

WELLS & MENDIP MUSEUM ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2017

Governance and Management

2017 saw the loss of two of our Trustees to illness – Barry Lane in March and Chris Briton in May. In July 2017, four new trustees were appointed – Clare Blackmore, Sue Isherwood, The Very Reverend John Davies Dean of Wells Cathedral, and Councillor John Osman (Wells City Council). In September Martin Grass formerly resigned as Chair of the Trustees and Andrew Fawcett was appointed as his successor. Martin continues to sit on the Board as a Trustee.

Christine Quinn continues as Museum Manager. Philip Porter and Jonathan Chivers are the regular museum caretakers, with Michael Brooks acting as emergency caretaker.

Search & Learn: the Story of Wells

Work continues developing the project that will create new 'Story of Wells' galleries, refurbish Balch's Study, and establish a community history resource at the museum. We continue to consult with local communities and stakeholders and have contracted Far Post Design, a museum interpretation and design company, to prepare a Concept Interpretation Plan in support of the project.

Museum Visitors and Exhibitions

During 2017, the museum hosted a total of 8 different exhibitions in our main Exhibition Room – art exhibitions in various different medias from local artists and painting groups including *Wells Art group, Mendip Art group, Anna Dmochowski, Mendip Calligraphy, the Old Bakery Artists and the Avalon Embroiderers' Guild plus a space art exhibition from the Wells and Mendip Astronomers and a superb exhibition on Firefighting in the Mendips run by a group of museum friends and volunteers.*

In our Meeting Room we hosted 10 smaller exhibition which included art by *Barbara Duncan, Tracy Marshall, David Cuthbert, Judith Skinner, Michael Brobson, Ros Cuthbert, Sarah de Say White and Wendy & Becky Lovegrove, plus a jewellery exhibition by Linda Odhiambo-Hooper and a fascinating display on Crime & Punishment organised by the City Archivist, Dr Julia Wood and several volunteers.*

We ran the Mendip Caving Photography exhibition and competition for the fourth consecutive year, and for three days in October, our Lecture Hall became a "Lodge" where the Freemasons talked about what it means to be a Mason and gave an insight into the history of Freemasonry in the City of Wells.

Income from museum admissions increased slightly from £8259 representing around 2753 visitors in 2016 to £8,569 representing approximately 2856 visitors. The museum "Friend" membership remained rose this year for individuals from 36 in 2016 to 58, as did our family membership which rose from 40 in 2016 to 50 in 2017.

Events

There was no Mendip Hill Heritage Day this year, but we did offer free tours of the museum, the backroom stores and the City Archives as part of the Heritage Open Days 7-9 September

The County Finds Liaison Officer visited the museum three times during the year to advise members of the public on their various archaeological or historical finds.

Publications

Six issues of the Museum Newsletter were published and circulated to museum "Friends" and local press.

Collections

The 2017 accessions comprise 17 accessions of new items or groups of new items including the caving diaries of J.H. Savory, a mining kibble (ore bucket) from Winterhead Mine near Shipham, a National Union of Railwaymen (Wells Branch) certificate presented to Charles Greenwood, and two items

originally loaned for the first firefighting exhibition, a leather fire bucket inscribed 'Wells 1779' and Bert Wheeler's brass fire helmet.

Considerable progress has been made by volunteers checking the box contents and recording new locations.

The museum was involved in two significant and successful collaborative projects. Working with the Bishop's Palace and Wells City Archives the joint exhibition "Snapshots in Time: Mapping Wells" at the Bishop's Palace from May to September was very well received.

During September and October the museum was host to the artist and film maker Sean Harris who created the installation "Playing with Time" as part of the MUSE: Makers in Museums project that placed artists and crafts people in eight museums in Somerset and Devon. Sean's stop motion animation project was inspired and informed by the museum's cave palaeontology collections and was part of Somerset Arts Weeks.

City Council Archives

2017 was another very busy and successful year for the City Archives. Once again the focus was on making the Archives more accessible, promoting them, and ensuring that conservation work continued. The Archivist is extremely grateful to the 20 Archives volunteers. Without their vast contribution, our achievements would not have been possible.

It was a year of exhibitions. Material from the Archives was included in the "Know Your Place – West of England" touring exhibition, which ran for a month at the Bishop's Palace. A "Crime and Punishment in Victorian Wells" exhibition ran at the museum from 6th to 26th April. It was based on the Wells Petty Sessions holdings in the Archives; the data was brought to light by volunteers at the monthly Archives Box-Listing Sessions. A collaborative group drawn from the Archives and the museum created, together with Paul Pickford, a "Firefighting in the Mendips" exhibition. It ran at the museum for five weeks and was extremely well received. An exhibition entitled "Cage, Cowhouse and Clink: Prisons of Wells from Medieval Times to the Present Day" was prepared for Heritage Open Day. Displayed at the Town Hall for one day, along with other Archives displays, it attracted a rewarding total of 595 visitors. Finally, there was a collaboration between the Archives, the museum and The Bishop's Palace, which produced a joint exhibition, entitled "Snapshots in Time: Mapping Wells". This ran for five months at the Palace, included three of the most significant charters from the City Archives, and received an incredible 45,930 visitors. Other outreach work included talks by the Archivist to the Street Society, Glastonbury U3A and Pilton Local History Society.

Many readers have been welcomed and many enquiries have been responded to. The Archivist has hosted a meeting of the Mid Somerset Archivists and Curators Group at the museum, and, with the museum's Learning Officer, a GEM training session. As regards development work, the Archives' digitisation projects have continued apace. The launch of the online Archives databases (containing data from Archives documents) was delayed, but it is hoped that they will go live soon. They will be freely accessible to a national and international audience. The Archivist is playing a significant part in the development of the new "Search and Learn: the Story of Wells" project at the museum.

Research

Researchers have continued to use the museum's collections, archives and library.

A team of Oxford University archaeologists researching Bronze Age burial practices studied the Charterhouse Warren Farm Shaft material, and Mendip Bronze Age Barrow material was studied by PhD researchers from the Universities of Worcester and Exeter.

Caving literature and collections were studied by an Open University student researching the early history of Mendip Caving Clubs, and researchers from University of Bristol have studied Bone Hole and Scragg's Hole collections.

Library

46 new titles were added (31 in 2016). Many were on Speleology, thanks again to the generosity of Tony Oldham, who continues to help us fill gaps in our runs of unbound periodicals held in the Attic.

Recorded research sessions: 135 (133 in 2016).

There were three exhibitions in 2017. The year began with "Toll-houses and Turnpikes" which prompted an article by Clare Blackmore in the *Wells Journal*. In October, "Rocking Religion" focused on the Victorian Evolution debate and was timed to coincide with Sean Harris's museum display "Playing with Time" which 'reanimated' various prehistoric animals. The current exhibition (started in November 2017) is "Somerset Women at War 1914-1918". The exhibits were largely collated by Sarah Villiers, while other material came from Steve Wilkinson and Clare Blackmore.

Visitor Information Service and Shop

The Museum Shop managed by Sue Marley continues to do well and sales have been consistent, and the museum continues to deliver the Visitor Information Service for the City of Wells.

Finance

The museum continues to maintain a good working relationship with Wells City Council. Grants and donations received this year included the Wells Lodge of the Freemasons, Rothschild in the Community, the Wells Natural History and Archaeology Society, and the Waitrose "Community Matters" scheme.

The hire of the Lecture Hall and Meeting Room by outside groups continues to contribute significantly to our income, with the number of regular hiring groups increasing in 2017.

Partners, sponsors and volunteers

In the 4th year of the "Wells Remembers" project, the team created a moving display on Passchendaele and story boards for local servicemen. Special thanks go to Jeff Allen, Geoff Dickson, Sue Curragh, Richard Witcombe and Dr Julia Wood.

Thanks also go to Mrs White, the mother of one of our Front of House volunteers, for the new reception laptop, Steve Tofts for all his photographic work for the museum, and Allen Cotton for his invaluable phone and IT work and for managing our Phillips collection.

Volunteers

The museum remains totally dependent on our large bank of volunteers, co-ordinated by Janet Rodger. We now have around 60, who have a wide range of skills that are too numerous to name individually. The Board wishes to record its sincere thanks to them all.

David Walker
Honorary Curator