

Mere Historical Society Morning Talk
Tuesday 6th December 2022
The Museum of Somerset and its Treasures
By Susie Simmons

Susie Simmons is Museums Operations Manager for South West Heritage Trust and amongst her responsibilities is The Museum of Somerset which is housed in the old Taunton Castle. It is probably fair to say that few members of the audience were familiar with the Museum, which, according to Susie, is one of the best of its type in the south west if not the whole country.

Susie began with a brief history of the castle from its origins as an early Saxon church to Norman castle and then later in the 1850s serving as a school and bath house. Bought by the Somerset Archaeological Natural History Society (SANHS), a group of wealthy Victorian philanthropists, the castle was converted to a museum. Eventually it was leased to the Council to run but it is still owned by SANHS. In more recent times the Museum underwent an extensive refurbishment improving the exterior and interior of the building and updating the display areas to follow a chronological path.

Today it is home to a number of nationally and internationally important items some of which Susie illustrated in her talk. These included a tree sculpture made from a 175 year old Somerset oak, a plesiosaurus found at Hinckley Point, an 80,000 year old Ice Age bear skull found in the Banwell Bone Caves, Iron Age finds including the Cadbury Shield from Cadbury Castle, the amazing Low Ham Roman Mosaic, the pot and coins from the Frome Hoard, the unique Cauldrons and Skillets Collection, a copy of the Alfred Jewel, art by Victorian Somerset artist Sarah Biffen who painted by mouth and artefacts from the Monmouth Rebellion.

Not only did Susie illustrate these wonderful items but she also explained about their significance, and how they were found and conserved. It was a talk full of fascinating detail and an inspiration to many of us to go and visit the museum and see this collection first hand.

Many thanks to Susie for such an interesting glimpse into her work and what this Museum has to offer.

For further information visit <https://swheritage.org.uk/museum-of-somerset//>

(South West Heritage Trust also manages the Somerset Rural Life Museum in Glastonbury and the Brick and Tile Museum in Bridgewater.)

Diane Ellis
6 December 2022



Section of the Low Ham Roman Mosaic featuring Dido and Aeneas



Ice Age Bear skull found at Banwell