TOTNES HERITAGE TRUST
Registered Charity 1182256

CHAIR'S REPORT TO CHARITY COMISSION

JANUARY-DECEMBER 2025

NEW TRUSTEE APPOINTMENT

In the Spring of 2025 the trustees welcomed an application from Alexander Ringsmith to join the Trust. Totnes is Alexander's hometown and at the time of his application in 2025 he was an archaeology undergraduate at Durham University. During the summer he organised a Hieroglyphs workshop in Totnes which was very well received. (Alexander has since graduated and is embarking on his postgraduate studies, also at Durham.)

This has been a very positive appointment as the Heritage Trust provides Alexander with a local platform for his heritage based activities and in return, apart from bringing archaeological knowledge to the Trust's pool of knowledge and expertise, he has brought with him a refreshing youthful perspective.

SECOND TOTNES HERITAGE FESTIVAL

As the Trust moved towards the summer of 2025 its energy and focus was coordinating the second Totnes Heritage Festival which, building on the success of the first festival the previous year, proved yet again to be extremely popular and well attended by residents and visitors. The Trust received a grant of £600 from the Totnes Town Council which was very welcome and helped to fund the printing of festival programmes and the insertion of the programme in the local monthly Totnes Directory which is distributed to 4,000 local households. Furthermore, the Council provided much needed support on the technical front by designing the programme for printing.

Following the festival the Trust convened a meeting of all the festival participants and it was unanimously agreed that a third Totnes Heritage Festival should take place in 2026.

PROPOSAL: THE WILLIAM WILLS PROJECT (SEE APPENDIX)

In October the Trust submitted a proposal (see Appendix to this report) to the Totnes Town Council to refurbish the exhibition in the Totnes Guildhall on the ill fated 1860/61 Burke and Wills expedition, the historic and tragic journey that crossed Australia from Melbourne in the south to the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north. William Wills, as a son of Totnes, is a significant local historical figure. The Trust submitted its proposal with an emphasis on post colonial sensibilities and at the end of the year the Town Council considered the application and decided that, once appropriate conservation experts had been consulted, it would consider whether a siting of a new exhibition in The Guildhall would be appropriate.

CHANGE OF TRUST NAME

At a meeting of the St Mary's Totnes Heritage Trust on Tuesday 18 November, the trustees of the St Mary's Totnes Heritage Trust passed the following resolution:

Emily Price, Chair, proposed that the name of the trust be changed from ST MARY'S TOTNES HERITAGE TRUST to TOTNES HERITAGE TRUST in order to reflect its evolving role to support other heritage organisations in Totnes in addition to St Mary's Church.

The resolution was seconded by Penny Martin, carried unanimously and application for change of title was forwarded to the Charity Commission for its agreement.

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Dated 28 September 2026
Emily Price
Chair
Totnes Heritage Trust

APPENDIX

THE WILLIAM WILLS PROJECT

Proposal by Totnes Heritage Trust

October 2025

1 – Background

2 – The Project

3 – The Way Forward

1. Background

William John Wills was born in 1834 and brought up in Totnes. In 1853 he emigrated to Australia. He made a significant scientific contribution to the Burke and Wills expedition (1860-61) which was understood to be the first expedition by non-indigenous people to cross Australia from south to north but which ended in the deaths of all but one of the party.

In Totnes there is the Wills monument located on The Plains and information in Totnes Museum. In addition, in Totnes Guildhall there is a plaque to commemorate Wills alongside a very tired display. Totnes Heritage Trust's aim will be to replace the present Guildhall exhibition and to bring the story of the expedition up to date and more in line with a twenty first century post-colonial interpretation of the history of the period. This exhibition, appropriately installed in the Guildhall to commemorate the civic aspect of the significance of Wills, a colonial settler, would complement a future aim by Totnes Museum to show the scientific contribution made by him.

Apart from being of interest to people in Totnes and around Britain, from time to time Australians visit Totnes to find out more about its connection to the story of the expedition. Totnes Heritage Trust wants to ensure that the story is presented in The Guildhall in a fresh and stimulating way and that people of all race, ethnicity and culture recognise that Totnes has done justice to this significant piece of history that Britain shares with Australia.

2. The Project

The aim of the project is to install a new display in the Guildhall with emphasis on the following:

1. Wills and Totnes: birth, upbringing, parents, schooling in Ashburton, emigration to Australia.

2. The expedition. Success and failure. Negative impacts of the expedition.

3. The part played by Wills in the expedition

4. Reasons for tragic ending: leadership, the environment, poor communication and a failure to establish sustainable relations with the Indigenous people whose knowledge of survival could possibly have saved them. Instead of collaborating they maintained a position of superiority and even fired on friendly Indigenous groups.

5. A recognition in the exhibition's narrative of the significance of the contribution made by the Yandruwandha First Nation people to the expedition and to the survival of John King, sole survivor of the four colonial explorers who reached the Gulf of Carpentaria . To this end it is proposed that the project will be developed alongside the indigenous Australian people whose ancestor's land was explored by Wills. The Totnes Heritage Trust will seek to work with Totnes Town Council with a view making the appropriate links in Australia .

3. <u>The Way Forward</u>

a) The first step in the project is to seek the permission of Totnes Town Council to replace the present exhibition in The Guildhall.

b) The trust will then seek funds for the project in order to appoint a consultant in heritage interpretation.

c) In partnership with Totnes Town Council and with advice and/or assistance from appropriate bodies, the trust will seek to establish links with the Yandruwandha present day descendants in Australia with an invitation to contribute to the story of the part played by the First Nation people in the expedition for the new display in the Guildhall.

St Mary's Totnes Heritage Trust

Income & Expenditure Account for the Totnes Heritage Trust
For the year ended 31 December 2025

Registered Charity Number 1182256

INCOME	**2024**	2025
	£	£
Donations	**8764**	1166
Donation Station	**826**	55
Gift Aid	**2572**	217
Crowdfunder	**0**	0
Events	**0**	0
Grants	**0**	600
Totnes PCC	**0**	0
Sales	**0**	0
Interest	**88**	48
Total income	**12,250**	2086
EXPENDITURE		
Donation Station	**186**	16
Totnes PCC	**9,380**	1225
Trustee Expenses	**-**	-
Website	**-**	423
Consultant.	**1,000**	-
Printing		-

	-	-
Donations return	**-**	7000
Events Costs	**381**	729
Miscellaneous	**133**	
Total expenditure	**11,080**	9393

Balance sheet for the Totnes Heritage Trust as at 31 December 2025

	2024	2025
CURRENT ASSETS	**£**	£
Balance at bank	**4462**	2106
Savings Account	**7131**	2179
	11593	4285