



# Whitstable Museum NEWSLETTER

September 2024



## Lord Mayor

The Lord Mayor, Councillor Jean Butcher and the Lady Mayoress, Di Baldock visited Whitstable Museum while opening Wild About Whitstable.

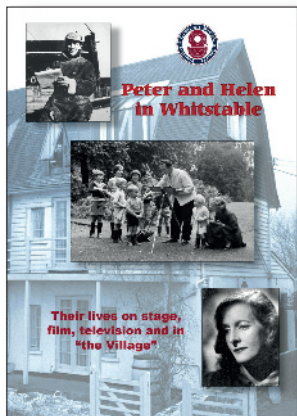
The mayor reviewed "The Wood Age" exhibition which celebrates this ubiquitous material that was arguably as important as Stone, Bronze and Iron which have been given official "Ages".



500 year old wood - Tankerton Wreck!

## Peter and Helen In Whitstable

The Lord Mayor and Mayoress also visited the Peter Cushing exhibition. We are told that we may have the only permanent museum display of Mr Cushing's life and work in the world!



Chris Gullo of the Peter Cushing Association helped us write this illustrated book.

Now in its second printing.



*WAW opened our eyes to trees!  
Within a minute's walk from the museum we found over 12 species.  
Can you?*

## Wild About Whitstable

Whitstable Museum was delighted to be part of this great community project for the second time.

Hands-on activities for children and adults were hosted in the museum:

- Seaweed surprises
- What's in a barn owl's buffet?
- Sand fossils through a microscope
- Making unusual bird boxes
- Plant communication workshop
- Nature inspired poetry.
- The tree walk from the museum.



## 39 Months Talking

Despite strong Councillor support, discussions with CCC on providing a long-term future for Whitstable Museum remain very slow.

Whitstable Museum is doing an impressive job, with visitor numbers up, strong investment in the visitor experience, new additions to the collection and popular exhibitions.

For 39 months we have discussed with CCC a survival strategy for one of their museums. The museum charity attracts substantial grants for museum development, but these cannot cover operating costs.

The small CCC management fee ceased in 2023 and CCC now wants to charge for the Oxford Street building. The charity cannot find an extra £40k operating costs each year. Does this make any sense?

To look ahead with confidence, we need to devise a new, innovative relationship with CCC that reflects Whitstable rate and tax payers' expectations in equitably supporting heritage across the district.

## Westmeads' Infants

A museum visit in the first week back to school is quite a challenge, but these 5-year-old children surprised us with their knowledge and excellent questions.



*Did the flood reach Westmeads?*

Museum volunteers enjoyed talking with the Westmeads' pupils about three topics:

- How the town and Westmeads school used to flood and why it is safe now.
- Why did the 'Great Fire of Whitstable' happen and what might have caused it?
- What is a Harbour and which types of boat use Whitstable Harbour?

*Why did 71 buildings burn down?*



## Supporting Whitstable's Visitors

The Whitstable Improvement Trust and Whitstable Museum produced this straightforward and attractive map and guide for visitors to help Whitstable bounce back from the covid pandemic. Over 12,000 have been distributed.

Now into its second edition, the map is free for individual visitors and is available at cost (£10 per hundred) to shops, hotels and guest houses.



## The Museum Shop

Almost every month, the range of items available in the shop changes to reflect exhibitions, museum activities or visitor interests.

### New books in the shop:

- Peter & Helen in Whitstable
- Invicta - now on its 4<sup>th</sup> reprint
- The Peter Cushing Scrapbook
- The Canterbury & Whitstable Railway - Brian Hart

### Children's fossils and geology

We keep as many prices as possible at pocket money levels to encourage interest in science. Popular items include:

- Geodes with quartz crystals inside
- Iron pyrite crystal cubes
- Sharks' teeth - naturally!

### For Whitstable's visitors

- A fabulous range of Cushing fridge magnets!
- Postcards with a local history flavour
- Walk leaflets with historical points of interest
- Posters, maps and historic photographs.

## Peter's Exhibition Hits the Spot!

Everything has come together to make "Peter Cushing - the Legacy" a most amazing success.

Loans and donations of personal effects, film memorabilia and tributes have made this far more than a celebration of his extensive stage, film and TV careers.

Researching Helen Cushing has revealed that she was a very intelligent and capable lady, born in St Petersburg with her family later escaping the 1917 revolution. Helen spoke four languages fluently, was educated in Switzerland and danced and acted in America at the age of 20.

The Peter Cushing Association helped us with Mr Cushing's dramatic career and they wrote the narrative to our new book 'Peter and Helen in Whitstable'.

Steve Keeler, the exhibition's curator said "This is why museums are important. Whitstable Museum's Peter Cushing collection has built up over 30 years and is now the best and indeed only permanent museum collection in the world. We are proud to be trusted to securely display Peter Cushing's story."



## Oyster Yawl Model Stormy Petrel

Christine and Richard Norris have presented their fabulous model of oyster yawl Stormy Petrel to Whitstable Museum.

Stormy Petrel was built on Island Wall, Whitstable as an oyster smack in 1890 by Richard and Charles Perkins. The vessel was owned and fished by and for her builders, dredging oysters in the summer and used for stowboating in the winter.

Carvel built with oak frames, the vessel never had an engine and is a rare survivor of her age. The smacks of Whitstable were as common as the Essex smacks but fewer survive. They were built heavy to take ground on the sandbanks of this part of the lower Thames estuary.

From 1928 STORMY PETREL was used as a watch boat, with a watch house cabin fitted by the Seasalter and Ham company, moored at the Pollard Spit overlooking their interests in the oyster fishery east of the Isle of Sheppey.

Following the Second World War she was sold to the famous barge and smack skipper, and author, Bob Roberts of Harwich. He kept her for three years and then sold her to Bernard Rozier, his third hand, who did not fish with her but kept her registered.

Stormy Petrel was bought by Richard Norris in 1962 who became only her fourth owner in her 120 year life. In 1998 she had a refit lasting three years in dry dock.



## Tudor Tea Rooms

As part of our research into Peter's links with Whitstable we naturally talked to Sue at the Tudor Tea Rooms.

We re-framed for Sue a sketch of Peter given by the artist Andrew Milne. Subsequently we contacted Andrew and he has created great sketches of Peter Cushing in nine roles specially for the museum. Thanks Andrew!



## Winding Engine is the Oldest!

The origins of the Beam Winding Engine from the C&W line have been researched, with the firm conclusion that it is the oldest railway winding engine in preservation!

We therefore have a major challenge to restore the engine to museum standards, in full mechanical working order although we anticipate it being turned by an electric motor, rather than by steam.

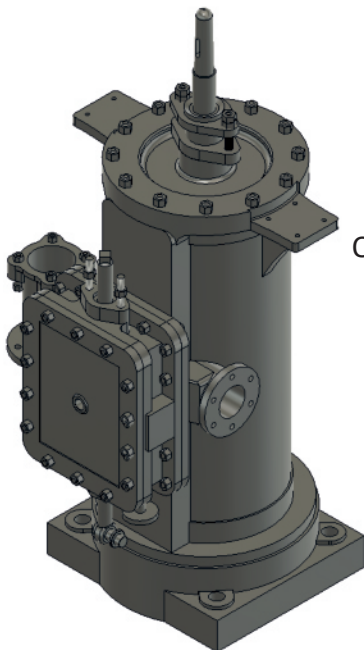
The first stage in the conservation and rebuilding project is an accurate survey of the parts that we have, using CAD, photogrammetry and laser scanning. This why the parts have not been under cover.



## C&W Winding Engine Steam Cylinder

One of the first results of the CAD survey.

Many hundred measurements were made by Nick Boddy as part of his university summer project.



## Shine a Light!

The museum buildings have had little investment since the museum was created in 1985. Although strictly a landlord responsibility, the museum charity has made several improvements to address safety issues and to reduce operating costs.

Whitstable Community Museum has invested in LED lighting, now employed across the whole site, replacing a motley collection of incandescent, fluorescent and halogen bulbs and tubes.

Strangely, CCC has not yet thanked us for saving over £4000 to their building maintenance budget!

## Coming Soon

The next compact exhibition is being curated by Timescapes Kent and will cover the battle with the "V" weapons over Kent in the Second World War.



## Shadow over England

Memories of the six 'V' weapons that landed in the Whitstable area between June 1944 & March 1945

With images supplied by Imperial War Museums.