

## **Newtown Textile Museum**

### **Highlights of 2021**

1. The most significant thing for the Museum happened at the very end of the year. Following the complaint to the ombudsman, Powys County Council accepted that the transfer of the building and contents to the MCRA in 2016 had been done on the wrong basis, and also that any artefacts given to the Museum during PCC's stewardship of it, belonged to the Museum. Deeds to rectify these issues were signed and sealed in August and November. These deeds then created the circumstances in which the MCRA could transfer the building and contents on to the NTM Trust itself. The relevant documents to enable the NTM Trust to become the owner of the Museum building and its contents were signed in December and the transfer made on 31 December 2021. This is unlikely to change the day-to-day management of the Museum but provides a much more secure basis for the future.

2. Changes and improvements were made to various parts of the Museum in the winter of 2021 including refurnishing the room next to reception from which Stephanie had taken various items she had loaned to the Museum. The displays on the top floor were also significantly improved. An additional display was created on the first floor of artefacts related to working life in the flannel factories. Displays on the Loom Floor were re-arranged to provide a more coherent story on the process of converting wool to flannel. The Pryce-Jones displays were re-vamped to incorporate some of the new acquisitions we have received. One glass cabinet was used to display an 1860s day-dress which had previously been in storage, and fashion accessories were moved from the Draper's Shop and brought out of storage to create a display of Victorian fashion accessories in another case.

3. The Museum met all the required COVID standards and was open to visitors 4 days a week from Tuesday 24 May (a little later than usual) until September 30. Sadly, we were not able to offer tours until the end of the season, nor could we have any demonstrations as neither fitted with Covid rules. Overall visitor numbers were therefore down compared to the pre-Covid years but there were 785 visitors in total. The feedback was consistently good and a total of £1,825 was donated.

4. Income was boosted through sales in the 'shop'. Despite limited space, a committee member, Christine Davies significantly widened and improved the range of items on sale. Many of them were made by local craftspeople and offered on a sale or return basis and some were donated to us for sale. We are particularly grateful to the Abermule quilters for their contributions.

5. The 2021 Exhibition was based on the "Sheep to Sugar" project which is exploring the way in which the woollen fabric called "Welsh Plains", produced in mid Wales between 1650 and 1850, came to be used to clothe slaves in the West Indies and the US. This material was supplemented with in-house displays about the slave trade, some of the connections of local people who were involved and the Welsh contribution to the abolition of the slave trade. It told a fascinating, and previously little-known, story.

6. Two students approached us during the year. In March Tilly Jordan, a university drama student, was researching an historical drama project and was keen to link it to the Museum. We were able to facilitate her work for which she was highly commended. We were then approached, in the early summer, by Emily Connell, a second-year student in costume design and making at Nottingham Trent University. She was seeking to gain experience of working in a museum. Following a discussion about a possible programme she had a six-week placement, for 3 days a week, at the Museum. She did a variety of work including a detailed description of two Victorian dresses in the

Collection; starting to catalogue our handling collection; and helping with the displays as well as talking to visitors. We benefitted considerably from her help and she felt that she had learnt a lot.

7. The Museum was featured in two television programmes over the year, the first was the Great British Sewing Bee shown in April which focused on flannel and where there was a short slot in the middle for John to talk mainly about Pryce Jones. The second was the Celebrity Antiques Road Trip where again the focus was on Pryce Jones and mail order, but also featured the replica of Queen Victoria's red flannel knickers. Both programmes have helped to raise the profile of the Museum.

8. The Museum participated in Welsh Museum's Festival week in 2021, as it has in earlier years. On this occasion the focus was *Weaving a Thread* with the Museum being open on October 29 and 30, with demonstrations on both days. Our opening was linked to a special weaving weekend at Oriel Davies as part of their exhibition *Blanket Coverage*. Their exhibition ran for a few months and was a celebration of modern weaving.

9. The Newtown Textile Museum Trust held four meetings during the year. A new Trustee was appointed at the end of the year at which point the Trustees were: Janet Lewis, Chair, Norman Davies, Treasurer, Carrie Canham, Katherine Keatley, Chris Tomley and John Evans, co-opted in his capacity as curator. The Management Committee continues to run the Museum on a day-to-day basis. There is usually a certain degree of turn-over of Committee members due to changing circumstances. Maya Jordan and Penny Foreman left the Committee during the year because of pressure of other activities and Victoria Haire joined at the end of the year. The contributions of all Committee members to the huge range of Museum activities are invaluable.

10. The other people whose contribution to the Museum is invaluable are those who volunteer to be hosts when the Museum is open. During the period when Covid restrictions were still in place a number of people who had been hosts in the past did not feel safe to mix with other people. This reduced the numbers inevitably but with many people going the extra mile, and some new recruits, we managed to open every day we had planned, apart from one.

11. All Museums that have no professional staff are expected to have a mentor, with the particular responsibility of helping the Museum to be accredited. The Trustees appointed a new mentor to the Museum in 2021, Alex Turrell, who is a Senior Collections and House Officer at Powis Castle. We are looking forward to working with him.

12. With the demise of the Laura Ashley company, an old loom that had been in the foyer of one of the factories was offered to the Museum, which was accepted. It was made in Ghent in the nineteenth century and has been installed on the loom floor. Although having no connection with Newtown, other than the Laura Ashley link, it presents an interesting comparison with the Welsh looms which are much lighter in construction.

13. On the publicity side, the Museum agreed a contract with Pear Communications, for the Museum's leaflet to be circulated, to venues within a 50-mile radius – and a little further in Shropshire from where we have had a good number of visitors in the past.

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