

Chard & District Museum

I must first report the sad passing of the previous Chairman, David Ricketts, which happened unexpectedly following an illness. David will be greatly missed by the museum volunteers, his friends and family and the wider community in Chard. We held a celebration of his life at the museum, and have a remembrance bench in place in the court for people to visit and pay their respects.

In my report in 2016, I updated you with regards to the new Chairman of the museum, Vince Lean, and his plans for the forthcoming year. In particular, his aims were:

- I. To serve the local community by keeping a record of the social history of the town & its people
- II. To conserve, store & where possible display local artefacts, documents & photographs relating to the town

Both of these aims have been achieved, and in addition, 2017 has been an extraordinary year for the museum, in which celebrating Chard's Heritage has taken centre stage. The museum was featured on two BBC TV programmes – Bargain Hunt and Invented in the West Country. Both of which were focussing on the outstanding collection of James Gillingham artefacts; invented in the West Country also looked at the pioneering work of James Gifford. Both programmes inspired more people to visit the museum, and along with promotions & open days the museum visitor numbers soared to over 2700 (a 23% increase on the 2016 figures).

Financially, the museum has seen an increase in casual donations, which has been driven by open days and private events. Both are free for entry, but people are asked to make donations towards the museum upkeep, and where supplied, refreshments. There has also been an increase in exhibitions, with a focus to moving larger one-off events to the Barn – involvement in Somerset Arts Week was a real bonus. In addition, celebrating all things local such as the Carnival and local dress makers have added a new appeal to the museum.

Chard museum is still entirely dependent on volunteers, and is managed by a committee of trustees. Whilst always looking for ways to support the wider community, 2018 will see the second memorial in the Courtyard, this will be in memory of SGT Swatton who served Chard from 1980 – 1998. A public unveiling for the plaque will be held at the museum on Saturday 17th February.

Whilst looking forward to 2018 it is worth mentioning that this year is the centenary for votes for women, and we have nominated Margaret Bondfield in the hope that she will be picked as one of the 100 pioneers. This would certainly be a very fitting celebration for the work that Margaret undertook, as well as another celebration for Chard.

There continues to be the outstanding issue of the lease hold for the museum, and the Chairman continues to work closely with South Somerset District Council in seeking a resolution. Whilst the lease is not due until 2021, early engagement is needed to ensure that the museum can build on this year's successes and plan realistically for the future.

Cllr Amanda Broom
Chard Combe Ward
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