

# BLAKE NEWS

## Summer 2011



Quite a lot has happened since the last issue of Blake News.

### SHUT DOWN

Work was done continuing the refurbishment, and included work on the heating and electrical systems as well as small repairs and decorating.

As well as this, work continued in parallel on the curatorial side with cataloguing. More photographs were scanned. A team from Bridgwater Carnival Committee spent much time working on the Museum's Carnival collection. A volunteer transcribed the records of a Bridgwater undertaker for the Wembdon Road Cemetery project. Another volunteer investigated local shipping from the Bridgwater Port Books the Museum holds.

The displays in the Blake and Bygones rooms were refreshed. The Blake ceramic made by Bridgwater children about 30 years ago was moved downstairs and modern illuminated display cases were fitted up in the Blake room.

The spaces under cases in the Bygones and Maritime rooms were fitted with matching cupboard doors, much increasing the amount of lockable storage space available in the Museum. Each cupboard is coded so the objects they contain can be correctly located in the catalogue.

Another task was to go right round the museum making explanatory captions for the artefacts. These are in a consistent typeface, and fitted in modern clear plastic holders, so presenting a clean up-to-date appearance. The Battle and Archaeology rooms remain to be done.

### Exhibitions

The season opened with an exhibition devised by Mr Ashley Hale on Romans in Somerset. This was followed in June and July on the Railways of Bridgwater. In the Gallery was an Exhibition on Bridgwater Castle and Medieval life. This was mounted as an adjunct to the Take One Picture ... Project, launched at the January Symposium.

Summer exhibitions are a brief one on the building stones of Bridgwater followed by one about the Westonzoyland Airfield.

A major coup is the dating of the Greylake Skulls to more than 10,000 years old. They were found in 1928 in a sandpit, in what must be the oldest cemetery burial in the UK. One of the skulls will be on display in the Museum from the end of July and will be unveiled by Mr Ian Liddell-Granger, our MP. This is part of the Festival of Archaeology.

Work is in hand devising an on-line exhibit about the Bridgwater Pageant of 1927. This was sparked off by the discovery on-line of a five-minute newsreel about it. The Museum holds the Pageant minute book, a costume and other objects. News cuttings and photographs were found at the Heritage Centre, Taunton.

### New artefacts

The Museum has recently been given a splendid model of a River Parrett barge. This is being restored and will be cased for exhibition in the Maritime Room.

A scale model has been commissioned to a scale of 1:24 (½ in to the foot) of Blake House, as Robert Blake would have known it. It will be cutaway to show the inside of the rooms, which will be kitted out with appropriate model furniture.

Models have been bought of the *Bridgwater Castle* and *Robert Blake* steam locomotives. These will form the nucleus of a small railway collection.

The Museum has been given two attractive watercolours of St Matthew's Fair. These are being framed. They will probably be the theme of next year's Take One Picture ... project.

### An addition to the Photographic Collection

The Museum has just acquired the balance of the Douglas Allen-Don Smith negatives. They now cover 45 years between 1954 and 1999 and contain over 15,000 negatives. The collection is stored in rooms in the Town Hall where there is space to work on them.

A link to the Museum's new online photograph page is overleaf. This is linked to a PayPal account and will allow people to purchase copies of the prints.

### Annual General Meeting

A reminder that the AGM takes place on Tuesday 11 October. Please consider becoming a member of the Committee. Talk to Nick Wallace about it.

### VOLUNTEER VACANCIES

In order that the Museum can operate, there are a number of vital administrative posts that need to be filled.

#### 1) Learning Co-ordinator

**Kay Robins is resigning as from the next AGM and we are looking for a replacement.**

The Learning Co-ordinator is the link between the museum and potential group bookings for visits. In the main requests are received from local schools, as well as Brownies, Cubs, Scouts and adult societies and associations. The museum closes for 'shut-down' between November and March, therefore very little, if any, activity in terms of group visits can take place during this time. However, this does not mean that I am not doing anything!

Groups usually contact the museum and my home number is given. I do not spend much time in the museum unless I need to be there (sometimes for meetings or over-seeing a visit). Most of my work is done from home contacting people by e-mail. I give the group organiser a Booking Form – we now charge £2 a head for groups with a maximum of 30 in the group. I agree a date for the visit and

note the museum diary, checking that nothing else is on the same date! We sometimes have requests for evening visits (not schools) so this means opening up the museum after normal closing time. Also, you need to get in the volunteers willing to do the tour at this time. Sometimes the group wants to cover a particular period of history e.g. the battle of Sedgemoor, or they may want a general look round. I choose volunteers to suit. The Bridgwater Garrison help us. We hold temporary exhibitions and this will attract visitors.

I also liaise with Dr Peter Cattermole and Tony Woolrich in the organisation of the annual Take One :Picture ... symposium for local teachers. This is held in January, and past themes have been The Irene (2010) and Bridgwater Castle (2011). The 2012 theme will probably be Bridgwater Fair.

There are policies in place and ground rules set between the museum volunteers and Bridgwater Town Council (which currently finance the running of the museum with SDC). Copies of the policies can be found at [blake@bridgwatermuseum.co.uk](mailto:blake@bridgwatermuseum.co.uk) At the moment, all the 'learning' volunteers have current CRB certificates. The government is reviewing the situation to possibly relax legislation under the Independent Safeguarding Authority, but we have to wait for an update. The Learning Co-ordinator must have a CRB certificate.

Kay Robins (Learning Co-ordinator, Blake Museum)

## **2) Custodian Coordinator**

***Jane Woolrich is resigning from the end of the season and we are looking for a replacement. She writes:***

By the end of this year when we reach 'shutdown' I shall have been Custodian Co-ordinator for two seasons. I feel this is long enough; I have really quite enjoyed it – except when it has driven me up the wall! I have met so many really nice people and it has been a real pleasure to draw them into the successful running of the Museum.

To start with, there were many long-standing volunteers who helped me greatly from their experience, but we needed more, so I had to compose suitable letters to the local press to induce people to come to introductory meetings. The number and variety of those attending, and their enthusiasm, astonished and delighted me. Several have branched out into other jobs, and most still do custodianship as well.

It was necessary to train the newcomers, an interesting but tricky task considering they were all variously skilled in their own fields. But the job of 'front desk' is so important that definite rules have to be put over and emphasised, and the shop custodian job also has its own special needs.

People need to be persuaded to do a regular turn if possible, which does away with the need to keep ringing people up to ask if they are available. Since I can only get to the Museum once or twice a week this is the only way I can cope, and occasionally and inevitably there are sad lapses. I find my large duty chart a very helpful way of keeping a general overview.

I hope there is someone reading this who would be prepared to take on the job of Co-ordinator. I should of course be more than willing to give all the help I can.

## **3) Shop manager**

A vacancy for this exists. The job involves managing the shop and purchasing the stock. The daily sales are handled by the custodian team.

## **Museum training**

The SW Federation of Museums and Art Galleries have now announced this year's FREE training programme for the south west. This training programme is funded by Renaissance South West and the South Western Federation of Museums and Art Galleries (SW Fed). It is delivered by the SW Fed. and has been put together by the Training Sub-Committee based on feedback and needs identified via your MDO networks.

## **Somerset's Training**

This free training package includes five specific courses designed specifically for volunteers and staff in Somerset and North Somerset museums. They are being promoted as part of the SW Federation Museum Skills training programme, but have been funded as part of SSM project.

They have been developed following the training needs analysis undertaken last year as part of the Sustainable Somerset Museums project. Based on survey results, and one-to-one meetings with museums, this range of training days has been designed to provide museums with the training they need and want.

The courses on offer in Somerset are:

- Knowing Your Audiences
- Introduction to Marketing
- Creative Income Generation
- Practical Social Media
- Volunteer Management and Recruitment
- Planning for the Future: Easy Steps to a Forward Plan

Blake Museum has a priority booking for these courses as it took part in last year's SSM Project:

Since fund raising and increasing the volunteer base is vital to our future, the committee has identified **Volunteer Management and Recruitment, Introduction to Marketing and Creative Income Generation** as specially important, so please contact Bernice Lashbook via the Museum as quickly as possible if you wish to take part.

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## **Websites:**

Friends: [www.blakemuseum.org.uk](http://www.blakemuseum.org.uk)

Museum: [www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk](http://www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk)

Resources: [www.bridgwatermuseum.info](http://www.bridgwatermuseum.info)

Photographs: [www.bridgwaterphotos.org.uk/index.php](http://www.bridgwaterphotos.org.uk/index.php)