



LANGTON MATRAVERS LOCAL HISTORY AND
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2018

Be assured that this is in fact our one and only 'Happy New Year' newsletter so please don't think that you were forgotten back in January. We decided that it would be better to communicate with our members at the beginning of the summer season, but it really does feel that this is being written in the depths of winter, given that there is a substantial covering of snow outside. Those of you who live far to the North, even beyond Wareham, will perhaps read this with a bit of a smile and dispute the use of the word 'substantial', but by the standards of us here in Purbeck the snow is deep and crisp and even, and we've had enough of it! All being well, by the time the newsletter reaches you in early April we shall all be enjoying Spring Sunshine rather than the freezing cold endured by the Langton quarryman who stands proudly in the village!

THE LANGTON QUARRYMAN

Regular visitors to the village will recognise this carving by Mary Spencer-Watson who lived and worked for most of her life in Dunshay Manor, her father having bought the house in 1923: Dunshay Manor dates back to Elizabethan times and was marked on a map in 1585.



Mary died at the age of 92 on 17 March 2006.

The Langton Quarryman can be found in a corner of St George's Church, very close to our museum, and over the few years that it has been there the carving has taken on lifelike qualities that resemble in many ways those of the men who worked in the local stone industry.

The photo was taken in the snow of 18 March 2018 by Jason Selman.



News of Reg Saville

If you live away from Langton you perhaps do not yet know that right at the end of January Reg suffered a fall in his bedroom at home and found that he could not get himself up, an experience that is recommended for no-one of any age let alone our well-loved friend and President of the Langton Matravers Local History and Preservation Society who will be 96 on 30 June!

Luckily he was found by a friend but paramedics insisted that he be taken to Poole Hospital from which after a few days he was transferred to the small community hospital in Wareham where he has remained since.

Reg's brother, David, who lives near Weymouth but travels frequently to Wareham to visit Reg, said 'today' [21 March] that after more than six weeks in hospital Reg must be getting better because he insists that he is ready to be at home again and 'Of course I can look after myself!'. David says that a move home may well be imminent and all being well Reg will have his way by Easter! We wish him well!

The Museum in 2018

Our museum, The Purbeck Stone Museum [which incorporates the village museum], re-opened on Saturday 31 March and we are looking forward to a successful season with a record number of visitors!

As in previous years it will be open daily except Sunday from 10am to 12noon and then from 2pm to 4pm.

A lot of hard work went into preparing for the opening and we are particularly grateful for the efforts of Mike Collins, very skilled with wood, who is also currently refurbishing the village sign and coat of arms, and Richard Cottrell, the new museum curator who is getting to grips with the wonderful legacy of many years left by Reg Saville. This year, as well as focussing on the local stone industry, the museum will again feature an exhibition based on the story of radar which was substantially developed in Langton Matravers, work which led to the tag 'How Langton Won the War'!

A special mention, however, must be made of The Lady Decorator who advertises in The Dubber each month and who spent several days in February gifting sponsorship of a very practical nature. Katie Francis, for that is her name, volunteered to re-decorate the inside of the museum and refused payment for both labour and materials. As a result, the museum is looking much brighter than it has for a number of years and we are very grateful for Katie's generosity.

We hope, too, that within a few weeks the museum will be even brighter following an upgrade of the lighting which will make the displays much more easy to look at.

A Serious Problem!

Never one to miss an opportunity, there is a need to mention a serious problem! We are still short of custodians to help us keep the museum open through the summer months. We need three volunteers who would be prepared to spend two hours [10-12 or 2-4] on one day of the week. We tend not to get all that many coach parties and consequently the time spent is not particularly onerous, and no special knowledge or skill is required other than the ability to meet, greet, and smile!

It seems that all organisations are having real difficulty to recruit volunteers and it would be wonderful if a few more from the village or local area could make Jasmine Cattle [01929 421372] happy by putting themselves forward!

We are also spreading our net more widely to try to encourage more volunteers and to that end we have registered with Volunteer Dorset Connect [www.volunteeringdorset.org.uk] and, free of charge, have placed a small advertisement to see the extent to which we will be inundated by fresh faces! Perhaps we will be so overwhelmed that on special occasions we will be able to provide Historic Cream Teas in the museum car-park...but perhaps most of you spotted that pig flying high over the village!

Our Website

What website? I didn't know you had one!

Well we have, and it is managed by Philip Wyatt who makes no bones about stating that www.langtonia.org.uk needs updating in order to make it more interesting and more useful a tool working on behalf of the museum and LMLHPS.

Try putting Langton Matravers into your browser and you will quickly be able to scroll down to Langton Matravers Local History and discover the kinds of information and articles which are available there. However, we are now in danger of being somewhat historic in our attitude to what was once deemed new technology but should now be considered an essential part of any organisation's publicity, and something needs to be done to bring us more up to date! For example, there is no reason at all why these newsletters should not feature on the website along with the dates of upcoming talks and meetings.

For many years Philip has worked tirelessly on our behalf but even he is now feeling some of the pressure of being nearer one-hundred years old than eighty, and that is why he would welcome someone who is keen to get involved with www.langtonia.org.uk so that not only interest in the museum and the Society is intensified but also tourists and others keen to know more about our village find what they need, whether this be through the website itself or through other forms of social media...though let us be sure never to emulate The Donald with a Tweet a Day!

Sitting here, with the snow still falling outside, I am suddenly aware that help with the development of www.langtonia.org.uk need not be limited to someone who lives within walking distance of the village. Here is an opportunity for someone living many miles away who has retained a fond interest in Langton to give a hand from afar, and I am sure that initially Philip would be delighted were something like this to happen. Such is the power of modern technology that anything is possible! You may not through long distance be able to be a volunteer custodian, but there are other ways in which you can help...even if your post code is randomly chosen from the membership list to demonstrate that you do in fact live in RG8 8BG, PL14 4DU, WA16 8EP or even CV37 6BS and cannot therefore be expected to turn up at the museum from Reading, Plymouth, Cheshire or Coventry for two hours each week!

Boils...but not on the Backside!

A contribution from Trev Haysom

In George Burt's underground quarry in Court Cowlease, Swanage, a track of three-toed footprints protrudes from the ceiling. George was nicknamed 'Boss', but he is not to be confused with another George Burt of that same generation who expanded John Mowlem's business in London. The casts are on the underside of the Roach bed, 'Boss', or his men, having taken out the layers the animals actually trod on.

In almost every more recent quarry where the Roach bed has been quarried...by Worth Road, Gallow's Gore, Acton, Queen's Ground, as well as Belle Vue and California in Swanage, the same kind of prints are found. Some are deep impressions; some shallow; most higgledy-piggledy; and others in clear lines such as in Boss's quarry. His sort are obvious trails, but what on earth did men make of these things when they discovered them many years ago?

As well as three-toed prints, several beds of stone have rounded shapes of various sizes also protruding on their undersides. When turned over they present as bulges. The quarrymen called them **boils** and complained about them, for nice flat blocks are more desirable. Little did they know in those days that these boils are also footprint casts. Some of them are no more than teacup size but others much bigger, about the size of an old dustbin lid.

An area of a layer called the White Horse that exhibits them has been preserved at Keates's quarry, just off Priest's Way on the Worth side of Acton. In 2017 even bigger ones came to light, each about one metre across with a space between them of about nine metres. Some stride! Some beast! It is easy to realise how they have not been formally recognised as footprint casts because they exhibit no obvious toes and lie so far apart.

There is a three-toed footprint in the Langton Museum collection, but not one of the really big ones, which weigh a tonne!

[Note from DFS...it is amazing that so much Jurassic evidence is coming to light and being preserved and if, like me, you live somewhere like Belle Vue, the thought that there may even be three-toed monsters roaming through the garden makes one frightened to go out at night: especially on 1 April!]

Subscriptions

Members' subs were due on 1 September 2017 and a small number have not yet renewed...clearly by oversight and not by design!!! There is still time to rectify the situation and that is why in a last ditch attempt to keep you 'on board' you are being sent this newsletter.

If you found an [unstamped] envelope with this communication I'm afraid it means that your subscription remains outstanding but it is not too late to maintain contact with Langton! Just send the addressed envelope back with an appropriate donation, your cheque being payable to LMLHPS, failing which you will not hear from us again!

For everyone else, the new subscription will become due on 1 September but you will receive a reminder of this nearer that date with the autumn programme of talks!

The Autumn and Winter Programme [2018-19]...and Newsletter Contributions!

No sooner than one season ends than thoughts turn to the next...it's a bit like painting the Forth Bridge.

In the autumn and winter just ended we had a wide range of interesting talks which included The Museum of Jurassic Life, The Kingston Lacy Archives, and The Flying Boats of Poole Harbour. This indicates that recently we have found it necessary to look further afield for speakers and subjects, largely because Reg Saville very understandably now no longer feels able to educate and entertain the membership and visitors as once he did!

The committee will shortly be planning the new programme so, if **you** would like to give an illustrated talk in the period September to March, or can recommend a speaker with whom you have been impressed, please get in touch with David Selman [01929 421481 selman@globalnet.co.uk]. We normally aim for an hour and a half at most, with or without a break.

David would also welcome contributions on a locally historic or stony theme for the Newsletter, Trev Haysom having got us off to a good start with his revelations about boils!

The Langton Poet

It is difficult to believe that there were once well over a hundred underground quarries in and around the Parish of Langton Matravers, some of which were very extensive with shafts that stretched a considerable distance from the light of day. All of them, well nearly all, have been closed off for reasons of Elfin Safety but some had a clear influence on Geoff Hooper, the Langton poet, whose memorial stone in St George's Churchyard reads

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF
GEOFF HOOPER
1928-2003
THE HAPPY QUARRYMAN AND POET
RIP**

One of Geoff's many 'local' poems was entitled quite simply

UNDERGROUND

Deep shafts that never saw the sun
Beneath the fields of Purbeck run.
Forgotten quarrymen long dead,
Deaf to the lark's song overhead,
Worked there by flickering candle light
While up above the day was bright.

And many a stained glass window's frame
From those dark silent caverns came;
And Purbeck mullions straight and tall
In many an ancient mellow wall
Of manors, churches, towers and spires
The length and breadth of our green shires.

Sometimes a probing blind machine
Breaks through where those old men had been,
And people say 'That's quite a find:
Did they leave anything behind?'
I always answer loud and clear
'Yes, quite a lot. But nothing here'.

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING...THURSDAY 26 APRIL 2018 AT 7.30pm IN THE VILLAGE HALL...PLEASE DO
COME SO THAT THE COMMITTEE FEELS THAT THEY AND THE SOCIETY HAVE YOUR SUPPORT!**