

Newsletter

July 2026



Tom Watson's wedding outside of Wesley Cottage in 1901 - Shared with the museum by Steve Dowson.

Hello!

It's a bit late for a July issue, sorry! I've been taking some time to pick up after our Very Important Deadline, and the time has slipped away from me! Here's the latest newsletter.



Dates for Your Diary!

The summer is flying by, and we've got two fantastic weekends coming up in Staithes.

 **Lifeboat Weekend** is taking place the 14th to the 16th of this month. It's always one of the busiest and most exciting weekends of the year, with the RNLI fundraising events, entertainment throughout the village, and (fingers crossed!) some wonderful weather. If you're visiting, do pop into the museum while you're here and say hello.

Then, next month, it's the **Staithes Festival of Arts and Heritage**. The village will once again be filled with artists, makers, musicians, exhibitions and open studios. We'll be opening our doors to welcome everyone exploring the festival can we beat last year's visitor record?

Whether you're a regular visitor or it's your first trip to Staithes, we'd love to see you. Roll on another brilliant couple of weekends!

Our next volunteers' meeting

All volunteers are welcome Thursday September 19th for an informal volunteers' meeting (A wine and chat sort of meeting). The time will be at 18:00, in the upstairs of the Smugglers gallery.



Accreditation: Have We Finally Become a “Proper” Museum?

There was a slightly top-of-a-rollercoaster moment this month when I found myself looking around the museum surrounded by carefully arranged folders, checklists, policies and procedures manuals, thinking: this is it... this is the big one.

After two years of work, we welcomed Shabeena, our Accreditation assessor, for our official museum accreditation visit.

Naturally, we had prepared.



The policy folders were out, neatly arranged and ready to go. We had practised finding things. We had checklists of possible questions and made sure we knew where to find the answers. We had prepared for the big questions:

“Do you have a volunteer induction process?”

“What are the resources for your collections care plan?” “Where do you keep your collections information?”

Thankfully, the answer to most questions was no longer a panicked “I think it’s somewhere in a folder...” but a confident “Yes, it’s here!”

Our collections catalogue was ready too.

Thanks to the hard work of our cataloguing volunteers, and the arrival of our new computer, affectionately known as Fridgeputer, our MODES catalogue was looking better than ever. Fridgeputer is probably ten times faster and more usable than our previous desktop upstairs, and suddenly our collections records looked shiny, professional and very much like the catalogue of a grown-up museum.

One of the things I was particularly pleased about was our Documentation Procedural Manual. Following advice from our Accreditation mentor, Esther Graham, I had added some new flow charts this month to make our processes clearer and easier to follow. When Shabeena opened the manual, one of the first things she said was: “I really like the flow charts!” Which, if you have ever spent an evening making museum paperwork more exciting, is about as close as you can get to a standing ovation.



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Object entry photograph record

Sticker colour	Object number on sticker	One word description	Location: Room	Section	Box	Cabinet	Shelf	Initials
W	E119	cc plate	10		50			ggh
W	E461	teapot (kercon)						
W	1586	black mug (kercon)						
W	1598	cream cc mug						
W	1429	mold of plastic mine						
W	129	cream mug						
?	From pub	"cc (small)						
W	1597	market box (kerma)						
W	1484	market box (kerma)						
W	1486	market box C.C.						



But why does Accreditation matter?

Accreditation is more than just a certificate on the wall. It is the recognised standard that shows a museum is being run properly: that collections are cared for, that information is recorded, that visitors are looked after, and that the organisation has the right plans in place for the future.

For a small independent museum like ours, it gives reassurance to visitors, funders and supporters that when they donate an object, volunteer their time, or support us financially, they are helping a museum that meets national standards. It also opens doors. Many grant funders look for Accredited status because it shows that a museum is well managed and that their investment will have a lasting impact. It helps us build partnerships, apply for funding, and continue preserving Staithes' stories for future generations.



But most importantly, Accreditation is a huge team effort.

So this is a massive thank you to everyone who has helped us get here: the volunteers who have spent hours cataloguing objects, the trustees who have helped with grant applications, those who have shared stories and memories, everyone who has filled in visitor surveys, and everyone who has quietly dusted, cleaned and cared for our collections.

Thank you to everyone who has looked after the museum, welcomed visitors, and covered for me while I disappeared into a mountain of paperwork!

If all goes well, by this time next month we might officially be a "grown-up museum".

Hooray!

Lights, Camera, Staithes!



This month, the museum was transformed into a film studio as we began making our new accessibility film, thanks to a grant from the North York Moors National Park. The idea behind the film is simple: to help more people experience the museum, hear our stories, and discover the objects that make Staithes such a fascinating place—even if they can't manage all of our stairs.

And what a week we had for filming. The weather was absolutely perfect (which, given our usual relationship with North Yorkshire weather, felt like a minor miracle). The sun shone, the sea sparkled, and nobody had to be filmed battling through horizontal rain—which is always a bonus!

The filmmaking team of Anne, Matt and Johannes arrived and immediately became a well-oiled machine. Watching them work was fascinating: while we were wandering around wondering where to put things, they were calmly arranging cameras, microphones and lights. And those lights! Somehow, they managed to make the museum look like a completely different place. Objects we see every day suddenly had a whole new drama and importance.

The film is going to be built around stories from people connected to Staithes, bringing the museum's collections to life. Kat talked about the Staithes Bonnets and the pride, skill and connection she feels towards this very special part of local heritage. Caroline shared the story of the museum's beginnings and explained why Laura Knight's painting *Friends* is such an important part of our collection.



Then there was me.

I was filmed too—which sounded like a much better idea before the camera actually turned on. Despite spending most of my time talking about the museum, apparently having a large camera pointed at me made my brain immediately empty itself. I genuinely can't remember what I said. Hopefully it was mostly accurate and not too many accidental historical inventions slipped through!

The film will be framed with stories from Bill and John, bringing in memories of fishing, industry, dialect and village life. The aim is not just to show objects, but to show why they matter—the people, memories and experiences connected to them.



We are really looking forward to sharing the finished film at the Staithes Festival of Arts and Heritage later this year. It has been a wonderful experience, and we are incredibly grateful to the North York Moors National Park for supporting the project and making it possible.

Now we just have to wait and see whether my bit contains anything so untrue we can't leave it in...

Apprentice Logbook

*What do we actually mean by
"Collections Care"?*

One of the questions we've been asking at school this month starts with, What do we actually mean by collections care?

Surely it's obvious. We look after old things.

We watch out for woodworm, we keep as much dust off as we can. We wear gloves if we have to. We draw graphs every month that tell us about our environmental conditions over the year, to help us decide where to keep the objects that like damp the least.

Well... yes. But the only protection we give to the much-petted turtle is a sign that says, "Please do not touch the turtles - they get scared."



Every now and then, we get awkward questions. Should the little girl's dress be behind glass? What about the naval uniforms? The old shop scales? And perhaps most controversially... Should visitors be allowed to stroke the turtle?

When I first started working here, I thought the answer was easy. There's a famous idea from the philosopher Immanuel Kant that says we should ask ourselves: "What if everyone did what I just did?"

If one person strokes the turtle, nothing much happens. If fifty thousand visitors stroke the turtle every year...we eventually have a rather polished turtle.



Museums know this. Every fingerprint leaves tiny traces of grease. Fabric weakens. Metals corrode. Wood dries out. Light slowly fades dyes and paint. From that perspective, collections care means slowing down nature for as long as possible.

But what if every museum put every object behind glass? Would anyone come? If we replaced every object with a high-resolution photograph because the original had become too precious to display, we'd certainly preserve them brilliantly. We just might not have much of a museum left.

It turns out this isn't just my dilemma. Museum professionals have been arguing about exactly this for years.

Protect it!	Let it live!
"Museums have the duty to acquire, preserve and promote their collections as a contribution to safeguarding the natural, cultural and scientific heritage" for future generations — <i>(ICOM Code of</i>	The Mausoleum Effect: A "glass display case both imposes a restrained stillness ... and reduces the mise-en-scene to that of a constructed mausoleum for passers-by to mourn" (Chynoweth 2021)
Treating objects as "primary evidence" for establishing knowledge that is not governed by "current intellectual trends" — <i>(ICOM Code of Ethics,</i>	Knowledge is not just data to be extracted; it is a "life force" (mauri) that is activated through "touch, formal address, conversation, tears" - (Schorch & McCarthy,
Museums should preserve an object's physical integrity for future generations. —	Heritage isn't just physical. It also includes memory, identity, emotion and human connection. — Tythacott & Arvanitis (2014)
Contemporary professional codes favour maximizing the "Physical integrity of heritage objects for the good of the greatest number of people" over a long period (Tythacott & Arvanitis	Our responsibility is also to keep objects meaningful in the present. Museums should be <i>caretakers</i> , not simply owners. — Krasny & Perry (2023)

Perhaps my favourite example is our piece of concealed clothing. For hundreds of years it wasn't meant to be seen. It was hidden inside a roof, where people believed it quietly protected the house and its occupants. Its whole purpose—its entire reason for existing in that place—depended on remaining concealed.

Then along came the museum. We've carefully documented it, photographed it, conserved it and displayed it. It's wonderfully preserved. But in revealing it, we've also taken away the very job it spent centuries doing.

I have been wondering, by preserving the object, have we accidentally destroyed part of its meaning?

The same is true of so many museum objects. The shop scales were built to weigh flour and sugar, not to decorate the shop counter. The naval uniforms were stitched to survive storms, not LED lighting. The little girl's dress wasn't made to be admired from behind glass. It was made to be worn by a child who probably sat in the sand and wiped sticky fingers on it. And then it spent 200 years providing magical protection to a house by virtue of being hidden.

Museums are incredibly good at preserving materials. We're not always quite so good at preserving functions. And what if we one day have a museum full of objects nobody remembers how to use?

So perhaps collections care isn't really about stopping objects from changing. Everything changes eventually. Perhaps the more interesting question is: Which part of the object are we trying to preserve? The fibres? The craftsmanship? The evidence? Its original purpose? The memories people attach to it? Or the conversations it continues to inspire?



Of course, the right answer is... all of them.

Collections care isn't simply about protecting old things. It's about constantly balancing the needs of the future with the experiences of people standing in front of the object today.

So, please don't stroke the turtle. Really. I mean it. (You know who you are.) But if you do find yourself smiling because he takes you to somewhere far away where Cook explored the pacific, or makes a new memory because you've never touched a turtle shell before, then perhaps you've discovered why museums keep having this argument.

Some things become worn away to nothing by touch. Others come alive.



Work Experience: Meet Issy!

Every summer we welcome work experience students, and it's always a pleasure to see the museum through fresh eyes. This year Issy spent the week researching geology, interviewing local historian Bill Hinchley, exploring our archives, designing exhibition panels and curating her very own display – Very Interesting Bricks.

Her exhibition showed how even the most ordinary objects can tell extraordinary stories. From a school brick to a lump of ironstone, Issy uncovered fascinating connections to Staithes' history, weaving in memories from Bill Hinchley to bring the displays to life. It's already been enjoyed by hundreds of visitors.

We're incredibly grateful for all the hard work and enthusiasm Issy brought to the museum. Work experience here isn't about making tea – it's about making a real contribution, and Issy certainly did that. We'll let her tell the rest of the story in her own words...



Record of moving objects to new locations

Date	Object number / box number	Previous location (Room, section/case ref.)	Object type (e.g. photo, painting, artefact)	Initials of person moving object	Reason for moving	Tick if you've removed the object
15th July 2026	Battery	Room 10 Cab 3	Battery	INS	New exhibition - BRICKS	✓
15th July 2026	Rush pins	Room 10 Cab 3	Rush pins	INS	" "	✓
15th July 2026	Cable	Room 10 Cab 3	Cable	INS	" "	✓
15th July 2026	Scrapers (Box 8)	Room 10 Cab 3	Scrapers	INS	" "	✓
15th July 2026	Expendable 4-55 W	Room 10 Cab 3	Capacitors	INS	" "	✓
15th July 2026	Emily's room	Room 10 Cab 3	Room	INS	" "	✓
15th July 2026	2143	Room 10 Cab 3	Model ship	INS	" "	✓
15th July 2026	Newspaper for newspaper	Room 10 Cab 3	Newspaper	INS	" "	✓
15th July 2026	Labels on cable	Room 10 Cab 3	Labels	INS	" "	✓
15th July 2026	Labels	Room 10 Cab 3	Labels	INS	" "	✓



Issy: My experience

I have absolutely loved doing my work experience at Staithes museum. It is a beautiful village and I have really enjoyed learning more about local history. My project for the week here was to make a new cabinet exhibition at the museum on rocks and bricks each with a story tying them to the village.

I began by researching each of the objects given to me and making a plan of what information I would include in the exhibit. The next day I interviewed local historian Bill Hinchley on his life in Staithes and how his stories and experiences link to each of the objects. I then made interpretive labels on each exhibit and included segments of transcript from my recorded interview with Bill Hinchley as well as quotes from books on the subject. I had used the museum catalogue to locate sources that would back up my displays.

I learned how to keep a note of what artefacts were removed from the cabinet and where they were put and vice versa with the new artefacts for my exhibition. I used images from the museum's image library to add a visual element to the information on the artefacts and make it more appealing to visitors. I also decorated the display cabinet and added a main title to make the exhibit more eye-catching.

The thing I enjoyed most about my time at Staithes Museum was the fact that I learned about all aspects of running a museum. It helped me to build a clearer picture of what sort of role within a historical career I may want to pursue in the future.

From the Archive: "Baptise him over again."

One of the joys of working through old archives is that every now and then a letter turns up that gives you a real glimpse into the lives of ordinary people. This month we've been looking at a letter from the Baker Papers, written at Boulby on 24th June 1757 by Thomas Wardell, manager of the Boulby Alum Works, to George Baker, one of the owners.

At first glance it's just a business letter. Local news, £200 to pay the workers, a new pair of twins, But tucked into the beginning of the letter is a remarkable story.

Wardell introduces the bearer of the letter as "Dick White's son", explaining that the young man had been impressed into the Royal Navy the previous year but had managed to escape. He warns that there is a press tender lying in Whitby harbour, and that if the young man is recognised and recaptured he will face severe punishment.

The Press Gang was one of the greatest fears for the seafaring communities of Staithes and Whitby throughout the eighteenth century. Although fishermen were supposed to be exempt, the Royal Navy knew that Yorkshire fishermen were among the finest seamen in the country and often ignored the rules. Men could be taken from their boats by force, leaving wives and families without an income. Some never returned for years. One Staithes fisherman didn't see the daughter he left behind until she was fourteen years old.



Communities did everything they could to resist. Secret passages between Staithes houses provided escape routes, neighbours warned each other when the Press Gang appeared, and in Whitby an angry crowd even demolished the Press Gang headquarters in 1784. Some men joined the Sea Fencibles, a volunteer coastal defence force, because membership protected them from impressment while allowing them to continue fishing.

Wardell's solution was wonderfully practical. He asks Baker to find the young man work at the alum works, where "he can work with a Barrow and Spade," and then writes one of the most memorable lines in the whole thing: **"Baptise him over again. Call him what you please."**

Boulby 24th June 1757

Your Sir

I have long flattered myself with hopes of a line from you and should be extremely glad to receive one. The bearer is Dick Whites son, he had the misfortune to be impressed the last year and made his escape as there is now a press Sender in whitby should he be taken away - undergo I imagine the most severe punishment as I believe the young fellow to be very honest sober and diligent besides though he has been brought up to the sea know he can work with a Barrow and Spade and I daresay will endeavour to make himself as useful as he can in any thing he is able would you be so kind as take him into any business under you. Baptise him over again. Call him what you please: let him use his bounds and tell him the Consequence should he exceed them, you would Do a Charitable action by preserving his Liberty, a Blessing we all Claim in England: and in Town myself what I shield with health valy above above all other Blessings this world can afford. On this Day tonight to received £200 of Wm Walker on Friday made our pay and am now Closely engaged in settling our Books. Mr Jefferson Continues badly; Mr Oldfield is ruined. His wife this morning fathers two thumping on him. He came over himself to tell me but looked extremely small. The poor woman they thought had been dead for some minnets I sent over this afternoon and she is better so she will recover. All is well here and I am
Your etc.

In other words, give him a new identity. Hide him in plain sight, keep him away from Whitby, and tell him not to stray beyond the boundaries you set. Wardell ends his appeal by saying that Baker would be "doing a charitable action by preserving his Liberty, a Blessing we all Claim in England."

We've included the original letter alongside a transcription so you can have a go at reading Thomas Wardell's handwriting yourself. See if you can spot the famous line – and imagine the relief that Dick White's son must have felt when someone was willing to "baptise him over again."

41
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The Very Interesting Bricks That Built a Museum



One of the highlights of this summer has been our work experience student Issy's wonderfully quirky exhibition, The Very Interesting Bricks. She challenged visitors to stop walking past ordinary-looking bricks and start asking questions about them.

Where did they come from? Who carried them? What have they seen? It turns out that the bricks in our own building have some absolutely brilliant stories to tell.

The building that is now Staithes Museum began life as the Primitive Methodist Chapel in 1879. But before anyone could admire its handsome front or sing a single hymn inside, there was one enormous problem.

The ground.

Our museum sits on a narrow terrace cut into the steep hillside. Before the chapel could even be built, the trustees had to buy and demolish a large thatched cottage belonging to John and Mary Laverick, costing the considerable sum of £275. Then came an even bigger challenge: stopping the whole thing sliding down the hill!

To do that they built a huge retaining wall using exactly 20,750 bricks, costing twenty-seven shillings per hundred. Twenty thousand, seven hundred and fifty! Next time you climb the museum steps, it's worth remembering that those bricks are quietly holding the hillside in place nearly 150 years later.

Getting the bricks here was an adventure in itself.

The railway hadn't yet reached Staithes, so the bricks arrived by train at Loftus before local farmers hauled them to the village by horse and wagon. Every journey meant another load rumbling over country roads towards the little fishing village.



One of those farmers, Matthew Codling of Cowbar Farm, accidentally left us one of my favourite stories. When he sent in his bill, he addressed it to the "Ranter Chapel" - the nickname everyone locally used for the Primitive Methodists. The minister, evidently preferring something a little more respectable, quietly altered the invoice to read "Primitive Methodist Chapel."

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The beautiful stone on the front of the building came from Boulby Quarry. Levi Thurlow dressed the stone and transported it to Staithes, while the rest of the village joined in. Men, women and children all helped move heavy materials and carried sand and water up from the beach. Building a chapel wasn't simply hiring a builder - it was something the whole community pitched in to achieve.



Even before this impressive chapel existed, there had already been a smaller Primitive Methodist chapel standing immediately next door. Built in 1838, it was funded in a wonderfully Staithes way: by regular contributions from the crews of local fishing yawls such as William Clowes, Princess Royal and Felicity. A successful fishing trip might not just buy supper—it might buy another few bricks for your chapel. As the congregation grew, they simply outgrew their first chapel, so they built the larger one we know today. The old chapel didn't disappear either - it became the Sunday school, later a tea room, and is now a private house. If you've ever wondered about the building with the wooden porch next to the museum, that's it.

And ours wasn't the only chapel with an extraordinary building story.

The Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, further down the village, was another remarkable community effort. The fishermen spent all

day at sea, then came ashore, still wearing their heavy sea boots, and dug the foundations by lantern light during the evenings. They were so eager to use their new chapel that the first service took place before the permanent roof was finished. Instead, branches were laid across the walls and covered with coble sails to keep the weather out while everyone worshipped underneath.





Then there's Bethel - the "High Chapel" as it was the closest to the top of the bank. Built in 1835 with major financial support from wealthy alum manufacturer George Dodds, it was constructed from beautiful Boulby sandstone. While the Primitive Methodists were famous for fishermen rolling up their sleeves, Bethel reflected the village's merchants and master mariners. Yet it became far more than a place of worship. Meetings demanding a lifeboat for Staithes were held there, and later it hosted a Royal Commission investigating the fishing industry. Those walls witnessed some of the biggest decisions in the village's history.



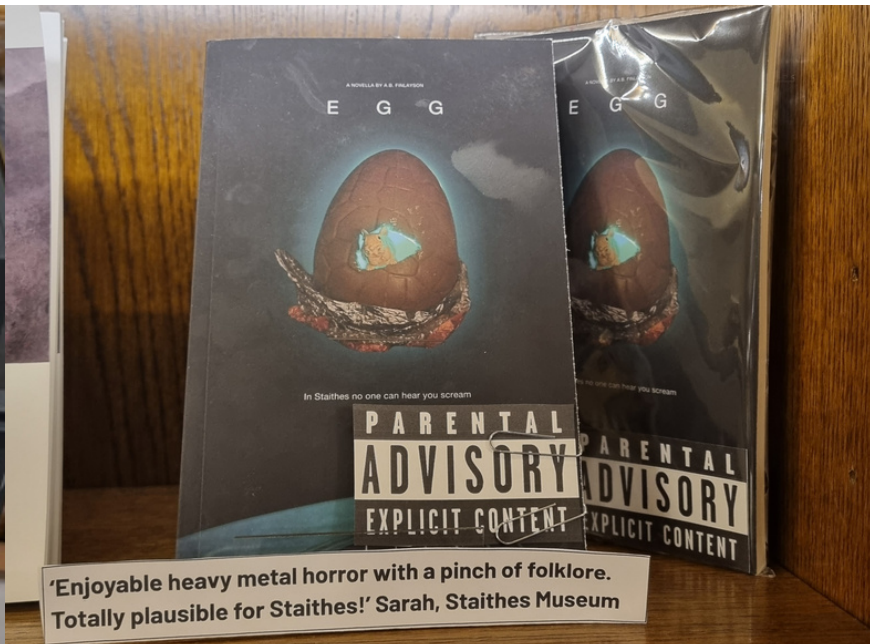
Looking at all three chapels together, a pattern emerges. These weren't just buildings. They were community projects built with money scraped together by fishing crews, labour freely given after exhausting days at sea, horses hauling thousands of bricks from Loftus, villagers carrying sand from the beach, and local craftsmen shaping stone from the cliffs.

Every brick worked very hard to get here.

So next time you visit the museum, spare a thought for those 20,750 very interesting bricks beneath your feet. They aren't just holding up the building - they're holding up nearly 150 years of Staithes history. Thanks to Issy's exhibition, I don't think any of us will ever look at an ordinary brick in quite the same way again.



New in the Shop... EGG (Parental Advisory: Contains Staithes)



What happens when you mix heavy metal, folk horror, the film Alien, and Staithes?

Apparently, you get EGG by A.B. Finlayson – a darkly funny horror novella with the unforgettable tagline: "In Staithes, no one can hear you scream." Set in the village, the story follows a touring metal band whose search for the source of a mysterious radio broadcast leads them into a village with some very ancient secrets.

We're now stocking copies in the museum shop, complete with a tongue-in-cheek Parental Advisory label. It's definitely not one for young children... but if you enjoy your Yorkshire with a generous helping of horrifying lovecraftian beings, it might be just the thing. Just don't blame us if your next walk through dog loup feels a little... different.