

The New Forest Heritage Trust is registered as a Charity  
New Forest Heritage Centre, Main Car Park, Lyndhurst SO43 7NY  
T: 023 8028 3444 E: office@newforestheritage.org.uk



# Progress Report

DECEMBER 2023



# Our past year

With the support of our generous donors we had a hard-working year – climbing out of Covid-19 and focusing on the building blocks for a better and stronger future.

The most important element of our mission is to help as many people as possible learn about what makes the New Forest special, and to place our unique archive and collection at the heart of this process.

Two studies we commissioned looked at how we might rebuild our learning programme, and how we can maximise our accessibility. Despite a slow return to the countryside by so many – and the effects of this on our trading activities – we chose a path of investment in people and positivity.

35 years ago, our founders saw a need for a Heritage Centre to be established – somewhere where documents and objects would be conserved and used to tell so many stories of life and landscape in this, one of Europe’s most important places for nature and conservation.

Our trustees, staff and volunteers are dedicated to this vision and, as an independent charity without public funding, we are grateful for every pound of support we receive to help us carry out our work.



## LEARNING

Using our audience data and a visioning workshop, we have developed an audience development plan and 5-year programme, designed to serve adults and children of different ages and abilities.



We recognised the enthusiasm and skills of our learning volunteer, Hayley, by appointing her to a paid part-time assistant role under our Head of Learning, Hannah. Hannah and Hayley have piloted a variety of successful sessions, which will now form part of our programme.

From organised schools groups to free ‘drop-in’ sessions helping those facing financial difficulties due to the cost of living crisis, our collections-based learning work has been very well received and the feedback has given us much confidence that we are on the right track.

**“Brilliant – lovely approach from the staff – thoughtful and fun activities”**

**“Your Forest Fledglings has been exactly what she needs – I really believe the way your team has welcomed her has helped hugely in building her confidence”**

**“An excellent way to use a museum and gallery, and perfectly pitched”**



## LIBRARY & ARCHIVE

**Our collection of 50,000 New Forest books, manuscripts, maps and ephemera is unique and our focus for the year was on laying foundations for the future.**

Our ambition is to achieve standards of cataloguing and collections management that exceed levels normally expected of heritage organisations of our size, and to share what we have with more people. To achieve this, we recruited a new and very experienced part-time Archivist, Judy Faraday (below), to drive forward our aspirations.



Judy will mentor our young archivist, Jasmine, who began with us under the Kickstart programme and is now embarking on a postgraduate degree in archives and document management.

We were awarded a grant from the Hampshire Archives Trust to help us conserve and catalogue an important collection of records given to us by the Crosthwaite Eyre family of Bramshaw. With a new group of volunteers and a conservator from the Hampshire Records Office, the project is providing us with a lasting knowledge of conservation skills and techniques.

Under this project, we invited a group of brain injury sufferers from a local charity, Headway, to experience manuscript care and handling as a form of haptic therapy.



## DIVERSITY & COMMUNITY

**We are committed to providing access to our building and collections to as wide a group of people as possible, and the Access Review and Plan we commissioned this year provided us with fantastic guidance on how we can achieve this.**

Our commitment to diversity is already strong, with learning and engagement participants this year drawn from areas beyond the traditional demographics of the New Forest.



In the autumn, we invited a group from two local visually impaired charities to a fascinating virtual nature tour of the New Forest with a local sound engineer using wild sound recordings.

We also resolved to work closer with an important non-profit organisation, New Forest Marque, to champion local producers. We invited Marque members to sell produce from a stand outside our Centre at weekends and this has proved to be a very successful initiative.



# With your support

We are committed to the principle of free admission as the most effective way to fulfil our mission to engage and inspire visitors with the story of the New Forest.

To fund our activities, we work hard to generate income from our shop and café and through the generous donations of our visitors. We also rely on support from a range of grants we apply for each year from private foundations and from museums development bodies.

In common with many charities, our ambition is to become as self-sustaining as possible but until this time, we continue to need help with our core and capital costs.

The following sections provide you with some examples of what we can achieve in the year ahead with your help.

[newforestheritage.org.uk](http://newforestheritage.org.uk)

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## Learning

One particular strand of our new learning strategy is Home Education.

Hayley is an experienced home educator, with first-hand experience. She understands the practical and financial challenges and constraints faced by home educating families. She will develop and deliver a Home Education Programme, offering participants empathy, support and understanding.

Many children who are home educated have SEND which makes it difficult for some of their needs to be met in a large busy classroom.

We will support local home educators and their children by providing a relaxed and informal environment, sharing our knowledge of the history and geography of the New Forest and access to our collections, displays and library.

The number of children being home educated has increased by 40% in the UK since 2018. In Hampshire the number of children being home educated has increased by 112% over the last four years.





## 'Purposing' our collection

We will be confronting our greatest challenge, which is to make our archive accessible and for our visitors and supporters to understand the long term relevance of it.

Last year we were delighted to have been awarded a primary grant from the Museums Association/Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund for our Embroidered Tales project. This project will focus on one of our most treasured objects – an 8-metre embroidery woven in 1979 telling the story of the 900-years of the New Forest since its designation by William the Conqueror.

Visual artist and community engager, Robyn Woolston (below), has joined us to deliver this project. Robyn will work closely with participants from local LGBTQ+ and Romani groups to tell new and previously hidden New Forest stories buried in our archives and waiting to be told.

This project will transform the way we catalogue, interpret and display our material and, most significantly, teach us how to co-curate our collection with marginalised groups who have not traditionally engaged with us, nor us with them.



## Sustainability and Finding our Future

We are fortunate to own our building, which is sited in the centre of Lyndhurst. Constructed in 1988, elements of its layout and infrastructure need updating and our visitor experience requires a major re-think.

We began to consider redevelopment plans before Covid and we need to divert time and attention to revisiting those, and beginning a journey towards a major National Lottery Heritage Fund (or similar) application.

Such a major project will take time to deliver and so during the year ahead we need to divert some core resources towards preliminary design and feasibility stages.

If we can succeed in our redevelopment aspirations, we will be able to generate greater support, interest, engagement and income to sustain us in the long term. Core funding that we can receive at this stage will be invaluable in nourishing us through these early stages of the cycle.





## Who are we?

In 1979, a group of local people came together with the aim to build a Centre "where local residents and visitors can discover more about the New Forest, its history, its customs, its people, its wildlife and its future". By 1988, they had acquired a site and raised sufficient public and private funds to construct the Heritage Centre that we occupy today.

The New Forest Heritage Trust is a registered charity (No. 1186656), overseen by 12 trustees.

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## What is there to learn about the New Forest?

Over our first 35 years, the New Forest has continued to grow in importance. It was designated as one of largest Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the UK in 1996 and became a National Park (recently voted the nation's favourite!) in 2005.

As an unenclosed tract of land since William the Conqueror, The New Forest contains some of the rarest habitats in northern Europe and is a vital case study for understanding the delicate relationship between mankind and the environment. The ancient right of commoning has been responsible for so much of what makes the area special.

The New Forest has also long been an inspiration for culture, creativity and progress – being home to the likes of Arthur Conan Doyle, Alice Hargreaves (the subject for Alice in Wonderland), Eric Ashby (an early pioneer of wildlife film-making) and the social reformer, Florence Nightingale.



## Why are we in a unique position to educate?

Unusually, the New Forest National Park Authority has no Centre of its own, and so we fulfil this role as an independent charity – acting as a hub for day visitors, holidaymakers, local residents and populations in the nearby cities of Southampton and Bournemouth.

Our unique learning tool is our museum collection and archive. It contains over 50,000 documents, photographs, maps, oral histories, publications and artworks – all given to us by the local community for safekeeping, research and education. The collection contains an abundance of characters and stories for teaching – from memoirs and accounts of Romani life, to the antics of snake-catchers, herbalists, artists and spiritualists.

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## What are our numbers?

In a good year, we would expect to welcome 190,000 visitors to our Centre and provide formal learning sessions for up to 2,500 children. We part-time employ 10-15 local people and provide volunteering opportunities for a further 15.

