



History of the Forum

During the 1980s and 90s many small museums in England were founded by groups of dedicated volunteers. Some financial support was available through the Heritage Lottery Fund and, in Northamptonshire advice was available through the East Midlands Museums Service (EmmS) which was funded by subscriptions from Museums and support from Local Authorities. At the Millennium the Government Department for Culture Media and Sport set up an organisation called Renaissance in the Regions,(Renaissance), administered through the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council - (EMMLAC for the East Midlands).

In February 2002 Su Davies, the Heritage Manager of Kettering Museum, wrote to all the museums in Northamptonshire to tell them about a government document 'Renaissance in the Regions: A new vision for England's Museums' and inviting everyone to a discussion meeting in Oundle. Later that year Su wrote to Tim Hobbs, the Chief Executive of EMMLAC to say there was a proposal to set up a Museums Forum in Northamptonshire. She mentioned that she was the Chair of 'GoSlam' (Group of Smaller Local Authority Museums). There was also another newly formed volunteer group called SID (Small Independent Museums). Leicestershire had already set up a county forum which was working very successfully and these developments were encouraged by EmmS. The result was that the Inaugural Meeting of the Northamptonshire Museums Forum was held in the Northampton Museum and Gallery on 26th September 2002. Ten Museums were represented; one more sent apologies and so did three of the Great Houses.

A very informal organisation was proposed and dates for further meetings were arranged. Plans were made to produce a leaflet which would give publicity for all the museums in the county and would be distributed widely. Each meeting would include an opportunity for members to report on what was taking place in their museums. By the fifth meeting, in March 2004, the advantages of membership were becoming evident to all members: numbers had increased; funding for the publicity leaflet was identified; Jim Grevatte, Museums Development Officer for the region, reported on sources of funding, training courses and the idea of national standards for Registration. The forum began to receive valuable information and support from the staff of Renaissance although how they managed to achieve so much when each meeting involved travel all over the region was a constant source of admiration. The eventual appointment of a County based Museums Development Officer in 2007 was a great help and led to new museums being set up and supported.

Over the next few years' the Forum has adopted a rather firmer structure appropriate to its increasing success and size. The annual Museum Heritage Awards have gone from strength to strength attracting a great deal of interest and publicity. In 2010 the name of the Forum was changed to 'Northamptonshire Museums and Historic Houses Forum' to be more inclusive of the many new members of historic houses.