



FRIENDS OF THE
DONCASTER MUSEUMS



HERITAGE
DONCASTER



Message from the Chair

Recently, I was pleased to receive an update on progress on the new 'Danum Gallery, Library and Museum' from Matt Cridge, Head of 'Stronger Families' at DMBC, who is overseeing Heritage Doncaster at present. He wanted to share with our members the latest developments and you can read his comments on the right.

The last few weeks have been difficult for many people in our community and although it appears that the lockdown is being eased, it remains unclear as to when we can begin our programme of events. With that in mind, can I thank everyone who has been able to renew their membership for the year. I was touched by members who also included a donation in their renewal of subscription; this was most appreciated. When the current medical crisis is resolved, I am certain that the role of the Friends in supporting Heritage Doncaster will be even more important as we face recovering from the Covid 19 crisis. Please remember you can still renew your membership by post, sending it to the museum on Chequer Road which remains our base, or by digital means via our website.

Dave Adgar

Contemporary Arts Society

The second instalment of our commitment to fund this membership for an initial four year period has now been paid. Neil McGregor, who explained the importance of this membership in our last newsletter is currently in discussions with CAS about the possibility of commissioning an artwork for the collection. Updates to follow as a project develops.

NEWSLETTER

June 2020

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'As you can imagine the ongoing Covid issues are having an impact on our ability to progress the work we need to complete. Construction has been delayed but not as much as we feared and so the works continue on site. The grounds have been landscaped and planted and they look really good. Also the internal fittings are being put in now so the building is taking real shape. The museum exhibits are being conserved and packed ready for move. The first item to go in was the sarcophagus as it is so large and heavy it needs specialist movers and space. This has now been put into the new building without a hitch so we are all very much relieved.'

We are awaiting further government and corporate guidance to allow us to plan an opening date so in the meantime we continue to prepare as well as we can in readiness for what will be a very busy, stressful but momentous time. What we would like to share is some of our work that we have developed on line, with heritage at home, and how we have been sharing the collections and Doncaster stories via our website and social media.

<https://www.heritagedoncaster.org.uk/heritage-at-home/>

We also hosted our first online lecture, the David Hey Memorial Lecture, A talk by Sharon Bennet Connolly on The Earls of Surrey and Conisbrough Castle.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pM10QGDMb24>

*Matt Cridge
Head of Stronger Families
DMBC*



Success Stories

James William 'Iron' Hague

In the last newsletter, I outlined how the Friends had helped with the acquisition of a rare early medieval pendant in 2013. It was also during that year that the museums authorities needed to raise £2,500 to buy the portrait of Mexborough boxer James William 'Iron' Hague. The portrait, seen below, had been on loan and displayed at Cusworth Hall for a number of years. After a public appeal raised half of the money which was required to purchase the painting, the Friends were approached to make a donation which, together with funding from the Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund ensured that the painting was retained in Doncaster. The V & A Purchase Grant Fund has an annual budget which it allocates to support acquisitions by regional museums outside London and requires evidence of local support if an application is to be successful.



The Friends were led at the time by Acting Chair Sue Lindley who worked hard to ensure the group continued to operate successfully after what had been a difficult time. This continuity of effort, by many members of the Committee and members over nearly 30 years, reminds us that difficulties such as those we face at the moment can be overcome!

James 'Iron' Hague was born in Mexborough on 6th November 1885.. Boxing was an immensely popular spectator sport at the time and Hague soon became successful, winning the Yorkshire heavyweight title against Dick Parkes at Doncaster on 8 April 1905. After this success, he went on to fight and defeat a number of English heavyweights, many by knockouts. In 1909, he was invited to fight **Gunner Jim Moir** for the English Heavyweight title on 19 April. He won this in the first round with a knockout. His homecoming was a splendid affair with thousands lining the streets of his home town. It is thought that it was to celebrate his victory that the portrait was painted. He went on to defend the title against Bill Chase, knocking him out in the sixth round, but lost it on 24 April 1911 to **Bombardier Billy Wells** (familiar to many as the man who beat the gong to announce the opening of films produced by the J. Arthur Rank Studios). The fight was for the first heavyweight 'Lonsdale Belt' which at this point was produced in gold. The Lonsdale Belt is the highest award available for a British boxer when he wins the British title.

After retiring from boxing, Iron Hague enlisted in The Grenadier Guards at the start of WW1 seeing action at the Somme in 1916, as well as during the Passchendaele Offensive of 1917. These two battles have come to epitomise the horrors of the war, with massive casualties suffered by the troops in appalling conditions. However, William survived the war and came home to Mexborough where he died on the 18th August 1951.

So a true sporting 'hero' who deserves to be remembered and whose portrait should remind visitors of an episode of which they can be proud. But as a footnote, relevant today as it was then, one aspect of Hague's career should be celebrated..

Soon after winning the heavyweight title, "Iron" Hague agreed to fight **Sam Langford**, a black boxer from Canada. Langford is now rated as being in the top 10 fighters of all time. Hague, did not believe in a 'Colour Bar' for boxing. He was quoted as saying that **"unless all men are allowed to freely compete, how can you ever find the true champion?"** Langford knocked Hague out in the fourth round. But said in later years that in all his time in boxing no one hit him as hard as the punch he took from "Iron" Hague. A huge left from Hague knocked Langford down but he managed to rally. But Hague had broken his hand with the punch, restricting his performance thereafter. Truly a sportsman who believed in the true meaning of sportsmanship!