



# **Watford Museum**

## **Scrutiny 2008**

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# **Watford Museum**

## **1. Statement of Purpose**

**Watford Museum exists to reflect the history and culture of Watford's local community and be accessible to all people in order to promote a better understanding and appreciation of Watford's cultural heritage and enhance the quality of life for local people and visitors: by collecting, conserving and exhibiting a collection of artefacts that represents the town's history from pre-history to present day.**

## **2. Resources**

### **Staffing**

The Museum is managed and curated by the Arts & Heritage Manager. There is a full-time Heritage Officer and Museum Assistant and two part-time Museum Receptionist/Administrators. A part-time cleaner is contracted through Watford Borough Council.

All front of house staff have been trained in Customer Care, Disability Awareness, First Aid and Museum Security.

### **Facilities**

Watford Museum is housed in a Grade II-listed Georgian town house on the Lower High Street in Watford. The house was built for the Dyson family c1775, with a brewery on the site recorded back to 1750. Bought in 1867 by Joseph Benskin, the brewery became the most significant of the local breweries. The mansion house was eventually converted into offices, and when the site was vacated, was chosen for the site of Watford Museum.

A maintenance budget is supplemented with the opportunity to apply for capital funding. A bid is currently under consideration for work to repair windows. Recent works include rendering and painting of the listed railings and wall in front of the Museum, roof work and replanting of the museum garden.

The Museum is DDA compliant, with wheelchair access, disabled toilets and a lift. An audit in 2006 resulting in extensive works to upgrade and improve these facilities. A cafe area in the foyer of the Museum has recently been established, serving Fairtrade refreshments and offering a space for visitors to relax. Improved reception and shop facilities have been developed in the last ten years, along with a new telephone system, networking of three computers and Torex till system.

The Museum has a small parking area to the rear of the building. This area is ticketed to enable priority to be given to visitors to the museum.

## **Collections**

The collection has continued to grow since the Museums opening in 1981. The Museum has a significant Fine Art collection, from bequests and purchases through the Art fund. One of our main purchases being 'A view of Cassiobury Park ' by John Wootton purchased with funding from the Art fund and donations from the people of Watford.

Around a third of the collection is on display. Apart from a contemporary art gallery being created the collections have remained as they were at inception, with the exception of a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Gallery in 1990 and the creation of a permanent space to display the Museum's internationally important Cassiobury Collection of fine art.

Cataloguing of the collection has been a priority and around 80% of the collection is now catalogued.

Conservation work has been carried out on the collection of drawings (watercolours) that the Museum holds. With over 30 works depicting Watford having been restored and framed.

Environmental monitoring has been updated and specialists in Fine Art, Archiving and Archaeology work with the Curator on collection care.

The Museum is insured through Watford Borough Councils Insurance Policy held with Zurich insurers.

## **3. Key Aims for Watford Museum 2006 - 2009**

### **Vision**

Watford Museum exists to reflect the many diverse and varied communities and needs of Watford, through collecting and interpreting the rich heritage of the Borough, focusing on access for all. Watford Museum is a community focused and supported local history Museum that continues to put community partnership working at the heart of its service provision.

### **Key Aims**

Watford Museum's key aims in delivering this vision are to continue to focus on:

- audience development
- partnership working
- diversity
- website development
- collections care
- interpretation of collections through exhibitions and display

### **Watford Borough Council Objectives 2006-2011**

Watford Borough Council has adopted the following objectives which incorporate those of the Local Strategic Partnership. The museum is well placed to support the Council in delivering on these objectives.

An efficient, effective, value for money Council  
A town with a high-quality environment  
A safer town  
A healthy town  
A good town for business, skills & learning  
A well-informed community where everyone can contribute  
A town to be proud of

### **Watford's Cultural Strategy Vision**

Our vision for culture in Watford is, with our partners, to make culture and creativity part of everyone's life, creating a town to be proud of, where people will always choose to live, work and visit.

### **Museum Objectives**

To deliver on the Council's objectives the Museum service will concentrate on the following services and projects which contribute to the Council's Cultural Strategy:

1. To investigate the potential for re-location of Watford Museum to improve the scope for joint working with other Cultural venues in the town
2. To continue an active collections policy to safeguard the rich heritage of the town
3. To establish and sustain partnerships to develop new audiences and enable access for all members of the local communities
4. To promote Watford's heritage through development and project working
5. To deliver a vibrant education, outreach and lifelong learning service
6. To achieve and build on the standards for Accreditation
7. To deliver the Space 2 gallery to provide visual arts exhibition space for contemporary local and national artists
8. To provide access to collections and dealing with enquiries
9. To undertake a collections care and management review focusing on the conservation and exhibition of the fine art collection
10. To develop facilities and services, including building maintenance and visitor services and shop
11. To promote tourist opportunities in Watford
12. To train and develop museum staff and volunteers and encourage development of the Friends of Watford Museum

#### **4. MLA Accreditation for Watford Museum**

In August 2007 Watford Museum received official accreditation from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). The MLA's Museum Accreditation Scheme sets nationally agreed standards for UK museums. To qualify, museums must meet clear basic requirements on how they care for and document their collections, how they are governed and managed, and on the information and services they offer to their visitors.

A detail document 'Accreditation Standard' a 60pg pdf document is available at [http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets//A/accreditation\\_standard\\_pdf\\_5640.pdf](http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets//A/accreditation_standard_pdf_5640.pdf)

#### **5. Performance Indicators**

All effective organisations measure their performance in order to know how well they are doing and to identify opportunities for improvement.

Watford Museum's performance is measured using best value performance indicator information within three categories:

**BV 170a** - The number of visits to/usage of museums per 1000 population

**BV 170b** - The number of visits that were in person per 1000 population

**BV 170c** - The number of pupils visiting museums and galleries in organised school groups

These measure museum usage which includes the number of visitors received, the number of school groups, the use of museum services for off-site visits, such as High Street trails and the number of visitors received to our web pages.

Watford Museum has shown consistent improvement of BV performance indicator figures since 2001/2.

	<b>2001/2*</b>	<b>2002/3</b>	<b>2003/4</b>	<b>2004/5</b>	<b>2005/6</b>
<b>Total usage</b>	13169	13300	12294	19216	29593
<b>Visits in person</b>	10307	8226	4278	3780	6971
<b>Schoolchildren</b>	659	490	175	348	479

\* Open 6 days a week

#### **Current Audience**

Our audience over the past 4 years has grown and diversified. This has been achieved by special projects that have been diverse, targeted and encouraged wider usage.

Results of most recent monitoring survey of museum usage (March 2006):

#### **Gender**

Male:	24%
Female:	76%

**Age**

Under 18:	33%
18-24:	28%
25-34:	11%
35-49:	20%
50-64:	7%
65+:	2%

**Disability**

Yes:	2%
No:	98%

**Origin**

White British:	76%
Mixed White & Black Caribbean:	2%
Indian:	2%
Pakistani:	2%
Other Asian:	2%
Caribbean:	13%
African:	2%
Other ethnic group:	2%

**Results of most recent Customer Satisfaction Survey**

An impressive increase in satisfaction with Watford Museum has been highlighted in a recent survey, with results improving from 33% in 2003/04 to 41% in 2006/07.

The results were part of a Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) survey that was carried out independently on behalf of Watford Borough Council to find out what residents think about the range of services the Council provides.

## **6. Programming and Partnerships**

In order to maintain growth and diversification levels Watford Museum ensures an interesting and varied programme of activities and events is always available to its visitors. The Museum also collaborates with diverse local community group. This maintains a consistent, high level of visitor figures & also promotes access for all within the community.

Below are some recent examples of Museum programming and outreach:

### **Events**

World Mental Health Day was celebrated on 10th October with an activity open day at the Museum. Workshops included Circus Skills, Lantern Making, Drumming, Yoga and Massage and there were stalls from Guideposts, Mind, Viewpoint, Sunflower Domestic Violence, Fair-trade and Pucker Teas. Over 70 visitors attended including a number of mental health patients. As well as providing a venue, the Museum worked with client-led groups over the months before WMHD to plan all aspects of the events, providing experience of exhibition planning, hanging and marketing

'The Haunted Museum' included vignettes of ghost stories from Watford presented by 'I Can't Believe We're Not Better' a mental health theatre company played to packed houses for all 4 performances.

'A Victorian Teenager's Diary' - The Diary of Lady Adela Capel of Cassiobury 1841 – 1842 - Watford Museum hosted the book launch which included a very well received talk by Marian Strachen, the editor.

Watford Museum hosted a Dig for victory day and invited the local Watford Band to play wartime songs, the friends of the museum made and served a wartime tea. A local collector brought along a Bren gunner, a wartime enactment group came with a saloon car and the local fire Museum brought their WW1 Fire engine. We also had a Nissan shelter erected in the museum garden and an ARP warden on hand to show tactics used to defend the home front.

### **Exhibitions and Space 2 Galleries**

'Against Nature' the object sculptures of Annelies Oberdanner	July 2006
'Sophie Wilson: A decade of work' an exhibition by local artist	September 2006
In celebration of Black History month, Lifestyle & Literature. A partnership project with Watford African Caribbean Association, Watford Palace Theatre and Holywell Community Centre.	October 2006
'John Knight: Three Cities' an exhibition by artist John Knight	March 2007
Two exhibitions by members of DRUM, the Disability Recreation Unity Movement. 'DRUMWORKS' and 'Step By Step'	March and December 2007
'Watford's Allotments in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century' an exhibition of creative writing inspired by allotments	July 2007

'Parallel Visions & Frances Geraghty' an exhibition inspired by Watford's twin towns	September 2007
'World Mental Health Day Art Exhibition' a display of works by mental health patients from Guideposts, Mind and Viewpoint	October 2007
'Through Our Eyes' an exhibition of the guideposts and Watford Museum photography project: photographic views of Watford through the eyes of local people.	October 2007
The work of "The Watford Museum School of Painting and Drawing' who meet every Thursday and Friday in the Museum tutored by local artist Martin Smith.	December 2007
'Inspirations' an exhibition of works inspired by Watford Museum's collection, by three local artists.	January 2008

### **School Holiday Workshops**

The museum is committed to providing good value holiday workshops for children, exploring themes in the collections and current projects. A discount is offered to Watford Plus Card-holders to make the workshops as accessible as possible to low-income families. Examples include:

Drumming Workshops	Learn to play a variety of drums and percussion instruments with guidance from a samba drummer
Wonderful Weaving	Learn to weave and create wonderful patterns
Hieroglyphics translation	Translate your name and paint it in Egyptian Hieroglyphics
Costume making	Using recycled materials create a stylish garment to wear
Print Making	Using printing blocks from the museum collection
Textile workshop	Learn how to transpose images onto fabric to create a wall hanging
Haunted pirate skulls	Using paper mache create a scary pirate skull decorated with eye patches gold teeth and bandanas.
Fireworks Pictures	Create a beautiful night time fireworks picture using oil pastels
Explore mosaic	Design and create an individual paper mosaic
Easter Card	Design and create your own easter cards
Jewellery workshop	Make your own unique jewellery
Portraits	Create a clay sculpture based on your own face

### **Partnership Projects**

The Big Draw is now an annual award winning event at Watford Museum. In 2006 and 2007 Watford Museum has worked in partnership with both Watford Grammar School for Girls and The Harlequin Centre. In 2006 the 'Dream Landings' initiative was very successful, it encouraged participants to explore their 'Journeys' through

drawings. In 2007 Big Draw success continued with a unique initiative 'The Prize Draw'. Shoppers were invited to draw items they would like to purchase and staff guessed their price.

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra Project 'Picture This' in partnership with Watford Museum and musicians from Guideposts had its debut performance in Stevenage in November 2007. The Guideposts musicians attended workshops and rehearsals hosted in the museum galleries.

The Watford Junction website project brings together for the first time evidence of over three hundred years of diverse history in Watford. This has been made accessible on an interactive website, to which people can add their own stories and experiences of migration to Watford. The project has far exceeded its original objectives and has been positively received by local communities. Although the funding from the HLF has been completed, the project and partnerships continue to develop. The Watford Junction has raised the profile of the Museum within local diverse communities, and increased expectations of the Museum's role in celebrating and commemorating local diverse history.

The year long event 'Dig for Victory' project was organised to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWII. This began with us working in partnership with Watford Allotments Society to transform the front lawn of the Museum into a wartime vegetable garden, using equipment and seeds that would have been available at the time.

The Museum also participates in the Watford CVS Assisted Volunteer Project, providing supported volunteer opportunities for people with long-term mental health issues. This has been extremely successful for the Museum and participants. Watford Museum also works with the local theatre company, I Can't Believe We're Not Better, for people with mental health issues. The company was commissioned to write and perform 'The Wonder of Watford', a play that takes the audience on a break-neck speed journey through history of Watford, which was performed in the Museum galleries to packed houses every night. The same theatre group also worked with the Museum to develop a hugely popular ghost event for Halloween.

### **Watford Museum School of Drawing and Painting**

Learn to draw and paint, or improve on existing skills in an informal and social atmosphere all under the guidance of local artist Martin Smith.

Drawing and painting: Thursdays AM & PM

Watercolour and drawing: Fridays AM Oil painting: Fridays PM

## **7. Education and Outreach**

Watford Museum provides a free education and outreach service for the local community. Over 30 local schools and education services have used this service in the last two years, with school confidence in participating in museum activities increasing because of the provision of a qualified teacher-led service. This service includes special opening arrangements for school visits, loans boxes and resources, history in the environment trails including Victorian Watford and a High Street Trail, and Leisure & Tourism, Design, and Drama projects. Watford Museum works with students from Key Stage 1 to A Level, across the ability range and outside mainstream education in behavioural units and special services.

Watford Museum works with the Watford Learning Partnership, ASCEND and local library services to develop activities for lifelong learning, and participate in Adult Learners Week and Family Learning Week. A partnership with West Herts College has resulted in frequent usage for subjects as diverse as leisure & tourism, shop & exhibition design, culminating in a museum-based module being established on the design curriculum for 2007.

Outreach services are also offered to local community groups and societies, including High Street Trails, museum visits and talks on Cassiobury and Watford High Street. Over one thousand people have taken part in a Watford High Street Trail since it was devised. The Watford Museum School of Drawing & Painting, has been established and run by a local artist and has proved very successful and has expanded to four classes a week.

## **8. Promotion and Publicity**

The Museum's audience is mainly local people, including group and school visits. The establishment of a high quality website has enabled us to reach a wider audience, bringing the significance of our collections and their relationship to the Earls of Essex to an international audience. On-line services and galleries continue to be developed, and the Museum regularly deals with enquiries from around the world.

A new Museum leaflet and poster have been designed to compliment the website, with high quality publicity material produced for all events. This standard has resulted in the Museum's marketing has been recognised within the Council and by the local museums community and requests for us to provide marketing training and advice to others.

Every event at the Museum is publicised, the most effective form has proven to be the use of posters. For all Space2 Exhibition a graphic designer is used to create a professional and effective poster that clearly promotes the exhibition. We also use professionally designed posters for most other events & workshops. These are distributed throughout the community to organisations whom are willing to display them.

Any opportunities for publicity are utilised. For example the recent visit by the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire was covered by the Watford Observer, on our invitation.

Watford Museum recently featured on a double page spread in the About Watford Magazine. This was a very successful form of promotion and the number of attendees to the School of Drawing and Painting has shown significant increase as a result.

Watford Museum events and exhibitions regularly feature in other regional publications including: Hertfordshire Learning; Hertfordshire Horizons; A Taste for Learning in Watford; Enjoy! In Hertfordshire

## **9. Friends**

The friends of Watford Museum are an extremely active and supportive group that play a crucial role in Watford Museum's success. They greatly assist with the museum programming, organising monthly talks that are open to all. Recent examples and up coming talks include:

- Welcome to Christmas, Seasonal Music & Customs to Enjoy. December 2007
- History and Decoration of Holy Rood Church in Watford. January 2008
- History of Scammell & its place in Watford's History. February 2008
- History of Aylett Nurseries. April 2008

Additionally they are very active in supporting the future of the Museum. The friends invited the Mayor to attend their last meeting in order to ensure they were kept aware of any developments the council has planned for the Museum's future.