

# Tudor House newsletter

## February 2011

**Remember to visit the Tudor House page on Facebook: <http://tinyurl.com/4vest9t> and 'like' it!**

Dear Friends, colleagues and supporters

Welcome to the first Tudor House newsletter, keeping you informed about the progress of the project and in-the-know about events and activities you can get involved in. Over the next few months we'll cover new discoveries in the house, research on some of the characters associated with the house and more about the resources and facilities that visitors will be able to enjoy.



Picture: The knot garden at Tudor House

**The story so far** Tudor House in its present form - the distinctive, timbered building that dominates St Michael's Square - was built in about 1492, but originally consisted of three dwellings dating back to about 1150. It has been the home of some of Southampton's most prominent citizens, including John Dawtry MP, who created the building we know today, Sir Richard Lyster, who was Chief Justice of England in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, and George Rogers, a successful 18<sup>th</sup> century artist. At the rear of the garden, where the wall once formed part of the town defences, are the remains of a Norman merchant's house, romantically referred to as King John's Palace.

By the mid-Victorian period Tudor House, like much of the Old Town, had fallen on hard times. It avoided the fate of many other Old Town dwellings demolished in the early 1900s slum clearance scheme but was bought and rescued around 1890 by WFG Spranger. He restored the building to how he thought it would have been in Tudor times and then sold it to the corporation in 1911 for less than half the price of the restoration. It re-opened as Southampton's first municipal museum in 1912. The garden was reinterpreted by renowned garden designer Dr Sylvia Landsberg in 1984 as a Tudor knot garden.

Surveys in the late 1990s revealed that the structure of the building was deteriorating and needed substantial renovation to secure its future. A Heritage Lottery Fund grant enabled the

first phase of work to be completed, ensuring that the building was fully watertight and no longer at risk of further movement.

The second phase, now nearing completion, has enabled the museum facilities to be updated, with greatly improved disabled access including a new lift and a café overlooking the garden. Educational facilities and access improvements at Westgate Hall (formerly Tudor Merchants Hall) will improve the experience for schools, and hirers of both buildings.



Picture: Tudor House before William Spranger took ownership

As the building works have progressed, so has research into the house's past. Lisa Ostreicher, an architectural paint researcher, was commissioned to carry out analysis of the painting schemes in different parts of the building. Her findings have helped inform the choice of colour schemes in some of the rooms, although we have decided not to go with the dull brown colour found in the Georgian wing.

Volunteer Clare Harris has been researching and collating information about the different occupants of Tudor House and the various activities which went on there. The writers of the audio tour which visitors will take around the house, have used Clare's findings to bring the house to life, basing the characters who speak to the visitor on real people. One of these is Margaret Tyers, the wife of the painter George Rogers. Her father managed the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens in London and it is tempting to speculate that her contact with the social elite who frequented the Gardens extended to the titled and fashionable visitors who came to the Southampton spa, and may also have been entertained at Tudor House.

Southampton's Archaeology Unit have recorded the entire building in painstaking detail as the later layers of paint and plaster have been peeled away and the original structure revealed. They have also been excavating in the garden, in the area where the foundations of the new café have been laid. They discovered more stone cellars, stretching down to the medieval quayside, and a large stone-lined pit, thought to be the site of the Tudor privy. They have also found tantalising glimpses of past occupants from the medieval period onwards – including fragments from a Victorian child's china tea set and parts of an old leather boot, 17<sup>th</sup> century clay tobacco pipes, a Tudor beer mug imported from Germany, and traces of a number of pet cat and dog burials.

Excavations were also carried out underneath Westgate Hall during the recent renovation works. An exhibition of the finds from this dig is currently on at God's House Tower Museum of Archaeology in Winkle Street. The star find is a medieval touchstone, used by merchants to establish the purity of gold, by rubbing the metal across the stone and comparing the streak.

The discovery of this stone, with some gold streaks still visible, shows that merchants were handling gold here over 500 years ago, checking the purity of coins used in trade.

### **What's happening in the house over the next month - a short report from Dan the project officer**

Linforde, our builders, are completing the interior decorating. This month they'll be putting down floor boards, finishing the plaster and paintwork in the house and beginning to put in final finishes, for example, fitting radiators and running tests on various state-of-the-art systems, including the new sprinkler system. The reception desk will be fitted, and some of the new audio visual displays will be installed.



### **Events and resources**

**Southampton's Past Times** From April, the series explores Tudor House and its inhabitants and the Tudor period and earlier, starting off with Dr Cheryl Butler on 'Beggars, rogues and vagabonds, the Poor in Tudor Southampton' on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> April. Tickets for the series can be booked by calling 023 8083 4536.

**Handling Boxes.** The education team has been overhauling our education resources. Our handling boxes – collections of themed objects available to schools and community groups for use outside the museums – are now smaller and easier to handle with practical items for groups of all ages.

**Teachers Session.** On Monday June 13<sup>th</sup> teachers in the city will be able to get their first look round Tudor House. Gemma Winterton will introduce the new educational facilities and talk more about how this fantastic resource can be used by schools. Contact Gemma on 023 8083 7814 to book a place, or to find out more about our handling boxes. .

**Hamton Street Mural project.** This summer, a mural by ceramic artists Joyce and Henry Collins is being renovated and installed at Hamton Street, close by Tudor House, using a Heritage Lottery Fund 'Your Heritage' grant.

Although not directly related to Tudor House this large cement and glass tile mural summarises the history of the city in 19 large colourful panels, depicting iconic events, buildings and objects,

from Roman period galleys, to the medieval Bargate to the 1976 FA Cup. Project activities in the community will be organised to coincide with the installation of the mural, including mosaic making workshops.

**Facebook.** For the very latest information about Tudor House and Garden, visit the page <http://tinyurl.com/4vest9t> and 'like' it (you need to have a Facebook account to 'like' the page).

### **Southampton Maritime Museum and Archaeology Museum**

With the opening of Tudor House & Garden in summer 2011 and the new Sea City Museum in 2012, many of the collections and stories represented in the Maritime and Archaeology Museums will be transferred to these new and vibrant venues.

Both Tudor House & Garden and Sea City will provide extremely high quality display environments for the cream of the City Council's museum collections as well as innovative and engaging interpretation of the City's history using technology, film and interactivity to bring Southampton's past to life.

To enable this, the Archaeology Museum will move to weekend opening from April 4<sup>th</sup> 2011. The Maritime Museum will be open seven days a week over the peak summer season and will close in mid-September following the Boat Show, to enable key exhibits to be moved and conserved in preparation for their installation in Sea City. This will include the major undertaking of moving the Queen Mary ship model which is over 7 metres in length and currently forms the centrepiece of the first floor exhibition in the Maritime Museum. This model will be a prime exhibit in Sea City.

In terms of the future use of the Wool House and God's House Tower, the Council will shortly be seeking expressions of interest for the leasing of these two unique buildings and will be ensuring that their distinctive place within the Old Town is sustained. The Council will be working with English Heritage to ensure future use is appropriate and in keeping with the buildings' listed status.

### **Finally, some dates to keep in mind. Guinea pigs required...**

Before the formal opening, there will be some 'soft opening' days when friends and colleagues will be invited to visit the house to help us test the systems.

Tea and coffee will be served to encourage people to complete our evaluation forms. If you are interested, email [museums@southampton.gov.uk](mailto:museums@southampton.gov.uk) and put 'soft opening' in the message line and we will add you to the list.



Picture: The imposing frontage of Tudor House in Bugle Street

**You are welcome to pass this email on to colleagues and friends.** If you have received this email from a friend and would like to be put on the mailing list direct, please get in touch here [museums@southampton.gov.uk](mailto:museums@southampton.gov.uk) and put Tudor House newsletter in the message line of your reply and we will add you to the list.

**Remember to visit the Tudor House page on Facebook: <http://tinyurl.com/4vest9t> and 'like' it**