

Dear All,

It seems a long time now since the first lockdown started and the Trustees made the decision not to open the Museum for the 2020 season. As the second lockdown ends and the Tiers system is reintroduced, we are all wondering if there will be any more changes to regulations before Christmas, and indeed into next year.

As you may know, we had been planning to open on the Christmas market evenings to go alongside the late night shopping in Totnes, but unfortunately that idea has come to naught as well. So, it is sad to say, but we will not open before next March. I would like to thank those volunteers who have offered to come in and help clean and maintain the museum, work on the collection, and help with the exhibitions. Hopefully this work can get going in the new year.

Since the first lockdown started on 23rd March, we have spent a lot of time trying to work out if we could re-open whilst complying with the Government Covid regulations. Initially it seemed impossible to implement the social distancing requirements in our Elizabethan House with its winding staircase and narrow corridors. However, we have, after a lot of head-scratching and meetings, come up with a 3-Phase Plan to open the Museum within the Covid regulations. Work on implementing the necessary safeguards was due to start in November, only to be foiled by lockdown number 2. So work will now start in this area after Christmas, when we hope we will be able to let everyone know what is happening.

We been Zooming with other Independent Museums in the South Hams and other parts of Devon. You will not be surprised to hear that they are all facing the same problems as we are. Many are trying to open part of the museums through different methods and being creative, as we are with the Archive Centre.

There have been occasional articles in the press, including an update in the Totnes Times. You may also have seen the article in the Totnes Directory about the Archive Centre and the work Sue and Jill do. We are hoping to put some more articles in the Totnes Directory over the next few months.

While the Museum has been closed this year a lot of work has been undertaken, as you will see below.

Re the Building:

The lease difficulties we have been having with the Town Council, have now finally been sorted out. After both sides taking legal advice, it is now agreed that the Town Council's responsibility is the floors, walls and roof of the building; the rest is down to us. This means we have to factor in the running costs for operating the museum and maintaining the internal aspects of the building into our annual budget.

The fire alarm and intruder alarm have both been completely updated and apart from teething problems all seems to be going well. There were some problems with the Wi-fi connection, and as a result an additional router has had to be put in. We have also had an issue of some dampness caused by some

missing roof tiles, but SHDC were repairing them as a matter of urgency. However the condensation got into the alarm system and set it off.

We have acquired new glass cabinets in a deal with Wings the jewellery shop down the road from the Museum, which has closed. Some of these have been set up in the Gallery and we will use the rest in the shop. We are now discussing what exhibits will go into our new display cabinets in the Gallery. Current thinking is they will house a new archaeology exhibit from artifacts in the collection.

At the moment we are measuring up the shop, workroom etc. to get an idea of how much new shelving would cost and the time scale for putting them in. We also hope to revamp the office and kitchen, with improved storage/shelving and working space.

Another area that has kept us busy is working on disabled ramps and access issues on the ground floor, funded by a small grant we have received.

We are also planning to install new notice boards outside of the Museum so we can post more information and attract more attention from passers-by.

During all these works we have been abiding by the covid regulations with a maximum of six people at any one time in the museum, meetings by Zoom, sanitiser in the Museum and in the Archive Centre, face masks where needed etc.

Your thoughts on any aspects of the works mentioned above, or any other areas of the Museum which you feel need updating would be much appreciated.

Trust:

We have been having regular Zoom meetings and carrying on both the practical and administrative tasks to keep the Museum running. Our main focus has been on working towards becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation [CIO]. This will take over the legal responsibility for the Museum and all the Legal obligations the Trust has. It will also be implementing the Action Points that arose from gaining Accreditation and the outcomes from the Collection Training Day led by Vicki Dawson and attended by the Trustees and Volunteers.

We have gone through the implications of moving from a Trust to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and the Governing Documents required by the Charity Commission. These are essentially based on their Model Documents, which has taken a considerable amount of time and when it is completed, we will be dealing with the Charity Commission to finalise the transfer. The Charity Commission has indicated they are happy with the submission so far and when the process is completed, we are hopeful it will allow us to recruit more Trustees.

We have decided to get to grips with the Collection records and to transfer our present outdated digital data system over to *Modes*. This is a new software system and was recommended to us by Vicki Dawson on our training day. We are in the process of transferring all the data, led by one of our Trustees who is already familiar with *Modes*. This is exercise now nearly completed, with the technical support of the *Modes* Technical officer. Over an initial 8,000 items have been transferred and it has raised several issues regarding the recording, description and entering of the items.

One aspect which has come up during this exercise is the IT required and whether we

have enough IT hardware/capacity as well as the staff/volunteer skills to undertake the detailed collation, transfer and updating the descriptions etc. of the items. We hope at some time in the not-too-distant future to ask our volunteers if they would be interested in receiving training to allow them to support us in the updating of the Collection database.

Collections and Exhibitions

The exhibitions at the moment are in limbo. Part of the issue is that we have been working on a bid to the Esme Fairburn Trust, which if successful will allow us to recruit a professional Curator to work in the Museum. Whether we receive the grant or not, we will shortly be looking at our current and planned exhibits. When all safety precautions are fully in place, we hope to work with the volunteers, to refresh the exhibits and see how we can upgrade them, funds allowing.

We are working to open in March if all is well, and we are able to do so within the regulations existing at the time. We have developed a 3-Phase approach based, on the 3 floors. Phase 1 involves a visitor route around the ground floor only. We consider this to be the most viable option to allow us to open as soon as possible. A one-way route has been devised and we want to install a new exhibit in the Bennett Room giving visitors a 'taster experience' of what the whole Museum offers and which they can enjoy fully once it is safe to open up all of the building. This will mean a lot of work; we had hoped to start before Christmas but will now have to wait until the New Year. This is when we will be putting a callout to ask for Volunteers to come and help us.

Social Media

Have you seen the Museum Mondays on Facebook etc. as well as the work on updating the website? We really want to expand our social media presence, so it would be

great if you could 'like' and 'share' all of the Museum posts on Instagram and Facebook. This is particularly important while the Museum is closed, as it helps to keep us in the public's mind.

AGM 2019-20

We will be holding a delayed AGM on Thursday 10th December. Following the Government and Charity Commission Guidelines it will be via ZOOM. If anyone wants to attend using ZOOM, please email info@totnesmuseum.co.uk and we will send out a link to the AGM.

It will be a simple, straightforward AGM as the presentations etc. we had scheduled for April (when the AGM was originally due to happen) will not take place. The meeting will be a formal business meeting as required; the annual report will be presented which will then be placed on the museum website following the meeting.

If anyone has any questions or queries, then please email at the above address and we will respond to them asap.

Unfortunately, we will not be able to meet up for our usual pre-Christmas mince pies and chat this year but we are ever hopeful that we will be able to get together in the new year, especially if we are all vaccinated! Maybe we will even have an Easter egg hunt around the Museum!

All the best and keep safe,

We wish you all a happy Christmas and a prosperous new year,

Tony

Tony Whitty
Chair of the Totnes Museum Trust.