



Museum Service Annual Report 2020/2021

The 2020/2021 year started with the museum being closed due to the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic. The museum team quickly adjusted to home working and online engagement – this being far different from welcoming nearly 60,000 visitors a year to the physical Museum in the Park. It was sad to suspend the volunteer team, and whilst the numbers did not recover through the year, they were slowly welcomed back in line with government guidance, particularly in the walled garden.

Collectively, the team experienced many ups and downs and constant adjustments to new guidance. We reopened from July but then closed again in November, only to re-open for a couple of weeks before having to close for the rest of the financial year.

This constant adjustment and working differently – all under the dark skies of a global pandemic - created many challenges but also opportunities. The museum team can be rightly proud of their response and delivering on the museum's manifesto.

A substantial online campaign was launched to maintain engagement with audiences. Some of the headlines include:

- Meet The Curator remotely – Five featured objects on a theme, posted each week on social media channels, this was later accompanied by a Wilf Merrett postcard campaign. By the end of March 2021 we had a reach of 503,000 and 31,000 engagements through these campaigns.
- We featured in the national BBC's 'Museum from Home'.
- We launched a campaign to preserve the community messages of hope, such as rainbows (pictured).
- Whilst travel abroad was forbidden we shared an 1872 travel journal, in blog form, written by local grocer Sidney Thornton, including commissioning illustrations from local artist Bill Jones.
- The 'Lost in Time' exhibition, of photographs by Theo Deproost, alongside objects was only open a few days before we closed. We created an accompanying exhibition video and related social media campaign featuring the Museum's objects and Theo's work in the exhibition.
- We presented a series of craft activities that can be undertaken at home, with a regular stream of new activities and the creation and circulation of a summer holiday activity pack.
- Delivered two online talk series – another first for the museum.
- Launched a new monthly blog series, as part of the Council's 2030 Strategy, featuring objects that relate to environmental/social sustainability.
- Regular sharing of content to our e-mail followers and development of a monthly update in 'newsletter' style.
- A regular walled garden blog prepared by the garden volunteers who worked tirelessly to maintain the garden in-between lockdowns.



As restrictions allowed areas of the museum were re-opened, starting with the walled garden, but at all times this was at reduced capacity due to restrictions and visitors were advised to book. As a consequence, visitor numbers and earned income were very low. The mansion remained closed until the introduction of tours in October. The public events programme focussed on outdoor areas in line with restrictions working with partners such as the Stroud Theatre Festival.



A successful a recovery grant award by South West Museum Development (SWMD) with thanks to funding from Art Fund and Arts Council England allowed us to re-design the schools offer. This grant of £2,648 enabled us to deliver remote learning to local schools through a combination of live streaming, including the sharing of in-house recorded video and digital resources for teachers. We initially committed to working with half a dozen primary schools, but ended up engaging with 13 classes in 10 different schools (around 360 pupils). The legacy of the project is set to continue.

A SWMD 'Small Grant Big Improvement' award of £904 was used to appoint consultants, Heritage Insider, to conduct 'a Fresh Eye visit'. They looked at the way we provide collections information to our visitors, the visitor experience more generally, the displays and some of the problems we've experienced with damage to the collections. This created an outline plan of action which we are now using to shape our direction in regards to an eventual redisplay of the mansion.

In March 2021 we secured all the funding required to implement the new free-to-join Museum in the Park supporter scheme, providing audiences with new and exciting opportunities to engage with the museum. To support the successful implementation of the scheme next financial year a new customer relationship management system will be procured, audience segmentation introduced and cultural marketing expertise will be sought to develop communication. This project will transform engagement with existing audiences, extend community reach to new audiences, and ensure long-term sustainability of the museum particularly as we recover from the impact of Covid-19. This is part of the museum's forward plan and the Council's Community Resilience and Well-Being Workstream and Fit for the Future programme. We are grateful to all funders for their support, particularly to our former Museum Friends organisation which formally dissolved as a charity in August 2020.

2021/22 will see us continue to recover from the pandemic and as restrictions ease hopefully open all areas of the museum fully. We have a strong pedigree in community engagement, knowing it is vital to maintain community links, share ideas and offer support where appropriate, key areas we will continue to work on and make more visible, include:

- Health & well-being (of staff, volunteers and the community)
- Social inequality, including racism and decolonisation
- Addressing the climate emergency
- Community recovery from Covid-19

The delivery of the Supporter Scheme will be a step change in museum engagement with audiences, providing a vital tool for a number of strategic aims. As ever, the museum will try and balance a wide range of community needs with limited resources knowing this will not be easy and that sustainability of our work must be a key consideration.

Kevin Ward
Museum Development Manager
Governing Body Approval: 26th
July 2021

Providing a museum service that encourages everyone who works, lives or visits the Stroud District to be proud of its past, present and future.

