

Progress report April 1 2017 – March 31 2018

Background and Introduction

Major changes to the displays in a number of the rooms had been made in the winter of 2017. The room next to reception had been furnished to give a feel for what it must have been like living in the cottages and the room next to it gave information on Newtown's development in the early 19th Century. The information panels in the rooms of the first floor had been re-presented, artefacts moved around on the loom floor and a new interpretative panel added. The Museum that opened its doors on May 1st 2017 was therefore significantly different from the one that was inherited in 2016.

Governance arrangements

What didn't change during the year was the way the Museum was managed. Running the Museum continues to be the responsibility of a Committee of the Montgomeryshire Community Regeneration Association, the charity that owns the building. The Committee's responsibilities include raising all the necessary funds and managing the Museum on a day to day basis. However, the Museum's finances are managed through the MCRA (but with a separate bank account) and the MCRA's accounts incorporate the Museum finances.

The Museum is run entirely by volunteers, with some invaluable support from the MCRA's staff member. The number of Committee members varied through the year with some members leaving and others joining. The specific roles of Chair, Secretary, Curator, Finance officer, Conservation officer, Communications officer, and Administration officer have not changed. In addition to the Committee members, around 35 people volunteer to help the Museum as hosts and in a number of other ways.

Achievements in the year

The five main strands to the Committee's work during this period covered

- attracting visitors and providing them with an interesting and enjoyable experience;
- improving the displays
- maintaining the building in good repair and meeting all statutory requirements.
- conserving, caring for and managing the collection of artefacts.
- raising the necessary funds.

Attracting visitors and providing them with an interesting and enjoyable experience

Attracting visitors

The Museum opened for the summer on May 2nd 2017 and closed at the end of September. The opening hours were slightly changed from the previous year so that it was open for 4 days a week: 12 – 4pm on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays and 10.30 – 4 on Saturdays and Bank Holidays.

The number of visitors built up over the summer with around 20 visitors a week initially increasing to 60 or 70 a week in July and August. For the summer as a whole 822 people including 96 children came to the Museum in opening hours, many of whom stayed for an hour or more. They came from far and wide - many from the locality but also people from the rest of the UK, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada and South America. Some of the people from these latter countries were interested in their family history and were trying to trace ancestors involved in the weaving trade two hundred years ago. Out of hours tours were offered and well received. 10 tours visited adding a further 93 visitors to the total.

Although the Museum formally closed at the end of September, a grant from the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries in Wales enabled an event to be held on November 4 during Welsh Museums Festival week. As the Museum originally opened in 1967, it was decided the event should be to celebrate its 50th birthday on this date. There were demonstrations of weaving and spinning; activities for children; a stall selling relevant objects; and a cake. This proved immensely popular and 140 people signed the visitors book. The Museum was almost bursting at the seams and a lot of Newtown people came and shared their memories.

With a few people visiting during the winter months by arrangement, the visitor numbers for the year as a whole was therefore around 1,100.

Providing an interesting and enjoyable experience

The Museum's `unique selling point' is its building and the fact that it is the last remaining one in a near original state of the 82 or so `factories' that existed in Newtown by the 1840s. It provides a structure for what is shown in the Museum. The three key themes continue to be: the story of wool - from fleece to flannel; the social and industrial history of Newtown; and the experience of living and working in the building that now houses the Museum.

The way this story is told was enhanced in summer 2017 by the use of videos, voice, text and photos on new screens and tablets purchased with grants from the Powys Community Endowment Fund of the Community Foundation in Wales and Newtown Town Council. The other attractions were a small exhibition of the records from the 1860s and 70s (found in an attic in Newtown a few years ago) of a Newtown draper, Amelia Ray. Demonstrations of different crafts but mainly spinning and weaving were

offered on most Saturdays during the summer and there was also a day specifically offering activities for children.

The feedback received was overwhelmingly positive. The comments received "*Very Interesting visit.*

Wonderful little museum. Very friendly volunteers and welcome.

Much improved from my last visit.

Very friendly & informative members of staff.

Fascinating little museum and very knowledgeable attendants. "

To attract visitors to the Museum people need to know about it! It took time to develop an effective publicity strategy which is still evolving. A website: www.newtowntextilemuseum.co.uk was created early on, along with a Facebook page. Visitors were encouraged to join the mailing list to receive a quarterly newsletter and there were 230 people on the list at the end of March 2018. Entries on other relevant websites were kept up to date and the Museum joined the Mid-Wales Tourism Association. A bi-lingual leaflet was produced in the summer and circulated in the locality particularly to tourist sites. There were favourable reviews on Trip Advisor and Google. But the most likely reason for someone to know about the Museum remained 'word of mouth'.

Improving the displays

Through the summer small changes continued to be made to the displays themselves and work was done to improve the lighting, particularly on the top floor. Almost all the existing bulbs throughout the building were also replaced by LEDs partly to help reduce our electricity bills.

In October 2017 the focus shifted from visitors to planning and putting in place the improvements and changes to be made to the Museum during the autumn and winter. Over this period displays were revised and rearranged on the lower two floors covering the growth of Newtown and information about one of the families that lived in Commercial Street in the 1830s and 40s. The model of the building, having been conserved, was moved down from the first floor to the ground floor to help to improve the experience for visitors who are not able to go up the stairs. This was coupled with a new touchscreen which is accessible to wheelchair users. Other digital displays were also changed and improved and new material put on a tablet.

But the major changes were on the top floor. With funds from the Ashley Family Foundation, through the Community Foundation in Wales, the displays were completely changed. Two shops were created – a drapers and a clog-makers - using windows and doorways from demolished Newtown shops, which had been in store in recent years. This enabled our artefacts to be shown in a more authentic setting. New display cases were purchased for other artefacts and improvements made to the displays of leather

and tanning, and blanket and quilts of various types and ages. A small exhibition was also created of Welsh costumes with interpretative panels on loan from Michael Freeman.

Maintaining the building in good repair and meeting statutory and museum standards

With funds from the Community Foundation in Wales Powys Church Act, work was carried out in early 2018 to improve the ventilation of the building; and the windows on the ground and first floor were painted along with the doors and the walls at the rear of the building. A measured survey of the building was also carried out by Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust to provide a benchmark against which to test any movement. In addition to the Museum having a record, a digital copy has been deposited with the Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust and a paper/drawn/digital copy with the National Monuments Record.

The standard checks for emergency procedures and security were carried out at the beginning of the year. Some work was carried out on the building to improve exit arrangements on the loom floor and to ensure all the emergency lighting was working properly.

In relation to meeting Museum standards, an application to MALD (the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division) in November 2017 for the renewal of the Museum's 'Working towards Accreditation' status was successful.

Conserving, caring for and managing the collection of artefacts

There were two main priorities in 2017-18 in relation to the care and management of the collection. One was to identify what items needed to be conserved and how best to care for the objects entrusted to the Museum. The other was to ensure that the records and documents about the artefacts were being brought up to date. In relation to both these areas, funds were obtained from the Association of Independent Museums and the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales to carry out an Audit.

A conservator, Cath Haslem, carried out a Collection Care Audit in June 2017 and its recommendations formed the basis of a further application to enable these to be implemented. The outcome was a tidy storeroom with appropriate boxes and shelves etc, more blinds to protect items from the light, the conservation of one or two objects and clearer ideas of how to maintain good care standards. Almost all of the changes were in place before the May 2018 opening.

Work started in 2017 on bringing the information about artefacts on Modes up to date, and continued through the year. The aim is to update identification of the location of all the objects and to have a complete photographic record but this is a time consuming process and was not completed in 2017-18. A Documentation/Collection Management

Audit was carried out by Alex Dawson in early 2018 and the recommendations of her report are being implemented.

Raising the necessary funds

The Museum has three main sources of funds: income generated in the Museum itself with donations from visitors and sales; donations from individual supporters and Friends; and grants and donations from Trusts and organisations. The end of September saw the closure of the Museum for the winter. By that time, the donations received in the Museum totalled £1,472; income from tours £265 and income from sales in the Museum £100, making a total of £1,837. The Anniversary event in November was a financial success as well as an enjoyable occasion with £322 raised through donations and sales. The total amount “earned” from the Museum in 2017/18 was therefore over £2,000.

Generous donations from individuals some of whom have joined the Museum’s Friends scheme are a further source of income. £2,714 was raised in this way over the financial year as a whole.

Appendix 1 lists all the grants received during the whole of 2017/18. It includes donations that have been received from a number of local businesses and organisations whose contributions went towards the various infrastructure projects and improvements to the displays. The total of £35,060 was raised, not all of which was spent in the financial year as some projects have taken time to be completed. Some of the money was received in advance and some when the work was completed, so not all these funds appear in the 2017-18 accounts. The grants fell into three groups:

- support for revenue funding from the Gwendoline and Margaret Davies Trust;
- funding to improve the displays in the Museum and the care, management, and documentation of the collection, from the Association of Independent Museums (AIM) with the support of the Pilgrim Trust; the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales; and the Community Foundation in Wales – Ashley Family Foundation;
- funding for further work on the building.

The support in relation to the building was agreed at the end of 2017 and beginning of 2018 but the work will not be carried out until the autumn of 2018. Some repairs are still needed on the main building and the cobbles need in the back yard need attention. But the main piece of work will be to replace the deteriorating wooden steps at the back, with ones of stone and brick which will be nearer in design to the stairs that were the original entrance to the loom floors. This is an exciting prospect. The grants were received from an anonymous trust and Powys County Council’s Community Regeneration and Development Fund.

Final comment

None of achievements outlined in this report would be possible without the huge dedication of the Museum's Committee members, the support of the many individuals who act as hosts in the Museum and the help of others who volunteer in a range of capacities. The Museum's curator, Stephanie Kemp, worked many long – and sometimes cold – hours in the Museum over the winter, often with invaluable help from others in the team, transforming the top floor into the attractive space it has become. Other Committee members have also contributed many hours and important contributions to the activities of the Museum. They have acted as hosts, as have many of our other volunteers, who are the people who bring the Museum and its contents to life. The Museum is lucky to have them.

Janet Lewis, Chair, MCRA Newtown Textile Museum Committee. August 2018

NEWTOWN TEXTILE MUSEUM

List of grants and major donations received in financial year 2017-18

May 2017 **Community Foundation in Wales - Powys Community Endowment Fund** £1,000 for equipment/technology.

May 2017 **Newtown Town Council** £452 for technology equipment.

May 2017 **Association of Independent Museums (AIM) with ICON and support from the Pilgrim Trust** £1,184 for a Collections Care Audit

May/June 2017 **Gwendoline and Margaret Davies Trust** £2,000 towards general revenue costs.

May 2017 **Newtown Rotary Club** £250. Improvements to the lighting.

August 2017 **Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales.** £250 for Welsh Museums Festival week.

September 2017 **Alun Griffiths** £250 towards the lighting.

October 2017 **AIM Preventive Conservation Grant supported by the Pilgrim Trust** £3,724 to implement the recommendations of the Collections Care audit.

November 2017 **Community Foundation in Wales – Ashley Family Foundation** £8,950 to reinterpret and rearrange the displays in the Museum, particularly the top floor.

November 2017 **Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales** £1,680 to carry out a Documentation Audit.

December 2017 **An anonymous Trust** £7,000 towards the replacement of the back steps.

February 2018 **Powys County Council Community Regeneration and Development Fund,** £10,000 towards building work.