

Annual Review 2021

Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust



The Objects of the Charity are:-

1 the advancement of education for the public benefit, in particular, but not exclusively, on the history, social history, heritage, economy, geology, geography, archaeology, architecture and other features of the Dudley canal tunnels, inland waterways, mines and its working boats;

2 the protection, preservation, conservation, maintenance, repair, improvement and development, to a navigable standard, of the Dudley tunnels, inland waterways, mines and its working boats for the use and benefit of the public, and in particular, but not exclusively, by providing educational, historical recreational facilities.



Welcome

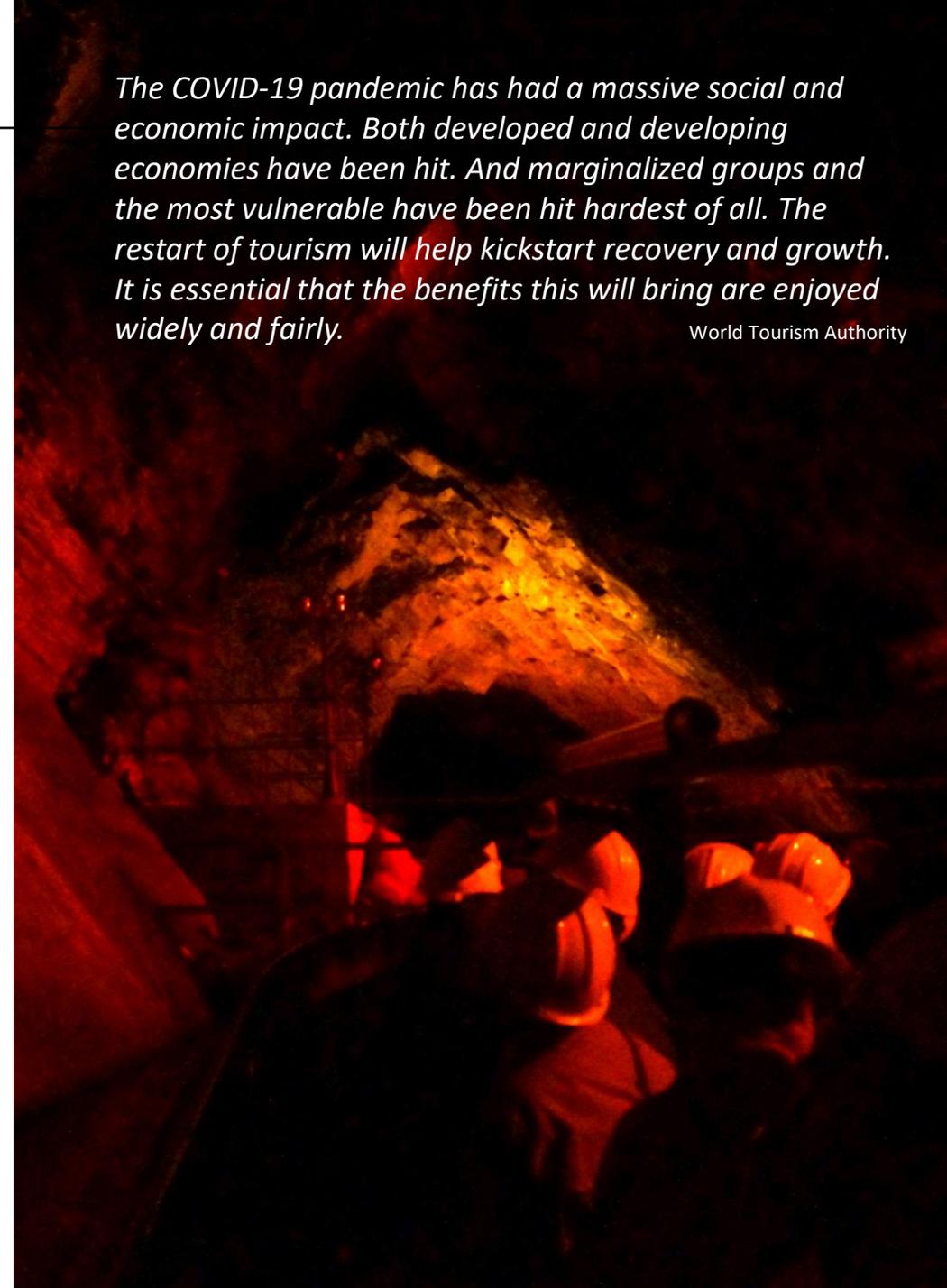
When we closed in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic we believed this would be for a couple of months, we never realised the impact would still be with us two years on. Operating within the many changes, constraints and worries has not been easy but it has forced us to fight, to work creatively and to look at our whole offer from a different viewpoint and from this has come many opportunities and silver linings.

We hope this 2021 Annual Review gives you a taste of what a strange, challenging and also rewarding period the Trust has experienced.

The Trustees and Directors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive social and economic impact. Both developed and developing economies have been hit. And marginalized groups and the most vulnerable have been hit hardest of all. The restart of tourism will help kickstart recovery and growth. It is essential that the benefits this will bring are enjoyed widely and fairly.

World Tourism Authority



Challenges

Initially we felt we would be closed for a couple of months – this in itself was a big challenge. Few realised come Christmas we would be facing Covid-Variants and rising infection rates.

For decades museums and visitor attractions have planned for “disasters” to ensure they were well placed and prepared to protect and continue to care for their visitors, staff, collections and environments. It's fair to say, few ever believed the need would arise where all elements, including the community, the country and indeed the whole world would need protecting as it has during 2020 to 2021.

As a Charitable Trust with a history of 60 plus years in operation we have faced many challenges but the Covid -19 Pandemic, with the fear and uncertainty, lock-downs and operational restrictions it brought made us question just how long we could continue to be viable. We were faced with dilemmas on a daily basis. We needed to be open to earn the income that is so vital to us, but we wanted to protect the people and the community around us and using us. We needed to cut costs, but we knew by doing this we would be impacting livelihoods. We needed to continue to invest in the maintenance and preservation of the historic environment, but we also needed to hold on tight to all our precious resources. We recognise we were not alone in this – but for every organisation and individual impacted it has been a personal journey.

Like many organisations our staff are our greatest asset, they believe in our mission and aspirations, many are long standing and have specialist knowledge and experience and we in turn have invested in them. They were all scared and wanted reassurances. Many of our suppliers struggled to get materials and the equipment we needed, or they were smaller organisations who simply could not continue with the many restrictions in place. Our visitors needed to feel confident in their visit and to see and understand all the safety measures which were in place, and they needed additional support and engagement at a time when our staff levels were stretched either through furlough or by trying to work from home.

We were also conscious that we needed to maintain contact with some of our service users who were more isolated and vulnerable, members of our Chit Chat and voluntary groups, local organisations who used our coffee shop as safe places to meet and some of our staff. Pleasingly we found ways round most of the challenges thanks to the dedication, quick thinking and willingness of the staff volunteers and Trustees to come together, albeit socially distanced, determined to get through not just 2020 but also 2021.



Challenges



Going into lockdown quickly brought forward the need for remote monitoring of the caverns and tunnels. 2019 had seen us experience unexpected movement and behaviours in the cavern, largely due to changing weather. These were picked up due to our continual monitoring. With lockdown, this level of inspection was compromised. In addition, we suffered trespass and vandalism which saw expensive equipment tampered with and stolen and made us worry for the safety of the perpetrators who were accessing areas which were unmonitored and could be at risk. An extensive safety and monitoring exercise was conducted prior to us entering back into the caverns, pleasingly apart from the anti-social behaviour the environment itself was in good order.



Though the site lent itself well to implementing social distancing requirements, creating new routes through the building, putting up protection screens and adding hand washing and sanitising stations the need to bring in pre-booking, preferably online did give us some issues. Our core offer, the underground trip, has always been a walk up offer. Working with our online booking provider we were able to produce an adequate system, but it soon became clear to maintain this would require investment in time, equipment and funding.

Each week brought new government restrictions and suggestions, along with improvements from our own Covid Safety Advisory group. We were conscious we needed to ensure we covered everything but also still wanted to make the whole experience a positive and enjoyable one. It would have been too easy to go overboard with safety signage, forcibly dictating routes taken and making our visitors feel like they were being herded around. We were extremely grateful for their custom and needed to demonstrate this as well as keep them safe and ourselves informed.

A number of our Trustees stepped in give operational support, especially at the height of staff furloughs. We increased our Board and Enterprises Meeting to monthly to ensure everyone was kept informed of our actions and we all learnt new skills in terms of virtual meetings and working digitally.

In terms of infection levels, Dudley maintained a high rate of Covid-19 cases through the year and with the Tier system implemented towards the end of 2020 closing us down we did not reopen till mid 2021, resulting in the loss of a fully booked Christmas offer and Easter which is the tradition start of season for attractions such as us.



Opportunities & Achievements

Escalate, Accelerate, Pivot and Stretch were all key words associated with how businesses had to operate during 2020-2021. They are words we certainly recognise here at Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust as we constantly adjusted to new restrictions, rules and visitors concerns and wants.

Despite losing 121 days of operation at the start of the year due to the Tier 3 restrictions, we were able to open in April and had a great start to the season both with the weather and visitor numbers. The pod system we introduced in 2020 continued to work well for us and we maintained this long after restrictions were lifted. This helped us better manage bookings but also gave a high level of comfort to our visitors, showing how with other safeguards we kept in place we were prioritising personal safety for all over all other activities.

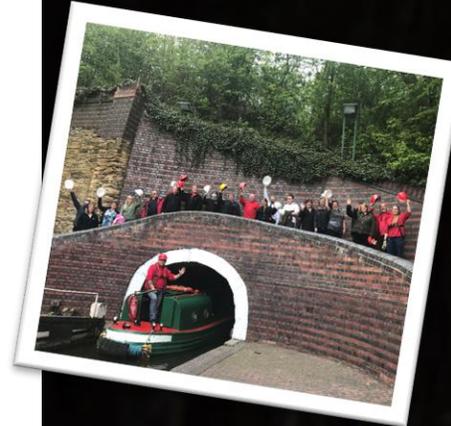
We were able to bring a number of projects forward due to the enforced closure giving us time and funding to commit to them. This included a new contemporary website and 120 sq. meters of new interpretation, opening up the towpath and highlighting the role of canals in transport, the mining of limestone and minerals, the growth of Dudley town and working life on and around the canal network.

Hurst Cavern benefitted from a new display which centres on the stories of the miners and is more interactive and flexible in use. With digital technology and the dramatic use of light and shadow it has been a well-received addition to the site.

We stripped back years of paint on our trip boats and improved the surfaces ready for their fresh coats. We upgraded equipment onboard such as new speakers and lighting and we



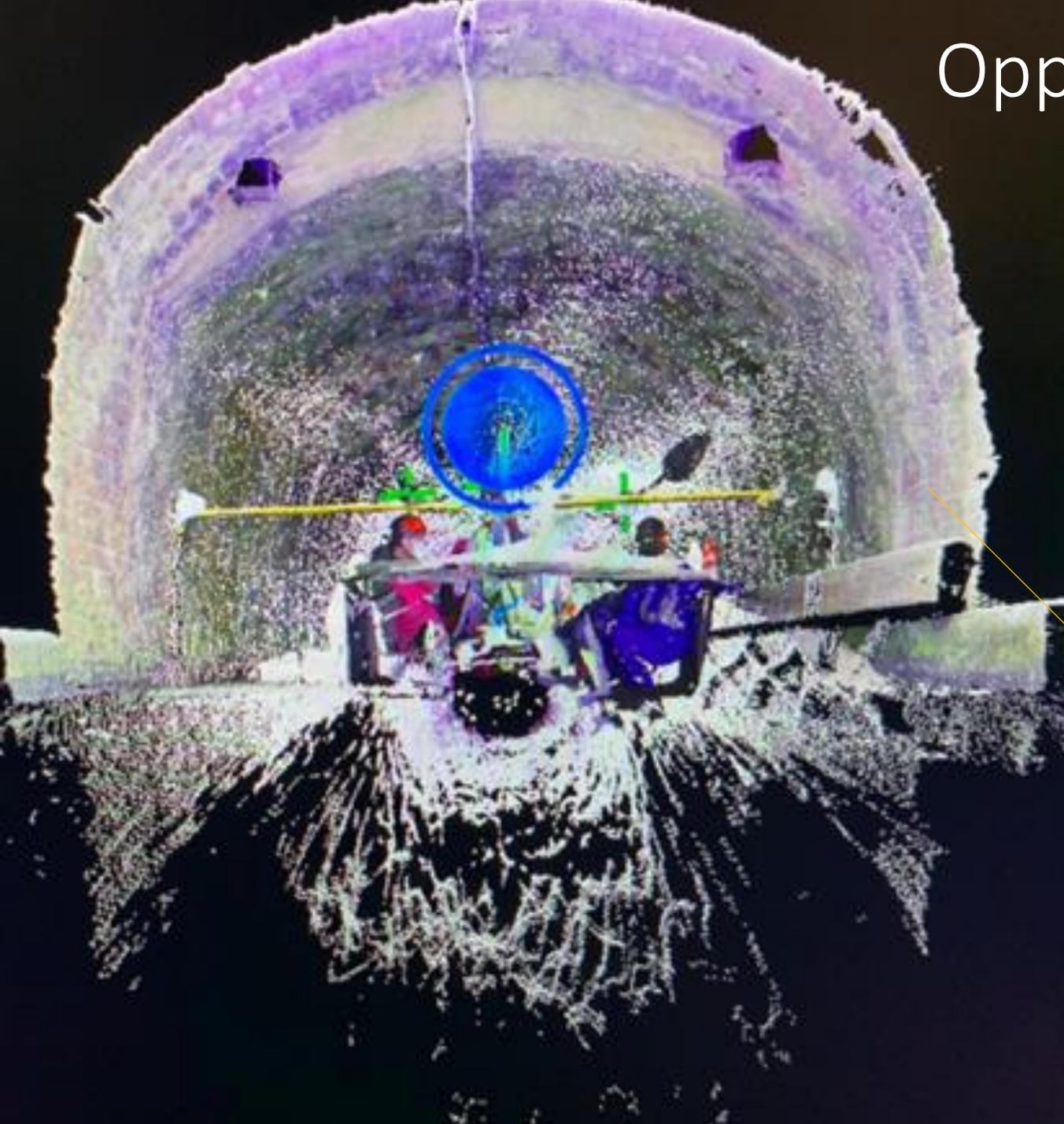
Hurst Cavern Redisplay



We continued to protect the maximum jobs and adapted and developed new roles and ways of working for the future



Opportunities & Achievements



replaced the last of the old charging points. Work began on adding a disabled lift to a second trip boat and we fitted out Sagitta with new lighting, flooring, steps and interpretation. We also purchased the kit required to add heating to the Vic Smallshire to extend its operating period and visitor comfort.

A grant through Historic England allowed us to undertake a full site laser scanning project which saw us digitally scan and record above ground, below ground and explore underwater scanning of the whole site. There will be a range of outputs from this but predominantly it allows us to better care for, understand, predict and react to the cavern infrastructure. The project and the changing environments forced us to be creative in approach, but it all proved to be very successful and from the outset very practical and useful.

With our "cultural asset" approach to seeking funding we were able to welcome a number of VIP's and supporters on site, including the BBC who came on Good Friday to put out an all-day news broadcast about our successful Culture Recovery 2 funding. We certainly raised our profile both in the cultural sector and in the media and during a period when it was vital to keep ourselves in the public eye.

We were also very pleased to attend the presentation of the 2020-2021 Queen's Award for Voluntary Services in Birmingham where our volunteers took to the stage to receive our very beautiful award from the Lord- Lieutenant of the West Midlands we were amongst thirty-two awardees for the two years, and it was heartening to have been recognised alongside them for the work our volunteers and staff deliver. Following this a Celebration Ball was held, the first for the Trust in which we recognised not only the award but the fact we had faced huge adversity and could see signs of coming through it with our passion for the Trust and our commitment to move on and grow still very much intact.

2021 saw us protect jobs and skills at the Trust for the second year despite the impact of Covid-19 on our ability to trade. Once again, our staff stepped up to ensure our site and offer was amazing. We reviewed and made changes to our Management Structure and departments which worked well, and we began instigating changes based on the reviews and reports we had commissioned in 2020 with advisors in Catering, Learning, Marketing and Business Resilience.



Wow what an unexpectedly fantastic trip. Not to give too much away but we travelled through several fantastic tunnels and caverns... An excellent surprise and well worth the £9 ticket price. We will definitely be doing more adventures with the Dudley Canal Trust.

Funding & Finance Precise

The Trust had been extremely grateful for the funding and support it had received in 2020 and we were heartened that this continued into 2021 with the Funding from Culture Recovery Fund Round One and Round Two. Historic England Commissioning Grant, Heritage Fund and Government support towards furlough costs and hospitality and leisure continuance grants.

All this support came with expectations in terms of keeping the business viable for the immediate period, delivering on projects, protecting jobs and positioning the Trust to invest in its ongoing sustainability and resilience. Feedback from the organisations who gave us grants was that we delivered over and above expectations and that we ensured all areas of the Trust and its offer benefitted. In addition to adding value to the site, investing in the staff and their training we were also able to put funds back into our reserves.

Culture Recovery Fund 2 - £109,800 awarded

Historic England Commissioning Grant - £48,000 awarded

Additional Restrictions Grant - £150,000 awarded

Simple summary accounts 2021

Tunnel Trust (charity)

Turnover	391,000	Notable turnover:	
		Boat Trips	269,000
		School Events	6,000
		Gift Aid	71,000
Cost of sales	44,000		
Gross profit	347,000		
Costs	-433,000		
Trading profit	-86,000		
Grant income	340,000		
Costs funded from grants	-94,000		
Other income	31,000		
Total cash profit	191,000		

Enterprises (trading arm)

Turnover	282,000	Notable turnover:	
		Catering	98,000
		Retail	55,000
		Santa/Halloween	82,000
Cost of sales	79,000		
Gross profit	203,000		
Costs	-203,000		
Trading profit	0		
Grants	190,000		
Total cash profit	190,000		

Overall cash increase 381,000

Dudley Canal Trust (Trips) Ltd

No significant activity
Outstanding loan of around £500,000

Old Dudley Canal Trust

Cottage sold
No other activity

2021 In Numbers

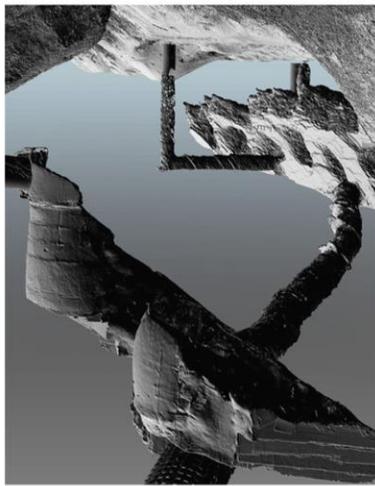


£255,000

Underground Experience Boat Trip Sales

2000 gb

of data laser scanning



70

Guests attended our first ball.



98%

Customer Satisfaction Score

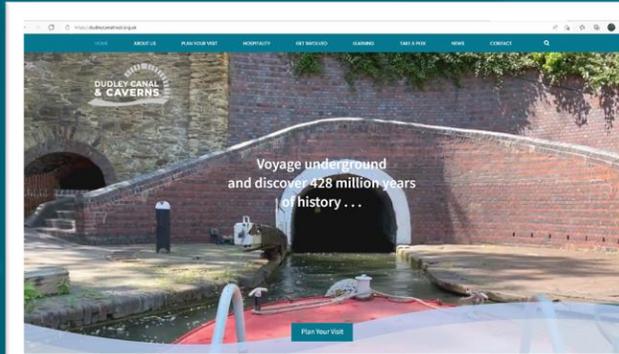


15

Projects Completed

1

Awards Ceremony



1

New Website



5

VIP's on Site



750

Scary Halloween Visitors

£50,000

Invested in Cavern & Boat Maintenance

Thank You

Though we have worked very hard throughout 2021 and the results of these efforts can be seen on site, we would not have achieved as much as we did without support from a range of people and organisations. To all associated with us – we offer a heartfelt thank you for your support and investment in the Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust.





A concerted effort to preserve our heritage is a vital link to our cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational and economic legacies - all of the things that quite literally make us who we are. - Steve Berry