

The Friends of The Twickenham Museum

25 The Embankment
Twickenham TW1 3DU
Newsletter, December 2002

Charity no 1028984

An event for Christmas

From 11 00am - 3 00pm on Saturday 21st December we are holding a small book fair. Books, both on display and some for sale will relate mainly to the published history of the old Borough. The day will also celebrate the Butt (Pope) collection, and the Stammers-Smith collection of books dealing with related eighteenth century matters which has come to us through the good offices of our patron Mavis Batey.

Please come, view and complete your Christmas shopping!

The Museum at One Year

Our newsletter of last December announced the imminent birth of the Museum after a gestation of thirteen years. What may we say of this infant of a year? First, that all who assisted at the delivery and have cared for it since feel immense and justified pride; second, that the new arrival has been greeted by the public with great warmth and affection, ensuring that it has flourished and become part of the community.

In the first six months nearly 2000 came, and the total for the year is over 4000. These are remarkable figures when it is remembered that in the first period we were open for only eight hours a week, increasing to ten since the summer. Many nationalities are represented in the Visitors Book. The Mayor, Councillor Eleanor Stanier, visited us in the spring, and we hope to welcome Councillor Douglas Orchard soon.

One hot July day brought The Georgian Group on a tour which had started at Pope's Grotto, went on to St Mary's Church and ended at Orleans House Gallery - except for one tireless lady who insisted on seeing the York House Gardens statues as well before returning to London. Among other parties have been The Fulwell Bus Depot Retirement Club, The Richmond Local History Society and The Wives Fellowship.



The Volunteers

From the beginning it was evident that the Museum could function only if enough people would give their time to be present during opening hours. Two volunteers would be needed for each two hour shift, one at the front desk, one roving. The first group came forward from the Borough of Twickenham Local History Society, and the task of organising this body of stalwarts was willingly undertaken by our newest

trustee, Geoffrey Morgan. There are now forty five volunteers, making possible the extra Sunday session.

The importance of Geoffrey's contribution cannot be overstated. His powers of persuasion and his concern for the welfare of volunteers and visitors alike are by now the stuff of legend. Many visitors return, and not the least of their reasons must be the cheerful welcome they invariably receive from Geoffrey and his volunteers. We thank them all.

The Exhibitions

(1) Our first display, which opened in January after a pre-Christmas trial, was of a fine collection of pictures, plans and old photographs of the Borough put together and presented by another trustee, John Sheaf. This immediately established the popularity of the Museum, and when the time for change arrived many regretted its passing, but the material will reappear from time to time.

(2) Villages on the River

By the invaluable efforts of Kathy White we secured support from the Heritage Lottery Fund ('Local Heritage Initiative') to defray the cost of mounting the second exhibition.

This enabled the preparation of 'story-boards' conveying the history of the constituent parts of the old Borough, its great houses, and the lives of its past inhabitants. These were beautifully designed by Sally Lace (whose husband Simon is Curator of the Museum of Richmond) from pictures and text supplied and written by John Sheaf and Tony Beckles Willson. They present a large amount of information in a beguiling way, and the text reappears in the catalogue ('Villages on the River') which includes an account of the construction and history of 25 The Embankment.



The Display Cases

To avoid the great expense of conventional museum display cases, specially designed acrylic tops were mounted on base cupboards obtained from 'Remploy', but this was not all that had to be done; objects to be displayed included not only those from our own collection but material lent by the Museum of London, fruit of relations skilfully developed by Kathy White. Stringent requirements were laid upon us as to the conditions under which their material might be shown. Objects must lie on hand-washed and ironed calico, covering low density fibreboard sealed with aluminium foil. Emissaries from the M of L brought us their treasures and found our arrangements to their satisfaction. Freda Hammerton, whose forbears lived in the house, has lent some interesting family items.

The Museum Website

The Museum is small, and our ambition to become a focus for interest in the old Borough is large. Hence our gratitude to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for a generous grant which is enabling us to create the Museum's website. This resource, a 'Virtual Museum', will be complementary to the physical displays in the house and accessible from anywhere in the world.

The website information, both pictures and text, will include a 'timeline' covering our history from AD 704, abstracts describing People, Places and Events, links to other websites, photographic records covering our history, and visual tours of the area following themes of specific interest.

Our computer facility has made it possible to scan and store much pictorial information, including that used for the displays in the current exhibition. We shall be able to present rotating slide displays of this material in due course.

The team led by John Bowling, our Computer Consultant, and Sarah Mallen of System Simulation Ltd, both local residents, includes a number of contributors and has been working on the project since last spring. We expect to make the work publicly available early in 2003.

The Party

On July 18th a party was held in St Mary's Garden of Remembrance by kind permission of the Vicar, the Revd Jeffrey Hopkin Williams. A marquee erected for

us by St Mary's 13th Twickenham Scout Group was decorated by Jean Cranswick. The guests numbered a hundred and fifty and included volunteers, donors and others who had supported us.

We were celebrating the foundation of the Museum and the opening of its first formal exhibition. It was an altogether remarkable occasion, deemed by some "the party of the year". The Chairman thanked those who had come, saying that while many people had earned our gratitude the Museum would not exist but for two people: the late Jack Ellis who had bequeathed us his estate, and Tony Beckles Willson who had led from the beginning and helped us overcome all difficulties.



The Mayor, Councillor Douglas Orchard, then made a short speech welcoming the Museum and posed for his photograph astride a penny-farthing bicycle. A good account of the event by Gail Hébert appeared in the Richmond and Twickenham Times.

Other Special Days

When the door opened on July 13th the new exhibition was greeted by a merry crowd in assorted headgear; Graham Bugby, son of active volunteers Derek and Enid, rode around on his penny-farthing and Bernard King's mock early cinematograph camera drew much attention. Barry Skinner made a fine 'Museum Open' notice.

On September 21st, Heritage Open Day, the press release announced: "free lollipops all round for those kids who take an easy-to-follow history trail" constructed by Harriet Bachrach, and a "bottle of champagne for the oldest visitor". The ninety visitors that day included three nonagenarian ladies, each of whom received a bottle from Tom Hutchinson, new licensee at 'The Fox'. For serious students of local history Dick Cashmore and Tony Beckles Willson were on hand to answer questions, and there was a

computer-generated video presentation of pictures from the Museum's collection. Outside, village stocks awaited miscreants.

25 The Embankment

The house is easier for the less agile to enter now that, at our request, the Council's Highways Management Group has levelled and slightly raised the pavement around the Museum steps. Our grant from Bridge House Estates will pay for the sturdy and elegant iron hand rails at the entrance and on the stairs made for us by Guy Hardern of Rushworth Sculpture, on Eel Pie Island. A bespoke bookcase is being made for us by another local craftsman, Nicholas Dyson, to house the collection of early Pope editions bequeathed by Mrs Margaret Butt, widow of the eminent Pope scholar John Butt. An acrylic sheet now protects the motley collection of old coloured wallpapers on the back of the partition by the front door. This was kindly put up by a friend of Jean Cranswick, Stewart Marsden, husband of Sarah whose catering for our party was of such a high order.



Finance

Our financial position has significantly strengthened this year thanks to donations by our patron Pete Townshend matched by Trevor Sutton, but fund-raising is still necessary if we are to increase the endowment fund to a level from which the income will cover foreseeable recurrent expenditure.

We are sorry to learn of the death of Miss Elizabeth Dumbell, a neighbour of Dick Cashmore and a supporter of the Museum over several years. She made generous financial donations but also gave us artefacts of considerable interest which have not yet been exhibited. We have received a very welcome anonymous donation of £1000 in her memory.

We were pleased to receive £500, matching an earlier donation, from our solicitors, Kagan Moss & Co.

A year ago we had still not heard from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, but have since received their grant of £20,000 to provide electronic public communication in the interests of education (see The Museum Website above). This has enormously increased the range of our activities and we are extremely grateful. We are indebted to Bridge House Estates for funding improvements in accessibility, and to the Local Heritage Initiative for supporting our current exhibition.

Our stall at the Twickenham Green May Fair brought in a welcome £342, and Tony Beckles Willson's book on Pope's Grotto continues to earn us about £300 a year. Tours of Pope's Grotto on open days and for groups have also earned £300 this year.

Management

We are sad to report that our honorary treasurer for the past seven years, Trevor Sutton, has found it necessary to resign from the trusteeship on personal grounds. He arrived at a time when our funds were low and we had to deal with the complications of

gross speculation by Jack Ellis's lodger, who then relentlessly challenged the Will. We were involved in recurrent expensive litigation. Favourable judgements tipped the cause our way, and once we were in possession of the house Trevor played an active part in clearing it, selling the mountain of stuff it contained and helping in its restoration.

We shall unfortunately also lose the services of Anne Sutton, who has been our excellent minutes secretary for the past three years. We thank them both for their part in our present success, and are delighted to welcome Colin White as our new treasurer and Mair Graham as our secretary.

We seem to be in tranquil waters, and believe that the time has come to improve management by forming an executive committee who will tackle such matters as strategy, fund-raising, accessioning, and future exhibitions. A first step has been taken with the acceptance by Suzannah Herbert and Ralph Cox of responsibility for certain aspects of house management.

Donald Simpson

Though he had no chance to become active in the Museum, it is fitting that we should join in mourning the doyen of local historians. Had he not suffered grievous injury six years ago there is little doubt that Donald would have become a source of strength and inspiration to us.

Opening times

We are open on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 11.00am - 3.00pm and Sundays from 2.00pm - 4.00pm. Special visits can be arranged for organised groups on other days and times.

Voluntary help

The museum is managed entirely by voluntary support from the community. If you would like to help on a regular or occasional basis please get in touch. Talk to one of the volunteers at the museum, or ring Geoffrey Morgan on 020 8894 3858. Or write to us at:

The Twickenham Museum
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or telephone during opening times:
020 8408 0070