

Newsletter of The Year Award 2023

This year BAFM relaunched the Newsletter of the Year Award to celebrate the outstanding work members of our groups do to produce the newsletters which help to educate, inform, and entertain their members. Editors, proofreaders, and authors all work hard to produce this contribution to the smooth running of their organisation. During the Pandemic, many groups used this outlet as a means of maintaining the links between individuals and their Friends' Group. From my own experience, I know that for many members, regular newsletters provided a lifeline to the outside world during lockdown.

It was a great pleasure therefore to receive so many entries to this year's award. The winner was incredibly hard to determine given the high quality of entries and both judges were delighted to receive a hard copy which enabled them to make their decision. I know we live in a digital age but there is something magical about the written page. Six groups were shortlisted and will receive a certificate of merit to be presented at the 50th Anniversary Conference of BAFM to be held at The Mansion House in Doncaster on the 30th September. For those groups unable by circumstances to attend, the certificates will be subsequently posted to the contact given.

Of the shortlisted groups, three were awarded a 'Highly Commended' certificate. These included an old friend, The Friends of Oakwell Park who were repeat winners of the previous incarnation of the Newsletter of the Year Award when the award was split to support groups of different sizes. I was pleased to meet up with them in 2018 to present their certificate and I'm always pleased to receive their regular copy, both in the post and digitally. The Friends of Southampton City Art Gallery were also in this category. After chatting to their editor on the phone, I was keen to receive their example. She was very modest about the newsletter sent out to their members, being more of a 'homemade' item, printed off on a home computer. However, the content was excellent and in keeping with the reputation of the Gallery as a centre for the collection of modern and contemporary art, there were several fascinating

articles highlighting their collection. The final publication in the category of 'Highly Commended' was 'Discovery', the magazine of the Friends of Rayleigh Town Museum. Appropriately, the lead article on the front page was entitled 'The Coronation and a Small Museum' and the author, David Pymer, could only end by saying 'God save the King'! Personally, I am also a great believer that God helps those who help themselves and obviously the group at Rayleigh kept that in mind. As well as articles, there were several advertisements from local firms, which had evidently helped fund the very professional design and production of the magazine. Funding this sort of publication can be difficult for small groups and they had been very successful!

Three other groups were shortlisted. It proved exceptionally difficult to decide on an eventual winner or runner up but after lots of discussions between the judges, it was decided to award two 'Runners Up' Certificates of Merit. Both the Friends Bowes Museum and the Friends of Bristol Museum and Archive produce excellent publications. The 'Bowes Arts' Newsletter (or more properly magazine) may have as its title a 'pun' on the French word for beautiful or good art and if so, a superb choice for a title. As many readers will know John Bowes spent many years in France and married his wife Josephine before deciding to build a French Chateaux in County Durham to form a museum collection of Fine and Decorative Art. The four-page article 'Magical Mister Merlin' by author Dorothy Brenley, celebrated the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the construction of the famous automation, the silver

swan. Together with the other articles in the magazine, it certainly whetted my appetite for a repeat visit to this magical museum.

Sharing the award as 'Joint Runner Up' is the Newsletter produced by The Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives. I am a regular reader of the magazine as copies are often sent to BAFM and forwarded to me. Again, like the Bowes, the magazine is of a consistently high standard. Bristol, as many of our readers will know, is famous for producing glass and ceramics and naturally this is reflected in the collection (and newsletters). Although the awards were based on the latest example to be forwarded to the judges, I would like to refer to a fascinating article which appeared in the December 2022 Newsletter. 'New Acquisition from Japan' by Amy Raphael (Project Curator, Japanese Ceramics) described a recent visit she has been able to make to Japan due to an external funding grant. This research trip was accompanied by an opportunity to acquire new examples of more modern ceramics for the collection thanks to funding provided by the Friends. I chose this example from what is a fascinating series of articles in each of the Newsletters I've had to privilege to read but also to highlight the importance of supporting the development of professional expertise with our staff. Please remember this if you can encourage young professionals to apply for our BAFM Young Professional of the Year Award' £1000 may not fund a research trip to Japan but it can encourage young museum staff to develop a project which will help them in their future career.

We now come to our outright winner. After much deliberation, the Friends of Birmingham Museums have been selected as Winner of the 2023 BAFM Newsletter of the Year Award. Against a difficult time of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery closure for refurbishment, The Friends have recognised the very real importance of the newsletter to continue to engage with their members. As Peter Miles wrote in the latest issue of 'Artefacts' with BMAG being closed at the moment 'now is the time when Birmingham Museums really needs its Friends more than ever'. What was so impressive about Artefacts was the way it was designed to be a gateway publication for the arts and heritage within the wider area of the West Midlands. Members reading the magazine are being kept aware of exhibitions in museums in Coventry, Worcester, and Kidderminster. There is information about theatre, dance, and musical

events as well. But the heart of the magazine is still focused on the collections of Birmingham Museums and the work of the Friends. I congratulate The Friends of Birmingham Museums and as their prize, two places at the Doncaster Conference have been allocated to them. I look forward to all delegates at the Conference and AGM on September 30th and hope we can share examples of each other's newsletters. Please continue to forward examples; digital copies, which can be edited are always welcome as we can incorporate them into the BAFM Journal and share stories within the wider community.

Editor's Note

I normally try to incorporate illustrations into articles, but this is an exception. It is planned to display PDF copies of our group's newsletters on the BAFM website. If you would like to take part in this initiative, please send a copy to my e-mail address daveadgar@gmail.com. I can ensure that your submission is written in Times New Roman font and that the font size is '12'. Images should be attached separately, so that our designer can

edit it to fit the spaces available. If you would like to highlight the work of a long term volunteer in the next two issues, that would be especially welcome as next year BAFM turns 50. If you remember a founder member of your organisation or remember a BAFM Council member from the last few decades, please send in your memories to me at the above address.

**Dave Adgar FRSA
(Interim Editor)**