

## **Heritage and Engagement Committee Meeting**

### **Report from Kate Green, Community Engagement Officer for Newton's Place An overview of work and projects in the museum throughout 2023**

The community engagement officer, Kate Green, continues to connect our local community with the museum and local heritage through a wide variety of activities, some of which happen in the museum and some of which are outreach.

It is notable, now that the museum is in its fourth year of operation, that people are seeing the museum as their 'go to place'. All ages regularly visit the museum and also take part in activities. Feedback that we receive about what we offer is overwhelmingly positive. We strive to offer new and exciting options and are always dreaming up new ways to bring people to Newton's Place.

#### **In the museum**

##### **Schools**

Many local schools work with us on a regular basis, bringing children into the museum and also asking the community engagement officer to visit their classrooms. We work with teachers to create bespoke activities that support their learning. When a school visits the museum, we always break the class into two groups and have half of the class explore the museum with regularly updated trail activities and we provide a bespoke workshop experience for the group upstairs with a swap-over at half time. This works very well and provides good variety of activities. One thing that we have noticed is that on Saturdays lots of parents are given a tour from their children who have visited us in the week.

##### **Schools we have worked with in 2023:**

All Saints Marsh  
Bradley Barton  
Decoy  
Haytor View  
Hazeldown  
Highweek  
Kingsteignton  
Rydon  
St Josephs  
School for Inspiring Talents (ashburton)  
South Devon technical college  
Wolborough  
Plus  
Newton Abbot College  
Coombeshead College

##### **What's in Store project**

One particular activity that we ran with local schools enabled children to see items from the collection that may never go on display in the museum. The children then created various artworks inspired by the objects and formed an exhibition of their work that was on display in the community area and in the Your Space cabinet.

**School Transport Fund, new for 2024.**

With schools that are on the edges of town having to walk children for nearly an hour to reach the museum, we recently asked the council if the museum could have a small fund to help transport children in for visits. An arrangement with Newton Abbot Community Transport will mean that classes can be brought straight to the front door. We are delighted that this fund will start in April.

**Home education groups x 2**

The community engagement officer runs two distinct home education groups.

Young family group. A bi-monthly group of under 12-year-olds along with their adults, with the majority being aged approx. 6 or 7 years old. Numbers for this group are high with an average attendance of 35 for each session.

Heritage Creatives. A monthly group for over 12-year-olds along with their adults. This is a more focused session with the young people exploring the museum collection and responding to it creatively with artwork and stories whilst learning curatorial skills.

**Twilight Sketching**

Every fortnight, creative folks from Newton Abbot have the opportunity to visit for a relaxed, sketching session. Across two hours, whilst the museum is shut to the general public, people choose to draw objects in the collection or features of the building whilst relaxing to piped classical or jazz music. A very relaxing opportunity for all! During the Summer holidays, we encouraged families to attend.

**Brownies/guides/scouts**

We offer evening visits to local brownies, scouts etc. We work with staff to create an interesting experience for the young people that results in them gaining a badge.

**W.I. groups**

We provide 'behind-the-scenes' visits for local W.I. groups, usually in the evening.

**Science of collections exhibition, Summer 2023**

A broad range of activities was organised to compliment the large, summer museum exhibition in the St. Leonard's room. Each week, free drop-in, creative workshops were on offer for local families. We were always full with people waiting to join in as others left. We will be repeating this offer during the next summer exhibition.

**Young Curator group**

During the summer holidays we ran weekly session for young people interested in learning about the work of a curator. Working behind the scenes with the collection, learning about how to take care of objects and undertake conservation tasks was a very popular activity. The sessions culminated in the young people curating an exhibition of their own, chosen objects along with a private launch event.

**Annual Halloween story-telling and drama event**

A new offer for 2023 proved extremely successful. With the help of a storyteller and actor, spooky stories linked to objects in the museum were told to families, after dark.

### **Newton Abbot Natters – Oral history project**

Following oral history training for volunteers, we now offer opportunities for local people to share their stories of the town, which are recorded and then stored in the museum archive.

### **Heritage Fund application for the store extension.**

The community engagement officer has been working on a funding application to the Heritage Fund which will pay for an extension to the museum expanding the current stores and providing space for community projects and for museum volunteers and conservationists to work. Charlotte Dixon who is on maternity leave was able to support the application process and we had many meetings and advice from Heritage Fund officers. The application was submitted on 15<sup>th</sup> November and we find if we are successful or not. On 28<sup>th</sup> March. The request for funding has now risen to over £900,000 for a 4-year project.

### **Outreach work**

Memory cafés enjoy reminiscing when experiencing objects from our handling collection. Lots of good conversations are had. We have visited memory café groups in Newton Abbot and further afield such as Ashburton and Bovey Tracey (we do ask for a donation from groups who are not in Newton Abbot itself.)

Newton Abbot CIC The museum supported the xmas fayre at the Courtenay Centre by running a handling table stall and also a Victorian Christmas card making workshop.

Headway group A group for people with brain damage and head injuries enjoyed experiencing our handling collection.

Homestart group Parents and pre-school age children based in Abbotsbury church have requested a few visits along with items from the handling collection.

Preston and Marlton primary schools – schools a little further afield have requested visits from the community engagement officer and the handling collection.

Moorland Community Care The over 60's club enjoyed reminiscing when experiencing objects from our handling collection.

Eat that Frog A visit from the community engagement officer along with the handling collection to talk about the variety of jobs that take place in a museum setting.

Young Devon Young people experiencing anxiety have benefitted from working with our community engagement officer.

### **Community area in the museum**

#### **Your Space cabinet**

The museum community area and Your Space cabinet is changed every month, featuring artwork created during workshops or items that local people collect. This provides something different for visitors to see on return visits and is also a great way to connect our local community with the museum.

### **Partnership working**

The community engagement officer strives to encourage and develop partnership working between the museum and other, local organisations. In 2023 we have worked with the following organisations:

Stover Country park

Newton Abbot library

Newton Abbot Art Group – 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary event and display. We have re-instated the annual exhibition

Learn Devon

Art Society Teignbridge

Bright Lights Creative Writing group – the group meet monthly in the museum for creative writing sessions and also held their first exhibition in the Rowell room

Soundart Radio – collaborating on various projects – Arts Award for teenagers, Everybody Counts maths and art workshops, Sound installation for the clock tower.

Education South West

Warm bank which merged into Chat Space, supporting a local person to run this valuable offer in Newton's Place

### **Strategic overview for NATC**

In order to keep a healthy overview of the cultural happenings in Newton Abbot, the community engagement officer continues to network with a range of organisations in the area, enabling valuable connections.

Heart of Teignbridge cultural Partnership

TDC Art fund

ACT climate change festival June 2024

### **New for 2024, things coming up**

Cabinet of Curiosity, the Board Game. We are starting an initiative for teenagers in town with an opportunity to play board games and invent a new board game for the museum called 'The Cabinet of Curiosity'. Sessions begin during the school Easter holidays with regular workshops taking place each Tuesday after from 4pm – 6pm.

Creative Newton Abbot stall.

With funding received from the Queens Jubilee fund we were able to purchase a branded gazebo that is used by the town council for monthly creative events in the town centre.

We have been planning to use the stall on market days to help raise the profile of the museum and of other cultural organisations and activities in the town. Beginning on 17<sup>th</sup> April we are launching 'Creative Newton Abbot, What's Happening?' The stall will be in the middle of town each Wednesday from 11am until 1pm and we are hoping that local people will appreciate regular information about arts and culture activities and events in Newton Abbot as well as local artists, creatives and organisations.