



# Discover Dunwich



Archaeology and history journal of Dunwich Museum. Issue 4, July 2024

## Welcome

This newsletter is available for Museum visitors to take away (donations welcome) and is posted to Dunwich Community Heritage Centre members.

There's a colour pdf version to download, along with back issues, at: [www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk/whats-on](http://www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk/whats-on)

Article submissions to:

[news@dunwichmuseum.org.uk](mailto:news@dunwichmuseum.org.uk)

or c/o Dunwich Museum, St James St, Dunwich, Suffolk, IP17 3DT.

Volunteers are always needed – contact details below.

Photos © Dunwich Museum

**Matt Salusbury, Simon MacDowall, editors.**



*Visitors to the ruins of All Saints Church, Dunwich at around 1905.*

*This image is from a magic lantern slide from the recently-acquired Dowcra collection (see page 2)*

## Dunwich Community Heritage Centre Launch

The Centre had its launch in the Reading Room on 20 April this year, during which we signed up our first members. At the launch, we heard from our curator Katharine Chant,

Katharine was instrumental in setting up Dunwich Museum in its current premises. She described the Museum's history and how the model of medieval Dunwich that is its centrepiece came into being.

We also saw some recently donated magic lantern slides (See page 2) showing earlier displays of artefacts in the 'Rocket Shed,' so-called because it stored rockets that fired ropes to rescue sailors as part of Dunwich lifeboat station.

We believe that there will always be enthusiastic staff, volunteers, and trustees to keep the Museum going for many decades to come. With coastal erosion, climate change and rising sea levels, who knows what the future may bring?

We have received a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund – **The Dunwich Community Heritage Hub- The Way Forward.** This will help ensure the Museum's sustainability and also fund much of what we will do this year.

The grant also helps us build our partnerships with other coastal communities and in the field of climate change. We hope to become a centre for the study of climate change and of coastal erosion, and to host a virtual conference on these subjects in the near future.

## Museum opening Hours

11.30am-4.30pm daily until 31 October 2024.

See website for Christmas opening.

We reopen 15- 23 February 2025  
2pm-4pm and weekends in March  
2pm-4pm

Daily opening resumes 1 April 2025.

## Contact Dunwich Museum

01728 648796 or 07979 428058

[manager@dunwichmuseum.org.uk](mailto:manager@dunwichmuseum.org.uk)

School bookings:

[schools@dunwichmuseum.org.uk](mailto:schools@dunwichmuseum.org.uk)

Family events

[chronicles@dunwichmuseum.org.uk](mailto:chronicles@dunwichmuseum.org.uk)

## Become a Member

To secure our future, the Dunwich Reading Room and Museum have become the **Dunwich Community Heritage Centre** – a charitable members' organisation.

We invite all our supporters and fans to become members. There will be Annual General Meetings at which members can express their views and vote for trustees.

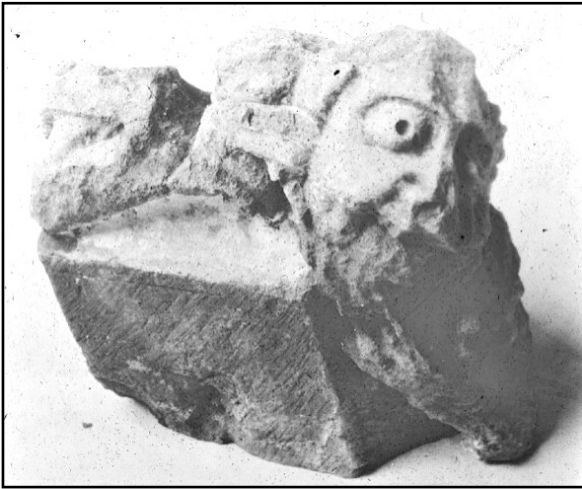
Membership is £10. Proceeds from memberships will help us sustain the museum into the future.

See: [www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk/membership/](http://www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk/membership/)

or email:

[membership@dunwichmuseum.org.uk](mailto:membership@dunwichmuseum.org.uk)

## Recent Acquisitions



© Dunwich Greyfriars Trust

*Stonework heads from Dunwich's lost churches, now missing. Photo circa 1910 from the Dowcra Collection.*

We are cataloguing and digitalising the *Dowcra Collection* of photographs recently donated to the Museum. This collection of over 650 objects includes images of a precursor to Dunwich Museum from (we think) the 1930s.

The artefacts shown in the photos include many which are familiar and which are still in the Museum collection to, including medieval coins and buckles. However, the old photos of the collection show many other items – fossil mammoth and elephant teeth, stonework and prehistoric worked flints – which are no longer in the collection. Some may have been borrowed on loan – but where are they now? We'd love to know.

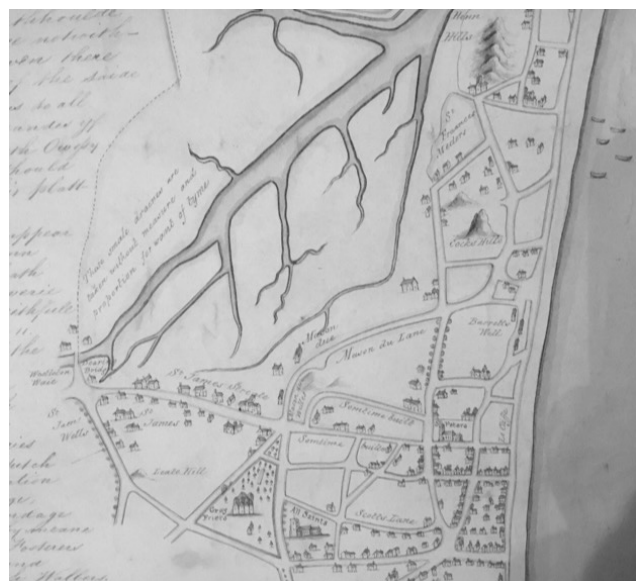
More slides in the Dowcra collection show Victorian visitors in the ruins of All Saints Church (see page 1). There are photos showing detail of the walls of All Saints and some of what appear to be fragments of gargoyles and other decorative figures from All Saints, also now missing. The remains of All Saints fell off the cliff in 1919, you can still see a part of the last buttress of All Saints in the churchyard of St James Church, down the road from Dunwich Museum (see page 1)

Digital images of the *Dowcra* slides will eventually be online at <https://ehive.com/objects?query=Dunwich>. We hope to showcase the collection at future events and via our audio-visual display panels in the Museum.

Our work on cataloguing and digitalising the slides has been made possible thanks to a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The grant is also paying for conservation of landscape watercolours and maps

Other important acquisitions include the *Joshua Kirby Map* – a hand-drawn map of Dunwich and Dingle from around 1760. The map is amazingly accurate when compared to modern maps of Dunwich. It shows ruins of Dunwich churches that are now entirely under the sea, as well as Cock Hill and Hen Hill, both of which have disappeared.

The old Maison Dieu – the area around the medieval hospital – has been anglicised on the Kirby Map to “Mason Due.” Fragments of Maison Dieu have turned up on recent archaeology digs. There's still a tiny bit of Maison Dieu Hill left, now fenced off, by the beach. The last condemned fishing shed on Maison Dieu Hill finally collapsed in early 2022.



*The Kirby map was purchased thanks to generous donations from Dunwich villagers and supporters. A pamphlet will be on sale in the Museum soon.*



## Rain Causes Cliffs to Collapse



*The Cliff Path at Dunwich closed following a cliff collapse, February 2024. The sign reads, "Sorry access closed due to cliff fall".*

Throughout the history of Dunwich, its greatest threat has always been from the sea. Tidal surges and storms lead to the waves scouring away the base of the cliffs, or in extreme cases like the Great Storm of 1286, washing away whole streets of the town.

It's thought that a volcanic eruption, possibly in Indonesia, caused a period of global warming in the northern hemisphere in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This in turn led to a period of increased storms, including the Great Storm that started Dunwich's decline.

(See *Dunwich and Climate Change*: <https://tinyurl.com/Dunwichandclimatechange>)

In recent years, coastal erosion at Dunwich seems to have slowed down, due to processes yet fully understand – we are still gathering data on this.

One factor could be that the sandbanks just out to sea (roughly where Medieval Dunwich was) have re-arranged themselves. The waves break on this sandbank and this dissipates a lot of the wave energy before they reach the beach.

Now, though, it seems that climate change has brought a new threat to the cliffs at Dunwich.

January 2024 saw two big storms hit the UK. February 2024 was the warmest and wettest in the south of England since records began, while April 2024 was England's warmest and wettest for over a decade. The months of January and February 2024 saw mostly mild weather but higher temperatures brought lots and lots of rain.



*The fenced-off viewing point on the cliffs following the Cliff Path's reopening in April 2024.*

On 5 January 2024, following heavy rain, a three-metre section of the cliff at Dunwich, part of the Cliff Path, collapsed.

The Cliff Path was closed shortly afterwards. It eventually reopened with a wooden fence surrounding a viewing point on the cliff. It is for the moment not safe enough to walk any further along the path on the edge of the cliff.

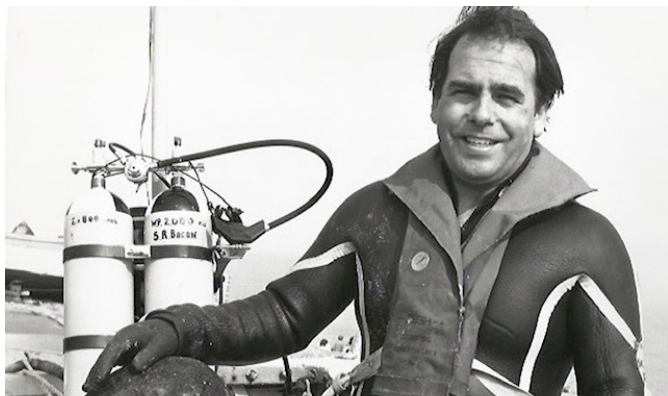
We thank our partners the Dunwich Greyfriars Trust for providing the fencing that allowed part of the Cliff Path to reopen.

Normally, January and February will see frosts and freezing weather instead of so much rain. David Sear, Professor of Physical Geography at Southampton University and a Dunwich Museum Trustee, said "long duration rainfall saturated the cliff sediments making them too heavy to be supported – expect more as the rainfall continues and stay clear of the edge. Cliff erosion is not all sea levels and waves."

Every one degree celsius rise in temperature means the amount of water vapour in the atmosphere can increase by seven per cent, according to NASA.

Heavy rain also caused Dunwich to be cut off briefly in October 2023 as the roads and tracks out of the village became impassable. The action of the waves also caused cliff collapses at Thorepness and Pakefield and elsewhere on the East Anglian coast between November 2023 and February 2024.

**Here we remember those who have contributed to Dunwich Museum in so many ways who and recently passed away.**



*Stuart Bacon* (photo above) led the Dunwich Dives that found the ruins of many of Dunwich's churches lost to the sea. His finds are in the Museum's collections.

Stuart went on to discover the Dunwich Bank Wreck, thought to be a Spanish Armada ship, and brought up one of its cannons. After the cannon was seized by the Receiver of Wrecks, he fought a campaign which resulted in the cannon being displayed in Dunwich Museum, where it still is today.

Before Stuart's dives, experts believed no traces of medieval Dunwich remained beneath the sea. Stuart made his discoveries in some of the worst diving conditions imaginable — in the swirling currents off Dunwich with almost no visibility. The Dunwich Bank Wreck was littered with abandoned nets — Stuart had to cut his way through these.

Stuart recently donated his finds to the Museum and passed on his knowledge to the Wessex Archaeology dive team who continue his work.

Stuart passed away aged 90 in January 2023.

Also gone and much missed are past volunteers and managers of the Museum. *Katharine Riches*, a former volunteer and trustee of Dunwich Museum, passed away in the summer of 2021 aged 102.

*John Francis*, who passed away in March 2023, was a former treasurer of the Museum, trustee and volunteer, famous for stepping in, often at short notice, when his colleagues were unavailable.

Former Museum manager until the end of 2014 *John Saunders*, and volunteer and trustee, *John Salusbury*, both passed away early in 2024.

## What's On

The museum's current exhibition is on *Pilgrimage* and features some rare pilgrim badges and ampullae found at Dunwich — evidence that Dunwich was on a medieval pilgrimage route for both English pilgrimages and as an embarkation port for pilgrims travelling through the shrines of Europe and beyond to Jerusalem. The exhibition continues at least to the end of the 2024 season.

Our *Summer Sale* is on in the Reading Room and Marquee on Saturday 6 July. We hope to host bric a brac, crafts and a good variety of other stalls.

Contact: [chronicles@dunwichmuseum.org.uk](mailto:chronicles@dunwichmuseum.org.uk).

There's a talk on "*The Big Cats of Suffolk*" on Saturday 20 July at 6pm in the Reading Room. Matt Salusbury, author of *Mystery Animals of Suffolk* and chair of the Museum trustees, will describe the many reports of sightings of mystery felines — black leopards, pumas, lynxes!

Join us for a *Pilgrimage to Dunwich* on St James Day Thursday 25 July. We'll meet at St Peters in Westleton at 11, to walk to St James Church and share a light pilgrim lunch.

Our annual *Art Show* will coincide with the Flower Festival at St James from 3 – 5 August.

Apply to exhibit:

[chronicles@dunwichmuseum.org.uk](mailto:chronicles@dunwichmuseum.org.uk)



There will be more events through the summer to celebrate pilgrimage, family archaeology days, erosion modelling and tours of medieval Dunwich led by 'Poor Clare' nun Sister Luke.

Details at:

[www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk/events](http://www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk/events)

