

# The Folk and Costume Museum, Saumarez Park, Castel, Guernsey, GY5 7UJ Well Worth a Visit

Following an extensive and expensive upgrade – approximately £250,000 was spent on the project - in 2006, 2007 and 2008 there is now a great deal more to see at the National Trust of Guernsey's Folk & Costume Museum (formerly Folk Museum) than ever before.

As the new name suggests, much of the changes effected in the two year makeover, involved the construction of the new Costume Section in what had originally been the greater part of two units of States Houses accommodation.

Other rooms have been enlarged and new displays mounted or re-constructed in them, including the new History of the Guernsey Tomato Industry, the Guernsey Fisherman's Display and the National Trust Information centre and adjoining research area with a small Guernsey-based library and internet access.

The Folk and Costume Museum will have the following 20 or so exhibits on view for the 2010 season – please see the numbered diagram accompanying this article.

On entering the courtyard the visitor can have a very good general view of the cobbled courtyard which was re-laid in 2003. At the time this was the largest cobbled area in the island – following the re-construction of Market Square in St. Peter Port it is now the second largest. The visitor can also get a very comprehensive view of the stable-yard buildings which originally housed horses and carts on the ground floor with stable-boys and gardeners billeted above them on the first floor. In the corner of the yard was the accommodation of the man in charge of the yard – the head gardener.

On entering the main building through the impressive Guernsey granite doorway with its rather strange linkage to a benitier of Caen limestone there are two impressive displays either side of the kiosk/entrance hall. The first is the old Guernsey Farmhouse Kitchen with its imposing inglenook fireplace, furze oven, green bed, dresser and bacon rack still laid out as it was in 1952 when the original museum was set up. The second display is the Town House Parlour, which was the first addition to the original Guernsey Farmhouse Kitchen tableau.

The display shows the lady of the house entertaining a female visitor whilst her husband plays on a piccolo piano of 1826 patent and her daughter shows off her reading skills from an early pop-up story book. Various ornaments are housed under glass domes and framed pictures of family members and items to do with the family business fill the walls. In one corner of the room – opposite the piccolo piano - is a polyphone record player of 1895 vintage which still plays beautifully. A polite request to the staff on duty will see the machine explained and played for the visitor. Also in this area is the story of Guernsey's longest lived resident – Mrs Margaret Neve (née Harvey) who lived to the ripe old age of 110 years and 10 months.

On mounting the staircase behind the kiosk – or by taking the lift if necessary – the visitor arrives at the start of three Victoriana displays – a parish schoolroom, a play room and a bedroom. Each of these rooms has a wealth of period items relating to the scene they depict from the old school benches, teachers desk, cane, books and posters in the schoolroom; to marionettes, model theatre, magic lantern, dolls' houses, perambulators, musical instruments, puzzles, books and games in the play room; to a half-tester bed, Guernsey painted chest of drawers (dated 1804), various wash basins and ewers, rag rugs and a rather cleverly-designed commode which closes down when not in use to look like an innocent chest of drawers. At either end of these rooms and in the corridor running along their length are displays of sewing machines, a Guernsey spinning wheel, school photographs, school exercise books and examples of children's embroidery dating back to the middle 1800s.

On passing through what used to be the back wall of the old bedroom, the visitor enters the first of the new Costume Display rooms. In what used to be three rooms of living accommodation there are now two large display cases of costume. In the first and much larger cases is a display of wedding dresses and other costumes related to weddings – the earliest item being a rather splendid wedding dress from 1759. In the second case is a display of garments related to the party that would have been held shortly after the wedding ceremony. Two items of note here are Christian Dior dress donated to the National Trust of Guernsey by the actress Olivia De Havilland (of "Gone with the Wind" fame) and the dress uniform of a Lt. Colonel of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guernsey (Northern) Militia Regiment.

At the top of the landing the visitor will next see some of the latest items to be put on display in the Folk and Costume Museum – three

ceremonial robes of Lord Saumarez's family which are now on permanent loan to the National Trust of Guernsey.

Also in this area and in alcove in the wall by the side of the staircase are items relating to Saumarez Park and the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace of 1851.

At the foot of the stairwell is a rather splendid collection of original Cobo Alice Dolls, made by Alice Le Huray (and her sisters and cousins) in the 1870s and 1880s, together with some of the winning entries in a Women's Institute competition to make a modern day copy. Also in this area is a rather imposing portrait of Mary (May) Bonamy Collings who was a founder member of the National Trust of Guernsey.

The second Costume Area will be housing a new display in 2010 to mark the centenary of the (Girl) Guide movement in Guernsey. This will be mounted by Miss Edith Le Patourel (Guernsey Guide Association) with help from the Costume Curator and other members of the Folk and Costume museum staff.

Moving on from the Guiding display, the visitor will enter the National Trust of Guernsey's Information Centre Room. This room contains an impressive late Victorian/early Edwardian miniature town house made by Mr and Mrs Alan and Mandy Le Page, which is also on permanent loan to the museum. At the opposite end of this room is a DVD screen on which is shown various information films to with the making of the miniature town house, the renovation of Les Caches Barn in the Forest by the National Trust of Guernsey, and how to cook a roast from start to finish in a Guernsey Furze oven. To one side of this room is a small research area, which is not currently open to members of the public.

This room roughly marks the half way point around the museum. It is furnished with comfortable chairs so that members of the public can have a little breather before tackling the second half of the museum's displays.

The next room is the Fisherman's Display area. This area was enlarged during the most recent renovations. The old fisherman's hut has been retained - as have all the old fishing nets, fishing baskets, ormering hooks and blocks and tackle - but moved to the opposite corner of the room. Where the old hut used to be is now a rather splendid Guernsey mackerel boat called "Janet II" but originally registered as GU68. The boat was built in 1927 by local boat-builder Charlie Luscombe and is now owned by Ian Lihou who has very kindly allowed the National Trust of Guernsey to display it on a long term loan basis.

A new item in this area for 2010 is the display cabinet relating to the heroism of Nicholas Brache and his son (also Nicholas) who carried out many brave sea rescues before the days of the RNLI.

Items on view in this cabinet include the certificates awarded to them for the saving of two Guernsey fishermen in 1842, and also the silver trophy awarded to Nicholas Brache (Junior) in 1842 as well as the address on vellum delivered by the then Lt. Governor of Guernsey and Alderney, Major-General Bell to Nicholas Brache (Senior) in 1850.

On leaving this room, the visitor finds him/herself back in the cobbled courtyard – but not for long – because immediately next door to the Fisherman’s display area is the first of two Cart Rooms. The first cart room contains two traditional farm wagons – the Box Cart, used for collecting vraic (seaweed) or round vegetables, and the Long Cart, used for moving hay from the fields to the hayrick yard.

Also in this room is a Street Piano, made by Spinelli and Rossi in 1890, renovated by Canon A.O. Wintle M.A. of Bury St. Edmunds in association with the Toc. H. organisation in 1930, and given to “Blind Bob” Payne, a local man, who used it in St. Peter Port up until 1966; a 1901 Governess’s cart and a butcher’s delivery hand cart.

The second Cart Room houses four main items – a medical practitioner’s Caravoine and a Horse Bus both used from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up until and including the Second World War, a Springer Cart, and a Farm Van, which would have been the utility vehicle of its day being used during the week to take produce to market and to take family and friends to Church on Sundays. Several other miniature push carts, wagons and wheelbarrows can also be seen in this room.

Above these two cart rooms - and reached by a short flight of stairs - is the Plough Room. Down one side of this large room are the ploughing and planting displays with the main item being the very large – and very heavy – “Great Plough”, which often needed as many as twenty draught animals to pull it. Also on this side of the room are smaller ploughs, seed drills, a harrow and a roller together with display boards showing various weeders, dibbers and animal traps. Down the other side of the room is the harvesting display. This section includes various tools used to cut the wheat – sickles and scythes as well as large hay rakes as well as a rather ingenious mechanical bird scarer. More bird scarers and animal traps also feature as do various artefacts used in the threshing process. A winnowing machine and various wheat measures and grinding utensils complete the displays in this area.

The pig sties have been renovated during the 2009 season. A new roof has been put over three of the original five sties and the walls and floors have all been re-pointed with a lime-based mortar.

It is hoped that this area will be further upgraded in time for the 2010 season with new doors, model pigs and information boards about the Guernsey pig industry during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The other two pig sties now form part of a workshop which is not open to members of the public.

The next stop is the block containing the Dairy, Wash-house, and Trades and Tools Displays. The Dairy is on the ground floor and shows in detail the process of butter making the farmer and his wife would carry out from the collection of the milk from the cow to the salted butter pat being transported to the weekly market on damp cabbage leaves – the fore-runners of sheets of grease-proofed paper. The Wash-house shows the process that the laundry girls would carry out from the collection of the dirty laundry, the lighting of the fire below the copper, the collecting of water from the well, the washing, scrubbing, rinsing, wringing and drying out of the clothes. Linked to this display is a smaller one showing the various types of flat irons etc that were used in the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Also in this area is an explanation of the development of the Guernsey Cow, the killing of the pigs and the preservation of their meat in the days before refrigeration and a display of old Guernsey lamps, lights and associated fittings.

Above this area, up a short flight of stairs, are the Trade and Tools exhibitions. The trades featured here include the brick-maker, the carpenter, the cooper, the cobbler, the tinsmith, the roofer and the quarryman. Each area has a comprehensive explanation of what each trade entailed. A window let into the end wall on this floor of the building gives a view of a cider-man shovelling apples into a chute where a pair of strong metallic mandibles crush and chop them into pulp as part of the cider-making process.

The cider barn alongside the Dairy, Wash-house and Trade and Tools building, gives a detailed account of the process of cider-making once the apples have been crushed. The machinery on view is part of a later crushing process whereby the apples are crushed by mechanical means powered by a man or animal turning a wheel which by a series of toothed cogs operates the mechanical jaws mentioned above. An older version a stone cider trough can be seen on the grassy area to the rear

of this building. Sadly it has one or two pieces missing- including the wheel – but the construction of the trough can be easily seen. Alongside the crusher in the cider barn is a cider apple press (dated 1734 and which originally came from a farm in St Pierre-du-Bois).

Behind the cider barn is the new barn which was especially built to house the National Trust of Guernsey's hay elevator. This barn also houses a New England Tiger hay rake which would have been the Rolls-Royce of its day. Behind and to the side of these two machines are a miniature dray, potato and wheat scales with original stone weights, a milkman's delivery cart together with his various ladles and imperial measures.

This new barn also contains an early example of a child's three-wheeler bicycle as well as examples of an original Rover Safety Bicycle, a Boneshaker and a Penny Farthing.

Crossing the yard to exit via the Guernsey Tomato Industry exhibition, a very interesting outdoor exhibit is the dinghy from the SS Stella. This boat was one of several lifeboats and other safety craft that the SS Stella was carrying when she hit rocks off Alderney in March 1899 and sank in eight minutes with great loss of life.

As many as 105 passengers and crew are believed to have perished in the disaster but this little craft is reputed to have supported 13 survivors from 4.00 pm until 7.00 am (for fifteen hours overnight) through heavy seas before they were rescued by a passing ship.

The Guernsey Tomato Industry Exhibition, put together by Lloyd Robilliard with the assistance of Peter Brehaut for the National Trust of Guernsey is now the only permanent display on the island about this once most important industry. Exhibits include: building a greenhouse, a steaming scene, a 1911 soil sterilizer, a pump house, various types of packing sheds with different types of tomato graders over the years, information panels about pests and diseases, getting the produce to market and a collection of various types of packaging from 1864 to the present day.

As the visitor returns to the entrance/exit he or she can spend some time looking at the various books, postcards, quality wooden toys, old styled preserves and confectionary on display and ready to be purchased all of which are relevant to what has been seen on the tour of the museum.

Those not wishing to purchase anything can instead read through and/or add to the comments in the visitors' book or ask questions of the staff

on duty who are always willing to answer any questions relating to the exhibits in the museum, general history of the island, or even how to catch a bus back to town.

Two sets of work sheets – one aimed at children aged 9 and under and a second for children aged 10 and under 14 exist to keep them occupied and to direct their attention to various objects, facts and figures in the museum. These will normally be offered to youngsters upon arrival, but if for any reason they are not, please do not hesitate to ask the member of staff on duty in the kiosk for one.

Small prizes are given for correctly completed work sheets.

During the summer months several interest groups attend the museum and give demonstrations of their skills and/or talking in the local Guernsey French (or patois) in the courtyard and or the National Trust Information Area situated between the Costume Area 2 and the Fishermen's Display Area.

The season has been extended since 2006 to include the Easter holidays, whenever they may occur, and the autumn half term to allow families with children of school age to be able to visit the museum together. The Folk and Costume Museum now opens on the 15<sup>th</sup> March and closes on the 31<sup>st</sup> October each year – seven days a week - but remains closed on the 9<sup>th</sup> May (Liberation Day).

The times of opening in the low season (or shoulder) months of March, April, September and October are from 10.00 am until 5.00 pm, and in the high season months of May, June, July and August the museum is open from 10.00 am until 5.30 pm.

Organised visits by schools are catered for and whenever possible these are timed to start and finish before the museum opens at 10.00, though there are times when organised school parties may be on site when the museum is also open to the general public.

Visitors should allow themselves a good hour to tour the museum. To avoid disappointment, last entries have been fixed at 30 minutes before closing but members of the public and members of the National Trust are welcome to visit the kiosk in the main entrance right up to closing time – and there is no compulsion to buy anything – though there are many wonderful temptations on sale.

The Folk and Costume Museum also runs a special Christmas Shop in the Guernsey Kitchen/Parlour area from mid-November to mid-December. The Kitchen display remains in situ but the parlour is cleared of museum items and filled with lots of Christmas items from Christmas cards, and decorations to affordable Christmas stocking fillers for friends and family. Please see separate article on this year's event.

Entrance fees to the museum for the 2010 season will remain unchanged from the 2009 season. The entrance fees are as follows: Adults: £5:00; OAPs: £4:00; Children/Students 5-16: £1.50; Children under 5: Free; (Worldwide) National Trust Members: Free; La Société Guernesiaise Members: Free. Or come as an organised party of more than 8 persons and apply for a special group concession rate.

Special guided tours both during the day and or private viewings during the evening can be arranged by calling the Curator on telephone (01481) 255384. Only normal entry rates will apply – there is no extra charge for a guided tour – though donations to the National Trust of Guernsey are always welcome.

Do come and see what this wonderful museum has to offer. We entertain between 9,000 and 10,000 visitors each and every year – and have had nothing but praise for our efforts in our visitors' book and Visit Britain Quality Assured Assessments.

**Visitors and locals alike: Miss this museum and miss out!**

Paul Le Pelley,  
Curator.