

# Church tower holds secrets of Soho's crushed artisans

**W**HEN the tower of St Anne's Church in Dean Street was cleaned out in the 1970s, workers had to shift more than one-and-a-half tonnes of pigeon droppings.

Yet 30 years later the fully restored and operation clock tower now houses the collection of the Museum of Soho, 5,000 items that have been collected by residents or donated by businesses, to maintain the area's rich social history.

Sitting at the large wooden desk on the first floor of the tower, however, Bryan Burrough is struggling to hide his bitterness at the circumstances that forced him to start building the collection.

"When the Soho Society was founded in 1977 we not only had to save the buildings but also the people and they were fast disappearing," he says, referring to the exodus of businesses from the area.

But while the living community of Soho has been secured – "one of the Soho Society's main achievements" Bryan tells me – the tradesmen that once filled the streets

**Bryan Burrough tells Joel Taylor why a special exhibition detailing Soho's vivid history is worth visiting**



The master telephone from the old exchange

have gone. "There were literally thousands of craftsmen working in the area," he says.

"The area has been home to high skill workers since the 1680s. I remember in the late 1970s there were clock-makers, theatrical costumiers, gun makers, cello

and flute makers, ostrich feather trimmers, gold lace workers, shoe and boot makers, wig makers as well as hundreds of tailors working on Savile Row suits.

"The list was endless, it wasn't just a few colourful craftsmen, not rural basket weavers, they were all over the place."

He adds through gritted teeth: "But Geoffrey Rippon (the former Conservative minister) got rid of the distinction between light industrial businesses and office workers and at a stroke all these businesses became unviable as their rent just rocketed. "We fought like mad but we lost the battle.

"The great irony is that the demand for a lot of these skills hasn't disappeared. They have mainly relocated abroad."

It was in this setting that Brian started picking items from businesses.

He says: "The history of the area is so fascinating and I already had a collection of books on Soho.

"I just wanted to keep things that would keep



Bryan Burrough among the collection

alive the memory of trades that were vanishing.

"I was just keeping pieces of everyday life. The first piece I got was from the Welsh Dairy as I knew they were getting rid of stuff."

He adds: "It wasn't long before my flat became filled with boxes of bits and pieces that I picked up. I had no idea what would we would do with it."

The collection includes a Bellarmine jug dating back from 1680 found under the cellar of the Ship pub in Wardour Street 20 years ago, a

cream pot from the Oxford Express Dairy which was based in Frith Street, prescriptions for Jean Pugh who ran a

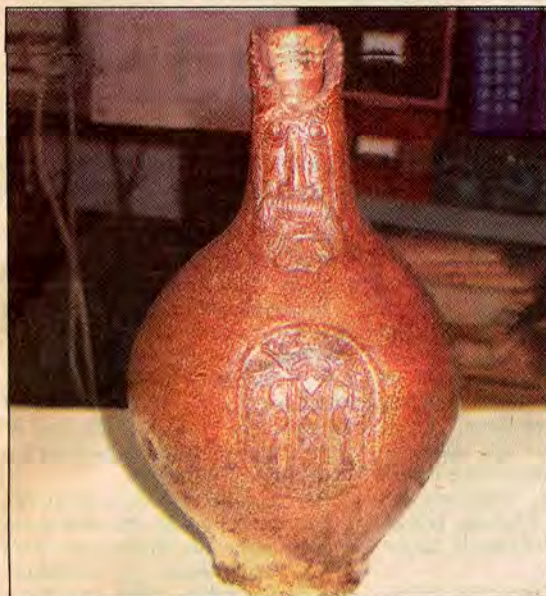
dairy and items from Joel-son's Delicatessen and menus from L'Escargot. In 1983 the Museum of Soho was registered and

its entire collection is now logged.

Bryan says: "We take anything that has a Soho connection and initially we wanted to get a building to become a permanent museum. We can't afford that sort of thing but we do have a close relationship with the Museum of London and we have lent them many items from the collection we plan to hold exhibitions."



Prescription bottles for Jean Pugh



The oldest item in the collection, the 1680 Bellarmine Jug

  
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