



## Museum Service Annual Report 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021-31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

2021/22 continued under the dark clouds of Covid-19 although there was hope, that soon, some degree of normality may return. The entire museum site remained closed for all of April with the exception of walled garden sneak peeks and hosting healthy lifestyle activities organised with the Council's Health & Wellbeing team, which continued until the end of the summer. Behind the scenes the museum team undertook deep cleaning (postponed from January) and the walled garden volunteers continued to manage and develop planting. The garden only opened from May to general visitors, followed by the museum in June – although booking was still required to manage numbers and visitor flow. The end of July saw all restrictions lifted and the museum operation return to something visitors may have recognised before Covid-19. It's worth noting that the museum received nothing but support and thanks from visitors during the times we were open with restrictions, and we should not underestimate the building blocks, now and into the future, of the importance of creating a welcoming and trustworthy connection with our audiences.

This year saw the museum embark on the biggest change to its operation since the opening of the walled garden in 2016. A year-long project to create a new free and easy to join museum membership<sup>1</sup>, providing audiences with new and exciting

opportunities to engage with the museum – both what's on and behind the scenes. To support the successful implementation the museum procured a new customer relationship management system, introduced audience segmentation and sought cultural marketing expertise. Through this project the museum is transforming its engagement with existing audiences, extending community reach to new audiences, and

ensure long-term sustainability of the museum particularly as it recovers from the impact of Covid-19. This forms part of the museum's forward plan and the Council's Fit for the Future programme. The initial uptake since launch has been positive and we are grateful to all those who sign-up to join the museum membership [www.museuminthepark.org.uk/membership](http://www.museuminthepark.org.uk/membership)



The museum was one of eight Gloucestershire museums working with SW Museum Development who secured funding to support us to be better prepared to develop audiences and volunteering. This involved building a strong peer network for learning and support, sharing of inspirational good practice examples and opportunities to learn, discuss and experiment during this development journey. By project end the museum had a bespoke plan around audience development and volunteering, which will assist in shaping the museum's plans at this uniquely challenging time.

As part of the museum's care and conservation plan it was successful in applying for a grant from Institute of Conservation's Collections Care Stimulus Fund to pay for a conservator to open an historic display case containing 12 taxidermy birds, treat them for pests, before cleaning and stabilising areas of damage, photographing the specimens and finally replacing the birds in their setting. The specimens themselves are important as one of the better-preserved examples of taxidermy in the collections – they are of great interest to visitors and often used with school groups to illustrate topics including Natural History & Homes of the Past.

<sup>1</sup> Funded by Stroud District Council, Arts Council England, Garfield Weston Foundation, Stroud District (Cowle) Museum Trust (from funds transferred upon the wind-up of the Museum Friends)



The museum successfully applied for a grant from Arts Council England towards the costs of an Ice Age Exhibition & Learning Pack matched by funding from Stroud District Council and the Cowle Trust. The exhibition was loaned by Worcestershire Museum Service and then customised with local context and the display of objects from the collection. This was accompanied by talks and workshops. This successful exhibition ran from end of January to end of March 2022 with the museum receiving just over 7,000 visitors during this period. This also provided a huge boost to visitor numbers.



The remote learning implemented in 2020 continued to provide a valuable and sustainable offer for communities to engage with the museum and the collections. It was used several times when Covid-19 prevented visits but has been used in equal measure to enhance the learning programme offer.

As part of the Council's 2030 strategy the museum launched a year-long 'sustainable stories' blog which explored different objects from the past to reveal useful lessons for a kinder, more sustainable, living in the present and future. This included subjects such as Christmas decorations and wrapping, cleaning, food buying through to personal hygiene. Overall, it demonstrated the relevance of using the museum's collections to highlight modern issues.

The museum re-launched (as it was cut short by Covid-19) its new Community Space. This is an area within the museum where individuals and organisations can tell their stories alongside the museum collection. The first included a collection of hat-pins owned by a local enthusiast. The museum also started a new collections-based series on missing histories. The intention being to highlight gaps in the collection with the aim of trying to raise awareness of important histories not reflected in the collection. The first looked at Menstruation Maternity Menopause. The museum was also consulted during the Council's community led review of street or building names and monuments in the Stroud District.

The museum worked hard to support other local festivals and events, such the Stroud Theatre Festival and Stroud Book Festival. By way of a further example, the museum supported two local artists who were successful in their Arts Council England funding bid to create and pilot a Museum & Stratford Park 'Hidden Treasures' outdoor family audio trail.

2022/23 will see a focus upon:

- Recovering from the impact of Covid-19
- Further integration of Museum Membership into our work
- Rebuilding the foundations of evaluation and audience development including delivery of new walled garden visitor information and missing histories
- Restarting the Collections Management System replacement project
- Storage and collections care actions

**Kevin Ward**

**Museum Development Manager**

**Governing Body Approval: 25<sup>th</sup> July 2022**