

# THE MUSEUM *of* WITCHCRAFT

## FRIENDS' NEWSLETTER

August 2013

Summer has arrived and it's been an amazingly busy season so far with visitor numbers up on last year and the new dedicated online shop taking off really well. A new group of American students came for their internship with Professor Tartar and one of the students gives us an update. The Project Open Sesame, which involves informative interactive doors dotted around the museum, has been launched with the help of woodcarver Steve Patterson, and a new series of Brian Hoggard's research into the Archaeology of Folk Magic begins.

*Editor - Kerriann Godwin*



*This year's New Jersey students with Jerry & Vanessa Greenslade*

### PROJECT OPEN SESAME JUDITH NOBLE

This is a new fundraising initiative we are launching to support the Museum. It is designed to provide activities for children to help them engage more with the collection. Many of us remember our first visit as children and the impression it made on us and we want to share its wonders with young visitors. *(Graham King writes about the reasoning behind this idea on page 4)* The Friends have engaged local craftsman Steve Patterson to make 25 miniature wooden doors. Hidden inside each door will be answers to questions, texts and images, pointing out particular things of interest. Each door costs £50 and we hope that you might like to get involved in raising funds for them. Moots and groups could fundraise for a door, and individual donations are also very welcome. If you are thinking of raising funds over the coming months, please consider targeting your efforts to Project Open Sesame. Don't

worry if you can't raise funds for a whole door; all donations will be very welcome. The names of all individuals and groups who support this project will be displayed prominently in the Museum and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have helped our younger visitors to enjoy their visit. We have commissioned the first 5 doors from existing funds and Steve is making them now. As soon as they are ready, we will put pictures on the Friends website and in the newsletter and there will be regular updates on the progress of the project. Donation cheques should be made payable to the Friends of the Boscastle Museum of Witchcraft and clearly marked Project Open Sesame. As with all our income, Gift Aid can be applied to individual donations to increase their value. Let's make this a success.

### Special Promotion for PF Members

In recognition of The Pagan Federation's support of the Museum, members will receive a £1.00 discount on the Museum entrance fee on production of their current membership card. This offer is ongoing until further notice.

### RARE TALISMAN GOES ON DISPLAY



This remarkable talisman (*front and back views shown above*) has recently been generously loaned to the museum by Suffolk metal detectorist, Bill Lovett. He realised its importance after showing it to a friend who is descended from Elizabethan magician and occultist John Dee.

It dates from the 16th or 17th century and was used as an amulet to protect a soldier in battle.

Museum historian, Joyce Froome, was very excited by the find: 'Our ancestors lives were often challenging and dangerous, and magic gave them courage and hope.'

The symbols include the Square of Mars, where the numbers 1 to 25 are arranged so that each line adds up to the same number. The spirits named on it were associated with Mars in the astrology of the time. It is now on display in the upstairs gallery.

Next year's May Event 2014 is already taking shape with a provisional theme of ghosts, and the rituals surrounding death. Kristoffer Hughes and Jason Karl are already signed up to speak and further details will be in next March's newsletter. It will take place on Sat May 10th.

## ON-LINE EDUCATION PROJECT UPDATE JULIAN VAYNE

As promised in the previous newsletter the Museum of Witchcraft On-line Education Project is well underway! In fact you can check out the site so far yourself by visiting [www.mowlearning.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.mowlearning.blogspot.co.uk)

You find a series of objects from the Museum collection and questions for each one, allowing visitors to use these objects to explore a whole range of issues. There are also links to useful sources of information to help learners research the issues for themselves. We're also planning to have some excellent videos (showing members of the museum team showing off the selected objects) embedded in the site very soon.

As the text on the site explains, we're hoping that this resource will be used by history teachers but also for 'personal development' (PHSE) and other areas of the (mostly Secondary School) curriculum.

The site has already been worked on by the museum staff, the Friends team and a few other folk with educational and technical backgrounds. But we're still in the development phase so if you've got any brilliant ideas for the project that you'd like to share please email me at the address given on the website [mowlearning@gmail.com](mailto:mowlearning@gmail.com).

We're also looking for parents, teachers and others who would be prepared to test the site in classroom settings, & for people who may have contacts that will help us market this resource. If you feel you can help in these respects please drop me a line to the email

above. If you want to use the site right now for learning please go ahead! It would be great to have some examples of how visitors have used the resources we've created for our official launch (which will be Halloween 2013).

Thanks again to all you Friends for supporting this project.

### NEW JERSEY STUDENTS 2013

LAURA ALSHAMIE

This July, seven students learned and experienced more than they ever thought they would in just two weeks. Students from The College of New Jersey traveled to Cornwall to immerse themselves in archival research. Working in the Museum, students not only got to embark on a research adventure through the archives, but they also had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with every book and magazine in the library. The first three days in the library, they located and organized all the book holdings: calling out numbers, searching for misplaced books, and putting everything back in meticulous order. The remainder of the two weeks, they spent their time data basing, archiving, and forming connections in binders with the many letters, notes, courses, and other correspondences held in the archive.

Linda Wang studied documents pertaining to Cecil Williamson & his bringing the Museum of Witchcraft to the wonderful county of Cornwall. Her binder of archives chronologically documented all of Cecil's

challenges, including issues with insurances and finding a welcome home for the Museum.

Laura Alshamie, Luc Brancheau, and Sue Haefner studied several correspondences and advertisements of various Wiccan courses and workshops that were in the possession of Tim Holland. They learned that Holland had a great interest in Wicca & thus attended workshops and corresponded with several people in order to get a better understanding of the craft. One of the most interesting box files, studied by Chelsea Cannon, included lessons and educational materials for aspiring occultists. Course topics for this file included *Joyful Living*, *Personal Psychic Development*, and *Craft Course*.

Katelyn Cifelli read letters from fans of Doreen Valiente for her work presented in *The Witches Way*. She also studied the Pickingill Papers. These documents focus on Wiccan practices that related to the old traditional craft. The documents after the papers were prayers & charms written and practiced by Christians.

Bel Drapier had one of the most recent files. These documents relate to Graham King and the process he had to go through in order to lift the ban on retail sales at the Museum. In addition to getting a true sense of Cornish culture and taking many beautiful seaside cliff hikes with Graham, these seven New Jersey students learned a great deal about archival research, modern Wicca, and traditional witchcraft.

**The Friends**

**AGM and**

**Get Together**

**will be held on  
November 9th  
2013 at**

**The Wellington  
Hotel Boscastle**

**Speakers**

**Adele Gardner**

**On Frieda Harris  
~Thoth Tarot Deck  
Artist**

**Steve Patterson**

**On Cecil Williamson ~A  
Magician's Life  
(preamble to new book)**

**Dr Fiona**

**Candlin** (Senior  
Lecturer in Museum Studies,  
Birkbeck)

**Keeping Magic Live**

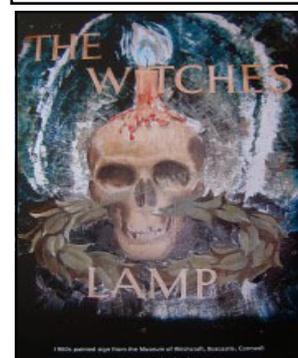
**Julian Vayne &  
Dr Ian Jamison**

**Outreach Update**

**plus the Saturday  
evening  
entertainment**

**'Secret Band'**

**Who are fiddle-tastic**



*One of the posters we are producing of some of the 1960s signs in the museum which are now on display.*

## The Archaeology of Folk Magic

At the May event earlier this year Brian Hoggard spoke about folk magic in a talk entitled 'Within Walls', which looked at the folk magic methods people have used over the centuries, particularly in reference to what is secreted in the walls of houses. We will be doing a series of his work in the next couple of newsletters as many examples he talks about can be found in the museum. \_\_\_\_\_ KG.

In these articles I hope to draw to the readers' attention a little known field of study known as the archaeology of folk magic. This is intimately related to what most people call witchcraft and involves the physical remains related to practices undertaken by the 'white' witch to protect people's property from 'black' witches and also practices which lay-folk undertook by themselves for the same reason.

So far the only person to have written a serious book on this is Ralph Merrifield (1) whose *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* covers periods from the Neolithic to the 19th century - therefore he spends only a chapter, albeit a very good one, on the archaeology relating specifically to witchcraft. Many people have written interesting academic articles on the archaeology of folk magic which you will find listed in the references but Merrifield's is the only book worth getting hold of. The type of finds that most often occur tell us more about what people did to protect themselves against black witchcraft than what witches actually did. But the way in which people protected themselves against witchcraft seems to suggest the survival of much older belief system or practice which does (I think) tell us quite a lot about the nature of witchcraft and its origins. The finds covered by Merrifield in his book range from mummified cats (dried) to witch-bottles and all of them seem to have something to

do with preventing the evil witch or demon from entering the home and causing harm. I shall detail the practices with examples and describe the way in which each was supposed to work.

### Concealed Shoes

The most common folk magic find by far relating to the protection of the home is that of concealing shoes in buildings. The Concealed Shoes Index at Northampton Museum receives an average of one find a month but curators there believe that hundreds of finds every year are simply thrown out by builders (2). By February 1998 the index recorded over 1100 examples primarily from Britain, but with some from as far away as Canada. The date range for these finds is interesting and appears to be proportionally related to surviving buildings from the periods concerned, until the twentieth century when the practice appears to have gone into serious decline. For instance, pre 1600's there are around fifty examples, 1600-1699 around 200, 1700-1799 approximately 270, 1800-1899 around 500 and 1900+ (when the records appear to decline) around fifty (3) - but this latter may be because people either keep their concealed shoes secret or they have not had a reason to examine their chimneys yet. These shoes are usually found concealed in chimneys, either on a ledge a little way up the chimney or in purpose built cavities behind the hearth into which items can be deposited from above. These have been termed 'spiritual middens' (4). Other places have included in walls, under floorboards, in window frames and in staircases. Nearly all of the shoes discovered in this context are well worn, half of those found belonged to children and only very rarely are pairs found. Shoes were expensive items and were repaired again and again until they could not be worn any longer. As a result of this the shoe was a unique item, perfectly

fitting only the wearer at the end of use. Various theories have been put forward to explain why shoes were concealed in chimneys.

One suggestion is that they were a fertility symbol. For example, Roy Palmer in his book *The Folklore of Hereford and Worcester* cites a very recent case from Broadwas-on-Teme where in 1960 a midwife refused to allow a young woman to remove her shoes until her child was born (5). Merrifield, discussing shoes, noted the old rhyme, 'there was an old woman who lived in a shoe. . . ' as being further evidence of the connection between shoes and fertility. He also quotes a case from Lancashire where it was apparently not unusual for women wishing to conceive to wear the shoes of those who had just given birth in the hope of 'catching' something of the wearer (6). Another slightly more bizarre account is a method once used by young ladies to invoke dreams of their future partners. They were said to pin their garters to a wall and arrange their shoes in the form of a 'T' and sing a short rhyme (7). Just how successful this was I don't know but it reaffirms the link between shoes and fertility yet again.

When shoes are found beneath bedroom floors the above appears to be a likely explanation, but in other locations the following explanation seems more likely. Denise Dixon-Smith, who was Assistant Keeper of the Boot and Shoe Collection 1986-1990 states that, "One reason for hiding shoes in chimneys and around doors may have been because they were 'openings' where evil spirits could enter the home, and the shoe - as a good luck symbol - should warn them off." (8) She was not the first to suggest this however.

Merrifield in his book suggests that an unofficial Saint named John Schorn was partly responsible for the custom. Schorn was alleged to have

performed the remarkable feat of casting the devil into a boot which Merrifield says may have led to shoes being seen as some kind of spirit-trap - this would explain the locations in which they are found (9). Supporting evidence of the protective associations of shoes comes from Reginald Scot who mentioned that spitting on shoes was a way to protect against witchcraft (10). A few shoes found have been vigorously slashed suggesting black witchcraft, not a spirit trap at all. The lack of writings from contemporary accounts about this apparently very common practice has baffled many people, but it is probable that secrecy was an important part of the folk magic protection. After all, you wouldn't want to risk letting a witch know how to avoid or switch off your spiritual burglar alarm would you? It is probable that the shoes were a kind of bait which 'contained' enough of the human to lure the witch into a dead-end in the chimney and have her trapped forever - witches were reputed to be unable to travel backwards. It is fortunate that June Swann began the Concealed Shoe Index at Northampton (11) for it has reaffirmed the importance of many of the other finds which are found in associated contexts and has generated a substantial revival of interest in this type of find.

1. Merrifield, Ralph, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, 1987, BCA, London. 2. Mackay, Andrew, 'Northampton Museums Concealed Shoe Index', Northampton Museum, 16th April 1991. 3. Pitt, Fiona, 'Builders, Bakers and Madhouses: Some Recent Information from the Concealed Shoe Index', a report on a talk she gave at the Archaeological Leather Group AGM in September 1997 contained in an article, 'Hidden Shoes and Concealed Beliefs', *Archaeological Leather Group Newsletter*, February 1998, p5. 4. Easton, Timothy, 'Spiritual Middens', in Oliver, Paul (ed), *Encyclopaedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*, 1995. 5. Palmer, Roy, *The Folklore of Hereford and Worcester*, 1992, Logaston Press, Herefordshire, p87. 6. Merrifield, op cit, p134. 7. Radford, E and M A, edited and revised by Hole, Christina, *The Encyclopaedia of Superstitions*, 1961, Helicon edition 1980, p169. 8. Dixon-Smith, Denise, extract from 'Concealed Shoes', *Archaeological Leather Group Newsletter*, no 6, Spring 1990. 9. Merrifield, op cit, p134. 10. Radford, op cit, p319. 11. She began the field of study with her article, 'Shoes Concealed in Buildings', *Journal of Northampton Art Gallery and Museum*, 6th Dec 1969, pp8-21 and has recently reworked her material and brought it up-to-date with, 'Shoes Concealed in Buildings', *Costume Society Journal*, no 30, 1996, pp56-69.

For more information, and info on his kickstarter project, check Brian's website [www.apotropaiois.co.uk](http://www.apotropaiois.co.uk)

## GRAHAM'S WITCHY BIT

Just occasionally we get a negative comment on Tripadvisor. This year we had 50 *Excellent* and *Very Good* reviews and 3 *Terrible* or *Poor* reviews. There will always be negative reviews from people who have another agenda or simply don't get it. We usually respond to the bad reviews - it gives us a chance to turn a negative comment into a positive and also gives us an advertising opportunity!

In response to the overwhelmingly good comments Tripadvisor awarded us their Excellence Award again for 2013. We're one of only 10% of attractions **in the world** to be acknowledged this way. This is a much sought after accolade and we're very proud of it.

One of our Tripadvisor reviewers commented that there were "no interactive activities for my kids". This got me thinking - we needed simple, reliable, interactive exhibits that would get both kids, their parents & other adults to think about our displays.

I came up with the idea of manufacturing small wooden doors with questions on - the answer would be revealed by opening the door. We could have one door in each display. I made a prototype and presented it to the Trustees of 'Friends' with a request to fund the project. The question on the 6 inch tall door was 'are trustees of the Friends ugly or pretty?' Opening the door revealed photographs of our trustees all of whom are of course very pretty! The Trustees have agreed to fund the project and have commissioned Steve Patterson to manufacture the first five doors - we hope to be receiving and installing some of them in the near future. Judith came up with the great name *Open Sesame* and our first truly interactive project was launched - thanks for funding it Friends and thank you to the Tripadvisor reviewer who made me put my thinking cap on!

## MEMBERSHIP REPORT EMMA CHOPPING

A big thank you goes to all of you who have renewed your membership over the last few months, and welcome to new members. Thank you to everyone who put a little extra in with their membership and donated money, stamps etc. It all helps. Those extra donations over the last 12 months come to over £500.

We now have over 250 members which is brilliant. Many new members have joined at the Museum when visiting or using the library for research purposes. If you have any queries please contact me at [friendsbmw@gmail.com](mailto:friendsbmw@gmail.com) and I look forward to seeing many of you at the Friends AGM in November.

You can renew in any of the following ways:

**Online** – go to [www.friendsbmw.org.uk](http://www.friendsbmw.org.uk) and use our secure paypal payment site.

**By post** – either fill out a renewal form, one of our leaflets or print off a copy from our website, enclose a cheque or postal order (please don't send cash through the post) and send it to the address on the form.

**In person** – you can join in person at the Museum or if you see our stall at an event and we can accept cash or cheque payments.

Here is a reminder how our **Group Membership** works.....one person is nominated as a contact for the Group, and all paperwork, membership cards and newsletters (if not online) will be sent to their address, to be shared amongst the rest of the members. The Group receives two cards in the name of the Group, and these can be passed between any of the members and used to gain free access to the Museum and the archives. Any two members of the Group may attend the AGM weekend and any of our other events free of charge.

Group membership costs £50 per year and there is no limit on the size of group. If you would like to become a Group member you can join online, or use one of our Friends leaflets. You can also join at the Museum in person, or email me and I will send you a form.

## FROM THE TREASURY

*RICHARD HATCH*

The big news is that we are fully operational with Online Banking at last. Our relations with suppliers are much easier, now it is almost effortless to make direct payments. The next step will be to include Judith as an Online Bank authorised person. We have just made a donation of £1200 to the Museum in June, and we are currently funding the Doors Project and the Educational Project. We expect to make a further donation directly to the Museum in September, based on available funds at that time. Meanwhile my next project is with the taxman, bringing our claims for Giftaid up to date. Thank you all for your financial support, which makes all our activities possible.

## WAND-ILISCIOUS



*Mark the Wand generously and regularly donates some of his beautifully worked wands and staffs for us to sell in the shop. He just popped in with another batch this weekend for our lucky visitors to purchase if they so wish.*