

St Michaels' Tower

By Pam Daw

2007 has been a very exciting year for Gloucester Civic Trust's Tower of Learning Project.

We started off 2007 with trepidation not knowing if we would be granted a lease by Gloucester City Council to take over the management of the building. In the meantime, our Tower Team members continued to look after the building; we cleaned out all the junk left over from the TIC days and made many improvements inside the Tower.

7th March 2007 was a milestone for the Tower project. At the city council Cabinet Meeting it was agreed for Gloucester Civic Trust to have a lease on St Michael's Tower. A loud cheer echoed around the Council Chamber from our very jubilant Tower team members. In fact we doubt if the Chamber has seen such a show of enthusiasm for many years! We then went to Fosters to continue the celebrations.

In May 2007 we started researching what grants were available to us. In fact there were many. We plumped for local ones first of all and then we decided the main grant application should be made to the Heritage Lottery Fund after weighing up all the possibilities. We know that no grant is guaranteed so it's really a numbers game applying and applying until we get lucky.

In August we were awarded £20,000 from Gloucestershire Environmental Trust; followed by £4,000 from the Gloucestershire Community Foundation and £4,000 from the Summerfield Charitable Trust.

In December 2007 we submitted a £198,000 bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The bid represented some 7 months of very hard work on behalf of the Tower team. The bid was so large we had to go out and buy a suitable container to put it all in. Then we delivered the bid in person to the Lottery office in Exeter.

During the 7 months of putting the lottery bid together, we had great fun whilst carrying out the extensive public consultations which were all part of the grant process. We had a series of Open Days in the Tower where on each occasion over 200 people streamed through the Tower door. Everyone completed a survey form on what they would like to see the Tower used for in the future. We also consulted 233 community and voluntary groups across the City. We went to see many of them and chatted to various community leaders who want to get involved in the Tower project.

Many of the people who visited the Tower have signed up to become a "Friend". In addition over 20 people, all of whom are Trust members, have signed up to become a Volunteer to help man the Tower when it's up and running. We're going to need lots of volunteers to run the building in the future. We've had experts calculate our potential footfall which they tell us will be in the region of 30,000 visitors – and more if we change the entrance to Southgate Street.

Marilyn Champion and I went back to school this year! We spent half a day at Harewood Junior School whose pupils will be helping us develop some of the Tower activities – and who knows some of them may become future Trust members? It was interesting to learn how heritage is delivered in schools nowadays. It's all high tech and very much audio visual and above all fun – very different from when we were at school! We were very impressed. We were also very relieved as our planned activities for the Tower are certainly on the right track.

Due to the initial grant funding we've had, we've been able to clear out the Tower to create a versatile open space.

For 2008 we shall be laying on numerous events thanks to local re-enactment groups and individuals who have come forward to offer their services free of charge to support our Project.

Please look at our Gloucester Civic Trust Website www.gloucestercivictrust.org.uk for details of the Tower events – and also keep an eye on it as the events will grow.

As Trust members and “guardians” of our city’s heritage please support the 2008 events in St Michael’s Tower. This is Gloucester Civic Trust’s Tower!

We hope we get good news in June this year when our Heritage bid is assessed. If we are successful we shall be able to convert the Tower in a Community Heritage Facility. The Tower will also be the city centre base for Gloucester Civic Trust where we can further promote the work we do and increase membership.

We aim to provide a new disabled toilet; kitchen and storage facilities; a new floor with under floor heating and a new entrance in Southgate Street – where the original entrance of the church used to be. For our Heritage Lottery Bid we had to specify in detail the types of activities and events we wish to lay on in the future – some of which we hope the Lottery will fund. Our activities have been put together based on the public consultation sessions we had in the summer and what people said they wanted – their replies also form part of the lottery bid and we had to include every single reply in the grant application so the Grant Officers can see we have done our best to give the people of Gloucester what they have asked for!

These activities include a community filming project; audio trails and a series of heritage based arts and craft workshops for adults and children as well as living history events and lectures. We aim to cater for all tastes young, modern, traditional – but all activities will be heritage based. Our goal is to make the Tower a fun and entertaining place to learn about Gloucester’s heritage. Above all we hope to attract younger people into joining the Trust. We need young people to come forward and to be the future of Gloucester Civic Trust and to carry on the good work done by us all.

As Chair of the Tower Team I'd just like to say what a great team we have. Like everyone else in the Trust, we give hours of our time freely and our Tower members and “Friends of the Tower” have dug deep into their pockets to fund many aspects of the Tower to date without any recourse to main Gloucester Civic Trust. Also thanks to Chairman, Robin Morris, for his unfaltering faith in us and his on going support.