



## ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne 3000

### Reopening your historical society

Rosemary Cameron

14 May 2020

The Federation of Australian Historical Societies has produced a great document to guide Historical and Heritage Societies through the re-opening process. The document is available:  
<https://mailchi.mp/f7b6ec0b3816/special-fahs-e-bulletin-reopening-of-historical-and-heritage-societies-14-may-3712381?e=9d47f15b5c>

I've also been assisted by the excellent advice of Margaret Birtley regarding collections.

I thought I'd outline some of the processes that the RHSV is engaging in which might assist or guide your decisions. I will be speaking about Victoria although I acknowledge that we have members in most states and territories and their time-lines and government dictates will be different and, of course, all historical societies differ in their operation and housing. We should also be aware that the situation is extremely fluid and these steps and dates might change should there be a second wave. It is a strange push-me-pull-you world we are dealing with where on one hand we are all bored and want normality but we are fearful too of further outbreaks.

#### Background

For the RHSV one guiding principle is that a lot of good things have come out of this lock-down. Fewer cases of flu and other communicable diseases have occurred so it is in our best long-term interest to incorporate some of the measures we have adopted recently as permanent. And whilst we are all suffering from Zoom-overload hasn't it been a marvellous revelation? It will become a feature of our future work practices and we will be working hard too to create events which are accessible digitally. One of the future problems for us is how do we make these digital events an income stream for us? During COVID we've all scrambled to create lots of digital content but it has all been generously given away.

For a long time we will be maintaining the 1.5 metre distancing and the 4 square metres limit per person – so even if the Framework says you can have 20 patrons in a museum, if your museum is only 40 square metres, you are limited to 10 patrons not 20 (40sqm / 4sqm per person).

By the time you read this, in Victoria we should be in Step 2 of the Australian Government's 3 Step Framework for a COVIDsafe Australia which means that galleries, museums and libraries can open for a maximum of 20 patrons (from June 1). Once Step 3 kicks in we will be allowed 100 patrons – but we don't have a date for this yet. In Step 2, 20 people can hold a gathering indoors (rising to 100 in Step 3).

#### Consult your volunteers

The first thing you should do when planning your reopening is to consult with your members and volunteers. People will have their own personal time-table about what they feel comfortable doing and when. Ask your volunteers what would make them comfortable back at your historical society.

Build in flexibility to your meetings, events and working hours so that volunteers can avoid public transport during peak hour.

## **Collections**

Your collection is probably the mainstay of your society and it may require extra attention at the time of re-opening (after many weeks, perhaps months, of closure). Some exhibition layouts may need adjustment in order to prevent congestion by visitors. Some displays – e.g. those that involve touch-screens or ‘hands on’ interactive exhibits – may need to be redesigned, disabled, fenced off or removed. There is collection-specific advice to be found on the following websites:

<https://aiccm.org.au/news/covid-19-collection-and-conservation-resources>

This list has been compiled by Australian conservators for Australian conditions.

<http://blueshielddaustralia.org.au/news/closed-by-covid-19-checklist-for-glams-and-historical-and-heritage-sites/>

This Guide was first published in late March. The expanded Version 1.2 was published on 29 April. It has been widely promoted. Under the heading ‘Getting back to normal’ (page 8), it includes many points about re-opening.

## **Sanitising**

At the RHSV we are now experimenting with allowing very small numbers of researchers back into the library so we have implemented the following:

- We spent \$65 on a hand sanitiser stand (nothing fancy) for the front door – it will be mandatory for all people entering the building to sanitise their hands. You don’t need a stand – I’ve bought one because it is more visible – a bottle of sanitiser on the front counter is sufficient.
- We also bought some floor decals to remind people about social distancing, especially at our front counter / bookshop. These are surprisingly expensive but using brightly coloured adhesive tape from the hardware store to mark lines and crosses will achieve the same purpose.
- And we have bought a Perspex ‘sneeze-guard’ for the front counter to protect our staff and volunteers from the public. Once again, a handyperson could knock up a frame covered in clear plastic which would be just as effective.

## **Bottlenecks**

We are looking at areas where people congregate. For us the lunch-room is difficult – we often have 6-8 people crowded into a very small space which is very convivial for both us and the COVID virus! We are putting extra tables in our gallery space so that volunteers can spread out whilst still lunching together. The collegiality of volunteering is a huge positive factor that we want to maintain but also keep our volunteers safe.

Other bottlenecks might occur in foyers, lifts, stairwells, around the photocopier, at the lockers, in the toilets and bathrooms – think about all these areas and how you can manage the flow of people so social distancing can be maintained.

## **Limiting exposure**

We will remove any magazines available for people to browse. We are looking at ways of changing the ways volunteer sign in so they don’t have to share a pen. We will suggest to volunteers that they bring their own mug (or claim one from the lunch room and keep it for the duration of COVID). We are traversing a bit of a tightrope trying to be COVIDsafe and environmentally sound so I’m not prepared, yet, to go down the disposable cup path. We are looking at providing single-serve packets of sugar and coffee. The biscuit barrel will probably go (sigh! But good for our waistlines).



## ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne 3000

We all share equipment – whether it is pens, desks, computers, laptops, the photocopier, scanners etc. Think about how you can sanitise these between uses. Make it standard for everyone to wipe down equipment *before* they use it. We usually have a pot of pencils in the libraries for people to use whilst working in the library. We'll be encouraging people to bring their own pencils however if they don't, we will generously donate a pencil to them. Books that are used by researchers will be wiped down before being returned to the shelves or re-used. We will be providing more gloves (Nitrile / powder free) for use in the library (gloves and sanitising wipes are available from hardware / stationery stores).

### Cleaning

As we ramp up the number of people coming into the building so we will ramp up our cleaning – more wiping down of commonly used surfaces like light switches, door handles, copiers, hand rails etc. Take a good hard look around your building and list the areas that need vigilance. All staff and volunteers will have some level of responsibility for this.

### Events

With regard to events, we will take a softly, softly approach with the introduction of just small events even after we reach Step 3. Our main lecture room seats 100 usually but in COVID terms we can probably only seat 40. And I think our audiences will also be cautious for some months yet.

If you have any queries please don't hesitate to contact myself or Jillian Hiscock at the RHSV

**Rosemary Cameron**     [rosemary.cameron@historyvictoria.org.au](mailto:rosemary.cameron@historyvictoria.org.au)

**Jillian Hiscock**         [collections@historyvictoria.org.au](mailto:collections@historyvictoria.org.au)

+ 61 3 9326 9288