

## **NEWTOWN TEXTILE MUSEUM**

### **Progress report on the first six months**

After some lengthy negotiations, the Newtown Textile Museum was given to the Montgomeryshire Community Regeneration Association (MCRA) by Powys County Council through a Community Asset Transfer on June 10<sup>th</sup> 2016. The building is owned by the MCRA and the Museum is being managed by the MCRA Newtown Textile Museum Committee. The Committee of volunteers is entirely responsible for the management of the Museum including raising the funds to run it. At present the Museum has no paid staff.

### **Achievements**

#### *Prior to the transfer*

- The MCRA Committee had been set up, chaired by Janet Lewis
- A grant of £6,000 had been obtained from the Gwendoline and Margaret Davies Trust to cover the revenue costs for the first year.
- A grant of £1,545 had been given by Newtown Town Council for necessary capital expenditure on a computer, vacuum cleaners and equipment to monitor the humidity.
- Volunteers were recruited with 30 people offering to be hosts in the Museum and to help in other ways.

#### *Post the transfer*

##### *June to September*

- The contents of the Museum were 'refreshed' in June and July including presenting more information about wool and having wool samples to feel.
- The volunteer hosts went through an induction process.
- The Museum was open on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays in August and September.
- There was a demonstration of spinning and our crafts on most Saturdays.
- 450 visitors came on the 25 days we were open and gave donations of £680.

##### *October to January*

- A brainstorming session in October identified three key themes for the Museum: the social and industrial history of Newtown; the experience of living and working in the Museum building; and Textiles.
- Ways of converting these themes into tangible changes in the Museum before reopening on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2017 have been set in train and are continuing.
- A number of grant applications to meet the costs of upgrading the facilities and maintain necessary safety standards were successful: £5,000 from the Powys Welsh Church Act Community Foundation in Wales, for repairs and building maintenance; £1,000 from the Skinners' Company Lady Neville Charity towards the CCTV cameras; £1,000 from the Oakdale Trust for the Modes programme

and some translation costs; and £250 from the Bodfach Trust towards improved lighting.

- The Newtown Local History Group gave us £1,000.
- One of our Committee members, Katie Weston, raised a magnificent £650 for the Museum by selling some wool she had specially dyed.
- The work on the building and facilities has been set in hand and/or completed.
- The Museum was granted 'Working towards Accreditation' status in November.

*January -*

The focus for the next few months is to refresh as much as we can of the way information is presented and the artefacts displayed. This will help to improve the 'visitor experience' and make knowledge of the building, Newtown's history, and the process of 'fleece to flannel' more accessible to our visitors.

### **Challenges**

- As volunteers with experience of many things, but not running museums, we have a lot to learn.
- We have to fully understand what is in our collection and how best we can share it with the public.
- We have to find ways of turning our ideas for developing and improving what is presented in the Museum into reality.
- We want to increase the ways in which our visitors can watch, and be involved in, the processes involved in working with wool.
- We have to develop our profile in order to attract more visitors.
- We have to support our existing volunteer hosts and seek additional ones.
- We want to develop educational programmes for schools and other activities for children.
- We have to develop a sustainable financial model.
- We have to seek full accreditation in a year or two's time.
- We need to work towards being an independent charity in our own right, rather than being a Committee of the MCRA.

Janet Lewis

Chair, MCRA Newtown Textile Museum Committee

February 2017