Conservation, Display & Interpretation Project for the Brecknock Museum and Art Gallery
End of Grant Report to the Garfield Weston Foundation - December 2020

1. Purpose and contents of Report

1.1   Purpose. This End of Grant Report is submitted to the Garfield Weston Foundation by the Brecknock Society & Museum Friends (BS&MF) on completion of the Conservation, Display & Interpretation Project for the Brecknock Museum and Art Gallery ('the Museum'). It complies with the Terms and Conditions of the Foundation's £50,000 grant awarded to the Society on 28 January 2018. The Foundation's grant has supported the successful delivery of the interpretation element of the project (Section 2.3) with funding for the Museum's new system of touch-screen terminals that provide interpretation of exhibits to visitors.

1.2   Contents.   Section 2 - Overview - summarises the context, objectives, timescale and resources of the Conservation, Display & Interpretation Project.   Section 3 - Key Points - provides details of what the interpretation element has delivered and describes the resulting differences and benefits as well as the challenges that have been faced. Section 4 - Future - discusses the Museum's future operation and delivering further benefits building on the interpretation element. Page 5 contains supporting images.

1.3   This report has been limited to points relevant to the Foundation in an End of Grant Report. Further information is available in our proposal and progress reports to the Foundation as well as relevant websites (see References - page 4). Hyperlinks to relevant webpages or documents are given in the text.

2. Overview of Conservation, Display & Interpretation Project

2.1   Project context. The Conservation, Display & Interpretation Project ('the Project') has been carried out by the BS&MF and Brecknock Art Trust as local partners to Powys County Council (PCC) who own and operate the Museum. The Museum closed in 2011 and has been refurbished under the £14.5M PCC-led project to create the new y Gaer cultural development in Brecon which incorporates the old Shire Hall in which the Museum is located (Image 1). In parallel with this, our Project has delivered three elements (Sections 2.2 and 2.3) to enhance the experience of visitors to the refurbished Museum. The Project's objectives, estimated cost and intended benefits were set out in the BS&MF's proposal to the Foundation in November 2017. The y Gaer development opened to public acclaim in December 2019, albeit 15 months later than was expected when we submitted our proposal to the Foundation. The Covid pandemic has subsequently restricted the Museum's operation and also delayed the completion of our Project.

2.2   Conservation and Display elements. These elements have achieved their objectives and were delivered to the Museum in time for reopening. Their funding did not involve the Foundation's grant. The Conservation element has funded the specialist conservation of nine significant items in the Museum's collections, all of which have strong links to Breconshire. All items are now exhibited in their restored state and contribute to the excitement of a visit to the refurbished Museum or adjacent public realm in and around y Gaer. The Display element has supplied three further display cases and a purpose-built watercolour cabinet for exhibiting the Museum's collections. The four items are now installed and contribute to the displays in the refurbished Museum galleries (Image 5).

2.3   Interpretation element (also referred to as 'Interpretation Project'). This element, which utilises the Foundation's grant, was completed in December 2020. It has involved a range of different players, activities and challenges in carrying out the following two strands of work to achieve its objectives.

1) Development and supply of a touch-screen system for interpretation of exhibits   Working with museum technology specialists and consultants, strand 1 has supplied and installed the system of 46 touch-screen terminals (Image 2) and customised software for displaying text and images as 'digital labels' (Image 3) to provide interpretation of exhibits throughout the Museum. The commissioned touch-screen system displays interpretative material provided through strand 2. The touch-screen system had to be (a) robust and reliable to operate in the Museum setting; (b) inviting to visitors and

easy for them to use; (c) structured to accommodate future expansion covering more exhibits and tiers of more detailed 'secondary' digital labels; and (d) supported by competent technical specialists.

2) <u>Research, preparation and compilation of interpretative material.</u> Working with local volunteers with interest in the Museum's collections, strand 2 has researched and prepared 'interpretative material' (i.e. descriptive text and images) for approximately 350 key exhibits identified by PCC's museum curator (originally to be about 200). Draft material submitted by the volunteers for each digital label has been finalised by [the Project Team](#) to the Museum's standards (edited; reviewed by curator; translated to English / Welsh text; some new images acquired). The 'finished' interpretative material (Word doc and jpeg) has then been compiled into digital label files using customised software supplied by strand 1 and uploaded onto the relevant touch-screen terminal by the Project Team.

2.4 <u>Timescale</u>. Our proposal to the Foundation was for a 2-year development project. Work on the Interpretation element started on 1 April 2018 in preparing the invitation to tender for the touch-screen system and the guidance on interpretation for volunteers. [Blackbox-av](#) was appointed as supply contractor in September 2018. The volunteers started their research in November 2018. We reported on delays (Section 3.4 - Challenges) in our letter to the Foundation dated 28 August 2019 following which the Project was extended by 6 months to 30 September 2020.   The first batch of finished interpretative material was completed in October 2019 and the customised software was delivered in November 2019 enabling digital label files to be compiled.   The touch-screen terminals were installed in December 2019 immediately prior to the Museum's reopening with around 130 digital labels on display. Further challenges (Section 3.4) delayed the completion of commissioning the touch-screen terminals and completion of the Blackbox-av contract (strand 1) until September 2020. At this point, with approximately 300 digital labels compiled and on display, the interpretation element's objectives had been achieved.   We then agreed with the museum curator and the Foundation to work towards December 2020 for completion of the Project and handing over the lead for ongoing interpretation to the museum curator as an operational activity of the Museum.

2.5 <u>Resources</u>.   Cash costs for the Project and the value of unpaid voluntary inputs are summarised below:

Final project costs December 2020		**Notes**
Conservation & Display elements	**£61,700**	Completed on budget
Interpretation element		***indicates use of Garfield Weston grant**
- Museum's consultant (Designmap)*	£2,200	Design and branding related to touch-screens
- Touch-screen terminals (Blackbox)*	£42,614	49no touch-screens, stands and associated software
- Translation English to Welsh*	£1,225	Funding to augment available Powys CC resources
- Photography / Project computers*	£4,654	Additional photography for label images; 2 x laptops
- Honorarium to Museum interns	£6,400	Supporting Museum staff on project-critical work
- Management, professional level	*£26,250*	75 days @ £350/day (*in kind by Project Team*)
- Interpretation, community level	*£72,000*	480 days @ £150/day (*in kind by Volunteers*)
- Total, Interpretation element	**£57,093**	Cash cost - excludes *'in kind'* sums
Overall total cash cost	**£118,793**	Excludes *'in kind'* sums

Note - 'In kind' days and value only applies to unpaid voluntary inputs. PCC staff time is outside the Project costs.

<u>Work structure</u> - The interpretation element was managed by BS&MF's Project Manager working with a [Project Team](#) which included PCC's museum curator and staff. The work of Blackbox-av (strand 1) was overseen by BS&MF's Project Manager. Work of the interpretation volunteers (strand 2) was overseen by BS&MF's co-ordinator.   Designmap were engaged as PCC's existing museum design consultant for the Museum refurbishment.

3. Key points for the Foundation related to the interpretation element

3.1 <u>Deliverables</u>. The following deliverables have been developed and supplied under the interpretation element and handed over to PCC's museum curator for use in the ongoing operation of the Museum.

1) <u>Operational touch-screen system</u> comprising 46 stand-alone touch-screen terminals (tablet plus stand) and 3 spares. The tablets operate on Android software and are supported by Blackbox-av.

2) <u>Customised 'Lightbox Lite' computer software</u> for museum staff to compile interpretative material into digital label files for uploading to a touch-screen terminal. The Lightbox Lite software is supported by Blackbox-av.
3) <u>'Finished' interpretative material</u> to provide 322 digital labels. The museum curator's priority for the interpretation element has been to supply 'main labels' for an increased number of exhibits and only a limited number of 'secondary labels'. (Image 3 explains 'main' and 'secondary').
4) <u>Database of research and ongoing interpretation for secondary labels</u> providing an archive of research and ongoing or incomplete interpretation by interpretation volunteers for future use by the Museum.
5) <u>Guidance documents</u> for (a) operating the touch-screen system and use of Lightbox Lite software from Blackbox-av, and (b) research and assembly of interpretative material (<u>BS&MF web archive</u>).

3.2 <u>Handover from BS&MF-led Project to Museum operations</u>   The museum curator now has overall responsibility for ongoing operation of the touch-screen terminals and preparation of further interpretative material. Although the Project is finishing, the BS&MF and Brecknock Art Trust (including Project Team members) and many of our interpretation volunteers expect to continue to assist the Museum with agreed tasks or resources. This will provide continuity of knowledge and experience.

3.3 <u>Benefits</u>. We are confident that the following benefits have been achieved. This view is endorsed by the Museum staff, by visitor feedback and by local community volunteers who have been involved in the interpretation element.

1) <u>Added interest and knowledge</u> provided to Museum visitors through the touch-screen terminals which are an exciting and flexible means of providing interpretation to visitors, particularly the young. This is undoubtedly the principal benefit of the Foundation's grant. The terminals enhance the information provided by traditional interpretation panels or printed labels. Their flexibility has been further demonstrated in the Covid pandemic by the ability to reconfigure the screen displays (Section 3.4.4).
2) <u>Added engagement with Breconshire's heritage</u> for visitors of all ages and for volunteers carrying out the interpretation. This builds on the overall theme of the refurbished Museum - 'Connecting Communities and Collections'.
3) <u>Availability of a database of research and interpretative material</u> for further use and expansion in promoting interest in the Museum's collections. Future uses are not limited to the touch-screen terminals (see Section 4.2).

3.4 <u>Challenges</u>.   The main challenges, largely unexpected, that we consider the interpretation element has faced in achieving its objectives (as in Section 2.3) are listed below. Resulting delays to the planned activities had a cumulative effect on the timescale (Section 2.4) and final Project completion.

1) <u>Problems with touch-screen software</u>. Blackbox-av encountered problems in (a) finalising (bug-fixing) the customised software which delayed the Project Team from compiling digital labels, and (b) resolving an unexpected gremlin in the operating system of the touch-screens. The knock-on effects on the programme resulted in some touch-screen terminals not being fully operational when the Museum reopened and delayed the completion of the Blackbox-av contract (Section 2.3, strand 1).
2) <u>Issues linked to the Museum's refurbishment</u>. First, the priority to provide digital labels for significantly more exhibits than originally planned (Section 3.1.3) meant that we had to shift the focus of some volunteers' work (Section 2.3, strand 2). Second, the delay in completing the refurbished Museum created pressures and delays to critical parts of our Project's programme.
3) <u>Availability of PCC's Museum staff</u> to provide agreed inputs to our Project when needed. Reductions in staffing levels made it difficult for PCC Museum staff to deal with both the Museum refurbishment and our Project and this caused unexpected delays (Section 2.4). Latterly we solved this by funding honoraria to Museum interns (Section 2.5) to secure inputs for project-critical tasks.
4) <u>The Covid pandemic</u>   This has impacted on our Project in two ways. First, the final commissioning of the touch-screen terminals was interrupted for 4 months by the March 2020 UK-wide lockdown Section 2.4). Second, with Covid restrictions in place following the Museum reopening in August 2020, it was no longer possible for visitors to select digital labels to view by touching the terminals' screens. To retain their benefit to visitors, the terminals have been temporarily reconfigured to operate in 'no touch' mode so each terminal displays a 'carousel' sequence of digital labels (as Figure 4) for the exhibits it covers.

4. Looking to the future

4.1 <u>Future operation of the Museum</u>. For the immediate future, at times when Covid regulations allow museums to open, PCC policy is currently to operate the Museum on a restricted basis with only its own limited PCC staff and no volunteers on site. In the longer term, the future successful operation of the Museum will depend on local partners, volunteers and trainees all working alongside PCC staff to provide additional human and financial resources to deliver the Museum's potential benefits and achieve the [Vision for y Gaer](#). Plans for this stakeholder involvement in the future operation of y Gaer have been set out by PCC and are expected to be implemented progressively in 2021 subject to prevailing Covid constraints.

4.2 <u>Delivery of further benefits from the interpretation element</u>. It is reasonable to expect that a resource of volunteers, whether existing or new, will continue to be available to the Museum to research and compile interpretative material for the touch-screen system. This work has been shown to be a task that local people who take an interest in the Museum's collection enjoy doing. However, delivering further benefits will be particularly dependent on building capacity for data management (i.e. working with computer-based data files and applications) within the Museum. PCC's current museum staff had insufficient time to provide this resource for our Project (Section 3.4.3). This data management capacity will be needed not only for routine handling of interpretative material and managing the touch-screen system but also for making best use of the Museum's increasing resource of interpretative material. For example, wider access to information on the Museum's collections will be available via the new [y Gaer website](#) that is soon to be launched. The BS&MF and PCC would like to discuss applying for a follow-on grant from the Foundation towards developing this data management capacity within the Museum and thus deliver further benefits from interpretation of its collections to the community.

Brecknock Society and Museum Friends   **10 December 2020**

Lead personnel
Mervyn Bramley - BS&MF Project Manager   Nigel Blackamore - PCC Museum Curator
William Gibbs - Chair, Brecknock Art Trust   Elizabeth Bickerton - BS&MF's volunteer co-ordinator

References
1. Proposal to Garfield Weston Foundation for Conservation, Display & Interpretation Project, Nov 2017
2. 12-month Update Report to Garfield Weston Foundation (1 April 2018 to 28 Feb 2019), March 2019
3. Second Annual Report to Garfield Weston Foundation, (1 March 2019 to 21 March 2020), May 2020
4. Brecknock Society & Museum Friends website - www.brecknocksociety.co.uk
5. Blackbox-av website - www.blackboxav.co.uk
6. Designmap website - www.designmap.co.uk
7. Y Gaer, Brecon website - www.ygaerpowys.org.uk - *on line imminently*

Image 1 - Aerial view of y Gaer - late 2019. The Museum is located in the refurbished Shire Hall in the foreground. The Library and Community Rooms are in the new building behind.

Image 2 - Blackbox-av installing one of the touch-screen terminals in the Museum. Each terminal comprises a touch-screen tablet mounted on a secure stand. Each terminal carries digital labels covering several nearby exhibits. The visitor selects a particular exhibit by touching its thumbnail image.

Image 3 - Example of a touch screen showing the main digital label (right hand side) for an exhibit. The screen shows three other thumbnail images (left hand side) to touch for opening secondary digital labels in the detailed tier. This is normal mode of presenting interpretation of an exhibit.
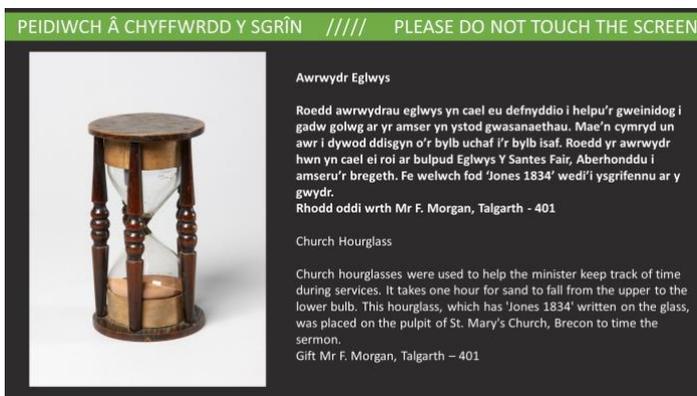
Image 4 - Example of a screen showing a main digital label configured in temporary 'no-touch' mode as currently on display for the Museum's Covid-restricted opening. Each terminal displays the main labels for the exhibits it covers as a 'carousel' sequence.

Image 5 - Panoramic view of the Brycheiniog Gallery showing dairy and transport exhibits. Three touch-screen terminals are highlighted by the yellow ovals. The two display cases are provided through the Display element.