

Museum of Somerset opening date revealed

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One of the largest collections of Roman coins ever found, a shrunken head from South America and Judge Jeffreys' medical bill are a few of the many new exhibits which will be on display at the new Museum of Somerset, opening on Thursday 29 September.

For the first time in three years, the Museum of Somerset will be throwing open its doors in spectacular fashion to welcome the public from midday onwards after a £6.93m redevelopment.

The museum now has 50 per cent more exhibition space in which to tell the story of Somerset from pre-historic times to the present day. Exhibits never seen before will be on display.

One of the main attractions is sure to be the Frome Hoard, the second largest collection of Roman coins ever discovered in Britain. This will be the first time the collection has been on display after a national fundraising appeal saved the hoard for the nation.

The museum will showcase some of Somerset's extraordinary heritage collections, and sets a new standard in the county for a modern visitor attraction, with new state-of-the-art galleries and interactive features. There is also a fully-equipped learning centre, a large multi-purpose gallery for staging major touring exhibitions, and a new café offering the best of Somerset produce.

Cllr Christine Lawrence, Somerset County Council's Cabinet Member for Community, said: "I'm delighted that the Museum of Somerset will soon be opening its doors and that the public will be able to see some of Somerset's extraordinary heritage in such a wonderful setting. Somerset County Council has invested £1.8m in this project, helping to make it a jewel in Somerset's crown. We know that not only will the museum attract local people but also visitors from far and wide. It will give a major boost to the local economy."

Museum of Somerset's Project Leader, Tom Mayberry, added: "Over the last three years we have restored a building that has been at the heart of the County's history for nearly 1,000 years. More of Somerset's amazing heritage will be on display than ever before. We greatly look forward to sharing it with members of the public."

The remaining £5m needed to complete this project came from external organisations, which included a £4.8m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Other major donors included Viridor Environmental Credits, The Garfield Western Foundation, Somerset Military Museum Trust, and Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society. The Society has been a key partner as the owner of Taunton Castle as well as of many of the museum collections.

Bookings are now being taken for group tours once the museum has opened. For more information about this, and for details of volunteering opportunities at the museum, telephone Susie Simmons on (01823) 255088 or email museumofsomerset@somerset.gov.uk.