Amgueddfa Wehyddu'r Drenewydd Newtown Textile Museum

NEWTOWN TEXTILE MUSEUM

Highlights of summer 2025

2025 was a year of steady progress rather than spectacular changes or new activities.

Visitor Numbers: We were open for our normal dates of the beginning of May to the end of September but, as in 2024, we opened a few days earlier (April 28th) to allow visitors going to and from Wonderwool to have a chance to visit us. It is difficult to tell if this has had a positive effect on our numbers. We had a total of around1,470 visitors, an addition of 130 in 2024. This included people who had come on tours and children coming to the Museum on a school visit. Covid and its aftermath had long term effect, but this seems to be wearing off at last.

Accessability: The virtual tour, in Welsh and English, that was filmed in 2024, by Gwyn Cole, with funds from the Making a difference in Powys fund, was shown on YouTube from the end of 2024. It became viewable in the Museum when we opened in Spring 2025. Visitors unable to go upstairs were pleased to watch it on a screen in the first room of the tour.

Our volunteers: We have no paid staff and are therefore very lucky to have a dedicated group of approximately 30 volunteers who carry out a range of special tasks: Treasurer, curator, secretary, Chair, shop manager, and volunteer coordinator as well as hosting in the Museum when we are open. There were a total of 92 standard sessions over the summer, each involving two hosts for at least 4 and a half hours, giving a minimum total of 828 hours; with additional hours for tours, Committee and Trust meetings etc. We have been experimenting with running the Rota digitally which, after various teething troubles, has proved to be useful.

Collection: Our collection currently comprises some 1600 items related to Newtown's textile industry and the wider history of the town in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We also have a particularly significant collection of items related to Pryce Jones's Royal Welsh Warehouse and the establishment of one of the World's first mail order companies. We continue to be offered, and accept, other relevant items linked to Pryce Jones and his work, such as copies of old catalogues. Other significant collections include a small number of items related to the opening of the Newtown to Llanidloes Railway in 1859 and an archive of c. 1300 papers of the business of Amelia Ray, a significant female entrepreneur of nineteenth century Newtown. We also hold the largest museum collection of photographs by John Owen, Newtown's first professional photographer.

Exhibitions: The 2025 exhibition focused on John Owen – Newtown's first photographer. He established his business in the town over 150 years ago, and in a forty-year career, he captured more than 25,000 images of the people and views of Montgomeryshire. He was an important figure both in our local history and in the wider context of the history of Wales. The Museum has the largest known collection

of his work, and our exhibition charted the story of both him and the art of photography in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the age of the selfie, we showed that his photographs have stood the test of time.

Charging: Our policy is that we do not have a formal charge but ask for donations. We discussed whether this was the right policy and concluded that it was. We want to make access as easy as possible, given our location and wish to be open to all, we would be unlikely to be able to charge more than £2 or £3. We are able to claim Gift Ad on donations but not charges. Many visitors are very generous, and we believe we take more money, and maintain goodwill, by not charging. We do, however, charge for tours and talks.

The shop: We had another good year in the shop with new items being added every year. Some successful collaborative items were noteworthy - these included hand-woven cushions by former weaver in residence Rachel Thomas, and museum logo aprons sewn by Helen Davies (Abermule Quilters), with pockets designed and printed by former work experience student Emily Connell. We also had a stall at the Christmas market in Newtown which was well patronised. The outcome was a net profit of £925 which was a welcome contribution to the Museum's finances.

Finance: 2025 was a good season in financial terms with visitor numbers, donations and shop sales holding up well compared to other small museums. We managed to hold expenditure to our budget, and we remain a going concern. The donations that we receive from our Friends and one-off payments are lifelines. But our cash reserves are very low, and we discussed the possibility of a major appeal in 2027, to celebrate the Museum's 60th anniversary. (It formally opened on the two top floors only in 1967).

Grants: No applications were made for grants as such in 2025.
But:
1.We benefitted from the second year of the grant from the Ashley Family Foundation to support our weaver in residence (see below).
2. We did apply to Kids in Museums in June 2025 for a Family Friendly Audit but were not successful initially due to lack of available funds. However, more funds were made available by the Welsh Government in the autumn, and our second application was successful in October 2025. The work of carrying out the audit, with the help of Kids in Museums staff, and their support of £500, was started in January 2026 and is feeding into the Museum's work in 2026.
3. We made a similar application to join a project being managed by Direct Access Ltd to develop and test a new self-auditing tool in relation to Access Policies and Plans. Again, we were lucky enough to be selected as one of the test Museums. But again, the work began in early 2026 for a few months. We have directly benefitted from the support and advice received from Direct Access.

School visits: The work we had done with a mentor provided through GEM, with Welsh government support in 2024, paid off in 2025. We had created a set of Explorer Bags with a Tomos the Mouse storybook and a Chest full of Victorian Toys. We also augmented our display of replica food in our recreated downstairs rooms.

We promoted the tours we were able to offer schools and had visits from a number of groups including Ysgol Dafydd Llwyd, the Sunshine Holiday Club at Penygloddfa and NPTC College. All were felt to be very successful. Some schools in the district were constrained from visiting because of the cost of transport. Sadly, the funds that are available to support this are only available at times of the year when the Museum has been 'put to bed'.

A weaver in residence: With the second year of the grant from the Ashley Family Foundation, for which we are very grateful, we were again able to offer a bursary to a student from Carmarthen School of Art to come and weave in the Museum for three days a week. from mid-July to the end of August. Following in Rachel's footsteps Emma joined us with different aspects of the process to share with our visitors. She used entirely natural dyes, many of which have therapeutic properties. This was of great interest to some of our visitors and, as before, they greatly enjoyed seeing the loom in action.

Workshops: We planned to run a number of workshops but were not successful in recruiting enough people to make them viable. It seems that the Museum is not an ideal place for them, given that we have no parking or cafe. But Tapestry Tuesday sessions were run again in the summer holidays and were, as always ,a great success with both children and adults. We also organise demonstrations at intervals when spinners and similar are available.

Films: In recent years we have been very successful in hosting a variety of media companies, all keen to tell the story of Pryce Jones and the birth of mail-order. Thanks to these and our own website and social media, we were approached back in May 2024 by a production team from the Franco-German TV company ARTE, based in Paris. They were making a programme for a long-running documentary series called "Invitation au Voyage" ("City Country Culture") and were keen to include Newtown and Pryce Jones in it. The programme was broadcast in February 2025, and is still available on-line at:
https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/120086-027-A/invitation-au-voyage/
In May, BBC 'Bargain Hunt' visited Newtown and recorded a feature on Pryce Jones at the museum. The programme aired in the Autumn and is still available on iPlayer -

Links with other organisations. In addition to the link with Carmarthen School of Art we have contributed to activities organised by Textile Junkies and had a display at the Llanidloes Wool and Willow exhibition. We had discussions with the Town Council about Newtown's Branding and will add NEW to our logo and documents where appropriate. There have also been discussions with the Quilt Association about possible collaborations.

The Railway 200 Exhibition train, marking the 200th anniversary of the Stockton to Darlington Railway, toured the country in 2025. It included images, supplied by the Museum, of the Pryce Jones mail order boxes. It revealed the permanent ways our lives have been shaped by over 200 years of railway history, including the birth of mail order. They have now created a website which features PJ and the establishment of mail order on their timeline - https://railway200.co.uk/timeline/

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The Management Committee: This continues to be the mainstay of the organisation. Some members of the Committee act as hosts as well as carrying out additional tasks. This is a considerable commitment for which we are enormously grateful. Some Committee members have been with us from the beginning, which is wonderful, but there is also a small turnover as the demands on people's lives change.

With 2026 being the 10th anniversary of the takeover by volunteers from Powys County in 2016, the need for a succession plan became plain. There was a need to find a new Chair of the Trust who was independent of the Chair of the Committee, Janet Lewis. She had fulfilled both roles from the start, which was not a good governance arrangement. There were discussions about how best to publicise and recruit someone to the role in 2026. Seeking possible successors for the Committee chair, the Treasurer, and the curator will also be pursued from 2026.

Janet Lewis 15.12.2025