

Exeter Historic Buildings Trust (EHBT)

Chairman's report for AGM 6th December 2019

Dear Members,

Thank you for your support over the last year. I apologise that I am unable to present my Chairman's report in person. I hope to resume a more active role next year.

The HLF Resilience Project

Judith Morgane has been manager of this project for just over a year. I would like to thank Judith for her efficiency and unbridled enthusiasm in delivering this important milestone.

Visitor and Community Programme

The total number of visitors including Sundays, tours, events, and performances to mid-November was 6427, out of which 640 were children. We have successfully exceeded our goals in engaging the public with these figures.

There is clearly a balance to be found between free events to widen our mandatory Community Engagement and money raising events to supply income. This balance is evolving.

We have put on a varied and popular programme of events including re-enactments, concerts, recitals, plays, children's programmes, and lectures.

Tudor cooking demonstrations on Sundays have proved popular. The informal lute playing has been much appreciated.

A highlight of the year was the remarkably atmospheric siege weekend run in conjunction with Commotion Times.

The Exeter City Red Coat Guides held their annual dinner in the Priory with a Tudor style banquet complete with minstrels and wandering entertainers.

We offered a school visit service in conjunction with the Exeter Cathedral Education Department but take up was disappointing with few school visits. School visits stay an important potential part of both our educational and community engagement. We are seeking ways to expand that activity.

Organising events takes experience, skill, expert marketing and time to deliver. The public clearly engage with much that we offer. We reach new groups of people with every event we put on and many of those visitors return to other events. We are gathering feedback and are setting up a baseline for future audience research.

The Lord Major came in procession to collect the baked loaf, which is the annual rent of the Priory. This has become an annual event that may develop with more pageantry.

Bookings

We have regular bookings for guided tours, but the uptake has been disappointing. We need to do more to promote these.

We have regular room bookings and hall hire. We have also moved our office to the West Wing and have now a dedicated conferencing space in the North Wing meeting room. We hope this will become a regular place for companies to hold their conferences, workshops and team-building days. Please spread the word that these facilities are available.

Fundraising and income generation

We have been successful in two bids: Garfield Weston have given us £30,000 and Viridor Credits £45,000 to support us in installing heating and community engagement. We have received a further two smaller grants towards community engagement from the Darlington Family Trust and the Veronica Awdry Charitable Trust.

We have developed a strategy for income generation, projection and recording.

Income generation is always a challenge. We try and keep the balance between free events and bookable ones, but we need to increase our corporate bookings. For this, breaking into the business community network could be a possible next step.

Condition Survey and Quinquennial Review

Joe Hibbert of Levitate Architects has delivered a comprehensive Condition Report and we now have a maintenance and repair schedule. We have improved the heating in the tenancies in the North Wing. We shall start to improve the heating in the West Wing this winter.

Volunteers

Our volunteer body has slightly increased in number. We now have some students involved in volunteering, and we have a garden volunteer team as well as our stewards. On behalf of the Trustees I offer huge thanks to all the volunteers. We simply could not run without you.

Membership

The number of members has grown to 95. This evening we might hit our target of 100, and next year 150.

Partnership

Amongst others, we work in partnership with Exeter Cathedral, the Devon and Exeter Institution, Tuckers Hall, RAMM, DEMS, Exeter City Council and the University of Exeter. We had two interns from university with us for a placement. We have recently started working on a major research project to be delivered by PhD students.

DEMS delivers regular handling session and contributes to our outreach programme.

We are hoping to engage an intern to help us with data entry and analysis.

We were part of the Heritage Haiku project run during Heritage Open Days in various heritage venues throughout the city and our visitors' contributions were performed on National Poetry Day.

Devon and Exeter Medical Society

The Devon and Exeter Medical Society Collection of over 12,000 ancient medical artefacts is now stored and partially displayed at the Priory. The volunteer curators have started the process of cataloguing and conserving the collection. Some notable donations to the Collection over the year include a 1905 X-ray tube, some early ECG machines, and a WWII portable anaesthetic machine.

DEMS intends to form a separate charity (Devon & Exeter Medical Museum - DEMM) to take over the Collection. Once the Collection is accredited as a museum, DEMM will be able to apply for grants and become financially self-sufficient.

We envisage DEMM taking an important part of our commitment to Health and Wellbeing community engagement.

Trustees

Over the last year, George Simpson, a very valued trustee, resigned. We gained a new trustee, Tamsin Holiday-Scott.

Working with our Resilience Evaluator, Diana Moore, we have in place a trustee succession plan. We have set responsibilities for individual trustees. As part of our Succession Plan, we are actively looking for new Trustees.

As planned, I shall be standing down as Chairman next year and I look forward to supporting my colleagues thereafter.

The Future

We are currently finalising our next three-year Business Plan. Income generation stays our focus. We also aim to make further capital improvements.

We shall embark on a Community Engagement programme based on a Wellbeing agenda.

We need to increase our staff compliment. We have started discussions with NLHF on a further grant application next September. We hope that we can report at next year's AGM success with this and confirm exciting years ahead. This is a consultative process and we ask tonight for your involvement with this in 2020.

Prof David Radstone
Chair
Exeter Historic Buildings Trust