



Association of
Independent
Museums

AIM Bulletin

October 2021

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Give yourself a financial
health check



Simply spellbinding!

The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic profiled

Welcome to AIM Bulletin!

Emily Hope, one of AIM's newest Board members, reports on how the Visitor Experience Team at **Beamish Museum** has adapted to the challenges of the last 18 months.

Rising to the challenge

Locking the main doors of Beamish Museum is a job that I do at the end of every working day, smiling and saying goodbye to visitors, knowing that I will be reopening the same doors early the next morning. Closing the doors on the 20th March 2020 was a totally different experience, not to mention doing it twice more in November and December.

Leading the Visitor Welcome Team during a global pandemic has been a challenging yet surprisingly inspiring experience, not least because of the physical adaptations we have had to make as a museum, but also because of the emotional effects the pandemic has had on the team.

We have had to overcome obstacles, which, prior to Covid-19, we would never have dreamed of. Imagine: talking through a glass screen to visitors wearing face coverings, dogs barking and excitable children shouting, all while you are trying to take customer details for tickets. But we did overcome them. And became stronger as a result, as I'm sure many museums and organisations across the country did too.

We developed new ways of working, implementing one-way systems, timed entry slots and reduced visitor capacity. All designed to keep the visitors and our staff and volunteers safe. We revamped our visitor signage, identifying the changes that visitors will experience – including advising them that “we no longer accept pounds, shillings or pence – we’re teaching the Edwardians how to use contactless”! During the first few

weeks of reopening, we learnt many new lessons and were reminded of the importance of managing the visitor's expectations.

The Entrance team is a vital cog in any museum's well-oiled machine, often being the first impression and first port of call for information. At Beamish, under normal, 'pre-pandemic' circumstances, upon arrival we would describe to visitors what to expect during their visit – immerse yourself in history, take in the sounds, smells, and even tastes of the past. However, now, we were explaining that we would like them to wear face coverings, advising them to stay two metres apart and reminding them to sanitise their hands. Despite all the new information we had to provide and the restrictions we were bound by, it was vital that our excellent customer service did not falter – so behind our face coverings we certainly learnt how to smile with our eyes!

There are *never two days the same* when working in a front of house team and never more so than during a global pandemic. As I'm sure many of you will agree, these teams are brilliant adapters, forward thinkers, and a calming influence during what can often be stressful situations. I am so proud of how Beamish has adapted during the past 18 months and how the cultural sector has pulled together to support each other under the most difficult of circumstances.

Emily Hope
Visitor Welcome and Retail (Gift Shop) Team Leader
Beamish Museum, The Living Museum of the North



Front cover

The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, based in Cornwall, explores British magical practice and holds artefacts relating to occult practice, folk magic and magical thought. Discover more on page 19.



Join our Members Insight Group

Would you like to join a forum of AIM members to provide regular feedback on all aspects of your membership? Can you help us ensure your membership benefits are meeting your needs and those of all our members? Do you want to help shape AIM's policy and advocacy activity? If the answer is yes, then join our new insight group!

What's it all about?

Building on our biennial member surveys, this new initiative is to further strengthen and deepen our insight into the support members need in the fast-moving environment we are all operating in.

It will help AIM develop its programmes, act as a testing ground for new ideas and initiatives, and enable us to hone our response to the common challenges and opportunities facing our community.

Who can join?

We are looking for members from right across the UK, from a variety of organisational backgrounds and with a range of experiences. From managers and directors to curators and front of house staff, to volunteers and all points in between.

In other words, a group that is fully representative of the many organisations and people that make up AIM.

What's the commitment?

You will be invited to take part in no more than four focus groups a year, of around 90 minutes length. All focus groups will be hosted by an external facilitator, so your responses will remain anonymous. We anticipate these focus groups will run quarterly, the first of which starting Nov/Dec

2021. Whilst we anticipate these will mainly take place online, we hope to set up at least one face to face meeting a year, when feasible to do so.

In addition to taking part in focus groups, we may survey your opinion on a variety of themes either via email or phone to help AIM respond to the regular requests for input it receives from e.g., UK Government, ACE and so on.

We anticipate refreshing the membership of the Group in line with the running of our Biennial Survey – so the maximum commitment is approximately eight hours a year for two years.

What's in it for you/your organisation

This is a great opportunity to network with colleagues from organisations of all sizes and types from across AIM, and with a wealth of different experiences. You'll hear about the latest challenges and innovations developing across our community and can help make a real difference. Finally, you will be enabling AIM to shape and sharpen its work and innovate in the face of challenging times.

I'm in! What do I do now?

To find out more and register your interest email info@aim-museums.co.uk today!



Image by Shere Rance on Unsplash

New Secretary of State appointed

As we go to press Nadine Dorries has been appointed as Secretary of State for the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). At time of writing the junior minister or ministers with responsibility for culture and heritage have not yet been announced. AIM Director Lisa Ollerhead shares the challenges and opportunities likely to be in their in-trays.

Elected as the Conservative MP for Mid Bedfordshire in May 2005, Nadine Dorries was previously Minister of State at the Department of Health and Social Care. She replaces Oliver Dowden and is the tenth culture secretary in ten years.

In correspondence congratulating her on her new role, we have highlighted that this is an exciting brief – looking after many of the sectors that make up our rich and varied public life in the UK – yet those sectors have struggled deeply over the last eighteen months and need the Government's ongoing help and support to thrive.

We also shared our recognition that the Culture Recovery Fund has allowed many to get through the closures and restrictions forced by the pandemic, and that the museum and heritage sectors have been enormously grateful to the Government for such support.

It remains our position that such support is an investment, and it is a good one that is well rewarded. Museums and

heritage organisations are important civic and community assets with major roles to play: in placemaking and the emerging levelling up agenda; through protecting the UK's rich cultural and historic collections and sites; helping people understand their full histories; bringing in domestic and international visitors; and supporting the cultural engagement and wellbeing of their audiences.

As she travels across the UK the Secretary of State will find many of AIM's members are now open again and eagerly welcoming back visitors. However, that reopening is not recovery, and their challenges are not over.

We hope that the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review will enable the Government to provide the ongoing support they desperately need. There is a major need for increased revenue funding through Arts Council England, and for their settlement to be protected; the confirmation of further years of the Museum Estates and Development Fund (MEND); a fair and consistent business rates system; permanency for the Museums and Galleries (Exhibitions) Tax Relief; and help to re-interpret collections, make buildings environmentally sustainable, refresh their volunteer base, improve governance, and look at major reform where needed at organisational, partnership, and sector level.

At AIM we are particularly keen on ensuring that the benefits of public support for museums are felt all around the country, from world-class museums in urban centres to the smallest museums on the shortest high streets. As we are sure the Secretary of State will find as she settles into her new role, our sector is lively, passionate and complex, which makes it all the more rewarding to work in.

News in brief

Ros Kerslake CBE leaves role as Chief Executive of The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Ros Kerslake has announced her intention to step down as CEO of the National Lottery Heritage Fund at the end of 2021.

“This has not been an easy decision. It will be a wrench to leave the Heritage Fund, but I feel that having delivered the strategy I set out when I joined, this is the right time for someone else to take the Heritage Fund forward to the next stage.

The last year has tested us all and it has been inspiring to see how the sector has adapted, improvised and found creative ways to engage communities in heritage right across the UK throughout the pandemic. In my time as CEO I have been fortunate enough to work with three highly committed chairs and a fantastic board. I know that I will leave the Heritage Fund in a very good place under Simon’s leadership. I am delighted that we’ve been able to make such a strong appointment to the board.”

I will continue in my role as CEO until the end of this year whilst my replacement is recruited. For me and my team, for now, it’s still very much business as usual.”

Working approaches adopted during pandemic identifies positive opportunities

Screen South, through its Accentuate Programme, has launched a report *Curating for Change: disabled people leading in museums* based on extensive consultation undertaken over the last year with a wide range of museums, sector organisations, disabled people’s organisations, and D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people working in museums or wanting to pursue a career in museums.

It precedes the Curating for Change programme (subject to funding) which aims to change the way D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse people are represented in Museums through a ground-breaking work placement programme.

Key findings in the report include:

- Almost all the D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people who took part in the consultation expressed the positive opportunity Covid-19 has presented in terms of flexible remote working, interview practices and digital engagement for audiences.
- The most cited reasons for D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people not making progress in terms of pursuing a career in museums were inaccessible recruitment practices; lack of flexibility in working patterns; and unnecessary requirements (e.g. driving licence, ability to lift objects) that could be met through other provision such as Access to Work.
- The main reason Partner Museums wanted to take part in Curating for Change was to increase skills and expertise. More specifically, they hoped to: increase understanding of how to recruit D/deaf and/or disabled staff; gain new skills regarding how to create fully accessible exhibitions and experiences; and understand how to engage more D/deaf and/or disabled audience members.
- Many of the disabled people’s groups and disabled individuals surveyed stated they would like to see more of their heritage reflected in museum collections, exhibitions and events. In addition, they wanted to work more closely with museums to co-produce these outputs.

The report explores where the sector is currently in terms of engaging D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people with museums and urges the proactive consideration of ways to increase engagement, capitalising on the momentous shifts that have occurred during the past year.

Read the report at screen-south.org/news-and-events

Opening conversations and laying the foundations for equity and inclusion at your museum

AIM and Museum Development Network, in partnership with NoBarriers, have launched a programme to support museums in England and Wales to improve their understanding of Equity and Inclusion. The programme will increase participants’ knowledge and skills around the Equity and Inclusion-related issues being faced by people working and volunteering in museums, their communities, and audiences. It will support you in having conversations at your museum and in laying strong foundations for taking action.

The programme comprises of 10 online sessions running from November 2021 to March 2022 and will support 20 organisations from across seven participating areas; *East of England, East Midlands, North East, North West, South West, West Midlands, Wales.*

Application is via completing an Expression of Interest (EOI) by 5pm, Thursday 21 October 2021.

Talk to your local Museum Development Officer to find out more or visit aim-museums.co.uk/equity-inclusion-museums

Now museums have reopened, the **AIM Team** has been able to start visiting members. Here are a few images from the Summer.

Meeting Members!



Top row left to right: Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Cogges Heritage Trust, Witney; Didcot Railway Centre (thanks to Clive Hetherington, CEO);

Middle row: Frank Collingwood at Oxford Bus Museum; The British Lawnmower Museum, Southport (thanks to Brian Radnam) and Nidderdale Museum, Pateley Bridge.

Bottom row: The British Lawnmower Museum again and a display in Nidderdale Museum.

Welsh Resilience Network – supporting each other in challenging times



AIM spoke to consultant Nick Winterbotham and Carrie Canham, Curator of Ceredigion Museum about the many benefits of the Welsh Resilience Network.

“It was a proposal from AIM supported by MAALD to address the fact that there was very little in the way of museum training and updating for the leaders of the (usually small) non-national museums in Wales.

I was approached by AIM after co-Directing MRL (the ACE-funded leadership programme in England led by the Black Country Living Museum) for five years. The programme was aimed at museum leaders and lead heritage officers in Wales – local authorities, National Trust, independents,” explains Nick Winterbotham, who facilitated the group.

“We kicked off in March 2018 with a training retreat in mid-Wales at Buckland Hall – halfway between Brecon and Abergavenny in Powys.”

“Over the last three years it has delivered three leadership retreats (the last one virtual because of Covid), eight one-day training events, a dozen ad hoc one-to-one mentoring events and a fortnightly lunchtime Zoom meeting for all comers –

we don’t minute but do record the challenges of the moment but without attributing to individuals.”

A key strength of the Group has been its generosity in dealing with the challenges of recent events according to Nick, alongside developing a strong leadership cohort that is more confident about sharing the trials, tribulations, and successes of contemporary leadership issues.

“None of us is as smart as all of us.”

But as well as welcome mutual support, the Group has offered a number of additional spin-out benefits during the pandemic, as Carrie Canham, Curator of Ceredigion Museum explains.

“The community of leadership in Wales is quite collegiate, so after the retreat at Greynog Hall we naturally started staying in touch with each other, initially through WhatsApp to share knowledge and check in with each other. During the

early days of the pandemic, it was a space to think ‘ok I am not the only one going through this’, as it can be quite isolating, the geographic situation in Wales.”

And it’s not just mutual support that the network is offering. Carrie has recently established the Welsh Museums Commercial Group as a spinoff of the Resilience Network. It seeks to help museums to benefit from collective purchasing power and the sharing of resources, expertise and processes relating to many commercial activities including setting up online retail. The future of the group is looking bright, too, according to Carrie:

“We’ve just had some more financial support (for the Resilience Network) through the Welsh Government, which is fantastic as it will enable more people to benefit. We’re also looking at how we might support the next generation of leaders coming up. ‘None of us is as smart as all of us’ as Nick often says, so that group problem solving, drawing on each other’s expertise and experience is so important.”

Art Tickets_

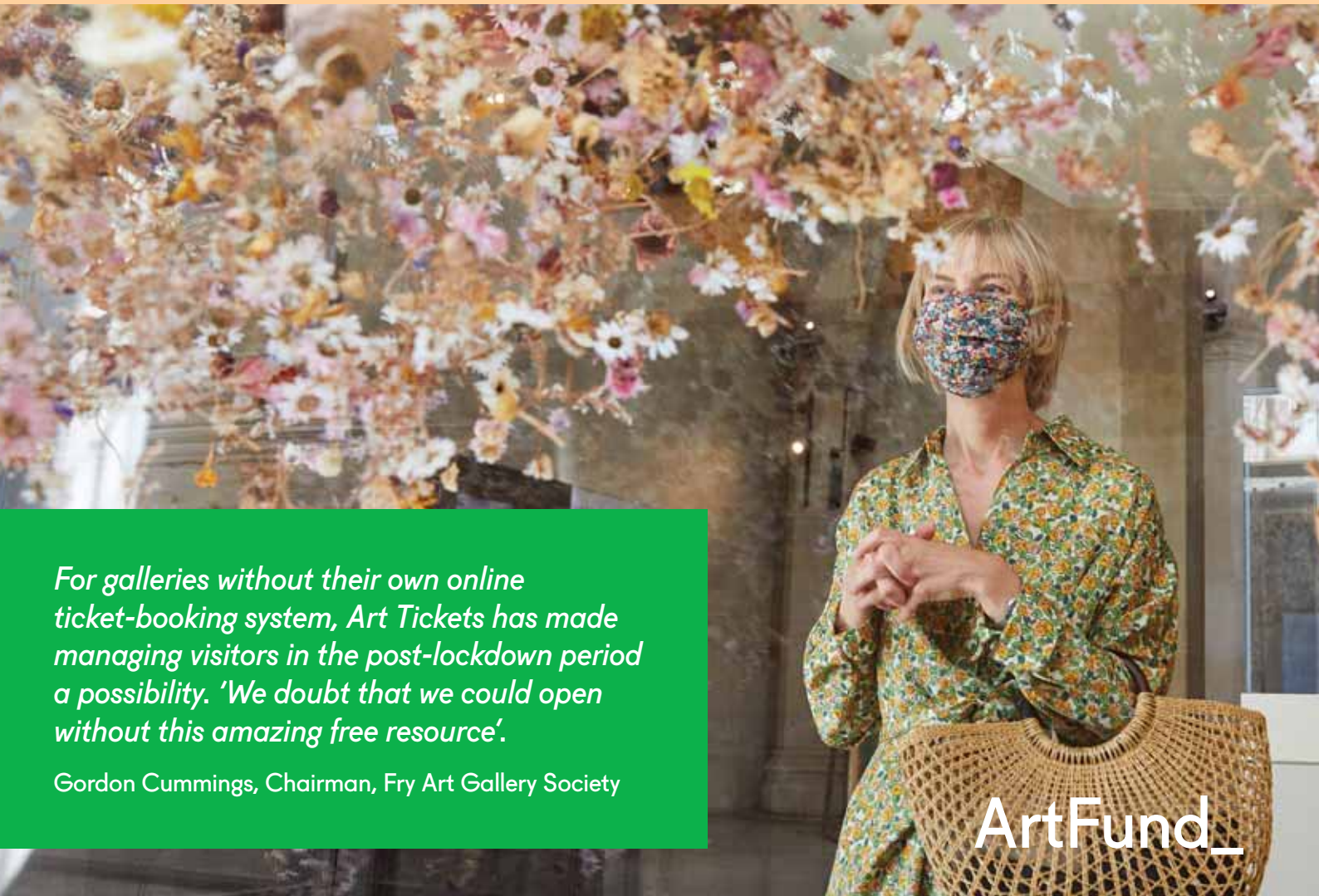
Plan for the future with Art Tickets, Art Fund's completely free ticket management system that makes things simple. Designed for museums by museums, we helped 120 museums re-open safely in 2020.

Art Tickets can help you:

- Manage social distancing with timed ticketing
- Reduce admin
- Improve visitor experience
- Get to know your audiences better

Get in touch at museums@artfund.org to book a 121 with one of the team to find out how we can help you open your doors.

Art Tickets. Ticketing made simple.



For galleries without their own online ticket-booking system, Art Tickets has made managing visitors in the post-lockdown period a possibility. 'We doubt that we could open without this amazing free resource'.

Gordon Cummings, Chairman, Fry Art Gallery Society

ArtFund_

This summer **Art Fund** launched **Art Pass Unbooked** an innovative approach to helping visitors support local cultural institutions.

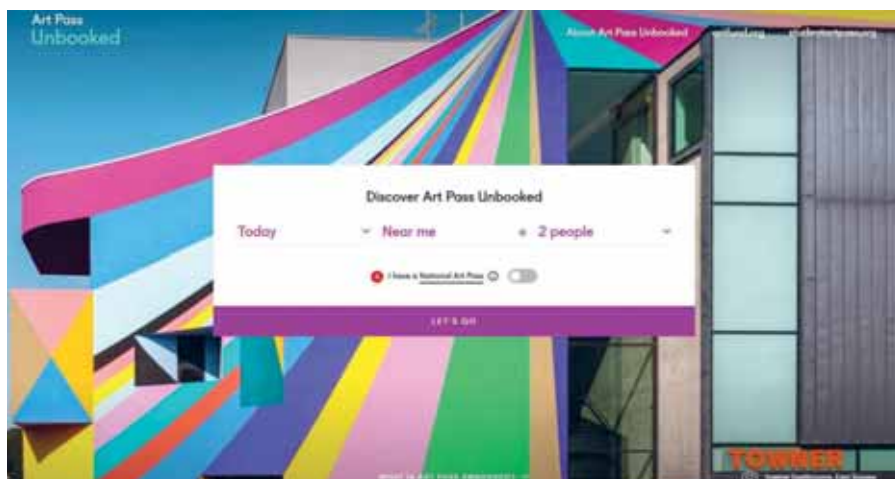
Using technology to improve access to the UK's smaller museums and galleries

According to Research conducted by Opinium for Art Fund, as lockdown lifted and beloved institutions across the country reopened their doors this summer people across the UK planned a massive 66 trips to museums and galleries.

However, the vast majority (65%) planned to visit one of the top ten biggest museums in the UK, compared with just 39% who said they would visit one of the 2,000-plus smaller venues across the country. The data also suggested that there could be a regional disparity in museums' fortunes – eight of those 'top ten' museums and galleries are based in London. Yet the research also showed concern among the public around the survival of smaller organisations, 48% saying it would be a 'tragedy' if smaller museums and galleries were to close and if they were to, the country could lose some of its most valuable cultural assets.

Many visitors also had concerns about what they would face during their visit. Almost two thirds (62%) expected to encounter long queues due to the combination of COVID measures and increased demand. Nearly half (43%) expected to see price hikes as venues attempt to recoup lost earnings and demand was also seen to be an issue with one in five (20%) saying that they had tried to book an event or attraction in the UK earlier this summer only to find it to be sold out.

The launch of Artpass Unbooked at the start of summer sought to address this.



Growing out of Art Fund's Art Tickets platform, this new platform inspires great ideas for days out by bringing together hundreds of museums and galleries from across the UK in one place, for the first time, clarifying local availability and enhancing the visibility of the nation's less well-known museums and galleries as they recover

vast majority of which are smaller operations – remain concerned about their long-term survival.

Jenny Waldman, Art Fund director said "We have launched Art Pass Unbooked to open up the possibilities and support local museums and galleries across the UK.

“ This new platform inspires great ideas for days out by bringing together hundreds of museums and galleries from across the UK in one place. ”

post lockdown. Users can find nearby museums that have tickets available – helping them beat the queues for entry expected at the larger institutions.

Data from Art Fund also shows that smaller museums and galleries need the support of the public to get back on their feet. Indeed 55% of museums and galleries across the country – the

This is a one stop shop for culture, allowing users to search among hundreds of museums and galleries, find availability, and book a spontaneous day out.

It's the perfect way to get a culture fix, avoid the big crowds, and support these vital institutions.”

<https://unbooked.artfund.org>

Architect John Puttick explores the future potential of museums as public social spaces.

Gathering Places: how museum buildings and spaces are changing beyond the pandemic

With their buildings closed and empty over so much of the past 18 months many people involved with museums have reflected on what is most important to them and their communities. Explorations with digital collections and engagement have led to new ways in which the museum can be experienced beyond the physical. As in so many areas, the pandemic has largely sped-up trends which were already becoming apparent before 2020.

At their heart museums are public social spaces – places where people can meet and catalyse civic life. What has been missed during periods of isolation over the past 18 months is less the simple viewing of displays but rather gathering with other people to experience new ideas and engage in the dialogue they provoke. Museums are uniquely positioned to challenge us to go beyond our private domain – both in meeting people who are different to ourselves and in learning new things that have not been ‘suggested’ to us in pop-ups. This is very hard to achieve online.

The museums we have worked with are actively using their physical spaces to support programming and events that involve people as participants rather than just visitors. They often support a range of community groups that gather at the museum for wide-ranging reasons – from line-dancing to DJ-ing to Scrabble – but also value the richness



the museum offers over other civic venues. If the museum’s physical design can support such uses it becomes relevant to age groups and sections of the community who may not otherwise get involved.

How can architecture and design support this? The answer most frequently lies not in a ‘trophy’ building but rather a strategic approach, where existing buildings are intelligently adapted to suit contemporary aspirations. As a process it is key to begin by considering social relationships first – who are the museum’s community, what activities and events encourage them to get involved – before considering design solutions. For clients ranging from the V&A to Watford Museum we have looked to reduce barriers and provide new-build elements that facilitate new uses.

The specific nature of museum buildings in the UK gives a particular challenge. Often housed in characterful Georgian or Victoria structures, the

existing building often provides physical barriers to entry as well as perceptual barriers in appearing imposing – even forbidding – to many people. Targeted interventions within the existing fabric can overcome level changes and open-up intuitive and inviting circulation, making best use of the building and collection. Externally changes to the entrance sequence and façade – or in some cases a new addition – can both symbolise the renewal of a museum and create a more welcoming and inclusive impression. Overcoming the cellular nature of many traditional buildings to provide flexible exhibition and events spaces can also unlock a design.

As we move beyond the constraints of the past 18 months, museum buildings have the opportunity to become the hub at the centre of a range of physical and digital experiences for their communities. It is vital to invest in spaces where people gather.

www.johnputtickassociates.com

Experience design is the ‘user led design of products and services’ – but how can it help museums and heritage organisations integrate, improve and innovate? We spoke to Alison Pearce of the National Trust to find out more.

Are you experienced?

Image by Vidarm on Unsplash

In the National Trust experience design refers to an audience led approach to planning investment and change – an interpretation of the concept developed in 2011 explains Alison, who leads on experience design for the Trust.

“At that point, we had no real way to integrate our approaches to audience development, property presentation and interpretation design, retail and catering investment, and visitor infrastructure projects . . . yet all these things make up the *experience*.”

“Also visitor numbers were growing so we were investing more and more in infrastructure – such as visitor reception buildings and car parks, but we needed an approach which enabled us to better future proof these investments. This prompted us to think about how we approach things more holistically. Our head of visitor experience at the time sought to learn from other organisations and sectors – for example more market-led masterplanning that you might see in a commercial visitor attraction, architect-led spatial masterplanning and the more familiar interpretive planning. This led to the basic premise that when designing our future experiences, we simultaneously look through four lenses:

Audience – Who are our current, and potential audiences? What do they want and need from the places that we

care for? How many people can we feasibly accommodate in our places without detracting from what’s special about that place?

Proposition – Drawing on what people want and need, but simultaneously thinking about what’s significant, what’s special about our places, what purpose do they need to serve? What proposition best delivers that purpose? And what are the components of that proposition?

Business model – How do we ensure financial sustainability? What’s the income model?

Space – What’s the visitor journey? How do the components of the experience and the infrastructure come together? Are we alleviating pinch points? Are we making sure that we are giving those who come to our properties access to the best bits?”

The Trust has an equally innovative staffing approach to support this way of thinking too, harnessing networks as opposed to teams.

“We’ve recognised that to do integrated thinking really well requires a specific skill set. So, we’ve developed a profile of the skills and expertise required to effectively lead this area of work and identified people across the organisation who have those skills. We supported

their development, and then essentially matched people with priority projects.”

The process is split into three stages explains Alison.

“We start with an analysis and diagnostic stage, really getting under the skin of a place, what makes it special, the current operation and experience, the audience and the potential. On the back of that we determine what the future ambition is.

The second stage is then about generating ideas and exploring options: what are the changes and investments we need to make to realise the ambition, what’s the to-do list?

And then the third stage is implementation planning. How are we going to do this? In what order? How are we going to fund it? How long is it going to take? Who needs to be involved?”

“So, our approach is basically about looking at a place through those four lenses as you work through those different stages.”

For Alison, drawing out the value of experience design is ultimately about people: getting the right people with the right expertise around the table at the right time, and having great conversations to maximise the benefit of the places that we care for.

AIM administers grants including AIM Hallmarks Awards, supported by Arts Council England and the Welsh government; and AIM's Conservation and Collections Care and Collection Audit Schemes, supported by the Pilgrim Trust.

AIM grants case studies

AIM Conservation and Collections Care

The Trimontium Trust

AIM grant: £7,348.33

Environmental monitoring upgrade

The Trimontium Trust was founded over 30 years ago to protect the site of the largest Roman fort in Scotland. A small museum in Melrose was later added and this space has recently been refurbished and extended to double the display space and treble the number of artefacts.

Central to this project has been the rehousing of the wide array of artefacts, ranging from delicate two-thousand-year-old ironwork to exquisite bronze armour and equally fascinating organic remains in state-of-the-art cases with state-of-the-art environmental monitoring.

All this is a quantum leap for a small organisation like ours and in this we have been generously supported by the AIM Pilgrim Trust grant. This has allowed us to seriously move up a gear from our previous simple in-case manual monitoring to a centrally situated Hanwell hub which accurately keeps track of our thirteen new wireless data loggers. As our new Click Netherfield cases settle in and happily withstand one the hottest and most humid summers the Borders has experienced, we can be confident that the internal environment is stable and suitable for our artefacts.

It is our belief that small institutions like Trimontium Museum add significant value to the civic pride and psychological well-being of our communities at a scale that is easily accessible. This grant has assisted us to aim high and tell our story to a much wider public.

John H Reid

Chairman, Trimontium Trust



Roman artefacts on display at Trimontium Museum.

Beck Isle Museum

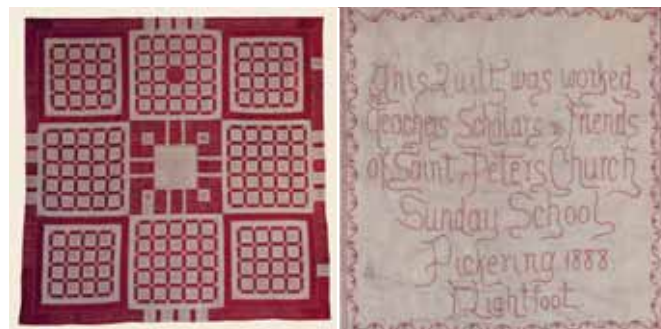
AIM grant: £3,470.40

Conservation of the 1888 Sunday School Signature Quilt

Beck Isle Museum of Rural Life was founded in 1967 by a group of volunteers interested in preserving the history of Pickering. Housed in a Georgian Grade II* listed building, the museum is home to some 50,000 objects, cataloguing Pickering's rich history as a rural market town.

The Signature Quilt was made by 'teachers, scholars and friends' of the Sunday School of St Peter and Paul's church in Pickering in 1888 under the supervision of Frances Lightfoot, the wife of the Reverend G. H. Lightfoot. It is one of the key objects in the museum's collection and an important part of the history of Pickering, providing us with 255 names, all female, of those who were involved with the Sunday school in 1888. One of the names on the quilt is Annie Tomkins who was maidservant to Reverend Lightfoot for many years. When the Lightfoots died, Annie inherited the quilt. It was passed onto her daughter who donated it to the museum in 1988.

The quilt is worked in red and white chain stitch on a Turkey red and cream cotton calico background, with names hand embroidered on calico squares. It had been hanging above the main staircase in the museum for a long period of time (possibly 30 years) and was mounted vertically on the wall using batons and Velcro. It showed signs of wear including



Left, Beck Isle Museum Sunday School quilt. Right, the centre of the Sunday School quilt.

stress tears in the fabric, staining and other deterioration in the fabric.

The focus of the project was to take it down from display and send it to a textile conservator, Sheila Landi, for it to be wet cleaned and conservation treatment to be undertaken.

As Covid 19 restrictions lift it is hoped to organise an exhibition in the community next year. In the meantime, volunteers have started researching the individuals named on the 1888 quilt to help us bring a fresh interpretation to the quilt when it does go on temporary display.

Sarah Maultby, Museum Curator said 'The Landi Company have done a fantastic job conserving the Signature Quilt for future generations. We are very grateful to AIM Pilgrim Trust for awarding us their grant to make it all possible.'

Sarah Maultby, Museum Curator

AIM Collections Care Audit

Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum

AIM grant: £1,100

We applied for the audit to get advice on three main areas:

- How to store such a diverse collection with different storage needs in one room
- How to stabilise temperature and humidity in the storeroom
- Whether the room is suitable for long-term use.

The report and auditor's visit have confirmed that we had serious problems with fluctuation of temperature and humidity in the storeroom (which have been mitigated but not fully solved), and that the room may not be suitable for collections storage in the long term due to moisture in the walls, various vents and proximity to electrical cupboards.



Exterior of Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum.

It has provided advice on how to improve current conditions as much as possible, and also made suggestions for longer-term forward planning.

It was really beneficial to work with an accredited conservator. Wilma was happy to answer all of my questions and it was great to have honest conversations with her; she grasped

the problems small museums face.

It is my hope that the museum will continue working with Wilma in the future – to analyse the environmental data gathered over the year, and also to hire her to audit the museum display areas which also see severe fluctuations in temperature and humidity.

Kirke Kook, Manager/Curator



What's behind Surging Energy Prices?

Image by Alexby on Unsplash

Electricity and gas prices keep rising, with seemingly no end in sight. So, what's happening and how can you mitigate the worst effects? AIM spoke to Geoff Berry of the Energy Action Group to find out.

The era of cheap natural gas is over

Natural gas, which is used to both generate electricity and heat for homes and businesses, has been abundant and cheap over recent years, however, in 2021 prices ballooned as demand drastically outpaced new supply. European gas rates have reached record highs while deliveries of liquid natural gas (LNG) to Asia are near an all-time high for this time of year.

Why has demand increased so quickly?

Climate change is playing a big part. Heavily polluting coal fired electricity

generation is being phased out and replaced by gas-fired generation.

Climate Events

Whether it is searing heat in Canada and SE Asia, or prolonged cold and wet in Europe, the effects of climate change cause spikes in demand and disruption to supply.

A cold, wet and prolonged winter in Europe resulted in record low levels of gas storage. Gas stocks, which would usually be replenished during summer months when demand is weaker have remained low, and with limited supplies heading to Asia, prices have soared.

Customs Conundrum – A look at post-Brexit shipping options to Europe

On 1 July new EU rules came into force regulating the shipping of items sold to the continent via online shops. As with all regulations the rules are not simple and place burdensome new requirements on businesses attempting to sell to customers in Europe. For museums with online shops navigating these rules successfully is essential to preserving a significant revenue stream. Edward MacWhirter from Associate Supplier Museum Shops, highlights the range of options available.

Option 1: Zero rating

This is the default option that MuseumShops currently uses for all EU-destined sales. Find the setting in your online shop that governs tax rates and set all EU destinations (as well as the Channel Islands) to 0% VAT. This will ensure that the customer pays no tax at checkout. When filling out the customs form for the courier or at the post office (usually CN22A or CN22B) the VAT number field must be left blank.

However, this option does not remove the obligation to pay VAT, it instead shifts responsibility from the business to the customer to pay. Your shipping policy page must make it clear that the Customer may have to pay local VAT rates and possibly a handling charge for their item to be released via customs. Obviously, this is not ideal from a customer service perspective, which leads to the next option.

Carbon Pricing: Prices in the world's biggest carbon market are soaring

Sky-high carbon prices are getting added to electricity bills: The EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), charges power companies for each tonne of carbon dioxide they emit. Prices have risen from €11 per tonne to €55 per tonne since 2020.

The world is facing a structural shift, driven by the clean energy transition.

The consensus is that no matter how you look at it, gas provides a readily accessible (and currently) affordable transition fuel. As major economies commit to reducing carbon emissions, natural gas helps bridge the gap between coal and a carbon free future. Consequently, the price of gas is likely to stay elevated over the medium-term and probably rise over the longer-term.

Natural gas emits 50% less CO₂ than coal and has become the fuel of choice for countries urgently seeking to reduce their CO₂ emissions.

With few other options, governments will increasingly rely on natural gas as a 'cleaner' replacement for coal as they seek to reduce carbon emissions.

What is the consensus on future energy prices?

Whilst predicting future energy prices is an inexact science, the underlying factors are hard to ignore.

What should you do?

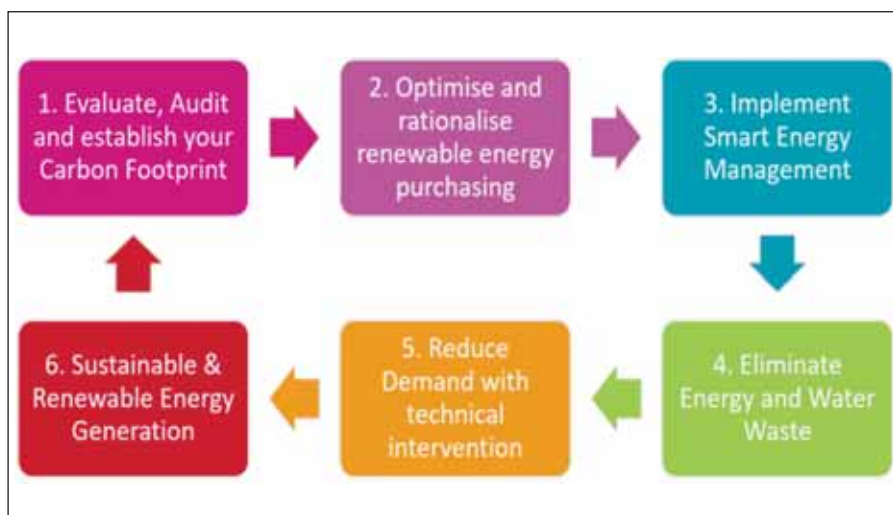
In the likelihood of energy prices continuing to increase it's more important than ever to employ energy management practices in reducing gas and electricity consumption. Some estimates put energy wastage at close to 20% in the UK. The causes range from simple inefficiencies to using energy unnecessarily whilst buildings are empty or partially occupied.

There is much that can be done to mitigate and eliminate energy wastage and the Energy Action Group has long championed a virtuous energy cycle for managing energy, cutting wastage, reducing demand, and generating power onsite.

Not only will this cut your costs and reduce your dependency on the grid, but it will also cut your carbon emissions.

Your AIM membership gives you access to the Energy Action Group, a consortium scale energy buying group.

Read more at aim-museums.co.uk/aim-energy-action-group



Option 2: Import One Stop Shop Registration

In 2020 the EU set up a one stop shop system for VAT. The IOSS allows UK businesses to register for VAT in one EU country and submit EU-wide VAT returns. The business will need to be able to account for VAT rates for all EU member states (most ecommerce software has this capability) and submit regular VAT returns to the EU authority where registered. An EU-based intermediary is required for this service, often at a steep annual charge.



However from October this year, MuseumShops will be making its IOSS number available for partners to use for dispatching items to the EU. MuseumShops will therefore be able to assume responsibility for VAT payments to European tax authorities for all transactions made via the museumshops.uk platform.

Option 3: Cease sending to Europe

This is the nuclear option which many museums have been forced into by the new requirements. While this does avoid the risk of hidden charges annoying EU customers it also removes any element of choice. Whilst regulations might ease with time, the direction of travel has not been encouraging.

A final word of advice; if it's edible, drinkable or otherwise alive, do not send it to Europe! The customs paperwork for sending items in these categories is so complicated that nine or more times out of ten an item will not reach the customer. If you would like to learn more about dispatching to the EU or would like to enquire about becoming a MuseumShops partner, get in touch at clientservices@museumshops.uk

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Challenging visitor numbers can have a direct impact on income, but what can you do? Now is the time to be more proactive than ever, as AIM Associate Supplier Paul Ogburn explains.

Don't just sit there – give yourself a financial health check-up!

There are four key areas you can look at that have a direct impact on the financial success of your business: *offer, gross profit, operational costs, and stock holding.*

Offer

Does your offer still align with your current audience? It will have altered over the past months, particularly if you are reliant on the international visitor, and staycations are also at an all-time, so ask yourself

- Is my offer right for the current visitor type and demographic?
- Do my retail spaces need to be reviewed and product locations altered to ensure my 'hot spot' offers align with my current audience?
- Is my menu still appropriate for my current audience type and demographic?
- Is the price architecture of my offer aligned with my current audience or does it require some adjustment?
- Is there some compelling narrative missing within the offer that would increase customer engagement and spend?

Gross Profit

With the number of transactions significantly down on budget, it is crucial you are maximising the gross profit from every pound spent. This can be achieved in several ways:

- Review the price architecture, is there an opportunity to increase

the selling prices on your most popular lines.

- Renegotiate cost prices, minimum order quantities and terms and conditions with the suppliers, reducing financial risk and helping with cash flow.
- Review the materials used within products for more reasonable alternatives.

Operational Costs

With income challenged by lower visitor numbers, the operational spend must be reviewed to balance the budget and improve the 'cost to sales'.

This requires some difficult decisions, particularly around resource, which is usually the greatest operational spend of any commercial business.

Key questions

- Do my commercial functions need to operate throughout the full opening hours of the venue?
- Is there an opportunity to review structure to improve efficiency and effectiveness?
- How can we operate more efficiently to meet current demand (e.g changes in hours/headcount?)
- A full review of additional operational spend, their viability, operational requirement and effectiveness, is there an opportunity to reduce or remove altogether, the marketing spend for example.

Stockholding

Applying the 3 R's to your stockholding is a must to reduce your capital spend, future financial commitment and improve cashflow, they are *Review, Rationalise and Return*. This will reduce the level of buying and financial commitment, improve cash flow and achieve that much needed injection of cash back into the business.

- Review levels of stockholding across entire offer, set new minimums to reduce levels of buying and stock holding.
- Rationalise the retail offer in line with current audience types and demographics, removing products that are deemed unsuitable, whilst enhancing those aligned for greater impact.
- Review all Sale or Return stock and return all poor sellers.
- Review book offer: rationalise, return poor sellers and increase number of face outs.

Paul Ogburn Consultancy Limited specialises in supporting the cultural, heritage and attractions sectors.

paul@paulogburnconsultancy ltd.co.uk
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AIM members can enjoy a 20% discount on Paul's popular Retail Surgeries – a cost-effective way of tackling a commercial issue without incurring the cost of hiring a consultant for the day. Book yours at
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Focussing on the benefits of your offer to visitors is a useful step to moving to a visitor focus, explains Colin Mulberg.

Attracting visitors: benefits versus features

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many museums and heritage venues are re-assessing their relationships with their audiences, including understanding the viewpoint of their visitors and what makes a great visit for them. Looking at the benefits to visitors instead of the features of your venue and exhibits is a valuable place to start.

Focussing on visitor benefits instead of venue features is often part of a wider internal shift away from looking inwards at collections, objects and displays. It helps trustees, management, staff and volunteers across your organisation to look outwards at your visitors, what they want from a visit and the experience they have when visiting.

Features are a traditional way of talking about a visit and *describe* and/or *explain*. This could be when a historic property was built or its famous occupier, the themes and extent of collections, key highlights or special/notable objects. Features feel safe and reassuring, as they are based on facts and museums and heritage venues are good at them.

However, features look at what you have – your viewpoint. They are based on what you know and understand and what you find interesting. For many visitors, features are a limited form of engagement and are not particularly persuasive.

In contrast, **Benefits** explore what visitors will get out of engaging with you – they *do* something for visitors. Benefits give motives to visit and/or to part with money, especially setting out what visitors will gain from you. To be a benefit, the gain must be real and have strong appeal, so it speaks directly to your audiences; it is on their terms and takes their viewpoint. Benefits are mostly immediate, especially when compared to historical features.

Benefits can be general; for example, shared quality time and social experiences when meeting up with family and friends have become a priority for many due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Benefits can be transactional (e.g. Friends can jump the queue) but also aspirational (e.g. increased wellbeing; feeling more relaxed; creative fulfilment; inspired; uplifted; improved self-esteem; creating worthwhile memories).

Benefits are particularly valued by visitors when they solve or avoid problems. This could be ensuring they get good



The Charterhouse, London is reviewing the benefits it offers to different audiences.

value (and avoid poor value); helping them to see the best (and avoid the mediocre); making the most of their valuable time (and not wasting it); reducing effort. Families have a recurring problem to keep their children amused over the long summer holidays and most museums and heritage venues are well placed to solve this.

Understanding and creating visitor benefits requires sustained work. It is the result of taking a long hard look at the visitor offer and why this is attractive for particular audiences. Often it helps to answer a series of questions: What can visitors do or accomplish with this? What are the results for them? How does this improve visitors' lives? Another useful approach is to ask the Five Magic Words of Sales for each audience – 'What's in it for me?'

Features do not have to be abandoned totally as they can add credibility and substance. But it pays to follow the marketing mantra, 'Features tell, but Benefits sell'. It is a focus on visitor benefits that will help venues to reach out to different audiences with compelling offers that give strong reasons to visit.

Colin Mulberg is Director of Colin Mulberg Consulting, specialising in improving the visitor experience for museums, galleries and historic properties/sites.
www.colinmulberg.com



The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic

The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic first opened its doors in 1950 and has been enchanting the public ever since.

Now tucked away in the harbour village of Boscastle, the museum's founder Cecil Williamson originally opened the museum in Stratford upon Avon in 1947, but due to objections from the local religious community, it wasn't until 1951 that the museum was able to set up properly in a series of buildings attached to a ruined mill in Castleton on the Isle of Man.

Williamson was a colourful character: a film director, spy for MI6 and a magical practitioner. His large collection of magical objects was later added to when Gerald Gardner joined him at what was now known as the Witches Mill and was installed as the resident witch. Gardner was in the process of founding the neo-pagan religion, Wicca, later to be known as Gardnerian Wicca.

Both strong characters, they eventually fell out and Williamson moved, along with his collection and wife Gwen, to the mainland in 1954.

After several ventures on the mainland, each meeting with some hostility, Williamson finally settled in a two-storey building in the harbour at Boscastle, where it opened as The Witches House in 1960 and where it has been ever since.

The next Director of the museum was Graham King. During a walk in the English countryside in 1996, he encountered and was made welcome by a group of early road protestors, the Dongas Tribe, gathering to celebrate the ancient Tan Hill Fair. It was this encounter that set in motion Graham's decision to leave behind his previous life, leading to his purchase of the Museum from Cecil Williamson.

Graham made the 200-mile journey on foot to Boscastle, where at midnight on the 31st October that same year the purchase was finalised. Graham and his team went on to develop The Museum of Witchcraft into one of Cornwall's most popular museums, which passed into the hands of present Director Simon Costin in a similarly theatrical way at midnight on 31st October 2013.

The museum has remained independent and receives no public funding at all, with income coming from door takings and our shop. Pre-pandemic it welcomed around 49,000 visitors a year and the MWM's

Instagram following is the envy of many much larger museums. When Covid 19 hit, it was the social media following that became the museum's front window through which it maintained and grew traffic to the Museum shop, a lifeline during the 18 months of enforced closure. The small and devoted team became experts in online retail. Along with the museum's director the museum employs four members of staff throughout the year.

During Covid the MWM has gone through a period of rapid change; it has deployed an online booking system for the first time and installed new air purifiers, whilst raising the entry price for the first time in ten years. We launched a hugely successful magazine, CONJURATION, which has its own website. Selling out the first edition in 16 minutes was an experience the team will not forget! A new Patrons Scheme, replacing and building on the successes of Friends of the Museum, launches in 2022. A sell-out London exhibition for the MWM's sister museum, The Museum of British Folklore, bodes well for MWM's own London debut, scheduled for Winter 2022-2023 which will see it partnering with a London Museum for the first time in our history.

With over 4000 objects in the collection, the MWM aims to explore British magical practice, making comparisons with other systems of belief, from ancient times to the present day. With the objects in the collection and a library of over 7000 books and manuscripts the museum is the main repository for artefacts relating to many of the most important figures of 20th and 21st century occult practice, folk magic, and magical thought in general.

Simon Costin, Director
museumofwitchcraftandmagic.co.uk





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- Save money with member discounts and build your CPD through CFG's comprehensive events and training programme.

Register for free at www.cfg.org.uk/aim – membership is open to everyone in your organisation.

What's coming up

Gift Aid Awareness Day 7 October

Every year, around £560m of potential gift aid goes unclaimed.

Our annual Gift Aid Awareness Day returns in October and we will be joining with other charities to help maximise gift aid returns – and to say 'thank you' to those who #TickTheBox and share the impact of Gift Aid with supporters. Keep a look out for our social media toolkit, updated gift aid guide, invitation to a webinar with HMRC and more.

Log in to the website and read our latest issue of *Finance Focus* to get involved

CFG Annual Conference 11 – 14 October

Our community will be coming together to share the latest charity finance insights and knowledge at this year's **CFG Annual Conference**. We've just launched a special ticket price for small charities.

CFG Mentoring Scheme 3, 10, 17 November

Are you interested in connecting with sector peers and developing your leadership and mentoring skills? Our hugely popular mentoring scheme returns in November and is free for AIM members.

Email zoe.bennett@cfg.org.uk to register interest

AIM Bulletin

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