

NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP



Most of you will know that the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) in Queen Street closed in December 2007 and has now re-opened after four years. At our meeting on Thursday January 19th, Simon Tootel talked to us about the enormous amount of work and re-organisation which happened during that time.

He first told us a little about the museum's beginning, since it opened in 1868 as a library and museum for Exeter, also housing the beginnings of the university, in the form of the School of Art and the School of Science. It was clearly a source of civic pride, and was built of local stones as a geological show piece for the region. Even by 1899 there was great pressure on the site; extensions were built to give more space, and prefabs built in the original central courtyard. Collections grow all the time, and by 2007 only 3% of the objects held were on display. Now that number is 5%, which still may not seem much but is in fact the same percentage as that shown by the British Museum.

Obviously, in order to do the radical alterations planned, the museum had to be emptied, and all the objects were taken to a large facility called The Ark, built at Marsh Barton. This is a huge unit with controlled conditions, where most objects still are, and where they can safely be preserved and conserved. This was an enormous undertaking, complicated by the difficulties of access inside and outside the building.

Planning for the project started in 2001 and was costed at £9 million. In the event, it rose to £15 million and then finally to £24 million. This was because many problems were encountered – Saxon dwellings where the Ark was to be built, a waterlogged Norman ditch underneath the RAMM, and a huge structural crack which developed, to name but a few.

Any of you who have visited the new building will have observed the architectural features which are now revealed, particularly the central courtyard, rising to full height and roofed in, and with a huge display case. Some areas have remained pretty much the same, such as the World Culture and Egyptian displays, but Gerald the Giraffe and the Natural History cases are in different places and newly arranged. The bridge over to the stretch of Roman Wall is a real plus and the new entrance at the rear of the building is a huge improvement, giving lots of space for group visits and circulation, without sacrificing the original and familiar entrance on to Queen Street. The new temporary exhibition spaces will enable large and world class visiting exhibitions to be shown.

As Simon pointed out, we are lucky here in Exeter that plans were so far advanced that the spending cuts did not stop the work being done, and the results are very impressive.

NEXT MEETINGS

March 8th

Our photographic evening in preparation for our display at the REVELS. Bring any objects you have of local interest to the club room at 7.30 where Malcolm Brooks and Roger Cashmore will be ready to photograph them. These may be buttons, coins, medals, broken china, commemoration souvenirs like mugs, shot, cannon balls, all sorts.

March 15th

Meeting with Sandford Heritage Group when Tom Coleman will talk about farm houses. Tom comes with a recommendation. The meeting is at 7.30pm in St Swithuns Church, Sandford. Parking is in their village

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hall car park nearby. Lifts will be available. Do come and support this event.

April 19th

Colin Hart will come and tell us about his experiences with a metal detector.

May 10th

Phillipe Planel on 'Lost Buildings'

June 9th

A Saturday afternoon outing to Poltimore House and Gardens with tea and cake.

All meetings are on Thursday evenings in the village hall club room and start at 7.30pm.

Everyone is welcome. There is a small charge of £1.50 which includes tea and biscuits.