on the day, and since, there is clearly a demand for something like this. People do want to know more about Wivenhoe's past. So will we do it again? I hope so but it took a lot more planning and research effort than people realise. It is under consideration. If you were one of those people who enjoyed the day and you feel encouraged to get involved, please let me know.

John Stewart

As we all know, John tragically died on 5th February 2018 and aged just 70. His death was most unexpected and untimely. He has deprived us all of his wealth of knowledge about Wivenhoe from his growing up here and his curious interest in collecting photographs and other memorabilia about Wivenhoe. Although he was a member of the team which meets at my home every Friday morning to work on the web site, by his own admission, he was not good at writing much down. His contribution to the banter every Friday morning is missed



greatly as well as his intimate knowledge of everything in his Collection. I added a tribute page about John Stewart's life and achievements on our web site. If you want to read it, just search for John Stewart.

Wivenhoe Memories Collection

John may no longer be with us but memories of him will live on in the form of his Wivenhoe Memories Collection. This comprises thousands of photographs and documents which he collected over a long period of time. This Collection is now occupying a lot of space at my home waiting for someone who would like to use his material to resurrect the Wivenhoe Memories Exhibition.

Digitisation of the Memories Collection

With the help of a large team of volunteers, during 2018 all of this material has been scanned so that now we have, or more correctly I should say that John Foster now has digital images of all this material on his computer. Fortunately John Foster has been willing to be the key person in the digitisation of John's Collection. For the sake of security, Eric Strudwick also has a copy of everything on a separate disk at his home.

So we have completed the first part of this Project. Now comes the more difficult part. John Foster currently has around 20,000 scanned images on his computer. Whilst they are all separate images, we also know that quite a few images are duplicates although not necessarily exact duplicates.

As part of scanning Project, we were also able to get access to John's computer and his laptop on which he had many images stored in digital form. These are now in John Foster's overall WMC database together with the images which we scanned from the actual photographs and other documents that John Stewart had amassed.

Cataloguing the Wivenhoe Memories Collection

John is busy writing some special software to allow us to catalogue all of these images with information about the object of the photograph. At the moment, all of these images are recorded in the database with just a meaningless number. We need information such as the name of the boat or the person in the photograph to be recorded to allow the database to be searched. That way it will become useful. The images need to be tidied up as in many cases they have black areas on them as a result of the scanning operation. Then there are the duplicates to be weeded out. Whilst John is sufficiently expert in software design and creation to get the computer to identify duplicate images, the match does have to be precise to identify duplicates. It will take a person though to make a final judgement to decide which image to keep and which to delete. So there is a lot of hard work required before we end up with a fully catalogued and functional archive.

John hopes he will have finished writing and testing the software by the end of January to allow a team of people to begin cataloguing all of these 20,000 images from February onwards. It will be a big task. Many volunteers are needed for this phase. John is hoping to be able to give copies of the database to volunteers so that they can work on different parts of it from their home and when it is convenient to them. Please do let me know if you can help with this.

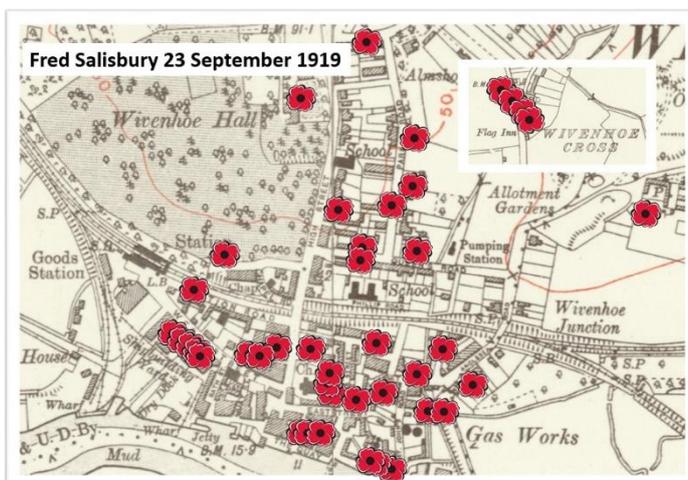
We will need help in identifying some of the names of people or objects in these images. We have been wondering if we could do this at a future meeting of the History Group instead of finding a speaker. It might be enjoyable to test people's power of recall of both the names as well as memories of the people concerned. If only John were still alive!

WW1 and Remembrance

Obviously as a Group, since the beginning we have put a big emphasis on the topic of WW1. You can now find 140 pages on our web site to do with WW1. This includes a list of over 320 names of people who Ian Valentine researched to discover all of the people who served in that War in various capacities as soldiers fighting in the army, or in the Merchant or in the Royal Navy, plus of course the VAD nurses who Helen

Polom researched. The especially bound Roll of Honour which Gill Strudwick organised with help from Vince Rayner now has pride of place in the Royal British Legion Hall on Wivenhoe Quay in a cabinet made by local resident Karl Douzier.

Frances Belsham spent hours putting together a digital slide presentation with a slide for each person who was killed in the War who had a family here in Wivenhoe. These slides showed each person's picture where we have it, or a picture of their gravestone and a few details about them including their age and the date they died. These 50 slides were shown in the order of the date they died and were followed by a street map of Wivenhoe on which a poppy appeared, one after the other, marking the street where the family would have received that dreaded telegram.



This rolling presentation was projected onto the big screen in St Mary's Church throughout Saturday 10th November. With all the poppies in Church, it was a very poignant tribute to Wivenhoe's fallen.

Future Projects

We have been thinking about what we should do now that the 100th anniversary of the Armistice is behind us. Time to move on but onto what?

WW2? That war started 80 years ago in September 1939. The impact on Wivenhoe was not as great as that of WW1. We have agreed we would like the diminishing number of people who were living in Wivenhoe at the time of WW2 to write down their memories of what life was like in Wivenhoe at that time and we will publish them on our web site. Please get in touch with me, or if you know them and know that they do not use email, ask them to on our behalf. We would also like to capture those memories on tape if we can find both people willing to talk as well as one or two volunteers willing to conduct the interviews. Again, please contact me if you could be interested with this. We are especially keen to find someone who would be interested in dealing with the editing and publishing these sound recordings.

Another project we considered was proposed by John Foster and follows on from the work he has been doing to record the details of Wivenhoe's burial records, together with such information as which plot each person was buried in. Those of you who came to our meeting last September would have seen all of the work he has put into building this database and what information he can provide from it. It was amazing.

Well, he suggested photographing and recording all of the information on the headstones in the oldest part of the New Cemetery as they are beginning to deteriorate quite badly. In case you are wondering why not the Old Cemetery, the Essex Society for Family History recorded those some years ago. Anyway, this idea appealed to the Steering Committee and we asked John to put the idea to the next Group meeting in March together with a proposal for a specific date when a team of volunteers could descend on the Cemetery with notepads, cameras, crayons and tracing paper, to begin recording. We suggested it needs careful planning with perhaps a trial run beforehand to see what it involves, as well as to make sure people can be assigned headstones and instructions what to do as soon as they arrive so as to avoid lots of hanging about.

The Chapel Museum

Whilst talking about the New Cemetery, I am reminded that John and Sheila Foster have spent a lot of time this last summer stewarding in the Chapel Museum. They have found it very rewarding. It doesn't get a lot of visitors but there enough people around to make it worthwhile to open for few hours each



weekend of the warmer summer months. If you have never been to see inside it, then perhaps resolve now that you make sure that this year you do go there. Better still, you could think about becoming a Steward too! John says no qualifications are necessary. If you don't know the answer to a question you are asked, then just say sorry you don't know. Please send me your details and I will pass them onto the Town Council.

Future Meetings

Having organised so many meetings during these 5 years, each with a speaker to give us an illustrated talk on an aspect of Wivenhoe's history or of relevance to it, we are now struggling to think of speakers we can invite to future meetings who would be interesting for members to listen to. In the future, our speakers are going to be people who will be talking on subjects other than Wivenhoe related ones. If you know of anyone who we might invite, please do let me know.

Our Next Meeting – Thursday 28th March 2019

As well as a speaker meeting, our next one will also be our annual meeting. The business of it won't take very long; Eric Strudwick, our Treasurer will produce a financial statement for members to approve; I will give a short report as Chairman and then we will elect people to serve as officers and to serve on the Steering Committee. New people to join the team will of course be very welcome.

I have already invited Julian Foyne to be our guest speaker that evening. His illustrated talk is entitled 'The War on the Colne, 1939-45'. From what I have heard, I think he will be a very interesting speaker.

The WHG Steering Committee

It is the role of the Steering Committee to determine what the History Group does, including the programme of activities and meetings. It is a team effort. We meet about 4 times a year to plan and make decisions. I am grateful to the following people for their support and enthusiasm for the History Group during this last year and without whom there would be no History Group:

Gill Strudwick – Vice Chairman
Eric Strudwick – Treasurer
Frances Belsham – Membership Secretary
Ian Valentine – Outings Secretary
Ann Jones - Minutes Secretary
and: John Foster, Helen Polom and Michael Smither

Conclusion

I think everyone who has been involved with the History Group and contributed in some way, whether helping on the day as at the High Street 100 Years Ago or by adding pages to the web site, should feel justifiably proud of what we have all achieved.

I hope we can continue to enjoy our history and continue working on exploring it, and recording it, for the benefit of future generations.

I look forward to seeing you all at our next meeting – Thursday 28th March 2019 at 7.30pm in the British Legion Hall on Wivenhoe Quay.

Peter Hill
Chairman, Wivenhoe History Group

7th January, 2019

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