

Ashwell Village Museum



The Museum, founded in 1930, grew from the collection of several schoolboys and is run by volunteers, under the control of a board of trustees. Since opening, we have cared for the collection and kept the building from deterioration by patching it up in keeping with standards of the time. However, we have now

reached a critical point where we need major restoration to keep the old building from deteriorating further and to allow us to preserve it and the collection for future generations.

The work called for does not come cheaply, and a major fund-raising exercise has begun, which, I am glad to say, all our supporters have joined in with gusto. The renovation involves checking every timber for rot and replacing all the infill with lime plaster, which will allow the building to breathe. Skilled craftsmen will carry out the work, which we hope will begin in the spring of 2019; but we will have to close the old building and remove all the contents to a safe place. During this period, we intend to keep the new galleries open to show a representative part of the collection.

Meanwhile, everyday tasks continue with the help of our volunteers: the Friends of Ashwell Museum, the cleaners, the curators, the conservers, the researchers and the Duke of Edinburgh Award participants. Their work not only allows us to collect and care for our history but also gives us the opportunity to research and expand this knowledge in depth for the wider community.

Historical insights from our research reach all over the world, with regular posts on Facebook and a mass of information accruing at www.ashwellmuseum.org.uk. Of most relevance in 2018, but not to be forgotten in years to come, are the accounts of the lives of all those from Ashwell who served in the First World War. We are very grateful to Lynette Wray for the immense amount of research she has done on this subject.

For Ashwell at Home we placed plaques on soldiers' houses to show the extent to which that terrible war intruded into village life. In the museum we had displays on Remembrance, Walter Sale, the Cottage Garden and Trailblazing Women of Ashwell. Extra activities have included the launch of the British Museum's book* about our Roman goddess, Senuna, and her ritual sites, a stall at the Ashwell Show, and an Advent Window.

Donations of documents have dominated this year, with old school magazines and records, booklets of poems by Thomas Wylie, the deliberations of the Jubilee Celebration Committee, but also a Coronation Commemoration spoon, given to children in the village, and two flags from the Ashwell Girls' Brigade.

Peter Greener, Hon Curator

✉ enquiries@ashwellmuseum.org.uk

* *Dea Senuna: Treasure, Cult and Ritual at Ashwell, Hertfordshire*

by Ralph Jackson and Gilbert Burleigh, published by the British Museum (2018)

History of the Building

Built somewhere between 1500 and 1520, the Museum is a timber-framed building with the spaces between the studs originally filled with wattle and daub.

When built, the downstairs would have been one room. The upper storey, with its fine crown post roof, would have been two rooms. Access to the upper storey would have been by a ladder through a hole in the floor above. The 1829 Rate Survey describes it as: "Cottage. Stud and plastered with thatched roof, containing 2 rooms and Pantry on the ground floor and 2 bedrooms above. Good Garden and Well of Water."

A drawing from about 1840 by Charlotte Morice, daughter of the vicar, shows it in a rather dilapidated state. On the front elevation are the ground floor windows, which were shop windows where customers would have conducted business. When the shop was closed, shutters would have covered the windows. Opening the shop would have meant lowering the shutters to the horizontal to rest on a frame that was fixed using the peg holes below the windows. The door to the right of the windows would have been the original door into the building.

Charlotte Morice's drawing, and a series of maps from 1841 to 1924, show a double-storeyed rear extension, which must have been taken down between 1924 and 1930 as it was not there when the Museum was opened in 1930. The Rate Survey describes it as: 'Cottage under the same roof as the last, containing Sitting room. Pantry and 2 small bedrooms. A Garden.'

The Owners of the Building

There is a local legend that the building was the town house of the Manor of Ashwell. However, this is unlikely to be true. In 1440, a certain John Kirkeby leased land from the Ashwell Manor. By 1489 this land had become a new manor of Kirkebies or Kirbys, which by 1565 was owned by St John's College, Cambridge. In a 1623 terrier of the College lands in Ashwell, the last entry is; 'It[e]m one Tenem[en]t scituat between Clement Ev[er]itte on the west, And the Almes lane east', i.e. the site of the Museum. This indicates that this land was not in the Manor of Ashwell but was in that of Kirby.

Tenants

Prior to 1829 we do not know who lived in the building, but in that year William Huffer lived in the front part and Sarah Ripshire lived in the cottage behind. In 1841 Edward Luff and family lived in the front with Sarah Ripshire still at the rear. When the Luffs moved out, a tailor, William Durham, and his family moved in. Twenty years later John Skerman, also a tailor, was the tenant. He lived there until after 1901.

By the late 1920s the building was empty and used as a storage place by the then owner, Mark Crump. He sold it for £25 to the new Ashwell Village Museum trustees in November 1930.

David Short

Story of the Museum

What started in the 1920s as the local curios that some schoolboys exhibited in a garden shed has grown into the permanent home for a unique and important collection covering the long history of Ashwell.

Several pupils of the Ashwell Merchant Taylors' School were inspired to collect by the headmaster. Their collection grew and grew, and in 1928 the objects were displayed at a church fête, creating such enthusiasm that a committee was formed of village elders to find them a permanent home.

The present building, then almost derelict, was chosen as most suitable, and the young curators, Albert Sheldrick and John Bray, were dispatched to bargain with the local butcher who owned it. It was thought they would get a better deal than the senior committee members, and indeed the old cottage was bought for the sum of only £25.

Then began the hard work of making the building fit to be a museum. The plaster was stripped from the outside, revealing not only a beautiful half-timbered Tudor building but also the true extent of the repairs needed. Fortunately, an old Ashwellian, Sir William Gentle, was so moved by the project that he offered to pay for the entire restoration. The museum was opened to the public on 30th November 1930.

The museum is full of everyday objects representing life in Ashwell and the surrounding countryside, from the Stone Age to the present day. Collecting is still continuing. History has not stopped, and people feel confident to leave things in our trust because the museum is a constant in this ever-changing world. Two modern extensions have helped to cope



During Restoration in 1930. Photo from Ashwell Museum

with this influx, but it is the old building that is now in need of more care and attention so that we can look after everything to inspire and inform future generations.

The museum is proud of its place at the centre of the local community, closely involved in the ebb and flow of village life and contributing to traditional events as well as initiating many of its own. A programme of lectures and outings is a regular feature of the village calendar, and the museum played a central role in 2017 when Ashwell celebrated the 1100th anniversary of its foundation. The children of the village school are regular visitors, and school parties also visit from surrounding towns and villages. The museum has a growing number of outreach box collections that are loaned to schools and others in the community.



Official opening as a museum, 30th Nov 1930. Photo from Ashwell Museum

As part of our work, we are cataloguing, digitising and photographing every one of the 16,000 objects, archives and pictures in our collection, which will eventually be made available for viewing online.

Our constantly evolving website routinely publicises the results of research by local people. During the period from 2014 to 2018 a centenary research project has enabled us to add many new details about all those from Ashwell who served in the First World War.

The original Museum building is Grade II* listed and is now on the Historic England "At Risk" register because of deterioration to the structural beams. It was erected in about the year 1500 on part of the old market place and was probably some kind of shop or office. Later it was known as the Town House. Churchwardens, parish constables, overseers of the poor and non-conformists all held meetings there. It has also been a plait school, a tailor's shop, a dwelling house and a store room. Now it is our museum, the very heart of our village, both metaphorically and geographically.

Peter Greener

Ashwell Museum Heritage Fund

Many readers will know that serious deterioration has been found in some of the structural timbers in the old part of Ashwell Museum, which dates from about 1500. The Museum is Grade II* listed and has been placed on Historic England's 'At Risk' register. The cost of a thorough restoration of this iconic building will be in the region of £200,000 to £250,000. The Museum Trustees have set up a Museum Heritage Fund to ensure that this work can be carried out to the highest standard and that Ashwell people and others will continue to benefit in the future from enhanced access to the community resources and educational work for which the Museum is already well known.

Grants

The Museum Trustees are making applications for grants to help raise this challenging sum. Our first application has obtained a grant of £500 from the localities budget of our County Councillor, Steve Jarvis. At the time of writing we are also making an application to the North Herts District Council Community Facilities Capital Project Funding Scheme and the Heritage Lottery Fund. We shall publicise the results of these applications as soon as we hear.

Fund-Raising Events

A series of fund-raising events is under way. The Friends of Ashwell Village Museum have been keeping open the Sunday afternoon teas in the Parish Room throughout the winter and will continue until the Church takes over again in April. A Burns Night Supper was held at Ashwell Primary School on 26th January. Simon England very kindly donated the venue free of charge as the school's contribution to the Heritage Fund. Three well-attended talks on local history and the launch of the Ashwell Community Cinema were held in February, with all the proceeds donated to the Fund.

A flyer will be distributed in the village with details of the other events planned, which include:

- An Evening with Flanders and Swann
- Ladies' Clothes Sale
- Coach Trip to Stratford-upon-Avon
- Auction of Promises
- Coffee Morning and Plant Sale
- Music Concert by The Galliard Trio

If you are able to offer help with furniture moving or catering at any of these events it will be greatly appreciated. Please contact John Rhodes: john.rhodes49@gmail.com

Purchases Online

You can help the Museum whenever you shop online with Amazon. Go to www.smile.amazon and type in 'Ashwell Village Museum' as your chosen charity. Amazon will then donate 0.5% of your purchase price to the Museum. Please consider doing your online shopping in this way.

Donations

We hope you will feel that you would like to make a donation to the Museum Heritage Fund. At the time of writing the Heritage Fund has received almost £20,000 in this way. Your contributions, however modest, will all be greatly valued. There are various ways in which you can do this:

- With cash or a cheque. Please make cheques payable to Ashwell Village Museum Trust and send them, marked 'Restoration' on the back, to: Shirley Wardrop, Treasurer, Ashwell Museum Trustees, 21 High Street, Ashwell, Baldock, Herts. SG7 5NL.
- Anonymously by BACS to Ashwell Village Museum, Sort code: 20-73-26, Account number: 60128236, Reference: Restoration
- Online: details to be published shortly.

All donations can be gift-aided if you are a taxpayer. Please apply to Shirley Wardrop (742861 or shirleywardrop@gmail.com) for a gift-aid form. Shirley will also be happy to advise you if you'd like to set up a standing order.

Restoration Work

We are hoping to keep the modern part of the building open during most of the restoration work but inevitably some of the collection will need to go into secure storage. We apologise for any unsightly hoardings and scaffolding around the old part of the building during the next several months. It will all be worthwhile in the end.



Charlotte Morice's Drawing of Museum. Copyright Hertfordshire Archives & Local Studies (HALS), DE/X916

The Museum is a key feature of what makes our village the special place it is. We should like to thank you in advance for your help and support in its hour of need.

Martin Hoffman, Chairman

Shirley Wardrop, Treasurer

Cliff Jenkinson, Secretary

✉ cliffjenkinson47@live.co.uk ☎ 742592

David Hall, Trevor James, John Rhodes and Christine Schwick, Trustees

Friends of Ashwell Village Museum

The Friends support the Trustees and Curator in running the Museum. We help with fundraising, our latest venture being to continue with Sunday Afternoon Teas in the Parish Room during the winter months. We do this with the kind permission of St Mary's Church, who run them during the summer months.

Our other fundraising efforts during 2018 were coach trips: to Windsor in April and Canterbury in October. Both were well supported. Our talks in the United Reformed Church (URC) hall were given by John Mills, our local sculptor, about his life and experiences, and Dr Mervyn Miller, who spoke about the Garden City Movement. These talks were also well supported and we appreciate all those who come.

At the time of writing we have not confirmed our programme for 2019, other than proposing a trip to Stratford-upon-Avon on Thursday 11th April.

At our AGM in March we hope to have a speaker who can talk about building conservation and restoration, because of the major structural repairs under way, or shortly to begin, at the Museum itself.

We held our volunteers' coffee morning in January and enjoyed a social evening on 21st September for all our volunteers and supporters who help in so many ways.

The Friends also arrange the rota for the opening of the Museum on Sundays and bank holiday Mondays, as well as for other groups that may want to visit. The Museum is kept tidy and clean for visitors by our team of cleaners.

Sadly, last year we lost Maureen Willatts, who had for many years looked after this group and arranged a rota. She is greatly missed so we are now looking for new people to join us. Please offer if you think you could give us an hour, just two or three times a year.

Future events will soon be listed on the Museum website, and we try to put a monthly article in the Ashwell Village News.

If you are interested in joining the Friends as a supporter please contact our treasurer. If you are interested in volunteering in any other way, please contact any of the committee or call in at the Museum where your contact information can be passed on.

Our opening times are Sundays and bank holidays 2:30–5:00 pm. We also open on Saturdays when the Book Swap Café is open.

Jill Powell, Chairperson ☎ 742318

Karen Mills, Secretary ☎ 742155

David Hall, Treasurer ☎ 743799

**Sign up for regular information
about the village at
www.ashwell.gov.uk**

paul.norman498@googlemail.com
PAUL NORMAN
07515 157767
01462 730125
PAINTER & DECORATOR
Interior & Exterior Decorator
Free Estimates



Based in Ashwell, we undertake all aspects of electrical work.

0800 180 4042
enquiries@collingselectrical.com



Edward's Cleaning & Maintenance Services
(Est. 1997)

Local, Reliable Service Offering :

Home Maintenance
Carpet and Upholstery Cleaning
General Gardening
Lawn Care
Patio Cleaning
Window Cleaning
Oven Cleaning



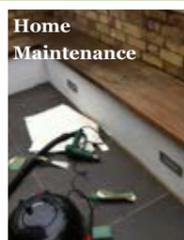
Edward Metcalfe
Home: 01462 742566
Mobile: 07713 095709
Email: edsmaintenance@icloud.com
Website: www.edwardspropertymaintenance.co.uk



Home Maintenance



Carpet and Upholstery Cleaning



Home Maintenance

bradleys hairdressers



An experienced and professional
hairdressers for ladies and gentlemen

REDKEN
APPOINTED SALON

Opening Hours
Monday 9am - 5.30pm
Tuesday 9am - 9pm
Wednesday 10am - 9pm
Thursday 10am - 5.30pm
Friday 9am - 5.30pm
Saturday 9am - 4pm

Barn D, Dixies Barns,
High Street,
Ashwell,
Herts. SG7 5NT.

☎ 01462 742043



S D BROWN

Building & Electrical Contractors

Established since 1980

Your Local Builder

Recommendations and References Available
Housing Association Approved Contractor
NICEIC Approved Electrical Contractor

For:

All Building Work including
New Builds

Extensions and Renovation Work
Garage and Loft Conversions

Bathrooms & Kitchens
Supplied & Fully Fitted
Plumbing

All Types of Carpentry Work
UPVC & Timber Replacement Double Glazed Windows & Doors

Supplied & Fully Fitted

Including:

- Conservatories
- Bi-fold Doors

Contact
Steve Brown

Tel: 01462 659884 - 01767 631046

Mob: 07760 241922

Email: sdbrownb@aol.com

www.sdbrownbuildingcontractors.co.uk



Sigma
Office Ltd

Microsoft.
Small Business
Specialist

Malwarebytes
Reseller Partner

Computer support for home & business

With a personal touch

- ▶ New PCs & Laptops, MS Office and Windows 10 advice, purchase/support
- ▶ Turbocharge your PC, get our SSD hard drive upgrade, up to x10 Faster !!
- ▶ Protection for your data and your children online!
- ▶ Servicing, repairs & updates at sensible prices
- ▶ Quality equipment to suit your needs & budget
- ▶ Customer support onsite, telephone & remote
- ▶ Website, domain and email hosting
- ▶ Networks for home or business. Whole home WiFi.
- ▶ VOIP - "Internet" telephone systems

AVG
Silver Reseller

CloudTelephones
Authorised Reseller

Get your own IT Support Dept **Call - 01462 742783**

Info@sigma-office.net
The Village Hall, Ashwell, Baldock, Herts, SG7 5PJ
www.sigma-office.net