

Hythe Museum Trustee Report November/ December 2023

The museum continues to provide a wonderful opportunity to celebrate Hythe's heritage as well as show case the town to locals and visitors.

This year many hours have been spent dealing with the contents of the boxes in the first of the two museum stores. Items have been cleaned, recorded, and wrapped, and then organised in themes rather than the previous mixed manner. Many of these artefacts have been logged manually and await transfer to a computerised system. Overall, in the order of two thousand items have been dealt with in this way over the last year.

In February, the John Button Room was cleared of its contents (the four large display books and wall displays). The objects held within the books and the information presented on them was removed. Some items have been retained for use in the 'new' room which is anticipated to be complete (or near complete) by the end of 2024.

The room was redecorated and re-carpeted and will include new display cases providing the opportunity to bring items (currently in storage) into public view (alongside photographs, posters, advertisements, post cards and further information boards).

Contents of the first storeroom which are considered suitable for display have gradually been moved to the John Button Room and organised in groups for future presentation. Overall, several hundred items have been brought out of storage to be used to present the history of Hythe from c1800 to the present day. Themes being considered include the Fire

Brigade, Education, Dr Randall Davies, Portex, Civic events, World War 1 and World War 2, Lord Wakefield, transport, leisure, entertainment, and sport.

The next stage is for display cases to be designed and purchased so that the items can be well-presented and accompanied by fresh information boards. Plans for the room also include a small number of interactive activities suitable for a range of age groups and needs.

In addition to all this work the sudden leak in one of the museum store rooms in November required immediate action and the removal of all the boxes from the store into the Curator room and Meeting room. We now await roof and ceiling repairs before the contents can be returned and shelved. Unfortunately such an event undid all the organisation and shelving of boxes earlier in the year and took time away from work on the John Button Room. Fortunately, there was only a little damage to the boxes and only a few were damp. In most cases the contents had been protected by the wrapping carried out months before. Some metal items had started to rust and required cleaning. Overall, only three display boards were made useless for future use.

The collection and current displays

From May through to August a special Coronation display was set up in the museum (including the Order of Service from Queen Victoria's Coronation in 1837 which is in the museum collection). Over this time visitors were encouraged to hunt for Coronation symbols hidden around the rooms.

From August there has been a display of treen – wood items - in the museum store which have not been on show for at least fifty years.

Contacts and correspondence

The year began with the curator being informed of a change of direction concerning the museum having a long-term loan of St Leonard's school logbooks. Although the Diocese had stated that it wished to receive the books for its archives in Canterbury, the Vicar decided that they should (instead) be held on long-term loan (and display) with the museum collection.

As with previous years a considerable amount of correspondence has taken place with individuals; from those researching local history to others asking for information about their family. In May the museum loaned some of its Horton items to Hythe Civic Society which contributed to their highly successful display about the life and photography of Benjamin Horton.

Over the last twelve months meetings have been held with members of the Hythe Civic and the Lyminge Historical Societies, members of the Griggs and Tournay families as well as a number of local World War 2 'evacuees.

Once again, the museum was kindly lent a range of Coronation memorabilia from Marie McGuinness. It is hoped that documents associated with the recent Coronation of King Charles will be loaned by Cllr Jim Martin to form part of our Cinque Ports and Royal collection.

Contact was once more made with people living in the towns and villages in South Wales to which many of the children in Hythe were

evacuated in June 1940. This is an on-going project which should be completed by 2025, to commemorate the move of over 250 children from Hythe 85 years ago.

Purchases, donations, and loans

Over the twelve months several small purchases have been made to increase and broaden the range of items held by the museum. This part of curatorship over the last four years has helped enhance the museum's display opportunities immensely. Specific items have included a World War 1 teetotum, a 1920 anatomy atlas, an Edwardian stethoscope, Castrol advertisement posters and Civil Defence and Home Guard badges. These are in addition to postcards, newspapers, photographs, medals, coins, and Coronation pieces to name but a few.

Sadly, donations made to the museum by members of the public remain few, many preferring to sell objects which were once part of the history of Hythe. On occasions we are still told that people have simply disposed of items, not thinking the items would be of historical interest!

Even so, there have been some gifts in the last few months which have been gratefully received and helped boost the collection. These have included a baby's gas mask, a 1940s Christmas toffee tin, a 1960s portable record player and a 1970's 'teas made', late Victorian samplers, a copy of the Joe Pilcher Romney Marsh photograph collection and a significant number of 1940's toys from Dudley Shipton.

One of the most notable donations of the year was two local signpost arms from about the 1930s. Although requiring some repair, these will be able to form a very important part of the planned transport display in the John Button room in the future.

Repairs and restoration

A fire bucket, kindly loaned by Cllr. Stephen Bailey was repaired in September as were a couple of silver cups which were found in one of the stores - both will form part of the new displays in the John Button room when it is complete.

Events and activities

The museum continues to be an important venue for those involved in the 'Wheels of Time' small museum scheme. The popularity of Hythe as a museum is two-fold: first, that the museum is open each day of the week (apart from Sunday), and second, that entry is free.

In order to collect together as much information and guidance as possible for the reorganisation of the John Button Room, the Curator has visited several museums around Kent and met with their Curators who have been involved in the design and lay-out of their displays as well as the purchase of modern cases. Visits have included Lydd Town Museum, The Fleur de Lis and Magna Carta display in Faversham, Kent Police and Folkestone Museums.

Publicity / Marketing

During 2023 the Museum Facebook page was used to promote the Coronation display as well as publicise this year's Christmas exhibition. The website was updated with information about exhibitions and items held by the museum.

Footfall

Members of the public make good use of the museum especially when passing to and from the library. Although there is no formal count it frequently proves to be the case that when the Curator is working in the museum, locals and visitors to Hythe are found looking at items on display and prepared to discuss their visit. Some remark that they have begun to regularly return as they are pleased to see presentations changing on a regular basis.

Membership

The museum continues to belong to the Museums and Library Services of Kent ensuring the curator is aware of development opportunities and means of support along with other museums throughout the county.

The museum also remains a member of Kent's "Wheels of Time" scheme. Hythe is now one of over fifty small museums (www.wheelsoftime.uk) encouraging visits from families from all over Kent to visit the group of museums involved and collect badges.

Future displays and exhibitions

Following the success of the last two Christmas hunts for seasonal items in the display cases, a different activity is to be set up this year with a focus on toys from Hythe's Christmas past. It is hoped that this will encourage further interest and footfall over the holiday period.

One Year Plan:

- To install new display cases in the John Button Room
- To exhibit items in the new display cases for the period 1800 to the present day, illustrating the history of Hythe
- To re-open the John Button Room (by the end of 2024 or early 2025)
- To write and purchase new information boards
- To research the possibility of introducing some interactive displays
- To continue to fill significant gaps in our collection (see below)
- To investigate and address any security and safety issues (should they be found) with regard to the display of firearms in the Military School part of the museum
- For repairs to the museum store to be achieved so that the collection can be returned to the room

One to Three Year Plan:

- Purchase manikins or better storage for costumes currently held in the museum store
- Purchase additional uniforms associated with the Small Arms School
- To better present the many medals held in the store
- To update displays in the first room, especially the information boards and improve access to some display cases.

Councillors remain very welcome to make contact in the year ahead to find out more if they wish to do so.

Kevin Bailey

November/ December 2023

On-going appeal

The museum collection still has significant gaps. We need to continue to appeal to Hythe residents for the donation or loan of any items relating to Hythe, including objects from shops and organisations around town, the Hythe to Sandgate tramway, the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway, Martello Towers, the Hythe lifeboat, sea fishing, Scouts and local sport, to name just a few.