

Meet the ~~Volunteer~~ Trustee

Interview by Colin Lansley
Written by Betty Butterworth

Find out something no one else in the room knows. It's an interview technique that the museum's new trustee **Diane Ritherdon** teaches in her training modules – and she likes to practise what she preaches. When Colin begins this interview by asking Diane where she was born, she instantly throws him by saying: *"I don't know. I was found on a church doorstep."* That was in the gritty, post-war East London that viewers of *Call The Midwife* will be familiar with. She was taken to a children's home, where she was adopted by a relief nurse. Her godmother (whose ring she still wears) was the matron.

Diane's family moved up north when she was seven, but she returned to London to attend university, followed by a year teaching maths in Kenya with Voluntary Service Overseas. Marriage to a senior civil servant and a career in personnel management (HR) followed, including a stint with British Leyland and five (*"very happy"*) years with Rank Hovis McDougall, where she rose to the position of company director.

When her marriage broke up, Diane left RHM to take a position with Union Cold Storage, one-time owners of Liverpool's White Star Line. *"It was all dock labour, and dockers are quite militant,"* she points out. *"I can stop express trains with my head without feeling it now!"*

A few years later, following a move to the less-unionised retail sector, Diane received a phone call from Harris Queensway asking if she'd like to come to a meeting. *"I was poached,"* she says. *"It's a lovely feeling when you get that call – and that's where I met my second husband, Julian!"* The couple worked together *"quite successfully"* until the firm was bought out and they were made redundant within a few weeks of each other.



Diane Ritherdon, Trustee

By then, Diane was ready to return to the North West. *"My parents still lived in Didsbury,"* she explains. *"My mother was bedridden for the last 11 years of her life and my dad was getting older and more frail. I moved back to the area to set up a consultancy business and Julian joined me."*

Diane acknowledges that she was *"very, very lucky"* and, despite the small part she played in the infamous Ken Dodd tax scandal, the couple's business was tremendously successful. Their client list included Philips Electronics, multinational glass manufacturing company Pilkington Group Ltd., British Aerospace and the Benefits Agency.

A keen interest in the concept of 'continuous improvement' led Diane to train as an assessor with the European Foundation for

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Quality Management (a non-profit membership foundation based in Brussels). It was while she was on an EFQM assignment in Vienna that she received a telephone call saying her husband had passed away. *“I continued with the business for a while,”* she says, *“but it wasn’t the same on my own.”*

It wasn’t long before the MD of Burton’s Biscuits asked Diane if she would take a three-month contract with them. She agreed, only to be pulled aside as she was leaving one evening and told they’d been sold to an American firm. *“He said, ‘Can you come onboard and see it through?’ And I stayed there until I retired in 2004.”*

Two years later Diane joined Leonard Cheshire Disability (a major health and welfare charity, founded in 1948 by RAF pilot Leonard Cheshire) as a national and international trustee. *“My dad was a naval officer,”* she says. *“He had a huge respect for Leonard Cheshire – we had books about him in the house. My mum... I can’t remember her walking without sticks. So it seemed natural.”*

Her work with the charity (in partnership with Rotary) took her to Rwanda as part of the Schools For All project. *“We didn’t want to just build a ramp, or make bigger windows,”* she explains. *“We actually took a holistic approach with Schools For All. We trained the teachers to teach disabled children, we trained the classroom assistants, we provided loans for the mums. Very often a disabled child was being used as a babysitter. If we took them to school, the mum couldn’t go to work in the fields. So we’d lend her the money to buy a weaving loom. It was quite a challenge.”*

Diane stepped down from her trustee role with Leonard Cheshire last August, although she continues to be involved on a voluntary basis at the Sandbach centre, which she helped to build through the fundraising group. *“And I’ll be round with my raffle tickets later on!”* she jokes.

Q: How did you become involved with the museum?

A: I’d been on a couple of Ian’s walks, and I joined the museum as a member. Betty

(Butterworth, administrator) sent me a nice, friendly email and I wrote back asking if there were any volunteering opportunities. I thought I’d like something local. So I met Betty and Julia (Davenport, trustee), and they recommended I look at managing the museum shop. That was 2 years ago.

Q: The trustees had asked you previously to join the museum board, but you’d declined. What changed your mind?

A: I’d always said that I wouldn’t become a museum trustee while I was still a trustee with Leonard Cheshire, and then I said that I wanted a few months off. I finished with Leonard Cheshire in August, and a couple of days before the Christmas holiday Mike Warke (Vice Chair) said to me, *“What’s your excuse now? Are you coming onboard?”* So I did.

Q: What are you hoping to accomplish for the museum as a trustee?

A: I want to see the museum on a more stable financial footing. I want to see people trained to do the next job up. I’d like to think that everyone who volunteers here – when they leave – has acquired more skills than when they came and I’m prepared to put my time into running courses. I saw a lovely phrase the other day: “Volunteers are not paid. This is not because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless.” I think we need to recognise that. I also want to make the museum more of a centrepiece for local people. We’ve recently implemented a plan to make the library more accessible – so it’s not just tucked away behind locked doors.

Q: Not many local people are aware of the museum...

A: We need to get it on the map! We’re looking into signage, possibly an extension, possibly moving to a High Street site... We need to make it more interesting, so it’s worth coming back to time and time again. At the moment it’s a bit static. There’s a lot here, but we’ve got to open it up more. But to do that, we need the trained volunteers.

Q: It sounds like you’re stirring things up!

A: I’ve stirred it a bit, I’m sure!



Museum free to all

(Donations welcome!)

Since the end of March Congleton Museum has been offering free admission to visitors!

This change has been made in order to maintain the rate rebate available to us following a change in policy by Cheshire East.

Museum trustee Diane Ritherdon told the Congleton Chronicle: *"This was a forced economic decision because we can't afford to lose our rebate. We currently take less money than we are going to lose. We hope to make up the difference in events and donations."* She also noted that the museum will become more reliant on charity grants and membership subscriptions.

As well as supporting the work of the museum, members receive valuable discounts on our walks and talks, a 10% discount on shop items and free access to the research library and our bespoke Victorian Names database.

Volunteers staff specialist library

Did you know that Friends of Congleton Museum are entitled to free use of the museum's excellent specialist library?

If you are following a particular area of research or simply wish to understand a little more about the history of the town, you may be interested in using this unique local history resource.



Trustee Sue Murgatroyd and volunteer Linda Ward study one of the many historic volumes housed in the museum's library.

"Due to the rare and fragile nature of some of items in the library, open access is not possible," explains museum trustee Sue Murgatroyd. "However, our Friends are welcome to pop in and examine the collection."

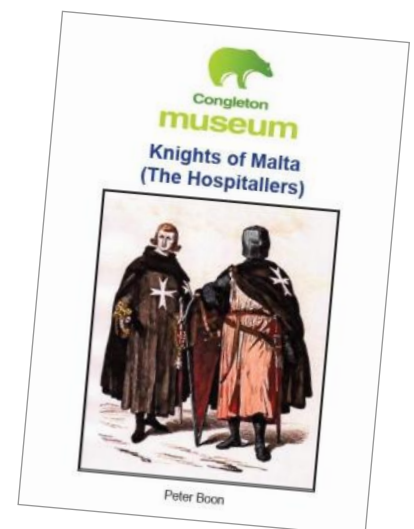
Trained volunteers are now available to assist with library information and searches on Tuesdays 1200 - 1530, Wednesdays 1400 - 1530, Thursdays 1400 - 1600 and Sundays 1400 - 1530. Other times may be available on request. Initial help is free; however a charge may be applied for any research work undertaken.

New booklet by Peter Boon

The museum is proud to announce the latest publication from local historian Peter Boon.

'Knights of Malta (the Hospitallers)' is a break from Mr Boon's usual local history booklets. Focusing on the part the Knights played in the Crusades, which is of particular interest to Mr Boon, the booklet also highlights their role in the formation of the St. John Ambulance Brigade and the origins of the present day banking system.

This booklet is now available at the museum for £1.50.



Meet The Authors



The tea and coffee flowed and the biscuits were out for the “Meet the Authors” evening hosted by Congleton Museum on Friday 5 April. Four local authors - **Joan Alcock, Peter Boon, David Daniel and Lyndon Murgatroyd** - gathered in the Sue Dorman room and spent a pleasant evening discussing their work with visitors.



Joan Alcock, David Daniel, Lyndon Murgatroyd, Peter Boon

The writers' publications were on display, and all were available to purchase. The table in front of Mr Boon was laden with copies of all 36 of his local history booklets, written over many years for the museum. It was an impressive spread!

Mr Murgatroyd's table featured 5 new booklets each containing an extract featuring one building from his books on houses and mills, now out of print. These booklets proved to be popular and are now on sale in the museum shop.

Sue Murgatroyd (event organiser/trustee) and Diane Ritherdon (retail manager/trustee) were kept busy supplying books and booklets for the visitors to take up to the authors for signing. Meanwhile, volunteer Linda Ward kept the kettles boiling and served everyone with tea and coffee.

“This event not only showcased the writing talent we have in Congleton, it also highlighted the town’s wealth of history,” said Mrs Ritherdon. “Our thanks go to all the authors for their support of the museum.”



Peter Boon & John Hopkins



Joan Alcock & well-wishers



David Daniel

Join Stephen Dean for a talk about The Staffordshire Hoard

One of the first people to see the Staffordshire Hoard is coming to tell people in Congleton all about it. Stephen Dean, Staffordshire's top archaeologist, is an inspiring speaker and says, "I can talk for hours on this subject." He'll be at Congleton Museum on **Thursday 6th June at 7.30pm.**

Stephen has worked as a field archaeologist and as an archaeological consultant; he has been Staffordshire County Archaeologist since 1994. He said: "To be involved in such an important find as the Staffordshire Hoard is a once in a lifetime opportunity for any archaeologist. As such, I deem myself incredibly fortunate to have been working for Staffordshire County Council, and to have had the opportunity to become involved when this incredible find was made."

As if that were not enough, in 2010 Stephen led the team of archaeologists which found more fragments. A lot of them were very small but some were very significant. One may be a cheek piece. The searchers did not use metal detectors but ploughed the area adjacent to the original find.

This talk has already created a lot of interest. Book early to secure your ticket.



Talks: 7.30pm start, booking is essential. Friends of the Museum may reserve up to two places, subject to availability. If your guest is not a Friend of the Museum, a £2 charge will be made. Please contact the museum to book a place.

Five new booklets

The museum has just published four new booklets based on Lyndon Murgatroyd's popular book, *Who Lived in a House Like This*, which is now out of print. He tells the stories of Henshall Hall, Bank House, Eaton Hall and West House and the people who lived there. He has also extracted the story of Brook Mills from his book, *Mill Walks and Industrial Yarns*, and all are now on sale in the museum shop priced £1 - £1.50.

Mr. Murgatroyd believes the booklets will be of special interest to people who now live in the houses or apartments which replace these buildings. He has promised to produce more booklets about Congleton's notable properties in due course.



awesome Artefact

James I Mace

This silver mace is one of a pair which were probably made for the town following the granting of the 1624 charter.

On the head of the mace are the initials IR and the coat of arms of King James.

This mace is now on display in the museum.



Forthcoming events

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Opening Times

Tuesday - Friday
12.00 - 4.30pm
Saturday
10.00 - 4.30pm
Sunday
12.00 - 4.30pm
Monday - closed
For holiday opening times please contact the museum.

Your newsletter team

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5th May 2013
Discovering Your Congleton
Leader: Peter Aston

Would you like to know more about your town? This walk is for you. Explore the origins of the town, the medieval development of its street plan and explore places that help explain the town's significance in national history.



7th July 2013
Mill Walks & Industrial Yarns
Leader: Lyndon Murgatroyd

The layout of Congleton has changed considerably since the first silk mill was built in 1752. This walk will try to show, through its mills, how Congleton's textile heritage affected the town.



2nd June 2013
A Pub Crawl through Time
Leader: Lyndon Murgatroyd

Congleton was renowned, in the past, for the high number of inns, taverns, and drinking houses for the size of its population. This walk will seek out those long lost drinking establishments and look at how those which still exist have changed over the years.



4th August 2013
The Importance of Water
Leader: Ian Doughty

Water has been important in the development of Congleton as both a means of transport and an industrial resource for the tanning and textile trades. The provision of drinking water and an effective sewage disposal system was still concerning the town as late as the 1960s.

Walks: £5 or £3 for Friends of the Museum (includes cream tea) - meet at the museum at 2pm. Please contact the museum to book a place.