

# MUSEUM NEWS

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## Victorian Life Swap

In early November with lockdown back on and everyone's plans cancelled, staff at the Framework Knitters' Museum began to wonder what life must have been like without many of the things we take for granted.

How different would life be without Netflix, wi-fi, TV and smart phones...not to mention indoor toilet facilities and simple things like an electric kettle?!

To find out (and provide a bit of light relief for everyone), the Museum Manager, Jim Grevatte, and his family decided to move into the museum's 19th century Manager's Cottage, and live there as a "Victorian family" over the weekend of 21st and 22nd November.

During the two days, Jim and his family "enjoyed" such experiences as sleeping on straw and horsehair mattresses, drawing water from the museum pump, cooking on a Victorian range (they ate a lot of soup), and playing chess and other games by lamplight.



The museum had asked local schools to come up with questions about how life has changed over the last 150 years, to help the Grevattes get the most from their experience. To answer these, the family documented their activities in words and pictures on the museum's social media pages – the only time they were allowed to use technology!

To find out more, please visit the museum's [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages, where you can read all the posts and view more pictures of the Victorian Life Swap.



## Curator's Notes

The team here were delighted to welcome visitors back in July with our special pre-booked 'exclusive' experiences. We've had some great feedback, such as this kind comment:

*'The whole experience was fascinating with such committed enthusiastic guides. We strongly recommend these personal tours to all!'*

Despite going back into lockdown, we've been able to continue working with college and university students as part of the 'A Right Good Yarn' project. Young creative minds are busy developing everything from animations and audio scripts to infographics and a new visual identity for the museum. It's fantastic seeing our amazing site through their eyes, and I look forward to revealing what they have created next year.

Our amazing volunteers have been busy also, researching into the lives of our knitting families. They've made some amazing discoveries, including details of the family who lived in our back to back cottage in the nineteenth century. It appears that four children slept in the tiny attic space with no fire!

All these findings are incredibly useful as we recreate their home for visitors to explore.

I'm sure it will be an unusual Christmas this year, but I'd like to wish you a very happy one.

**Jim Grevatte**

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## Why is there a piece of Ruddington lying at the bottom of Boston Harbour, USA?

In Parkyns Street, Ruddington, the workshop of 'Alfred Cooke Machinists, Limited' has recently been demolished to make way for residential housing.

The business, established in 1880, built stocking frames which were shipped to many countries including Russia, Australia, Canada and America. Cooke's had agents in Moscow and Philadelphia (maybe a link here with John Parker?). One unfortunate machine is resting at the bottom of Boston harbour having slipped out of its sling when being offloaded!

Before Raleigh, the firm produced the 'Ruddington Cycle' so loved by William Parker whose favourite ride was to Boston (Lincolnshire) and back – a journey he made on his 80th birthday! After 'signing the pledge' he named one of his daughters Temperance. In 1882 she married Alfred Cooke.

In 1910 Cooke's was advertising Elastic Stocking Machines, Patent Power-Driven Shetland Shawl Machines and Motor Cycles – see below right. From the mid-1950s, now run by Alfred's son Bert and grandson Alan, the business turned to general engineering. Around 1998 Cooke's left the village and the building was taken over by Melbourne Flooring.

At the Museum we proudly keep the spirit of Cooke's alive with two of the last manual frames ever made, around 1952. In 2001 Alan, a talented engineer, working with Ted Dring, Peter Spick and John Rogers since the early days of the Museum, recognised a newly acquired wide frame as one of the last he had made. He was looking forward to restoring it to working order but sadly died later that year aged 87. Staff called these four volunteers 'the Wednesday Afternoon Gentlemen'.

The buildings to the rear of the site, now a private house, are protected, but with the loss of the workshop, maybe a little of Ruddington's rich history is lost too.

**Kathy Powis, with thanks to David Cooke**

## 'A Right Good Yarn' project timeline

### Summer 2020

Permission granted to start. Project Delivery Team appointed. Details of main building works finalised and contractors invited to tender.

### Summer 2020 to Spring 2021

New exhibitions to be designed, complete with storylines, text, graphics and other interactive features.



### Late Summer 2020 to Summer 2022

Activity Plan will be put in place, to include a range of events for the local community, craft groups, schools and other audiences to enjoy.

### Autumn 2020 to Late Summer 2021

Construction works will take place on the main site, Gunn Cottage and the Chapel to create a brand new visitor route and enhanced facilities, including a new café and gift shop.

### Late Summer 2021

New exhibitions and displays will be installed.

### Autumn 2021

Trial opening period, followed by community launch, reopening and celebrations!



## 2021 – Golden Jubilee Year for the Framework Knitters Museum!

We're all looking forward to seeing an end to 2020 for various reasons, but here at the museum, we're more excited than most about 2021.

Next year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our amazing site being saved from the bulldozer and transformed into a unique space dedicated to telling the story of framework knitting for generations to come.

With our redevelopment project, 'A Right Good Yarn,' also scheduled for completion in 2021, it's set to be a bumper year for the museum with lots to celebrate!

We're planning all kinds of events and activities, so please keep an eye on our website, [www.frameworkknittersmuseum.org.uk](http://www.frameworkknittersmuseum.org.uk), and our social media pages for the latest updates.

## Transforming the Textile Emporium

As work commences on redeveloping the museum site for 'A Right Good Yarn,' the Textile Emporium was first on the list of rooms to be stripped back to its original features.

This was a fascinating exercise that took us back through multiple layers of history and various refits – each providing a unique snapshot into the lives of the families who lived here.

Here are just two of our favourite finds.

### Traditional red and black Victorian tiles



We'll be restoring this floor to its former glory for a new generation to enjoy. The knitters' cottages will be a focal point in our redesigned visitor experience when the museum reopens.

### The original fireplace



We finally uncovered this under 1930s and 1980s refits, finding scraps of history along the way. These included pieces of old wallpaper and paint, and evidence of the original Parker business.

### Other finds were less historically significant...

We were amused to discover, amongst other more recent gems, a page from a 1986 *Daily Star* stuffed into the chimneypiece...and a pair of striped underpants lurking behind a radiator!

## Our first 'virtual' Artist in Residence

We're delighted to welcome Sabine Kaner as our first online Artist in Residence. Sabine will take over our social media pages for the month of December while she creates new work inspired by our site and collections.

Sabine is also working with the New Art Exchange and Northampton Museum and will explore ways to bring these together. She'll be looking into the lives of modern textile workers, particularly those from immigrant communities, and how their lives link with those who lived on Chapel Street.

## A new garden for Gunn Cottage

Our plans for expanding the museum include knocking down a wall (pictured below) to build a new visitor route enabling access to the gardens belonging to Gunn Cottage.



When we reopen, visitors will be able to enjoy a new, larger garden with lots of potential for outdoor events. There'll also be plenty of space to grow heritage plants and crops, similar to those grown by the families who lived here in Victorian times.

So far, however, it's all been about hard graft! Helen and two of our volunteers, Anthony and John, have done sterling work clearing some of the larger bushes and ash trees, getting rid of the ivy on the wall and dismantling a couple of ornamental walls so we can reuse the bricks.

Our next job is to remove lots of pebbles from the garden, some of which will be used around a new wildlife pond. We also need to make a large pile of topsoil for the builders. If you're interested in helping out, please contact Helen Brownnett at the museum.

## An unusual Christmas

At this time of year, we'd normally be 'All systems go' in preparation for our annual Victorian Christmas event. Sadly neither this nor the village-wide Christmas Fayre are taking place this year. However, all is not lost as there's still lots going on in Ruddington over the festive season – and the museum will be getting stuck in as always.

Firstly, we're planning to have a stall at the Ruddington Village Market on Saturday 5th December. The Market will go ahead despite the new Tier 3 restrictions and stallholders, volunteers and marshalls will be working hard to make sure everyone has a safe and enjoyable time. Please visit us between 9am and 2:30pm to stock up on handmade Christmas gifts, cards and stocking-fillers.

On Monday 14th December, it will be our turn to open a window in the very first 'Ruddington Village Advent Calendar'. Every day from Tuesday 1st December to Christmas Eve, a different business or organisation in Ruddington will create a special, festive-themed display for their 'window'. We've teamed up with The Old Bakehouse on the corner of Chapel Street to display our window – and we can't wait to show you what we've got in store! Look out for posters and leaflets around the village to find out more about the event.



We'll also be busy on social media with our own museum-themed Virtual Advent Calendar – not to mention a very special visit from Santa Claus himself on Christmas Eve! Check out our Facebook and Instagram pages throughout December to join in the fun.

## Friends' Corner

Due to the global disruption of life this year there are no events to report but, God willing, not to mention Boris and the Pandemic, we plan to make up for it next year. Our committee met in September (all within the rules!) and agreed to donate £1,000 to the Museum conservation work.

Further recent donations were £324 for the refurbishment of the Parker Bible (with approval of Parker family members), £40 to purchase a new 'A' board, and early in the year, a cash donation of £2,500 towards the ARGY project.

Our constitution was revisited and a few amendments made for confirmation at our AGM (on hold until we can meet).

Our winter newsletter brought in a 'flurry' of renewals so we have retained nearly 90% of our membership which, in these troubling times, is very encouraging. Thank you to everyone for their continuing support even though, temporarily, you were unable to access any of the benefits. These subs have been our only income this year. At our next meeting, we shall be welcoming a new recruit who has agreed to 'give it a try' (no names mentioned just yet).

Museum staff, trustees, volunteers and tradespeople are to be congratulated on progress with the development work. Each time I pop in – not often for obvious reasons – there is a new/old floor, a hole in the wall, a garden taking shape at Gunn Cottage, new paintwork...and other amazing changes. We are so fortunate to have talented folk who have the vision and faith to move us forward.

Christmas approaches, with sadly no 'live' Museum or Friends events to delight visitors and raise funds, but I do wish our loyal Friends and everyone connected to the Museum a happy Christmas, however we are able to celebrate.

**Kathy Powis, Chairman of the Friends of RFKM**



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