

Annual Report
2021



mmf

Maidstone Museums' Foundation



Sisters Leah and Cassie proudly display their brass rubbings in the Friends' Shop

MMF President Sir Robert Worcester KBE DL

MMF Board (2021)

Mark Baker (Chair)
Fran Wilson (Vice Chair)
Stephen Farrant (Treasurer)
Trevor Sturgess (Secretary)
Ivan White (Membership and Shop)
Mike Evans
Janette Lloyd
David Pickett (resigned July 2021)
John Newcomb (resigned January 2021)

Bill Stotesbury
Marianne Webb
Cllr Paul Harper (resigned July 2021)
Cllr Martin Round
Cllr Simon Webb

www.maidstonemuseumsfriends.org.uk

“Museums encourage the young, educate, entertain and enlighten us all. We diminish their role at our peril”

Annual Report 2021

Maidstone Museums' Foundation Registered Charity No. 802547

Report from the Chair

Once again, I cannot avoid the words with which we have become so familiar – COVID-19, pandemic, lockdown. Uncertainty was a theme across much of 2021.

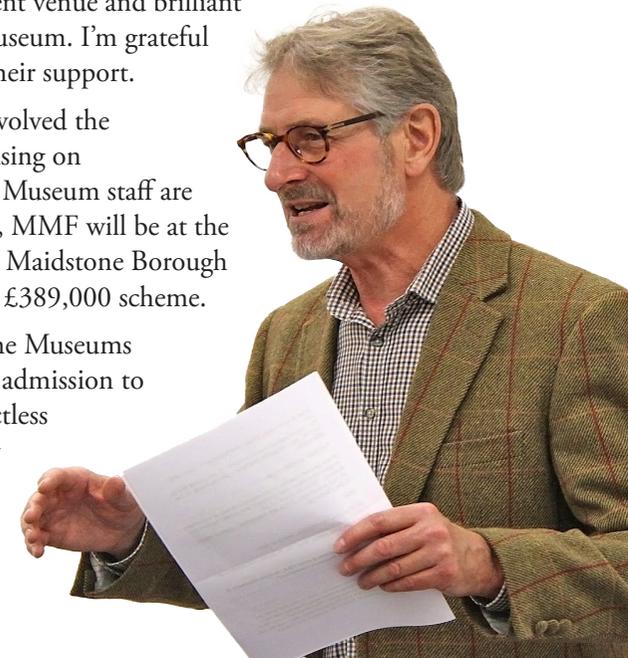
But towards the end of the year, there were encouraging signs that the worst was over, that the vaccination programme had reduced the risk of serious illness, even though infection rates were still worrying. MMF operated almost normally throughout the year, with virtual meetings replacing physical ones for some of the time. We resumed in-person meetings from August and continued to hit the ground running.

Our Friends' Shop in Fremlin Walk provided an ideal venue. We kicked off with a special gathering to consider a wide range of strategic issues such as membership, MMF profile and board diversity. A far-sighted paper raised important action points that are gradually being implemented.

After more than 20 years as a charity supporting the Museum, we recognise the importance of constantly reviewing what we do, how we adapt to meet the needs of members and what we do to even better support our wonderful Museums. Again, a key part of our strategy is to operate the Friends' Shop in Fremlin Walk. We use this as an event venue and brilliant showcase for the charity and the Museum. I'm grateful to Fremlin Walk management for their support.

Another centrepiece of our work involved the proposed new Museum gallery focusing on archaeology. If this goes ahead, and Museum staff are already well into the planning stage, MMF will be at the forefront of fund-raising to support Maidstone Borough Council's backing for the estimated £389,000 scheme.

We continued to raise money for the Museums through sales of goods in the shop, admission to events, donations and a new contactless system to adjust to our increasingly cashless times.



Another innovation was our website that enables us to spread the word to our Friends and those who search us out not only in our catchment area but across Kent, the UK and internationally.

I'm particularly proud of our Student Ambassador scheme that continues to lead the way among museum friends' groups. We look to the young to carry the torch for museums in the years to come. As ever, I'm grateful to my fellow MMF trustees for their hard work, volunteering, looking after the finances, running the shop, and doing so much behind the scenes.

I'm sure that the worst of times in 2020 and 2021 will give way to the best of times in 2022 and beyond. Our museums remain local treasures that must be celebrated, cherished, protected and promoted. They need our love when public finances are stretched. They provide solace in tough times and stimulation in better days. They encourage the young, educate, entertain, enlighten and promote pride in place. We diminish their role at our peril.

Mark Baker (Chair)

Finance

Membership growth

Whilst Covid impacted the Museums' ability to open for the entirety of 2021, the year proved to be another one of financial consolidation for MMF. The charity continued to develop its activities with the backing of a growing committed membership, and further significant growth in the Family category.

The Charity's income came principally from subscriptions and voluntary donations, with more than £8,300 received from these sources. As well as applying more than £1,000 of unrestricted donations to assist the Museum in meeting ever-increasing running costs, the trustees focused on possible ways of boosting financial contributions from the public. This was in line with

the Charity's objectives and recognition that lockdown conditions for the Museums were finally removed in 2021.

Trustees worked with the Museum management team to choose suitable static and portable contactless donation equipment. MMF funded its purchase for just over £1,200. The supplier has a proven successful track record with other UK museums and early signs suggest a return on investment should be quick, with much-needed funds starting to flow through to the Museum via MMF, which is great news.

Overall, charitable funds increased by just over £3,500 during the year and at year end amounted to just under £15,500. 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 2021 accounts are subjected to a voluntary independent examination.

Stephen Farrant (Treasurer)



Raffle prizes handmade and kindly donated by Mrs Elizabeth Marsden

Fundraising

With 2021 creating similar restrictions to those the year before, our fund-raising activities for the Museums have again been limited. In addition to MMF volunteer efforts in the Friends' Shop in Fremlin Walk and the Museum garden (see below), direct financial support was provided for the:

1. Purchase of contactless donation equipment for installation in both the Museum and the Shop. Sum raised: £1,175
2. Funding of volunteer lunches to recognise exceptional effort. Contribution: £101

In November 2021, Maidstone Borough Council agreed formally to the development of a project to revitalise the Archaeological Gallery. The Council committed £389,000 to the project and received a pledge from a local charity to grant a further £100,000. The Council has asked MMF to match this £100,000; a challenge that the MMF board has willingly accepted. Work is therefore in hand to develop an MMF Fundraising Strategy for this exciting project, a working group to oversee activities and a draft Action Plan. Work will commence in 2022.

Donating

MMF has made great strides in encouraging general donations. This is different from fund-raising' (covered earlier) which seeks support for specific campaigns or key projects.

MMF promotes donations to support the general work of the organisation and the Museums. It is important these days to embrace electronic methods to make the process swift, safe and seamless. Three methods were commenced in 2021:

1. **Website** (www.maidstonemuseumsfriends.org.uk) – a specific page – 'Donations' – has been included in the design to make giving simple, notably through electronic means. It encourages the use of Gift Aid to boost the level of donations and offers advice on how to leave a legacy to the charity.



2. **Contactless donation stand** – A stand has been installed in the Museum entrance foyer in full view of visitors to promote donations by debit or credit card. The default suggestion is £4 ("tap to give") but this can be raised or reduced according to the donor's wishes.

3. **Mobile contactless donation device** – at the same time this device was installed in the MMF Pop-Up Shop, providing similar functionality. Whilst based at the Pop-Up Shop, by its nature, this device can and will be used by MMF to encourage donations at events held within the Museum itself and elsewhere going forward.

Events

In September, MMF launched a Programme of Talks and Events in the Friends' Shop as part of our aim of engaging more with the wider community. The talks are held on the first Thursday of every month, starting at 6.30pm. We charged £1 for Friends and £3 for guests, including refreshments.

- September – Sights and Memories of Sandling, by Robin Ambrose;
- October – Maidstone Museum: a mini V&A, British Museum and Natural History Museum combined, by Sam Harris (Museum Collections Manager)
- November – History of Maidstone Wallchart, by Bill Stotesbury (trustee)
- December – Christmas Concert, with the Chamber Choir of Invicta Grammar School



Local historian and author Robin Ambrose signs a book for Friend Olga D' Silva after his talk on "Sights and Memories of Sandling" in September



Bill Stotesbury, MMF trustee, explains how he designed his Maidstone poster



Invicta Grammar School Chamber Choir singing outside the Friends' Shop in December

Samantha Harris, Maidstone Museum's Collections Manager, talks about the Museum at the MMF annual meeting in October



Each event attracted more than 30 attendees, with many more enjoying the concert both inside and outside the Shop on the first of the town's late shopping nights.

We received useful feedback from attendees about the time, days of week, regularity and fee charged. In late 2021, MMF published a programme for the first half of 2022.

Receptions were held for members of the council's Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee, (September), and for Corporate Friends and prospective members (November). These resulted in greater awareness of what we do among decision-makers and recruited two new Corporate Friends. We intend holding such events every year.



Mark Baker, third left, hosts a reception for borough councillors, including Cllr Fay Gooch, Mayor of Maidstone, and her escort Peter (second right).

Others, from left: Fran Wilson (MMF Vice-Chair), Izzy (Student Ambassador), at back from left Cllr Simon Webb and Cllr Martin Round

MMF website

Online presence boosts profile and membership



In 2020 the Board of MMF had agreed to set up a website with five key objectives:

1. Raise MMF profile
2. Supply regular news
3. Promote fund-raising campaigns for capital projects
4. Embrace opportunities for online contact, membership development and giving
5. Provide a link to the Museums' website.

The design was completed over the winter months and the site – www.maidstonemuseumsfriends.org.uk – was launched in March 2021, together with a dedicated email address – info@maidstonemuseumsfriends.org.uk

Articles and photographs are constantly uploaded to the site to keep it current. We are also pleased that the site has high visibility on search engines, and that there has been an encouraging rise in subscriptions, renewals and donations through this route.

We believe the website will easily recoup the setting-up cost of £720, and rigorous maintenance contract will ensure the safety and security of the website and on-line transactions.

Gardening Club

Tudor courtyard transformation

Gardening was one activity that escaped pandemic restrictions as it was outdoors, and the Friends' monthly Gardening Club continued uninterrupted.

After the Museums received a gift of red pelargoniums and purple petunias from the council's parks staff, MMF volunteers planted them in the Tudor Courtyard. The 100 or so plants offer an abundance of wonderful colour all year round.

By Autumn the petunias had died and were removed, but an important bonus was the survival of the pelargoniums. The Courtyard is South-facing and protected on three sides by museum buildings – thus the pelargoniums went on flowering well into Winter – helped by judicious dead-heading. We have high hopes that these plants will flower again in 2022.



Green fingers: Ivan White (MMF Trustee) volunteers for gardening tasks



Tudor Courtyard in bloom

Four tubs were cleared of box bushes, as they had blight, and were replaced by lavender and rosemary plants (two of each). These did especially well during the year – and the smell was amazing. In the rear garden good work was progressed to clear many of the old overgrown cherry trees (roots and all) from the bed in front of the 'Stone Store' building. This is work in progress.

Friends are encouraged to join the Gardening Club, especially if they have useful skills and experience. There is a clear health and safety plan.

Membership

Families sign up in record numbers

Another year with Covid restrictions changing throughout the year. With no access to the Museum during enforced closure, cheques had to be sent to my home address. Payments by debit and credit card had always been accepted by the Museum but this facility naturally stopped. We encouraged payment via internet banking but not everyone has access to this.

An annual letter from the MMF Chair invites renewal and I enclosed information about Museum opening times as well as encouraging members to renew despite the Museum being closed. The letter was amended six times as the situation changed. The renewal letter sent with new membership cards was also altered six times during the year. After the August launch of the MMF website, we celebrated the first online membership in September.

Despite Covid, membership numbers rose in 2021, representing 631 people and eight local corporate supporters. We are particularly grateful to Invicta Grammar School for circulating information about the MMF to families of incoming Y7 pupils. This has resulted in an encouraging uptake of family memberships.

Membership in numbers at December 31, 2021:

Corporate – 9

Life – 42

10-year individual – 9

25-year individual – 7

Single – 33

Joint – 24

Family – 123

Ivan White (Membership Secretary)

Friends' Shop in Fremlin Walk

3,200 visitors welcomed to shop after the lifting of lockdown

We started 2021 in the grip of a Covid lockdown. The Friends' Shop stayed closed until the easing of restrictions enabled us to open on April 16. Since then, thanks to our small number of volunteers, we have been open to welcome Friends and visitors every Friday and Saturday from 10am-3pm. Since reopening day, the Shop has welcomed nearly 3,200 visitors

Previously run by Maidstone Museum, we changed the signage to underline the fact that the shop is run in the town centre by Maidstone Museums' Foundation on behalf of our members, to raise funds for the Museums, promote them to a wider audience, and signpost visitors to the nearby Museum. This was a popular attraction

The same can be said for the free activity of Brass Rubbing which attracted numerous children and families throughout the year.

In June we moved the front display of Geoffrey Hall prints to make way for a display of black and white photographs loaned by Maidstone Museum and showing how the town and surrounding area looked in the 1890-1920s.



Ivan White, MMF Trustee and shop manager, faces up to Vera the Velociraptor



Eva and her parents enjoy the brass rubbing challenge

August saw the arrival of a smaller Dinosaur to join Vera the Velociraptor. We also gained a life-size model of a dinosaur egg that we displayed close to a window at the rear of the shop and it proved a popular attraction. We were also kindly given a small 'stuffed' alligator by MMF member Steve Lakin.

Eggciting addition to shop's attractions



Elephant in the room

During the summer, Maidstone hosted 56 Elmer elephants displayed across the town. They were sponsored in aid of the Kent of Heart Hospice. The Elmer Trail attracted hundreds of families during August. One sponsor Elaine Craven, founder of Earl Street Employment Consultants, saw her Elmer, decorated in a Nettipattam style that she is familiar with in the Indian state of Kerala, standing proudly at the foot of the steps alongside Fremlin Walk car park. At the end of the project, the Elmers were auctioned, raising a whopping £400,000 for the charity. Elaine made a successful bid for her Elmer and the former MMF Vice-Chair, generously offered it on long-term loan to the Shop. It has also proved a huge attraction.



Elaine Craven and Ivan White with Elmer

As mentioned above, we held a number of breakfast receptions, and In October, the shop hosted the MMF Annual Meeting, with Sam Harris, Museum Collections Manager, giving an insight into the Museum's treasures.

Poster power

In November, Bill Stotesbury, an MMF Trustee and professional designer, gave an insight into his creation of a Maidstone poster, copies of which are on sale in the shop.

Tidings of comfort and joy

Our annual Christmas Concert in December resumed for the seventh time, with the Chamber Choir from Invicta Grammar School delighting shoppers outside in Fremlin Walk and then inside the shop for a large audience, including Cllr Fay Gooch, the Mayor of Maidstone and MMF members.

Proceeds from sales of prints, placemats, coasters, greetings cards and other items are given to the Museum and support events. The Shop is literally a shop window for the Museum and offers a great opportunity to tell visitors and new residents about the Museum.



Invicta Grammar School Chamber Choir sing inside the Friends' shop

Our biggest challenge is finding enough volunteers to keep the shop open as often as we would like. If you are interested in helping for just a couple of hours from time to time, that would lessen the load on the others – and offer you a valuable experience.

Ivan White (Shop Manager)

Schools and education



MMF Student Ambassador Izzy (Invicta Grammar School) with Cllr Fay Gooch, Mayor of Maidstone,

Unfortunately, the year started with another national closure of schools and the

closure of the Museum. This and other uncertainties made it very difficult to plan new education activities. New student ambassadors had been appointed but this had to be done virtually as different year groups could not meet in person.

The newly appointed Student Ambassadors met the MMF Chair and Secretary in a useful virtual meeting during which they shared their plans and ideas for the next school year.

One of the first school visits to the Museum after re-opening in July was by Invicta Grammar School Fashion and Textiles A Level students. This was the first visit to a cultural centre that the students had been able to make since the start of the pandemic and gave a welcome morale boost for the students.

After a tour of the dress collection, the students were given an excellent opportunity to study and analyse classic couture pieces from the 1950s and 1960s by Dior, Givenchy and Balenciaga. This study visit was an important source for their Non-Exam Assessment (NEA) design coursework for A Level.





The new school year offered schools the chance to mix year groups again and the Ambassador team met to start planning possible projects for the new school year.

The MMF and Museum were featured at the Invicta Year 5 Open Saturday in October.

A stand of Museum objects and information sheets that could be observed and discussed featured as part of the Extended Learning showcase. This was a great opportunity to promote membership to visiting parents.

The Design Heritage Challenge was the new Education Project for the new school year and

launched to schools across Kent in November. It is loosely based on the Design Museum Design Ventura competition, but the key difference is the final prototype product. The Heritage Challenge requires students to identify a source of inspiration from the Museum such as an artefact or gallery.

Students create a design for a product that could be sold as a batch production of 10 in the Museum Shop and then make a prototype. However, with Covid rates fluctuating, Museum hours reduced and still some uncertainty, it was decided to relaunch this challenge would be relaunched in January 2022. We are hopeful that this project will motivate and inspire many young people to visit and value the Museum.

We are looking forward to creating new education opportunities, developing resources and expanding Student Ambassador teams across other schools to increase engagement of young people for 2022.

Janette Lloyd (Education Trustee)

Publicity

Despite pandemic lockdowns, MMF spread the word. Although our usual Newsletters were suspended, members were kept informed by regular emails. Most of these were about the programme of monthly talks in the Friends' Shop. Another gave formal notice of the Annual General Meeting held in October and an invitation to attend. There was an encouraging audience for the AGM and Samantha Harris's fascinating talk about the Museum.

New display is just roarsome

Vera, the velociraptor is the latest weapon in directing people towards a new pop-up shop and art gallery.

Several town centre units have shut, and the new display, in the former Thomas Cook store in Fremlin Walk, is designed to signpost the attraction of Maidstone Museum in St Faith's Street.

With the museum re-opening yesterday (Wednesday) after the pandemic shutdown – appropriately with an exhibition about dinosaurs - Vera reminds shop-



Ivan White, pop up shop manager, with Vera

pers of a museum that's been called Maidstone's "jewel in the crown."

Since lockdown was eased, the

shop has attracted scores of visitors, with children excited by a close-up look at Vera.

Maidstone Museums' Foundation, an independent charity that has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds for the museums and operates a Friends scheme, runs the shop. Staffed by volunteers, it is open every Friday and Saturday from 10am – 3pm.

The shop is part of a campaign to promote the museum, owned by Maidstone Borough Council, during financial uncertainty.

MMF also gained welcomed publicity about shop activities in local publications Kent Messenger and Downsmail. These included stories about brass rubbing and the arrival of Elmer. We are grateful to their respective editors for the helpful coverage. A contributed article about the shop was published in the winter edition of One!, the official journal of One Maidstone Business Improvement District.

We can reckon 2021 a staging post between the relative normality of 2019 and the tragic consequences and restrictions of 2020, and the brighter days we hope will come in 2022 and beyond.

The next few years promise exciting developments in Maidstone Museum and MMF. With our growing legion of members, MMF will continue to stay alongside our precious Museums with the aim of supporting, protecting, promoting and fundraising – as well as being its closest critical friend.

Trevor Sturgess (Secretary)

This beautiful butterfly spent a lot of time pressing up against the Friends Shop window on a warm August day, a herald perhaps of better times after pandemic and lockdowns





Registered Charity No. 802547

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