

Press Release July 2012

The Meteorite from Lake House on display at Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum



From September 10, 2012, a 90kg meteorite, possibly the biggest to have ever fallen on the British Isles, will go on display at the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum.

Mystery surrounds the history of the meteorite. For at least 80 years it sat near the front door of Lake House (at Wilsford-cum-Lake near Salisbury). When the house was sold, the stone was confirmed as a meteorite by the Natural History Museum where it remained in storage for many years. Professor Colin Pillinger, famed for his work on the Beagle 2 Mars spacecraft, had been studying a smaller meteorite from the Danebury Hill Fort in Hampshire and felt that there could be a connection between the two. The meteorite from Lake House was retrieved from storage and although the two objects were found to be unrelated, Colin has continued with his study of the larger meteorite.

The meteorite landed on earth some 30,000 years ago and was apparently preserved by the frozen conditions during the last ice age. In normal circumstances the meteorite would have disintegrated, but the cold and ice helped preserve it. Thousands of years later, in the Stone or Bronze Age, it is thought that the meteorite was built into a burial mound close to Lake House. The local chalk environment would again have helped to preserve it. The meteorite may have been unearthed in the 19th century by Edward Duke, a previous owner of Lake House who was an antiquarian who excavated burial mounds nearby and had his own private museum. Photographic evidence shows it on the doorstep of Lake House at the time the property was owned by the brewer Joseph Lovibond, Mayor of Salisbury in 1878-79 and 1890-91.

The Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum is thrilled to be able to display the meteorite. In addition, for a two week period from 10 September to 22 September, the Museum's Learning and Outreach Officer will be running a full programme of FREE supporting events for schools.

The two week programme will include sessions for all ages from infants to A-Level students, including the opportunity to handle moon rock and other meteorite samples loaned by the Science and Technology Facilities Council.

Two special workshops are being organised with Dr Paul Roche, Director of the Faulkes Telescopes Project and national schools' astronomer, and Professor Colin Pillinger. These will be aimed at GCSE and A-Level students.

Professor Colin Pillinger will also be giving a lecture about the meteorite at the museum at 6.30pm on 11 September. Tickets: £8 (members), £10 (non members).

For further information please contact Adrian Green, Director on 01722 332151 or email: adriangreen@salisburymuseum.org.uk

Images

1) Meteorite

2) Lake House, ©Country Life Library

ADVANCE NOTICE OF PRESS DAY – 12 NOON ON 11 SEPTEMBER AT SALISBURY MUSEUM. Professor Colin Pillinger will give a short presentation about the meteorite and will be available to answer questions about this incredible object.