



Friday 1st November 2024.

The Rural Life Living Museum Saved from Closure, following successful public fundraising campaign.

We are delighted to announce that as of 31st October 2024 we met our target of £150,000 within the 3-month timescale set out at the beginning of the campaign, launched on 5th August 2024.

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Overview and Position of the Museum

The Rural Life Living Museum is unique collection of the discarded buildings, implements and objects of everyday life, collected by Madge and Henry Jackson since 1968. The couple opened their back garden to the public in 1973. Tragically, both their children pre-deceased them, and the Old Kiln Museum Trust (Registered Charity 289150) was formed in 1984 to protect and continue their legacy.

The museum has been created by many thousands of people who have donated objects and volunteered their time, support and skills. In 2024, we now have some 20 buildings and a collection of 40,000 objects.

The Rural Life Living Museum is now owned and operated by the Old Kiln Museum CIO Registered Charity Number 1200370. (Charitable status transferred to CIO in 2022) The museum receives no external funding for operational costs and has survived hand-to-mouth through ticket sales and donations for 50 years. The rising cost of operating the museum meant that expenditure began to outstrip the income generated through ticket sales and donations.

On August 5th, 2024, we launched a fundraising campaign to raise £150,000 by the end of October or there was a very strong chance the Museum that Madge and Henry built in their garden, with the help of hundreds of volunteers, would have been forced to close. The legacy that Madge and Henry entrusted us all with, would have been lost.

We have been overwhelmed by the support we have received. Over 2500 individual donors answered our call for help and prevented the closure of the museum by donating towards the campaign. Thank you for supporting the Rural Life Living Museum.

What Reaching our target allows us to do:

- £50,000: We have solved an immediate cash flow crisis in order to sustain the museum through the winter months when income is at its lowest.
- £50,000: We have returned cash borrowed from reserves during 2024 so that these funds can be made available in the future should another crisis unfold.

- £50,000 enabling us to bring on board professional help to develop and grow our audience and diversify our income streams to make the museum more financially resilient into the future.

Before our funding crisis we were working on a new strategic plan for 2025 – 2035. This plan has been slightly delayed in its completion whilst we focussed on fundraising but will be released early in 2025. Its aims include:

1. Governance and Developing the Board.
2. Fundraising Communities and Stakeholders.
3. Partnerships, Commercial Development and Economy.
4. Collections, Interpretations and Visitor Facilities.
5. Volunteering, Preservation of Skills and Intangible Heritage.

2025 will see us launch:

- Our first Patrons scheme for regular individual charitable giving to support and develop the Museum and its offering.
- Our first Corporate Sponsorship programme.
- Our first legacy giving programme.

We have broader plans in the early stages of development with our nearest neighbours and partners to increase our co-working and collective resources / mobility as custodians, conservators, businesses and visitor attractions that may result in a major project together in the future.

We know that, whilst it is much loved, much of the Museum is tired and requires renewal. We will be looking at ways to improve accessibility, the look and feel of the museum in the garden, alongside how we display and interpret our collection for a modern audience, whilst ensuring that we preserve the essence and spirit that built this unique place.

Winter Event Programme & Opening Hours

Our much-loved Santa Specials are back! Santa Specials will be running on Saturday 14th, Sunday 15th, Friday 20th and Saturday 21st of December. Catching the steam train to see Santa in his grotto has become an annual tradition for many, and an event the museum has produced for 40 years. Success in our fundraising means that we will be offering this much-loved event again for Christmas 2024. Tickets and further information are available on our website: rural-life.org.uk

The Museum will be open for general visitors, Wednesday to Sunday (10am to 4pm) until Sunday 8th December. The Museum will open for Santa Specials ticket holders only on 14th, 15th, 20th and 21st December. We will then close for winter maintenance until Saturday 25th January 2025.

2025 Event Programme

We will be announcing a full event programme for 2025. We are thrilled to welcome the return of many of our popular events for 2025, including Village at War on May 10th & 11th and Steam at Work on September 6th & 7th. We aim to introduce a number of new events each year and 2025 we will welcome you to the first Tilford Garden Show on June 21st & 22nd. Our full event programme will be announced in January 2025.

Thank you for supporting the Rural Life Living Museum.

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Statement from Trustees:

The Trustees of the Old Kiln Museum CIO would like to thank every supporter who generously donated financial aid and their time or skill towards the fundraiser to save the museum from closure. We thank the dedicated staff team for their incredible hard work this year, while continuing to operate the museum to ensure a great family day for all. Lastly, we thank our volunteers who have supported the staff team and continued to share their passion and knowledge for the museum in the garden. We are looking forward to the future and the next chapter in the museums story.

Statement from Ed Fagan – Museum Director:

Realising you need help is hard, asking for help is even more difficult. From the day we launched our campaign on 5th August 2024, I have been overwhelmed by the support we as a team and that I personally have received. From individuals who know the Museum well, to first time visitors who saw us on the news, through to fellow museum professionals who got in touch to voice their support for our action, and, most touchingly, to make sure I was alright. I was never sure that we would reach the target, and besides the money raised, we as an organisation, have learnt so much during this process. The validation from understanding just how many people care about this place has been invaluable, alongside all those individuals who offered support in kind, and many who came for coffee to talk to me about what we were doing, to offer advice and guidance from their own experience, or in some cases, to check that we had not forgotten anything!

I am extremely proud of what my staff team (all 3 of them!) have achieved since I became Museum Director in April 2021. This fundraising campaign is a current high point, from the lowest ebb, and I can't wait to move forward from here. Being the custodian of Madge and Henry's legacy was never going to be easy, but we have proven that it has a future, that it is well loved and deserves to be here, for all, forever. Thank you.