

**Friends of Blake Museum  
Chairman's Third Quarterly Report to Bridgwater Town Council  
February 2010**

Almost the whole of the time in this quarter has been spent in Shut-Down, with Friends and other volunteers heavily involved in refurbishment or curatorial work.

**3:1) Refurbishment The main jobs have been to:**

- Insulate the Museum Roof (Contractors)
- Re-tile the mill and make weather-tight for conversion into a Museum store, mainly of artefacts from Colley Lane (Contractors plus volunteers) This is on-going and is planned to be finished during May.
- Sort out rain-water drains.
- Guttering repairs.
- The fire and intruder alarm-system was converted to wireless operation of instead of being hard-wired. (Contractors)
- Re-paint room 4 (The Old Blake Room) for conversion into a new Museum Gallery. A new fire door was fitted by contractors.
- Complete the painting of the meeting room. New shutters to the second window will be installed by contractors during March.
- Repaint the Gallery and the upper landing.
- Install a partition to the store adjoining the Archaeology Room.

All the above have involved extensive electrical work and the installation of a hot-water heating system. In addition, a number of minor works have been done elsewhere in the building.

Work planned to be finished by the time the Museum re-opens at the end of March, will include:

- The installation of a hearing-aid loop system (funded by an appeal to the Blake family) and a carpet in the Meeting Room.
- The laying out of the lower garden with plants in tubs and rose-beds (Funded by the Friends) and a metal fence along the Brook.
- Contractors to fix a leaking roof above the Gallery.
- After the Museum opens, once the frost has gone, the boundary wall of the raised bed in the upper garden will be rebuilt.

**3:2) Curatorial**

In parallel with the refurbishment, a team of Friends and other volunteers has been working on the collection, mainly cataloguing. This has included:

- Making an inventory of the contents of the picture store and drawing up a list of items recommended for disposal.
- Making an inventory of the contents of all the archive boxes we have in store in advance of starting work to re-organise the Museum's Catalogue database. A similar exercise will need to be done for the objects held in boxes in store, and for the un-accessioned material we have. This is likely to be a continuous process over several years.
- Identifying and captioning scanned photographs, also a continuous process.
- Listing names and other details from a file of newspaper cuttings of the local fallen of World War One.
- Revising an existing Museum catalogue relating to Maritime matters with a view to putting it on the Museum's website.

**3:3) Displays**

Temporary Exhibitions have been arranged for 2010 about: How we used to vote – Election corruption in Bridgwater in the C18 and C19; The Ketch *Irene*, the last Bridgwater-built sailing vessel and The Bridgwater Way of Death – the cemeteries; Carnival. The Dockside Daubers have booked the Gallery for an art display.

New displays will be mounted in Room 4, (the old Blake Room) of local geology; large archaeological remains; the Gaol bells and Bronze Borough seals. A series of water-line sailing ship models will be taken from store and displayed in the Maritime room, and the Docks model will be fitted with miniature LED lights operated by push buttons so features can be highlighted.

**3:4) Research queries:**

Various queries have been received and dealt with, including a paid commission for a forthcoming BBC programme.

**3:5) Museum objects:**

A number of objects have been accepted for the Museum's collection, including a set of 35mm negatives of building developments round the town in the 1970s and 1980s. More are likely from this source. 4 different sets of images of Bridgwater on CD have been received – 2 by purchase and 2 by gift. There are Edwardian postcards and other historic images, as well as more modern material mainly about buildings. The historic material is later than the photographs from the

Museum collection that were scanned last year. There are some duplicates and weeding is in progress. Once completed, the images will be grouped by theme - Blake Gardens, shipping and docks, etc. Curiously, there is nothing on modern Carnival.

An engraving of Robert Blake was loaned to the two-month-long exhibition 'Hidden Treasures of Somerset' at the Rural Life Museum, Glastonbury.

### **3:6) Learning**

As was noted in the last Quarterly Report (section 2:13) no requests were received for school visits despite the fact that over 100 local schools were sent invitations to make contact during the shut-down period. However, we now have three group bookings once we have re-opened – two from Primary schools and one Brownie Pack. Risk Assessment visits by the leaders are being arranged.

The Learning Coordinator has already attended two courses sponsored by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. One covered the new regulations regarding the protection of children, the other covered the new Learning Programme for Primary Schools which is designed to encourage teachers to use a cross-curricular approach to teaching methods. This information will enable her to plan for future visits. On 1 March she will attend the first Somerset Voluntary Sector Assembly – What's in Store for Somerset, to be held in Taunton.

On 23 January, we held a one-day symposium for teachers called "Take One Picture". The project originated from the National Gallery and is now being used nationally by museums as a means of getting schools involved with their local museum. The day was funded by the Community & Heritage Office for Somerset. Nine teachers attended, and eight Museum volunteers were on hand - some making presentations to them and others helping behind the scenes on catering duties. The picture we used as the focus for the day was the painting of the *S V Irene* which is on display in the museum. We are hoping that the teachers will have taken up the opportunity to undertake the project with the children and will work together with us to produce work to be displayed in an exhibition in the museum in May.

### **3:7) Visitors**

Since shut-down began a week after the previous report was written, the very small number of visitors then is statistically insignificant. (See section 2:1) A handful of people have visited during shut-down with research queries.

### **3:8) Volunteers**

The policy of continuing with curatorial work in parallel with refurbishment has meant that on any one day there have been regularly 6-8 volunteers in the building. The spell of snow and ice in January meant that some volunteers found it impossible to leave their homes. At no time, however, were there any days then when the Museum was closed due to lack of volunteers. During March, several training days will be held for Custodians and Key Holders.

On the 19 & 20 February, volunteers from the museum were on hand in Angel Place Shopping Centre for Community & Heritage Days along with other local museums and the Bridgwater Garrison. The idea was to promote the museum and to try to recruit more volunteers. The event was deemed to have been a success as there was a lot of interest shown by the public. We hope for positive results in due course.

We are taking steps to increase the pool of volunteers, particularly those committed to key-holding and administration.

### **3:9) CIO/Museum Trust**

Some work has been done drawing together background information for the team to consider, but the problem is identifying suitably qualified people with the necessary skills and commitment who might be approached.

### **3:10) Fund Raising.**

The Friends raised £320 at the Christmas Fayre on 5 December and received a donation of £500 which went towards the cost of restoring the damaged Blake portrait. The Friends have agreed to donate £1500 in the 2010-2011 financial year towards the cost of a portable display case and conservation supplies.

Bryan Gillard/Tony Woolrich. 23 February 2010.