

The Piano Hoard Comes Home

In 2017, 913 gold sovereign and half-sovereign coins were discovered in Shropshire, hidden inside this piano.

So what is the link with Saffron Walden?

How have we acquired such a fascinating assemblage of material?

This piano was originally supplied by Beaven & Mothersole Piano Tuners, who were based in 27 West Road, Saffron Walden. Their name can be seen just above the keyboard. Receipts show that they had purchased the piano direct from the London manufacturers, Broadwood & Sons Ltd in 1906.



In 1983, the piano was bought by the Hemmings family, residents of Saffron Walden. They owned the piano for 33 years, before moving to Shropshire and gifting it to their local college, The Community College, Bishop's Castle, completely unaware of what was hidden inside.



It was only when the piano was professionally tuned, that the coins were finally discovered, nestled between the keys and the keyboard.

Research has shown that the coins found date to between 1847 and 1915; so they originate from the reigns of Queen Victoria, King Edward VII and King George V.

It is likely that they were concealed within the piano by a Saffron Walden resident. Some of the cardboard packaging in the pouches, which encased the coins, were taken from distinctive Shredded Wheat cereal boxes.



The style of the packaging suggests that the coins were concealed around the time of the Great Depression, when there was great economic hardship across the world.

“The identity of the person who hid the coins and their precise motivation will probably remain a fascinating unanswered question”

Peter Reavill, Shropshire Finds Liaison Officer

When the coins were discovered, they were declared treasure under the Treasure Act 1996, as they were gold coins which were deliberately hidden and no rightful heirs could be traced. At the time of its discovery, this hoard of modern gold coins was the largest of its type.

We are delighted that a representative sample of twelve of the gold coins from the hoard, as well as their packaging and the piano in which they were hidden, have now been acquired by the Museum. This fascinating mystery has captured many people’s imaginations, having received local, regional and national news coverage.



Saffron Walden Museum seeks to bring the piano hoard home

Town museum makes bid to acquire hoard of rare coins hidden in piano

Acknowledgements

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The Museum also wishes to thank all those who have been involved in the story of this hoard and helped us with the research and logistics to bring it home to Saffron Walden

Martin Backhouse, Piano Tuner

Graham and Meg Hemmings, previous owners of the Piano

Peter Reavill, Shropshire Finds Liaison Officer

Zofia Everett, Essex Record Office, Saffron Walden Archive Access Point

Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

The Community College, Bishop's Castle, Shropshire

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Robert Simonson (Archivist), Surrey History Centre (Broadwood Co. Archive)

Shropshire Museum Service

Butler Smith Specialist Carriers

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Welwyn Hatfield Museum Service: Nabisco / Cereal Partners (Shredded Wheat).

The Saffron Walden Almanack - Essex Record Office.

National and Local media coverage of the hoard's discovery and acquisition.

