

NEWSLETTER

BALDOCK MUSEUM AND LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Coming Events

23rd January: ‘Norton Henge and the prehistory of the Baldock Basin’, Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews, the NHDC Archaeology Officer, explains the local ritual landscape.

27th March: ‘Baldock in the 19th Century; a small but flourishing town’, Peter Bysouth explains the conclusions drawn from his book on local 19th century towns.

22nd May: ‘Baldock Through Time’, Hugh Madgin looks at some of the changes in the townscape of Baldock and other local towns over the last century or so.

24th July: ‘Baldock Houses; even more tales of the unexpected’, Jane Havercroft continues her popular series of the stories behind some of Baldock’s houses.

25th September: AGM and social evening with quiz and buffet.

27th November: ‘Baldock in 1914’, Frank Foy uses the newspapers to show what Baldock was like at the eve and during the early months of the First World War.

PLEASE NOTE: All these talks will take place in the **TOWN HALL** and **NOT** in the Community Centre whatever you might have read to the contrary! They are likely to be in the downstairs room; if going upstairs is a problem to you please telephone 892640 beforehand to check. The talks will start at 8pm as usual and visitors are welcome, admission £2.

Members may also be interested to know that the Baldock Arts and Heritage Centre will also be putting on local history talks during the Baldock Festival. One of these will be Frank Foy’s entertaining look at Baldock in 1913 as seen in the newspapers. Frank kindly gave this illustrated talk for us in November when our advertised speaker let us down and it proved so popular that he has been asked to do it again. It is also hoped that there will be an illustrated talk about the Baldock Soap Box Derbies in the 1950s with some interesting amateur film of the event in 1954. Part of the object of the new Arts and Heritage Centre is to encourage interest in the history of Baldock and therefore will naturally tend to be drawn together with this society, not only with regard to the provision of a museum/ heritage centre but also in putting on local history talks and events.

The Museum and the Town Hall

By now most of our members will be aware that the new Baldock Arts and Heritage Centre is open for business and that several events have been successfully staged there already.

As was explained at our A.G.M. in September, the plan is that the new scheme should progress in several stages. The first of these, the refurbishment of the hall/theatre and of the ground floor foyer to a usable standard, is almost complete; the idea being that BAHC can begin to raise revenue to help meet running costs while the rest of the work continues. In the Spring the second stage will begin with the redecoration of the exterior and some preliminary work on the cellars, which are in a poor state. The third stage will be to install a lift and incorporate the old Fire Station (which is presently used as a store) and the Museum end of the building, into the BAHC project. It will be at that point that the Museum will move into the main body of the building and it may be that there will also be a reordering of the layout of the ground floor, then, or later as a fourth stage.

That, at least, is the general plan and it depends very much upon the funding that becomes available in the future and upon the support of the townspeople, not only in helping practically or financially, but also in attending events and using the Town Hall.

The Museum will stay as it is for the time being and it is difficult to predict when the move will take place, certainly not this year and probably not next year either. The likelihood is that it will occupy the old Fire Station area next door to the present Museum. This

space is very suitable for a museum, having little natural light and a very high ceiling which may allow for a small mezzanine floor or balcony on which some permanent display cases could be placed. This is conjecture of course because no decisions have been made about the layout of the ground floor as yet.

Of equal concern is the allocation of suitable museum storage space. As we explained in the January Newsletter two years ago, it may be that it will not be possible to provide sufficient space for all of our collection and perhaps not for any substantial proportion of it. This is the reason that we are using the term 'Heritage Centre' rather than 'Museum' to describe the new project because the latter implies a collection of objects that are properly cared for and recorded whilst the former requires only a display. It may be that we will be able to continue to function as a museum or just keep part of our collection, but we are keeping all our options open. The most attractive and interesting items will be displayed in the new layout and we would have to keep a selection of items in reserve for display changes etc. in the future even if the bulk of the collection had to be dispersed to North Herts Museums or Hertfordshire Archives. We would also keep copies of most of the photographic collection and transcribe the essence of the content of the documentary collection. A large part of this work has been done already.

All of these explanations will be familiar to those of you who attend the AGM but other members may not be aware of them.

PLEASE NOTE: The Museum is closing for the winter and will not open until Sunday 2nd March. At present it is being redecorated and is not available for use. However if anyone wishes to visit during February they may do so by appointment, tel. 892640. The new opening times will be 2-4pm on Sundays and 11am -1pm on Wednesdays.