University Centre Shrewsbury
Guildhall
Frankwell Quay
Shrewsbury
SY3 8HQ

Charity Reg. No. 1161594

Annual Report
Year ended 31st March 2020
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1. Our Mission

**Mythstories** works with the spoken word; in a museum and in outreach projects.

We encourage our users to be storytellers themselves, passing on oral heritage and keeping it alive.

2. Status of the Charity

**Mythstories** is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation governed by a standard ‘Foundation’ constitution.

Mythstories began as a website in June 1998, before opening as a museum in February 1999. The original Charity was created by a Deed of Trust in 2001 and merged with the CIO in 2015.

3. Governance and Management

**Contact** c/o Mr. Peter J. Roscoe, 19 Victoria Street, Castlefields, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY1 2HS or info@mythstories.com

During the year 5 Trustees held office:

- Peter John Roscoe (second term – ends 31st March 2020)
- David William Reeves (until his death on 11.07.2019)
- Geoffrey Arthur Hardy (second term – ends 31st March 2021)
- Pauline Ann Rigby (second term – ends 31st March 2021)
- Jacob Edward Owen Williams (first term – ends 15th May 2021)

Three Trustee-designates shadowed the Board during this time. Simon Poole, Phil Jefferies and Zara Bannu.

The trustees and trustee designates cover the following skill areas: business management, cultural education, health psychology and resilience, legal expertise, child & vulnerable adult protection, verbal arts practice. Some have experience as former or practising young storytellers, some have current experience of academic life as students or lecturers.

Trustees met electronically to conduct business, with two Trustees approving all financial transactions. A physical meeting planned for March to effect Board changes was cancelled due to Covid-19. Day-to-day management continues to be delegated to two key employees.
Since year-end several changes have been implemented. The three Trustee Designates joined the Board on 1st September 2020. Geoff Hardy and Pauline Rigby have indicated they wish to stand down. Both were founder Trustees of the Charity and their advice has been key to its success over the years.

A maximum of 7 Trustees may hold office.

4. Objectives

The primary focus of Mythstories is educational; preserving and disseminating traditional tales. It does this by:

A Maintaining a publicly accessible collection of storytelling artefacts which introduce visitors to traditional tales and folklore and a library which includes volumes of stories as well as books on the theory and application of storytelling. The current collection incorporates the Society for Storytelling Library and a copy of the audio archive of performance storytelling created by the London Centre for International Storytelling.

B Maintaining a website, free at the point of use, disseminating traditional tales and ideas for their use in formal and informal educational settings.

C Initiating outreach projects in the Shropshire/Mid-Wales borders area, which focus on the region’s oral heritage.

D Working with other organisations to promote storytelling in the United Kingdom.

E Exploring the educational uses of storytelling, as a gateway to literacy and to develop ‘soft’ life-skills.

The Trustees and management keep in mind the Charity Commission’s guidance on public benefit when designing and delivering activities that flow from this objective.

5. Achievements and Performance

Following discussions in the previous year, in May 2019 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with University Centre Shrewsbury, part of the
University of Chester. Thereafter the museum in Wem closed to allow relocation of the collection to the University premises in Guildhall, Shrewsbury.

Over 70 volunteers assisted in the relocation. We are grateful to them all for donating their time and transporting the smaller items in their own vehicles. We are especially grateful to members of the Grand Order of Guizers who travelled from across Europe to dismantle and re-assemble the processional giants, and to local firm Boys & Boden who provided a vehicle and driver to transport the giants and other larger and heavier items. As a result of the generosity of all our volunteers, the entire relocation was achieved in three months and at minimal cost.

![Volunteers at work](image)

After the relocation volunteers began the immense task of verifying and updating the location database for nearly 3,000 items.

From August 2019 the Mythstories collection has been displayed in the public spaces and in the corridors and seminar rooms of University Centre Shrewsbury. In addition to the students, approx. 1,000 individuals visit the Centre each week and all have free access to those items on display.

In October 2020 the museum was pleased to host the Shropshire Arts Café, and give local artists and arts professionals an inaugural curator-led tour of the collection. In January 2020 staff from the West Midlands Museums Development team visited the new museum and gave specific advice on collections management and accreditation procedures with reference to the new location.

Chargeable curator-led public tours and school and group visits were due to commence in March 2020, this was not possible due to the closure of the building as part of Covid-19 Lockdown measures.

During the year Mythstories in-house events transferred to UCS. Initially events were supported by a successful grant application to Arts Council England and the Shropshire Community Council Grassroots Fund.
The events were designed to highlight some of Mythstories’ past work and to publicise its relocation to Shrewsbury.

In April we held a cartoon workshop as part of Shrewsbury Cartoon Festival and thereafter commissioned cartoonist Graham Higgins to produce drawings for an auca, based on a previous commission – a 2002 poem by Michael Rosen retelling the life of Fouke Fitz Waryne, the Shropshire-born Robin Hood. The auca is now on display as part of the Shropshire constellation of exhibits.

Also in April we initiated a regular day for Home Educated children and their partners-in-education. Up to ten families attended each meeting to explore stories and ways of storytelling. This Group continues to meet and is now led by volunteers with participants paying a small contribution to cover expenses.
In May the group worked with craftsman John Grayson, who last worked with Mythstories in 2005. This year he was commissioned to create a set of enamelled boxes retelling a ‘3-sister/3-brother’ archetype. We are proud that much of the young people’s work is featured on the resulting commissioned piece, which shows the Siberian tale Kotura, Lord of the Winds.

During the summer term curators held ‘Lunchtime Encounters’ at UCS, giving the public an opportunity to learn about and handle some of the exhibits that were being relocated. These proved popular events and attendees asked that they be repeated during 2020.

Over the summer holiday period, storyteller Amy Douglas revisited her 2000 ‘Year Of The Artist’ work and created a new walking trail of Shrewsbury’s Shuts which was enjoyed by tourists and residents of the town.

Also over the summer period Mythstories’ former apprentice, storyteller Jake Evans got on his bike for a three-day cycle tour of the Shropshire sites associated with King Arthur. His journey was chronicled on Facebook, meeting people on the sites and live-streaming videos of the storytelling and incidental incidents. Prior to his journey we held a guided research session at Shropshire Archives to delve into the history of the sites, which proved immensely popular and sold out. A new permanent display of pictures of the story sites was added to the Shropshire constellation.
The final part of this funded project took place in the Autumn term and highlighted the work of Joseph Coyle (aka Joseph Scrobb) on the story ‘The Death of Cock Robin’. An exhibition of Joseph’s work illustrating the well-known rhyme was held at Shrewsbury Library and he gave a talk at UCS detailing his researches into the creatures and customs that feature in the tale.

During the year artists and volunteers continued to work on the Heritage Lottery Fund project Montgomeryshire Folk Tales, completing this on time with a celebratory event in February 2020. It was an ambitious project, working across Montgomeryshire with three community groups and establishing a fourth, involving more than 60 volunteers whose ages ranged from 6 – 70+ and co-ordinating the work of five main artists. It was further complicated when one venue proved unviable and another had to be found. One artist was unable to work due to injury and others stepped in for the final month’s delivery, battling with floods to reach the venues and ensure all commitments were met. The postcard illustrator was diagnosed with a fatal illness. A final year student, who had previously volunteered on the project, completed his work and the postcards were printed in time for distribution at the original illustrator’s memorial celebrations in January 2020.

Despite these challenges it was a highly successful project. This was due in large part to the volunteers who engaged with the oral heritage of the area, participating with enthusiasm. The new community club created continued after the project end, 1,000 illustrated postcards carrying dual
language story précis were distributed across the UK. Most importantly the volunteers have produced a young-people led on-line teaching resource to replace the 1947 book that inspired the project.

Since year-end we have been contacted by the descendants of the author of that book, who are thrilled that the work is now reaching a new generation, and by other young people who have added to the teaching resource by retelling two of the stories in Welsh.

During the year the **Telling Space** storytelling club held ten family storywalks in different parts of Shropshire and North Powys. These volunteer-led events are an opportunity for people to share tales inspired by the landscape.

Mythstories volunteers played an active part in the planning of the February 2020 Shrewsbury Darwin Festival. Many events of the week-long festival were affected by severe weather and flooding, but the museum was able to hold three special curator-led collection tours.

In March 2020 the University held a Diversity Festival and Mythstories arranged for former Young Storyteller and Three Lions Pride founder, **Joe White** to speak about homophobia in football.

**Mythstories** supports environmentally-friendly ways of working. Our staff, volunteers and visitors are encouraged to use public transport, with opening hours and outside events being timed to minimise the need for travel by car. Staff recycle all materials only when re-use is not possible. The University buildings in Shrewsbury where the collection is housed are a modern design, incorporating solar energy.
6. Staff and Volunteers

During the year our key employees, Dez & Ali Quarréll managed the events at UCS, delivering the Lunchtime Encounter sessions and taking the lead on the Home Ed group. They managed the Montgomery Folktales Project, assisting at some of the events involved. They co-ordinated the relocation of the collection, in their voluntary capacity and also ran the Telling Space storywalks. Following year-end Ali Quarréll retired and continues to volunteer as the charity’s day-to-day administrator.

Key volunteer, Suzanne Thomas, an emerging storyteller assisted at many events, especially with the marketing and delivery of the Home Ed. group. Pat French agreed to take on the volunteer role of ‘Guardian of Giants’, liaising with their makers and advising the Giants’ security and the prevention of accidental damage to them and to visitors to the Guildhall building. Sian Murray, a student at UCS, was also inducted as a volunteer and trained in cataloguing exhibits. All volunteers have indicated they wish to continue with their roles once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

University staff member, Prof. Tim Jenkins, volunteered as the Museum’s mentor and will assist us in our application for Accredited Museum status.

Ali and Suzanne attended the remainder of the training course on the Narrative Immersion approach to planning museum visits. Suzanne also attended initial Welcome Host visitor facilitation training. Dez and Ali attended a Carbon Literacy training day. All these courses were organised by the West Midlands Museums Development team.

James, a returning-to-work-skills volunteer at UCS, has been regularly working alongside Dez on verifying and updating the location database of exhibits.

Two students were interviewed during the year for six-week volunteer work-based learning placements that were due to commence after year-end.

7. Marketing

Mythstories’ Facebook and Twitter continue to see increased engagement. These platforms are becoming more important as a means of keeping in touch with our audiences.
All events during the year were marketed on Eventbrite, which has proved very effective. They were also advertised within the town and surrounding areas via individual event bookmarks – which proved very popular and have a use beyond the event date so avoid the recycling bin.

We used generic bookmarks to advertise our relocation, and also pencils made from recycled cd cases, which were particularly popular.

The relocation attracted local press and media coverage, and the giant rebuild was filmed for the local BBC station.

8. Financial Review

Income
Mythstories is primarily project funded and has a reputation for bringing in quality projects on time and within budget while achieving the set targets. During the year we received a further instalment of £11,960 from Heritage Lottery Fund on account of the Montgomeryshire Folktales project and the final £1,482 from Arts Council England relating to the programme of activities that took place during the year.

There were no opportunities for earned income, as the museum was closed for relocation.

Mythstories has no guaranteed regular funding, but has traditionally benefited from Shropshire Council’s Arts Organisations Revenue Grant. In 2019/20 it received £900.

Expenditure
Since relocating to UCS Mythstories has further reduced its overheads. The museum no longer pays premises costs. A commercial sponsor, Tiancom, provides free hosting for our extensive website. Skilled volunteers keep the Charity on course, with key employee costs for 2019 amounting to approx. £9,000 and relating to work on funded projects.

This ‘sustainable’ model has given Mythstories the resilience needed to weather the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reserves
Mythstories aims to hold unrestricted reserves to a maximum of 3 months’ non-wage running costs plus 10% of its average annual project funding. Most of these reserves were expended on relocation and will need to be rebuilt once the museum is fully operational.
9. Covid-19 and Beyond

The main impact of Covid-19 has been a loss of impetus. Activities planned have been thwarted and we have been unable to engage in person with our potential audience and existing users or to develop project partnerships.

The University student Work-based learning placements planned for May/June 2020 have been cancelled, together with Work Experience offer to younger students. The start of our planned CPD offer for teaching staff has been postponed until 2021 and the 2020 Spring season of Lunchtime Encounters completely cancelled. The final distribution of postcards produced by our Montgomeryshire Folktales project – planned for the summer 2020 International Storytelling Festivals – has been put back a year and the new storytelling club established under that project closed.

The UCS building will re-open in October 2020, with access by non-students and University staff strictly controlled, and it is unlikely we will be able to run school visits during the academic year 2020/21, with resultant continuing loss of income.

Our application for Accredited Museum status is also on hold, as the scheme will not be reopening until April 2021 at the earliest. This results in a lack of access to potential funding streams.

Our focus for 2020 and beyond is on developing our on-line resources to maintain digital contact with our users and to build our new audience.

We will seek to develop the museum offer so that it responds to the new layout of the collection, and reflects the ‘new normal’ of a post-Covid world, with a greater reliance on digital interpretation accessed through users’ own smartphones, than on handling the artefacts on display.

And we will develop ideas for outdoor projects, linking stories to their landscape.

Approved by the Board ............................................... (date)

Signed: ........................................ (trustee)  Signed: ........................................ (trustee)