

# Newsletter of the Robert Owen Museum Newtown, Powys

Issue 4

December 2012

## Season's Greetings

In the spirit of Owen's infamous scepticism about organised religion, we send ecumenical, non-denominational and religiously unspecific seasonal greetings to all our readers. We are absolutely confident that Owen would have wanted everyone to enjoy the ancient festival of the turning year; a festival made more special for Gemma Bowker, our publicity officer, whose first baby will be born late in December.

## Celebrating the International Year of the Co-op

The usual celebrations of Owen's birthday on 14 May were combined this year with commemoration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Owen's first essay in 'A



New View of Society' and the Unesco Year of Co-operatives.

It was a beautiful spring day and there was a

wonderful turnout. Rex Shayler, our Chairman, donned his Robert Owen outfit and, after Owenite hymns by the Silver Band and the Musical Drama Group choir, he and Gemma Bowker read Owen's words before the traditional laying of flowers on Owen's grave.

## Pictures Coming Home

We reported last time on the loan of three



important pictures for an exhibition in Munich. The pictures returned safely and are on display again. And important restoration work has been carried out on the print of Owen's Institute with a gift from The Munich Architecture Museum.

## News of the Collection (1)

In the January 2012 edition, we made a plea for help in restoring pictures identified as needing work in last year's conservation review of the collection. The Friends of New Lanark made a generous donation



which has allowed us to restore the "Comerford" print to its former glory.

This really is a very strong and little-known image of Owen. It is an early lithograph clearly based on the sketch in the British Museum and shows Owen at the height of his powers c. 1815. The 'before' photo here clearly shows the

ravages that the work had been subject to. Come along and see how fresh and pristine the image looks now.



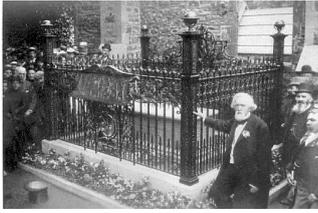
There are plenty of items in the collection that need help. The watermark on this print of Owen is particularly ugly. But it could be washed away for less than £100. If you can make a donation to the work of restoration, we will be glad to acknowledge your

generosity in the display.

## David Brown and the 'discovery' of Owen's Grave

One of the great joys of looking after the Museum is the unexpected correspondence we get from academics and family historians all over the world.

One that stands out this year is the contact made with David Brown of Manchester. He had a family story recorded in Country Quest magazine about his great great grandfather, John Jones, who lived in Pool Road, Newtown, and had 24 children! John Jones, so the story goes, was contracted to clean up St Mary's church yard and uncovered in the process the neglected tomb of Robert Owen. >>>>



The family story is not precise about dates, but it is conceivable that John Jones played a part in the movement which led to the renovation

of Owen's tomb early in the last century. This famous photograph shows Jacob Holyoake at the dedication of the renovated tomb in 1902. See more about Holyoake below.

## News of the Collection (2)

A large grant has been won from AIM/Pilgrim Trust for the restoration of three large watercolours.



Exhibited at the back of the museum, these are often overlooked. But they are quite splendid and when we used David Pugh's photos to create temporary exhibits while the originals are away, we saw them with fresh eyes.

In an earlier Newsletter we recorded the continuing relevance of Owen in the work of contemporary artists Mair Hughes and Bridget Kennedy. In November we hosted an exhibition of their work jointly with the Oriel Davies and have acquired from Mair her digital collage: *Study in Black and White*, which features Owen and his famous silent monitor. Yet another reason to come and re-visit the museum.

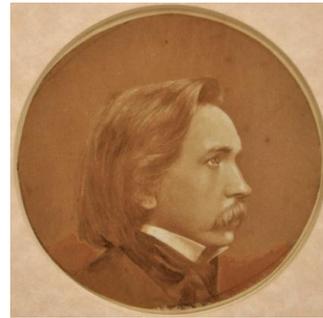
## Souvenirs on Sale

We always try to have on sale a few souvenirs. This is partly for commercial reasons. But mostly it is to provide those who have enjoyed the Museum with a memento of their trip to Newtown.

Apart from postcards and books, we now have a small selection including bookmarks, pencils, lapel badges and some more expensive engraved glass items. Our mark-up on these is very small, so if you want a real bargain come along and see. All proceeds go directly into supporting our work at the Museum. And if you will pay the postage, we would be glad to post any item.

## Curator's Pick

In each Newsletter, the Curator picks a favourite item from the collection. This time it is a collection of Holyoake papers sent to the Museum by Holyoake's daughter, Mrs E Holyoake-Marsh, just before the Museum opening in 1929. Holyoake was one of the giants of the Co-operative movement and it is he who sports the large white beard in the famous picture at the tomb (opposite).



The Holyoake papers mainly concern the history of the Co-op and are safely stored in the Braxfield Bureau in the centre of the Museum. But amongst them was a picture of a much younger Holyoake

that looks more like the young firebrand who was imprisoned for blasphemy in the 1840s. Visitor donations have allowed us to frame this portrait and put it on display.

## Opening Times

The Museum is open 5 days a week thanks to our partnership with Val Howard and Disability Powys, who jointly staff the front desk from 11 until 3, Monday to Friday. In the long school holidays, Museum volunteers opened every Saturday with mixed results. Some Saturdays had virtually no-one through the door while others saw a score or more view the collection. We always say that it is quality that counts as much as quantity and we were charmed to meet Owen enthusiasts from all over the UK.

The Museum will close for Christmas on 21st December and open again on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

## New Volunteers

We are delighted to introduce two new volunteers who have joined the day-to-day management. Fiona Lunnon is a trainee teacher recently arrived in Newtown and has taken on the education brief. Eva Meredith Jones is a long-time friend of the Museum who has become more involved and is now the deputy Chair.

We welcome your views and questions about the Museum. The usual channels are by phone on 0798 696 1819 or by email at: [info@robert-owen-museum.org.uk](mailto:info@robert-owen-museum.org.uk)

You can find news on our website or on our facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/?sk=welcome#!/RobertOwenMuseum>

If you would like to support the museum and help preserve Robert Owen's legacy, please get in touch or visit <http://robert-owen-museum.org.uk/friends>