

Dear All,

I hope that you, your family, and friends are all keeping safe and well as we reach the anniversary of living with a global pandemic.

There are promising signs of life returning to something like normal and if the government's 'Roadmap' goes to plan, we should be able to reopen the Museum shortly after 17th May, fingers crossed! Obviously, our number one priority will be to ensure that we make the building a safe place for people to work in and to visit and re-opening would only happen after everyone was confident that this was the case.

With that hope in mind, we want to start making those essential hands-on preparations to make Totnes Museum safe and ready to receive visitors again. The Trustees have drafted a Covid-secure plan and, looking at the Roadmap, it looks as though we can welcome our volunteers back into the Museum from 12th April to help with cleaning and refreshing our exhibits, again with people's safety at the forefront of all our plans and working practices. Obviously, this date may change, but it would be really useful if you could indicate whether you are able to come in and help with this job. A separate email will go out shortly to volunteers about this.

A lot of work has been going on behind the scenes while we have been in lockdown.

Museum Exhibitions

As social distancing protocols make accessing the upper floors of the Museum difficult, we have been planning a new layout and

exhibition for the ground floor. There will be a one-way route for visitors through the ground floor, taking in the reception area, Bennett Room, still room, kitchen and outdoor areas. The new exhibition will cover aspects of the history of Totnes, focusing on key areas of the town, including the role of the River Dart, the wool industry, and the importance of the railway to the development of the town. The shop area also is being given a make-over. We believe these changes will allow us to open safely while giving our visitors an educational and entertaining introduction to the story of Totnes.

When we can welcome volunteers back into the Museum, we hope you will add your own ideas to the content and style of the exhibition, so that it is as good as we can possibly make it.

Work will obviously still need to be carried out on the exhibits on the upper floors and we look forward to staging the delayed exhibition curated by Sue King and Jill Drysdale on Totnesians in America.

Thanks to a small grant we received, we have also added ramps to improve access to the ground floor. We have also replaced the rope handrail on the staircase with a wooden one, which gives much greater support – and confidence – when climbing the stairs.

Bids

We are currently working on a bid for an AIM Collections Care Audit grant. The purpose of the audit is to help museums identify key collection care issues and priorities. Peter Bethel is leading this bid and we hope to hear within the next few months if we have been successful.

AGM 2019-20

The delayed AGM from April was finally held on 10th December. This was a Zoom meeting and was the shortest AGM we have had.

The key points from the AGM were:

- We agreed to make the transition from a Charitable Trust to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) This became effective from 1st March 2021.
- Tony Whitty stood down as Chair after 4 years in the post. Anne Austin was elected as Chair, Peter Bethel as Vice-Chair and Alan Roffey the Treasurer.

Modes

As mentioned in previous newsletters, we are in the process of inputting our collection documentation onto Modes. The initial transfer of our 8000+ artefacts from Cardbox is now complete; we now need to start the extremely long task of ensuring the documentation is correct. This is most definitely an area where the expertise of the volunteers will prove invaluable.

New Appointment

Many of you will have seen that we are currently advertising to recruit a Museum Manager. The new manager is a key step towards us developing the Museum as a destination venue of choice for visitors and an educational facility to tell the story of Totnes. We hope to have more news on this shortly.

Trustees

One aspect of the transition to a CIO is that we have increased the number of trustees who can sit on the board from 9 to 12. After advertising, we are pleased to announce that we have appointed two new trustees. These are Nick Booth, who is Head of Collections at SS Great Britain Trust, and Harriet Fox, who is studying for a Master's degree in Heritage Management. We are confident that both will bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the Board.

As mentioned above, I was appointed Chair of Totnes Museum at the AGM in December as Tony stood down after four years in this post. I am very pleased to say that Tony will be staying on the Board to continue to support the Museum. I am sure you will all join me in thanking him for his dedication and work over the last few years, particularly his monumental efforts in ensuring we achieved accreditation. Tony will be an extremely hard act to follow and I am not sure I can match his energy levels. I look forward to working with everyone involved in the Museum and particularly look forward to when we can all meet up again and open the Museum doors to the public.

Best wishes to everyone; keep safe and well.

Anne

Anne Austin
Chair of the Totnes Museum Trust.