



# Discover Dunwich

Dunwich Museum newsletter

Issue 1 2019

## Welcome

THIS IS the first edition of *Discover Dunwich*, the newsletter for and by volunteers, staff, trustees and visitors of Dunwich Museum and the Dunwich community.

It is hoped that this publication will come out two or three times a year, in print and (in colour) in a pdf format emailed to those who put their name on a mailing list and accessible via the website.

The deadline for the next print edition will be 21 April 2019. Submission to: Matt Salusbury, editor, via [mattsal@gn.apc.org](mailto:mattsal@gn.apc.org) or care of Dunwich Museum, St James St, Dunwich, Suffolk, IP17 3DT.

Volunteers are always needed at the Museum – contact details are below.

*Matt Salusbury, editor*

**DUNWICH MUSEUM**  
01728 648796 or 07979  
428058  
**manager@**  
**dunwichmuseum.org.uk**  
schools bookings:  
**schools@dunwichmuseum.org.uk**  
**www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk**

**MUSEUM OPENING:**  
**Reopening for 2019 –**  
**February half term:**  
**16 February 2019-24**  
**February 2019,**  
**2pm-4pm.**  
**Open March weekends**  
**2pm-4pm. Then open**  
**daily 11.30-4.30 from 1st**  
**April 2019 onwards.**



Dunwich Museum celebrates 100 years of votes for women – see back page.

## The Bells! The Bells!

Phantom bell legends from Dunwich and nationwide

IS IT true about the bells? Most visitors to Dunwich Museum ask that question, along with the other question about whether the coastal erosion still continues.

The phantom bells at Dunwich, though obvious nonsense, are actually among the more plausible of Britain's phantom bell legends, as I discovered when I researched these. At least churches had actually once stood in Dunwich – more than can be said for the locations of many phantom bell legends!

Dunwich's phantom bells peal at night in some versions of the tradition, while in most such legends they are heard before a storm, or on a particular "holy day."

According to *Dunwich Suffolk* (Jean and Stuart Bacon, 1975) Master Mariner John Day in 1856 claimed to have known his position when making for Sizewell Bank by the tolling of a submerged bell from a church at Dunwich.

Rowland Parker, author of *Men of Dunwich*, had "never heard any local talk of bells tolling out to sea" as of 1979. But in a recent entry to the Dunwich Museum enquiries book, a visitor staying at Dunwich Heath claims that at the end of 2017 they were woken by short "peals" from bells late at night coming from Dunwich. (The current St James's Church has a single automated bell that just tolls the hour – it can't ring peals.)

Some visitors imagine Dunwich was swept away in an Atlantis-style tsunami that some-

how left churches and their bells intact under the waves. The truth was very different. With the cliffs gradually crumbling away, parishioners would have had many years' warning that their church was approaching the end of its life, giving them time to strip out the valuable bells. Dunwich parish records show St Nicholas's church had a receipt for the sale of its bells to build a pier to protect the original St James's church as the sea advanced.

There are a few places in the UK where there actually *was* a church lost to the sea, besides Dunwich. St Anne's on Sea in Lancashire once had one, it's now off the coast.

The bells of the church at Walton-on-the-Naze off the Essex coast – taken by the sea in the 1790s – are said to warn of incoming storms. The church is said to have reappeared above the waves briefly in 1928, although Brian Jennings of the Frinton and Walton Heritage Society told me the location of the church has never been confirmed and that witnesses probably misidentified brick groynes built out to sea.

Some more plausible phantom bell legends come from the Cornish coast. In these it is often ships' bells that toll after they have sunk. It's the bell of the ship *Neptune* that are supposed to ring off the coast at St Ives.

Unlikely traditions about phantom bells include one from Kirksanton in Cumbria, where a village church is said to have once **BELLS** – see back page

# Recent finds

items handed into the Museum by visitors during the 2018 season

## Pliocene Blue Planet

Tim Holt-Wilson writes

MRS SANDIE Sheals from Chester recently dropped a lump of stony matter off at the Museum. Yellowish-brown in colour; cylindrical, about 15 inches by 13; with low protuberances sticking out; a honey-combed texture in places and looking battered and worn by the sea. She found it on the beach fronting Dunwich Marsh, towards Walberswick.

Earlier this year I was given a similar object found on the beach at Felixstowe. Having worked on the fossil vertebrates at Ipswich Museum, I knew it was the sea-battered centre of a whale vertebra, minus its various lateral and spinous processes. It had come from the Red Crag strata of late Pliocene or early Pleistocene age (about 2.8 million years old) which outcrop locally along the coast. Curiosity drove me to find out more about the Crag whales of Suffolk. I investigated the geological literature and even visited the British Museum of Natural History, where I met a cetacean researcher, Dr Travis Park, and spent an interesting three hours looking through their collection of Suffolk finds.

Whale fossils are often found along the coast of Suffolk, as nondescript lumps of bone. Most useful for researchers are the dense bones from the inner ear, which look rather like knobbly, brown beans with a curled over, ear-like flange on one side. Fossil whale species can be distinguished on the basis of these bones, so they are definitely worth finding.

Our Dunwich specimen (catalogue number N182) is a lumbar or caudal (tail) vertebra, most likely from a small baleen (mysticete, filter feeders, like a blue whale or right whale) or medium-to-large toothed whale (odontocete, like a sperm whale). It is not possible to be more precise. Its colour and state of preservation suggest it may have originated in the Red Crag, but was then perhaps eroded out and incorporated into the later Norwich Crag strata that outcrop at Dunwich, dated about two million years ago. It is in a similar state to the Crag whale vertebra (N157) in the display case near the back door of the Museum. There is also a fragment of whale rib, or-



**The whale vertebra (DUWHM: N182)**

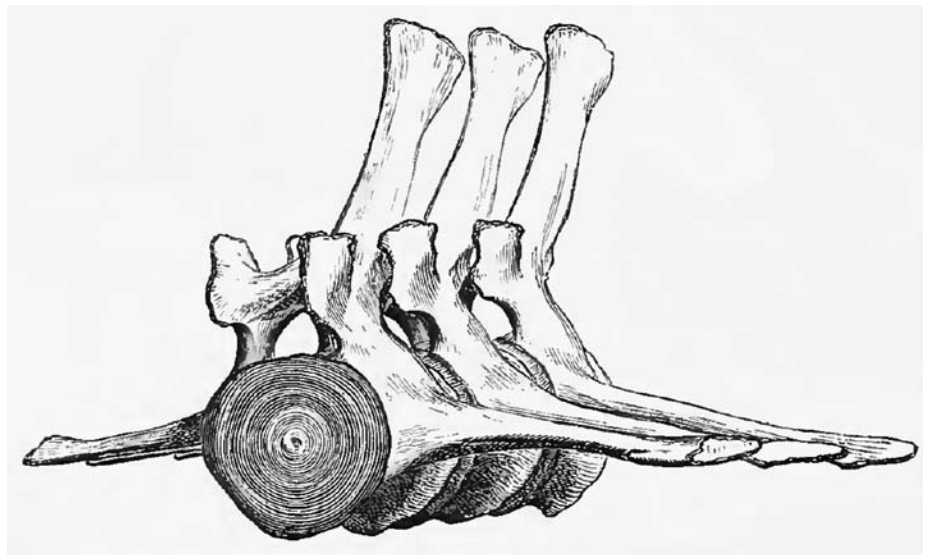
ange in colour and heavily mineralised with iron.

There is some interesting 19th century information which records a “shell-bed exposed in the cliff at Dunwich. This bed, a red crag, appeared in patches at the foot of the cliff about 1500 yards south of the church-in-ruins.... Mammalian remains were also found, and these appeared to come from a hard ferruginous bed of clay and sand, shown here and there on the beach, some feet below the shell-bed in the cliff”. Mammal remains including whale vertebrae and rib fossils had been found, as well as elephant, horse and rhinoceros bones and teeth. I have never seen an exposure of this ‘red crag’ but anyone who finds themselves

out near Cliff House at low tide mark after a storm should look for this bed and its fossil debris. It may extend below beach level further north up towards the village, and may well be the source of the whale fossils. How old is it? It is likely to be part of the Norwich Crag Formation, of early Pleistocene age about two million years old, which forms a greater part of the sandy and gravelly cliffs at Dunwich. It also includes horizons of

ferruginous (iron-rich) sands with fossil shells occurring at about sea-level at nearby Sizewell. Bits of ferruginous mudstone can be found on the beach and are occasionally handed in at the Museum. I suspect they have been derived from this hidden, iron-rich stratum. They contain little sparkling flecks of the mineral mica.

What was life like in our local corner of the Blue Planet in Norwich Crag times, about 2 million years ago? The North Sea was a bight or cul-de-sac, as the Straits of Dover had not yet opened. The climate was temperate, and the location of Dunwich was under water, as the sea stretched as far west as Essex and Hertfordshire. Offshore sands were de-

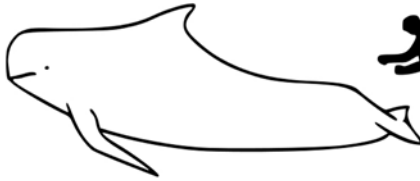


**Complete vertebra from a modern whale. Image: Eschricht, DF & Reinhardt, J. from: Flower, WH (ed). *Recent Memoirs of the Cetacea*. Ray Society, London, 1866. Out of copyright**



posited in the Dunwich area.

Next time you are in the Museum and pass the whale vertebra near the back door, spare a thought for the cetacean (whale) inhabitants of the Blue Planet in Norwich Crag times. They are the ancestors of today's wonderful whale species. Old bones may have interesting stories to tell.



Our vertebra could be from a smaller toothed whale like this one.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

### Beast from the East loosens ack-ack bits?



THIS IS one of several bags of fragments of some type of brass artillery shell from World War Two handed into the Museum. Many of these seem to have been loosened from the cliffs, bits of which crumbled away in the Beast from the East, particularly at Dunwich Heath.

The fragments shown above are from the Dunwich Beach car park. Shell parts also seem to be turning up at Walberswick Sluice. Some fragments are stamped with numbers.

Several visitors who handed these fragments in thought they were from anti-aircraft shells – possibly from the 3.7-inch anti-aircraft guns deployed in World War Two along the coast against German V1 missiles passing over the Suffolk en route to London.

### Sponge Bob dinosaur contemporary



I FOUND this strange object on a deserted stretch of beach between Dingle and Walberswick Sluice in February 2018. I had no idea what it was, it resembled an ancient Greek vase encrusted with concrete. I accidentally dropped it and it shattered, but I was able to glue all the bits back together.

Geologist Tim Holt-Wilson could immediately identify it – it's a prehistoric fossil sponge, a "tulip sponge" covered in a layer of sediment, from the *Siphonia* family. You can still see the honeycomb structure of the sponge on the inside.

Our sponge was from the Cretaceous period, around 65million years ago, so contemporary with the last dinosaurs, when Suffolk was mostly under the sea. It's not from the much younger types of rock we find on the Suffolk coast, so it would have come from out in the North Sea somewhere, "rolled" ashore by the action of the waves over many years. (I found it just after a big tidal surge.)

The *Siphonia* is now in the Museum stores awaiting cataloguing.

**Matt Salusbury**



### Reconstruction of live *Siphonia*

## Dunwich Voices

review



DVD, Caroline Gay Way, *Mindscales* On sale in Dunwich Museum

A collection including poems (some set to music) together with a collage of images, *Dunwich Voices* transports you to 13th century Dunwich, a bustling cosmopolitan town at its zenith just before the Great Storm of 1286. It also gives a glimpse of Dunwich when the Great Storm strikes and in its aftermath.

By turns eerie, joyful, humorous, evocative, atmospheric and haunting, it brings to life the history of our once flourishing village.

It's a historical gem – a most interesting slice of Suffolk history, a mosaic of historical record, interpretation and charming vignettes encompassing life in the 13th century. Some of the poems are based on historical facts, but there is also considerable artistic licence.

One incident that was rumoured to have happened involved townspeople attacking the houses of "traitors" who moved inland after the devastation of the Great Storm, such as the strength of feeling amongst some.

*Dunwich Voices* has already had performances locally including a full house at the Dunwich Reading Room. It's going to the 2019 Venice Biennale, while there are also plans for possible *son et lumière* performance with a light show projected onto the walls of local churches, or for an interactive experience on tablets and through headphones for visitors to the Dunwich Museum.

"Saint Felix"

# Conservation tutorial at Dunwich Museum

AT THE Museum we pride ourselves that our collection is maintained in tip-top condition, but it's always worth getting a review and we needed some training to maintain the Armada cannon – not in *full* working order, you'll be glad to hear.

Robert (Bob) Entwistle is senior conservator for the Ipswich and Colchester Museum Service and doesn't come more qualified in his field. So we were delighted when he said he would give up a day of his time to talk and demonstrate to a group of eager volunteers.

Bob turned up with two large boxes of chemicals, cleaning materials, and a lifetime's experience. First we set about the beautiful Tudor silver collection of the Corporation of Dunwich, now the Dunwich Town Trust. Who better than to buff them up but Angela Abell the Chair, and Nick Mayo also of the Town Trust! Bob showed us how to carefully apply the polish and then clean it off with methylated spirit before applying micro-crystalline wax to keep the air out and preserve it for a lot longer than a dip in Goddards silver polish would. Additionally there was the telescope, writing



**Polishing silver (from left:) Nick Mayo, John Cary, Bob Entwistle, Annie Bayman, Angela Abell**

stand and medieval halfpennies. On his instructions we had bought some Pacific cloth we will use to line the display cabinet over the winter break – it absorbs sulphur in the atmosphere and stops further corrosion.

Next the Armada gun: Royal Armouries had asked us to wax it once a year, and we needed some training to apply the wax and use it properly. Again micro-crystalline wax was the thing to use (it's marvellous stuff and we've got a bucket of it now). Firstly we had to clean the bronze surface with methylated spirit to remove the grease of a thousand hands. Then we rubbed in lumps of the hard wax and spread it around as best as pos-

sible. After that we applied a hair-dryer at full heat while polishing and rubbing the wax as hard as possible. The elbow grease paid off; soon the smoother parts acquired a pleasing lustre. Another piece of our heritage was protected from the ravages of time, and visitors.

While I finished up the gun, Bob popped in to see Tim Holt-Wilson, the archivist, with Angela and Nick from the Town Trust.

Bob gave Tim a few useful tips on paper conservation and Tim was able to show everyone how thoroughly and professionally the archive systems worked.

**John Cary**

**Photo: Jane Hamilton**

---

## **BELLS – from front page**

stood and to have sunk beneath the ground, its bells audible if you put your ear on the earth of the Village Green.

Many such legends come from the Welsh coast, where tolling phantom bells are said to have been stolen and dumped at new off-shore locations by the Devil himself. One can supposedly be heard warning of storms approaching Whitesand Bay in Pembrokeshire.

Still in Wales but inland, there is said to have once been a “cathedral” at Llangorse Lake in Brecon, “before it was flooded” and whose bells still ring out on “holy days.” Since Llangorse was formed at least 10,000 years ago, this is credibility-stretcher.

A gently pealing bell can be heard under the waters of Nigg Bay in the Scottish Highlands. From London's suburbs comes the tradition that Old Church Road in Romford, Essex, recalls a church that “sank into the ground” leaving only the sound of phantom bells every St Andrew's Day.

How are landlocked churches supposed to have sunk into the earth? The wrath of God upon sinners is sometimes cited. Phantom peals are accompanied by bubbles rising from the ground as the church sinks closer to Hell at Bell Hole marshes at Tunstall in Norfolk. Bells can also be heard on Christmas Eve coming from Bomere Pool in Shrewsbury, said to be the site of a village church demolished by divine retribution after a parishioner “mocked God.”

In Nottinghamshire, phantom bells are said to ring on Christmas Day at the site of the village church of Raleigh. This settlement really was flattened by the East Midlands Earthquake of 1185, although not “swallowed up” as legend tells.

There is also said to be a Sunken Church at Coningsby, Lincolnshire, whose bells toll every year on the anniversary of it being destroyed by God's wrath. The location has a natural rock formation slightly resembling the rubble of a church.

**Matt Salusbury**

---

## *What's on*

a review of the year's events and what's happening in 2019

EVENTS at Dunwich Museum in 2018 included “Votes For Women!” family activities every Thursday in August.

This featured craft activities celebrating anniversaries of events from 1918 – some women getting the vote, the birth of the RAF and the end of World War One. There was Edwardian-style ginger beer and skittles and a “suffrage and peace march” by Museum volunteers and staff in Edwardian costume carrying “Votes For Women” placards from the Museum to The Ship at Dunwich pub, where they chained themselves to the anchor in the front garden with paper chains. (See front page photo.)

A pottery expert, Sue Anderson, who is conducting a survey of pottery held in local museums in the region, came for a day to look through our collection. She gave us a talk on identifying pottery from different periods. It was well attended with visitors from other local museums.

Events for 2019 are still being planned



**Visitors show off the badges and rosettes they made in Suffragette colours during a “Votes for Women” craft activities day. Photo: Jane Hamilton**

– check on the website [www.dunwich-museum.org.uk](http://www.dunwich-museum.org.uk) and on Twitter at @DunwichMuseum for updates.

2019 special exhibitions include – provisionally – Stewart Bacon's collection of finds from the Dunwich and Orford dives in the 1970s and early 1980s.