Case study 3: Buderim Pioneer Cottage, Queensland

www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/Experience-Sunshine-Coast/Cultural-Heritage

www.buderim.qld.au/buderims-history/buderim-historical-society/

Buderim Pioneer Cottage

Buderim Pioneer Cottage museum and Sunshine Coast Council

Summary

Buderim Pioneer Cottage's experience shows the positive impact of a high performing council with a focus on cultural heritage and digital access. Strong support from Sunshine Coast Council, the State Library of Queensland and Queensland Museum Network has enabled volunteers to move forward with confidence in terms of collection digitisation and access.

Background

The Buderim and District Historical Society was established in 1966 and operates a community-owned house museum, Buderim Pioneer Cottage, on the Sunshine Coast. The Society documents, records and shares the history of Buderim and the cottage with the community and visitors. It has an active group of more than 25 volunteers who share the role of opening the museum and welcoming visitors.

The museum is part of the region's 16-strong Cultural Heritage Network. It is open six days a week, for four hours per day and is always busy.

Partnerships and support

Sunshine Coast Council (SSC), with an estimated resident population of some 336,000 people, owns and cares for a number of heritage collections, as well as buildings across the region. As well as caring for its own collections, SSC has a six person Cultural Heritage Team (two of whom are funded from the Cultural Heritage Levy), who work with the community, providing workshops, support and training for museum volunteers.

The Cultural Heritage Team is the primary source of advice and support for the museum volunteers. The Cultural Heritage Levy allows the team to create a strong network Cultural Heritage Network for the Sunshine Coast and to back up the advice and support with funds to allow projects to be enacted and goals to be achieved. The process of training, grants and projects that are funded creates an ecology where museum volunteers not only feel educated and empowered to take on museum projects, but also funded and supported by local professional museum staff who are available close at hand.

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Top: Desk and writing materials from the collection of Buderim Pioneer Cottage.

Above: Kitchenalia on display at Buderim Pioneer Cottage.

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When seeking advice regarding digitisation of its collection, the museum has built a relationship with the State Library of Queensland due to the workshops provided by the library through council. The President of Buderim Pioneer Cottage cites the social media skills she acquired by doing workshops presented by council in conjunction with the State Library.

The State Library of Queensland Connected Collections approach has seen much support extend out to community museums in this region, via the council staff. Although no State Library staff were interviewed for this project, it is worth noting the efforts made by this initiative of the State Library of Queensland, to see collections across the state connected and digitised for all. http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/resources/qld-history/connected-collection-of-queensland-memory/digitisation-toolkit/queenslands-connected-collections-and-digitisation

In addition, the digitisation toolkit and information made available on the State Library of Queensland website is comprehensive and accessible for anyone who chooses to use it.

The museum also has a good connection with its local Museum Development Officer, one of five employed by Queensland Museum for the Queensland Museum Network.

Collection

The museum has a collection of around 5,000 items, primarily relating to a domestic home environment, and also encompassing archives and paper based materials connected to the history of the area. A majority of the items have been acquired by donation. However, in recent times, the museum group has undertaken strategic collecting, seeking out particular items required for the museum and its presentation.

Process

The collection is almost fully catalogued in an Access database created in-house. Not all objects are photographed. There is a committed three person team dedicated to cataloguing the collection and the museum acquires around 100 objects per annum. They have also discussed deaccession. A previous SCC grant saw a collection documentation manual produced for the museum by a museum consultant.

A portion of the museums' photograph collection is scanned and saved as TIFF files. The museum volunteers were skilled up in this process and the standards they should use, through a workshop provided by SCC. The Council uses for itself, and recommends the use of, State Library of Queensland standards for the digitisation of images.

Digital access

The museum volunteers came to the decision to digitise their collection after attending the workshop provided by Council. There has been concern from one committee member about the sharing of images owned by the museum, however the majority of the group see it as a positive thing and one that promotes the museum and activities to the community and visitors. The President cites one example of a couple who drove out from Brisbane to visit the museum in order to see a bed held in the collection there. They have a similar bed in their home, and were keen to see another.

At this stage digital access is through photographs displayed on the museum website. The sharing of the collection will eventually occur through the Council's Art and Heritage Collection Database and the potential for this database to feed into aggregated platforms will be investigated.

Cultural Heritage Levy

Sunshine Coast Council raises an $8 per ratepayer annual Cultural Heritage Levy, which generates over $1million for cultural heritage provision. The levy aims to:

- Protect cultural places such as buildings and other sites
- Raise peoples' awareness of the value of local heritage
- Celebrate the cultural heritage of the Sunshine Coast.

In 2015–2016 the levy enabled projects such as the Heritage Sector Development Program, the heritage calendar, digital stories and film projects, museum boxes, grants and funding and more. It provided training for museum volunteers in:

- Digitisation
- Metals conservation
- The Australian curriculum and your museum
- Collection management principles
- Development of education programs
- Exhibition development and label making.

A link to the Council's Cultural Heritage Levy Program 2016-2017 is available here: https://www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/Experience-Sunshine-Coast/Cultural-Heritage/Heritage-Levy

Opportunities for the broader network

- SCC has already identified significance assessment training as the next stage of assisting community museum volunteers with collection digitisation work. The Council staff has also acknowledged the lack of engagement by community museum volunteers (in general, and not including those at Buderim Pioneer Cottage) with the process of collection digitisation, and they are working to have significant objects held within regional collections digitised, with the consent of the museum, to ensure their longevity.

- There is potential for Council to consider creating a Collection Digitisation Officer traineeship, providing a role dedicated to the digitisation of regional collections, subject to funding available under the Cultural Heritage Levy. A position such as this could be taken up by a museum studies graduate, seeking further sector experience.

- Both the SCC and Buderim Pioneer Cottage could explore the potential to share their collections on national collection sharing platforms, so that a broader audience searching for national collections can identify those held in the Sunshine Coast region.

Conclusion

SCC has demonstrated a unique and firm commitment to both its own heritage collections and community collections across the region, through the $8 annual ratepayer Cultural Heritage Levy. The $1 million generated by this levy, enables a range of support services, funding and programs that have included a focus on the digitisation of collections. A levy of this type is unique in the Australian local government landscape, and SCC is to be applauded for its initiative and commitment to ensuring the sustainability of collections and museums across its region.

The Buderim Pioneer Cottage benefits from SCC's investment in cultural heritage. It is a well organised and engaging museum operated by a group of dedicated volunteers committed to sharing the story of their community and documenting their collection following museum best practice. The commitment to collection management and documentation is admirable and ensures the sustainability and security of the collection for future generations. The digitisation of the collection by cataloguing it into a digital program and holding digital images of the collection is also to be admired. The museum is keen to share their collection with visitors both virtual and real.

The Sunshine Coast region is an admirable example of community museums and local government working together to document and share collections with the wider community, leading to longevity and sustainability of the museums and their collections.

Sunshine Coast Council Digitisation Plan

The Digitisation Plan has seen all Council collections digitised and shared online via the Art and Heritage Collections Database. This database contains the council-owned public art collection, Sunshine Coast Art Collection and the collection of Bankfoot House, a council owned historic house. The database can be viewed here: https://sunshinecoast.spydus.com/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/MSGTRN/OPAC/CULTCOLL?HOMEPRMS=CCPARAMS

The commitment to collection digitisation goes beyond council collections, with council supporting the documentation and digitisation of collections from community museums in the region. The regional digitisation project has been offered to 16 volunteer heritage organisations who are members of the Sunshine Coast Cultural Heritage Network as well as the council-run Heritage Library. Seven of the 16 museum groups have had some collection items digitised.

Community museum volunteers are encouraged to digitise their own collections. Support and advice on this process is provided through workshops on collection digitisation (photography and scanning) provided to community museum volunteers as well as a 'digitisation lab' being made available to all, within the facilities of Bankfoot House. Community museum volunteers who wish to digitise their collection items are welcome to use the facilities. Council will also loan out digitisation equipment to volunteers who wish to use the equipment.

Beyond this, SCC is also identifying significant objects within local collections, and borrowing the items, so that they may be digitised, in situations where volunteers have shown little engagement with the process of digitisation. Council has also funded the digitisation of collection items that are beyond the scope of council to digitise, by 'outsourcing' the digitisation of their own collection items and those of community museums who request it.

To date diaries, books, photos and maps have been digitised from Heritage Library, Landsborough Museum, Fairview, Bli Bli on Maroochy Historical Society, Bankfoot House, Buderim Historical Society, Discover Eumundi. Council staff are also working with Peachester History Committee on digitising two other significant local collections.

To date, the independent digitisation of collections by community museum volunteers has been limited, despite the provision of training, support and equipment. Staff at Sunshine Coast Council cite the following as reasons why the local volunteers they work with, have not engaged with the process of digitising their collections.

- Volunteers lack of time and have a high workload managing their respective museums
- Location of equipment and transporting objects/documents for digitisation
- Perceived or real experience using technology
- Trust and ownership of collections affect sharing of precious objects and materials
- Time and expertise collating research about collections and cataloguing onto the database.