

Annual Town (Parish) Meeting – Wednesday 10th March 2021

Report from the Chair of County Hall Museum Management Committee

Compared with other areas of the town council's services, the County Hall Museum, being based in a building, has been badly hit by the COVID-19 emergency. During the hiatus between lockdowns, we opened for half hour slots on the hour, limiting attendance to 10, with the intervening half hour being used for cleaning. We instigated a booking system called Eventbrite and, after a dry run with volunteers, successfully implemented the procedure. We purchased a React-Air Virus Neutraliser, a portable air and surface steriliser, to supplement the usual arrangement, such as social distancing etc. We intend to continue to use Eventbrite and the air and surface steriliser even when things return to 'normal'.

Despite the museum building being closed to the public for most of the year, the museum's collections and events have remained accessible to the public. The Museum's 'permanent exhibition' is on view via the virtual tour accessed through the website. Virtual visitors can 'walk' around the whole museum and experience the collection on show, find it here <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/museum/virtual-tour> .

We have created a Museum YouTube Channel which includes videos about the collection, talks and children's craft workshops. "A View of Abingdon" is proving popular – that was from Heritage Day live streamed event ...find it here <https://youtu.be/a0qcHndVOnQ>. To date there are 15 videos available, which can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLqyOenBcgJ56cD6wFgcTGQ>

We have held Teams live events, streamed talks and events through Facebook live and have plans to accelerate production of such events. We have a Facebook presence here: <https://www.facebook.com/abingdonmuseum>

We have increased posting social media articles about different objects in the collection throughout lockdown. Our Twitter account is growing in followers all the time, please follow us at <https://twitter.com/AbingdonMuseum>

Abingdon Museum social media posts continue to develop our local and national profile by linking with other museums and institutions through established channels, developing our follower base and public visibility. Our experience indicates that 'live' social media events are the best way to increase activity and promote the Museum. It is our intention to produce more live events and activities than in previous years during the 2021 - 2022 period.

We have started a [Museum blog](#) designed to articulate aspects of the collection and Abingdon's rich history, the first being in May 2020 during the first lockdown. This is very popular and reaches North America and Australia among other places.

Regarding education, the 'Museum Crafting Crew', having offered a wealth of activities for children in 2020, finalised their offering for the year at Christmas. Replacing the cancelled Christmas craft activity, due to tier two restrictions, they handed out craft bags containing basic materials (that would have been used for the hands-on session) to children in the Market Place. With worksheets and instructions available on the

website, children were still able to enjoy 'remotely' the craft activity that the Museum annually provides.

In July 2020 we held our annual Bob Frampton competition for school children. The theme was "Single use plastics, are substitutes available? What are they?" and we received a number of entries of artwork or poetry and awarded three prizes across the age groups.

In November 2020 the Committee decided to permanently close the Mousehole Café and the café manager has been redeployed within the Council's administration team. The café had a loyal following of supporters and provided a welcome presence within the County Hall basement. The decision took into account the number of eating establishments nearby, and other potential uses for Council funds.

In December 2020 two staff members staff devised a novel Christmas video based around Christmas cooking. 'The Abingdon Museum Christmas Bake-along' was filmed and produced at the Museum, then broadcast on 19 December 2020 following publicity to promote it. The video, aimed at families featuring easy and fun recipes, received 80 views.

In February 2021 we begun a new initiative to provide virtual classroom workshops. These have been well received by local primary and secondary schools and fill the gap from not being able to accept school visits while the museum remains closed to visitors.

We continue to research other digital methods of showing our wares and services and have budgeted for any necessary purchases, software or otherwise. New projects include research towards a digital event for 'International Women's Day' on the 8 March 2021, based upon notable Abingdon women, and the 'Abingdon People in Lockdown' oral history project. Advertising to collect stories, images and recordings of local people's lockdown experiences has recently been published on the website, it is our intention to present this collection in some form later in the year, most likely as a digital exhibition.

Strategic developments are recorded in and monitored using the Forward Plan:

1. Basement. An options appraisal to determine future best use of these rooms .
2. Lift to the Sessions Hall/Attic. This will commence with a feasibility study. Note that even if that is successful, this is a medium/long term aspiration and will require grant funding, bearing in mind that the developments ten years ago required the same and were coupled 'earmarking'/saving over the few preceding years and fund-raising by the Friends.
3. Accreditation. Further to above, our existing accreditation expires in 2024, so is included here.

Thanks to all the staff, volunteers and members of the Museum Friends for their hard work and support during this difficult year.

Cllr Pat Lonergan

Chair of County Hall Museum Management Committee 2020-21