

Annual Report
2020



mmf

Maidstone Museums' Foundation



Sign of the times: mask wearing during the pandemic

MMF President Sir Robert Worcester KBE DL

MMF Board (2020)

Mark Baker (Chair)

Mike Evans (Vice Chair)

Stephen Farrant (Treasurer)

Trevor Sturgess (Secretary)

Ivan White (Membership Secretary)

Cllr Paul Harper

Janette Lloyd

David Pickett

John Newcomb

Bill Stotesbury

Fran Wilson

www.maidstonemuseumsfriends.org.uk

***“Museums are as much about today
and tomorrow as yesterday”***

Annual Report 2020

Maidstone Museums' Foundation Registered Charity No. 802547

Report from the Chair

I seem to recall that I began my report for 2018 stating that it had been a challenging year and there was a somewhat similar report for 2019, although a great deal had been achieved.

In writing that last report none of us could have known what was to happen in 2020 when COVID-19 struck and we entered periods of national lockdowns. That of course meant that Maidstone Museum closed to the public and life for MMF would change radically. However, during this uncertain period – thanks to all our Trustees – the charity remained very active. Virtual board meetings were held via Zoom and it generally worked well.

Probably MMF's greatest achievement of the year was establishing a presence in the town centre by opening a Pop-up Shop in the former Thomas Cook premises in Fremlin Walk, one of Maidstone's main retail centres (report on p5). This gave MMF and the Museum a shop window in the retail heart of Maidstone.

Zooming in: MMF Chair Mark Baker at a virtual board meeting during the pandemic



Our partnership with Invicta Grammar School continues to flourish and I'm delighted that pupils' families continue to support us. I'm grateful to the Student Ambassadors who continue to spread the word about our Museum.

It goes without saying that our prime reason for existing is to promote MMF as a way of supporting the County Town's wonderful museums. We support the staff in all they do to improve these treasure houses so that the public get the very best from their visit and young people learn more about their heritage.

Museums are as much about today and tomorrow as yesterday. Our mission is to do all we can to support those in Maidstone and promote their value to public, councilors and officials. Maidstone Museum is one of the County Town's crown jewels and deserves to be celebrated.

I thank all MMF Trustees for all their hard work during the last challenging year. It has been a difficult time for everyone but we did not stand still. At no time did we forget just what MMF is here for. Where the MMF leads, we urge others to follow.

Mark Baker (Chair)

Finance

Substantial growth in membership

Despite the financial impacts of Covid, when the Museums were forced to close to the public for long periods, 2020 proved to be another year of financial consolidation.

However the charity continued to develop its activities with the backing of a committed membership. Net revenue came principally from subscriptions in 2020. In addition to applying restricted funds to further enhance collections, the trustees focused on planning for ways of increasing future financial contributions in line with the Charity's objectives once lockdown conditions for the Museums were removed in 2021. Overall charitable funds were increased by just under £3,000 during the year and at December 31, 2020 were just under £12,000.

Financial decisions were implemented in a timely manner and fully met the prime aim of furthering the charity's objectives. The technical content of fundraising and promotional material was always cleared before publication. Periodic management accounts confirmed income and expenditure surplus/deficit to date and reserve values. A detailed review of the Charity's income and expenditure is set out in the Annual Accounts, a copy of which is available on written request to the Charity's registered office. The 2020 accounts are subjected to a voluntary independent examination

Stephen Farrant (Treasurer)

Fundraising

In view of restrictions on our activities for much of the year, efforts to raise money for the Museums have been very limited during 2020. In addition to MMF volunteer efforts in the pop-up shop in Fremlin Walk (see separate section), financial support was provided for the:

- production of printed Ancient Lives perspex display panels to enhance the Ancient Lives collection area – £474.50;
- production of interpretation panel board of the Water Treadwheel for display to enhance existing local collections (external) – £267.50

It is to be hoped that we can increase activity in this area in 2021.



MMF Website

At the end of 2020 the Board of MMF agreed to pursue the establishment of a bespoke website. We have always had an important presence on the Museums' website, under the *support us* pages, and this has helped in explaining our activities, projects we are supporting, and the membership choices.

However, it was felt that greater profile for MMF and regular news about the organisation could be better achieved through an independent website. In addition, we wished to move to embrace opportunities provided by electronic contact and finance transfer. It would enable membership fees to be paid or renewed on-line and any payments transferred all through the press of a button. This is also true of opportunities for people to donate to MMF.

The intention is to have a direct link from the suggested MMF site and the Museums' one – and vice versa. We never forget that part of our aim is to raise the profiles of the Museums. The work to set up this proposed site and write the content will take place during the first half of 2021.

Gardening Club

Despite Covid-19, good work was progressed

In 2020 Friends established a regular Gardening Club at the main Museum. The objective is to maintain the three open spaces there:

- the Courtyard in front of the Tudor part of the building;
- the Godiva courtyard to the rear of the main staircase near the Bentlif library; and
- the gardens at the rear of the Tudor part of the building.

It gathers on Tuesdays every four weeks, always starts at 10am and lasts no longer than three hours. All Friends are advised they are welcome, especially if they have useful skills and experience.

Work during the year did go ahead, but Covid lockdowns meant we could not gather every month. Nonetheless, good work was progressed to clear the ivy from the Stone Store building's roof to the rear, and weed the Tudor Courtyard.



*Weeding in the Museum garden:
trustee Ivan White*

One of the Museums' aims is to create a Tudor herb garden in the four beds in the front courtyard, to reflect the original Tudor building, and plans are being drawn up. MMF will help them achieve their ambition next year.



*Green fingers:
trustee Mike Evans*

Pop-up Shop, Fremlin Walk

It was vital that we complied with pandemic rules

The shop in the former Thomas Cook premises in Fremlin Walk had been run by Museum staff and open on Saturdays to promote the Museum during the first Covid lockdown.

It became apparent that with changes in Museum staffing and working hours, the shop would not reopen. So MMF took on responsibility.

With lockdown, the AGM usually held in June was postponed to October 15 when it was hoped that restrictions would have eased. A risk assessment showed we could accommodate 20 members and 12 Board members all seated and socially distanced in the shop. In the end the Government changed the rules in early October and the AGM was held virtually on Zoom.

In September it was agreed that we should open the shop to the public on Fridays and Saturdays 10am – 3am. It was vital that we complied with pandemic rules. After another risk assessment, yellow self-distancing tape was laid down. Clear visors for volunteers and hand sanitiser were provided.

MMF had already acquired prints, postcards, greetings and Christmas cards, notelets, place mats, coasters, all with original illustrations by the artist Geoffrey Hall. He donated the items to the charity when he retired. He kindly agreed that all proceeds from the sale of these items would go to MMF. A total of 195 prints were displayed and three tables set up for other items. I took the opportunity to mass email the membership about the presence of the shop.



Shielded: Ivan White, who has special responsibility for managing the shop



Ivan White puts up a notice about social distancing

We opened on October 3 but had to close from October 31 due to a further lockdown. Along with other shops we were able to reopen for Christmas on December 4, but had to close again from December 20 before a further lockdown. It was a bitter blow for everyone in retail. My thanks to Mike Evans and Trevor Sturgess who volunteered to help me on the days the shop was open.



Taped: the shop is re-engineered for pandemic restrictions



Art gallery: an early visitor to the shop



Festive spirit

Membership

In the past it has been just a routine administration job. Covid altered all that. First we needed to change the arrangements for payment. With no access to the Museum when it was closed, cheques needed to be sent to my home address.

Payments by debit and credit card had always been facilitated by the Museum but this was impossible when the Museum was closed. We added the information that it was possible to pay for those with access to internet banking.

Along with the usual Chairman's letter inviting members to renew. I sent out an addendum letter with the latest news about Museum opening or closing arrangements. I also encouraged members to renew even though the Museum was closed. The financial support was invaluable. The letter had to be amended most months as Government rules kept on changing. The renewal letter sent with new membership cards had to be altered each month with similar information.

I'm grateful to Fran Smith for writing the membership cards with such attractive calligraphy, especially as she was one of many who had to self-isolate all year.

Whilst membership numbers at the end of 2020 had decreased slightly, compared to 2019, they were still significant and reflective of growth achieved in recent years. By the end of the year, membership represented approximately 465 people and six local corporate supporters.

Membership in numbers at December 31, 2020:

Corporate – 6

Life – 43

10-year – 4

25-year individual – 5

Single – 35

Joint – 26

Family – 81

Ivan White (Membership Secretary)

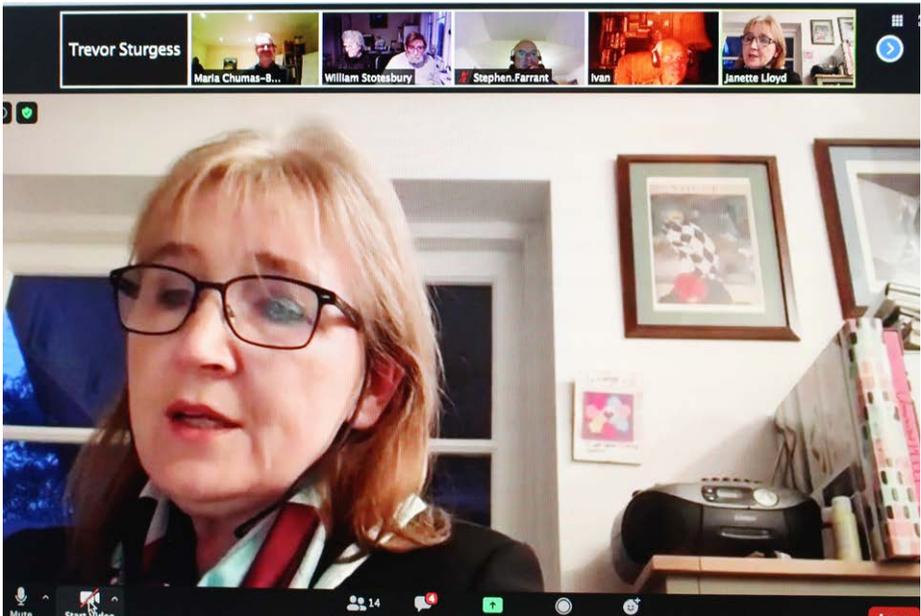
Schools and Education

Following on from the successful event in Autumn 2019 for new Invicta Grammar School members of the MMF and their families, the student ambassador team appointed for the year planned a number of events and activities they were going to run in the summer term.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic and the consequent Museum and school closures, these plans were unable to take place. When schools did re open in the Autumn term of 2020, meetings in person with the ambassador team were not possible due to the ban on multiple year group meetings within the Covid-19 control measures.

Therefore, meetings took place on the Microsoft Teams platform. A key part of the new school year was to review the ambassador team. Two of our most experienced ambassadors wanted to step down to concentrate on their A Level studies.

This provided the opportunity to advertise the role and to recruit new members to the team. We were successful in increasing the ambassador team with a broad range of skills and a number of new and exciting ideas. These included planning talks on objects from the collections that could be shared by students using digital platforms.



Janette Lloyd joins a Zoom meeting

Another area important for the team is to support the drive for new members. Despite the limitations for outside visitors, an Open Day at Invicta Grammar School was planned for a Saturday in early October when families could book a specific time slot.

A display of the Museum and MMF was put up within the Extended Learning exhibition for that event and this ensured the continuity of communication with prospective families. Unfortunately the annual carol concert was unable to take place.

Planning for further events had to be put on hold, again due to the second and third lockdowns. A priority for post-lockdown times is for the new ambassador team to become more familiar with the current collections within the Museum.

We are looking forward to creating new education opportunities and developing resources to engage young people for 2021.

Looking to a brighter future

MMF is a force to be reckoned with...

Little did we know on January 9, 2020, when we held our first board meeting of the year, that it would be a year like no other.

MMF, the Museum and One Maidstone had exciting plans for the coming year. We discussed the successful annual Christmas Concert, little realising that there would not be another in 2020.

A further meeting was held in February as news of COVID-19 spread across the world. Our meeting on March 12 was the last physical Board gathering until August 2021. The Museum reported 3,500 visitors at half-term before what a minute records as the “impact from coronavirus”.

We resorted to the virtual format, and Zoom came into its own. Our first Zoom meeting was held on June 11. Virtual meetings were held every month thereafter, with the focus on resolving existing challenges and always looking to the future.

Volunteers spent time in tidying the Museum garden. In time, an agenda item *Life after Lockdown* appeared, looking at how we could step up use of the Pop-up Shop, carry out garden maintenance and plan events.

All in all, there was tremendous energy and trustees were busy planning an exciting future after the lifting of lockdown restrictions. By the end of 2020, we may not have celebrated Christmas at our annual concert with the wonderful Invicta Grammar School choir and musicians, but we were about to enter 2021 with plans, actions and energy.

Above all, we wanted to show that MMF is a force to be reckoned with, a principal flag-waver for the Museum and its staff at a time when museum funding often looks vulnerable and the importance of museums often devalued.

The pandemic showed that a museum can improve well-being and mental health, as well as playing a key role in destination planning and attracting visitors who contribute to the economy.

After the uncertainties of 2020, MMF looks ahead, determined to do its best for the Museum, attract new members and meet the aspirations of our Friends and supporters.

Trevor Sturgess (Secretary)



A brighter future: we're looking to welcome many more families to the Pop-up Shop in 2021



Screenshots
of our recently
updated website
– why not log-on
and take a look?

Latest News



MMF Pop-Up Shop

The uses to which the Pop-Up Shop in Fremlin Walk are being out has been expanded over the last three months. It is being used to hold MMF events and meetings, providing a real focal point in the town centre for Friends. The Trustees are already holding monthly Board meetings. And the Events' calendar commences in early September with a talk by Robin Ambrose

[... continue reading](#)



Robin Ambrose to give a Talk to Friends

We are pleased to report that Robin Ambrose, the local historian and writer, is to give an illustrated talk to the Friends. It will be at the Pop-Up shop in Fremlin Walk on Thursday 2nd September – starting at 6.30pm. The talk will be "Sights and Memories of Sandling". It covers Sandling & Boarley; four Big Houses (including Boxley Abbey), the zoo, the riverside, farms, wartime and more).

[... continue reading](#)



Maidstone's Museums Re-opened in May 21

The team at the Museums are again operating the wonderful collections here in Maidstone. Things are a bit different though. The main Museum is open between 10am and 4pm, Wednesday-Saturday for most of the year. During school holidays, it is open from Monday to Saturday but will close altogether from mid-December to mid-February.

[... continue reading](#)



Registered Charity No. 802547

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