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Aaron sets up home in old museum

If you think your home has some unusual features you should see where Aaron Bailey lives.

For Aaron's new home was once a museum commemorating a Portsmouth workhouse for the poor people of the city. And on his living room and bedroom walls are historic stone plaques honouring the founding fathers of the 19th century 'poor house' where destitute people found a home in return for their labour.

Aaron, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in 1990 and uses crutches to get about, left his former home at Hilsea, Portsmouth, because he needed a property more suitable to his needs.

He approached Portsmouth Housing Association (PHA) for help over finding new accommodation to meet his needs – and with support from PHA sales and marketing coordinator Jo Harding the former museum at the old workhouse at St Mary's House, Portsmouth, was transformed into a specially-adapted ground-floor flat.

St Mary's House, formerly known as the Portsea Island Union House, dates from 1845. The historic building was redeveloped by PHA some years ago to provide affordable housing and the museum was retained for residents' use.

PHA decided last year to convert the old museum into a flat. Aaron, aged 44, a committee member of the Portsmouth and district branch of the MS Society, said: "When I rang up I was put through to Jo and she said the old museum was going to become a flat.

"I needed a place to suit my needs and she helped me sort out the adaptations I needed. It's an absolutely beautiful place for me to live. It suits all my needs and to live in a place steeped in such history is great."

Jo said: "It's a great pleasure for PHA to help Aaron in this way. PHA agreed to put in the adaptations Aaron needed – including a wet room with grab rails – and I was thrilled to be able to offer him this apartment in a shared ownership arrangement."

History leaps from the plaques. The living room plaque lists the names of the "gentlemen of the Portsea parish" who made voluntary contributions to help found the work house. Among them are Portsea church wardens Thomas and George

Ridge, who between them gave £45, and overseer James Thomas, who contributed £2 and 20shillings.

The Portsmouth and district MS Society branch helpline number is 023 9269 6559.

The photo shows Aaron (left) receiving the keys to his new home, and a congratulatory bottle of wine, from PHA's Jo Harding



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Notes to Editors

First Wessex Housing Group manages around 17,000 affordable homes primarily in Hampshire and with some activity in Surrey.

The group comprises Atlantic Housing Limited, First Atlantic Housing, Pavilion Housing Association, Portsmouth Housing Association, Fernhill Care Limited and Wessex Property Limited.

Portsmouth Housing Association: provides homes in Portsmouth, Fareham, Gosport and Havant. It also provides a wide range of community regeneration services across South East Hampshire.