



# Association of Independent Museums

Helping Heritage  
Organisations Prosper

[www.aim-museums.co.uk](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk) DECEMBER 2020

**Celebrating ingenuity,  
creativity and resilience**



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## Comment

### Leading in the face of uncertainty

When I first agreed to write this editorial it seemed appropriate to write about reopening, what we had learnt about sustaining our audience, what worked well, what our visitors told us. Mid way through completing the article a fresh round of closure and lockdown was announced requiring a rapid rethink!

It made me reflect that this actually encapsulates exactly what we have all been going through this past year. Those of us leading organisations or teams feel we are getting on top of things and working to a plan, when everything changes once more and we re-think, re-calculate yet another disaster budget, try and motivate deflated staff, while ourselves wondering about the likely survival of our organisations. So, what are the secrets of leading when even next week seems uncertain? For a long time we have been very used to working to three or five year business plans – our funders have always dictated that we crystal ball gaze as reassurance that we are sustainable and can guarantee a level of delivery and income that their funding justifies. Most of those business plans seem works of fiction – whole chunks of income such as venue hire and weddings have all but disappeared and may never return on the scale we have known. So without those clear plans to dictate targets, KPI's, and sustainable income how do we continue to operate and move forward?

I would suggest it will be our core values that will guide us, if we know why we do what we do and for whose benefit, that will help us to find ways of delivering those benefits even if it has to be new ways of operating. We may have to pare back programmes because of funding limitations but activity will be linked to core purpose and will give us a clear steer on where to go next.

AIM has always advocated that independent museums have the ability to adapt and respond quickly and have organisational cultures that allow this. It is this behaviour and attitude which make us successful. Never before have we needed this adaptability more – current circumstances are requiring us to literally change plans daily or weekly and so the detailed business plans may have to be put to one side for a while. If we are reminding our teams regularly what we stand for and ensure that we are clear what is important to retain – whatever gets thrown at us – at least we will have a chance to maintain team purpose and organisational effectiveness and indeed our very survival.

**Marilyn Scott MBE MA AMA FRSA**  
Director, The Lightbox

## AIM's Emma Chaplin on rising to the challenges ahead



**As the December 2020 AIM Bulletin goes to press there is no sign that the rollercoaster that is this year of constant change and challenge is about to end.**

AIM has been delighted to celebrate the ingenuity, creativity and resilience of our members as you have worked to secure the very survival of your organisations and develop engaging, enriching, COVID-19 safe visitor experiences.

This issue of the Bulletin is packed with case studies, ideas and inspiration for working in these challenging times but we are aware that it coincides with another lockdown and closure for museums in England, periods of lockdown and closure for museums in Wales and Northern Ireland and a range of restrictions with potential for further change in Scotland.

We also acknowledge that many museums have not been able to reopen at all this year and are hoping for a different operating environment in the Spring.

It can be hard to maintain morale and energy levels with so much uncertainty. AIM is here to guide and support you through whatever lies ahead. We are here to connect and support the independent museum and heritage community, and we will continue to be here for you through the winter.

Keep telling us what your concerns and needs are, apply for our grants and take part in our Hallmarks at Home events where you can share and learn with other AIM members.

We can and will get through this together.

*Do let us know of your challenges and concerns at [info@aim-museums.co.uk](mailto:info@aim-museums.co.uk)*

## Sell-out success for Hallmarks at Home

**AIM's Hallmarks at Home programme of online events was introduced as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and, with thanks to Art Fund, will be running until March 2021. The webinars are intended to support you with the issues you're facing right now and to give you the practical advice you need to survive and thrive in the longer term.**

Hosted by AIM's roster of experienced consultants, each event has an opportunity for you to ask your own questions. Attendees tell us it's also great to hear from other AIM members and have the chance to 'meet' other museums online.

All recent events have been over-subscribed and have included topics such as:

- Understanding your audiences
- Volunteering and the new normal

- Applying to trusts
- Managing people through change.

2021 event dates will be published on the AIM website as soon as they're confirmed but act fast as places are limited and events book up quickly!

See all forthcoming events here:  
[www.aim-museums.co.uk/dates-for-your-diary](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk/dates-for-your-diary)

### **AIM members can access free HR advice and support from The HR Dept**

We're delighted to announce another free service for AIM members. If you are looking to outsource your HR completely or just need help with a one-off project, The HR Dept's HR and employment law solutions will support you in achieving your business goals.

Highly qualified and knowledgeable, The HR Dept's experts have a deep understanding of employment law. Whether you need HR support with employment contracts, managing disciplinarys or anything else on your journey as an employer, they can help. Support available for AIM members includes:

- 15 minutes free introductory call to help with quick or urgent HR queries
- Free contract and handbook review. Check if your documents are up to date or if you need to make any updates to be compliant.

To access this support visit  
[www.aim-museums.co.uk/hr-support](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk/hr-support)

## Front cover

**Black Cultural Archives (BCA) in Brixton is the home of Black British History, collecting, preserving and celebrating the histories of people of African and Caribbean descent in the UK. Read more in our profile on page 19.**





## Culture recovery fund

# AIM members success in Culture Recovery Fund announcements

**M**useums in England welcomed crucial support for the next six months as part of the UK Government's £1.57bn culture recovery fund.

### Applications up to £1m

Over three-quarters of the museum organisations that successfully applied for a maximum of £1m of funding were AIM members, drawing down just over 80% of the awarded funds.

Thanking DCMS and Arts Council England, several took to social media to share the good news. Including the Stained Glass Museum in Ely, with an award of just over £71k, The Tank Museum in Dorset was allocated £780k, The Postal Museum in London received £860k and the Bridport Museum £50k.

### Applications over £1m

Several AIM members were also successful in their application to the funds for over £1m, including the Design Museum, Black Country Living Museum, London Transport Museum, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Ironbridge Museums, and the Dulwich Picture Gallery.

Tim Cooke, Chief Executive of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust said: "This award is a great encouragement for the work of sharing Shakespeare, for the town of Stratford-upon-Avon and for the whole region. We are immensely grateful to DCMS and Arts Council England for their commitment and support. We have been so badly hit by the financial impact of the pandemic, so this investment is vital and enormously welcome at this critical time."

Sam Mullins OBE, Director of London Transport Museum, said: "We are incredibly grateful and relieved to have received support from the Culture Recovery Fund. London Transport Museum has already lost £3 million and counting this year, but this new funding gives us hope. It is a huge shot in the arm for my trustees and colleagues and gives us confidence for the future. A huge thank you to Arts Council England, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media



Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon.

and Sport and HM Treasury, and to the many supporters and visitors who have stood by the Museum during this difficult time."

Andrew Lovett, Chief Executive of Black Country Living Museum and AIM Chair "We're incredibly grateful for the support given to the Museum, ultimately by the people of the UK, as a result of our successful application to the Government's Culture Recovery Fund. Prior to the pandemic, BCLM was justly proud of its contribution as an independent heritage business to the region's identity and economy. These funds will help us to adapt to survive in the short term, so that we can thrive and grow with our community in the long term."

Lovett added, "As Chair of the Association of Independent Museums, I also recognise and welcome the positive impact of the Culture Recovery Fund for hundreds of museums across England and the value attached to them by millions of visitors."

AIM Director Emma Chaplin said

"It's great to see a range of organisations receiving support from the Culture Recovery Fund in these recent announcements – it marks a real investment in our collective future. We know that considerable challenges remain, not just for independents but for all museums, but funds such as this act as a bedrock on which adaptability, creativity and optimism can build, so museums can thrive once more."

## In brief

### Proposed new articles – Extraordinary General Meeting 10 December 2020

AIM has undertaken a complete review of its governing documents, many written in the 1970s, to bring them up to date for the 21st century. AIM members are invited to read and consider the proposed new Articles and to join us at a Zoom Extraordinary General meeting on 10th December 2020. To attend the meeting or submit questions in advance contact Emma Chaplin.

[www.aim-museums.co.uk/egm](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk/egm)

### New enterprise support programme announced for UK heritage sector

Heritage organisations across the UK are under increasing pressure and financial constraints, with many facing extreme challenges to ensure a stable future. Starting in February 2021, Steps to Sustainability, a new National Lottery Heritage Fund programme delivered by the Social Enterprise Academy, will provide a pathway of support to address these challenges.

Steps to Sustainability will support 60 organisations from across Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England to strengthen their strategic leadership and income-generating skills.

The programme is aimed at those who are in a position to help increase the sustainability of their organisation and lead in a way that helps to generate and diversify their income. Applications are open now and all successful organisations will be eligible to apply for seed and match funding grant of up to £10,000 to develop a new income generating idea and incentivise increased trading income during and immediately after the programme.

<https://your.socialenterprise.academy/courses/view.php?id=407>

### Nominate a museum charity to receive a festive financial boost

Ecclesiastical Insurance is giving £120,000 to good causes as part of its annual 12 days of giving Christmas campaign. The specialist insurer will be giving 120 different charities an early Christmas gift of a £1,000 donation, with 10 winners announced each weekday from 7 to 22 December. Ecclesiastical is inviting people to nominate a registered charity close to their hearts to benefit from this festive financial boost.

Nominations are open from 9 November to 21 December and you can vote for your favourite charity at [www.movementforgood.com/12days](http://www.movementforgood.com/12days)

## UK round up

# £5.5m Heritage Recovery Fund for Northern Ireland

**I**ndependent museums and collections are among those eligible for £5.5m funding recently announced by the Northern Ireland executive.

Grants from £3,000 to £250,000 are being distributed to heritage organisations to help them respond to the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and support their future sustainability. Self-employed individuals working in the heritage sector will also be able to apply for grants of up to £5,000, helping to retain vital skills and jobs in the sector.

The new fund, distributed by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), offers stability to organisations that were financially sustainable

before the pandemic but are now at risk of failure.

Paul Mullan, Director of The National Lottery Heritage Fund in Northern Ireland, said: "As an organisation, we have been actively working to support the sector throughout this crisis, but we know we are not out of the woods yet. We welcome this funding from the Department for Communities to help protect our much loved heritage in Northern Ireland from being permanently lost.

"Heritage is hugely valuable for us all – it is vital in creating economic prosperity, in making local communities better places to live, and in supporting our own personal sense of wellbeing."

## News from the Museum Development Network

**I**n a unique partnership fostered in response to the pandemic, Museum Development Network (MDN) and The Art Fund are delivering an investment programme to support museums across the UK. In addition to The Art Fund's £280K contribution, Museum Development providers across the four nations have added £540K to the pot and will distribute Recovery Grants to the sector.

The Recovery Grants will support organisational resilience and help museums to reopen safely and effectively, to meet audience needs and expectations, and to develop a sustainable offer. To date, 250 applications have been received and 200 museums have been awarded grants with some application rounds still open.

Museum Development in England has developed a nationally consistent self-assessment Health Check tool. Museums in receipt of Recovery Grants are asked to complete the Health Check survey with questions about their business plan, governance and leadership, financial planning, people development, working practices, audiences and collections. The information is reviewed by regional MD teams and the museum receives an advisory report to help map a path to improve, develop and strengthen the organisation.

The Health Check was due to launch in June 2020, so we added a free text field in each section for museums to describe how COVID-19 had impacted that area of the organisation. We are now receiving real time data about the sector's priorities and changing needs.

Across the first 38 respondents, there is evidence of shared experiences at two ends of a 'COVID-19 spectrum'. There are those museums that are in a state of paralysis, lacking the skills and confidence to manoeuvre beyond a 'firefighting' stage; while others view the pandemic as an opportunity to rethink what they do and plan for a new future.

For more information on the Recovery Grants and Health Check tool visit [www.museumdevelopment.org](http://www.museumdevelopment.org)

## Joint statement issued on Scotland's Museums at Risk

**S**cotland's representative bodies for museums, including AIM, have signed a statement that warns that many of the country's museums may not survive the COVID-19 crisis given the combined impact of loss of earned income, limited emergency support and local government cuts.

The concerns are backed up by research from Historic Environment Scotland, who found that within the heritage sector museums face the highest risk of closure.

Since the beginning of lockdown, the Scottish Government has provided £4 million of investment in the form of the Museums Recovery and Resilience Fund. Welcomed by the sector the funding will provide invaluable help to those that successfully apply. However, the fund is only able to support independent museums, who make up around half of the sector and the total amount allocated in funding makes up only a small proportion of the £97m that the Scottish Government was allocated by the Treasury to support culture during the coronavirus crisis.

Sharon Heal, Director of the Museums Association, said: "We are deeply concerned about the plight of civic museums in Scotland. Local authorities are in a difficult position because of the extra costs associated with dealing with COVID-19 and the prospect of future cuts to their budgets."

"We are already hearing of major local authorities that are considering not funding their museums and galleries because they are non-statutory services. We are deeply concerned that some museums will not be able to reopen after lockdown. Museums are vital civic spaces and can play a critical role in rebuilding and recovery with their communities – but they need funding to be able to do that."

Duncan Dornan, Head of Glasgow Museums said: "The potential, permanent loss of any museum across Scotland immediately diminishes all our opportunities to learn and express ourselves. Any measure which directly supports museums everywhere will allow these loved and appreciated institutions to continue to work in all our interests and save many from the worst of outcomes."

Read the statement at <https://bit.ly/38ANBNU>

***We spoke to Dr Karen Buchanan, Curator of AIM Member Gairloch Museum about their recent Art Fund Museum of the Year accolade.***

## Think big and go for it!

### Can you tell us a little bit about Gairloch Museum?

Gairloch Heritage Museum opened in 1977 in a converted farm steading, its mission to “promote and encourage interest in, and care for, the history, culture, beauty and character of the Parish of Gairloch”. Renowned primarily for our social history collection, our acclaimed displays also include the first Pictish stone found on the west coast mainland and the enormous Fresnel lens of Rubh Re lighthouse. In 2009 we achieved Museum Accreditation status.

More than just an independent museum and 4\* VisitScotland tourist attraction, we are the centre for historical and genealogical study in Wester Ross and offer events and activities all-year-round for visitors, residents, schools and community groups including the disadvantaged and socially isolated.

In 2019 we moved to a new building – a repurposed nuclear bunker. The innovative transformation of this building from village eyesore to 5 star attraction was the result of tireless effort, enterprise and determination by the Board, our volunteers, and the wider community. Since opening in July 2019, we have received praise for the originality of our building and the excellence of our permanent displays. The new museum has successfully won the support of our community, raised our profile nationally and attracted enthusiastic new visitor audiences, and in October this year we were announced as winner of Art Fund Museum of the Year.

### What is the Museum of the Year award all about, for those new to it?

The Art Fund Museum of the Year award is the largest and most prestigious museum prize in the world. The prize champions what museums do, encourages more people to visit and gets to the heart of what makes a truly outstanding museum. The judges present the prize to the museum or gallery that has shown how their achievements of the preceding year stand out, demonstrated what makes their work innovative, and the impact it has had on audiences. In a normal



Marc Atkins



Marc Atkins

year, five museums are shortlisted, and one winner takes the prize of £100,000. In 2020, in recognition of the unprecedented challenges that all museums faced, the five shortlisted museums were named as joint winners. They equally share an enhanced award of £200,000 – a 40% rise over previous years.

### How did you get involved?

All museums are eligible to apply for the award. We completed the application form, outlining to the judges what made us a candidate and why the past year had been exceptional for us. We also had to submit a three-minute video telling our story.

### Apart from the accolade, what do you see as the key benefits of your win?

The press coverage that we received as a result of our win was phenomenal. As well as articles in all the national and regional press, our Curator appeared on national television and radio talking about the award. We have been given a generous marketing budget for the year and had access to a PR company in London and a creative agency who we worked closely

with in the run up to the announcement. Our visitor numbers have shot up in the immediate aftermath of the announcement. There is no doubt that our profile has been raised very significantly. We obviously welcome the £40,000 of unrestricted funding, and we are looking forward to working further with Art Fund and the other four winners over the course of the next year.

### What advice would you give any AIM members looking to take part in the future?

I would recommend that other museums in the same position think big and go for it. Independent museums are doing a fantastic job within their communities and deserve recognition. If an AIM member feels they have had a particularly successful year for whatever reason, I would urge them to apply. The whole experience has been fantastic for us, even though we did not get to go to an award ceremony in London because of the COVID-19 restrictions.

[www.gairlochmuseum.org](http://www.gairlochmuseum.org)

[www.artfund.org/museum-of-the-year](http://www.artfund.org/museum-of-the-year)



**Following on from the recent launch of its Inequalities Response and Action Plan and the Tackling Inequalities Hallmark, AIM is delighted to announce new funds to support this vital work.**

## AIM Hallmark Grants: Tackling Inequalities

**T**he AIM Hallmarks of Prospering Museums identify and promote the typical characteristics of successful heritage organisations. This year grants of up to £10,000 will be available to support projects addressing AIM's new Tackling Inequality Hallmark.

The AIM Hallmarks Grants support Accredited Museums or museums Working Towards Accreditation in England. There is a total fund of £60,000 in 2020-2021 funded by Arts Council England, through AIM's National Portfolio Organisation funding.

### What we're looking for

We wish to support organisations to contribute to positive change and who are

committed to identifying and taking steps to address inequalities. This could be through organisational change; for example, widening their range of Trustees or developing an inclusive approach to understanding and acting on the needs of their workforce. Museums also have a unique opportunity to use and develop their collections to highlight discrimination, identify and address missing perspectives and encourage debate and discussion.

We know that this is a challenging area for museums and that many of our members are keen to embark on positive action. We are therefore open to proposals that you feel address the needs of your organisation.

### Introducing Culture&

AIM is working on its inequalities response and action plan with Culture&, a London-based independent arts and heritage charity established in 1987.

Culture&'s mission is to open up the arts and heritage workforce, audiences and programmes through training, cross-arts commissioning and audience development.

Culture&'s flagship programme, the New Museum School, provides 18 work-based training placements annually with leading museums, galleries and arts organisations such as the British Museum, Southbank Centre, Royal Collection Trust, English Heritage and the British Library.

Culture&'s public programmes are aimed at expanding audiences and are delivered in collaboration with arts and heritage organisations such as the British Library and Wellcome Collection.

Margaret Harrison, AIM Programme Manager

"We're really pleased to be working with Dr Errol Francis and Culture&. They have considerable experience in supporting arts and heritage organisations in developing programmes that promote diversity in the workforce and expand audiences.

This is a great opportunity for AIM members to get help in considering how their organisations can address the new Hallmark. If anyone is thinking about applying for a Hallmarks grant then please get in touch to talk through your ideas or sign up for the *Hallmarks at Home* session on *Tackling Inequality* on 15th December. It will look at practical examples and case studies and is also an opportunity to discuss potential Hallmarks grant applications."

### Application process:

To find out more visit [www.aim-museums.co.uk/for-aim-members/grants/aim-hallmarks-awards](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk/for-aim-members/grants/aim-hallmarks-awards)

The closing date for this round of Hallmarks grants will be 31 January 2021. Awards will be made by the end of February.

[www.cultureand.org](http://www.cultureand.org)

If you want to speak to one of the AIM team about a potential application, please don't hesitate to get in touch:

Margaret Harrison –  
[margaret@aim-museums.co.uk](mailto:margaret@aim-museums.co.uk);

Justeen Stone –  
[justeen@aim-museums.co.uk](mailto:justeen@aim-museums.co.uk)



David Baldwin Photography



Liz Isles Photography

Culture& work, including top, The Memory Archives, (2019), and above, New Museum School Graduation, (2019).

# Now more than ever – AIM support for challenging times

**A**IM represents, connects and strengthens the UK's independent museums and heritage organisations. As a member you are an important part of a supportive and engaged community of over 1000 independent organisations from right across the UK. And as the voice of the independent sector, AIM is making sure you are heard too.

Our accessible programme of expertise and practical guidance is relevant from your board to your front desk. Our focus on pragmatism and success inspires innovation, enabling you to build resilience, network and plan effectively in these challenging times.

We continue to offer excellent value-for-money as well as access to grants, key resources, and greater collective procurement power.

There has never been a better time to be part of the AIM community.

- **Stronger together** As an AIM member, you are an important part of a growing

network of over 1000 similar museum and heritage organisations across the UK

- **Representing your needs** We are an authoritative, respected voice. We are consulted on and regularly help inform government and sector decisions
- **Keeping you in touch** Our Bulletin and regular eNews shares the latest news, advice and innovations relevant to you, your organisation and your career
- **Supporting you** Expert advice available through AIM's
  - extensive online resources – everything you need to know, from setting up a museum, to running a café, securing tax reliefs or appealing business rates decisions
  - Friendly, staff team on hand to help with your queries and questions, and make sure you access the best support for all your needs

- **Benefitting you:** Enjoy affiliate membership of the Charity Finance Group at no extra cost – access regular finance updates, special interest groups on museum finance, and helplines on accounting and tax, legal advice, property, pensions and managing financial difficulties
- **Exclusively for you – grants, consultancies, advice lines and discounts**
  - Extensive member-only grant schemes
    - Hallmarks Awards
    - Biffa Award History Makers
    - Pilgrim Trust conservation grants
    - Training grants
    - Prospering Board governance consultancies
  - Hallmarks at Home consultancy workshops
  - Free advice lines on business rates, Museums and Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief, and HR advice and support
  - Reductions on your energy bills through our Energy Action Group procurement process
  - Member discounts on AIM's national conference and advertising
  - Free Trustee vacancy advertising.

[www.aim-museums.co.uk](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk)

**AIM's new Success Guide is an invaluable introduction to a vital role. Here, authors Ruth Lesirge and Hilary Barnard (HBRL Consulting) outline their approach.**

## Successful Governance for Museums – a guide for trustees

**I**n writing the guide, HBRL has drawn on wide-ranging experience of governance reviews, Board workshops and leadership development programmes for AIM, independent museums and leaders to provide new and serving Trustees with a practical reference resource that they can dip in to.

Independent museums are an important part of the wider charitable sector and face many similar challenges. The guide takes a UK wide perspective, recognising that there are three different legal and regulatory governing compliances at work. The charity governance codes reflect this common ground and seek to build better governance practice. Regulatory compliance really matters, and the guide steers the reader through this territory.

The positive and creative challenge addressed in the guide is establishing and acting on what can be done to strengthen Board practice, in particular: attracting Trustees with key skills, generating team based thinking, as well as supporting governance, management and operations to become better aligned. Our hope is that Boards will feel encouraged to take up this challenge.

Trustees bring a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience to their role on museum boards. Well-constructed skills audits can show and collate that talent and usefully highlight where gaps and areas of weakness are. This guide therefore offers a detailed guide to constructing that skills audit.

However, Boards can only contribute effectively when the relationship between Trustees, and between the staff and board is healthy and constructive. Being a critical friend to staff is an essential part of being a museum Trustee, but

so too is providing support to staff and being confident in delegation. Rather than work based on vague or even ambiguous understandings that can come apart in a crisis, effective Boards lay out a written framework defining the respective roles for governance and operational/management. The guide unpacks what this might mean in practice.

It is sometimes said that there is a shortage of available Trustees and many museum Boards have found it difficult to recruit. To avoid this, some Boards have been reluctant to institute term limits on length of Trustee service. This is likely to be a spiral downwards to a Board becalmed and lacking the impetus that new perspectives can provide. The guide takes the view that Boards need both refreshment and continuity, with incremental change of Trustees making it possible to not only keep institutional memory, but also actively encourage new voices and ideas.

There is no magic bullet to holding this balance, but the guide offers key pointers to help Boards carry out an open process for Trustee recruitment, selection, appointment, and induction. However, Trustees need to recognise that attracting and retaining the right Trustees means having an honest conversation! For example, applicants need to know what the time commitment might be; it is important to make clear that the work will be more than 'just turning up for four or six meetings a year' and that all Trustees are expected to undertake work between meetings.

When recruitment is done well, Boards benefit from the enthusiasm and sustained contribution of new Trustees. It also minimises the risk of having disillusioned and disgruntled people on the Board, who feel they are committed to work they had not bargained for!

Engaging local communities also has a major contribution to play in developing diverse Boards that reflect people's lived experience and ambitions. We applaud the creativity of Boards: knowing local needs and wishes, they are finding ways to continue delivering public benefit in very difficult circumstances this year.

So, this guide aims to help Trustees continue to strengthen their governance practice and ensure that their Boards add value to the work of the museum and to it realising its goals. We provide signposts to resources that can inform new practice by museum Boards. We are keen to hear your feedback and what has helped the progress of your Board.

**Ruth Lesirge and Hilary Barnard (HBRL Consulting)**

[www.aim-museums.co.uk/resources](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk/resources)





Casson Mann

***Seeking to bring together the best of museum and visitor attraction, Showtown celebrates Blackpool and its role in the development of British popular culture. We spoke to Learning and Engagement Manager, Kerry Vasiliou to find out more, and discover the challenges and opportunities of developing a new museum during the time of COVID.***

## It's Showtown!

Located on the first floor of a new five-star hotel on Blackpool's bustling promenade, Showtown is helping rethink Blackpool for the future through exploring its past, and in particular its significant contribution to entertainment. Objects on display will include a rare bowler hat owned by Stan Laurel, and loans from the V&A, including Tommy Cooper's 'headtwister' illusion magic trick and costumes worn by Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise.

The project is in its sixth year of development and will soon be managed through a charitable company limited by guarantee and operating at arm's length from the council. Capital building work delayed because of COVID is due to start shortly with opening now scheduled for 2022, offering a little more time to build on Showtown's dynamic brand launch earlier this year.

That brand is built on the innovative idea that Showtown is a hybrid, bringing together the best of museums with the visitor attractions the town is renowned for, says Kerry Vasiliou, Learning and Engagement Manager.

"We know through our market research that we are looking to reach a certain type of family audience, one that has been coming to

Blackpool year-on-year; but also those that already live here; we want the museum to be something that residents feel is theirs, that they take ownership and are proud of. We're also aware that we have to compete in Blackpool's tourism industry, so we have to be loud, we have to be populist in terms of our approach."

The development's business plan has benefited from the town's visitor attractions generously sharing knowledge and knowhow, but a clear focus on museum ethics and the central importance of the collections underpins the project.

"We want to raise the profile and improve people's understanding of Blackpool, and how significant it has been in the development of British popular entertainment over the last 150 years so we'll tell stories with integrity and help people learn about Blackpool, but visitors will do it having fun and by being entertained through play with their families."

Building a new museum brand is always a considerable undertaking but sustaining that development during the time of COVID-19 is a particular challenge. Showtown's approach has involved bringing profile raising together with engagement activities, dialling up the emphasis on each where most appropriate.

"When COVID started, we thought we had a year until we opened but obviously that's now extended so we have a little while longer to build the brand. We've found building that brand and raising profile has been most successful when we draw on synergies between our engagement programme and our PR activities. For example, when we lowered a model of a baby elephant into the museum before the walls and the stairs went in, we knew this would be a great PR stunt.

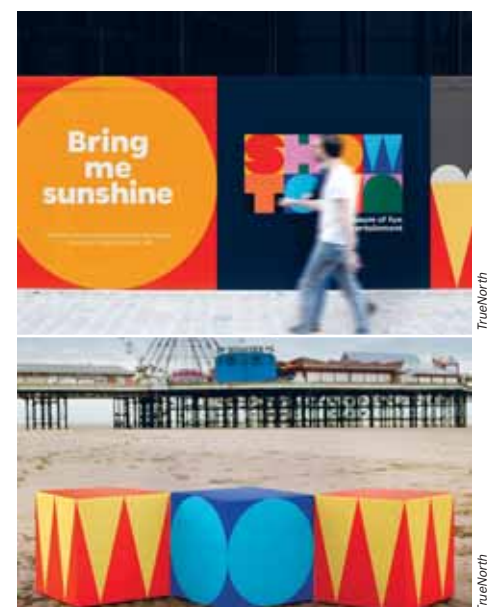
But we were also keen to connect it to the town, so came up with the idea of children writing letters to the elephant to keep it company whilst in the museum, and that in turn became a time capsule project and an opportunity for us to work with schools. So, the synergy between the two, engagement and PR, made for a nice story and great coverage from BBC and ITV. It also fits really well with our values; to have fun and inspire, instil pride, to nurture, to transform, to celebrate, and to be open and have integrity – all values we want to highlight every time we use the brand."

Despite the challenges COVID-19 has posed Kerry feels in a privileged position compared to many. So, what advice would she offer those considering complex project development in these strangest of times?

"Museums having to adapt and change what they already had, is so much harder than starting afresh, and planning going forward. We've learned to be extremely resilient and patient and flexible, to take risks and try new things and to try and not become too attached to something that you have worked really hard on – that's really difficult to do and we've had to redesign things so many times. But we must be as objective as we can, to make sure we make the right decisions going forward."

Showtown is due to open to the public in 2022.

[www.showtownblackpool.co.uk](http://www.showtownblackpool.co.uk)



TrueNorth

TrueNorth



**Ben Leah, Director of Hayes Parsons Insurance Brokers, reflects on the current Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) business interruption "test case" and its implications for museums in a changing insurance market.**

## A challenging year

Insurance started the year with a poor reputation, and the COVID-19 crisis has crystallised this view in the eyes of many museums. Whilst the industry pays over 96% of all claims according to the Association of British Insurers, it often does not feel this way.

### The "Test Case"

The decisive action the FCA took to provide clarity was welcome, but we were disappointed many insurers were too dismissive of their policy positions at the outset, and even now are relying on courts to determine their own policy coverage. The recent judgements (more than 150 pages worth) have brought about clarity, to an extent, without being fully conclusive. The judgements relate to how courts would interpret different styles of policy wordings, but it would be down to the assessment of

each policy in the context of how written, and the situation presented, as to whether claims may be successful.

### Where are we now?

At the time of writing, most insurers, and the FCA, are still 'assessing their position' whilst the Supreme Court gets ready to hear potential appeals. They are expected to conclude the appeal hearings on 19 November. However, this is a complex matter and whilst the courts are determining at breakneck speed we fear the saga may become more protracted, which does not help the view that insurance is too complicated and outdated.

### What does this mean for museums?

Many museums will be insured with insurers we are familiar with, whose business

interruption coverage in this area is broadly written in a similar way. Although the FCA judgement may not have named them explicitly it is widely accepted some policies will not respond, and you should have been communicated with to this effect. Where you have received more of a 'holding update' from your insurer the advice is to sit tight and await further news.

### The changing market

Depending on where you are in the renewal cycle, we would recommend giving additional consideration to how you review and procure your insurances. The insurance industry had already been going through a period of change, albeit you may not have experienced this as competition has remained fierce, but the pandemic has accelerated the way insurers are reviewing the risks they wish to provide cover for. You should expect to see premiums increasing; additional emphasis on what insurers will and will not insure; stricter compliance with policy conditions and less choice. When speaking with your current provider, if the above is not being conveyed fully, or you are not drilling down on the nuances of your insurance cover, it may well be worth seeking a second opinion.

[www.hayesparsons.co.uk](http://www.hayesparsons.co.uk)

**Although taking card payments is now paramount for all museums, industry data suggests seven out of ten of all businesses pay unnecessary Merchant Services fees. But what are Merchant Services? How does it work? Why does it have to be so confusing? Tom Faithful from AIM Associate Supplier Unyfi explains.**

## Merchant Services 101

### What are Merchant Services?

The term merchant services is a wide-ranging description for the various card payment services built for businesses, including face to face payment processing, online payment processing and the hardware for taking payments itself. It essentially enables a business to accommodate card payments in a secure and timely fashion.

### What am I paying?

Typically, a merchant will see charges as a percentage of the transaction for different card types, alongside a pence per transaction authorisation fee. Museums take many transactions with a low average transaction value (ATV) across a wide range of card types so ensuring the overall cost of taking payments is kept low is imperative.

### What makes up the % charge?

The charge is made up of three elements:

1. The Interchange fee – This is the fee the

merchants card issuer (NatWest, Lloyds, Santander etc.) charge for accepting an electronic payment. This fee is set by the bank and cannot be adjusted.

2. The Scheme fee – This is the fee the "scheme" charges, typically it will be VISA or Mastercard, but you may see AMEX or Diners. The scheme fee varies based on the type of card (VISA debit, Mastercard Credit or VISA Commercial debit etc ...) These fees are set by VISA/Mastercard/AMEX and cannot be adjusted.
3. The Acquiring banks margin – The acquiring bank accommodates the payment being processed (Worldpay, First Data, Barclaycard, AIB) and makes up a large portion of the total cost. This is the area in which most museums are being overcharged and where companies like Unify can procure worthwhile savings.

The above only expands on one aspect of the cost of processing card payments. As you can

see, the process is not straightforward, and it is no wonder 95% of merchants do not understand their monthly merchant statements. It is essential for any business to manage these costs and processes, with COVID-19 expected to be with us for the long term, cash is becoming more and more redundant, so card use is only going to increase.

### Why does it have to be so confusing?

The majority of acquiring banks will not declare their margins and will increase the charges annually throughout the lifetime of the contract. Unless you are particularly diligent, these price increases will invariably be missed. At Unyfi we ensure our banks margin is declared at the quotation stage, whereby we provide a full transparent analysis of current costs, compared to future costings. This margin is also fixed for the duration of the contract, thus mitigating annual price increases.

At Unyfi, we pride ourselves on the transparency we provide to our clients and our ongoing support. Unlike going directly to a bank, where you only have one option, Unyfi conduct a comprehensive market comparison, ensuring each client has the most cost effective and suitable solution for their needs.

Still can't understand your invoice? Talk to one of our expert advisors and we can provide industry specific help and no obligation comparison quotes free of charge.

Tom Faithful  
Merchant Services Consultant, Unyfi  
Tel: 07341 984641

**Management Consultants Fourth Street highlight how responding to COVID-19 demands constant creative thinking, not least as museums are perhaps more important to our communities than ever.**

## What more can we do?

**W**ith the support of Cultural Recovery Grant funding, most museums had started on the road back from the first national lockdown. Now they are dealing with a second. The path ahead will be difficult. The sad truth is that some organisations will not survive. Beyond the painful process of redundancies, museum Boards will face tough decisions about what to do with the heritage they hold in trust. Transferring collections, mergers and consolidation, disposals and liquidation are all on the table, even if these measures seemed unfathomable just 12 months ago.

Those that live to fight another day will need to adapt to a new reality of fewer visitors, skeleton staff, heightened anxiety, and the possibility of further lockdowns. Part of that evolution will require changes in organisational culture. We must stop thinking of museums as physical buildings full of 'stuff' and think of them more as providers of valuable community services. Museums connect people, they provoke dialogue, promote healing and provide hope, identity and sense of place. That collection of services is needed now more than ever.

The first lockdown illustrated the stark difference between those museums that retreated behind a sombre website asking

for donations and those that sprang into action: collecting lockdown stories and mementos, producing education packs to support home-schooling families, and mining their collections for lessons from the past to help us make sense of an uncertain future.

The digital museum must be a priority now. Websites must be lively, informative and interactive, not just a list of opening times and admission prices. If prioritised and given the importance it demands, even the smallest museum can produce a digital experience of substance, creating a direct connection to audiences.

The Ben Uri Gallery and Museum is an instructive example – operating with limited resources but with an exceptional collection and dedicated staff, it has produced one of the best digital galleries on the web, full of audio, video, scholarship and resources for teachers, researchers and health care workers. The physical gallery is a shop unit in St John's Wood. But the website is a TV station, a radio station, a school, a library, a research institute, a forum, a health care hub and – of course – a museum.

Museums can do more to remind people of their value to communities. Retailers have been hit just as hard by these lockdowns. High

streets are on their knees and town centres are struggling. Museums can help to activate these places, by meeting people in the streets or by repurposing vacant units.

What can we do for local schools who are grappling with their own social-distancing challenges? Can the museum 'pop up' in the parks and public squares that we've come to treasure as COVID-safe space? Can we make better use of our own outdoor space? If you have the outdoor space, use it – your community needs it.

Let's face it – for the foreseeable future, our buildings are our biggest liability. However much we adapt space and sanitise surfaces, people will be anxious about spending time indoors. Our biggest assets, by contrast, are that deep well of trust that people still place in museums and the unique skillsets we've developed over the years: providing perspective, telling stories, listening, organising, marshalling volunteers, engaging communities, and creating fun, inclusive and welcoming environments. We need to think of ways to harness those skills and put them to use on-line and off-site, while we temporarily shut down the building.

Be assured, visitors and audiences will remember and reward those museums that – in the darkest moments – didn't just ask for donations, but also asked: what more can we do?

Fourth Street management consultants have specialised in the arts, cultural and heritage sectors for more than 20 years, providing robust commercial advice to help museums realise their vision and achieve long-term financial sustainability. [fourth-street.com](https://fourth-street.com)

**Due to the altered COVID-19 landscape, we may have to re-learn what our visitors want, explains Colin Mulberg.**

## Re-engaging your visitors

**T**he museum and heritage sectors are dealing with shifts in visitor behaviour, reduced attendance and related income, as well as concerns on the safety of visiting. A longer-term emerging change is in the type of experiences that visitors now want from a visit.

Though it is early days, other sectors are picking up signs that a fundamental shift is happening; we should look carefully at what lessons we can learn. The key question is: are the customers we left the same as the customers that we hope will come back?

In retail, for example, the long view is that visitors are increasingly valuing experiences and emotions; when people go out, they want to feel brighter, wiser, stronger and more uplifted than before they left home. Priorities are shifting, with a focus on family, friends and social, shared

activities. People will think harder about how they spend their leisure time, accelerating the shift towards creating memories and experiences.

Both the business and retail sectors highlight the issue of in-home versus out-of-home experiences. In-home experiences have expanded during the pandemic with an explosion of digital content – more videos, broadcasts, podcasts, webinars, games, music, downloads and live streaming are available, with increased social media use/content and new film releases now by-passing cinemas and going straight to streaming services. This trend is set to continue. The conditions are also ripe for Virtual Reality to expand domestically over the next 12-18 months.

Much of this analysis applies to the museum and heritage sectors. Many of our visitors are spending much of their time at home and experiencing life through a screen; many museums and heritage venues recognise this and have been adapting and supplying on-line content. As the amount and choice of in-home experiences and content increases, venues will face stiffer competition to get their digital content viewed and it will be even more difficult to monetise on-line content.

Yet when lockdowns ease people will still want out-of-home experiences, away from their screens and the same four walls. They will be looking for the dynamic, physical, exciting experiences that they cannot get in-home – to feel alive, as one retail commentator put it. The out-of-home experience is already being seen as essential to wellbeing and combating social isolation. Expectations are changing and if visitors take risks venturing out, they will want to have a really good, fulfilling time as payback.



**With the rush to 'do digital', the importance of a strategic approach has often been left by the wayside. Here Alec Ward, Museum Development London, shares useful pointers on where to start with the wealth of guidance available.**

# Thinking digital? A guide to your strategic starting point

From DCMS' 2018 *Culture is Digital* report to the National Lottery Heritage Fund's *DASH* report published in October, there are a number of excellent resources, reports and guides focused on encouraging a more strategic approach to digital, but it's daunting to just dive in. If you're based in a museum, your regional Museum Development team can help, with some regions (like our team in London) offering direct support for your digital work.

A light touch place to start is the Digital Culture Network's 'Introduction to Digital Strategy'. This short read offers lots of food for thought as you start considering a more strategic approach to digital. For a detailed introduction, Cogapp's free 'Digital Strategy For Museums Guide' is a fantastic resource. I've pointed a number of organisations here, as it's ideal for getting a basic overview and understanding of the subject.

Once you've got that introduction, Culture 24's *Digital Pathways* platform is an excellent resource bank and "provides people working in and with museums with

the tools and knowledge they need to build their digital skills". The National Lottery Heritage Fund also has an excellent resource page, with a section focused specifically on digital strategy.

When you're getting nearer the point of building your strategic approach to digital, it's important to have an understanding of the areas that digital will have the greatest impact. Charity Digital have created a short checklist to help you develop an understanding of how digital relates to your organisation, particularly during the pandemic.

For a more focused look, the 'Digital Culture Compass' Tracker tool can give you a detailed overview. Part of the Digital Culture Compass commissioned by Arts Council England in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund, it offers an overview of all of your digital activities and how they relate to your organisation strategically. By completing the toolkit, you'll have an understanding of your digital strengths and weaknesses and the areas you need to improve. By putting in a bit of time it can be incredibly useful as you are starting to form your ideas around your digital strategy. Check London Museum

Development's training video to help you use the tool, on our *YouTube channel*, or Culture 24's *introductory guide* to the tool on Pathways.

This year, Culture 24 published an excellent report for Europeana on *digital transformation*, with a focus on instilling digital confidence across the workforce. The report does a great job of breaking down terminologies and language, sometimes a major barrier in the world of digital transformation. Whilst the report may not be your first stop on your journey, it's a fantastic resource as you begin to advance your thinking. It brilliantly highlights the importance of the people, particularly in leadership, within the process of digital transformation.

Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet. Each organisation is unique; what works for one may not work for others. These resources, reports, guides and tutorials will all help you out at the different stages of your journey. Start small, work smart, but aim big.

For live links to all the reports outlined in Alec's piece visit [www.aim-museums.co.uk/DigitalStrategy](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk/DigitalStrategy)

Museum and heritage venues are well placed to meet this need; indeed, large retail parks cite museums as the kind of experience they might require to attract shoppers. We have real objects, varied collections, interesting and personal stories to tell and a physical environment to explore. We are trusted as organisations and in many communities could become a focal point and safe space in which to enjoy socialising. Yet for this to happen, we will probably need to change and adapt the experiences we give visitors, as traditional static displays of labelled objects in cases might no longer be sufficient. Taking the lead from other sectors, we will need to rethink the visitor offer to focus on what makes the out-of-home experience far better than in-home. This may be less about content and more about a dynamic, immersive, sensorial experience that cannot be reproduced at home.

Venues should look at **all** the assets that they can use to make a visit special, starting with spaces. Outdoor spaces are at a premium, and gardens, courtyards, covered walkways, terraces can all be part of imaginative offers. Car parks are being repurposed and many venues are using awnings and marquees to utilise outside areas. Re-imagine architecture and buildings both inside and out to see how they could contribute and be used for different purposes. Is your building

interesting or connected to a strong story? Buildings could be labelled as exhibits to add value to a visit and reinforce a sense of place.

We can again learn from outside the sector; especially the creative arts. Music, art and performance are developing imaginative shows with new formats or using spaces in new ways. Drive-in opera or comedy and Shakespeare in pub gardens are just a few examples. Architects and designers are predicting a glut of empty offices and shops as work and retail patterns change fundamentally. Partnerships could help take collections and stories out beyond museum walls. We may have to re-invent how and where we engage with certain audiences.

Reduced capacity is an issue, but also an opportunity. There is scope to develop more intimate, personalised experiences, adapted to individual groups. More local visitors could encourage deeper relationships and repeat visits. Exciting offers with reduced numbers gives the potential for increased income generation (e.g. VIP tickets).

Many commentators are predicting that there will not be a return to 'normal' as our customers/visitors will have changed and moved on. The museum and heritage sectors will need to understand what our audiences now want from us and ensure that we offer them really wonderful reasons to visit.

Colin Mulberg is Director of Colin Mulberg Consulting, specialising in improving the visitor experience for museums, galleries and historic properties/sites. He curates the 'Understanding Your Visitors' strand of the Museums + Heritage Show and is looking for examples of venues that have changed their offer to visitors. Contact him via the website: [www.colinmulberg.com](http://www.colinmulberg.com)



# Interpretation, design and build for unique visitor experiences

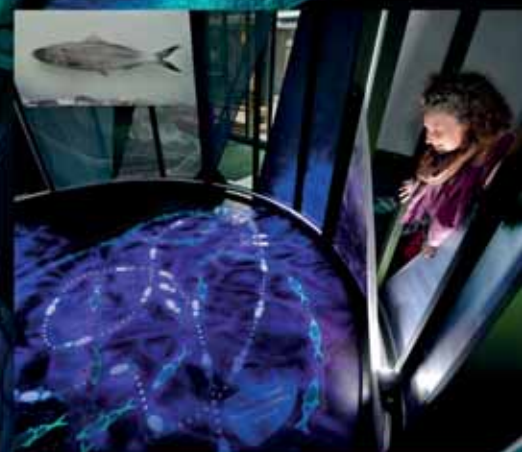
The Story Museum 'Whispering Wood'



North York Moors 'Land of Iron'



Dippy on Tour, Rochdale



Unlocking the Severn touring exhibition



***With many museums forced to limit their indoor space, interpretive designers the Creative Core celebrate the joys and possibilities of outdoor interpretation for museums and visitors alike.***

## Let's take this outside

Prior to the current lockdown, museums had started to reopen their buildings amid a bewildering array of new restrictions – visitor routes were overhauled, numbers limited and ticketing reintroduced. However, for museums blessed with outdoor space, the situation may present new opportunities to meet visitors where they feel more at ease and less burdened with COVID-19 risk. Whether your site sits within acres of parkland, or just its external walls, the Creative Core has ideas for how to maximise this outdoor potential.

During lockdown, outdoor space has become a peculiar refuge; many of us have spent more time outdoors than ever before, taking daily exercise, enjoying nature, and exploring our local areas. At the same time, cultural life has migrated outside, with outdoor public space transformed into impromptu theatres, art galleries and concert halls. Many cultural institutions now recognise this shift and are refocusing their programmes to reach audiences outside, where they feel more comfortable and receptive.

So, what does successful outdoor interpretation look like?

The best makes an energetic and engaging addition to the outdoor environment. Instead of detracting from what's around, it accentuates its surroundings and the unique sense of place. It is innovative and inspirational, without being wordy and didactic. It works to enhance the visitor experience, giving access to fascinating stories and characters that visitors can truly relate to. It can even offer opportunities for self-led, multi-sensory interaction



Top and inset, Tactile 3D map table in iron and oak – part of 'Land of Iron' interpretation in the North York Moors National Park. Above, Steppe mammoth anamorphic mural – part of 'Deep History Coast' interpretation along the North Norfolk coastline.

and play through a menu of low-tech and no-tech activities. It forms an important part of a memorable day out and gives visitors a reason to come back.

Some of our favourite examples of outdoor interpretation help draw us back into the historic landscape, reorient our perceptions and create moments of discovery. Against the peaceful

backdrop of sheep and heather; interpretation in the North York Moors depicts a fiery landscape of ironworks, kilns and railways. All at once, we realise we're standing at the epicentre of a booming ironstone mining industry, now all but vanished from the landscape. Viewpoint silhouettes and tactile 3D maps help us re-impose this forgotten heritage back onto our surroundings and appreciate the transformation that's taken place.

Other examples provoke conversation and debate. Interpretation along North Norfolk's prehistoric coastline gets us thinking about the natural environment and how it has changed over millions of years. Imagery built up through fleeting glimpses and surprise discoveries suggests what life might have been like for early humans living cheek by jowl with mammoths, woolly rhinos and hyenas. A disused water tank in seaside Sheringham proves an unlikely spot for a prehistoric encounter; as stencil shapes suddenly align to reveal a family of steppe mammoth in a life-size anamorphic mural. Elsewhere, human footprints in the ground are a simple but effective reminder of who was here before us.

For sites with limited space, outdoor interpretation is not off the cards. Wall-mounted signage offers prime space for a branded welcome, whether to invite would-be visitors through the door, or provide interpretation on buildings and landscapes. Tactile engagements offer a new and unexpected dimension to traditional graphics, while non-invasive fixings ensure suitability for historic buildings. Public realm interpretation can also help maximise space by combining functionality and storytelling, such as interpretive street furniture or viewpoint panels to engage passers-by in the heritage of their surroundings.

As museums face the uncertainty of the months ahead, outdoor interpretation has a role to play in sustaining audiences with new stories told where they feel safest.

Contact us to find out how Core can help your organisation build a compelling outdoor offer:

[www.thecreativecore.co.uk](http://www.thecreativecore.co.uk)

[info@thecreativecore.co.uk](mailto:info@thecreativecore.co.uk)

## Survey into freelancing in the cultural sector highlights concerning issues

Valuable insights on the cultural sector freelance experience have been published following an extensive survey carried out earlier this year by Museum Freelance.

The survey provides valuable and robust data on the cultural sector's self-employed workforce, which the team hope will help drive wider recognition of the integral part freelancers play in its ecosystem.

Marge Ainsley, co-director of Museum Freelance, said: "We know the insights will help us to champion and support freelancers and will be valuable for freelancers themselves. We also really hope they will stimulate reflection and improvements in the wider sector; from clients, funders, and sector support organisations.

"Whilst the majority of those surveyed enjoy freelancing, there are a range of issues affecting freelancers' wellbeing, and their ability to earn a living. As well as issues around pay, procurement and contracts, there are also challenges around feeling valued and access to opportunities."

60% of the 314 survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that you can make a successful career from freelancing in the cultural sector, with flexibility and freedom, work-life balance, and being your own boss the top motivations. However, only 47% similarly agreed that freelancers are

valued and recognised for the work they do and a mere 12% that sector organisations support freelancers.

A set of related recommendations for sector organisations including providing affordable opportunities; developing and implementing best practice procurement processes; and guidance on contractual issues has been developed by Museum Freelance.

Additional initiatives spurred by the findings include coordinating a freelancers panel, developing campaigns and lobbying to create change; as well as seeking funding to deliver on ambitious plans to champion freelancers in the sector.

Christina Lister, co-director of Museum Freelance, said:

"With a growing proportion of the museums workforce choosing to – or being forced to – turn to freelancing, it is now more important than ever that the sector tackles the issues identified in this survey.

"Whether you are surprised by the findings or they confirm what you suspected, we now have a good base and clear calls to action on what can be done to address many of the challenges raised in the research. We want the issues raised to get on the sector's agenda, and the insights to be a catalyst for positive change."

Read the report at [bit.ly/34fr4UI](https://bit.ly/34fr4UI)

# AIM GRANTS CASE STUDIES

To help AIM members with a variety of needs, including training, conservation, development and exhibitions, AIM administers a range of grants. These include AIM Hallmarks Awards, supported by Arts Council England and the Welsh government (AIM Hallmarks in Wales); AIM's Sustainability Scheme, supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation; and AIM's Conservation and Collections Care and Collection Audit Schemes, supported by the Pilgrim Trust. AIM Bulletin regularly publishes case studies of some of the successful applications.

## AIM CONSERVATION AND COLLECTIONS CARE

### Royal Army Physical Training Corp Museum £640

#### *Restoration of historic gymnastic apparatus*

The Royal Army Physical Training Corps (RAPTC) Museum tells the story of the branch of the Army dedicated to physical fitness. Its collection includes many items of historic and current-day training equipment, and in 2018 the Museum was gifted a 1960's-era pommel horse and vaulting buck. These had seen many years' use by Army gymnasts and P.T. instructors before being relegated to a storeroom where they had remained for an extended period.

Consequently, conservator Stephen Umpleby ACR was approached to make a survey of the objects and draw up a plan for their restoration in liaison with the Museum Curator. A preliminary survey showed that it would be possible to stabilize their condition through re-stuffing the affected areas, stitching closed the tears and inserting backing repair patches to cover the holes. The latter would be skived down and dyed to blend in with the original material.

The AIM grant covered the cost of the initial assessment and all subsequent treatment to the objects.

The restored vaulting buck and pommel horse now occupy pride of place in the RAPTC Museum gallery where they will help to portray the history of Army physical training for many years to come. The AIM Pilgrim Trust conservation grant helped get our historic gymnastic equipment into shape.



The pommel horse and vaulting buck on display at RAPTC.

Eli Dawson, Curator  
RAPTC Museum

### Elgin Museum £1,300

#### *Improved Collections Care of Elgin Museum's Art Works*

Elgin Museum houses and displays an eclectic collection acquired over the past 184 years. Run and managed by volunteers, it is Scotland's oldest continuously independent museum.

Lack of space is a constant problem; there is no room for a permanent art display, and storage of the art works has been inadequate for some years, hampering access and conservation needs. The aim of the grant was to engage a conservator to advise replacement of the old wooden racking with modern museum-standard racking and checking of the some 250 framed

artworks as they were rewrapped in conservation-grade materials, inventoried and clearly labelled.

The balance of the money needed was funded by Art Fund and the work has been completed during the COVID-19 closure, largely by members of our Emergency Executive Group. It is still intended that at some future time we will be able to capitalise on the improved access to bring the art works to the public gaze, and that identified conservation needs can be pursued.

Our Vice-president summarises: "It has been a great opportunity for students and volunteers to interact with our often overlooked art collection, and to help secure its long-term conservation."

Janet Trythall, Elgin Museum Volunteer

### Dundee Museum of Transport £1,181.98

#### *Museum archives*

Dundee Museum of Transport has only been collecting for around ten years. Archive storage had historically been confined to the back room of a workshop however; as the collection developed, this area was increasingly unsuitable. The environmental controls were challenging; there was no heating, the area had suffered from water ingress and dust would filter through from the workshop.

The grant from AIM funded the purchase of dehumidifiers and packing materials, as part of a wider programme to relocate the collection to an off-site store. This new store already provided improved security and even had the luxury of a heating system! However, early monitoring of the %RH indicated that dehumidifiers would help staff and volunteers to stabilise the environment. Collections were packed into archival sleeves and relocated.

We would like to thank AIM and the Pilgrim Trust for support in getting expert advice to identify the issues that were within our control to resolve and for enabling us to purchase this equipment.

Alexander Goodger, Museum Manager



The new dehumidifiers in action at Dundee Museum of Transport.



## Emsworth Museum

£5,000

### *Conservation of an Edwardian wedding dress*

Emsworth Museum has in its collection a silk and lace wedding dress that was bought for the marriage of Margaret Tatchell on 21 April 1908 to John Lewis, the proprietor of a local rope and sail making business. Economically, Emsworth was in its heyday in this period with thriving boat building, shipping and seafood industries supporting a vibrant community.

Emsworth Museum is a small museum run entirely by volunteers, with a focus on objects with a demonstrable Emsworth provenance bringing out memorable stories from Emsworth's history.

When the wedding dress was initially put on display around 1995, it was shown on a period wickerwork mannequin that had stressed some areas of the dress, causing increasing damage over time. Sarah Howard, a local textile conservation specialist, recommended a plan of action and based on this plan, the Trust were awarded a grant from the AIM Pilgrim Trust Conservation Scheme.

The restored wedding dress will be displayed in a new cabinet, creating the opportunity to curate displays focussed on the commercial life of Emsworth, which places the wedding dress in its societal context.

**Dr Margaret Rogers**  
Emsworth Museum

*Emsworth Museum will re-open on Saturday 3 April 2021.*



Margaret Tatchell and John Lewis on their wedding day in 1908, and Wedding dress post conservation in the conservator's studio.

## Nantwich Museum

£5,000

### *Preventative conservation to improve environmental conditions*

The aim of the project was to improve environmental conditions in the Museum's galleries, as some of the paintings on display were in an unstable condition with high levels of light having a detrimental impact.

The AIM grant enabled us to tackle two issues; the need to take steps to reduce light levels and secondly the need to gain a better picture and understanding of the environmental conditions in the galleries.

We commissioned a company called Sun-X UK to make and install UV filter and black out blinds throughout the Museum. This included placing film onto a problematic skylight with hard to reach access. We were extremely fortunate to find a local scaffolder who kindly donated their time and equipment to enable this to happen. Blinds were also fitted to three large, arched Victorian windows and a high circular window, as well as to more standard sized/shaped windows throughout.

We also purchased seven real time environmental monitors. They were extremely easy to install around the Museum. They upload temperature, humidity and light readings directly to a cloud-based system which allows us to easily check environmental conditions.



UV filter being installed at Nantwich Museum.

This is ideal as we do not have a designated Collections Manager. We can generate reports to gain an understanding of what is happening within the galleries which will inform us as to what steps we need to take next.

**Kate Dobson, Manager**  
Nantwich Museum

## Little Hall Lavenham

£4,750

### *Gayer-Anderson Library book cleaning*

Little Hall is a late 14th century hall house in Lavenham, Suffolk that was home to twin brothers Robert and Thomas Gayer Anderson, soldiers, collectors and benefactors. The Library contains the books collected by the brothers and is a valuable insight into their interests covering art, architecture, antiquities, poetry and the classics, some going back to the fifteenth century.

In 2018 mould was discovered on many of the 1,145 books in the collection. A survey by Lorraine Finch of LFC Conservation and Preservation (LFC&P) confirmed that the outbreak was extensive, caused by poor air circulation due to the instalment of fixed Perspex security panels to the face of the bookcases.

The mould was too hazardous for the books to be handled by the volunteers so they were removed by LFC&P in sealed containers and the bookcases cleaned with a mixture of industrial methylated spirits and water to destroy the mould spores.

Within the studio each book was placed in a cleaning cabinet fitted with a suction device to gently draw the mould away from the surface of the books. They were then brushed with a natural hairbrush to remove loosened mould and dirt.

The objective was to stop further damage to the books and ensure the Library was safe again for visitors and volunteers. Not only did the AIM Pilgrim Trust grant help the museum to achieve this vital piece of work but it also prompted us to think more widely about our book collection. In advance of the conservation works the volunteers produced a collections database to enable more comprehensive management and understanding of the book collection. We are now developing plans to train our volunteers to carry out annual inspection and cleaning of the books. And as the books are returned to the shelves our volunteers are undertaking a basic condition survey which will be recorded in our database.

**Graham Panton, Chair**  
Little Hall Lavenham



The curator at Little Hall Lavenham returning the books to the shelves.

## The Wiltshire Museum

£4,750

### *Conservation of Correspondence to William Cunnington I, 1799-1810*

The Wiltshire Museum is governed by the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (WANHS) and was formed in 1853 to establish a Museum and Library promoting the study of objects connected with Wiltshire. The museum opened in 1874 and has extensive Designated archaeology collections along with art, natural history, local history and an Archive and Library.

This fascinating 'letter book' contains 246 letters sent to William Cunnington between 1799 and 1810. Written to him by fellow antiquarians they discuss archaeological discoveries as they began exploring some of Wiltshire's prehistoric sites, including from the World Heritage Sites of Avebury and Stonehenge. The letters contain information about many of the objects in the Museum's Prehistoric Wiltshire Galleries and are much used by researchers. For years, the book has had restricted access due to conservation concerns. In 2019 the museum received a grant from the AIM Pilgrim Trust Conservation Scheme to conserve and digitise the letters and house them in bespoke archival ring binders.

Lancefield Conservation cleaned, repaired and digitised the letters before making three clam shell ring binders to store the letter collection. During the conservation work additional information and some correspondent names and addresses were revealed.

The outcome of the conservation work to the letters is amazing. They look clean, the curled edges have gone, and the script is much clearer to read. The clam shell ring binders are beautifully made and will safeguard the letters for future generations to enjoy.

*"We are delighted to see this important collection of letters transformed into a resource that can now be made easily available to the many researchers who access our nationally important archaeology collections every year. Making these letters accessible in the widest possible terms will enhance our research programme and no doubt lead to further discoveries being made in the future".* Lisa Brown, Curator.

**Jane Schön, Collections Officer:**  
Archive and Library  
The Wiltshire Museum



The Wiltshire Museum letter book after conservation.



## Lyme Regis Museum

£2,000

### *Conservation of the Landslide panel*

The Bidon Landslip panel is an oil-on-board heptatych, recording the popularity of the site of a landslide in Devon in 1840.

We acquired the panel in 2017, but it was so dirty that you could hardly see what had been painted, the boards were warped, the frame was about to fall apart and there were with scratches and signs of water drip marks across the front.

Conservation, by Alison Smith ACR, was essentially that conventional for oil paintings: cleaning, stabilising, some retouching, re-varnishing and frame repair; but the results are stupendous! Never in our wildest dreams would we have expected such fine detail to be revealed in glorious natural colours, with the bonus of the pictures being full of life, of visitors in period costume and some local boatmen. It is already on temporary display pending a re-arrangement of our Landslip Gallery to accommodate it, where it will join a plaster model and engravings of the landslide.

*Conservation has re-awakened enjoyment of an historic artwork of local and national interest for public display and geological science – and revealed period social detail.*

**Richard Bull BSc (Geol), Hon Curator**  
Lyme Regis Museum



The Bindon Landslip Heptptych Panel of August 1840 before conservation (top), and after conservation.

## AIM COLLECTIONS CARE AUDIT

### Andrew Logan Museum of Sculpture

£1,100

#### *Collections care audit*

The audit process and the final report has achieved more than we expected. We are delighted with the further areas for improvement identified, particularly the effect of the light levels and humidity on Andrew's integral material, resin. In terms of next steps, we intend to apply to the AIM Pilgrim

Collections to implement actions identified by the audit.

Peter Meehan was an absolute delight to work with. We are thrilled to have met him and will absolutely maintain contact – incredible he is based not so very far away from us and is approachable, knowledgeable and helpful. We are very grateful to AIM for brokering the introduction through this fund. His experience and knowledge is already invaluable to us – and long may that continue.

**Anne Marie Pope, Museum Manager**  
**Andrew Logan Museum of Sculpture**



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## Museum profile

# Black Cultural Archives, Brixton

**B**lack Cultural Archives (BCA) in Brixton is the home of Black British History. Our mission is to collect, preserve and celebrate the histories of people of African and Caribbean descent in the UK and to inspire and give strength to individuals, communities and society. Our founders felt there needed to be a space where they could go and see positive representations of themselves. Originating as a community archive, Black Cultural Archives now contains 50 sq meters of archival material across two sites. At Black Cultural Archives visitors can do research, view exhibitions and come to events. We have a small team of 11.

In 2019 we welcomed 46,948 visitors to our building, celebrated International Men's Day with an immersive Black men's mental health exhibition, celebrated Windrush with a summer of activity and created our 2030 strategy, which was launched in May. As we come to the end of the year, 2020 has seen a change for everyone within the heritage sector and this has been no different for Black Cultural Archives. At the beginning of the year the staff at BCA were gearing up to begin our Reimagining Black Cultural Archives capital projects. We had an artist residency planned for the summer and a range of in-person exhibitions and events we were looking forward to. With the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic we had to close our doors on 19th March. This led to a drop in traditional income streams we, like so many others relied on. These sources of income depended on visitors engaging with our space through our exhibitions, education workshops, Café, public programming and room hires. This income represented 30% of our annual budget in 2019.

During our building closure we transitioned to the online space, this was in large part due to our team's dedication to our mission, community and audiences. We held talks and other events online including a public meeting where we launched our 2030 strategy. The pandemic also came with its struggles as a lack of income caused our Café to close with no set reopening date, and we had to say goodbye to treasured team members.

With the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement earlier this year Black Cultural Archives' importance in the UK has only been strengthened as a heritage organisation representing the depth of Black history in Britain. We've been able to create new partnerships as a result, and individual giving to our charity has increased as our profile rose. BCA was used as a filming/shooting location by various news outlets during lockdown.



Our building reopened as Covid safe on 3rd September. Using part of the funds from our Reimagining capital project we were able to make pandemic appropriate tweaks to protect staff and visitors, without compromising on our aesthetic and mission. Our courtyard space is now full of plants which have been used to create separate seating areas for visitors to adhere to social distancing. Other precautions such as a one-way system, and limiting researcher numbers in our reading room were all implemented. During our short return between lockdowns visitors were pleased to see us with our doors open.

With another national lockdown and the sector left in uncertainty we will continue sharing and uplifting the histories and lives of the Black community. Currently our online content can now be viewed on our digital showcase [www.bcaexhibits.org](http://www.bcaexhibits.org) which includes our Black curatorial residences supported by Arts Council England.

Black Cultural Archives is still able to be resilient during these times. We are working on new ways of generating income that are lockdown ready. Support from trusts and foundations, and the Cultural Recovery Fund have been key to our survival.

The pandemic has not stopped Black Cultural Archives' upwards trajectory. In this new normal the staff are continuously adapting, learning and expanding to different ways of operating. We are hoping to continue engaging with visitors in both a physical and digital space in 2021 and beyond.

[blackculturalarchives.org](http://blackculturalarchives.org)

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*"For a small organisation it is encouraging to have the reassurance their events can offer."* – David Green, Director, The Florence Nightingale Museum

Discover what you gain as a member at [www.cfg.org.uk/charity\\_membership](http://www.cfg.org.uk/charity_membership), it's free for AIM members to join through our partnership and open to everyone within your organisation, from your volunteer team to your board of trustees.

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## Sector comes together to support UK Government's Kickstart scheme

**The pandemic's impact on the work prospects of young people is incredibly challenging. Recognising this, AIM and the Museums Association have been working together to support the sector in accessing the Kickstart Scheme, a new UK-wide initiative created by the UK government.**

The scheme seeks to help young people currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment develop the skills and experience they need to find work through offering them a six-month placement and related support.

Mo Suleman, Director of Resources, Derby Museums, one of the many organisations that took part in a recent webinar to find out more and discuss collaborating highlighted the reasons behind their involvement

"Young people have been some of the hardest hit by the UK's growing jobs crisis, particularly during the Coronavirus pandemic, and many face the risk of long-term unemployment. The Kickstart initiative can help them secure the vital work experience they need to supplement their education at this difficult time and gain invaluable skills that can only be learned in the workplace."

Siân Harrington, Chief Executive, Fulham Palace Trust added

"Fulham Palace Trust has been running a garden apprentice programme since 2012,

and we have trained 19 apprentices over that time. The Kickstart scheme would give us the opportunity to work with younger people and give them their first experience of working in a public garden like ours. At the present time with the job market the way it is we feel we can help young people by giving them that important experience which will set them apart in the job market, and also give them training and development support which will give them greater confidence."

CCS skills has now submitted its bid to ringfence much needed financial support for the sector; supported by a wide range of partners including Arts Council England, UK Theatre, UK Music, Youth Music, Museums Association, Creative Scotland, Federation of Scottish Theatres and Arts Council Wales. The bid was submitted October 15th with a response from DWP expected just after the Bulletin went to press, with placements able to begin any time from grant award to December 2021.

For the Cornwall Museums Partnership (CMP) the scheme supports their strategic objectives, as Charlotte Morgan, Programme Manager explains

"Evidence is beginning to show that young people's employment has been disproportionately affected by the pandemic; they have been more likely to have been furloughed, or made redundant, apprenticeship opportunities

have dropped, and there is more competition than ever for entry-level positions. We hope this scheme can support us at CMP to provide some balance to this in Cornwall. This initiative is also useful for organisations, and we are looking forward to welcoming some fresh perspectives (if successful) to CMP through the Kickstart placements."



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