**ANNUAL REPORT 2021**

With the pandemic still very much in evidence, 2021 turned out to be another challenging year for the Museum. Restrictions to normal working were in place at the beginning of the year and resulted in the late opening once again. And we had to limit our opening days to just three as we needed more volunteers on duty.

However, thanks to our fantastic maintenance team, we were able to open on July 27th which appropriately was ‘Norfolk Day’. The two boats, our ever popular ‘Falcon’ and ‘Marsh Harrier’ were soon up and running. With the difficulties encountered in 2020 with the existing entrance and reception location due to covid restrictions and regulations, it was decided to move the entrance/exit, reception and cafe to the Cooke’s Staithe building, no mean feat! But again, with the help of Nick and his team it was completed.

I am sure many will agree, this new arrangement worked very well and we had lovely comments from our visitors. In addition, it was gratifying to be actually making good use of this wonderful asset, realised in 2019. A massive amount of work was needed to achieve this, Nick and his team as mentioned, but also our curator Nicola and Gill, administrator. Results for the year were understandably modest, but nevertheless, very welcome. The few events and themed days we *were* able to organise, were very well attended, In fact the Thursday of the ‘Halloween Week’ was one of our best days ever!

So we ended the year on a happy note but knowing the pandemic had not gone away.

Thanks to Nicola hems, our hardworking curator, we were able to succeed with a number of grant applications including the Government’s Job Retention Scheme, Covid Support Schemes, Arts Council England ‘Cultural Recovery’ Grant, ‘Love the Broads’ and SHARE (Museums East). The SHARE grant enabled us to commission promotional videos which have been very well received. A ‘contactless donation point’ was also made possible.

With the support of the Broads Authority and the Environment Agency, I was pleased we were able to install the ‘Broadland Futures Initiative’ exhibition. Visitors enjoyed learning more about the challenges the Broads face in the light of climate change. I hope we can mount similar exhibitions in the coming years.

The Board also saw a few changes. Our wonderful Company Secretary, David Talbot, decided to call it a day after something approaching 17 years’ service and stood down on 14 June 2021. He took care of all aspects of museum finances, budgets and accounts. We all felt in safe and secure hands with David in control. The calm and informed way he dealt with sometimes difficult issues was a great comfort to us all I know. In May 2021, Trevor Bone also decided to retire from the Board. We all know how much he has given to the museum. Trevor was responsible for countless successful projects, not least reflooring The Marshman’s Building, but perhaps his most valuable contribution was organising and overseeing the full restoration of our steam launch ‘Falcon’ which has become an iconic and much loved feature of the museum visitor experience. With Nicola, he played a major role in the ‘Marsh Harrier’ project which has proved a huge success. There were many other innovations that Trevor accomplished during his over 20 year involvement with the museum and his contribution will never be forgotten. We welcome his continuation as a volunteer in Nick’s maintenance team.

So I felt it was time to rebuild the Board and I am delighted to be able to report that three new trustees joined during the year - Andrew Farrell, Christopher Tooth and Ruth Briant. They all brought new skills and experience and have already contributed hugely in their different ways – Andrew in fund raising and project management, Chris with schools and education and internal communication, introducing ‘volunteer forums’ and monthly ‘Bulletins’ which have been very well received. And I warmly welcome Ruth, with her experience in education and learning in museums, and who has also agreed to review ‘The Friends’ and how we can improve and promote.

Finally, I would like to convey my thanks, on behalf of my fellow trustees, to the many people whose continued commitment and support makes our museum what it is. These include all our volunteers, maintenance of buildings and boats, reception and front of house, documentation and archiving, boat helms and crews. We also recognise the incredible work Nicola Hems continues to do in so many areas, she has guided us through this difficult year, making sure we all followed covid guidelines to keep us all safe. She has worked tirelessly on grant applications and fund raising. And she tries, sometimes with success, to keep me on the straight and narrow! And to Gill Austin, our administrator for all her tasks in the office, on figures and spreadsheets, on-line booking, boat rotas and many more. We thank her also for her voluntary work with the shop and café – an important part of any museum. We can always rely on Gill to come up with new and innovative ideas on how to improve different areas of the museum. And of course, my huge thanks to all my fellow trustees who continue to devote much time and effort ‘behind the scenes’.

To those who decided to retire from our volunteer teams, we thank you for your past support and commitment and we wish you well for the future.

It *has* been a difficult period for the museum, but we are getting through it and I believe we are on the verge of new and exciting developments.

I finish with a message from one of our younger visitors, Sophie from Kent –

*I loved the Halloween Trail; it was so much fun. I liked learning about boats too. It can help me to learn new things that I didn’t know in the past. I want to come back’*

Robert Paul

Chair of Trustees