

FOAM newsletter Spring 2009

The Athelstan Museum has been in its new location in the Town Hall for just over six months now and expectations have been exceeded. There have been many visitors, 5327 in the first six months and much interest. One feature that is attracting a lot of attention is the model of the Abbey in its heyday, which can be dismantled and rebuilt. The grandeur of the present abbey is overshadowed by the splendour of the complete abbey as it was in the fourteenth century.

The volunteers play a crucial role in keeping the museum open and many are enlarging their interest to help on the curatorial side. If you would like to join then come to the museum to enrol. Volunteers once more will be running the museum when our professional staff, Pippa Griffith and Christina Staff, leave, so there will be lots to be done. They have done a wonderful job and have really succeeded in getting the museum 'sorted out'. FOAM owes them a great debt. It had been hoped to extend their contracts when the lottery money finished but sadly the funds are not there.

While on the subject of funding it must be reported that £20,000 is still needed. Although FOAM have raised more than the original target – thanks to the tireless efforts of Miranda Ford – because costs, over which we have had no control, have risen there is a shortfall. We need £10,000 to cover the outstanding costs of the full refurbishment including building costs and then the budgeted costs for next year (2009-10) which we think will be about £10,000 as well. Malmesbury Town Council have agreed to remit the rent and service charge for next year which will be a fantastic help. A fresh appeal for the missing £20,000 will be launched soon. Please help and get others to help.

Late night opening in early December went well. There were lots of visitors who enjoyed the new museum. The Christmas Fair helped raise funds; a higher attendance would have raised more! Christmas card sales were below expectations so these are still available. Buy now to avoid disappointment!

Other successful events were the Mull at the Museum which as well as being most enjoyable raised £500 and M.E.Batstone's art exhibition 'Light and Colour' with a wonderful display of paintings produced £1,000.

As well as conventional visitors the museum is attracting school visits. Several classes from Malmesbury primary school have come already (four more classes are booked for March) as have other schools nearby. The cubs and brownies were here as were preschool groups. People with special needs have been shown around and visits have been made to clubs etc. with talks and exhibits. This is seen as an essential part of our outreach programme.

Family activities have proved popular; we've run six different events and 561 adults and 324 children came; that's most encouraging.

A list of future activities is on the back page – do come.

*Roger Griffin*

### **Museum and Abbey House Gardens work together**

Abbey House Gardens will open its doors to the public later this month first with a National Garden Scheme day which raises money for several charities principally Macmillan Nurses, and then daily for the new season from March 21 when season ticket holders are offered the chance to take a friend for free! Ian & Barbara have worked hard to develop and promote their gardens over the last 12 years resulting in increased footfall for the town's other facilities, not least the museum. In spite of the poor summers of the last couple of years; the previously high value of sterling which kept both foreigners at bay and encouraged UK residents abroad and then a fire last November that destroyed most of their exotic plant collection, the Pollards are rising from these ashes with renewed confidence for the season with a significant increase in their group bookings. They are keen to work with the museum on common interest projects aimed at sharing history groups and school parties and even keener to see some good weather!