



Discover Dunwich



Dunwich Museum newsletter

Issue 3 July 2021

reopening again

Welcome

WELCOME TO Issue 3 of *Discover Dunwich*, another “coming out lockdown” reopening special.

This is a pdf version of a black and white edition that was printed to be given to Museum visitors for free (donations welcome).

Article submissions to: news@dunwichmuseum.org.uk or c/o Dunwich Museum, St James St, Dunwich, Suffolk, IP17 3DT.

Pdfs of back issues are at www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk/whats-on, to get future editions by email: news@dunwichmuseum.org.uk.

Volunteers are always needed at the Museum – contact details are below.
Matt Salusbury, editor

Wreck’s identity remains an enigma

Graham Scott gives an update on the mysterious Dunwich Bank Wreck



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OPENING HOURS

The Museum is open **11.30am-4.30pm** seven days a week until the end of October. Social distancing measures are in place. Reopening has become helped by a National Heritage Lottery Fund Grant to re-engage with our community

THE DUNWICH Bank Wreck is 700 metres out to sea off Dunwich Heath, roughly level with the Coastguard Cottages there. It was discovered by Stuart Bacon in the 1990s. Stuart and his team hauled up the magnificent bronze cannon that greets you as you come in through the door of Dunwich Museum. (<https://tinyurl.com/44wxs3m4> for more on the Dunwich Dives and the cannon.)

Following in the footsteps of Stuart is Graham Scott, Senior Marine Archaeologist with Wessex Archaeology, who has been on several dives on the Wreck. He gave an update on the most recent (2020) dive at a Dunwich Museum Zoom talk in March.

The Wreck is one of the most challenging marine archaeology environments in UK waters, “extremely difficult to investigate,” says Graham. His team found the wreck wrapped in abandoned fishing nets, which they had to cut free before they could proceed. Visibility is usually poor to non-existent, with peat and sediment emptying into the sea from nearby rivers, swirling around in a strong current. Up until the 2020 dive, the Wreck was gradually being buried by silt. Sometimes the divers could only work for an hour a day on the wreck, so gruelling were conditions there.

Little remains of the actual ship. What Stu-

Chris Freeman (left) and Andrew Hamilton (right) lower the anchor (thought to be from an 18th-century Admiralty survey ship) into place in its new stand outside the then still closed Museum in May. They kindly donated their labour. Photo: Jane Hamilton

art Bacon’s team – working in poor visibility – took to be ship’s timbers now appear to be natural wood that’s been washed out to sea.

The Wreck may be scattered over a larger area than first thought. It’s difficult to date the wreck with certainty. Some ships from the Dutch and English fleets were lost at the inconclusive Battle of Sole Bay (1672), several miles out to sea from Southwold, there are contemporary accounts of the masts of sunken fire ships visible above the waves south east of Aldeburgh soon after the battle. It’s more likely, though, that the Wreck was a Spanish Armada ship (but there’s no convincing evidence for this yet). Or it could possibly even be a cargo ship transporting artillery for the army or navy of England’s King Henry VIII (1509-1547) – he ordered many bronze cannons from Belgium and Germany.

At least two bronze cannons rest on the seabed around the Wreck. On a rare day with some visibility in the Dunwich Dives the word “Remigy” could be **WRECK – p3**

Recent acquisitions

Newly obtained treasures of Dunwich Museum

Telegram, telescope...

THE LAMP from Darsham Radar Station was one of the many artefacts donated to Dunwich Museum in the second half of 2020 and the beginning of 2021.

Apart from a few antique postcards purchased on eBay, all our new acquisitions in the last 12 months have been donations – either generously bequeathed to the Museum by families with a local connection, or kindly handed in after being found on local beaches. (See back page for some finds donated by a particularly productive beachcomber.)

The artefact already known as the “Darsham radar light” is one such treasure. It was previously on display in the old Darsham Village Hall.

RAF High Street, which was at High Street, Darsham (five miles inland from Dunwich off the A12) was an important radar installation during the Second World War. Sited around where the A144 road to Halesworth now leaves the A12 just north of Lymball’s Lane, it was one of the first radar stations to detect the huge aerial armada approaching England that signalled the start of the Battle of Britain in July 1940.

Its four wooden pylon-like towers with aerials – 360 feet (109m) high – were a hazard to aviation. Another radar tower of the same “Chain Home” configuration at Stoke Holy Cross near Norwich was accidentally decapitated by a bomber.

So throughout World War Two, the red light would have stood on top of one of the four radar arrays, helping to ensure low-flying aircraft didn’t crash into it. The Museum is looking into the feasibility of putting the light on display.

Also donated was a fine telescope, which had once belonged to George Darkins, who was the postmaster of the Dunwich Post Office. (There’s still a cottage on St James’s Street identifiable as The Old Post Office). Darkins was also a volunteer crewman of a Dunwich lifeboat, and possibly its skipper. This explains why he had such a fine telescope.

Keeping to a nautical theme, the Museum has also been gifted a framed telegram sent in June 1872 from “Elmy” care of a Lloyds shipping agent in Harwich, to a John Elmy in Westleton,



Left: The Darsham radar light, Right: manager Jane Hamilton with telescope.

informing him that the ship *Isabel* had been “wrecked at longsand” with “all hands saved.” The donor told us that the “Elmy” who sent the telegram was one of the crew of the *Isabel*, and that the John Elmy in Westleton was his father, while the *Isabel* was a fishing boat operating out of Dunwich.

Our new acquisitions are currently in the stores being catalogued. We don’t have the space to display all our collection, but you can view many of them in digitised form at <https://ehive.com>, entering the search term “Dunwich.”

MATT SALUSBURY

Timberrr!

IN THE EARLY months of 2021, ships’ timbers came ashore in storms on two beaches on the Suffolk coast – at Thorpeness, nine miles south of Dunwich and at Covehithe, north of Southwold. Maritime archaeologists were prevented by Covid lockdown from going to take a look at them and were reliant on photos sent by locals to identify them. Based on the pins holding the Thorpeness timbers together, they are believed to be from a at least one 17th or 18th century warship or collier (coal transporter).



Above: a visitor with a recovered ship’s timber at the Reading Room.
Below: more timbers ashore at Dingle (Photo: Julia Davison)



Then ship’s timbers started turning up on Dunwich’s beaches – a single long, thick timber on Dunwich Beach and the remains of several ships timbers pinned together washed up on Dingle Beach. The timber from Dunwich Beach was recovered and carried by volunteers to temporary storage at the Reading Room.

Dunwich and climate change

David Sear, Professor of Physical Geography at Southampton University and a Museum trustee, examines the role of climate change in Dunwich's story



All Saints Church – lost to the sea in 1919, when erosion was quicker than today. Photo: Dunwich Museum's Nicholson Collection of postcards, out of copyright.

WEATHER IS what you get, climate is what you expect. Climate is the average state of the weather over time – so climate change is an alteration in that mean state. Now we're in a world with mean global temperatures rising rapidly.

Back in the 13th century (the zenith of Dunwich) the northern hemisphere was in a "medieval warm period" when average northern hemisphere temperatures were warmer. Later in the 16th through to the mid-19th century, average temperatures were cooler – the "Little Ice Age".

When the average state of the climate changes, this alters the strength of storms tracking across the UK. We've seen this recently with increased flooding in Cumbria. Individually these were storms (weather), but collectively we see the last two decades as a storm-rich period. In Dunwich, the great storms of 1250 and 1286 came during a period of increased storminess in the North Sea at a time when Dunwich probably lacked a beach protecting the cliffs.

In contrast to today, the climate change affecting the Dunwich of 800 years ago was natural – possibly driven by increased volcanic eruptions (there was a particularly large eruption in 1258) and increasing solar activity. Current climate change is different. Today's increased warming results from the build-up of carbon emissions in our atmosphere, with the change far quicker and larger in magnitude than the forces driving the storminess of the 13th and 17th centuries.

The Little Ice Age (around 1450-1850) was a period of cooler than average local temperatures. During this period, intense storms resulted in major cliff retreat at Dunwich, about 2-3m a year. St John's church was lost to the sea in the 1540s, St Peter's in 1695-1702, the town jail and the market place in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Cock and Hen Hills fell to the great storm of 1740.

The rate of cliff retreat was at its highest in the period 1894-1906, averaging 8.8m per year. The slowdown in erosion has been marked in the last 20 years but is part of a pattern that started around the 1920s, and may be related to the growth of the offshore Dunwich banks. As waves approach the coastline, a shallower sea slows down the movement of the water, causing the waves to break, releasing the energy stored in the wave and driving the movement of sand and shingle.

The Dunwich bank grew and coalesced into a single bank sometime between 1867 and 1922. This bank reduced the energy of waves at the Dunwich coastline. In the last 20 years the Dunwich bank has flattened and migrated towards the coastline. The beach has become more stable. Cliff erosion rates are now at less than 1m a year, with cliff retreat over the last decade mainly caused by long periods of wet weather and intense rainstorms.

- There are links to David's reports on Dunwich at www.dunwich.org.uk. A much longer version of this article is at www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk/whats-on.

WRECK – from *front* read, engraved on one of these. ("Gun 3" – subsequently stolen from the seabed sometime around 2012.) This led to the identification of Dunwich Museum's cannon as the work of Belgian gunfounder Remigy de Halut.

But gun experts Ruth Brown and Kay Smith note that the squared-off ring on the breach of the Dunwich Museum cannon, its dolphin-shaped handle or knob on the end of the breach and the "bearded man's head" decoration round its muzzle are signatures of Gregor Löffler, another Hapsburg Empire gunfounder based in Augsburg, Germany.

Then there's a 1684 Royal Ordnance Office report of a Mr Lincoln being dispatched to Knodishall (not far from Dunwich) to buy a "brass" cannon. Had it been recovered from the Dunwich Bank Wreck? **Matt Salusbury**

The Whisperer in Darkness

Review – SPOILERS!

BBC Radio 4, on BBC Sounds



Image credit: BBC Radio 4, with thanks to Sweet Talk Productions

THE GLORIOUSLY bonkers sci-fi horror thriller radio series *The Lovecraft Investigations* is loosely based on the horror stories of HP Lovecraft, which were usually set in the USA of the 1920s. Among Lovecraft's better-known novellas is *The Dunwich Horror*, set in (a fictional) Dunwich, Massachusetts.

The Radio 4 series, among the channel's top ten most popular podcasts, moves the action to modern East Anglia, particularly Rendlesham Forest, home of the infamous 1980 UFO incident and – yes, also to Dunwich!

Currently at 35 episodes and counting, *The Lovecraft Investigations* includes 10 episodes of *The Whisperer in Darkness*. In these, two investigators look into a strange plane crash and all sorts of horrifying weirdness. Episode 3 of *The Whisperer in Darkness*, available on BBC Sounds (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07wnwly) is especially eyebrow-raising. In it, enquiries take our heroes to Dunwich Museum, complete with its model of the lost medieval town. (SPOILERS!)

There they encounter a creepy and evasive Dunwich Museum manager. When confronted with some questions she throws herself off the cliffs, but not before hinting at the "real reason" why "they" made Dunwich disappear under the sea all those years ago!

You can tell *The Whisperer in Darkness* is pure fiction. Our interpid investigators can get clear-as-a-bell mobile phone coverage and a wifi signal in The Ship pub, which everyone in real Dunwich knows is a fantasy.

Jana Carpenter, who plays lead character Kennedy Fisher in *Whisperer*, told *Discover Dunwich* she and her husband (*Whisperer* scriptwriter Julian Simpson) "love Dunwich and very much wanted to include some of its history (real and made up) in the podcast... we love the museum too." **Matt Salusbury**

Sandie Sheals finds fossils on the sea shore

MANY OF the fossils in Dunwich Museum's collection have been kindly donated by Sandie Sheals. She has a good eye for unusual objects among the shingle.

What makes these many finds extraordinary is that Sandie's usually in Dunwich for just one week a year. How does she do it? What's her secret?

I've always loved finding things. As a child I was one of those kids who walked looking down at the small things rather than the taking in the big views. I'd find lots of things, from a small weed to an interesting stone, a fossil, bit of glass or something that's been lost by someone recently or thousands of years ago.

When I was about eight I found a bit of Fool's Gold (the mineral iron pyrites) in a piece of flint in a pile of builder's rubble, it made me wonder what else I would find.

I lived in Suffolk as a child and often visited the Suffolk coast. I still visit with my family and my own grown-up children. Every year we stay for a week or two and we do the odd day trips as well. We always seem find something interesting.

We love beachcombing, and the great walk between the mysterious Dunwich and Walberswick. This is where I find most of the treasures I take to Dunwich Museum. I think it's because this is where we spend most of our time, relaxing, playing, watching the



Sheals finds in the collection – top left: whale vertebra; top right: fragment of a mammoth or elephant's tooth; bottom left: fragment of a fossil deer antler; bottom right: a piece of prehistoric mammal bone. Photos: Dunwich Museum

wildlife and the sea.

Between Dunwich and Walberswick we've found treasures including fossils, worked flint, semi-precious stones, seed pods from thousands of miles away, bits of coral reef, bits of ancient petrified wood, bricks, pottery and glass. Also bits of ancient leather shoes including very small children's shoes, fragments of human bone, a World War Two mine and much else that would need identifying.

I've also found things nearby at Southwold and Covehithe and Minsmere beaches too.

I have little knowledge of fossils so I gratefully rely on the Dunwich Museum to look and let me know what my finds are.

Visiting local museums like Dunwich helped me imagine what I might find.

I don't go out to look for fossils or anything in particular. I walk along, zigzagging across the beach looking for anything that has an interesting shape or colour or just looks out of place among the shingle. The dark brown colours and shapes of bone fossils stand out against the pebbles.

Advice? Go out to enjoy the walk. You will find something. *Sandie Sheals*

What's on

The Museum's now open seven days a week, events planned

IN SPITE of multiple lockdowns in 2020, we were still able to run some events last year, including a local ghost walk for Halloween.

This year, our temporary exhibition on the Dunwich Dives continues, displaying finds brought up by Stuart Bacon and his team from the seabed off Dunwich. We also have a new interactive display board in our upstairs gallery.

Sister Luke's occasional walking tours of medieval monastic Dunwich have resumed. A Tuesday evening term-time Dunwich Museum Kids Club for local families has started, email community@dunwichmuseum.org.uk for details.

There will be outdoor activities around Dunwich Greyfriars monastery this season, thanks to a grant from Suffolk Coasts and Heaths AONB. Activities include a Family Archaeology Day on **14 August**. Updates and details of 2021 events in partnership with Dunwich Greyfriars and Artbranches will follow.

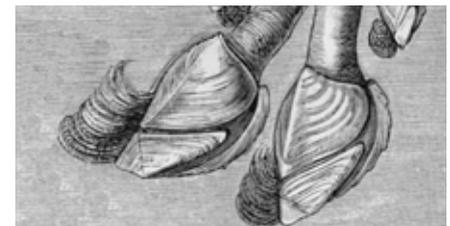
On Twitter the account of this news-



Sister Luke's tour of medieval Dunwich pauses at Greyfriars monastery Photo: Beth Brookhouse

letter is [@DiscoverDunwich](https://www.facebook.com/DiscoverDunwich). Dunwich Museum's Facebook page can be found at [@DunwichMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/DunwichMuseum).

The Museum's instagram account is at [@dunwichmuseum](https://www.instagram.com/dunwichmuseum). Check these and our website www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk for updates, including events throughout the 2021 season.



Blistering barnacles!

WE CONGRATULATE our Collections Manager Tim Holt-Wilson, who has recently attained immortality.

His name will live on for all eternity the official Latin name of a fossil barnacle species that has been named after him.

In recognition of his work on fossil barnacles, a stem barnacle found in a gravel pit in Norfolk, which was a contemporary of the dinosaurs, will forever bear the name *Subsecolepas holtwilsoni*.

The little animal, from a time when East Anglia was mostly underwater, is not photogenic. So we have instead included above a Victorian out-of-copyright illustration of a generic fossil stem barnacle to give an idea of how living *S. holtwilsoni* may have looked.