

TOURIST INFORMATION TEAM

ANNUAL REPORT BY Lindsay Mitchell

What a year of sheer frustration!

We started 2007 with the news that our base in Merchant's Quay was under threat and that "demolition" was planned to take place by that Easter. We were to be offered the possibility of a new home by George Streatfield, Curator of the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum, albeit a small corner in the Museum. This was not without its difficulties. However, the Curator thought he could squeeze us into the front area of the Museum by adapting the layout to accommodate our desk and cupboards. Nothing eventually transpired.

Easter came and no plans had been agreed for Merchants Quay and the demolition was delayed. In the meantime, the main Café, Cawardines, had closed and one by one many of the other shops closed down including the Edinburgh Wool Mill; others relocated to premises in the city centre. Since then Naylor Powell have moved into their new premises by the Barge Arm and shortly after, Merchant's Quay was closed to the public – including the public toilets!

Our Tourist Information Team carried on, although the number of visitors who ventured into our territory was much lower. Our wonderful Historic Docks were fast becoming a vast housing estate surrounded by a building site. It was at this point when we decided to start up a Visitors' Comment Book!

Our gallant volunteers battled on manning the information centre despite the feelings of uncertainty, through bad health, family problems and general volunteer absence due to holidays. Due to the reduced numbers of visitors, it was decided to reduce the opening hours of the Information Centre.

We welcomed the support of Billy who worked hard to run Joe's Café who supplied us with hot drinks and snacks as well as the chance of the occasional chat!

We were thrilled, however, to welcome back crowds of visitors for the Tall Ships Festival in October 2007. It felt good to be busy once more. The whole event proved a great success for Gloucester. Sadly the Festival was short lived and we returned to our lonely existence adapting to a singly manned centre with shorter shifts.

With the main public heating switched off we relied on small electric heaters during the very cold spell before Christmas. With very few visitors, we worked even shorter shifts and finally closed from December 23rd. It was then decided to extend the closure throughout January, with hope for better news coming our way.

On December 6th new plans emerged for the Merchant's Quay replacement, which were presented by the owners Crest Nicholson. However we note that our Information Point does not feature in any of the proposals. We still wait to see if a new home can be found for our band of volunteers who work so hard to promote the docks area and the city as a whole.