

Appendix 3 – Farmland Museum Report



The Farmland Museum at Denny Abbey Report to South Cambridgeshire District Council 2018

Summary of the year so far:

The 2018 season opened on Sunday April 1st, Easter Sunday. The first event was the traditional short Easter Dawn Service at Denny Abbey at 6.30am. It was attended by about 35 people from the local churches and was broadcast live on BBC Radio Cambridgeshire. A somewhat bleary Chair of Trustees, who had been on site from 5.00am to look after the outside broadcast team, was interviewed after the service was over, which gave us added valuable publicity.

On April 16th HRH the Princess Royal visited us for an afternoon reception to celebrate 21 years of a successful partnership with English Heritage. This was a wonderful opportunity to get together many of the people who have been involved with the Museum and with Denny Abbey over the years. The sun shone and Her Royal Highness spoke to about 70 people. She seemed really interested in the Abbey and the Museum and in the people she met. The District Council was represented by the then Vice Chair of the Council Cllr Brian Burling, and his wife. It was a lovely afternoon which brought everybody together. It also resulted in another interview on BBC Radio Cambridgeshire.

The Museum and Abbey have been open to the public from Tuesday to Sunday and on Bank Holiday Mondays. Opening hours were increased slightly to compensate for the lost hours due to Monday closing. The season ends after the last special event (Pumpkins and Spooks) on Sunday 28th October. Schools and other groups will still be able to visit by arrangement and outreach talks and activities will still take place

It has been very disappointing that overall visitor numbers have been down on 2017 despite very hard work from staff and volunteers. There are two immediately identifiable contributory reasons for this. One is the national trend of fewer people going to museums and the other was the very hot weather in June and July. We have not yet tried to analyse whether the Monday closure affected the figures significantly but it seems probable that the other factors were more significant. An appreciable number of visitors did arrive during the extra hours the museum was open on the other days which would have helped to compensate for loss of a whole day. There have been some very positive comments from visitors who have come. Facebook comments include:

"It is a beautiful place, welltended and fascinating. Very worth a visit or three. Seems to be not very well known, which is a shame, and puzzling. The Abbey is lovely and exudes history. The museum part is interesting, the Walnut Tree Cottage is so pretty, and the little cottage garden is wonderful. That place is a true gem!" May 2018

"Visited here last year during the Denny Time Machine event. We had lots of fun at the event and also looking round the museum and abbey. Highly recommend for a good day out." August 2018

"we had a fantastic day. our first experience today and despite the weather we all had a great day. would recommend this place to anyone. Suitable for families and children, young adults with special needs or mobility problems. We could have spent all day exploring. We will be back" August 2018

Visitor numbers 2018 compared with 2016 and 2017

	2016	2017	2018
April	865	1399	1231
May	1401	1270	1225

June	881	1021	774
July	1392	1432	1024
August	1878	2119	*1713
September	910	1025	811
Total	7327	8266	6778

(*Had it not rained hard for the Sunday of the August Bank holiday weekend then it is highly likely that the August figure would have been much closer to the August 2016 figure – with reasonable weather we would have expected something over a hundred visitors, the actual number was about 20 very brave souls)

These figures do not include the numbers for the Twilight event and Family Activity afternoon during February half term or the people encountered during outreach activities such as talks and public events which add up to about 700 in all. This year these have included talks to groups at Teversham and Fen Drayton and stands at the Haddenham Steam Rally, Shuttleworth Museum and at a textile festival in Waterbeach (where one of our rag rugs was displayed). The Museum will have a presence for the three days of the Ely Harvest Festival in October. There have also been visits to schools to give assemblies or run activities and there are several more assemblies and visits booked for October. Most of these outside visits are now carried out by trustees or volunteers who are also involved in giving tours and talks on site.

There have been fewer visits from schools than in the past (four at the time of writing). This is due in part to pressures on schools' time and funding. Also, the Museum and Abbey's stories are less immediately relevant to the current national curriculum. Recently however, there has been an upsurge in interest from a number of schools inquiring about visits to the museum and Abbey or outreach visits to the schools which means that this term is quite busy and will continue to be after we have closed to the public

Volunteers

In all there are about 15-20 active volunteers who continue to play an essential and invaluable role in the running of the museum. A small team from the charity Headway have created an amazingly productive and attractive allotment. A volunteer produces a lively quarterly magazine which goes to Friends, supporters, district councilor and others. The regular Wednesday team undertake site maintenance tasks and work on the collections and in the gardens. There is a need for more volunteers to help at event days and with education events, children's activities which take place during half terms and on Bank Holidays. Recruiting is ongoing.

Volunteers include people who have retired and want to get involved with something which uses their skills and can be an opportunity to develop new ones. It provides a good way of socializing with new people. There are people who wish to gain some work experience after periods of unemployment or ill health and a few who want to get some relevant experience before applying for jobs in the museum/heritage sector. Volunteering is not only essential to the museum but makes an important contribution to people's sense of wellbeing and of feeling a part of a community with a common cause. There are genuinely mutual benefits to both the museum and the volunteers.

Trustees

Our Trustee board stands at six. During the year, one Trustee resigned after a long period of service, and another due to personal circumstances. However we gained two new members. One is also a Wednesday volunteer who is a very welcome addition to both teams as he has some relevant skills to bring to both roles. The other works at Duxford Imperial War museum and his input is also very helpful. We continue to look for trustees especially for people who have skills in marketing and fundraising.

After the election in May Cllr Anna Bradnam replaced former Councillor Peter Johnson as the District Council Representative on the board of Trustees. The Treasurer Michael Williamson is another volunteer who puts in many hours a year and attends meetings but is not a trustee.

Staffing and future development

We have received a grant from the Litchfield Trust (administered by Cambridgeshire Community Foundation) for £3500 to appoint a consultant to look at our marketing and make recommendations as to how we might build on what we already do. This work is currently being undertaken by Kelly Cole of Phillips Profile and will be completed towards the end of October. We also have a small grant to be used to enhance facilities for hire of parts of the site. Marketing it as a peaceful, accessible and relatively inexpensive venue for small off site meetings, events, parties etc. will be a priority for 2019.

In 2019 it will no longer be possible to fund two Visitor Services Assistants (VSA's) to run the shop throughout the season (in the past these have been fully funded by English Heritage). The Trustees are using this and the general financial situation as an opportunity to restructure the staffing and create two new posts in place of the existing ones. It is essential that we still conform to the required standards for museum Accreditation and the requirements of English Heritage but there will be an emphasis on developing other opportunities to maximise the use of the site to generate income. We are at the beginning of a consultation process with the existing permanent staff which will be completed by the end of October. Once final decisions have been made we will re-apply to the Heritage Lottery fund for a grant for a Community Engagement Officer (a 3 year post). Their task it will be to develop audiences from areas with high levels of social deprivation who traditionally do not tend to visit museums (identified from our analysis of visitor postcodes) and to engage with audiences in the new developments in the District, and ultimately, with the new residents in Waterbeach New Town many of whom will have arrived knowing nothing of the story of where they are living

In the longer term we are still working on a Master Plan to develop the museum so that it will be able to cope with bigger audiences and adapt to the easier car free accessibility which will arise as construction of the New Town evolves and people will be able to come to the Museum and Abbey using the old medieval causeway routes.

South Cambridgeshire District Council

We are indebted to South Cambridgeshire District Council for the continued support this and very much hope that it will be possible to have further support next year. The Museum and Abbey are a unique and enormously valuable asset for the growing communities in South Cambridgeshire and, Cambridge City and in particular for the residents of Waterbeach New Town when it is built. The Farmland Museum and Abbey can help people to understand something of the story of the place where they are living and of the dramatic change to the local region since the middle of 20th century. It is a place which can encourage social inclusion, wellbeing and community engagement through volunteering, taking part in events or just visiting and enjoying the peace and quiet. It is an oasis of calm with a strong sense of the past. The Museum and Abbey are a unique resource for South Cambridgeshire and beyond and they are the only large Heritage attraction within South Cambridgeshire. They need to be accessible and affordable for our local residents.

Dr Jane Williamson
Chair of Trustees
September 2018

Update October 2018 - This is to add some more information about where we are at the Farmland museum with staffing which may be of relevance to the meeting.

Because English Heritage have reduced their funding next year we aren't going to be able to appoint two visitor Service Assistants and this has given us an opportunity to rethink what we want staff to do with our very limited resources. We have made both existing posts redundant and are about to start advertising for a part time Museum Officer (responsible for the Museum collections, displays, events, school visits etc) and a part time Commercial Officer who will make income generation a priority and have overall financial and site management responsibility. There is some overlap and

the post holders will need to work very closely together. They will have annualised salaries but work more hours in the open season than in the winter they will need to take on front of house responsibilities. We will appoint one VSA to work weekends and one weekday for the open season. It will be challenging but is an exciting opportunity to develop a much more commercial approach if we can find the right people.

We will continue to recruit volunteers , the present group are fantastic they work terrifically hard and are very dedicated, but we can always do with more.

The Assistant Curator leaves next week as she has got a new post working for the National Trust so handed in her notice before we needed to make her redundant. This post will no longer exist.

The Museum Manager has decided that she does not wish to apply for either of the new posts and is taking redundancy . She will leave on or before Jan 23rd.