



The Dean Heritage Centre

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Centre Managers report

Dean Heritage Museum Trust AGM on 27th October 2016

Good Evening, thank you for joining with me and the team. We are all here this evening to hear about the Dean Heritage Museum Trust, its financial footing, and the changes and road ahead.

Before I talk about the Museum's future, I ask your patience whilst I explain a little about my history.

Born in the Dilke, I am a forester born and bred, but not of Forest blood. My family moved to the Forest in 1957 when my grandfather accepted a post as GP in Drybrook, working there until he retired, he birthed many Foresters, and saved many more.

A great friend of my grandfather called Basil Johnson was instrumental in the birth of the Dean Heritage Centre when he became president of the Forest of Dean Rotary Club. Here is an extract from his memoirs:

I became president in 1977, and as my project, I set about the daunting task of creating a forest Museum. I had been aware for some time that we were losing memories of life in the Forest and also artefacts when people died. It was a very ambitious venture, but I am pleased to say that after two years of hard work by many people we were in a position to launch the idea to the general public. A meeting was called at Speech House for this purpose, and was so well attended, not all who came could get in.

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Trustees: N Parkhouse; (Chairman); Edward Beard, Mary Dutson; Graeme Schrouder, Helly Barker & David Hawes*



And so the Dean Heritage Museum Trust was created with the support of the Forest community, local businesses, the rotary club and the Forest of Dean District Council

This wonderful area, rich in cultural heritage, is the place I am lucky enough to call home. I grew up with this rich cultural identity and also a sense that it was at risk of being lost, if I and my community did not fight to protect it. And so I feel privileged to be standing here before you tonight as the Centre Manager of this fantastic independent charitable organisation.

Since taking my post here, I have faced many truths about this organisation. I came in with fresh eyes. This Trust was borne out of this community- the Forest passion, spirit, fight and desire to retain our unique cultural identity. Today the dedicated team of staff and volunteers who run the DHC, do so with passion, courage and dedication.

The Trust, established in 1979, has become custodian of a heritage mill building, an accredited Museum with 20,000 cultural artefacts, and an Educational charity offering 23 workshops linked into the academic key stages of our schools' National Curriculum.

The trust employees 12 forest residents, including myself, who in total equate to just over four full time staff. A number of devoted volunteers from our community work alongside the staff to run the Centre's five-acre woodland site, open 363 days of the year- weather permitting.

On behalf of all the team of the DHC, I would like to express our gratitude to the many local businesses, organisations and individuals who have supported and worked with the DHC over the years.

History is a tool for learning, the Dean Heritage Museum Trust is proud of what has been achieved, and eager to step forward into a future that is sustainable. To do so, the Trust must take several measures – all of them will help us build our future; some of them will be challenging, and some of them will be difficult.

Firstly, at the beginning of this month, the Trust served a 12-month notice regarding the local business which runs the café at the DHC.

Although this has been a sad decision and process for all involved, the board and the team of the DHC understand that it is a necessary choice to benefit the long-term future of the Dean Heritage Centre.

Secondly, the DHC had a Service Level Agreement with the Forest of Dean District Council providing core funding towards the running costs. Owing to Government cutbacks, this income was gradually reduced, and ceased completely in 2014.

Our reserves are therefore being depleted by running costs exceeding income. Since October 2015, when I was appointed, running costs have been reviewed and dramatically reduced. There is now, however, little leeway to cut running costs further, if the museum's objectives are to be met.

So,.... we need to diversify our income streams to be less dependent on visitor numbers, which can be very variable. It is a key objective of the trust to develop a fund-raising strategy, increasing donations to the museum, and finding new sources of sustainable income. This is vital for us to become a sustainable museum with a balanced budget.

Thirdly, in the coming year we are involved in three exciting projects.

We have recently secured a grant of almost £5,000 from the Association of Independent Museums for a project to audit and increase the Trust's income from donations and other funding streams.

We have also been successful in applying to the Art Council's Museum Resilience Fund and we have been awarded nearly £72,000 over two years for a project titled 'focusing on the fundamentals'. This project will entail:

- improving the quality of visitor experience
- increasing our current income streams
- focusing on strategy and leadership
- strengthening the skills of the whole workforce
- improving our financial management and cost control

Our third project, part of the Foresters Forest project, concerns the Oral History of the Forest. The project will record the unique Forest dialect and the stories told that bring our history to life.

Now finally, before I hand you over to my colleagues, Nicola Wynn and then Joanne Clarke, I would like to return to the beginning - As a Child of this Forest and on behalf of future generations, I would now ask you to join with our team in support of the Trust and its objectives, and to help promote the long-term good of this most fantastic Forest Museum.