



Morrab Library Newsletter - Spring 2021



Welcome to our Spring newsletter. We know we've been keeping you up to date through our weekly links and other communications, but we thought it time to give you an overall picture on life in the library.

From the Trustees

The Trustees are delighted to announce that Harry Spry-Leverton has been elected Chair of Morrab Library. Harry is already our Honorary Librarian and he will endeavour to carry out both these roles. He is looking forward to helping guide the library through the next few exciting and busy years, and will be in touch with members soon to talk about how he sees the Morrab moving forwards.

The Trustees have also elected David Holmes as our new Health and Safety Officer.

The first few months of this year have been very busy for the Management Trustees. As you are aware we had the AGM at the end of March in the format, all too familiar for these times, of an online Zoom meeting. We are very grateful for the strong attendance from members and the execution of much important business. We believe that this year we were able to provide all the membership with more information than ever before on how the library is being managed. It is our firm commitment to the membership that our management should be responsible, responsive and transparent. Many of you may have noted that [mini-biographies of the current trustees](#) are now on the web site, along with contact details. Please feel free to get in touch at any time about any issue.

A great highlight for the committee this year has been the addition of four new trustees; already they are making significant contributions to our work. At the AGM we presented a strategic plan, encompassing our vision for the library and how that might be achieved in the next few years. This plan is at the heart of our work as trustees - every meeting we will be reviewing our progress. For your interest, one of the major items is the maintenance, repair and refurbishment of the building.

A professional survey of the building back in the autumn informed us of the scope of the work required and the likely costs.

In spite of the difficulty of the last year, we are very excited and optimistic about the future of the library once all the restrictions are lifted. We are immensely grateful to you, the membership, for your unwavering support over the past year despite not being able to enjoy the library in the way that you have done. We will continue to work closely with Lisa and her team and yourselves to make the Morrab a better place than ever.

Stephen Clark, Honorary Secretary

Library Update

The library team has been soldiering on amidst the disruption, and as ever, we are grateful to you, our members, for so much - not only for putting up with the COVID regulations and reduced access to our beautiful building, but for renewing your membership, your lovely messages, and providing other support to us to help ensure our future (we particularly love the chocolates!). A very big thank you goes to those volunteers who have been able to resume work since we re-opened - the conservators, Photo Archive team, cataloguers, sorter of the second hand books, and those who work with the returns of your loans, shelving and keeping the collections organised.

Excitingly, we are working on re-modelling the front desk in reception, so it will soon be possible to allow our fantastic front desk volunteers to return and help us when you visit. We have missed them so much and can't wait for their return.

Current regulations will continue until June, when we await the next round of Government announcements about what will be possible. Any reduction of existing measures here will need to be balanced and considered in the context of keeping our staff, volunteers and members safe and well. But I can assure you will be working to make things simpler and more relaxed for our members, and again, we thank you for your patience.

You'll have seen our first foray into online exhibitions with [The Emperor, the Collector and the Library: The Thomas Dawson Napoleonic Collection](#), hopefully the first of many more. This is just one way we aim to open up our collections more in different ways to show you what wonders we hold. Don't forget you can follow us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) for images, information about the collections and much more.

You may be wondering about our talks programme - much missed by all. We are currently working towards being able to deliver a hybrid talks programme in the second half of the year, which hopefully will mix some in-person attendance alongside live-streaming on ZOOM, allowing events to be held safely while being accessible to more people. We'll be working with an intern from Plymouth University to develop this, and we'll keep you posted.

We launched our [Short Story Competition](#) this week - we would be delighted if you might consider entering your own story, and/or spread the news about the competition as far and wide as possible. Enormous thanks go to our lovely library member Nigel Castle for sponsoring this, and our fantastic members who are judging the entries.

The library hopes to resume our weekly free guided tours on Friday afternoons in the summer. In the meantime, our brilliant volunteer Linda has offered to provide a talk and limited tour, by arrangement, on most Fridays with at least 48 hours advance warning. So if you have visiting friends or family, get in touch and we'll see if we can help.

One important date to note: The library will close on Saturday 26th June, as the Morrab Gardens become the focus for Mazey Day celebrations that weekend. Given the required logistics and conditions around library members (and staff) trying to gain access circumventing the event's timed ticket entry system, and the likely volume of crowds, the decision has been made to close for the day. Apologies for any inconvenience. We will remind you about the closure nearer to the day.

New faces in the library

As well as some new Trustees, we have recently welcomed two new staff members to the library. Alison Todd is our part-time bookkeeper/administrative assistant, helping the Honorary Treasurer, other trustees and the librarian with some of the necessary behind the scenes work needed to keep us operating.

Tracy McMorris has recently replaced Tuna Read as our cleaner, and she is working hard to keep the library looking its best. We are very lucky to have them both and they will be great assets to the library team.

We have also welcomed a new intern, Eliza McCarthy, a student at Exeter University, who is undertaking some research into the JT Blight archive collection for the next few months, and is hoping to explore some new insights into his life and work.

Life in the Photo Archive

There is always a lot of interest in the Photo Archive from local people and from much further afield. A New York writer is using one of our images in a new academic book and at the same time there are plans to include some of the photos from the Serena Wadham collection on themes of diversity in an exhibition. A local man is also putting together an exhibition about the Levant Mine disaster so that school children are aware of the mining heritage in West Penwith and the lives it cost. Photos have great resonance, behind the images are real lives, which tell happy and sad stories.

David Puddifoot, Photo Archive Manager

Keeping our collections safe

We've been working extra hard throughout the last year to identify those storage areas that could do with some extra attention to make sure our collections are housed as safely as possible. To this end, we are in the process of installing new UV filters on the windows in the newspaper room, to help keep the sun's damaging rays out. Newsprint is particularly susceptible drying out and becoming brittle due to excess sunlight and heat, so this will make a huge difference. The work was generously paid for by two library members from Darlington, Judy Burg and Richard Taylor, and we are extremely grateful to them for their generosity.

We have also invested in some new environmental data monitoring equipment, which will capture minute by minute humidity and temperature readings in the rooms housing our most precious books, archives and photographs. This will help us determine areas which need priority work and make sure our collections aren't damaged by poor conditions. We also have been gifted a new dehumidifier which will help protect the room where we keep our second hand books before sale from damp conditions. The library also now monitors pests in the building (not members we promise!) - you may see a number of 'sticky' traps dotted about capturing those pesky silverfish and other insects. Keeping an eye on numbers and types means we can deal with any serious infestations or outbreaks, and stop them munching on our books.

Book and Archive cataloguing update

Many of you will have seen [the news of the cataloguing](#) of the first of around 70,000 Morrab books onto our new library management system called KOHA. There's been discussion around digitising the library catalogue since at least the 1990's, so it's been a long time in the making. And it will still be some time before our members notice too much difference, but we are delighted to have made a start. We're sure that being able to locate books electronically by their subject, title or author will only enhance your joy at making new discoveries hidden within our collections.



An historic moment for the library as our former chair Peter Chapman catalogues our first book.

Work on cataloguing our archive collection on to the National Archive catalogue continues, and is already producing results. We've recently answered enquiries from people who have found our (still relatively) small number of records online from London, Germany and New Zealand!

Books, books and more books!

Our Book Selection Working Group met last week to select a new round of titles to purchase for the library. Once they are received and catalogued we'll send out a list of them. We always welcome suggestions from you, our members, so please do pass on requests to the staff.

Remember too that we continue to have a wonderful selection of second hand books for sale in the library, and we hope to offer some table sales outside the library's front doors throughout the summer. We are currently accepting small numbers of donations of books from members (one box or bag at most, but no more), and if you are eligible for Gift Aid, please let us know as we can make an additional 25% on the sale of these. While we're on the subject of sales, don't forget we have a lovely variety of postcards, greetings cards, bookmarks and prints by the artist John Trigg for sale, with all proceeds going to the library.

Post lockdown Reading Group - register your interest

Our Honorary Librarian, Harry Spry-Leverton would like to know if any members might be interested in joining a Reading Group here in the library once things are a bit more 'normal', likely meeting monthly in the afternoon. Please contact the library to let us know, and we can gauge how much take-up there is.

A sad loss

We were very sad to learn the news of the passing of life member John Peak on 1st May. Alongside his many civic roles, John was Honorary Secretary to our library for 12 years throughout the 1980's and 90's, and it was during his tenure that the Jenner Room was created, which brought all of our Cornish (and at the time, Celtic) collections together into one space - he even helped sand the floorboards in there! John was made a Bard in 1995 for his service to the Morrab Library and to the community. He is remembered with great fondness by his friends and colleagues as a true

gentleman and a tireless worker who loved the library, and he'll be very much missed. Many thanks to John's family too, who have asked for donations to Morrab Library in his memory.



Here's John in 1975 - an image from our Photo Archive

Stable Block Project

You may be aware that in the last few years, efforts have been made to capture grant funding and approvals towards the restoration and conversion of the old Stable Block next door to the library. The aim is to transform the space into a new communal learning space for botanical and horticultural projects. Positive steps continue and Leslie Watson, our Trustee, has joined the project team helping to see the dream become a reality. We'll keep you updated on developments. More information can be found here: <https://hypatia-trust.org.uk/gardeners-house> .

Penzance Art Festival

Don't forget the inaugural [Penzance Art Festival](#) will run from the 4th - 20th June, and will bring together the town's many artists, galleries and museums for a town-wide celebration of the very best of Penwith art. While the library isn't in a position to host any events this year, we very much support this event and encourage your participation in it, and we are excited about being involved next year!

So finally...

We're hopefully on a positive trajectory now and on our way to the library becoming more of its old self again. We'll take our time to make sure everything and everyone is safe, but we can't wait until the library is a proper hive of activity, friendship and community once more.

Lisa Di Tommaso, India Vaughan-Wilson, and Sue Garwood

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