

TOPSHAM MUSEUM SOCIETY
Registered Charity 289367
25, Strand, Topsham, EX3 OAX

ANNUAL REVIEW and FORWARD PLAN

Year ending 31st. December 2009

Objects:

The Society is established to advance the education of the Public by the provision and management of a public museum in Topsham. In the furtherance of this the Topsham Museum Society collects, records and displays objects and memorabilia pertaining to the local history, flora and fauna of Topsham and the Exe Estuary.

Executive Summary

Exeter City Council continued to provide valuable support both practically and through the good offices of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum. To both of these we are most grateful.

The poor weather during the 2009 saw a huge influx of visitors and on behalf of the Trustees I would take this opportunity of thanking all our hard working volunteers, without whom the museum could not function.

Trustees: The following were elected as Trustees of the Topsham Museum Society at the Annual General Meeting held 22 April 2009.

David Clement, (Chairman), Myra Green (Secretary), Anthony Jennings (Treasurer), Peter Davies, David Hubbick, (Membership Secretary), Rachel Nichols, Mike Ness, Cathy Maguire and Liz Hodges. There were no other Trustees during the period under review.

Peter Davies is not standing for re-election as a Trustee and I would take this opportunity of thanking him for his past services. Peter served as Museum Secretary for three years, and as a Trustee for 5 years. He is continuing to help at the museum.

Management: Overall management is by the Trustees acting with the assistance of a team of volunteers forming a Management Committee. Advisors from The Royal Albert Memorial Museum at Exeter and MLA and Renaissance South West provided valuable assistance and advice. John Madin of the RAMM sits on our governing Council representing RAMM and Exeter City Council. No paid curatorial or museum staff are directly employed.

Major Risks: The major potential risk the Trustees had been exposed to during the previous Financial Year was a significant cost over-run of the lottery-funded works, but the costs were closely controlled and the project ended on time and with a cost overrun of around £20,000, which is an excellent result given the uncertainties. The only works left to complete will be the housing of the *Ruby* and we hope to proceed with this in the forthcoming Autumn after the museum closes to the public. We believe our cash resources on deposit will be sufficient to meet the balance of the projected costs. Topsham Museum Society, a voluntary body, has run the museum for the past 23 years on behalf of Exeter City Council who own both the building and land, and much of the collection, which was bequeathed to them by the late Dorothy Holman. Topsham Museum Society occupies the premises under a Lease from Exeter City Council who are responsible for the maintenance of the buildings. The Exeter City Council fully funded the cost of re-roofing the sail loft area and insulating this during the winter 2009/10 and finishing this in early March 2010.

Accounts: Our Independent Examiner, Steve Preston, has continued to provide valuable support and the accounts have been examined by Steve Preston as normal, and approved by the Trustees.

Bankers: Our principal bankers are Lloyds TSB, Fore Street, Topsham. In addition we hold a deposit with NatWest Bank as noted in our accounts.

Financial

- a. The accounts approved by the Council form a part of this Review and are annexed to this Report.
- b. **Reserves Policy** Topsham Museum Society maintains financial reserves to ensure continuing solvency of the Society in the event that one or more of the following unforeseen circumstances arise:

1. Historical levels of income are not maintained. The major risk here would be loss of income from the tea room which contributed £12,695 after costs in 2009.
2. Significant unscheduled expenditure is required on plant or equipment to maintain the functioning of the Museum. Each of: the heating system; the lift; or the interactive displays could require expenditure of up to £5,000.
3. A potential acquisition is identified, requiring immediate availability of funds (e.g. for a purchase at an auction sale). This might be up to £5,000 as anything more would need to be the subject of specific fund raising.
4. We are also holding reserves to complete the construction of the housing for the Market Boat and the *Ruby*, to which Devon County Council provided a grant of £1,000 during the past financial year.

In addition, the Society's expenditure is incurred mainly during the first quarter of the year, when general maintenance and stocking the shop are undertaken, whereas significant income does not start until April when the Museum opens. Year end reserves need to be £7,000-8,000 higher than the minimum level to cover this trend.

Taking account of the perceived risks associated with the above factors, both individually and in combination, the trustees have established a policy of maintaining year end reserves of between £20,000 and £25,000.

c. Society Reserves as at 31 December 2009

It will be seen from the accompanying accounts for 2009 that the Society's cash reserves at the end of the year (£49,824) were about twice the level called for by the above policy. This is mainly due to

- The Society still faces the possibility of further expenditure of up to £15,000 to bring the lottery project to a satisfactory conclusion.
- The recorded visitor numbers in 2009 were lower than our expectations brought about by recessionary influences, albeit the shop and the tea room performed extremely well.
- The income from fund raising events was lower than in previous years as the major fund-raising activities (mainly Secret Gardens) are held on alternate years.

Plans previously held back are now being built into work for the next three years and are being progressed. When the final works are complete it is envisaged that reserves will have fallen to around £25,000 by the end of 2011.

Highlights January 1st 2009 to December 31st 2009.

- a. **The year's special exhibition** The subject of the 2009 Exhibition was *Topsham Meets the Met* creatively put together by Steve Jebson, Claire Mills and the team from the Met Office at Exeter. We are extremely grateful to the Met Office for their support and input. The museum team consisted of Rachel Nichols, Liz Pascoe, Annette van Oppen and Myra Green, with Catriona Batty digitising the images and creating the rolling screens - to all of whom we owe our thanks. The display attracted excellent comments and we are most grateful to the Met Office for their support and input.
- b. **Occasional Exhibitions** The ground floor front room hosted several successful special exhibitions, including paintings by the marine artist and local salmon fisherman, Eric Voysey. This was followed by a display of linocut prints by Barbara Vincent; a joint exhibition with the Bill Douglas Centre commemorating the 70th. Anniversary of *Gone with the Wind*, and finally Topsham Art Group paintings featured in the 2010 calendar. We collaborated also with the Devon & Exeter Institution to commemorate Vivian Leigh.
- c. **Study Day:** The Museum working with Exeter University and the Bill Douglas Centre for the History of Cinema and Popular Culture organised "A Celebration of Vivien Leigh – 70 years of *Gone with the Wind*" The keynote speaker was professor Helen Taylor of Exeter University, author of *Scarlet's Women*. Invited papers explored some of the culture surrounding the iconic actress and particularly the connection with southern culture of the United States.
- d. **Oral History Project:** During 2009 the museum created a new initiative co-ordinated by Myra Green to explore further the oral history of the local community. The interview team consists of Vanessa Ascough, Sharon Patrick, and Jennifer Pearson with Mike Patrick providing technical know-how. So far, 20 interviews have been recorded and are being archived by Catriona Batty. The programme continues in 2010 and suggestions of people to interview are welcome

e. **Lectures**

These were coordinated by Mary Lambert to whom we are most grateful and a complete programme of lectures was given which were all well attended.

April 29 Sunspots and Stargazing by David Strange of the Norman Lockyer Observatory
May 27 Charles Darwin – Celebrating his 200th Birthday by Professor Herbert MacGregor
June 24 The History of Weather Forecasting by Martin Kidds from the Met Office
July 29 British Seahorses and the Topsham Connection by Neil Garrick-Hamilton
Sept 30 Development of Waterborne Transport in Devon by David Clement
Oct 28 Fragile Fortunes – The Story of the Gibbs family by Elizabeth Neill

f. **Fund Raising:** We continued to raise funds for the museum generally, through the trading company, Topsham Museum Trading Ltd, which was formed to take over sales in the tea-room and shop. All profits of TMT Ltd are passed back to Topsham Museum Society and their accounts are consolidated with those of the Society.

g. **Visitors:** In 2009 visitor numbers to include functions, were 11,472 as compared with 2008 (12,048) when we had the added publicity of the Art Fund nomination. The tea room, upon which we depend for the majority of our income, had a good year and we would take this opportunity of thanking all involved under Jennifer Bliss and Margaret Bradford, together with those on the shop and front desk reception under Judy Wood-Rogers, which had a record year. Visitor donations also saw an increase over the previous year.

h. **Membership** Membership of the Society now stands at 370 (2008 – 376), David Hubbick has continued to maintain the membership list and we thank him for his help in that connection. We endeavour to have the majority of members utilising the Gift Aid arrangements, which offer benefits at no additional cost to the member, to a Society such as ours with the additional payment to us by the Inland Revenue of some £644 (2008 - £835) for the year under review. Some 70% of members Gift-Aid their subscriptions. If you are not already “Gift-Aided” insofar as your subscription is concerned do please contact **David Hubbick** on Telephone number **(01392) 877 526** to make the appropriate arrangements. As members know, there are benefits in joining the Topsham Museum Society, including an annual journal, and I would like to encourage each of our existing members to use 2010 to recruit just one friend. We previously introduced a class of “Life membership” for a ‘one-off’ subscription, which was moderately successful with a total of 27 Life Members.

i. **Education:** Particular emphasis is given to involvement with local schools, and visits from them are welcome outside the normal museum opening hours. A number of ex-teachers amongst the volunteers assist with the reception of school groups. We continued to attract school parties and took our travelling collection out to schools. Additionally we held a Family Day in August run jointly by the TMS Education team, Katherine Weston, the Devon Heritage and Outreach Officer and the RAMM Volunteer Coordinator; an initiative we hope to repeat in 2010. We also initiated a programme with The West of England School for Young People with Little or no Sight, which was moderately successful, and have forged links with Exeter University, hosting members of the Geography Department, and providing and managing student placements from the Archaeology Department which have proved of significant mutual benefit. We anticipate an increasing demand for this part of our education work in attracting students of all ages. It is intended that our exhibits reflect the National Curriculum as far as possible. Additionally adult education is catered for by Topsham Museum Society members providing lectures and talks to a wide selection of audiences over the region, which often results in a visit to the museum by those organisations. During the past year we have also run a number of visits and excursions jointly with the RSPB to observe bird life on the estuary.

j. **Documentation and Conservation:** This is an unglamorous area of activity, but steady progress continues to be made with the programme of recording the collection and with the routines associated with conservation. Catriona Batty provides sterling work with Rachel Nichols who has been working on conservation, rehanging and re-displaying or resting various displays. We have excellent support from Helena Jaeschke, Conservation Development Officer Southwest and from staff at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum. We are seeking volunteer(s) to assist with archiving and collating of materials with Catriona, and offers of assistance would be welcomed. Our library has been re-defined by Tom Epton to whom we are most grateful. Documentation formed a vital part of our Accreditation application submitted in late 2009.

k. **Accreditation.** Headed by Tom Epton the enormous task of preparing Topsham Museum for Accreditation was undertaken; Special thanks should also go to Catriona Batty, Cathy Maguire and Rachel Nichols for the tireless work carried out, which has resulted in our being recommended for full Accreditation.

l. **Boat Collection:** We have previously reported on the acquisition of the Mahogany Skiff, Exe Market Boat, the Exe Salmon Boat and the *Cygnets*. The Heritage Lottery Fund met the costs of refurbishment and

conservation of the vessels by Roger Hall of Penarth. The last vessel, the *Ruby*, our Exe salmon boat, has been completed and returned to the museum pending the construction of suitable housing at Topsham. Planning Permission to enable this work to be carried out has been given and we anticipate completing those works in the Autumn of 2010.

- m. **Publications:** The 2009 edition of our Journal, *Topsham Times* was published in mid-June. The editor, Cathy Maguire, is always seeking articles for inclusion, and those who feel they could contribute are encouraged to contact her. Work is currently in hand for the 2010 edition. In addition two small publications were produced in association with and funded by the Met Office in conjunction with our 2009 exhibition, which was extremely successful. We would wish to record our thanks to the Met Office for their generosity.
- n. **The Lottery Funded Project:** The whole of the monies due from the Heritage Lottery Fund, £261,000 and Exeter City Council (£15,000), were received and, apart from minor items and the housing of the *Ruby*, to which Devon County Council has granted £1,000, the project is complete.
- o. **Funding Assistance:** Exeter City Council assisted with grant-aiding our rent and insurance. For the ninth year we adopted the policy of not charging for admission and do not anticipate any change for 2010. The Terms of our assistance have been put on a more permanent basis with the signing of a three-year rolling Agreement with the Exeter City Council.
- p. **Professional Support:** The basic concept that the Museum should be a small, high quality establishment run by volunteers remains unchanged. We continue to look to the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, for professional advice and support and, as before, confine ourselves to the history of Topsham and to the Exe Estuary. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the RAMM at Exeter for the close support they provide and John Madin, our curatorial adviser, for his input. Over the past two years we have had tremendous support from Helena Jaeschke with conservation work, and our Museum Development Officer, Susan Eddisford. These Posts are both 'Renaissance' funded and we hope that funding will be available for these posts to be retained.

Significant Challenges:

As reported last year, some issues demand continuous attention to ensure the smooth operation of the Museum. These issues, which relate to staffing and to the encouragement of visitors, are discussed below.

- a. **Volunteers:** The Museum does not employ professional staff, and could not afford to do so. We have been extremely fortunate throughout the period of over twenty years of its operation (the museum opened in 1986) to be able to call upon the services of a dedicated group of volunteers who are prepared to devote a significant amount of their time to administration, supervision, conservation, building maintenance, etc. There are currently some 187 volunteers who together with the members make up the workers responsible for all aspects of the museum. The majority of these volunteers are retired people, who bring a wealth of experience to the organisation. There is a continuing need to recruit and train new volunteers to maintain the momentum of the organisation. This constitutes the largest challenge facing the Museum and demands continuing effort. I would make a strong appeal to any reader who is not already involved, that you would be most welcome to come along and 'join the team,' either behind the scenes throughout the year when we welcome those interested in all areas of Museum work and with many talents, skills and interests from data entry and typing to conservation and publicity. Additionally in the Summer months we need volunteers for front of house activities. If you can help, or if you know someone who might be interested in offering one or more afternoons a month for the 7 months we are open (that is as little as seven half-days only!) to steward, or help in the tearoom or on the desk, this would be gratefully appreciated. Contact **Andy Simey**, our dedicated Volunteer Co-ordinator on **01392 876649**, or **e-mail her via museum@topsham.org**.
- b. **Publicity:** Thanks must go to Charles Potter who has taken on contacts with the press and general publicity, including articles in the monthly *Estuary* magazine and the member's Newsletter but we could always use help with other areas of publicity. This is a high profile job on which our visitor numbers greatly depend and assistance would be gratefully received.
- c. **Building Structure:** In the autumn 2007 Exeter City Council surveyed the building and agreed a completely new roof to the Sail Loft was required. Plans were delayed from 2008 and the works were carried out during December 2009 and completed in March 2010. This entailed a huge amount of work in shifting displays – particularly for Sandra Rendall and her team and we thank them all, particularly in the run up to re-opening!

- d. **Visitors:** Lastly the current economic condition of the country may impact on visitors spending in the shop and tea-room, but given that our entry is free of charge we hoped any adverse effect on our financial position would be minimal, which proved to be the case.
- e. **Tea-Room:** We pride ourselves that our cakes and scones are made locally by volunteers for which we are extremely grateful. Our net tearoom income greatly relies on this, and there could be a significant risk of loss of income if they gave up.

2010 and the Future:

- a) **2010 Special Exhibition:** This has been prepared in conjunction with Topsham Sailing Club to commemorate 125 years of the Club, and we particularly thank the club officers and Chris Williams who together with Chris Lambert, Mary Lambert, and Myra Green have been responsible for the excellent exhibition to be opened following our AGM on 31 March 2010.
- b) **Accreditation:** The museum has been verbally advised of our success in achieving full Accreditation.
- c) **Opportunities for Learning Policy:** This applies to visitors of all ages, and is operated by Myra Green and Liz Pascoe with their team. The lunchtime lectures are part of the same policy dealt with by Mary Lambert.
- d) **Lectures:** Forming part of the Opportunities for Learning Policy, we have a full programme of lectures for the forthcoming year, again ably organised by Mary Lambert. Mary has expertly done this work for a number of years and is looking for someone to assist and, later, to take over responsibility – so any volunteers? We do owe a huge debt of thanks to Mary. The subjects to be covered in 2010 include:

Held the last Wednesday of each month: Doors 11am for 11.30. Free to ALL.

April 28 Dr. Chris Williams: Vice Commodore Topsham Sailing Club: *125 Years of TSC*

May 26 Mark Turner: *The Art and Craft of Gilding*

June 30 Tony Eccles: *Souvenirs collected by Veitch Plant Hunters*

July 28 Danielle Wootton, Liaison Officer at RAMM: *Portable Antiquities*

Sept 29 Dr. Richard Oliver: *Devon and Topsham Maps*

Oct 27 Tony Whitehead, RSPB *Winter on the Exe*

My only comment is “Be There!”

- e) **Conservation:** There is a continuing need to provide care and conservation to the collections and this is undertaken with expert advice from the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, and for which we are most grateful. As mentioned above, it is also most useful to have access to advice from Helena Jaeschke, CDO Southwest. Her appointment is one made possible by the Renaissance in the Regions initiative. RAMM advise on items in which they have an interest.
- f) **Curatorial Staff:** The difficulties in financing have made employment of curatorial staff impossible. Your Council sends volunteers on courses arranged through the South West Federation of Museums and Art Galleries, which provide extremely useful help in the many aspects of museum administration, documentation and conservation. Any volunteer who would like to go on a course is asked to contact Myra Green, our secretary, or Catriona Batty for further information.
- g) **Health & Safety:** Peter Davies has been responsible for Health & Safety, and enabled us to keep abreast of the increasingly regulated environment in which we live. This is discussed regularly at our Trustees Council Meetings. Peter will continue in this role.
- h) **Visitor Numbers:** We continue to try to increase our visitor numbers but in 2009 saw a decline in the number of out-of-hours group bookings. The Underloft is available for booking and courses run by other organisations and we are especially pleased to be hosting the Topsham History Group meetings once again. We also opened for Museums at Night in May and Heritage Lottery Day in September, both of which we plan to repeat in the coming year. The premises are therefore used for much more than the advertised standard opening times. We continue to encourage Local Societies to visit in groups. Activities, including lectures, and social events continue to be held at the Museum. Advertising encourages tourists to visit the Museum as part of a "*Topsham Experience*". We take advantage of publicity facilities available through the Devon Museums Group. Since providing free admission we saw a doubling of visitor numbers in just 4 years (1999-2003) which was a great achievement and this has been built upon since then. 2008 was an excellent year due in no small part to the publicity from The Art Fund Nomination in early 2008, and we attracted 12,048 visitors. There was a drop in 2009 to 11,512 caused by recessionary factors and the lack

of the 'buzz' generated by the free publicity in coming runners-up in the Art Fund Prize. We hope to build on this number by targeting publicity in 2010; by continuing to enhance and change our exhibitions, allied with our improved facilities; and by opening an extra afternoon each week during August.

- i) **Monitoring Progress:** All areas of Museum activities are reviewed annually and reports produced, which assess each venture, review policy and update targets for the future. Currently we are in the process of continuing to review our practice on the structure, management and governance of the Topsham Museum Society to ensure compliance with the current requirements. This should be completed within the course of the next few months and further information will be published.
- j) **The Gardens:** The Garden Group planned the layout of the Riverside Garden to preserve the integrity of the site and make it available for use by residents and friends of Topsham. The entrance gates are no longer locked and, to date, no vandalism has occurred. The Garden Group are responsible for all our attractive displays which enhance the ambiance of the museum and go a long way to attracting visitors. We intend to gravel the strip by the wall in the apple tree/tea lawn as we have now tried turfing and seeding this area but to no avail. We are concerned about the Greenhouse which is the responsibility of Exeter City Council and this area will be cordoned off, as it is not safe. We have had discussions with ECC and a conclusion is hoped to be reached later in 2010. We now have a second person in Geoff Wilkinson, to back Roger Ascough with the lawns when he is away. Pam Bush has retired and we send her our warm thanks, and appreciation to all the gardeners for their hard work. We would be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to join the team.
- k) **The House:** Following the redisplay in the sail loft it is now the turn to look at the period house. With the increasing interest in family and local history we intend to create a local studies room and hope to involve more people from the local community in collecting this information. Within this project we also hope to build up our archive of oral history. Over the winter of 2008 a full assessment was made of the period rooms of the typical merchant house of 1700 to the Holman room with Miss Holman's furniture and memorabilia and then to the 20th century Old Kitchen. There will also be more emphasis on the social and building history of Topsham at the date of the house's construction, without losing the feel of the period rooms as we have known them for many years. Visitors in 2010 will see that the Vivien Leigh Room has been altered and redisplayed.
- l) **Disablement Access:** Access to the museum through the front entrance complies with the Disabled Access requirements.
- m) **Forward Plan:** Your Council has considered the future and has formulated an on-going 3-year plan of aims, centred primarily on developing the exhibits and the associated work of archiving and recording our collections; and secondly the development of our volunteers together with the management and governance of your museum. Any new volunteers to assist will be very welcome. Your council has been reviewing the overall strategy of the Museum to ensure its sustainability in the longer term. The on-going process has involved wide-ranging discussions with volunteers representing all aspects of the museum's activities.
- n) **Trading Company:** The Trading Company was formed in 2007 to administer the trading activities formerly carried on by the Museum Society. The activities remain with the existing tea room, shop, fundraising, group visits, and special events teams who are responsible to the Trustees. The only direct financial receipts of your Society are now by way of subscriptions and donations, and any associated Gift Aid, plus the donated profits made by the Trading Company. These contributed £14,009 net of expenses in 2009.

Concluding Remarks

2009 was a challenging year for all, primarily because of the national economic position. We go forward to 2010 with an excellent special exhibition on the 125th Anniversary of Topsham Sailing Club, designed and laid out by Mary Lambert and Myra Green after much research with a team from The Topsham Museum and the Topsham Sailing Club. Other changing exhibitions are being mounted in the old Parlour by Rachel Nichols, starting with a showing of the late Cynthia Rowan's paintings. New displays have been arranged in the newly decorated Vivien Leigh Room.

The current uncertain economic facts of life could affect our receipts, but we still do offer real value for money when compared with competing attractions. It is the hard work from volunteers that goes into making YOUR museum the success that it is. We are fortunate to be supported by a superb team of individuals, each working for the common good, and each indispensable in their own way. Myra Green continues to be a tower of support as Secretary and we are glad to welcome her continuation in the post. Peter Davies, in addition to his work on maintenance matters with Freddie Nichols, took on responsibility as Health & Safety Officer. David Hubbick has responsibility for the accounts

of the Trading Company and also looks after Membership. Anthony Jennings is meticulous as Treasurer of Topsham Museum Society. Freddie Nichols, John Claxton, Roger Ascough and Ray Hattrick as always are towers of strength on the electrics and heating, maintenance and décor, working throughout the winter. Rachel Nichols has implemented the further changes to the period rooms this winter, along with her Collection Management role in conservation. She has also built up a comprehensive set of guidelines and forms, which formed part of our Accreditation work and will also be immensely useful in the future. Judy Wood-Rogers looks after the shop, which made tremendous progress in 2009, and Cathy Maguire oversees our publications. The success of the catering in areas of museum daily life owes a huge debt to Jennifer Bliss and Margaret Bradford. Catriona Batty has been all things to all and is the one we turn to when we need to find things and information or exhibits relating to specific topics. We are fortunate in having Sandra Rendall and her team watching over the Sail Loft area. Charles Potter masters the intricacies of publicity material and the production of the Newsletter.

Thank you one and all including all the very many volunteers who contribute to specific tasks, in particular Judy Sugden (House Stewards), June Swan (Minute taking and Group Visits) and Andy Simey (Volunteer recruitment and co-ordination).

No Chairman can work efficiently without the support of his team. All of our members are a part of that team, which together makes Topsham Museum the success it is. I believe we have a strong future, which is certain to lead to even greater success as a focal point for our community. From that community we draw our volunteers. We always need new volunteers to share and enjoy the tasks and I look forward to meeting our new recruits from amongst you all.

David B. Clement,
Chairman,
Topsham Museum Society

March 2010