

AGM – Chair’s Report

As Chair of the South West Fed for the last year, I am delighted to welcome you to our 88th AGM, my first as Chair.

The last year has been very successful for the Fed with particular highlights including

- Highest membership income for many years
- Highest conference attendance ever with forums also being full to capacity
- A new memorandum of understanding with the University of Exeter
- New vibrant board meetings that now include sessions for sector leaders to consider key issues for culture and heritage and to network regularly at roaming locations across the South West

All of this work supports our missions to connect and inspire the heritage community across the South West and I would like to thank everyone who has helped to make this happen.

We continue to develop the skills of our members and others in our sector, as we saw with the fora held in the last year. The session in Autumn 2018 was full and had a waiting list. We explored the theme *archives in museums/heritage sites* at Aerospace Bristol and had a diverse range of attendees as well as three great speakers and support from the National Archives. Delegate feedback was very positive and the venue was exceptional, we all appreciated the free access to the exhibition, as well as eating lunch under Concorde!

The Spring 2019 Forum explored the theme of *Learning and Engagement on a Shoestring at The Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm museum in Yeovilton* - a wonderful venue with an extraordinary collection of aircraft. We enjoyed talks about delivering education programmes across multiple sites, volunteer run programmes and delivering first-class learning experiences with little to no budget, with sharing of best practice case studies from beyond the south west. We were also privileged to be joined by a team from GEM who took delegates through the practical steps needed to develop a successful learning strategy on a budget.

The next forum will take place on Thursday 3 October at Gloucester Cathedral where we will explore *Interpretation of the Historic Environment*. Speakers include one of the UK’s top Interpretive Design Consultants, Iagemakers and Gloucester Cathedral’s Head of Visitor Experience, Lorna Giles who delivered a ground-breaking interpretation scheme for the 1,000 year old site as part of a £6M development project.

We held our two-day annual Conference and AGM at Exeter University again on the 4th and 5th July 2018. The theme was ‘**Confronting the Challenges: Visits & Collections**’ and was attended by approx. 50 delegates across the two days. Although delegate numbers were slightly down again, content was well received and we enjoyed the excellent facilities provided by the University that allowed us to offer the different Conference elements, such as workshops.

This year we ended our formal partnership with the South West Museum Development Programme to focus on creating more clarity between our two organisations, with SWMDP taking the lead on training and advice whilst we at the SW Fed are focused on networking and key events such as the fora and conference, as well we job and other promotion via our comms. We continue to support each other with cross promotion and SWMDP also send a representative to our new board meeting sessions, as do the Group for Education in Museums, with whom we have worked closely in the past.

Resources and information provided through our website, eBulletins and social media have continued to provide members and others in the sector, with guidance, ideas, advice, news and job opportunities. Our twitter followers have increased to nearly 3,000 Facebook has now exceeded 750. I would like to thank Matt Ashdown, Development Officer for all of his efforts with this week.

This year we have been focused on following up on our governance review, remaining focused on our commitment to being Together for Heritage across all activity. This culminated in the recent campaign to change our articles, which frustratingly fell short by just 4 votes. ADD COMMENT HERE TO REFLECT AGM VOTE RESULT.

Our board continues to represent a diverse group of individuals with experience in many different types of organisations from within the sector. We have also developed new networking opportunities for board members and sector leaders, with representatives participating in our board session that move around the region and cover a variety of topics from evaluating wellbeing to sustaining project legacies. Representatives currently include AIM, National Trust, Museums Association, NLHF, ACE, Historic England, SWMDP, Culture, Health and wellbeing alliance, National Archives, Locality, Heritage Trust Network, GEM, and the University of Exeter, with other non-sector reps joining us depending on the topic.

This has been my first year with the Fed and I have been struck by the passion and enthusiasm of both our board and members. It has been a great first year and I have thoroughly enjoyed learning more about the organisation and exploring ways to take it forward for the future, ensuring sustainability and resilience. I have also seen the value in us varying the location of our conferences and meetings and look forward to exploring a wider range of locations over the coming year.

Having completed my review of the year which runs up to the end of March, it is important to add a note of caution regarding the Fed's future. The detail will become more apparent in the financial report but we are aware as a board, that we are much more vulnerable financially, with the changes in funding arrangements that were previously in place with SWMDP and an urgent need to find a more sustainable and income generating model as a priority, to ensure this incredible and long standing organisation continues to flourish and be a great asset to the sector. This will be our main focus for this year.

All of the Fed's work is achieved by volunteers and one very part time member of staff. I am hugely thankful for their support and it wouldn't have been possible without them. I would also like to thank our members, without whom the Fed would not exist. Members were at the heart of our activity over the last year and membership income has increased significantly, which is great news, especially as the conference is also the most well attended we have had for a number of years.

Finally, I'd like to say a few special thank yous to those who are leaving the board this year. Those stepping down, and if they are here I would like to ask them to come and receive a small gift of our appreciation, are Vice Chair – Kevin Ward, Treasurer – Susan Fox, Secretary – Lisa Powell, Regional Rep Bristol – Sophie Bristol, RR Devon – Paula Martin / Elaine Ward, RR Dorset – Sylvia Andrews, RR Somerset – Sonja Rogers and UoE Relationship Manager – Anna Bryant

Thank you, and I wish you all well as you move on to new challenges. Your contributions to the Fed are hugely appreciated. In particular I would like to thank Anna for all of her support in handing over the role of Chair, and to Kevin, Lisa, Laura and Matt for their huge efforts with our recent governance review.