

**Agenda item 6b Friends of Blake Museum
Chairman's Second Quarterly Report to the Bridgwater Town Council
November 2009**

2:1) Visitors to the Museum

From 5 July (the date the last statistics were compiled) to 5 November the museum has been open for 86 sessions (total 516 hours), and the gardens have been open for refreshments for 4 Sunday band concerts. During that time there have been 1827 visitors (1525 adults and 302 children) an average of just over 21 per day. The last month the average was 23. One in six of our visitors is a child. The average daily total for the whole of 2007, the last year for which SDC kept analysed statistics, was 21. This figure included a number of school parties and since we have not had any this year, it indicates that we are getting more casual visitors than before, and the total number can be expected to rise once school visits begin.

The cumulative total since the museum opened on 20 May is therefore 2634 visitors (2202 adults and 432 children).

2:2) Some visitors' comments

Great – will be back. *Jo'Burg RSA*

A wealth of information here. *Taunton*

Good improvements. *Patagonia*

Interesting collection. *Trinidad & Tobago*

Great visit – well worth the trip. *Brisbane Australia*

Really super to see all the new layouts. *Bridgwater*

Very interesting, merci. *Isere France*

Great improvements - we love it. *Bridgwater*

Fascinating history beautifully presented. *Church
Gresley Derbyshire*

Great - kids loved it. *Bridgwater*

Remarkable achievement. *Perth W Australia*

V interesting. Congratulations on new downstairs. *Bridgwater*

Well done - a credit to you all. *Shaftesbury*

A brilliant museum – we'll return. *Minehead*

2:3) Exhibitions

Temporary exhibitions have been held about Bridgwater buildings and the Chubb collection, using existing resources, and an exhibition has been hosted about italic handwriting for everyday use. A display of the work of the Wembdon Art Group and an exhibition about the Bridgwater Choral Society were held in October. In early November an exhibition of photographs of historic carnival costumes was put on. In May next year an exhibition is scheduled about the Bridgwater-built SV *Irene*.

2:4) Display team

The new committee is in the process of establishing a display team to refurbish old displays and devise new ones. Ms Natalie Watson, Hon. Curatorial Advisor has provided a mass of valuable information about this.

2:5) Research

A small number of research queries have been received and dealt with satisfactorily. There have been very few requests for reproductions of images.

2:6) Talks

The Museum has hosted talks given by the Museum Friends, the Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society, and the Bridgwater Civic Society.

2:7) Museum objects

A number of objects have been donated to the Museum. These have included local business records, medals, photographs and china. It has been gratifying to see the obvious pride the donors have in the history of Bridgwater and the villages in the Museum.

2:8) Volunteers

Volunteer numbers have increased, and every Monday there is a working party engaged in maintenance and construction work. In addition, volunteers come to sort images to be sent for scanning and others come regularly to caption scanned photographs. A number of scans are being placed on the web site. Others sort and check the collection against the catalogue. A number of university students have assisted with this work in the summer vacation and others come as part of their course work for the International Baccalaureate from Bridgwater College. Efforts have been made recently to strengthen the number of custodians who welcome visitors. Other volunteers have recently come forward to manage the garden on a more active basis.

2:9) Publicity

Three editions of the *Blake News* have been published during the quarter, and the Friends' website is updated weekly with news of progress. A volunteer is responsible for the design and production of the Museum's print needs. The Museum occasionally is mentioned in news stories in the *Bridgwater Times* and the *Bridgwater Mercury*, but the coverage generally is very disappointing. The Museum also featured in the online travel section of the *Daily Telegraph*, as one of the top 20 Somerset Heritage sites.

2:10) Accreditation

A number of volunteers was involved in helping to prepare the documentation for the recent Accreditation.

2:11) Fund Raising

At the time of writing this report the Friends had raised over £1300 from members of the Blake family towards the cost of a hearing aid loop system for the Meeting Room.

2:12) Learning

No schools have responded to our invitation to make use of the Museum's resources, though a party did arrive unannounced; they were not, however, admitted, as having made no booking, no risk assessment had been prepared and no-one was on hand to deal with them. Another attempt will be made shortly to interest schools in what we can offer them, and plans are in hand to devise activities based on the archaeological collection. Eight or nine volunteers have received their successful results of the Enhanced CRB checks.

We are very heartened by the response we have had from local sixth form colleges for either small groups or individuals who are coming regularly to work on the collections. Some come as part of their International Baccalaureate, and others to gain valuable experience towards obtaining a University placement next year.

Learning Coordinator Mrs Kay Robins travelled to London on the 22nd October to the National Gallery where she was able to learn about a project called "Take One.....Picture". We are in the process of contacting several schools in our locality to take this idea forward. It will be a wonderful chance to work with school groups and encourage participation. The portrait we are going to use is the one of Bridgwater-built SV Irene. We have secured funding for this of £2,310 from the County Museum Heritage Service..

2:13) CIO/Museum Trust

When the Museum was transferred to the Town Council in Spring 2009, it was with transitional funding with a view to forming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation or Trust to run the Museum and a separate one for the Mill (TC minutes March 2009 ref 94/08 and April 2009), and Museum sub Committee meeting 18 May 2009, minute 10. It should be noted that legislation to establish Charitable Incorporated Organisations is not expected to reach the Statute Book until Spring 2010.

Further to the Memorandum of Understanding between the TC and the Friends, (published 19 August 2009), the Friends committee considered on 29 September 2009 a report from David Sebborn about the suggested options for the Trust. A working party from the new committee has been set up to liaise with the Town Clerk during the winter with a view to tabling firm proposals for discussion during the New Year.

2:14) New Friends' Committee elected at the AGM, 13 October 2009

The numbers have been increased to strengthen the Committee's management role.

The Officers and Committee for the next year are:

Bryan Gillard (Chairman), Chris Leigh (Vice Chairman), Bernice Lashbrook (Secretary), Ian Boyer (Treasurer), and Charlotte Edmonds, (Shop Manager), Nick Wallace, (Programme Secretary), John Willcocks, (Talks publicity), Tony Woolrich (Newsletter editor and Webmaster).

Co-opted non-voting members are:

Paul Berryman, John Robins, Kay Robins, Maggie Sampson. The committee has powers to add to this number during the year as appropriate.

Bryan Gillard/Tony Woolrich 7 November 2009