

TAVISTOCK MUSEUM

Charity Registration No.1098266

Annual Report



The Medieval Abbey

Spring 2021

TAVISTOCK MUSEUM ANNUAL REPORT – SPRING 2021

The report contains a brief summary and the accounts for the 2020 season, and looks ahead to our 2021 season.

1 Last Season (March – October 2020)

It was always expected the 2020 season would be a difficult one for the museum due to the closure of the archway under the Court Gate for infrastructure works in Guildhall Square. However the total closure of the museum for the whole season on account the pandemic was completely unexpected. A decision was made by the trustees not to re-open the museum in the Spring as this would have put volunteers at risk both from museum visitors and from each other.

The finances of the museum have been impacted by the pandemic. The loss of donated public income and museum shop income was partially offset by a gift aid repayment based on previous years. Fortunately a financial cushion was received when the museum was awarded a business support grant of £25,000 at the start of the pandemic. The Trust is also grateful to West Devon Borough Council for a generous 20% discretionary charitable relief.

Sadly there were two deaths of volunteers. In July the death occurred of Alan Stone a popular volunteer who regularly cycled in from Lamerton. In October the death occurred of Trevor Kerswill who was a trustee and former treasurer of the museum. He had a wide knowledge of antiques and collectables, and set up the museum shop when we first came to Court Gate. On a happier note we were delighted to learn that Sarah Smith who stewarded at the museum while at college and went on to Winchester University has obtained a 2(1) honours degree in history.

Peter Gallie, our treasurer for the last five years, resigned at the end of the year and we are pleased to welcome Peter Hurdwell to the post. In August Keith Shorter who has moved from the town to live 'up-country' to be closer to family tendered his resignation as a trustee. Our thanks to Peter and Keith.

Many of our volunteer activities have been suspended this year but two volunteer have been involved with town exhibitions; Linda Elliott provided Tavistock BID with information for their 'Windows In Time' posters in forty three shop windows showing previous uses of the premises, and Kevin Dickens supplied photographs from the Merrifield and Thorington Collections (Christmas Theme) for the windows of the Tavistock Library.

2 Next Season (March - October 2021)

The 2021 season looks to be an uncertain one as it is likely that the virus will be around well into the summer. The museum is extremely fortunate that it has two large gallery area where it will be relatively easy to implement safe distancing. In order to re-open safely to the public the museum will need to have in place hand sanitising, social distancing measures and probably a one way visitor circulation based on visitors leaving from the archway doorway.

Post pandemic there will need to be changes in the way the museum operates and how it will be financed. It seems likely that our archway sales will remain key to the museum finances and while second hand books and plant sales may continue to flourish the collection and sale of bric-a-brac from

charity shops will no longer be possible. Installation of a card payment system looks inevitable and this leads to the more contentious issue of charging for the museum entry.

The offer by the Town Council of a new lease on the same terms as present gives the Trust a degree of security for the continued use of the present Court Gate premises. This is obviously a good deal for both organisations as the museum is a functional use of an important town building. However it will involve the Trust in a commitment to use its best endeavours to obtain grant funding for the upkeep of the building.

Possibly in July 2021 the refurbished Guildhall will open. Besides bringing an important public building back into use some parts of the building are intended to be a key centre for the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site. In order to avoid duplication of themes some re-appraisal of our own role as an area centre for the mining heritage will need to be re-considered.

On show in the museum for the first time will be the two medieval groats (4d) found at Milton Abbot five years ago. They have kindly been donated by the finder and the landowner to the museum having had a slow journey through Treasure Trove procedures.

APPENDIX 1 – LIST OF TRUSTEES

Mr Paul Ward and Mr Tony Fey were appointed by the Tavistock Town Council in May 2020 as their observers at the Trustees meetings.

Trustees (as of January 2021)

Tom Young (Chairman)
Roderick Martin (Museum Manager)
Peter Hurdwell (Museum Treasurer from the 1st January 2021)
Paul Croucher
Linda Elliott
Sue Davies
Steve Ball
Pat Warne
Barbara Watson

Museum Advisor – No appointment yet

APPENDIX 2 – THE DRY ROT PROBLEM

During the 2019 / 2020 winter months there were again prolonged periods of wet weather which brought to a head the problems of dry rot in the front walls of the cottage extension. Dry rot is a fungus which seeks out any soft timber and can spread very rapidly. It requires moisture to thrive which is readily provided by water penetration of the porous stonework and leakage from inefficient roof drainage. Long before our occupation this was recognised as a problem and there had been a number of unsuccessful attempts by the Town Council to control it in the past. A major concern has always been that it would spread to the timber joists on the first floor and to the roof.

Cracks first appeared in the window frame to the right of the main entrance on the first floor of the building and were reported in the autumn 2017 to the Tavistock Town Council who are the landlord. Inspections were carried out but no action was taken and by the autumn 2019 similar cracks also appeared in the window frame to the left on the first floor of the building. In the spring 2020 significant blistering of the woodwork was visible in both windows. The Town Council were again contacted and an inspection was carried out by a specialist contractor who advised the urgency of further investigative work and removal of all affected woodwork.

The right hand window was removed to reveal that its frame had serious signs of dry rot. A check of the wooden skirting revealed that the spread of the dry rot had been facilitated by felt having been placed behind the skirting on the first floor of the building. It was probably intended to protect the skirting woodwork but unfortunately provided a smooth surface along which the dry rot has travelled. When removed the second window frame on the left of the main doorway was found to be in a far more rotten state than the first one; with only the paint holding much of the remains of woodwork together. The photographs shows that the likely source of water for the dry rot in these windows is the gutter box and downpipe to the right of the museum entrance.





Under the terms of the present lease agreement the Museum Trust are responsible only for the interior of the building including the windows. However it may be reasonably argued that the principal cause of the dry rot is water penetration from outside and therefore the responsibility of the Town Council. In May the Tavistock Town Council offered an extension of the museum lease for a further 20 years which will extend our tenancy of the Court Gate premises until 2041 but required the Museum Trust to finance the replacement of the two front upstairs windows of the cottage. This offer was accepted by the trustees.

Unfortunately a third window located in the audio-visual room and the lintel above the main entrance were also found to be affected. In the end the Trust financed the removal and temporary boarding of the three window frames, the replacement of the skirting woodwork and door lintels, and the workshop fabricate of three new window frames. This prompt action by the Trust has hopefully for the time being prevented the further spread of the dry rot to the adjoining floor joists and the roof timbers, as well as to other parts of Court Gate.

A related problem has been the blockage of two external rainwater downpipes last winter which caused water to run down and splash onto the external walls of the walls of the turret resulting in damp affecting the internal plaster within the toilet. The damp also destroyed some Victorian style of wallpaper in the Subscription Library. Plaster softened on the lower turret walls of the toilet area has been replaced using lime plaster. In early January 2021 a zoom meeting was held between representatives of the Trust, Subscription Library and Town Council and the WDBC conservation officer to discuss the problem of the rainwater down pipes. This proved a positive meeting and it is hoped that an LBC application to replace the downpipes with larger diameter piping and provide more easily maintained drop boxes will be approved.

APPENDIX 3 – FINANCES FOR 2020

RECEIPTS

Archway / Museum Shop	£931.29
Covid Grant	£25,000.00
Gift Aid Refund	£1,797.89
Donations	£517.78

£28,246.96

B/F Cash 2019

£536.73

PAYMENTS

Building repairs	£10,123.44
Electricity	£1,245.17
Insurance	£886.67
Telephone, website	£397.08
Water rates	£103.59
Subscriptions	£50.00
Accounts audit	£70.00
Stationery	£53.33
Fittings	£174.95
Training	£0.00
Advertising	£0.00
Sundries	£17.17

£13,121.40

Net receipts for 2020

£15,125.56

Cash in bank 31/12/2019 A/C's

£12,685.37

Cash in bank 31/12/2020 A/C's

£28,347.66