



Axminster Heritage Limited Annual Report

**March 1st 2021 – February 28th
2022**

Company number 05365585
Charity registration no: 1113818

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Executive Summary (2 pages max)

Despite still being influenced and limited by the COVID restrictions, the financial year March 1st 2021 – February 2022 was a period of recovery and the start to a return to ‘normal’. Unfortunately we are not too sure what our ‘normal’ is as we only had one year of being open to the public after our reopening at Easter 2019 following the refurbishment.

Even though the total number of paying visitor in the summer seasons fell (from 1340 in 2019 to 881 in 2021) and the numbers of days we were open fell (from 175 in 2019 to 115 in 2021), the actual numbers of paying visitors per day we were open was exactly the same at 7.6 per day.

The spread of visitors recorded showed that the majority of visitors came from the South East or London, but there were few from Devon (especially East Devon), showing we are not attracting a local market. However, our marketing is aimed mostly at the South West which has raised some questions about how and where we market ourselves in the future.

Our total users were on the decline, not because we weren’t doing what we could do but because we had to change some of our practices. The main drop was people coming into the centre for tourist information as this was affected by our one way system. We still provided the leaflets, bus timetables etc. on a revolving stand outside the entrance but we couldn’t record this interaction of people taking the material in any meaningful way.

We also looked at new ways to bring in none museum visitors to use our facilities. In the past this has been centred on using the Bradshaw Meeting Room but we have been looking at how we can also use the main gallery areas outside of our opening hours. This has been difficult to coordinate due to COVID but in this financial year we did hold our first children’s sleep over for the Ottery St Mary Beavers. This was the first sleepover organised in Devon by any scout group since the first lockdown in March 2020 so was also a significant moment for the scout movement.

In the museum area we were able to hold two temporary exhibitions, and both were accompanied by talks. These were:

- i. First World War Monuments
- ii. Land Use Change in the Axe Valley

There have been few changes in the main gallery, the main one being the installation of the new butter churn which had been donated, and then restored by two volunteers. One of the most important things for our collections and display spaces was our continued involvement in the English Heritage led Pest Management Study. This allowed us to get a greater understanding of the potential and real pests that we have in our building that offer some threat to our collection. The formalised collection of this data not only helped us identify our issues but fed into a national database to illustrate the nature of pests in museums and historic houses.

The restricted opening allowed us to continue with our behind the scenes work on the collections, especially our image archive. We now believe that 95% of the known photographic images and postcards we hold in the archive have now been digitised to

archival quality since the start of the COVID pandemic. We have now re-sleeved and re-boxed all these images so that we no longer have to touch the original images to see them. We also reinstated MODES as our museum database. All the data from the EXCEL database that had been used during the refurbishment in 2018-2019 was transferred onto MODES in January 2021 but we didn't really start to work on the database until this financial year. This work has included attaching images to all the object files and making sure the data is correct, which has generally been updating the location of the images which have been re-boxed. All this work will make managing the collection easier and also we are well on our way in our preparations to eventually get our collection database online.

Heritage Alive took on the social distance restrictions by hosting a series of talks and workshops online via zoom which did see us get participants not only from around the UK, but the talk on the Legacy of Slavery saw people attend from the USA and Jamaica. When able to, Heritage Alive also ran workshops and talks in person and the best attended was a talk and Sitar performance by Ricky Romain. One of the usual income generators, the Coach Trips were not financially viable with restricted seating so we had to put on hold for most of the year which limited the number we could run.

The Fundraising Committee were restricted in their activities but their highlight was the Georgian Day when we had volunteers dressed in Georgian Costume around the Heritage Centre and on the Minster Green. Funds were also raised through the annual duck race at Dalwood and selling the Rotary raffle tickets.

We have continued to address our environmental impact and saw us gaining recognition from Plastic Free Axminster, changing our cleaning supplies and also got a £1000 grant from Bells Whiskey to install bug hotels and bird boxes in the courtyard (with cameras) along with several workshops.

Axminster Heritage Centre should be proud of what it achieved in the financial year 2021-22. This is down to all the hard work of the volunteers who both staff the reception desk when we are open and who also carry out the behind the scenes work. The Manager's work is made easier with their support and dedication.

Content

1. General Overview of the Year	5
2. Executive Committee	6
3. Visitors	7
3.1 Visitor Numbers	
3.2 Visitor Comments	
3.3 New Audiences: Sleepovers	
4. Shop Products	13
5. Marketing Report	14
6. Fundraising Report	17
7. Collections Report	18
7.1 new key donations	
7.2 changes to long term galleries	
7.3 temporary exhibitions	
7.4 Participation in Pest Management Project	
7.5 Data Base	
7.6 Photographic Archive	
7.7 Disposal	
7.8 Courtyard	
8. Axminster Information Point	22
9. Heritage Alive	23
9.1 Talks	
9.2 Coach Trips	
9.3 Workshops	
10. Building Work	26
10.1 New storage cupboards	
10.2 Sash Windows	
10.3 Environmental Goals	
11. Membership	27
12. IT/Website	27
13. Paid Staff	28
13.7 Manager	
13.8 Kickstart	
13.9 Cleaner	
14. Volunteers	29

1. General Overview of the Year

This report covers our financial year March 1st 2021 to February 28th 2022. Even though we might mention things that started before this period, or continued after this period, our priority is the actual financial year.

This period was still dominated by the COVID pandemic. It saw us having periods when we were shut on government advice or by law, volunteers and the Manager working from home and also the gradual reopening to the public, trying to go back to normal hours.

Throughout the period we were required to maintain the restrictions imposed on venues such as hand cleaning stations, screens, socially distancing, face coverings and one way routes through the building. As these had been set up in the preceding financial year there was no additional work or costs and the volunteers had become used to managing these changes.

After the second Lockdown from November 2020, the Axminster Heritage Centre reopened its doors in May 2021. We returned to the limited opening to allow proper cleaning between each day of opening so we operated along our winter opening hours of Tuesdays and Thursdays 10am-4pm and Saturdays 10am-1pm.

Even though we had limited opening of the building to the public, volunteers and the Manager could carry out tasks behind the scenes on days the museum was closed, as well as catch up on training via online courses run by the museum sector.

We finally reopened to the public in May but restricted our opening to Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. In July the government announced the removal of all restrictions but after consulting with the museum sector and tourism bodies it was felt that we would maintain the restrictions (social distancing, one way and face covers) to safeguard our volunteers and visitors. From Monday 21st July, even though we maintained these restrictions we opened to our full summer hours Monday-Friday 10-4 and Saturday 10-1. However, we felt the restrictions in the Bradshaw Room should be maintained and we continued to give talks online as well as in the Bradshaw Room with socially distanced spacing from July onwards. This Hybrid mix worked well especially when a theme had a wider interest than just Axminster, like the talk on the Legacy of Slavery which had participants from Axminster, London, USA and Jamaica

The Executive Committee functioned throughout the year either by holding face to face meetings when permitted or through Zoom conference calls.

2. Executive Committee

Chair of Executive Committee: Philip Percival

Even though it was hard at first to get members of the Executive Committee to use Zoom, we eventually were able to hold meetings initially in Zoom and then in person. The numbers attending did at times stretch us to the maximum social distancing numbers but the Executive committee were able to operate and make sure the Heritage Centre was not only meeting their legal requirements and government guidance but also were operating the building in a way that was safe for the volunteers and maintained full security and safety of the collections.

The individual sub committees operated in different ways, often based on the way that they usually ran their business and the number of members of the sub committees. Sometimes though, decisions were made by the chair person, or individual members to expedite a job/task.

During this period the Chair of the Executive Committee, the Chair of Trustees and Manager had regular email exchanges and phone conversations to provide continuity and a decision making pathway between the various formal meetings.



One way signs and barrier ropes to protect visitors and meet government guidance



COVID Security at Reception Desk to Protect Volunteers

3. Visitors

Manager: Nigel Sadler

3.1 Visitor numbers

At Axminster Heritage Centre we try and keep as accurate number of interactions we have with the public at the reception desk. It is easy for us to record paying visitors as we put their entry fee into the till. We also record child visits the same way. However, our interactions are greater than this. We provide free admission to members of some museum organisations (Such as Museums Association, Association of Independent Museums and International Council of Museums) as they publicise this fact, but as we can see we have few people who take us up on this offer. We count free adults who go round the museum, and generally these are the people who visit on the free Saturday each month for locals. We also have records for people we engage with generally for the Axminster Information Point (Formerly the Tourist Information) and we add to this by including anyone else who engages with the volunteers at the reception desk and do not go round the museum. This engagement is occasionally people just coming in to buy from the shop, but the majority are coming in to buy tickets especially for events/coach trips put on by Heritage Alive.

Date	Free Adult	Free Childs	Free TIC/ other s	Free Members	Free Museum Bodies	Paying Adult	Total	Shop Cash	Shop Chq	Shop Credit Card	Total
March	0		0	0		0	0	47.85	0	0	47.85
TOTAL											
April	0		0	0		0	0	16.5	16.5	0	33
TOTAL											
May	6	5	55	14	2	22	104	97.41	0	109	206.41
TOTAL											
June		2	134	37		107	280	308.07		571.75	879.82
TOTAL											
July	19	23	175	42		161	420	296.02	36	740.95	1072.97
TOTAL											
Aug	11	37	226	41		189	504	506.34		1072.81	1579.15
TOTAL											
Sept	5	13	243	39		237	537	744.12	609	1268.46	2621.58
TOTAL											
Oct	9	68	160	31		165	433	664.49	310.55	796.05	1771.09
Total											
Nov	34	32	73	19		47	205	735.85		624.7	1360.55
Total											
Dec	1		33	14		7	55	182		-29.71	152.29
Total											
Jan	2	2	62	9		27	102	63.97		147	210.97
Total											
Feb	0	2	69	13		26	110	283	18	190.79	491.79
Total											
TOTAL	87	184	1230	259	2	988	2750	3945.62	990.05	5491.8	10427.47

There is little point trying to compare the figures for 2021-22 with 2020-21 due to COVID restrictions making these figures meaningless. However, we can try and compare the 2021-22 figures with the summer figures of 2019. What we can say is that we had fewer days open than 2019, and here is the summer comparison to our last nearly full year open, 2019-20.

Visitors Summer Season 2021

Month	Free Adult	Free Child	Free TIC/ other	Free Mem	Free Mus Bodies	Paying Adult	Total	Till Cash	Till Chq	Till Credit Card	Total
April	0		0	0		0	0	16.5	16.5	0	33
May	6	5	55	14	2	22	104	97.41	0	109	206.41
June		2	134	37		107	280	308.07		571.75	879.82
July	19	23	175	42		161	420	296.02	36	740.95	1072.97
Augt	11	37	226	41		189	504	506.34		1072.81	1579.15
Sept	5	13	243	39		237	537	744.12	609	1268.46	2621.58
Oct	9	68	160	31		165	433	664.49	310.55	796.05	1771.09
Total	50	148	993	204	2	881	2278	2632.95	972.05	4559.02	8164.02

Visitors Summer Season 2019

Month	Free Adult	Free Child	Free TIC/ other	Free Mem	Free Mus Bodies	Paying Adult	Total	Till Cash	Till Chq	Till Credit Card	Total
April	960	208	182	19		97	1466	1095.03	10	673.75	1778.78
May	43	25	288	25	2	247	630	1509.65	125	532.52	2167.17
June	3	14	231	33	0	214	501	1575.54	30	406.50	2012.64
July	2	26	375	17	0	174	594	1173.59	71.15	405.33	1650.07
Aug	20	101	349	31	5	252	758	1463.47	10	731.41	2204.88
Sept	13	9	363	30		231	646	1368.58	173.50	326.73	1868.81
Oct	6	36	299	64		125	530	1025.22	60	231.79	1317.01
Total	1027	419	2087	219	7	1340	5099	9211.08	479.65	3308.03	12998.76

Days Open

	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	TOTAL
2021	0	6	13	19	26	25	26	115
2019	21	27	25	27	24	25	26	175

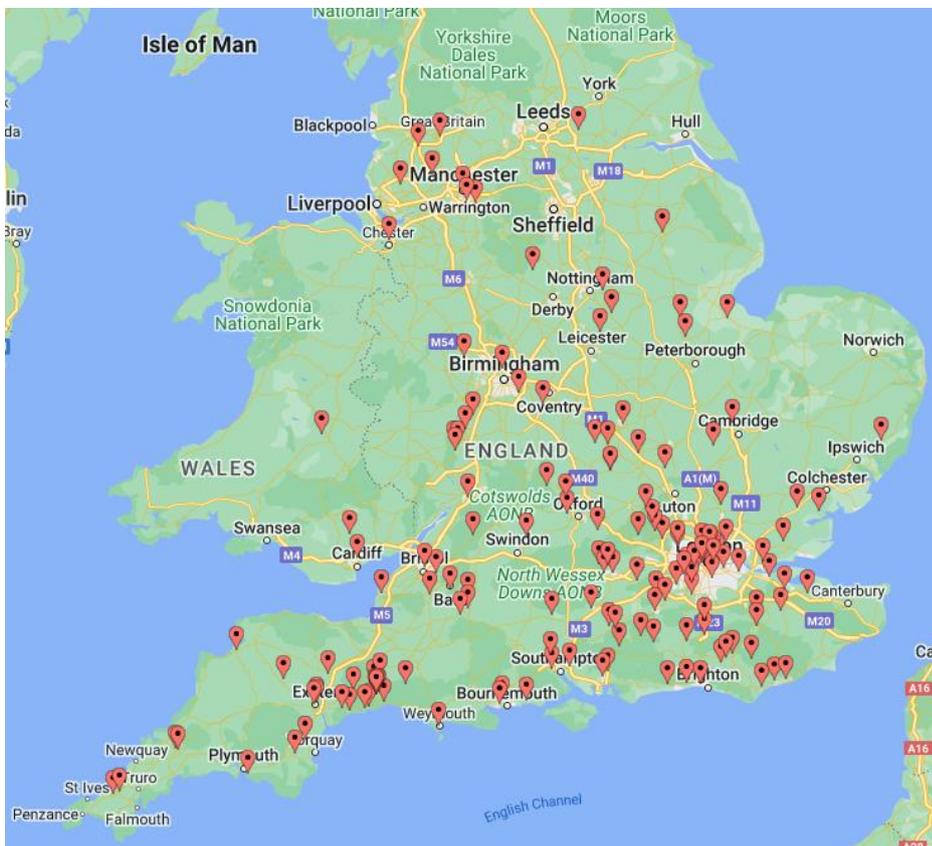
In 2019 we had a grand reopening after our major refurbishment. Even if the numbers of visitors/users was lower than expected it gave us some confidence for the future. Unfortunately, the COVID pandemic not only had an immediate effect on our numbers by restricting the opening hours through enforced closures or the need to do more cleaning between days we were open, but also has affected how the public now engage with their free time. They have re-evaluated things based on what they missed most during the lockdowns and restricted travel.

Interestingly though is that the average number of paying visitors per day we were open in 2019 and 2021 was 7.6, exactly the same, so even with all the restrictions our summer daily averages were the same.

We had hoped that by the year 2021-22 there would have been some pick up but clearly there hasn't. Could this be down just to people not wanting to visit places indoors where catching COVID was a higher risk, or is it down to people wanting to stay on the coast in the warm summer and being on the beach or outdoor? These are questions we don't think we will ever be able to answer.

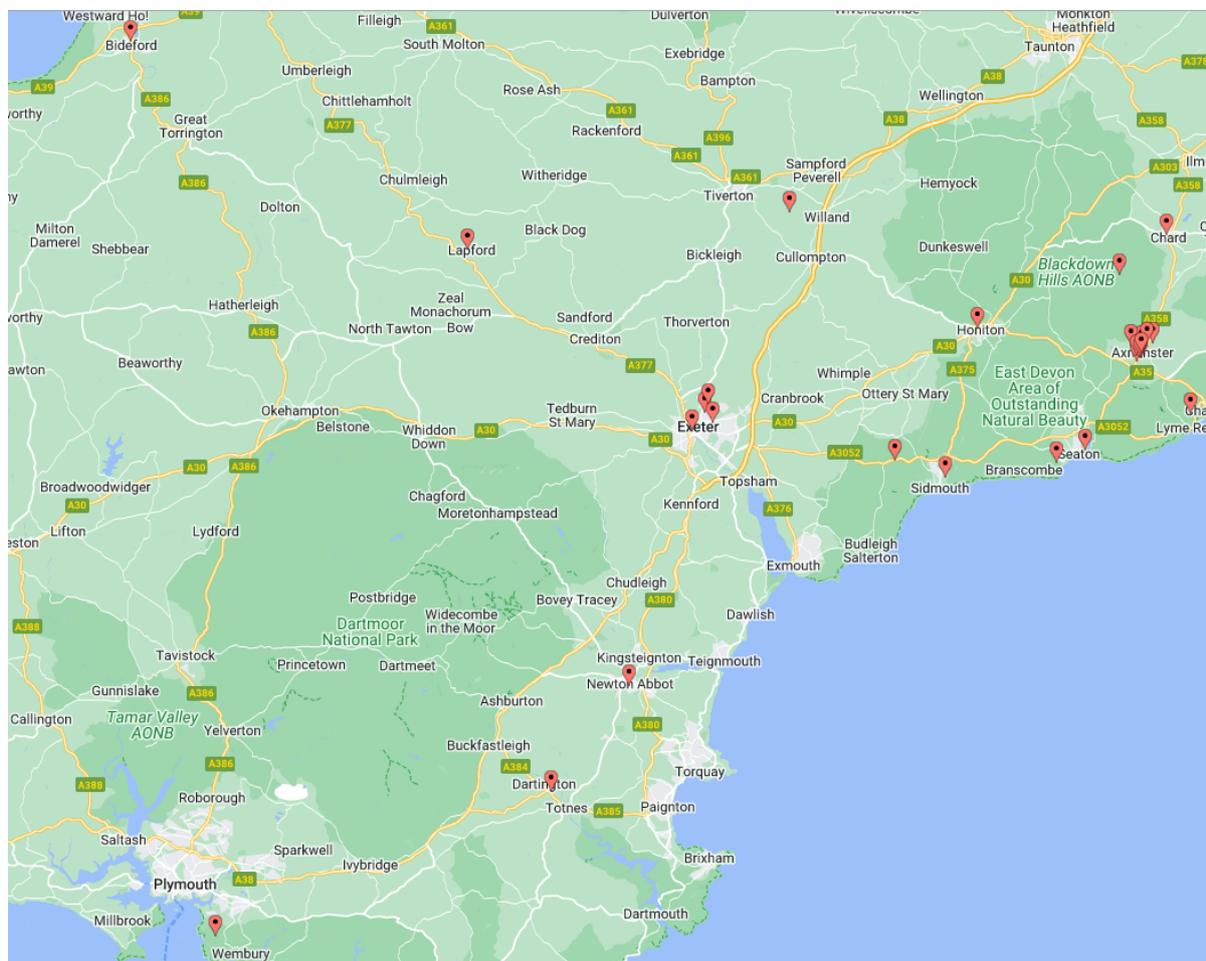
Axminster does not have a reputation as a tourist attraction. There is little here to draw in tourists. We found in 2019 that the biggest complaint we got at the Axminster Information Point was the lack of signage in town to aid people who did not know the town to move around on foot. In 2020-21 we communicated our concerns to the town council and presented a report to them regarding the need for 7 finger-pointer posts and 7 map boards throughout the town to provide clear pedestrian signage. We continued meetings with councillors and the business community in 2021-22 to further this. It is our understanding that they will be installed during the latter part of 2022. We are hoping this may have an impact on the footfall at the Heritage Centre.

One benefit of Track and Trace was that we used our Gift Aid forms for this process. Visitors were given the option as to whether they wanted to gift aid their entry purchase or not and most people agreed to gift aid. This should mean as a percentage of visitors we had a higher gift aid donation sign up, but also we can use the first part of a post code to identify where the visitor had come from. Using this data we are able to produce maps showing the spread of where visitors had come from.



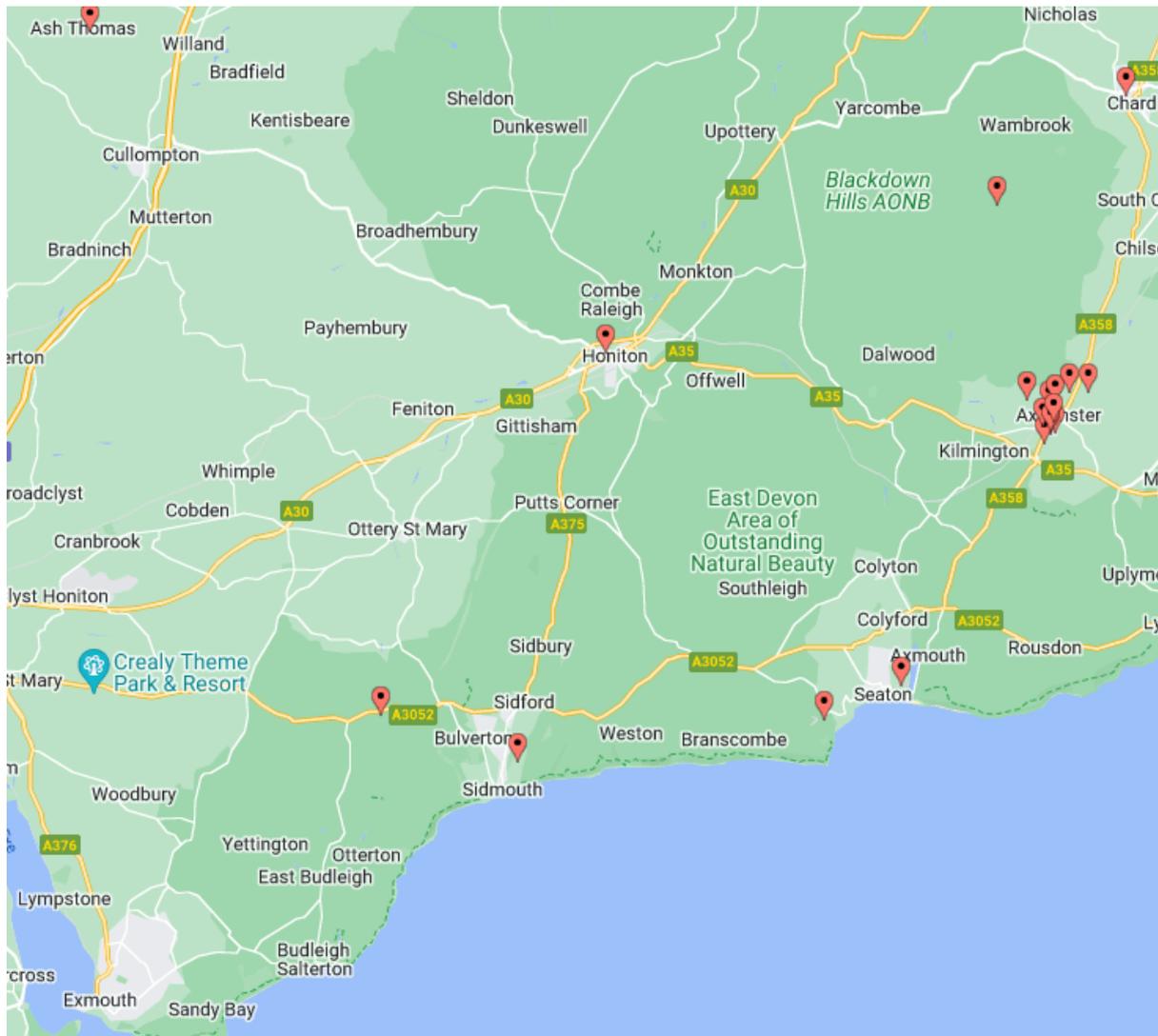
2021-2022 AHC visitors

During parts of the year Cornwall and Devon residents complained that a large number of visitors were coming from areas which had higher rates of COVID infection which led to peaks in infection rates in the South West a week or so after a period of high tourism. Our mapping shows that the majority of visitors to the Axminster Heritage Centre did come from the SE and London, which collates with the concerns at the time.



2021-2022 AHC visitors – Devon

What the limited data shows is how few of our paying visitors come from Devon/East Devon. Looking at Devon postcodes it is clear we are not attracting much of a local market. There are clusters around Axminster and Exeter but in a summer when the weather was fine we should have had more local visitors. Unfortunately, as Axminster has few tourist attractions locals were more likely to visit a town where they had a good half day or full day activities with the local museum being just one of these draws.



2021-2022 AHC visitors – East Devon

Looking at East Devon, the largest group of paying visitors came from Axminster. This can be seen as an oddity as we find locals are more likely to visit on the monthly free Saturday or join as a member. This might be a legacy of COVID in that some locals are willing to explore their own town.

3.2 Visitor Comments

We had a lot less visitor comments on our comments board. This year they included:

- Absolutely Spiffing + Spectacular
- Absolutely loved the staff. They told us about the history. Thank You!
- Very Good. I Liked it
- Axminster Heritage Centre is as interesting as the towns history. We found it great value and we were educated by the assistant. Great Job.
- Most impressive. We learnt a lot – nice and spacious
- We will be back soon. Lots to see. Thank you
- Great Museum. I enjoyed the stamp
- It was very fun
- A very pleasant and interesting visit. Thank you for your smiles and information
- I love it. I really like it

3.3 New Audiences: Sleepovers

In 2019 Axminster Heritage Centre was looking at ways to utilise the building in more ways. Unfortunately, COVID curtailed these plans and with social distancing playing a large part in what we could do (or couldn't do) we found ourselves being very limited. We did bring in music as already mentioned, but this was in the Bradshaw Room and we really wanted to expand the offers we had for the main exhibition area.

The Scout movement issue many badges for their various levels: Scouts, Cubs and Beavers, and one of these is for children staying at a venue for a night away. Axminster Heritage Centre had been talking in 2019 about inviting a local Axminster group but this had not progressed that far before Lockdown in 2020. Due to the COVID pandemic all levels of scouts had missed out on the experiences they should have had whilst gaining their badges in 2020/2021 and were going to progress onto the Cubs without these experiences. The Manager's son, a member of the Ottery Pathfinder Beavers, falls into this category and even though we had been able to do many of the badges at home, this isn't the same as having shared experiences with friends. They had been unable to find a venue to organise a sleepover and I grasped this challenge to use this group as our test sleepover and it turned out to be the first formal Scout movement sleepover in Devon since March 2020. This followed full risk assessments, site visits and a full implementation of COVID procedures including all adults who were attending on the day/night having to take a lateral flow tests before arriving at the Heritage Centre.

The group arrived at around 4.30 on Saturday afternoon and the children then did a tour of the museum and completed the children's trail. Only one of the children had ever visited the Axminster Heritage Centre before and two of the children had never been to a museum. A picnic was then had before the group ventured out of the Centre to look around Axminster.

The Bradshaw Room was left as a refuge: a place a leader could take any children who couldn't sleep and where the early risers could be taken so as not to disturb those still sleeping. It was also so breakfast could be prepared in the morning without disturbing any children who had remained asleep.

The children respected the setting and tidied up after themselves and leaders took every precaution to make sure drinks weren't spilt and food wasn't dropped. When the children were collected around 10am on the Sunday morning the Museum, toilets and Bradshaw Room were left as clean as when the group had arrived.



Ottery St Mary Beavers



Preparing for sleep

4. Shop Products

Manager: Nigel Sadler

The shop is an essential income source for Axminster Heritage, but it requires a quick turnover of stock, otherwise stock ends up failing to sell or getting damaged. For example during long periods of closure the books on sale can become dog eared due to the damp. In 2019 the shop included a lot of items that had been produced before we opened, either back in 2005 for the 250th anniversary of the first Axminster carpet or for when the museum opened in 2015. Unfortunately, some of these items, especially 2 publications, were produced in large quantities and are slow sellers.

In 2019 new items were purchased, and these items are included in our shop because they relate to the themes we cover in our galleries, or were locally produced crafts. With Lockdown in 2020 occurring just before the start of the summer season we had not purchased any new shop stock. When it came to March 2021 a decision was made not to make any major big shop purchases as we could not predict the visitor numbers or potential shop sales. We therefore relied on existing stock. In February 2022 we did start at looking at repurchasing stock we had sold out of (such as books) and buying in new stock to cover the proposed sheep exhibitions.

Axminster Heritage would like to thank David Knapman whose book 'Unsteady Progress' was published during 2020. The sales of this book have been a major part of our shop income for 2020, 2021 and 2022. His generosity in providing the profits from each book to the Heritage Centre has helped us have a steady stream of shop income even during periods the shop was physically closed to the public.

5. Marketing Report

Chair of Marketing Committee: Rebecca Green (March-Dec 2021)

Lead Marketing – Nigel Sadler (Dec 2021-Feb2022)

As part of the marketing strategy it was felt necessary that some volunteers and the Manager extend their knowledge through training to increase our ability to be able to market Axminster Heritage to our full potential (within budgets). One of the options we considered was video production. With this in mind the chair of Marketing, Rebecca Green, and the Manager were able to secure places on a South West Museum Development (SWMD) programme. The course would generally have cost around £400 but we were fortunate that after the initial application process we were chosen to be part of the training and all fees were met by SWMD. Due to COVID restrictions the training was online in March and April 2021. We were able to put to use our training immediately by producing a series of videos which we posted online promoting that we were reopening to the public in May.

Members of the Marketing committee undertook further online training (mainly through Zoom meetings) to develop more skills as in the areas of simple design work.

One of our main marketing tools is our Heritage Centre leaflet. We were unhappy with the lack of information and support we had received from the company we employed to distribute our leaflets. We met with another company, Pear Communications and were impressed with their operation, especially the part that we pay only when we want leaflets distributed rather than a flat annual cost. We are now working with them for our leaflet distribution.

As the decision was made to increase entry charge from £3 to £4 for the start of the 2022-23 season we needed to make sure the leaflets reflected this. We could have just put a sticker over the old price on the remaining few thousand old leaflets, but it was decided that a new leaflet was needed. However, at this stage it was decided not to completely design a new leaflet, but to utilise the old design and change the front cover by adding the dates 2022-23, and change the back page to include a map locating us and the new admission price. The design work was down by Creative Solutions (within the 2021-22 budget) whilst the 10000 new leaflet print by Axminster Printers fell within the 2022-23 budget.

One of the main jobs of Marketing is to make sure we can publicise to our best abilities all of the events/activities being put on by the various committees, especially Heritage Alive and Fundraising, as well as general adverts for the Heritage Centre. We rely heavily on our website, Facebook, Midweek Herald and Marshwood Vale for events, but in 2021-22 it was hard to feature regularly in Marshwood Vale for example as we were wary of advertising too many events that might in the end be cancelled due to government rule changes on COVID.

We took out half page or quarter page ads in several of Archant magazine/newspaper specials as these covered East Devon or Axminster (they are the publishers of the East Devon magazine and Midweek Herald). We also took out paid adverts in a few tourist brochures, and in a few local magazines such as the programme for the production of Evita at the Guildhall.

Our more targeted advertising comes through our website (especially what's on pages), targeted emails to those who have asked us to add them to our mailing list, and to our members, both through the Newsletter and email updates. Generally people who use these are already people who are partaking in our offers. The posters are designed in such a way that they are Mailchimp ready and can therefore be easily mailed out via email, and also posted on our website and Facebook with little or no additional work. This saves us a lot of time.

Website Statistics - Website Visits per month

2021

June	2088
July	2175
August	2557
September	2476
October	2465
November	1996
December	1520

2022

January	1958
February	1968

One of our more active public facing platforms are our two Facebook accounts. The first is our main one, Axminster Heritage, and it is through this we promote most of our activities and more generic historical information. The Axminster Heritage Facebook page not only carried promotions of our events, we also tried to provide regular snippets of local history, usually in a themed way. For example during Women's History Month in March 2021 we had articles on Nancy Dawson, Margaret Tomlinson Née Tansley (Second World War photographer), Georgina Emily Conybeare and Emily Kathleen Sheppard. In March and April 2021 we had History of pubs in Axminster and we also finished off a series on the Blue plaques which we had started in the previous financial year. Unfortunately, due to other commitments at the centre, mainly the reopening in May 2021, these themed posts stopped in the summer of 2021. We are hoping to start them again in 2022/23.

Posts by us promoting our activities on our Facebook page are also easy to share so we have identified local Facebook pages that will post our updates as well as targeting other Facebook pages for particular talks and workshops.

The second Facebook page is Axminster History and Genealogy. This was set up in 2020 as part of Lockdown to allow us to divide the public requests for and sharing of historical information. Members of this page are more likely to ask for information about their family, or history of local shops and businesses. It is worth looking back of the last few years on this Facebook page to see what has been posted and how people have helped each other with local history queries, and the joy of sharing their family photographs.

We added little to our Youtube channel in 2021-22 apart from the series of videos we produced promoting our reopening in May 2021. The main reopening video saw over 100 views.

In December 2021 Rebecca Green decided she needed to step away from Marketing due to other commitments and stood down as the chair of the Marketing Committee. From January the Museum Manager decided that it had been hard to coordinate marketing meetings and any marketing strategy that for the first part of 2022 he would take on responsibility for Marketing, supported by David Garrod. This meant there were less posts on Facebook but more targeted marketing to save time and money.



AXMINSTER
heritage
Centre

Axminster Heritage Centre tells the local story from the prehistoric axe makers, the Iron Age hillforts, Roman roads, the Anglo Saxon development of the Minster and the subsequent growth of the town. Learn about Newenham Abbey on the outskirts of town and its total destruction by Henry VIII as well as key figures who helped shaped the area.

No history of Axminster would be complete without the story of the world famous Axminster carpets. We are housed in the second phase of the Whitty family carpet factory and have on display original Georgian Whitty carpets. There is also a 20th century carpet loom which we run weekly.

Our dye garden shows the range of plants used to create natural dyes for yarn for carpets.

The centre also houses the Axminster Information Point and a 50 seat capacity meeting room available for hire.

Axminster Heritage Centre
Thomas Whitty House
Silver Street
Axminster
EX13 5AH
Phone: 01297 639884
Website: www.axminsterheritage.org
Email: info@axminsterheritage.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/axminsterheritage

Opening Times
Easter - October (Summer Opening)
Monday to Friday - 10:00am to 4:00pm
Saturdays - 10:00am to 1:00pm
November - Easter (Winter Opening)
Tuesdays and Thursdays - 10:00am to 4:00pm
Saturdays - 10:00am to 1:00pm

There is fun for all the family, including a children's trail and interactive displays.

Check our website for special events and activities at the centre.

Example of one of our adverts used by Archant Publishing

6. Fundraising Report

Chair of Fundraising Committee: Andrew Moulding

As well as restricted opening hours, COVID restrictions limited the numbers of people who could gather together. This had serious consequences for the potential income generation possible by the Fundraising Team (as well as the Heritage Alive Team). Regular annual events such as the quiz night and horse racing had to be postponed as social distancing rules meant it was either not possible to hold an event, or if possible we were unable to have enough people participate to make it financially viable.

Luckily outdoor events did not have such severe restrictions as indoor events and this meant the annual Duck Race could take place at Dalwood on September 11, 2021. As tickets could be sold in advance to people not attending it meant the committee were able to make a sizeable financial input to the funds.

One of the highlights of fundraising in 2021 was the Georgian Day, organised by Gina Younes. This saw volunteers dressed as Georgians walking around the Market and Minster Green. There was also poetry reading and coffee 'houses'. It was unclear whether this was a fundraising event or organised by Heritage Alive as the same organisers were involved in both. It was therefore decided that as Fundraising had had more restrictions to opportunities to raise income then the funds from the day were deposited as a Fundraising activity.

We were also involved in the annual Rotary charity raffle ticket sales and this brought in a sizeable amount of money as well, being able to sell tickets through the fundraising committee, at the museum and at other events we attended.



Members of the Georgian Day team

7. Collections Report

Chair of Collections Committee: Laurence Hitchcock

7.1 new key donations

Due to the restricted opening hours we have had a lot less people just dropping into the Heritage Centre to make donations of new items. One of the most interesting of the new donation was a large butter churn. It was donated to us in September 2021. Unfortunately the stand it was on was in too poor of condition to salvage, but David Knapman and Stuart Courtman did a lot of work on the barrel of the butter churn and made a new stand for it. It has cleaned up very well and was put into the gallery in the farming area in February 2022.



Butter Churn as it was when it arrived(above)

Butter Churn After Repair Work and now on Display (right)

7.2 changes to long term galleries

The main change has been the addition of the new large butter churn donated in 2021 and conserved in late 2021/early 2022. It was felt that there has been little we could do to change things while the restrictions were in place. We are only looking at adding items to the long term displays if they enhance a story we are telling, or we have space to display it.

7.3 temporary exhibitions

The temporary exhibition space is an area that we can show items that are generally in store, so one of our considerations when choosing the themes is what we have in the stored collections that would help tell the story.

It was hard to plan for temporary exhibitions without knowing the potential audiences we could attract. We had planned to put on a temporary exhibition called 'Spinning a Yarn: The story of Axminster and Sheep' in 2020 which would have had a whole host of activities associated with it. It was decided in March 2020 not to go ahead with it and it was delayed until starting at Easter 2021. With the unknown consequences of COVID restrictions it was postponed until Easter 2022.

We did not want to open without something so two replacements were organised.

i. First World War Monuments

This exhibition coincided with the centenary of the unveiling of Axminster War Memorial in 1921, and ran through the summer opening period. The panels included an overview of the First World War memorials, Memorials in Devon that would have commemorated local men, and then individual panels on the Axminster, Chardstock, Dalwood, Kilmington, Membury and Musbury memorials. This exhibition was accompanied by a Zoom talk by Nigel Sadler, who had been researching the history of War Memorials for a possible book in 2018.

ii. Land Use Change in the Axe Valley

David Knapman had been carrying out research from maps and land use changes and created an exhibition (with accompanying talks) that looked at the Tithe Map, and then three areas through the last 150 years or so from the Tithe Map to modern use. Each area had a panel showing photographs of the areas and maps of the areas. This exhibition ran through the winter season.

7.4 Participation in Pest Management Project

English Heritage had been concerned about the increasing number of pests appearing in museums and historic houses that was putting collections at risk. They set up a nationwide pest monitoring programme to look at the national variance in pests and what were the most prevalent ones. This was initially for 6 months and the pest recording started in September 2020. However, when it got to the end it was decided a further 6 months was required to see if the closure of buildings during lockdown had any impact on pest management and collection care.

In March 2021 the second phase of the project began and as Axminster Heritage Centre had recorded an above average number of woodlice in the first stage of recording it was felt this signified the building was damp and we were provided with a brand new more environmentally friendly dehumidifier. However, we did point out the damp was being caused by a poorly fitting back door which we had replaced with a new electronic door and the damp was no longer an issue but we still got the dehumidifier.

The data collected by us makes very interesting reading and has highlighted some concerns which we have either already addressed (like the new back door) or are addressing.

7.5 Database

Axminster Museum had used the Museum Object Data Entry System base (MODES) database to start to digitally record their collections. When Axminster Museum came under the umbrella of Axminster Heritage it had been intended to continue with this database. However, with the urgent need to have information on all of the collection at hand for the removal of the items off site and back onto site it was deemed more efficient to create an excel database. This excel database worked well for its purpose but was not sufficient for a long term digital database. The Excel database was submitted to MODES who converted this data into files compatible with MODES. This happened in 2020 but with COVID and working at home rules little could be done with MODES.

During 2021-22 extensive work was undertaken to create additional content for the MODES database which has included inserting pictures for all the objects we have pictures for, updating new locations for objects, especially photographs and checking data for errors.

7.6 Photographic Archive

One of the big changes in the collections we hold is the photographic archive. We started to digitise the images to archival quality in 2020 as part of working from home due to COVID. During 2021-22 the scanning of all of the image archive stored in the boxes was completely finished off. There are still some stray images being found but it now means that we have easy access to high quality digital images for 95% of all the photographic images we know that we hold. We also undertook a complete re-boxing of the images which saw us change the way they were archived and lead to a major project in updating the MODES database in their new box location. This now makes finding the images a lot easier, but also as each picture is now stored separately in an acid-free plastic sleeve they can be seen without being touched and are kept in order within a ring-binder acid free box.

7.7 Disposal

All museums should review their collections on a regular basis to make sure the objects they hold are still relevant to their collecting policy. In 2015 Axminster Heritage took over the management of the collections of the Axminster Museum. Unfortunately, there were periods when Axminster Museum took objects into their permanent collection that should not have been accessioned. In 2019 the Collections Committee carried out a review of the costume collection which saw, in most cases, none accessioned items in store being removed from the store and either added to the handling collections or disposed of outright. This might sound drastic but in fact these items had been purchased as 'room settings' for the Axminster Museum. They had no real historic value and definitely no proven connections to Axminster.

In 2021-22 we were able to carry out further revaluations of the collections. This saw some non-accessioned items with no relevance to Axminster being sent to auction, with the money raised from the sales going into collection management. Other non-accessioned items and accessioned items with no local relevance have been transferred into the handling collection, being developed for community group and schools use.

7.8 Courtyard

Though not formally the responsibility of the Collections Committee it is felt that it should be reported that the Dye garden in the courtyard has settled and is a delight to see. The work put into installing the plants and features in 2019 has made the courtyard and dye garden a place of tranquillity in the centre of Axminster. It is attracting many insects and other wildlife and this has been supported by the installation of bug hotels

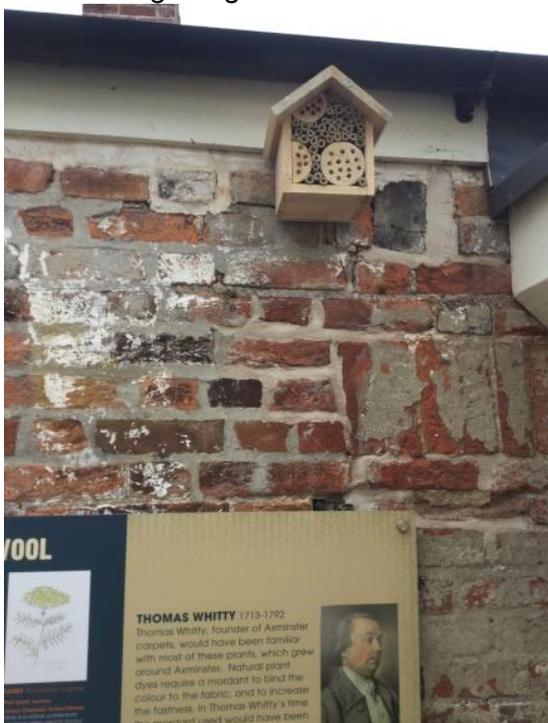


A butterfly in the courtyard, August 2021

During the year the manager was able to secure a grant from Bells Whiskey to help develop the Dye garden/courtyard. The grant for £1000 allowed us to buy in several large bug hotels for the courtyard as well as 2 bird boxes with cameras installed. The camera footage can be viewed in the main gallery on two small screens. The money also provided supplies for two workshops. The aim is to provide protection and to attract bugs and birds into the haven of our courtyard, which will help the plants that we grow.



The two large bug hotels



The smaller bug hotel



One of the bird boxes

8. Axminster Information Point

Chair of Tourism Committee: Keith Barnard

Axminster Information Point suffered the most during COVID. Due to the introduction of the one way system inside the Heritage Centre it meant the Information area was isolated and could only be accessed by people paying to go through the museum. In 2020 it had been decided that this was not fair so we moved a revolving leaflet/magazine dispenser outside of our sliding doors so that when we were open people could pick up the latest magazines and leaflets, and of course new bus timetables. We could answer questions if someone came in and asked at the desk, and get them leaflets if they were not on the revolving dispenser.

The spin off from this was that even though we engaged with a lot of people picking up bus timetables, Marshwood magazine etc, as they didn't come into the building we did not record their interaction with us. This meant the number of users for the Information Point was under recorded showing that fewer people had engaged when the number drop wasn't really as dramatic.

One thing that we have received acknowledgement for is that the Heritage Centre is now one of only two places in the centre of Axminster that still gives out the midweek herald for free. Elsewhere venues have taken up the option of selling them. However, we have to be careful with the numbers we take to dispense as in winter we can get left with lots.

One of the things that we inherited from the Old Tourist Information Centre was the income we could raise by selling tickets to the Axe Vale Show. Unfortunately this income stream was lost as the show did not go ahead this year due to the government restrictions being imposed on public gatherings.

9. Heritage Alive

Jane Griffiths had been the lead for Heritage Alive but during 2021 she decided that she needed to step back and handed over the reins. It was decided that instead of having a formal Heritage Alive Committee that it would be a more informal operation. Part of this decision was that whilst government COVID restrictions were still in place there were few activities that Axminster Heritage could put on. There were some events that were held regularly that could not continue during any restrictions. Even when there was loosening of the restrictions the social distancing in enclosed spaces made it unviable to run the regular activities such as the monthly film shows and Time for tea talks. Instead, we looked at ways firstly to keep (or make new) audiences with an increased online presence. We did more history posts on Facebook and eventually started a series of online talks and workshops, slowly moving to hosting activities back in the Bradshaw Room, whilst meeting any of the Social Distancing guidelines set by the government.

Our priority for this financial year was to be less concerned about the income but more about getting the public back engaging with us and trying to give some resemblance of returning to what was normal before the pandemic period. We did not make as much income from Heritage Alive events as in the past but it is clear that we engaged with a much wider cross section of the community both in Axminster but also the UK.

9.1 Talks

In the past, Heritage Alive organised talks had been limited to local speakers for the Time for Tea monthly meeting. It was clear that in this financial year the Axminster Historical Society had gone very quiet and were offering nothing in the way of talks. Also, in the past we had heard comments that the Historical society's talks were no longer about Axminster and the surrounding area. We decided that Axminster Heritage, through Heritage Alive should be offering talks on local themes.

This included talks on:

On Zoom:

- The Development of War Memorials to commemorate servicemen killed in the First World War' - a talk by Nigel Sadler. Wednesday 26th May at 7:00pm on Zoom.
- 'Farming and land use patterns in East Devon in the 1830s and 1840s' a Zoom talk by local author, David Knapman. Wednesday 9th June at 7:00pm.
- June 16th 'Axminster's Links to the Jurassic Coast' – David Knapman
- July 22nd 'Iron Age Hill Forts of Devon and Dorset' as part of the British Council of Archaeology's Festival of Archaeology.
- August 18th The Legacy of Slavery (attended by people in USA and round UK). This was given by the Manager Nigel Sadler due to his interest in this subject and his book released in 2018 'The Legacy of Slavery in Britain' (published by Amberley Publishing)

Talks in Bradshaw Room:

- July 8th Raga "That Which colours the mind", an evening with Ricky Romain, talking about his journey learning the Sitar accompanied by a musical performance
- Sept 1st The History of Our Local Landscape – Part 1 Membury Road

- Sept 8th The History of Our Local Landscape – Part 2 Foxhill and the area between Lyme Road, Musbury Road and Woodbury Lane
- Sept 22nd The History of Our Local Landscape – Part 3 The Yarty Valley at Wastwater
- October 21st ‘The west Country’s Last Line of Defence – Taunton Stop Line’ by Andrew Powell Thomas



9.2 Coach Trips

- June 18th Dartmouth
- August 6th Greenway and Colaton Fishacre
- Sept 24 Swanage
- October 29th Wookey Hole Caves
- Dec 3 Cardiff Christmas Market – Cancelled due to new government restrictions

9.3 Workshops

It was also decided that Heritage Alive needed to raise funds that could be used to subsidise children/family events. This was going to be achieved by hosting book sales in the Bradshaw Room. The first was held on Sept 25, with several more held afterwards. The first one was to raise funds for the Pumpkin Carving workshop as we needed to purchase the pumpkins in advance, without knowing how many would be used –the ticket prices basically covered the cost of the participant’s pumpkin.



Pumpkin carving workshop for the family

Online Workshop –

- March 13 Calligraphy Workshop – Back to Basics for Beginners (by Gina Youens) 3 hours, £15 (set up Eventbrite account to take bookings online)
- April 10th 'Painting the Devon Violet in Watercolour' (By Gina Youens)

Workshops in Bradshaw Room

- May 22nd 'Painting the Devon Bluebell' workshop
- June 26th 'Paint a Border of Summer Flowers in Mixed Media for Beginners' workshop.
- Sep 4 2021 – Sustainable Workshop
- October 28 - Pumpkin carving. This was a success in 2019 so we have decided to make this an annual event.
- Dec 6th Sparling Calligraphy for Christmas – Led by Nigel Sadler
- Dec 11 Christmas Card Making Workshop – Led by Rebecca Green
- Painting A winter Landscape
- Painting a Devon Landscape
- Beginners Sewing Workshop

10 Building Work

Like any historic building the Axminster Heritage Centre takes a lot of day to day upkeep such as drain cleaning, touching up paintwork and minor repairs. These are generally done by the manager and volunteers. However, there is often more large scale jobs that we need to undertake and we have to plan these in.

10.1 New storage cupboards

Split between the financial year 2020-21 and 2021-22. The storage cupboards on the first floor were completed in March 2021 and were immediately put to use to store the cleaning materials and surplus leaflets for the Tourist Information.

10.2 Sash Windows

We took advantage of the restrictions placed on the Bradshaw Meeting Room due Social Distancing rules meaning we could hold very few activities in there to carry out some work in this room. The sash windows were either sticking or not staying up so we brought in a contractor to reweight the chords and tidy up the sash windows both in the Bradshaw Room and the one in the Kitchenette. The total cost of this work was just under £1000.

10.3 Environmental Goals

The Bells Whiskey grant was just one element of trying to make Axminster Heritage more environmentally aware. During this year we reduced the amount of non- environmentally friendly cleaning products and we gained our 'working towards being plastic free' from Plastic Free Axminster plaque. We are also looking at making all building work as environmentally friendly and sustainable as possible.



Nigel Sadler and Rebecca Green with the plaque and certificate from Plastic Free Axminster

11 Membership

Membership Secretary David Garrod

Membership hadn't been changed since it was introduced in 2006 and it was felt that it was time to review it. David Garrod and Nigel Sadler undertook this review and made recommendations to the Trustees regarding increasing membership fees, introducing new membership categories so they included individuals, couples and family, and we also introduced the idea of corporate membership. All the proposals were agreed on and the implementation of these changes began in the financial year 2022-23. With these changes a new membership leaflet was being planned.

The Membership Newsletter has gone from strength to strength and we now publish a new addition every 2 months. The idea behind this was that it kept members more informed and linked to what was happening at the Heritage Centre during COVID 19, but it has been decided to maintain this regularity of new editions after reopening.

We have tried to increase the offer to members so Members were invited to the launch of both of the temporary exhibitions and get prior knowledge of all of our activities.

Of course the limitations put on us by COVID has meant that we have run less activities, meaning less 10% discount opportunities, and less days of opening meant less days a member could visit for free. We would like to thank members who have renewed and continued their support of us.

12 IT/Website

IT Manager David Garrod

One of the main tasks of the IT manager is to make sure the Website is functioning properly and is up to date. The IT Manager is always looking at the website and at possible ways for improving it.

Another job is to make sure all of our software programmes are up to date and to monitor/support suggestions of new programmes that we could purchase to make doing our work easier/better. During this financial year we:

- Upgraded Mailchimp from the free version to the paid version as it is essential for sending out the newsletters, Events and workshop information and other promotions being GDPR compliant.
- increased the External/cloud storage for emails through Penguin and Cpanel for all @axminsterheritage.org emails as we quickly filled the original memory allocation
- added Norton Internet Security Software to all AHC computers
- needed to be more proactive, especially with online talks so we purchased a Zoom account so our meetings could last longer than the 40 minute free version
- We maintained the support for the Till as essential we have immediate support if there was a problem

13. Paid Staff

13.1 Manager

The day to day functioning of the museum is managed by the part time Museum Manager. This post was funded by the grant we received from the Heritage Lottery Fund (now the National Lottery Heritage Fund). With over 30 years' experience of working in the museum sector Nigel Sadler was able to guide the organisation through the rocky road of lockdowns, and social distancing whilst also trying to develop the offer from Axminster Heritage

13.2 Kickstart

The Government's Kickstart programme was aimed at helping under 25s who were either long term unemployed or had the risk of becoming long term unemployed. We signed up early in the programme when the rules changed (before these rule changes a company needed to already employ at least 30 people) but even though we had interest, we were unable to get anyone to take up a place with us.

As a last resort John Church and Philip Percival attended a recruitment day in Honiton and were able to sign up Tyler, who had left school before his 18th birthday. The manager was assigned as his lead and he started working for us at the beginning of December 2021. His employment costs were being met by the government along with a £1500 grant to us to meet any additional costs we would incur.

Unfortunately, his employment came with conditions which included any return to home working meant he had to work from home, which would of course be awkward for us. We were aware of the high risk that this would happen so we utilised some of the £1500 grant to buy a laptop for his use and set it up with an Axminster Heritage email account. Therefore, when the government announced working from home we were prepared. Unfortunately his start to employment also coincided with his mother catching COVID and the rules meant he had to isolate at home as well.

We became aware that his work ethics/practice left something to be desired. He had no mobile phone contract (we tried to set one up on his phone which had no sim but he seemed somewhat reluctant) and rarely replied to emails we sent him for updates and creating work tasks for him.

In January 2022 he was able to return to work at the centre and we taught him how to scan archive quality images of the photographs in our photographic archive. His task was to finish what the Manager had almost completed during Lockdown from home. He was also to attend subcommittee meetings and do other tasks. He had little initiative and working on his own, and didn't really want to work on the reception.

He was employed by us until May 2022 (outside of this time frame for the report), but after a discussion, even though the Trustees were willing to employ him at our expense for an additional three months it was decided this would be unsuitable as he hadn't really achieved the levels we would have expected in his 6 month employment.

13.3 Cleaner

We employ a self-employed cleaner. Our long standing cleaner stepped down from the post as she felt it was getting too much and Rebecca Green stepped in as cleaner.

14. Volunteers

Volunteer Coordinator – Rebecca Green

We have put the volunteers as the last item in the report, not because they are not important but because they are the most important asset of the Axminster Heritage Centre. Everything listed above in the report would not have happened without their involvement and commitment. Even though there is a part-time paid manager, without the volunteers the organisation could not function. All trustees, members of the executive committee, the sub committees and the reception desk staff volunteer their time freely to help us operate this wonderful organisation.

In total we operate with around 40 regular volunteers some giving as little as a few hours a month, others giving up to 80 hours a month. This free time is invaluable to us and the fact that at least half of these volunteers have been with us for more than 5 years it is a sign that they enjoy their time with us.