

Directors Report

Introduction

2019-2020 has been an extraordinary year. Like many heritage organisations, we had to close our doors in March and adapt quickly to a locked-down world. At the same time, we also received notification of our successful application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for our exciting new project, *The Next Chapter*. Needless to say, there have been ups and downs but we have faced challenges in the spirit of the 19th century scientists who founded the Institution in 1813, adapting and innovating our programme and services so that we have continued to flourish and connect with our members and supporters.

The Next Chapter

With a major grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, we look forward to working with our appointed architect, Marcus Chantrey, to create a welcome area, better access and upgraded facilities and to open up our front rooms and our garden space for events, reading and study. A conservation management plan and detailed survey drawings are currently in process, to aid us in our understanding of the site as a whole and plan for its ongoing conservation needs. Archaeologists will soon be appointed to dig a test pit in the side passage and we hope to replace the 20th Century lean-to structure with a new development, which will house new lavatories, workspaces, a lift and an environmentally controlled strong room for the most fragile and rare items in our collection. Repurposing all four front rooms in the 'south range' will enable us to offer an enhanced programme of activities for all ages and abilities, including events to promote Exeter's new status as a UNESCO City of Literature. In the Library we are planning a collection review to help us learn more about our heritage collections and to develop a long-term research strategy.

We are also committed to opening up our collections for new interpretation. This month we have welcomed our first Artist in Residence, Dr Ingrid Pollard. Ingrid is an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society and her work has been exhibited widely, including Tate Britain, Victoria & Albert Museum and Photographers Gallery, London; NGBK, Berlin; the Caribbean Cultural Centre, New York; the National Art Gallery of Barbados; and Camerawork, San Francisco. In 2019, she received the BALTIC Artist Award and was a recipient of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award. We are working in partnership with a new curating and producing practice *Talking on Corners*, and partners Libraries Unlimited, The Thelma Hulburt Gallery and the University of Exeter. Ingrid will be taking inspiration from our collection and site to create new works and a series of wide-ranging partnership events.

Collections Explorer

During lockdown, we launched our online Collections Explorer (18 months ahead of schedule) so that we could offer online access to collections during our temporary closure. Collections Explorer features prints and drawings from our digitisation project, 'Our Region Revealed: unlocking the treasures of the Devon and Exeter Institution Illustration Collection'. With the help of a new graphic arts scanner we are cataloguing and digitising our prints, drawings, photographs, and paintings, many of them unpublished, while preserving fragile collections for generations to come. We are looking to develop new ways of engaging with the collections and have exciting plans to encourage participation in the collection through research and learning and engagement activities. The images on Collections Explorer are available for purchase and download and all funds help the Institution to continue to deliver outstanding public education and essential collection care. The

project has been generously supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, The Pilgrim Trust and Friends of Devon's Archives.

Fundraising

We have been able to access the Heritage Emergency Fund to underwrite our loss of income from room hire and events over the past six months. This holds us in a relatively stable position this year but we are especially grateful to those members who are able to continue to support us with their membership, which is vital for maintaining the day-to-day operation of the Institution. We are now able to take contactless payments via the office and 'card not present' payments by phone. During lockdown we also launched a suite of new fundraising initiatives which aim to create community around collection care. Our revised Adopt a book scheme encourages all members to participate in the history of the Institution by adopting their favourite book, print or drawing, while our new Rescue a book scheme supports the conservation of 'endangered' books. This year we are prioritising important works of science and technology to support STEM learning and engagement. We also now offer adoption gift packages which include a free private tour of the Institution. More recently we have launched a stunning range of graphic art merchandise featuring artworks from our prints and drawings collection, including packs of Christmas cards, notecards and postcards. More details are available on our website and all cards can be purchased from the office. Designs include West Country watercolours by Edward Ashworth, stained-glass from Devon churches and Victorian trade cards of local businesses.

Facing the challenges of Covid-19

As we closed our doors in March, we began to think more creatively about how to continue to provide access to our historic collections and to deliver our learning and engagement programme. Plans to revitalise our website accelerated as we considered ways to divert our members and the wider public in online activities while our building was closed. Our programme of Isolation Creations included a broad range of at-home activities, including making activities and science experiments for Bookworms (our youngest members), online Read-a-longs, a research call-out, weekly virtual tours, and 'Books in isolation', a weekly blog highlighting treasures from across the collections. We continued our offer of daily newspapers and magazines to all members via a three-month complimentary access to PressReader. We also continued to offer a remote enquiry service, including searching Ancestry and the British Newspaper Archive on behalf of members. Our new-look monthly newsletter has enabled us to keep in touch with members and volunteers more regularly. We also continued our schools' outreach, live-streaming sessions to children still in education settings.

Welcoming our members back to the Institution

Our phased reopening began in July with two 'recharge days' a week. At the beginning of September, we opened five days a week, including Saturdays. Our small staff team have worked incredibly hard to ensure that the Institution is as safe as possible while remaining the familiar home-from-home that our members enjoy. We are fully compliant with the latest government guidelines for 'hands, face and space', and we continue to monitor the situation.

Our programme follows the rule-of-six; our collections and research facilities continue to be available two days a week by appointment; we have spaces for quiet study and reading, including the return of newspapers and magazines in the Outer Library, and the Courtenay Room has been reconfigured to offer refreshments. We have been able to hold socially-distanced workshops over the summer in the safety of our garden and our new external public tours have proved extremely

popular. We have resumed small-scale live programming on Saturdays and our Autumn Lecture Programme begins online soon.

Heritage Open Days

We celebrated our reopening during Heritage Open Days week (11 – 20 September) with a programme of creative activities for adults and children, including nature-themed activities in our garden, external tours of the site and workshops on botanical drawing. The West Quarter Research Group, which includes many of our volunteers, also published *A Snapshot in Time* – the fascinating story of two 15th century timber-framed houses and the families that occupied them. These events were fully booked and it was a joy to see participants and volunteers enjoying the September sun in our outdoor spaces. The Lord Mayor made a special visit to congratulate us on our project funding and to observe a children's workshop in the garden.

University Partnership

We continue to work closely with the University of Exeter and have partnered in the Global Lives module for the fifth year running. This module is an introduction to postcolonial theory and its application in heritage collections and a sample of the alternative blue plaques created will be shown in the forthcoming exhibition *In Plain Sight* at RAMM. We have welcomed several new student volunteers and interns and been supported by colleagues from across the university, in our response to the pandemic. Our current exhibition, *Eyes Wide Shut: German Dreams and Dreamers*, features prints by Caspar Walter Rauh (1912-1983), a post-war graphic artist and illustrator, and paintings by contemporary artist Steven Bramble, and is a collaborative partnership with the School of Languages. A conference on the early 19th century German literature which inspired these artworks is planned for next year.

Professional networks

We have coordinated our response to the pandemic and the ongoing recovery of our sector by working with our partners in the Independent Libraries Association, The Museums Association, Exeter Heritage Partnership, Exeter Culture, The Visitor Economy Recovery Group and the Cultural Recovery Group. We are grateful for this support and pleased to make an active contribution to the ongoing recovery of our city and region.

Finally...

During this difficult time, we are grateful for the encouragement and support of our staff team, our members and volunteers and our trustees. We have proved to be a resilient and strong-knitted community, even during a global pandemic. Thank you.

Emma Dunn – Director of Programme and Projects
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Devon and Exeter Institution