

**Written Submission for Scrutiny Committee from Brixham Heritage Museum,
2014**

In the report commissioned by the Arts Council, Michael White, a professional Accountant, was asked to look at the possibility of a merger between Brixham Heritage Museum, Torquay Museum and Torre Abbey. In his report he did say that we were operating as leanly as possible and were the most financially sustainable of the three museums.

Both he and Jon Finch agreed however that we cannot be financially independent without the grant we presently receive.

Both reports suggest that money could be saved by greater co-operation in marketing and in our workforce. We have joined in the joint ticketing promotion with advertising through the Herald Express and in the Education programme. However, a greater exchange of volunteers is not acceptable as the Brixham people do not wish to undertake the time and expense of travelling into Torquay – it would be unwise to have to use money to reimburse them in the light of cost cutting measures!

It has also been mentioned that there could be one Curator shared between the three museums, but each museum needs a Curator with different specialisms, so this is not feasible. It is worth noting that the total wages paid at Brixham Museum amount to less than one normal museum officer's salary (see attached report summaries).

It has been said that we have no business plan, but Michael White, a professional accountant of Devon Square Partners Ltd., prepared one in March, 2013, and we are now working on a new one, but it is very difficult when we don't know what the future grant will be.

Making plans for an increase in admission charges and losing our paid secretarial help (4 x 3.5hrs/week), we feel that we could just manage a 20% reduction, but a 42% reduction would mean that we would have to dip into reserves.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR WE WOULD HAVE TO CLOSE, BECAUSE IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO RETAIN OUR RESERVES TO PAY FOR PUTTING BRIXHAM'S HERITAGE INTO STORAGE.

See Reports

1) Brixham Museum Business Plan – March 2013
M. White, Devon Square Partners Limited

2) Torbay Museums Options Appraisal – October 2013
Jon Finch, Black Radley Limited

Attached are notes from these reports.

A Profile of Brixham Heritage Museum

“Brixham Heritage Museum offers good value to Torbay Council”

Financial stability and vulnerability:

Brixham Heritage Museum is the smallest of Torbay’s museums but in some ways it is the most sustainable, being very much volunteer led and the standard of management information and accounting undertaken by the treasurer is very good. The accounts demonstrate a modest-sized and tightly-run organisation. However its grant from Torbay Council does make it very vulnerable.

The council grant is modest when set against comparable museums [see for example, Godalming Museum – below]. Nervousness with regard to repeated threatened grant cuts has not been helpful in developing a more commercial culture and has tended to undermine confidence. **An added sense of recognition and understanding of the Museum’s work by Torbay Council by providing medium term surety of grant levels would be a fillip to confidence and therefore sustainability.**

The reviews show how exposed the Museum is to the vagaries of costs such as premises related expenditure. The building dates from 1902 and was originally Brixham’s Police Station. It covers three floors and while owned by Torbay Council, the Museum has a full repairing lease. In 2012/13 the repairs and refurbishment costs were estimated to be just under £3,000 equivalent to 15% of the Council’s grant.

Workforce profile:

As an operation the Museum relies heavily on volunteers with contracted staff consisting of a part-time curator, part-time administrator and two seasonal receptionists, all on very modest paid hours. **The total salary costs of the paid staff being on a par with the national average wage of one person.**

[Godalming Museum - Godalming’s local Council directly employs the curator and also subsidises the volunteer manager and contributes £66,000 a year to its operation costs. This offers an interesting comparison with Brixham.]

An Assessment of where the Museum now is:

In 2013 Brixham Heritage Museum was joint winner (with the Horniman Museum London) of the annual “Most Family Friendly Museum Awards”, a national completion sponsored by the Sunday Telegraph. This accolade underlines the Museums investment in education, its belief in creating a family experience and its common sense in pulling it all together as a deliverable product. Among the special educational offers, the Museum organises hands-on archaeological digs, Napoleonic boot camps and WW1 outdoor events for children, families and disadvantaged youngsters.

The Museum was recipient of the *Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence* two years running (2013 and 2014). This honour reflects the Museum's commitment to providing a well-run and high profile visitor attraction in Torbay.

The Museum is the custodian of artefacts and archival materials available to researchers, including important collections associated with Brixham's maritime past, Brixham Seamen's Boys' Home, the Berry Head Napoleonic Forts and prehistoric finds from Brixham Caverns. Of **more** than local/regional significance are the military artefacts from the Forts and Middle Bronze Age pottery from Ash Hole Cavern.

The Museum organises Family History Research, answering enquiries from as far away as Australia and Canada. This has been a highly popular service providing the Museum with a regular income stream.

Possible Consequences of the Proposed 42% Cut in the 2015/16 Grant

- There will be a reduction in the number of existing paid staff (all of whom are already only part-time).
- Reduction in educational services including outreach activities.
- No further major improvements to existing displays or creation of brand new display with the consequence of a decrease in visitor appeal.
- Admission charges will have to rise and free admission currently available to Torbay Carers, Torbay Childminders and similar disadvantaged groups may be jeopardised.
- There will be a threat to the continuing preservation of the Museum's collections and archives.

If a further draconian cut is implemented beyond 2016 there is every likelihood that the Museum will close down completely.