



## Museum Service Annual Report 2018/19

Despite a continued climate filled with uncertainty, 2018-19 was another successful year for the Museum and one that also set us on our course for the next five years.

The big headline is that we received over 62,000 visits to the Museum in the Park. This was far above the previous year total of 56,000 which itself was a small rise on the 'standard' 55,000 a year. Getting to the 60,000 mark has long been an unofficial target that many of us thought was possible. It is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the whole team and those closely involved with us that this has been achieved. I cannot emphasize enough that for a museum of this size that is a significant number. The following few years will tell us whether this was a unique year or a new standard

2018-19 saw the launch of our new Forward Plan (2018-2023). This is a stretching plan that will see the Museum build on past achievements. At its heart is the idea of increasing our engagement with audiences and building a closer relationship to deliver on our manifesto. The principle aims of the Forward Plan are:

1. Provide a user focused museum service that encourages engagement, ensuring the Museum in the Park is an important community focal point
2. To ensure we have a resilient and sustainable museum service
3. Manage, advocate and share the potential of the Collections for the benefit of our communities.

We retained Accreditation (a National Standard for Museums). The award reflects the high standard of practice we deliver across all three areas of Accreditation. This covers how we are governed and managed; how we provide services and facilities for users and visitors; and, how we care for and manage the collections.

We concluded the first phase of the membership/supporter scheme project in early 2019. This will be the most significant change in our engagement with audiences since the Museum in the Park opened. This work funded by an Arts Council England Catalyst Grant and delivered in partnership with the Friends of the Museum saw the production of a business case that demonstrated the viability of a museum run free-to-join scheme. In 2019-20 we will be working closely with the Friends of the Museum alongside investing resources to get this project to the next stage - enabling a further funding application for its delivery. At the heart of this project is the desire to have a deeper level of engagement and understanding with our users.

The Walled Garden continued to amaze and wow. Our volunteer garden team are doing wonders. The Garden was a Regional Finalist in the national Civic Trust Awards. It also acted as the 'main stage' for the first Stroud Shakespeare Festival. The Garden also led to the discovery of a largely unknown story of the Giant Snowdrop Company, which was based near Stroud in the 1950s/60s. Thanks to the support of a number of people we were able to have Giant Snowdrops in the Garden with an accompanying display telling the story in the Museum.





The Democracy Weekend in July highlighted the position of the Museum in the community for such events. As well as marking historical events at the heart of this country's culture, it presented the opportunity to work with colleagues from Democratic Services at Stroud District Council.

Whilst our focus has tended to be on the story of the people of the district, over time the mansion and estate have become 'objects' of interest in their own right. So it was with delight that a new local history book, 'Stratford Park and the Mansion House' was launched at the Museum. The book has been compiled and written at the request of the Museum, by Museum Trustee and local historian Marion Hearfield. This generously illustrated book uses research from the Museum collection and stories from people who lived or worked here. The book was jointly published by the Friends of the Museum and Stroud Local History Society.

In 2017 we undertook the first phase of the re-development of our shop; this has had a major impact on not just our income but also means the shop is more closely aligned with our engagement values expressed in our manifesto. We were therefore delighted to be able to embark on the second phase following a £500 grant from SW Museum Development. The outcome of this work is that gross income has increased by 60% over an 18 month period since the first phase of the redevelopment.

We launched a new website in January 2019. This step was taken to ensure our website can support our planned activities throughout the forward plan by adopting a more commonly used website development tool.

Towards the end of the year the Museum was successful in applying to take part in the SW Museum Development Business Diagnostic Programme Pilot. There are three stages: Self assessment, which identified work in the areas of audiences, working practices and collections. A review was undertaken of the Museum's Forward Plan - the Museum receiving excellent remarks. Thirdly, a facilitated session was held to discuss the outcome of the report. We will be working with SW Museum Development on the priority actions from this diagnostic which will form part of our work in the next year.

Whilst only a small snapshot, the above demonstrates how, through engagement near and far, we can continue to develop the museum to meet the needs of our present and future users.

**Kevin Ward**  
**Museum Development Manager**  
**Governing Body Approval: 29.07.19**

Our manifesto is to provide a museum service that encourages everyone who works, lives or visits the Stroud District to be proud of its past, present and future.

