

NEWSLETTER

BALDOCK MUSEUM AND LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Museum News

As some members will already know, there is real progress being made towards the Town Hall Group getting a lease from NHDC sometime in the Spring of this year. The Council's Cabinet has directed the officers to amend the terms of the lease so that it takes more account of the fact that we are a small community group operating with a charitable purpose. It may yet happen that some part of the terms may cause a block to further progress but we are quite hopeful that there will be no insuperable difficulties.

None of this will alter the present situation of the Museum for a year or more but once the lease is signed we hope that our members will rally round and help the THG as many of them did for the Baldock Arts Festival. **Talking of help, we are rather short of Museum volunteers, so if you could spare 2 or 2½ hours every two months please contact Brendan on 892640. It is a good opportunity to catch up on some paperwork or reading and to meet some very pleasant people.**

In Memoriam

Sadly Dennis King, one of our members, died on the 19th December aged 91. An account of his very full life will appear in the next Baldock Mail but we should record here his contribution to this Society. He gave a great deal of time and effort to advising the Society on a whole range of matters, especially on complicated arguments with authority – like that over Baldock Fair. He was also benefactor in many other ways that do not appear in the Society's accounts and was an invaluable source of knowledge about the history of this town, which he had come to love so much, over the last 75 years.

May he rest in peace.

Coming Events

Thursday 24th Jan	The 1913 Roman Catholic Mission to Baldock (marking the centenary of Baldock RC Parish)	<i>Brendan King</i>
Thursday 28th Mar	Postcards and Memories of Baldock	<i>Paul Castle</i>
Thursday 23rd May	A Brief Introduction to the Three Counties Asylum	<i>Richard Wright</i>
Thursday 25th July	Baldock Houses: More Tales of the Unexpected	<i>Jane Havercroft</i>
Thursday 26th Sept	AGM, Quiz and Buffet Evening	(venue to be announced later)
Thursday 28th Nov	A History of Bygrave	<i>Duncan Hector</i>

All Meetings except 26th September at Baldock Community Centre at 8.00 pm.

Visitors welcome £1.50.

Dr A V Baillee – Part 3: Inside St Mary’s House

In two recent issues of the Baldock Mail, the life of Dr Albert Victor Baillee was described. He had been Dean Of Windsor before retiring to Baldock in 1944. He had come from an aristocratic background and his godmother had been Queen Victoria. He came to live in St Mary’s House, Church Street, Baldock. After his death the house and many of his possessions were sold.

In this article, we will describe some of the personal possessions listed in the auction particulars as they may shed further light on this extraordinary man.

Albert died at St Mary’s in 1955, aged 91 and his lengthy obituary appeared in the Times. It describes his illustrious career and his crowning achievement of restoring St George’s Chapel, Windsor which had been in a dangerous condition. St Mary’s House was sold and the remaining house contents were sold separately at auction. Presumably his family kept as much as they could but, after a long life and with a large house to clear, they were continuing a long tradition of house clearance by auction. The sale ran to over 400 items. In the end, some were retained in St Mary’s House then sold on, with the house, to Winton Aldridge. They included an 18th century gilt wood mirror, a brass fender and a Chippendale four poster bed which were still in the house in recent memory. There was a wide range of furniture and furnishings in the catalogue. A selection of the more interesting items for sale is described below.

A gold and onyx circular brooch inscribed “In remembrance of the all lasting union of Albert and V.R. and former happy days” 1862. Queen Victoria had been an intimate friend of Albert’s mother as well as being his godmother. He was born three years after the death of Albert and named after him and Victoria. Perhaps this brooch was given to his mother by the Queen. The Queen certainly gave his mother “Life of the Prince Consort” by Theodore Martains which had a fly leaf autograph “To dear Lady Frances Baillee from Victoria”. Another book was a royal gift to Dr Baillee himself: “Old English Glasses” by Albert Hartshorne, 1897 with autographed flyleaf “To the Dean of Windsor” and was signed by King George V and Queen Mary and dated 13th May 1918. There was a small ivory photograph case containing three portraits, given after Queen Victoria’s death to V.N.S Grant before making its way to the Baillie family.

Several items were connected to his career. There was a Hutchinson’s History of Durham where he was based very early in his career and was ordained. There was a presentation book in green morocco and gilt covers decorated with opals and rubies, containing three watercolours of Coventry with signed address from the City. He was Canon of Coventry from 1908-1912 then Vicar and Sub-Dean 1912-1917. Not a bad leaving present!

There were two volumes of “Windsor Castle” by W H St John Hope with coloured illustrations and a red and gilt wood tray with Windsor Castle scene. The books reflected his varied interests. Debretts and Blood Royal of Britain were probably important for his job and for keeping track of his aristocratic family connections. Likewise, Winkle’s Cathedrals and Churches (three volumes) and English Castles and Abbeys (two volumes). There were many books about national and international history plus seven volumes of Reginald Hine’s local history books. He had leather bound copies of Punch and also British Birds’ Nests by Kearton – probably an essential for any man with a child-like heart, as he was said to have.

He had a passion for the stage, literature and poetry. There were various works of Dickens and Thackeray, 16 volumes of Byron’s Life and 8 volumes of Tennyson’s works. The latter is interesting as Tennyson was a pall bearer for his aunt’s (Lady Augusta Stanley’s) coffin. Inevitably there was a Holy Bible; this set was in three volumes covered in red velvet and a jewel case.

Albert had an expert knowledge of pictures and there were very many in his house. There were also a number of busts and statues, many of them well known pieces. He had a bust by William Theed of Lady Augusta Stanley, his aunt, and another copy in marble can be seen in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. Similarly, he had a pair of bronze busts of Victoria and Albert, also by Theed, and another pair is now held by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

It is noticeable that many items in the house were high quality, often bound in leather or cased in walnut. This even included the electrical goods such as the Pye radiogram in a walnut case and the Armstrong console television set in a walnut case. It was still rare to own a TV in 1955. Perhaps even rarer, was to own a dishwasher, in this case, an Aidamaid. This must have been a tremendous novelty to a man born in 1864.

His 1950 Wolseley 6-80 grey saloon car was also for sale complete with heater, radio and fitted luggage rack.

Albert sounds like an interesting and sociable man. It was said that he retained a youthful enthusiasm to the end of his life, especially over any new possession. It might be a new friend or a picture he had just bought or a book which its author had sent him; whatever it was, for the time being, he could hardly talk of anything else. He knew a vast number of people many of who used him unsparingly. The Times commented that he would not be remembered as an ecclesiastic but his memory would be cherished as that of a magnificent friend with a child-like heart. He was “a truly good man”.

The auction sale details are in the Baldock Museum collection.
