



Association of  
Independent  
Museums

# AIM Bulletin

December 2022

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**The fascinating story  
behind The Devil's  
Porridge Museum**

# Welcome to AIM Bulletin!

## A continual dialogue with society

I recently heard a museum professional say that “A museum that is not in dialogue with society is dead”. This was a very blunt reminder of our responsibility to ensure that heritage spaces keep speaking to the people that use them.

There are, however, so many dialogues to manage: visitor numbers remain depressed post-Covid; there are ongoing revenue challenges caused by the impact of rising costs; there is a strong desire to improve our environmental footprint but little available budget to invest in our buildings; there is a driving need to interrogate the stories our collections allow us to tell, the way we tell them, and who we tell them too.

As heritage professionals our role in fostering dialogues between objects, places and narratives gives us a powerful opportunity to shape our understanding of ourselves and our communities. As the very fabric of our society is shaken up, we are also moving away from the traditional object-led interpretation model many of us grew up knowing. This call to remain in continual dialogue with society represents a strategic pivot in favour of placing communities’ relationships with objects and heritage at the heart of interpretation.

Museums are responding in so many positive ways. Some are looking at how they can welcome more community groups into their venues, perhaps providing warm spaces for local residents, or school meals for youngsters during the school holidays. Many are looking closely at collections

to explore how these can be more sensitively written to tell community stories that are properly inclusive. Others are examining how to chart these extraordinary years perhaps by collecting Covid stories and pandemic ephemera. All are looking at how we can collectively face the huge challenge posed by climate change.

Day in, day out, I am constantly inspired by how much capacity we have as a sector to meet these challenges in creative and intellectually rigorous ways. And it is the people above all – the care and compassion of the people I meet, and an almost trademark determination to not be daunted by the scale of the task, that makes me certain our sector will remain resilient and relevant.

Heritage professionals recognise we are better placed to meet challenges and opportunities by working together, and generously sharing knowledge. I see this in the fantastic collaborative approach collections take to shared digital content through the organisation I work for, Art UK. As a new trustee of AIM, I am looking forward to supporting another organisation that thrives on collaboration. Through resources, discussion and advocacy, AIM can help its members professionalise their approach to the many challenges we face. If you are looking for support, guidance or just a friendly chat then get in touch. AIM is for your museum and collectively we need each other’s support more than ever.

**Dr Camilla Stewart**  
Head of Commercial and Collections’ Services  
Art UK



### Front cover

The Devil’s Porridge Museum possibly holds the accolade for the best-named museum in the world. It tells the story of HM Factory Gretna, the largest munitions factory on earth during World War One. So where does it get its name from? Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, of Sherlock fame, visited the factory as a war correspondent in 1916 and saw the munitions girls mixing cordite, an explosive, with their bare hands in massive pots. He reported that it looked like they were making ‘the devil’s porridge’. Read more on page 19.

Nearly a third of AIM members completed our recent survey on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.



# Seeking Certainty

AIM's September survey of the independent sector highlighted the difficulties facing museums as inflation and energy prices surge whilst visitor numbers continue to lag behind projections.

Around a third of our institutional membership responded to the survey, significantly outstripping January's survey on the impact of Omicron.

Whilst resilience and reserves are supporting some museums through this tempestuous economic period in the short-term, the survey underscores a need by many for support that can provide medium to long-term respite and certainty.

Key findings included

- 14 respondents reported being at risk of insolvency, two imminently.
- 70% of organisations reported still having three or more months of unrestricted reserves.
- About half of museums found visitors and income over summer were either similar to projections or up to 29% below. Just under a third had visitor figures and income significantly below projections.
- Half of responding museums believed

they can absorb cost-of-living pressures in the short- but not long-term.

- Energy costs were the main pressure (70% of organisations) but around a third to half also reported pressures on staff costs, core activities, and capital project costs.
- On average, organisations reported that energy bills were just over 20% of income, with rises of about 45% expected in the next 6-12 months. However, this average masks a massive range, with 34 organisations reporting they expect rises of over 90%. There are also significant differences in cash amounts, which range from the hundreds to high six figures. The average sustainable proportion of energy bills against income is expected to be around 38%.
- About half of organisations were still in fixed contracts, with around a third of these ending in the next six months.
- 90% of organisations were planning actions to tackle cost pressures, with the most common steps being trying to increase income, using reserves, reducing energy consumption, and reducing costs such as L&D.
- 40% of organisations have or plan to

scale down activity including reducing public offer, reducing events, or delaying or cancelling gallery refreshes and capital projects. Just over a third of organisations did not think increasing income would be possible given economy-wide pressures.

- About one in six is planning restructure or redundancies.
- About half of organisations are expecting visitors and income to be below projections to the end of March 2023 (however, a sizeable part of the sample did report regular closure over the winter months).
- The kind of support most wanted is funding support with energy bills specifically – it should be noted that many responses were received before full details were announced of the recent Westminster government support package.
- Organisations are also seeking core funding, project funding, and maintenance funding. About 20% of organisations would like support for staff wellbeing and for reducing energy consumption.

Read the report at [www.aim-museums.co.uk/seeking](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk/seeking)

# ACE announce future funding of organisations



Image by Levi Mair Clancy on Unsplash

## AIM funding from Arts Council England (ACE) continues following November's announcements by ACE.

The investment sees 990 organisations receive a share of £446 million investment, including 276 new organisations.

AIM members currently account for 48 of the museum National Portfolio Organisations (NPO), with 15 of those joining in this round. AIM first became an ACE Sector Support Organisation in 2018, receiving funding that currently supports a significant element of its work. It now becomes an Investment Principles Support Organisation.

Arts Council England Chair, Sir Nicholas Serota, said:

“As well as continuing our commitment to our many established and renowned cultural organisations, I am deeply proud of the support we will be giving to those new organisations which will help ignite creativity across the country. We are facing economic pressures at present, but this funding is about an investment in our future.”

Responding to the news, AIM Director Lisa Ollerhead said  
“We are delighted that AIM has received this very welcome news of sustained support.

These funding announcements come during a period of relentless pressure, not only on museums and heritage organisations, but on our visitors, and on the public purse.

Deciding on which organisations receive investment is an unenviable, almost impossible, task and the team at ACE should be commended for the help they offer both during this process and after today's announcements, and for the wider work they deliver in supporting the country's cultural life.

Those who applied should also be recognised; the time, effort, and passion for their work they demonstrate in doing so is a mark of what makes this sector great.

We look forward to continuing our work with ACE and our members in supporting the independent museum sector.”

AIM Chair, Andrew Lovett OBE added

“In these times it is easy to forget that funding such as this is both an investment and a strategic expression of confidence in our sector. Confidence in our member museums and in their ability to support the ongoing recovery of the towns, villages, and cities they are based in and confidence that they will use the support to ensure a valued return for the taxpayer.

On behalf of our members, I'd like to express my thanks to ACE for their continuing support of AIM.”

Read more at [www.artscouncil.org.uk/investment23](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/investment23)

# New Success Guides launched

**We're pleased to announce the publication of three new AIM Success Guides, now available to download.**

## Setting up a new museum

Aimed at those thinking about setting up a new UK museum, this Guide is structured around the AIM Hallmarks, an excellent checklist to plan your development. To support the launch, we've published four case studies sharing top tips and advice with anyone else setting up a new museum, experiences which may also provide useful lessons for more established museums.

- Crab Museum
- Museum of Youth Culture
- Corwen Museum
- Redditch Local History Museum

Find the case studies here:

[www.aim-museums.co.uk/helping-organisations/case-studies/](http://www.aim-museums.co.uk/helping-organisations/case-studies/)

## Fundraising

This Guide is intended to help small and medium-sized museums to fundraise as successfully as possible. It is helpful to anyone working in a museum, whether staff or volunteer since there is a role for everyone in the fundraising process. It will be particularly relevant to those who have specific responsibility for fundraising strategy and implementation, and for management staff/volunteers and trustees.

## Museum Displays and Interpretation

Interpretation helps connect our visitors to our historic places and collections, it is how we communicate stories and ideas about our heritage. This guide will help you to:

- Understand what interpretation is
- How to plan interpretation
- How to produce content and text for interpretation
- Understand how to use professional support
- Think about costs for interpretation

Find these, and other AIM Success Guides here:

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





# AIM News

## VAT refund Scheme for Museums and Galleries – webinar 7 Dec

VAT is an irrecoverable cost for most museums and galleries. However, there are ways in which this cost can be reduced or removed. If your museum/gallery offers free of charge admission and is open to the public for at least 30 hours per week it could apply for 'special' Section 33A VAT status, allowing you to claim back VAT

that's normally blocked from recovery.

Given the current opportunity to apply and obtain 'special' VAT status closes on 3 January 2023, we recommend that application forms are completed and submitted before Christmas.

We are working with Azets to provide specialised support on this

opportunity, join us at a webinar on 7 December to find out more.

Register for the webinar at [aim-museums.co.uk/events/vat-33a-advice-webinar](https://aim-museums.co.uk/events/vat-33a-advice-webinar)

*Azets specialist tax service has provided specialist VAT and tax assistance to organisations in the arts and culture sector for over 20 years. [www.azets.co.uk](https://www.azets.co.uk)*

### Join the AIM membership 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 insight group!

Since its establishment last year, the membership insight group has provided invaluable feedback to inform AIM policy, plus helped with data for government calls for information. We're looking for new members from right across the UK, from a variety of organisational backgrounds and with a range of experiences. From managers and volunteers to curators and front of house staff, to directors, and all points in between.

Find out more at [aim-museums.co.uk/mig](https://aim-museums.co.uk/mig)

### AIM and sector partners launch research into admissions pricing policy

DC Research Ltd and Durnin Research Ltd have been appointed to deliver 'Research into admissions pricing policy in museums and its impact' for AIM and partners Arts Council England, Museums Galleries Scotland, the Welsh Government, the National Museum Directors' Council, and the Art Fund.

The work will explore admissions policies and pricing strategies in the UK museums sector and produce guidance that organisations can use to help inform ticketing policies in the current challenging environment for museums.

This new research follows on from AIM's 'Taking Charge' report and success guide published in 2016 which looked at organisations transitioning from free to paid entry and vice-versa, and hybrid pricing models.



# AIM National Conference takes shape

The power of possibility! AIM conference returns to Scotland next Summer and will see colleagues from across the UK come together to explore how 'being independent' can strengthen opportunities to engage our communities, drive new approaches to creativity and enable a greater sense of organisational control and governance in these challenging times.

This year Conference travels to The Surgeons Quarter, located in heart of Edinburgh's iconic old town and run by The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, an internationally respected institution pioneering in the advancement of surgical breakthrough and patient care since 1505.

Speakers will be announced early next year but delegates can look forward to a schedule packed with the usual AIM mix of inspirational and practical advice, debate, and discussion.

Tickets go on sale in January 2023 and include great value early bird packages.

*AIM National Conference  
15-16 June 2023,  
Surgeons Quarter, Edinburgh*

## Re:Collections - Anti Racist Museums Wales

A new project will provide support to museums in Wales to deliver the Culture, Heritage and Sport goals and actions in the Anti Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP).

*Re:Collections - Anti Racist Museums Wales* will provide museums with bespoke consultancy, mentoring, workshops, grants and the chance to share experiences and learning. It builds on AIM's experience supporting museums in addressing social inequalities through its Tackling Inequalities grants, and in developing and undertaking co-creation projects with under-represented audiences through its New Stories New Audiences funding.

AIM will be working with the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust [www.racearchive.org.uk](http://www.racearchive.org.uk). The Trust is a specialist library and archive, focusing on the study of race, migration and thinking about race; anti-racist activism and the fight for social justice. They are recognised as a centre of excellence in oral history work, Global Majority community-led collecting and ethical

community engagement. They also have expertise in supporting cultural organisations to review their practice and build anti-racist organisations. The Trust will act as strategic advisor on the programme, and its recent research report on anti-racism and EDI in the heritage sector 'If Nothing Changes, Nothing Changes' (September 2022) will be a key resource in the development and delivery of the project.

Participants will benefit from workshops, consultancies and mentoring all focused on supporting museums to build the skills and confidence to meet the goals of the ARWAP, and grant funding will support museums to deliver projects that use these skills.

Further details on the scheme, including the application process, will be published by AIM in December.

To register early interest and to find out more contact AIM Head of Programmes, [margaret@aim-museums.co.uk](mailto:margaret@aim-museums.co.uk)

External changes can be challenging but they can also bring out the best in organisations, says consultant **Louise Emerson.**



Image by Priscilla da Prez on Unsplash

# Challenge can bring out the best

The recent AIM survey showed that the most common concern<sup>1</sup> right now is energy costs, followed by capital costs, and core cost pressure continues. About 50% of respondents believe they can manage in the short term<sup>2</sup>, which leaves six months to decide on the changes needed to increase sustainability, notwithstanding the uncertainties that abound.

Others are thinking of the last resort – using reserves. And no one is sure when these pressures will subside. But uncertainty is a condition for innovation and disruptions create opportunities to make lasting, substantive, positive change. For example, Covid prompted many museums to sort out long standing governance issues, start to build better local connections and reminded us how important team well-being is.

We all know that the issues that put us at risk take on a sharper focus when uncontrollable external change happens. So, perhaps now is the time to check your underpinning assumptions and think strategically, and at least ensure that the decisions to deal with today's issues align with future goals.

In this article I offer some suggestions for the short-term and pose some questions for medium/long-term.

## Scottish Business Support programme opens

**Following the success of the 2021-22 'Surviving to Thriving' Business Support Programme, MGS is delighted to have been awarded additional funding from NLHF to continue its work supporting the heritage sector in Scotland.**

## Short-term considerations

### Reducing services and activities

- Calculate the whole cost, not just financial
- Think holistically – what is the impact on other functions?
- Focus on benefits: financial, social and customer, before cutting whole services
- Plan for ‘what ifs’ – the energy crisis may continue

### Increasing income

- Interrogate existing income streams to increase efficiency
- Negotiate well on every cost
- Invest where there is proven growth
- Fundraise for activities that are strategically aligned

### Prioritising

- Delay – what is not appropriate/necessary at this time? What will not have a payback (financial)?
- Can that refurbishment or purchase wait?

### Reducing staff costs well

- People – Your best asset and (possibly) your biggest cost<sup>3</sup>
- Cutting vs reduced contracts – consider role changes
- Be very clear on rationale for change and communicate and listen to feedback on impact and options

- Think holistically – role interdependencies, informal networks, the impact on visitors
- Use a scalpel rather than a cleaver

### Keeping the team motivated

- Cuts to personal development and cuts/delays to projects impact morale, increased spending scrutiny leads to quality concerns, reduced staff means workload pressure
- Listen and consult
- Get everyone involved in contributing to efficiencies
- Communicate the results of everyone's efforts and ideas, recognise them
- Is working from home a cheaper or better option?

### Using reserves

- Only use reserves to fund operational costs as a **last resort**<sup>4</sup>. Why?
- Funding bodies want to see reserves
- No reserves – no fund for emergencies – operational costs need to be managed
- If you build reserves from surplus or topped up from CRF, it will be hard to recoup

## Building a sustainable future

### Visitor forecasting

- What is going to be valuable to the customer of the next ten years?
- Who are your best visitors and what need could you satisfy?
- What does your local community need? Can you partner/or deliver?

### What assumptions are being made and are they still relevant?

- Are opening hours between 10am to 6pm best serving your visitors?
- Could a competitor become an ally?
- What sort of relationships do you want to have with partners and visitors?
- How could you reinvent how your service is paid for?
- Are you holding on to something that you need to let go of?
- What alliance could generate visits?

*Louise Emerson is a Business Consultant working with museums to create value.*

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

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1. AIM – Seeking certainty: A snap museums survey September 2022
  2. Some fixed term contracts run over the winter period
  3. Volunteer led organisations excepted
  4. At risk organisations excepted

Developed by Museums Galleries Scotland, Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS), and greenspace scotland, the Business Support Programme 2023 will deliver a comprehensive resilience and leadership training programme for heritage organisations across Scotland.

This free programme – a bursary payment will be made to all participating organisations to help with costs of taking part – starts in March 2023, lasts 9 months and all sessions take place online.

It will support 20 heritage organisations across Scotland to build capacity and develop sustainable business models. Two participants from each organisation can attend each training strand and they don't have to be the same people each time.

**“It will support 20 heritage organisations across Scotland to build capacity and develop sustainable business models.”**

The programme is open to organisations across the wider heritage sector in Scotland and covers four key areas: Leadership, Governance, Business Planning and Community Engagement over approximately 18 days of training and workshops.

Deadline for applications is 12 noon on Monday 12th December 2022.

[www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/projects/business-support-programme](http://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/projects/business-support-programme)

# News in brief

## Dutch Flowers, Compton Verney 29 October 2022 – 15 January 2023

In partnership with the National Gallery, London, Compton Verney is hosting an exhibition exploring the development of Dutch flower painting from its beginnings in the early 17th century to its blossoming in the late 18th century.

Visitors will be able to enjoy ten masterpieces of the genre, with nine paintings on loan from the National Gallery and another from a private collection. Dutch Flowers examines the origins of Northern European flower painting, the height of its popularity in the Dutch Golden Age and its final flowering in the late 18th century.

[www.comptonverney.org.uk](http://www.comptonverney.org.uk)



Paulus Theodorus van Brussel, *Flowers in a Vase*, 1789 (c) The National Gallery, London

## Scarborough Museums and Galleries appoints new Chair of Trustees

The new chair of trustees at Scarborough Museums and Galleries is renowned Egyptologist, Professor Joann Fletcher.

Professor Fletcher lives in Scarborough and is based in the Department of Archaeology at the University of York. Although only recently becoming a



trustee of Scarborough Museums and Galleries, she has been researching aspects of the collection for almost 20 years and working as consultant and advisor for Harrogate Museums and Arts, the Museum of Wigan Life and Barnsley Museums, where she is also guest curator and patron of Barnsley Museums and Heritage Trust.

Professor Fletcher says: “To be able to work with museum colleagues from Scarborough and beyond on its world class collections will really be such a privilege. It’s certainly an exciting if challenging responsibility, but I’ll do everything I can for the collections of my adopted town I love so much”.

Andrew Clay, CEO at SMG, says: “I am delighted that Jo has agreed to become our new Chair. Not only does she bring a wealth of experience, but also an unending passion for heritage and culture.”

[www.scarboroughmuseumsandgalleries.org.uk](http://www.scarboroughmuseumsandgalleries.org.uk)

## New book explores origins of independent museums

During the late twentieth century, the number of museums in the UK dramatically increased. Typically, small, and independent, the new museums concentrated on local history, war, and transport. *Stories from small museums* By Fiona Candlin, Toby Butler and Jake Watts asks who founded these museums, how, and why.

In developing the book, Toby Butler, an expert oral historian, and Fiona Candlin, a professor in museology, drove around the UK to meet the individuals, families, community groups, and special interest societies who established the museums. The rich oral histories they collected provide a new account of recent museum history – one that weaves together personal experience and social change while putting ordinary people at the heart of cultural production.

## Stories from small museums

Fiona Candlin  
Toby Butler  
and Jake Watts



## Panacea Charitable Trust appoints new Director

The Panacea Charitable Trust has appointed a new Museum Director, Zara Matthews, to head up its museum team in Bedford.

Zara most recently worked for Arts Council England in the Cultural Property team, and prior to that as Market Town Museums Manager for Leicestershire County Council working with Harborough, Melton and Charnwood Museums.

The Panacea Museum tells the story of the Bedford based Panacea Society a



religious society founded by a group of women in 1919, who followed the teachings of Joanna Southcott.

The Panacea Charitable Trust looks after the Museum, its site, and collections, as well as the Centre for the Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements ([www.censamm.org](http://www.censamm.org)) and providing awards for social-related grants to reduce poverty and sickness for people in the Bedford area.

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

### Art Fund publishes new report on diversity in the curatorial workforce

The report, a combination of two pieces of work by Black-led organisations Museum X, in 2021, and Culture&, in 2022, was commissioned by Art Fund to assess the impact of ethnic diversity initiatives on the curatorial workforce in the UK arts and heritage sector. It sets out the priorities for funders, museums, and art organisations to

meaningfully increase ethnic and cultural diversity in the sector.

Findings highlighted in the Executive Summary include

- Few ethnic diversity workforce initiatives in the UK arts and heritage sector have aimed specifically at diversifying curatorial roles; most have instead been aimed at generic entry-level roles.
- Where these entry-level roles have led to curatorial positions, this has been largely due to individual personal drive and ambition rather than the programmes themselves.
- The Arts Council England (ACE) Inspire Fellowship programme, International Curators Forum and programmes developed and delivered by ICF/Art360 Foundation stand out as initiatives that have had a sustained focus on curatorial diversity.
- In contrast, in the US there has been greater investment in and focus on diversifying the curatorial workforce, better quality demographic data and more effective collaboration between funders, museums, galleries and universities – all of which has led to a demonstrable increase in the proportion of non-White people entering the curatorial profession and now being appointed to director roles.

Read the report at [www.artfund.org/news/art-fund-publishes-new-curatorial-diversity-report](http://www.artfund.org/news/art-fund-publishes-new-curatorial-diversity-report)

### Elizabeth Gaskell's House Welcomes a New Chair of Trustees

Elizabeth Gaskell's House has announced the appointment of Alex Walker as the new Chair of Trustees. Alex has over 40 years' experience in the museum sector, including being head of the Harris Museum and Art Gallery in Preston, Chair of the British Association of Friends



of Museums and is currently a member of the advisory panel for the Heritage Volunteering Group. She has been a Museums Association regional representative and is completing her term as Chair of the NW Federation of Museums.

To celebrate this new appointment Alex helped plant a new tree in the garden at Elizabeth Gaskell's House as part of the extended Queen's Green Canopy initiative. The Spindle tree being planted is one of Britain's most colourful native trees, turning a spectacular deep red in autumn, but as its name suggests it also has resonance with Manchester's historic cotton-spinning past, a subject matter explored in several of Elizabeth Gaskell's novels including her first novel Mary Barton.





**Recent recipients of the Kids in Museums 'UK's most Family Friendly Museum' The National Emergency Services Museum in Sheffield highlight how to deliver sustainably and creatively on a tight budget.**

# Small budgets, high expectations

The landscape for museums and the wider culture industry has changed dramatically in recent years. Visitors are expecting to be entertained, enthused, and engaged with history and to feel that they have spent their time – and, importantly, their money – well. So, what can independent museums do to create exhibitions which can compete with larger, funded heritage sites but don't cost the earth?

At Sheffield's National Emergency Services Museum (NESM), the answer is a rather eco-friendly one: RECYCLE! The South Yorkshire attraction is tackling the challenge through innovative exhibition design backed by a 'make do and mend' approach that puts reuse, recycling, and sustainability at its heart, supported by a small multiskilled team of staff and volunteers.

## Heritage Access 2022

### New report on accessibility of UK museum and heritage sites

**A new report on the accessibility of UK museum and heritage sites shows no major improvements in information for blind and visually impaired, D/deaf, hard of hearing, and neurodivergent visitors in since 2018.**

The report, published by VocalEyes, in partnership with Stagertext, Autism in Museums and the Centre for Accessible Environments tracks the changes in the state of access over the past four years.

Left, Exhibitions like this one, commemorating the Sheffield Blitz, are put together on a shoestring. Right, Police helmets repurposed as light fittings in the museum's coffee shop and the Museum entrance.

Matthew Wakefield, the museum's CEO, says, 'Necessity is the mother of invention and that was never truer than at NESM. We pride ourselves on offering an experience that is inclusive, hands-on, and relevant. But this costs time and money and for independent museums like us, who need to raise every penny that we spend, both of these are precious commodities. So, we need to think differently and creatively when designing our exhibitions.'

Matthew says, 'At NESM we have become masters of reinvention; surplus handcuffs become exhibition barriers, duplicate helmets become light fittings and old lockers become display cases. Cost saving methods like this not only save us pennies but reduce our landfill contribution and give new life to old or unused items. Through our networks we also rescue surplus items from elsewhere that were destined to be thrown away. Things like old museum cabinets, storage systems, tech and even salvage from fire stations come to us to be refurbished and reused.'

Recycling these highly expensive fittings that were destined to be broken up or sent to landfill allows the museum to spend money elsewhere, on vital building works to restore its 120-year-old station or on crucial vehicle restorations. This system of sharing resources and fixtures and fittings goes both ways, as NESM send on cases, cabinets, and other fixtures to be reused by other sites too.

The museum is helped by a talented team of staff and volunteers who carry out much of the work in-house. NESM is fortunate to have a diverse (but small) team who come from all kinds of backgrounds and have all manner of skills, enabling it to reduce its use of sometimes expensive outside contractors and saving on things like digital design for interpretation and graphics, sign writing, exhibition design and technology installation. Involving the entire team, including volunteers, also enables the museum to deliver a



varied and co-curated exhibition which reflects its community and ensures everyone is valued and involved.

To keep costs low and standards as high as possible, the museum also acquires some of the technology used in its interactive spaces from alternative sources; working with universities and their students who are creating new apps, resources, or software, not only supporting the community but investing in new talent and skills.

The museum has practiced what it preaches in recent years. Since its first Covid closure in 2020, NESM has opened four completely new exhibitions and refurbished five other galleries, all on extremely tight budgets. Matthew says, 'People are often stunned at what we can achieve. Our Blitz exhibition, for example, was created for a fraction of what it would have cost had we approached it in the traditional way. We have visitors from other heritage organisations who simply cannot believe that we are able to put together something so amazing on such a shoestring budget.'

'We think our methods are a positive, community-driven, cost-saving, and sustainable way forward. It doesn't solve all the problems we face in budgeting for new exhibitions but it's a way we can continue to improve our museum even in the current climate.'

[www.visitnesm.org.uk](http://www.visitnesm.org.uk)

#### Other key findings include

- Online information about access provision at museum and heritage sites has increased significantly since 2018.
- Far smaller increases were recorded in online information relevant for blind and visually impaired people, D/deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing people, and neurodivergent people – people historically under-recognised as requiring accessibility measures.

- 19% of museums and heritage sites surveyed have no online access information in both 2018 and 2022, showing no improvement.

The report includes guidance for venue staff on creating and presenting access information online, covering around 40 different access aids, facilities, resources, and events and gives clear, non-technical guidance on how to ensure that text, links, images, video, audio, and downloadable documents are all accessible. It also covers tips for

inclusive communication with visitors.

VocalEyes have also launched the Heritage Access 2022 benchmark tool, an online search and map interface where you can find the benchmark score for the access information provided by the 2,258 UK museums and heritage sites covered by the project.

[Read the report and access the benchmark tool at   
vocaleyeyes.co.uk/research/  
heritage-access-2022](https://vocaleyeyes.co.uk/research/heritage-access-2022)

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

### Selly Manor Museum

£4,382

#### *Minworth Greaves Archives*

Minworth Greaves is a medieval timber-framed hall house dating from the 1300s, and the oldest building in Birmingham. It was rescued by chocolate manufacturer George Cadbury, who saved it from demolition and arranged for the building to be moved 12 miles from north Birmingham to be rebuilt in his garden village in 1932. Today the building is part of Selly Manor Museum and a focal point and important community centre for George Cadbury's Bournville. In 2016 a collection of archives, relating to Minworth Greaves being dismantled and moved was discovered, and entered the museum's collection. The archives came to the museum in poor condition, but the AIM Pilgrim Trust Remedial Conservation Grant awarded the museum £4,832 to conserve plans, drawings and sketches that help to tell the story of the Minworth Greaves reconstruction.

In 2022 we marked the 90th anniversary of the remarkable project to save Minworth Greaves with a special exhibition, and these archives brought the story to life. The archives vary from original plans to detailed sketches of the structure, some of which are directly related to prominent architect William Alexander Harvey who oversaw the project. They have now been enjoyed by a new audience and displayed for the first time and will remain accessible to the public for the ongoing study and enjoyment of this important building.

The project has achieved everything we set out to. 48 archival documents received conservation, with 16 of



Minworth Greaves exhibition.

those being prioritised for substantial treatment. All were subsequently displayed and are now accessible to the public. The conservation work made a huge difference to the items. Following the display, the conserved items are now stored in our archival storage area in suitable conditions. The area is environmentally monitored and managed by museum staff.

The application process was easy to understand and straightforward. The communication with AIM has always been great, and we appreciated the quick turnaround in finding out whether we had been successful. Thanks AIM for your support, it has been a wonderful project to deliver this year and we're very proud of the outcome.

**Daniel Callicott**  
Heritage Manager  
Selly Manor Museum (Bourneville Village Trust)

## York Army Museum

£540

### *Preservation of WWI objects*

The project's aim was to preserve three WW1 objects that are on display in the York Army Museum permanent exhibition: a Brodie helmet, a water bottle and part of a rifle (part of muzzle and firing mechanism). These items are part of a group of artefacts that were exhumed with the remains

of two unidentified soldiers of the 2nd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment at Villers-Bretonneux (France) in December 2007. The remains were interred at Adelaide Cemetery, Villers-Bretonneux, in September 2011. The artefacts were not reburied but repatriated to York Army Museum.

The objects have been on display in the permanent exhibition of the York Army Museum since 2015 and were showing signs of severe active corrosion. The objective of this project was to stabilise

and preserve them rather than attempting restoration. Thanks to an AIM remedial conservation grant, York Archaeological Trust removed the active corrosion, stabilised and consolidated the objects. The artefacts are now back on display in the permanent exhibition at York Army Museum.

**Aline Staes**  
**Collections Manager**  
**York Army Museum**

Pictured, York Army Museum WWI items.



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Susanna Denniston, Chairman, Salisbury Museum

*"Hilary was great to work with as her focus was on pragmatic structured solutions"*



Ian Walker, then Chairman  
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## Publishing

**guidebook**

*noun*

book that gives visitors information, designed to enhance their visit

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## Did you know . . .

**Looking to reach museums and heritage organisations across the UK?**

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**Interpretation is at the heart of museums. Without it, museums are merely a collection of objects, but what is it and how can we do it better? Author of our new AIM Success Guide 'Museum Displays and Interpretation Success' Ruth Mckew explains more.**

# Impress with your interpretation

Interpretation is both an activity and an output, it should be continually evolving in response to our audiences, and it should encourage visitors to consider an unfamiliar perspective or learn something new.

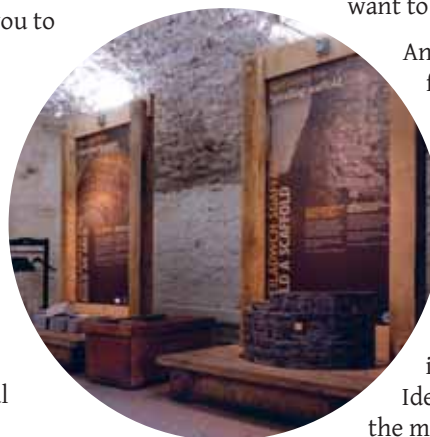
Museum audiences have high expectations, and it can be hard to know where to start. How high should text be? How much information is too much? To create successful interpretation, we need to understand our audiences and the heritage that we wish to interpret; interpretation is the mechanism that connects our visitors to the heritage.

Interpretation in museums has often evolved on an ad hoc basis, as funding or resources have become available, creating a mix of styles and approaches that can sometimes lack a clear narrative or story. Even if you are only interpreting one element or display, a strategic approach can start to create a coherent visitor experience. AIM's new guide will introduce several types of interpretation and how these connect to our collections,

from object labels to graphic panels, interactive exhibits, guided tours, and digital interpretation.

The guide will help you to

- Understand what interpretation is
- How to plan interpretation
- How to produce content and text for interpretation
- Understand how to use professional support
- Outline costs for interpretation



consider how it fits into the rest of the museum, how it will communicate with your audiences and what stories you want to tell.

An interpretive framework will help you to set out the key stories and heritage assets and provides a useful tool to help develop themes and create a coherent approach to your interpretation. A 'Big Idea' should encapsulate the most important thing that your visitors should know or feel after their visit.

The new *Museum Displays and Interpretation Success Guide* links to the *Understanding Your Audiences Success Guide* and will signpost you to further resources and information and what professional help is available. <https://bit.ly/3goLHq5>

## About the author

Ruth McKew, Director of Headland Design is part of a multidisciplinary team that designs and delivers interpretation for museums and historic sites across the UK. Ruth has worked in museums for over 20 years and specialises in interpretive planning.

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



There are lots of ways to provide interpretation, and what works for one museum may not work for another, your interpretation should reflect your values and organisation.

It's important to take a strategic approach. Even if you are only planning one display, or exhibition, you should



**New Associate Supplier, Vision Fountain, outline the powerful creative opportunities new technologies and gaming culture can bring to the heritage sector.**

# Kings of The Underground

*Kings of the Underground* opened at the National Waterfront Museum, Swansea in November. Produced by Vision Fountain, the exhibition tells the story of the 'last generation of Welsh miners' through 3D portraits, the use of technology popular in gaming culture and virtual reality (VR), creating a cross generational project that youngsters can really engage with.

Working across the south Wales coalfield, Vision Fountain captured forty colliers' faces using photogrammetry, which converts 2-dimensional images into 3D images. As well as recording facial features, audio interviews were conducted and audio-visual presentations mixing the miners' 3D portraits with snippets from their interviews and eight-foot-high printed 3D portraits form the heart of the exhibition.

The technology Vision Fountain use proved popular in outreach activity with primary schools in ex-coalmining communities in the valleys. The schoolchildren were given the opportunity to model their classmates and upload the results to 3D modeling platforms, as well as experience a Welsh drift mine in virtual reality. Each school created a collage of a coalminer, and seven large miners' collages are now part of the exhibition.

Richard Jones, creative director at Vision Fountain, grew-up in a coal-mining community, but spent 25 years living away. Richard was struck by how most remnants of the coal mining landscape had been erased during that time, providing an initial impetus for the exhibition.

Several Welsh coal-mining museums have partnered on the project during its production phase, lending experienced staff, know-how, networks, and venues. The National Waterfront Museum, Big Pit National Museum, Rhondda Heritage Park, and South Wales Miners Museum have been instrumental. The long-term partner for the project is the National Museum of Wales' archive and Swansea University's South Wales Miners Library, who will store the recordings and the portraits for posterity, enabling future generations to listen-to and engage with their past.

The importance of the project was made more poignant with the passing of several of the miners as the project progressed. Mellard Lloyd, who started in the mining industry at just 14, was

95 years old when he sat down in the photogrammetry studio set-up in the Winding House Museum, Rhymney. Sadly, Mellard passed away just months after the recordings.

Richard attended Mellard's funeral, which took place in a traditional Welsh chapel.

"I was flabbergasted when the project was mentioned in the eulogy. That really hit home how important retaining these faces and recording are for generations of families and Welsh culture in general.

Whist using gaming technology, something that most kids are familiar with, seemed an obvious way to leverage them towards their heritage."

*Kings of The Underground – Exhibition by Vision Fountain/National Waterfront Museum until 19th March 2023 (part of Amgueddfa Cymru/Museum of Wales)*

[www.visionfountain.com](http://www.visionfountain.com)



# The Devil's Porridge Museum

The Devil's Porridge Museum possibly holds the accolade for the best-named museum in the world. It tells the story of HM Factory Gretna, the largest munitions factory on earth during World War One. So where does it get its name from?

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, of Sherlock fame, visited the factory as a war correspondent in 1916 and saw the munitions girls mixing cordite, an explosive, with their bare hands in massive pots. He reported that it looked like they were making 'the devil's porridge'.

HM Factory Gretna was built in response to the shell crisis of 1915. Chosen by Lloyd George, the site was nine miles long by two miles wide, stretching from Dornock in the west to Longtown in the east. The townships of Easttriggs and Gretna were built to house the 30,000 workers, including schools, hospitals, and recreational facilities. Construction only began in August 1915 but within a year the factory was producing more cordite than all the other factories in Britain combined. 12,000 of these workers were women and they came from all over the British Isles – 62% were under 18. They made a vital contribution to the war effort and the impact upon their lives was monumental.

This legacy and indeed the reason for the existence of Gretna and Easttriggs was largely forgotten until a display was formed in the back of a church in Easttriggs by volunteers in 1997. They later moved to a barn and finally, in 2014, to a purpose-built museum building. The museum achieved accreditation in 2018 and maintains a 5 star Visit Scotland rating, a phenomenal achievement given these humble beginnings.

Led by a board of trustees, the museum has 30 volunteers and a team of office staff comprising a Curator, Office Manager, Youth and Community Involvement Officer, and a Museum Assistant whose duties include research, digital marketing, and front-of-house.



Visited by 20,000 visitors a year, the museum generates income from ticket sales, the shop, café, and events. It also receives funding to assist with outreach and specific research projects. As well as delivering a varied education programme, the museum runs clubs for the local community including art, Gaelic and gardening, and seasonal events.

The rich collection of objects and archives continues to be added to – as well as HM Factory Gretna, they brilliantly explain the industrial history of RAF Annan, ICI Powfoot and Chapelcross Nuclear Power Station, successfully tying it with the social history of the surrounding area.

Highlights include Sir James (see image left), a fireless locomotive which was used to transport raw materials within the factory site; a chemical manual for

HM Factory Gretna complete with blueprints used by the factory's chemists; and an unassuming wooden lunch box which was used by a munitions girl. This later became the school lunch box of Sheila Ruddick, one of our late trustees. As a young girl, she disliked this old-fashioned box until her mother explained its history and that it had belonged to her great aunt. Sheila was an integral part of the museum until she passed away, and this object symbolises the museum's centrality in the local community.



The archives contain letters, diaries, and memoirs from workers at HM Factory Gretna, but the most evocative items are autograph books. Filled with memories, poems, and sketches, they bring to life friendship and a sense of togetherness during a period of turmoil.

In 2021, thanks to generous funding from the Dumfries and Galloway Coastal Communities project, the museum embarked on an ambitious research project to collate as many Gretna workers as possible. A team of dedicated volunteers began to systematically research the lives of people who worked at Gretna, and along the way uncovered some fascinating untold histories. This work has been centralised in the Miracle Workers' database on the museum website, the first of WW1 munitions workers to be available publicly and serves both as a lasting legacy for this project and as a knowledge base for those researching WW1 munition workers.

This formed the basis for the museum's 2022 *Disability: Past and Present* project, which showcases the experiences of people with disabilities and chronic illnesses at HM Factory Gretna, as well as the wider contributions of disabled people to the war effort. This project has involved an accessibility audit, hosting a series of online talks with a disability historian and outreach work with local disability groups, culminating in an exhibition and published book, *The Health of the Munition Worker: A Disability History of the World Wars on the Solway Military Coast*. All are welcome to visit the museum to March 2023 to experience the exhibition.

**Emma Gilliland, Curator**

[www.devilsporrridge.org.uk](http://www.devilsporrridge.org.uk)



# People are the beating heart of The Museums + Heritage Awards

**The 2023 Museums + Heritage Awards is open for entries and this year offers more ways than ever to recognise the hard work and extraordinary achievements of individuals, teams, and organisations across the sector.**

With 17 categories to choose from and with two new additions, this year's ceremony will reward even more talent.

The first of two new awards will recognise a team that, for the past year, has quietly helped operations to continue running smoothly. The objective of *Team of the Year* is to reward the parts of your organisation that don't often get public recognition. From HR, grounds maintenance, and collections care staff; teams in all departments will be considered by the judges. They will be looking for a collective positive impact which made a difference in the day-to-day running of your organisation. What

better way to show your appreciation than nominating your team?

The second new award will recognise the support given to the sector by freelancers, consultants, associations, partners, and suppliers. This new *Sector Support Award* will recognise the creativity and solution-driven focus which is crucial to the success of museums, galleries and heritage and cultural visitor attractions. The judges will reward a person, business, or association whose work has supported and enhanced the sector, or which can demonstrate the tangible difference made to its clients.

As well as these two new categories, the awards continue to provide opportunities to all areas of the sector including the invaluable contribution made by volunteers. In partnership with AIM, the awards shine a spotlight on that with its Volunteer(s) of the Year award category.

Those wishing to enter [https://awards.museumsandheritage.com/the Museums + Heritage Awards](https://awards.museumsandheritage.com/the-museums-heritage-awards) have until 1 February 2023

**Pictured: 2022 Winner of the Volunteer of the Year award: Cleveland Pools.**

## AIM Bulletin

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