

Hillary House hosts 'smashing' event



By Chris McGowan

It was a smashing good time at the Hillary House on Aug 22, when the Aurora Historical Society hosted a presentation on conservation, care and preservation of ceramics.

Lead by assistant curator Nicola Jago, she said, "Since I have been here, we have been doing some amazing things".

The Aurora Historical Society (AHS) has introduced workshops that involve both the public and AHS members which offer insightful information at a historical location. The "Caring for Ceramics" workshop was the second held at Hillary House this year.

Jago, who has been with the AHS for 2.5 years, specializes in ceramics and holds a BA in Classical Archaeology from Brock University and a Masters in Museum Studies from the University of Toronto. Her passion for ceramics and pottery is evident as she describes her experiences working in Turkey during her university days where she was tasked with piecing ceramics back together, as well as tips on how to preserve, store and clean china so that it will last forever.

She also discussed the different types of ceramics, such as, clay, earthenware, stoneware, porcelain and bone china, giving details of their differences and how they were made in ancient times compared to now.

To add to the excitement of the presentation there was ceramic pieces, and original dishes on display that were found on the grounds of Hillary House and in the house itself. The broken ceramic pieces were excavated during regular gardening tasks.

The presentation was a "participate if you like" hands-on workshop where attendees were requested to bring a flower pot. The task was to take the flower pot, put it in a pillow case, smash it, and glue the pieces back together to learn, understand and actually do what archaeologists do when they find ancient pottery and ceramics.

The tip we learned with this workshop was careful assembly and taping with masking tape is the key to mending delicate objects. It is important to have all the pieces of your broken dish or pot. The masking tape helps hold it together while the glue bonds the broken pieces. You can use an all-purpose adhesive, or the professionals use poly vinyl acetate which needs to be used in a well-ventilated area. With patience and the right glue, you can repair even the most fragile china, porcelain and clay pottery.

Well let's just say this, some of the participants were much better at this than others, as one in particular looked somewhat like a freakish flower pot put together by Dr. Frankenstein. Nevertheless, fun was had by all and the Hillary House was filled with laughter.

The "Evening with the Curator" workshops at Hillary House continue with the next one being held on Thursday September 19, "Creating a Memory Cookbook & Recipe Exchange."

For more information about the workshops, contact the AHS at 905-727-8991. The workshops are capped at 10 participants each and pre-registration is a must. The fee to attend is \$20 per person or \$15 for AHS members.