

Newsletter

August 2026



Our next volunteers' meeting

All volunteers are welcome for an informal volunteers' meeting (A wine and chat sort of meeting) on Thursday, the 24th of September. The time will be at 18:00, inside the museum this time! See you then.

Hello!

Hooray! We've achieved accreditation at last, and now we're looking forward to the future - and of course the arts festival, which is now less than a week away. Congratulations everyone, well done, and thank you all for your support.



Volunteer Open Day - Thursday 1 October at 11.30am

Fancy getting involved at the museum? Come along to our Volunteer Open Day for a cup of tea, a biscuit and a chat with Douglas and a few members of our volunteer team!

We've got lots of different ways to get involved, with flexible roles to suit all sorts of skills and interests - and you definitely don't need to know everything about Staithe history.

We're always looking for more people to join the team, particularly at the moment, so if you've ever thought about volunteering but weren't quite sure what it involved, come along and find out!

Cups of tea and biscuits included!!



A Verrill story

We had a lovely family history moment in the museum this month.

Some visitors came in and bought a John Tindale card from the museum shop. It has a photograph of a crowd on the Staith, and they looked at it and said, "That's my mum as a baby" - and then, "And that's my uncle." They had never seen the photograph before!

So, naturally, they came upstairs to find out if we had any information about their Verrill family history. And - surprise - the museum was absolutely full of Verrills.



The problem with studying the Verrills is that lots of them inherited the same family names, so it can sometimes be very difficult to tell them apart. There are lots of Thomas Verrills and Margaret Verrills and plenty of other Verrills all appearing in the records, and you have to do a fair bit of detective work to work out who is who.

But fortunately, something rather incredible had just arrived at the museum that very week - Eileen Huby's family history research collection.

Eileen spent a lifetime researching Staithes families, and she had a particular connection to the Verrills. Her research includes extensive family trees for lots of Staithes families, and we were able to find our visitors' names in one of her Verrill books.

And not only did we find them - they were able to add to it! They gave us some extra information about the family, including new descendants and additions to the family tree.

It was a moment that felt like the museum was doing exactly what it is meant to do.



Eileen's family history research

Eileen's research is amazing. She told people that doing all the research "kept her from going mad" after her husband passed away, and she really did get stuck into it. She created an exercise book for each family, with a contents page listing all the people inside. Then each page gives information about births, deaths, marriages and descendants, as well as family myths, newspaper references, stories and anything else she had found out about that person. Then on top of that, there are the birth, marriage and death records from here to Loftus - some copied out by hand, some even typed on a typewriter! There is so much hard work represented in these books.

It is going to be incredibly useful for us, particularly because people come into the museum asking about their family history very often! We can now hopefully start answering some of those questions with information that has already been painstakingly researched by someone who knew these families.

We're hoping to do something like a Family History Day at some point, where we can let people have access to the family trees and celebrate all this painstaking research - and maybe help people find out a bit more about their own family tree while they're here.

At the moment, though, there is a slight problem. The books have a fairly strong smell of cigarette smoke, so we don't really want to have them all sitting out in the museum, for the sake of our visitors and the rest of the collection. Instead, I'm working my way through the folders, cataloguing and digitising all the documents, and then we'll work out later on what the best way is to share them.

It's a massive job, but I think it's going to be incredibly valuable. Doing this work is one of those things where we're trying to work out the balance between collecting, digitising and sharing as much of this information as possible for free, because it belongs to the people of Staithes and we want everyone to be able to use it, but at the same time making sure we're not spending huge amounts of museum time doing things that don't bring any money in, when we should be prioritising financial sustainability.

Whatever we decide to do, digitising everything is the first step, and then we can think about whether there's a way of making some of it available online, having a Family History Day, or perhaps doing something else entirely. If anyone has any good ideas about how we could do this - particularly if you would personally be interested in using or working with Eileen's research this winter - please let me know!

Let our Colin take you from here to Hawaii



The first think I flicked to in the arts festival programme (after looking for our advert, and our comedy-history contribution) is the section describing the talks. There are new ones this year, and for £4 you get a whole hour of someone who has spent a lot of time researching something fascinating - so if there's one that catches your eye, you can book a ticket via the festival website!

This year, our very own Colin Harvey is giving a talk about one of Staithes' most famous connections: **Captain James Cook RN: From Here to Hawaii**

Colin is a volunteer at the museum, so he knows rather a lot about Captain Cook already, but for this talk he's taking us on a much bigger journey.

He'll be looking at Cook's boyhood in the Staithes area, his time in Whitby in the Merchant Navy, and how he went from being the son of a local labourer to becoming one of the greatest marine explorers, navigators and cartographers of his time.

And, of course, the journey doesn't end in Whitby.

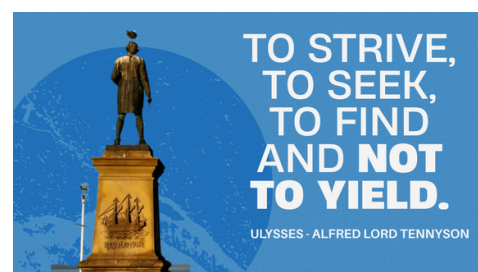
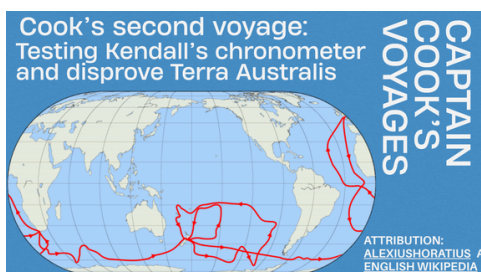
Cook's three great voyages took him right around the world, eventually ending in Hawaii, where he was killed in 1779.

So this is quite literally From Here to Hawaii - starting with a boy growing up on our doorstep and ending on the other side of the world.

The talk is on Sunday 13 September, 1.30–2.30pm at Staithes Village Memorial Hall, and tickets are just £4.

And there are lots of other talks throughout the festival too - from Dame Laura Knight and the fishermen who fought in the Great War, to dark matter, Gertrude Bell and Staithes itself.

The festival is free, but the talks are ticketed, and some have limited places, so if there's a talk you're interested in, don't leave it until you arrive in Staithes to decide! Book your ticket in advance [here](#).



Poetry, Tragedy and Other Things

If you like your poetry with a bit of laughing, storytelling and general unpredictability, there's a very good reason to head down to the Lifeboat Shed on Sunday morning.

Andy Blackford is back!

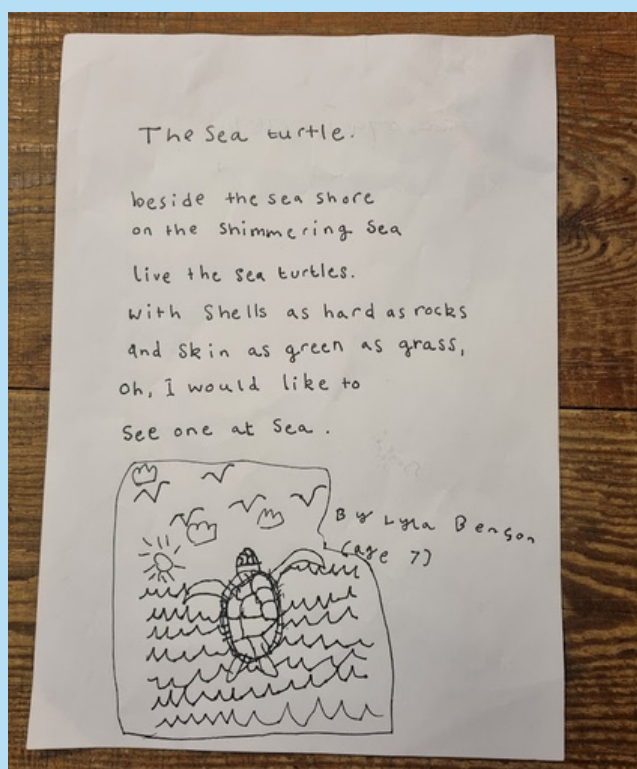
Andy is a poet, author, storyteller, former rock musician, former professional skateboarder, museum volunteer and, somewhat wonderfully, the man behind the legendary Um Bongo advertising campaign. He also has a long connection with Staithes, and earlier this year we had a little exhibition of his poetry in the museum.

This time he's bringing The Stand-Up Tragedy Show, alongside poets Carmen Marcus and Bob Beagrie.

Expect poems, anecdotes, observations and probably a few things you weren't expecting.

Sunday 13 September, 10.15–11.45am, Lifeboat Shed. Free entry - no booking required.

Come along and see what happens when poetry gets let out for the morning!



Poetry competition

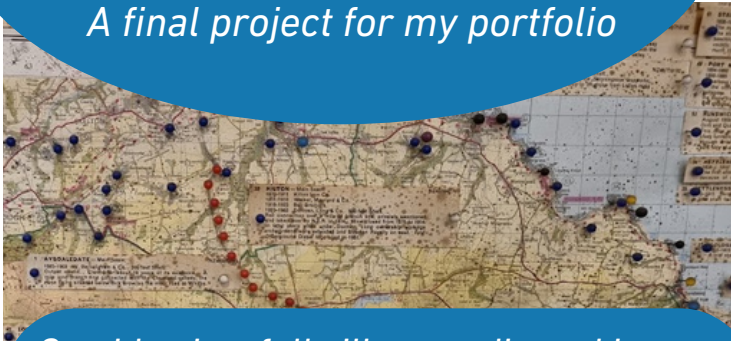
Judging is happening right now (while I'm writing this paragraph) for our poetry competition!

We've had everything from shape poems and playful pieces to some really deep reflections on Captain Cook, Staithes, and empire. There's been a brilliant range of ideas, and it's going to be very difficult to choose the winners!

Look out for the winning poems during the Arts Festival, where they'll be displayed alongside the objects that inspired them. We can't wait to see them up on the walls!

Apprenticeship update

A final project for my portfolio



One idea is a full village audio and image tour on our bloomberg connects guide, with a map in the museum. This would be a kind of digital upgrade to the paper-based village map, and would be particularly useful for people who come into the museum trying to find a particular cottage because Google Maps has failed them.

But it could be much more than just a way of finding your holiday cottage. We have so many historic photographs and stories about particular cottages, families and places in the village, and it would be lovely to be able to connect those directly to the places where they happened. You could be standing outside a cottage and find out who lived there 100 years ago, or see what the building looked like in an old photograph.

It would also help us take the museum out from behind our very thick stone walls and into the village itself. And, if the new free village Wi-Fi that the National Park is working on installing gets completed, it could be a really good opportunity to make something like this work.

School has been on holiday this month, so I've had a bit of time to start thinking about my final exhibition next year -which seems a very long way away, but actually isn't! I need to start planning it and writing a proposal for next summer, so I've been thinking about what I might like to do.

I have a few ideas at the moment, and they are all very different.

Another idea is a "Staithes Superstitions" exhibition. We've had quite a few people mention in our feedback forms that they'd like to know more about the superstitions and folklore of Staithes. The problem is that we don't currently have a huge amount about this in the collection (mainly just in the shop), and it's not the sort of thing where you can just go into the catalogue and find "The P-I-G word not being said", "Evidence of mermaids", and "a sheet ironed without any creases in it." So that one would involve quite a lot of research and probably producing some illustrative materials as well.



I've also been wondering whether there could be a more interactive project using Eileen Huby's family history collection, which we've just been talking about. There is so much information in those books, and it would be interesting to think about how an exhibition could use them to tell stories about individual families and the way Staithes has changed over generations.



And then there's another idea which I'm particularly interested in: the story of the top of the village. The museum has always been very focused on the bottom of Staithes - fishing, mining, the harbour, the fishermen and all the things that happened around the Beck and down by the sea. But there is a whole other story about the top of the village that we haven't really collected very much of. There was a big movement of people from the bottom of the village up towards the top, and there are lots of interesting characters connected with that part of Staithes, including people like Robert Brown. It could also help answer a question that visitors ask us all the time: "Why are there so many holiday cottages at the bottom of the village?" There's actually a really interesting history behind that, and I think it would be nice to be able to tell it.



Then there's the smock jackets, which currently live on the back stairs, there's our posser, mangle and wash tub that could do with some explaining, and there's a plan on the go to make a film about John Cole's heritage fishing skills into an interactive exhibit and museum film.

So many ideas so little time! There's lots of research and thinking to do before I pick just one. Often, we work in response to opportunities, so I'm looking forward to seeing where it goes. And to getting back to lectures in September!

Bill Hinchley's Staithes Memorial Board

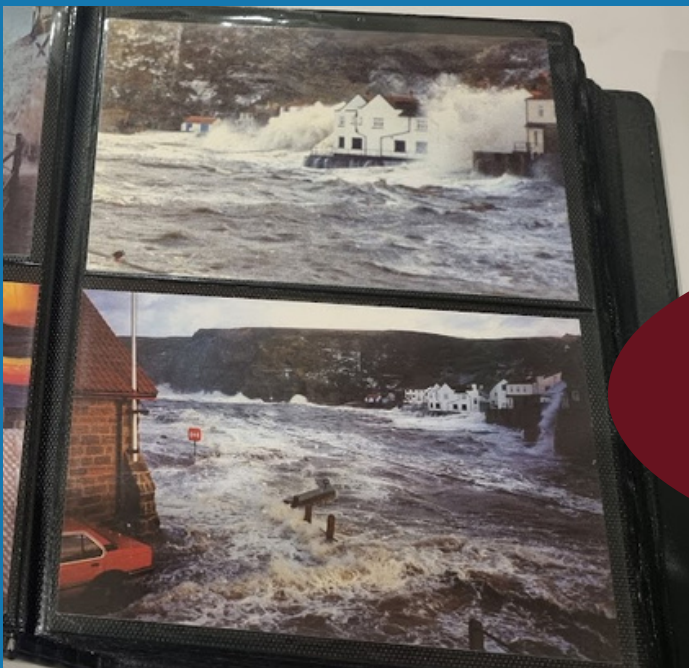
One of the things that has become a real part of the Arts Festival at the museum is Bill Hinchley's Staithes Memorial Board, remembering the people of Staithes who lost their lives at sea. One of the stories on the board is the loss of the *Pebba*, which is also remembered in a poem in our collection (read the whole thing upstairs in the lifeboat area):

"The boats went out in the morning,
As full often they'd done before
With never a thought of danger
Or what the day had in store."

The boats went out fishing as they had done
hundreds of times before, but on the way
home the weather turned:



"The wind by now had increased in strength
In fact, it was nearly a gale -
And the boats sailed on like a flash of light
Under greatly shortened sail."



Then the storm struck the *Pebba*.

"When a terrible storm struck the *Pebba*
She went down in the depths of the sea,
And Neptune took toll of two brave souls -
The sons of the brave and the free."



Another boat turned back to try to rescue them. Two men were still in the water, and the crew managed to save one - but the other disappeared just as they were reaching him.

The poem describes the people waiting on shore:



“Strong men lined the beach with pale face,
Frail women and children in tears,
For the news had gone round like lightning,
And our hopes gave way to our fears.”



It is a heartbreaking poem, but it also shows why the memorial board matters. We often imagine that the history of these disasters is neatly recorded, in historical documents or memorialising poems like this one, but it isn't. Sometimes there was no body, no grave, and sometimes not even a name in the newspaper.

Bill has pieced together the names on the memorial from parish records, newspapers, remembrance cards, family histories, museum objects and local memories. Some people appear in several sources. Others appear only once.

And some have disappeared from the record altogether.

So when you come to the festival, do take a look at the memorial board in the museum. It is much more than a list of names - it is an attempt to remember the people behind them, and to recover some of the stories that might otherwise have been lost.

Happy Accreditation, Everyone!

WE GOT ACCREDITED!!

It is official - the Staithes Museum and Heritage Trust has been awarded Museum Accreditation, which is the national quality standard for museums in the UK.

So after two years of policies, procedures, cataloguing, emergency planning, documentation, flow charts, spreadsheets, folders, more spreadsheets and an alarming amount of paperwork... we are now officially a grown-up museum. Hooray!!

Accreditation recognises that we're properly looking after the collection, recording what we have, planning for the future and doing all the boring-but-very-important museum things properly.



The Accreditation assessor visited us in July and recommended us for accreditation, and then we had to wait for the final decision. When the email finally arrived confirming it, there may have been some slightly excessive celebrating.

The really nice thing is that it is a team achievement. The trustees, staff, volunteers and all the people who have donated objects, photographs, money, time, information and stories have all helped get us here.

And we've even made it into the newspapers! Trustee Colin Pyrah sent out a press release, and The Whitby Anchor wrote a lovely article about the museum and the accreditation. They described how the community came together to save Reg Firth's collection after his death and how that rescue has grown into the independent museum we have today.

So thank you to everyone who has helped us get this far.

We are still the same slightly chaotic little museum in a very old chapel, obviously.

But now we are a properly accredited, officially grown-up slightly chaotic little museum. Well done, everyone!



The Anchor

[Menu](#)[Search](#)

One man's lifetime collection of Staithes history is awarded museum accreditation



Colin Pyrah, one of the trustees, at Staithes Museum which was founded by the late Reg Firth. Picture: Ceri Oakes.

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Friday August 28 2026 by Emma Ryan

Object of the month - Ann Maid doll



Our object of the month this month is a little doll who lives upstairs, sitting in her wooden chair next to the Staithes bonnets. She looks a little bit haunted, but she has a rather lovely Staithes story.

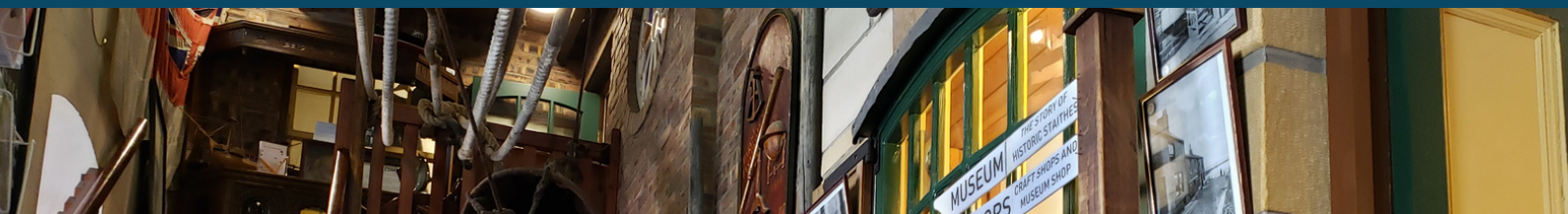
The doll was given to the museum in 2023 by Ellie Preston. She had belonged to her mum, Elsie, who bought her from her neighbour, Ann Lawson. Ann made all the doll's clothes herself and sold her work under the name "Ann Maid" - you can still see the name sewn onto the hem of the little apron.

Ann will be familiar to lots of people in Staithes. She and her husband Terry ran the Gift Shop on the High Street for more than 50 years, and Ann was also one of the last people making traditional Staithes bonnets.

The little wooden chair is another bit of local history. It was made by the postman, Mr Smailes, who delivered the post around Staithes and was also a talented woodworker.

And then there's the Preston family themselves. Elsie and Eric ran the Staithes Post Office and General Store from around 1969 until 1984, living above the shop. Elsie's mum Emily lived in the little cottage behind.

There's something rather nice about that. This tiny doll connects Ann Maid, the Staithes bonnets, the postman, and the old Post Office and shop - all through one little object.



Looking forward to the arts festival

It's nearly here! We're really looking forward to the Arts Festival and, as always, it's going to be a busy weekend in Staithes.

The museum is getting involved in all sorts of ways this year. We've been sharing museum films and photographs with the group showing films down on Becksides, we're sharing "Staithes History for beginners" on our social media, we're hosting the Co-op in our front yard, and the winners of our poetry competition will be displayed alongside the objects that inspired them. We've also contributed some local history to the festival programme.

Last year we had 1,250 visitors through the museum over the festival weekend, so we're hoping to beat our record this year!

If you'd like to come and volunteer at the museum over the weekend, please put your name down for an hour slot on the schedule under the calendar. Every hour makes a huge difference when things get busy! And if you're just popping in for a visit, don't forget to say hello to our museum crafters. They've been working very hard to fill the shelves with their gorgeous handmade crafts and gifts — and there are some lovely things in there at the moment. Bring on the festival!!

