



Association of
Independent
Museums

AIM Bulletin

December 2023

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A young girl with long brown hair and glasses is sitting at a table in a museum, looking intently at a taxidermy specimen of a bird in a glass case. She is holding a red pen and looking at a book or document on the table. The background shows other museum displays and a bright green chair.

**Inspiring
creative action**
Lessons from The Wild Escape

Welcome to AIM Bulletin!

Lisa reflects on another busy year across the sector

Congratulations to all AIM members, your staff, board members, and volunteers, for successfully navigating another challenging year! Whether you anticipate a peaceful Christmas or a busy time at the museum in the coming weeks, I wish you the energy to carry you through until your next well-deserved rest.

AIM has had another busy year. In April, we were fortunate to start our new round of Arts Council funding, and we continue to benefit from generous support from the Welsh Government, Pilgrim Trust, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and Arts Scholars Charitable Trust. As always, we have been working hard to ensure that the grants and services facilitated by this support contribute to your success.

We enjoyed another great (and sunny) conference in Edinburgh, published vital new research, introduced our new Trustees 101 event, our Connected Communities and ReCollections programmes, and further rounds of New Stories, New Audiences, Pilgrim Trust and Brighter Day grants, alongside our core activities such as the Bulletin, eNews, AIM Higher consultancies, Hallmarks at Home and more. We were reassured by our Member Survey

earlier this year that what we do continues to support you in governing and running your organisations more effectively.

Of course, though, we want to do ever more. Like you, we want to grow and improve. And like you we must spend our – your – money carefully, making sure every penny is doing something important.

Throughout 2023 the AIM Board and team have been looking a little further ahead, to AIM's fiftieth birthday in 2027. We've been developing our strategy and enhancing ways to better serve you, focusing on partnerships, community, and harnessing our collective voice. During 2024 we will be sharing these ideas and ambitions with you, including at our next National Conference at the Black Country Living Museum in June. As well as Conference we hope to have some exciting announcements and new events during the year, always based on what you tell us you need and want from us, as your membership organisation and your representative. We hope you'll join us at some of these moments and look forward to seeing you.

With best festive wishes from all the team at AIM.

Front cover

Earth day 2023 at Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens. Art Fund's programme 'The Wild Escape' brought 532 museums, galleries, and historic houses together with schools, artists, and thousands of young people to take creative action to support nature. The results were subsequently brought together in an interactive artwork made by BAFTA winning games studio PRELOADED which launched over the Earth Day weekend in April. Read more on page 19.

The Wild Escape. TWE. Photoshoot from Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens for Earth Day 2023. Sunderland, England. Sally Ann Norman/Art Fund 2023



Up to £30 million is being provided through the Government's Know Your Neighbourhood Fund to create volunteering opportunities and support those experiencing or at risk of chronic loneliness.

AIM Connected Communities

First round of grants awarded



Funded by
UK Government

Nearly £3 million is being distributed on behalf of Government by Arts Council England via partners Libraries Connected, Creative Lives and AIM, through the AIM Connected Communities programme, to create more than 1,000 volunteering opportunities and support more than 4,000 people experiencing, or at risk of, chronic loneliness.

Research has found that those living in the most deprived areas are more likely to report feeling lonely; as well as being less likely to volunteer; that loneliness is closely linked with mental health and wellbeing, and that certain types of volunteering opportunities can help connect communities and help people develop skills and grow their networks.

Civil Society Minister Stuart Andrew said:

“Loneliness is something anyone can experience, at any time. We know that volunteering can help people connect, as well as improving mental wellbeing and helping people develop new skills.

“This funding will mean those in some of the most disadvantaged areas across the country are able to volunteer in an area that interests them. From arts groups to skills development workshops, there are thousands of ways for people to get involved, meet new people, and try new things.”

Lisa Ollerhead, AIM Director said

“Museums possess a unique power to unite people around captivating exhibits, beloved local landmarks, and inspiring ideas. Our AIM Connected Communities grant programme is dedicated to harnessing these opportunities and we're delighted to be giving five projects the go-ahead in our first round of awards.

As well as the grants, we look forward to museums participating in a capacity-building programme to empower and enhance the skills of their dedicated staff and volunteers, while also facilitating partnerships with local organisations. Our goal is to ensure that the projects funded by these grants have a lasting, positive impact within the museum and resonate throughout the broader community.”

Peckover House and Gardens

Peckover House and Gardens have been awarded £81,400 to deliver a transformational project, Damsons, aimed at people living with dementia. Working with the Alzheimer's Society, the project will create an accessible, safe space for people living with dementia, their families, and carers, to enjoy as they reconnect with nature and explore creative outlets.

Barnsley and Doncaster

Barnsley Museums and Heritage Doncaster have joined forces to deliver a heritage and wellbeing initiative in the Dearne Valley. With a grant award of £50,000, they will be working with b:friend and Age UK, both charities tackling chronic loneliness in elders, to deliver a programme of Museum in a Box outreach sessions using trained staff and volunteers to reach isolated communities.



Barnsley Museums Barnsley Cares programme.

Bowes Museum

The Bowes Museum has been awarded a grant of £54,139 to engage disadvantaged young people in County Durham in high-quality heritage volunteering opportunities. Working in partnership with Teesside School and Sixth Form, the project will create 30 new roles for young people aged 14-18 within the museum and enable participants to learn new, transferrable skills, encourage creativity amongst the cohort and reduce the social isolation experienced by many.

Wolverhampton Arts and Culture

Wolverhampton Arts and Culture have created a project that will see them working with Strengthening Families hubs across the city throughout 2024. Using their grant of £94,000, they aim to reduce the social isolation and loneliness experienced by many new families through a series of wellbeing and creativity sessions directly tailored for individual communities.

Powell-Cotton Trust

The Powell-Cotton Trust has been awarded £56,960 to extend their innovative Sunshine Project through 2024-25. The project creates new nature-based volunteering roles for people with learning disabilities and mental health conditions, working with key community partners such as Thanet Community Day Services and Liberty Training.

aim-museums.co.uk/aim-connected-communities

AIM Connected Communities is funded by the DCMS Know Your Neighbourhood Fund through Arts Council England.

The agility and tenacity to thrive

As he steps down as CEO and Director of London Transport Museum, Sam Mullins reflects on an ever-dynamic sector.

The greatest change during my working life in museums has been the rise of the socially entrepreneurial independent museum. My museum career began in 1977 with Shropshire County Museums after a year at Leicester Museum Studies. The entrepreneurial style of nearby Ironbridge Gorge Museum, then led by founder Neil Cossons, was strikingly different to my training. One evening in my local, the Ironbridge gang were found celebrating the 'capture' of a chemist's shop from Bridgnorth, later

to be rebuilt at Blists Hill. I was awed and impressed by such panache!

After creating a new community museum for Market Harborough in 1983, St. Albans Museums were a complete contrast, part of an ambitious, commercial, and gung-ho leisure department. For a local authority director struggling with cuts and shrinking access to capital, the can-do pragmatism of an AIM conference offered the state-of-mind and good practice appropriate to the straightened circumstances of the 80s and 90s. I found AIM's passion and agility infectious and joined Council after moving to lead London Transport Museum in 1994. Every time I am asked to Gift-Aid on admission, I am reminded of our campaign with the Tourism Society to retain this benefit when government proposed its abolition; also, of the significance of appointing our first executive to deepen AIM's support for the sector.

A second change has been the recognition of the primary importance of leadership in complex cultural organisations. My own Damascus was through the Directing Change group, set up by Anne Murch and led by George Gawlinski from 1991. A group of new directors struggling with the challenges of funding, governance, people, and purpose, found huge benefit from sharing their triumphs and disasters, from understanding that their peers were all facing similar challenges and were willing to share insights and anxieties.

As museums have become more plurally funded and complex institutions, the importance of good governance has become ever more important. Leading for AIM on the sustainability awards panel, it was abundantly clear that most applications for marketing or retail investment were weakened by the lack of a clear view of the organisation's purpose. The sustainability AIM could best offer

In partnership with Arts Council England, Museums Galleries Scotland, the Welsh Government, the National Museum Directors' Council, and Art Fund, AIM commissioned DC Research Ltd and Durnin Research Ltd to explore current admissions pricing policy in museums and their impacts.

Admissions Pricing policy – latest research and guidance

New research should help museums and galleries optimize their income, position themselves effectively in the market, whilst maintaining accessibility.

An accompanying Success Guide condenses crucial findings and should help museums to review their own pricing strategies. Key topics covered include business planning, 2023 pricing benchmarks, effective communication, audience targeting, and specific lessons for charging and non-charging institutions.

The research emphasises that pricing should align with an institution's values as well as its business planning and

highlights that pricing alone cannot be the sole solution to museum issues.

According to the findings, the challenge of the pandemic was seen to demonstrate that quick, adaptive decisions regarding pricing were possible and facilitated visitor returns, despite limitations.

[Read the findings at aim-museums.co.uk/research-admissions-pricing-policy](https://www.aim-museums.co.uk/research-admissions-pricing-policy)

[Join the research team online on 14 December 11-12 and Thursday 25 Jan 11-12.30 to find out more.](#)
[Book at aim-museums.co.uk/dates-for-your-diary](https://www.aim-museums.co.uk/dates-for-your-diary)

was to fund a review of their purpose and governance, rather than shop fixtures.

My final reflection has to be on the crucial importance of appointing and retaining good people, those creative, committed, agile, tenacious executives and trustees who go the extra mile when the going gets tough. Surviving the Covid crisis and emerging a stronger organisation was only possible because LTM had a great team, from leadership through heads of department to front-of-house, volunteers, and the contract cleaners. It's not a cliché, people are indeed everything to museums; modelling and nurturing a strong local culture is the most important thing we do as leaders.

Times are tough just now, notably outside London's strong tourist market. The visitor's discretionary spend is reduced, energy prices remain high, construction costs are on a sharp upward trend and public funding local and national is under pressure. These are not the conditions which might suggest optimism about the future of independent museums. However, it has to be said that industrial, railway and maritime history was much harder sell in the 1960s and 70s when the pioneers of AIM set out to bring entrepreneurial dynamics and customer insight to museums in the service of heritage preservation.

This is a hopelessly optimistic sector, which has brought a ship back from the

Falklands, locomotives from the scrapyards, canals into use, mill wheels to turn and buses to growl into life. Through restoration, operation and exhibition making, we are the stage for unique experiences; for fun and insights to be found in unique places and collections and from brilliantly presented authentic histories; for communities to celebrate and participate in the preservation and promotion of their local identity; for volunteers to give their time and expertise and be sociable together, preserving a deep legacy of the histories and places which have formed our society and landscape and for families to enjoy learning across generations.

The reputation of museums remains high, amongst the most trusted organisations in the UK for credibility and reliability. My experience at LTM convinces me that having an independent board and being predominantly self-funded has lent us the agility and tenacity to thrive in the aftermath of Covid and closure, to deliver across a portfolio of activities and for a broad spectrum of public and corporate funders.

There have also been some great personal moments; opening the Harborough

Museum in 1983, repurposing St. Albans museums, creating the Depot at Acton in 1999, reopening at Covent Garden in 2007, taking a restored steam train into Moorgate for the 150th anniversary of the Tube in 2013 and a restored B-type bus to Flanders to commemorate London busmen and the First World War. In truth, for me the job is at its best when the place is just humming along; galleries sparkling under the lights, a short queue at the door, school groups learning loudly together, the shop tills whirring, the café steaming, soft play area bouncing, and galleries thronged with enthusiastic visitors.

Writing this just a couple of weeks after stepping down from the 24/7 of directorial activity, the future is an opportunity to be a historian once more, to enjoy being a researcher and writer of histories of TfL and of London, for sharing my experience such as at SS Great Britain where I am vice chair, and as a mentor and consultant.

Sam Mullins, OBE

Sam Mullins was AIM President from 1999 to 2005, and Director of London Transport Museum from 1994 to September 2023.

sam@sam-mullins.co.uk



Steady state? AIM's latest survey findings shared

In September AIM conducted a survey on how the sector is managing continued high energy bills and an ever more-challenging picture for public funding.

Over 250 respondents highlighted:

- For 70% of museums visitor numbers during the summer months were at, or better than, projections and for 64% the same was true of summer income.
- 72% of museums feel able to cope with cost pressures, though for 44% this is only in the short term.
- 64% reported they had not had to scale down planned activity this year.
- Large museums appear to be particularly vulnerable and least likely to report they can 'absorb costs,' with only half reporting this (compared to 70% of small museums and 83% of medium).

- Strongest support needs echo those pre-pandemic: capital funding for maintenance (44%) and transformation projects (39%).
- There is clear demand for MEND, or nation equivalent funds, to be continued.

AIM Director Lisa Ollerhead

"While the findings give some reason for cautious optimism, they also suggest a split sector: some museums are enjoying strong visitor numbers and income, can manage the ongoing impacts of the cost-of-living crisis and energy bills, and have limited support needs – while others continue to struggle, although fewer to the drastic point of fearing insolvency.

This prompts us to consider whether we have arrived at a juncture where certain museums have successfully rebounded from the pandemic's impact, while others should be regarded as permanently altered in terms of their visitor numbers, income patterns, or their pre-2020 trajectory."

aim-museums.co.uk/steady-state

News in brief

Teaming up for Conference 2024

We're delighted to announce that our Host Venue Sponsor, Black Country Living Museum has been joined by Bloomberg Connects as Headline Conference Sponsor, and Hayes Parsons Insurance Brokers and search specialists Minerva as Gold Sponsors.

Full details of the fantastic range of sessions, workshops, breakouts, and events will be online in January alongside early bird tickets and more.

January renewals

Some AIM members will soon be coming up to their membership renewal date on 1st January. This year and following feedback, we want to ensure that renewals aren't requested at a time when you are either taking some well-earned rest or are busy hosting seasonal visitors. To help, we'll be adjusting some membership renewal dates so as not to clash with the seasonal holiday. You don't need to do anything: we'll send out renewal information one month, two weeks and seven days before your updated membership renewal point, so you get plenty of notice. Again, if you've any questions please don't hesitate to contact AIM on membership@aim-museums.co.uk

Could you be Art Fund Museum of the Year 2024?

Applications are now open for Art Fund Museum of the Year, the world's biggest museum prize. The prize recognises and celebrates outstanding work and projects across UK museums and we're always pleased to see AIM members on the shortlist. Applications close on 15 January 2024.

Tamalie steps down from Brooklands

Brooklands Museum has announced the appointment of Alex Patterson as its new Director and CEO. after nearly six years of energetic and transformational leadership by previous AIM Director, Tamalie Newbery. During Tamalie's time at



Brooklands Museum, it was a finalist for Museum of the Year, was the subject of two television series and formed new partnerships that expanded its educational remit. Alex comes from a background in independent museums and has worked with national institutions, including Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust.

www.brooklandsmuseum.com

'Retain and explain' guidance released

The Westminster government released guidelines on the management of historic statues in October, specifically directed at custodians responsible for public memorials.

Encompassing statues, monuments, and commemorations and published by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS), the guidance aims to assist custodians in handling demands for the removal of heritage assets under their care. Under its "retain and explain" approach, the policy advocates maintaining assets in their current locations while providing an explanation of their historical significance. The guidance does not cover collections housed in museums and galleries, whether on display permanently, temporarily, or in storage. The formulation of the guidelines was the result of input from academics and heritage stakeholders who were part of a government-appointed Heritage Advisory Board.

Demystifying museum marketing

Marketing Strategy for Museums, by marketing consultant and AIM trainer Christina Lister, is a practical guide to developing and delivering impactful marketing.

The book explains how museums can develop a strategic and proactive approach to marketing, connect with



audiences and make effective decisions with limited resources. It breaks down jargon and provides useful frameworks and ideas of how museums can successfully develop and deliver marketing strategies and campaigns, with examples from AIM members and museums around the world.

Published by Routledge as part of its Guides to Practice in Museums, Galleries and Heritage. RRP is £31.99 but AIM Bulletin readers/members have an exclusive 20% discount using code AIM20 when the book is ordered from the publisher: <https://routledge.pub/Marketing-Strategy-for-Museums>.

Arctic Convoy Museum Appoints Inaugural Curator

The Russian Arctic Convoy Museum on the shores of Loch Ewe has appointed Dr Karen Buchanan to the post of Curator with the twin ambitions of gaining accreditation and making



its collections catalogue secure and accessible. Dr Buchanan is well known locally, having served as Curator of Gairloch Museum through its award-winning redevelopment project. Loch Ewe was the point of departure for many of the convoys taking supplies to Russia during WW2, under the constant threat of attack from enemy aircraft and U-boats. Many wartime buildings, gun emplacements and anti-aircraft batteries survive in the local landscape. The popular Museum was first envisioned in 1998 to commemorate veterans and tell their stories.

racmp.co.uk



Tank Museum's outgoing Director honoured in a traditional tank-pulling ceremony

17 years on from his arrival in Dorset, 16 members of staff pulled a World War Two Matilda II tank with Richard Smith OBE in the commander's seat. The tank pull has its origins in British armoured regiments when outgoing Commanding Officers would be drawn in a tank through the garrison gates by the regiment's senior officers. During Richard's tenure, the museum saw a total redevelopment which doubled annual visitors and saw annual turnover increase from £1.6m to £6m. Richard hands over to Chris Price, currently CEO of North Yorkshire Moors Railway, who will assume the role of Director in January 2024.

tankmuseum.org

Elisabeth Frink: A View from Within' at Dorset Museum

Thirty years after her death, the first ever exhibition dedicated to Elisabeth Frink's time in Dorset will showcase over 80 sculptures, drawings and prints at Dorset Museum, including the working plasters that informed the final bronze sculptures that have never been on public display before.

One of the most celebrated sculpturers of recent times – the first female sculptor to be elected as a Royal

Academician (1973) – Dame Elisabeth Frink (1930-1993) produced over 400 sculptures throughout her illustrious career.

As part of this new exhibition, her Dorset studio will be recreated featuring her tools and the working plasters that formed the basis of some of her most well-known bronze sculptures, giving visitors a unique opportunity to step inside and see how one of Britain's foremost artists worked.



Elisabeth Frink working on the Dorset Martyr group, 1985. D-FRK/1/10/7/2/6 © Anthony Marshall/Courtesy of Dorset History Centre. Artist copyright in image kindly approved by Tully and Bree Jammet.



Rob Macdonald, Museums Galleries Scotland

Addressing the challenge

Gillian Simison, Head of Museum Development, Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) explains the financial challenge for Scotland's museums and the work taking place to address it.

As demonstrated by AIM's recent survey findings in *Steady state? A snap museums survey September 2023* and by MGS's own data, there is a mixed picture in Scotland surrounding the financial challenges that museums have faced in the last 12 months.

Although visitor and income levels post-pandemic have increased in some areas, and for some organisations, this is not consistent across the sector in Scotland, with some experiencing unprecedented drops in both. The cost-of-living crisis has also made it extremely challenging for museums to attract visitors and generate income. Stretched finances are impacting on programming and the ability to maintain buildings.

Organisations across the Scottish sector go beyond their basic services to deliver outreach programmes. These activities enable museums to become integral parts of their communities, and supports financial resilience. The Family Burns Brunch at Robert Burns Ellisland raised the profile of Ellisland as somewhere accessible and interesting for children resulting in a noticeable increase in local visitors. The Scottish Maritime Museum has run community events throughout the year to help bring back visitors and engage new audiences. However, the rising costs of labour and energy have made it difficult for museums to provide additional activities. Many report cutting back on staff to relieve financial pressure, reducing themselves to basic staffing requirements to keep the doors open. Morale is falling as workloads become insurmountable. The hollowing out of museum services has a negative impact on what museums can offer to communities and visitors. The last 12 months have also presented challenges for volunteer and board recruitment, a concern as good governance is important to financial resilience.

Although staffing cuts are most acute in Local Authority services, this is having a knock-on effect elsewhere in the sector by reducing the capacity of Local Authorities to provide support. Volunteer-run museums are suffering the most from this. Coupled with over a decade of shrinking budgets in culture, this is worsening the 'perfect storm' scenario presented to Parliament during last year's pre-budget inquiry. Running and operating depleted, basic museums services to keep the doors open does not echo the sentiment and ambition of the culture strategy in Scotland.

MGS distributes funding from the Scottish Government. Increasing competition and uncertainty about future funding is making planning very difficult for a lot of museums. We know that organisations have tried to bring fundraisers on board to help them take a more strategic approach, but they have found hiring a fundraiser difficult. To counteract this, and to support museums to develop sustainable business models, MGS has been running a Business Support Programme funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. The programme will share learning from its participants with the wider sector.

Help with capital costs remains one of the biggest areas of need voiced by our sector. In response MGS, supported by the Scottish Government, has created the Capital Resilience Fund to help museums reduce costs by increasing their energy efficiency.

The Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries for 2023-2030 developed by the sector and supported by the Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development, is mindful of the challenging times we collectively face. We aligned our grant outcomes to the strategy as a key means of supporting the sector to deliver its ambitions while building resilience.

The Strategy also sets out clear actions to support museums and galleries to connect with their communities and bring social impact for all. Additional funding has been announced by the Scottish Government to 'more than double' culture funding. We hope that this, in addition to the Culture Strategy, will ensure going forward that resources are targeted and responsive.

Welsh Museums News

Welsh Museums Festival

The Welsh Museums Festival made its return for October half term with a week of special events to celebrate the diverse history and culture of Wales. Over 45 museums across Wales took part by hosting a variety of mostly-free events. The Welsh Museums Festival has been running since 2014. It is organised by the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales and funded by the Welsh Government.

This year the Festival launched a new Welsh Museum Passport Challenge encouraging museumgoers to visit six museums up until April 2024 and get a stamp in their passport for each visit. Once completed, visitors have the chance to enter a prize draw.

The Festival also launched a new Halloween activity booklet available in participating museums and allowing young visitors to explore the history of Halloween in Wales and across the world with games and puzzles.

Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, Dawn Bowden

“The Welsh Government is delighted to fund the Welsh Museums Festival through the Welsh Museums Federation. The festival is an excellent opportunity for us to highlight the contributions of the local museums sector and showcase the diversity of museums across Wales.”

Working effectively with your Board

Welsh museums are invited to join this brand new, two-part programme supporting managers and staff who work to or with charitable Boards. Participants will be given an overview of the essential legal and regulatory requirements of charitable Boards in Wales and gain an understanding of good practice in charity governance and the ways it can be applied for the benefit of the museum.

Workshop sessions will take place online and be highly interactive, giving you the opportunity to share your governance challenges. Sessions will be led by Hilary Barnard and Ruth Lesirge, both experts in charity governance. For more information, contact

Margaret Harrison, Head of Programmes, on margaret@aim-museums.co.uk

AIM's Trustee induction for Welsh museums

An essential and practical introduction to museum governance and best practice for new trustees, or a refresher for existing trustees, this course consists of two workshops:

- Part 1 on Tuesday, 20 February 2024 4pm to 6pm
- Part 2 on Tuesday, 5 March 2024 4pm to 6pm

These sessions will be interactive, engaging and will provide tools for you and your board to use in improving the governance of your museum. It's an invaluable opportunity to network with other trustees, exchange ideas and be refreshed in your thinking about trustee induction. The two-session course is delivered by Hilary Barnard and Ruth Lesirge, the authors of AIM's "Successful Governance for Museums" and acknowledged experts in charity governance. The course is funded by Welsh government and is open to museums in Wales only.

aim-museums.co.uk/events/museum-trustee-induction-welsh-museums-cwrs-cynefino-ymddiriedolwyr-amgued-dfeydd-cymru

AIM Higher Micro-consultancies for Welsh museums

Whether it's reviewing basic good practice or dealing with complex challenges, our AIM Higher governance support programme offers the opportunity to work with one of our roster of experienced and expert consultants. Participating boards receive one-to-one support from a specialist consultant, who will work with you to identify

and address areas for development. AIM has support available to museums in Wales, funded by Welsh Government.

aim-museums.co.uk/for-aim-members/for-trustees/prospering-boards-governance-support-programme



Manchester Museum.

Being agents for change

Fiona Woolley, AIM Grants Administrator attended Museums for Everyone in October 2023.

When putting objects and artwork on display in a museum, gallery, or heritage setting, we make conscious and unconscious decisions to tell multiple stories. The narratives that we promote in turn help to provide a sense of place. Connections are made to audiences both old and new. At the NW Fed's recent 'Museums for Everyone' conference held at Manchester Museum, six speakers explained how they had approached interpretation from a new angle, questioning their narrative to unearth untold stories and hidden histories at their organisations.

Peter Fallon, Head of Visitor Teams at Manchester Museum, highlighted that the responsibility of providing a welcoming experience was the duty of *all* staff and volunteers. From the challenge of providing appealing events and exhibitions to attract new and existing audiences, to the friendly welcome at reception, to the creation of facilities that meet the needs of visitors. Through consultation, they work hard to ensure that their audiences' access needs are catered for, that exhibitions are inclusive, and their visitors feel welcome.

The morning's presentations focused on hidden stories. Lynda Jackson, Museum Manager at Judges Lodgings Museum in Lancaster and the artist Lela Harris outlined their project *Facing the Past*. Funded by an AIM *New Stories New Audiences* grant and Art Fund, it explores the museum's links to the slave trade. Through partnership working with two

universities and local black history groups, they were able to unearth documents detailing thirty-eight enslaved people with connections to Lancaster. They then focused on four characters and, through questioning the evidence, were able to build up an impression of what they would have looked like.

Lela highlighted that the strong project brief and the freedom she was given contributed to the success of the project. Being involved with the research phase and primary school workshops helped to inform the four portraits, and an extra two that Lela was compelled to create. As the characters and faces of the people from the past emerged, the portraits have, using Lela's words, "*revealed the humanity behind the hidden history*". The resulting portraits in the Judges Lodgings provide representation of the enslaved people that helped create the wealth of the family that once lived there.

Objects to anchor a story.

The importance of the story, whose story, and whether known or untold, was woven throughout the remaining sessions. James Arnold, Curator at the Harris Gallery, introduced a co-curation project working with Preston's Caribbean community and the £16 million pound redevelopment work of the Harris. He stressed the importance of using authentic interpretation to make sure that objects connect with your audience.

Amy Wilkinson, Heritage Officer at Englesea Brook Chapel, introduced us to another project funded by an AIM *New Stories New Audiences* grant. The *Root and Branch* exhibition explores the links between Primitive Methodism and the founding of the probation service. Sparked by a serendipitous visit in summer 2022, Amy spoke honestly about the challenges of working with a large service when you are yourselves a small organisation with limited staff, and the flexibility that a small team offers to be able to

pull together an exhibition in a short period of time.

Her presentation echoed the need for clear partnership agreements, timeframes, and expectations for successful co-curation projects.

Afternoon sessions explored audience, narrative voice, and representation. Dominic Bilton, Curator of the *(Un)Defining Queer* exhibition at the Whitworth Art Gallery, shared his research into cataloguing and curating exhibitions where 'queer' had not historically been used as a search term. Jez Dolan introduced his work and his experiences of being an artist in residence alongside the recent Derek Jarman exhibition. Both speakers highlighted the importance of authentic interpretation based on lived experience.

Heather Smith, Access and Equality specialist at the National Trust, introduced the *Everywhere and Nowhere* collaboration with the University of Leicester which explored the hidden

stories of disability at National Trust houses. The project unearthed 79 potential stories, whittled down to ten. A digital output will help reach a wider audience, and practitioners with lived experience of disability helped develop the script and present the stories.

A session looking at expression points led by Felicity Paynter, Interpretation Manager at the Science and Industry Museum and Ruby Duncan, their Exhibitions Intern closed the day. They explored how they had encouraged feedback from visitors on difficult subjects with different methods helping to channel the emotional response creatively and successfully.

In her closing speech, the new Federation chair described museums as "*emotional living places*" and the need to "*give people a seat at the table to drive the work forward.*" The onus is on us, those working and funding projects in the heritage sector, to be the agents for change.

www.nwfed.org.uk



Manchester Museum worked with artists and communities to make a rickshaw to display in the South Asia Gallery.

In part one of a series, we caught up with **Amelia Silver – Fellow – Thackray Museum of Medicine in Leeds** and **Freya Purcell – Curatorial Fellowship Assistant – Bristol Culture** from to hear the latest on the pioneering **Curating for Change** programme.

Curating for Change

Screen South, through its Accentuate Programme, received a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of £950k for *Curating for Change*, an England-wide heritage project that aims to be transformational for the museum sector. Curating for Change provided a landmark fellowship and traineeship programme for D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people wanting to pursue a career within museums. Participants were hosted by more than 20 partner museums across England to research and curate a range of new exhibitions and events. The programme marked the first time that such a significant range of museums have come together to create a network of activities that will begin to tackle the under-representation of disabled people in museums.

Can you tell us a little about your placement and the work you have been doing at the museum?

Amelia I'm the Curating for Change Curatorial Fellow based at the Thackray Museum of Medicine in Leeds. I've been lucky enough to get to work on projects all over the museum, including two permanent displays, two temporary displays, and one temporary exhibition. I've done lots of co-production and met some really interesting people in the process.

Dressing Disability, my final output, is a display, film, and programme of events that explores fashion and disability, and puts access, representation, and identity at the forefront. I worked with two disabled co-creators to put together the display. We talked about things such as representation in the fashion industry, how we feel about our disabilities, and whether or not we feel 'disabled enough.'

In collaboration with artist Florence Burns and poet Enas Saeed, I commissioned a short, animated film, which will feature in the museum for 12 months. I also put on two creative workshops with the Thackray's weekly youth group, Culture Club. We did lino printing with Vickie Orton and made a fashion zine with Kit George. *Dressing Disability* was almost entirely created by disabled women and disabled people of marginalised genders.

Freya I have been working as Curatorial Fellowship Assistant curating the exhibition *Concealed/Reveal: Disabled, deaf, and neurodiverse artists driving creativity*. Through this exhibition we have been highlighting some fantastic artists



Amelia with co-creators Enas and Lucy.

and aspects of their experience that have been overlooked, as well as exploring how disability can be a creative force.

What has been the most positive aspect of your placement, to date?

Amelia The most positive aspect of my placement has been all the amazing people I have met. Within the Fellows and Trainees, we have created a mutually supportive community which I hope we will be able to maintain and strengthen into our future careers.

Freya Meeting some of the fantastic people it takes to make an exhibition, from the co curation group who all brought their own expertise, to the team of curators and conservators at the museum who were so generous with their time, or the producers who created additional materials like audio description. Getting to meet everyone and learn from them has been amazing.

What learning do you feel you will take into the future?

Amelia Through the Curating for Change programme, I've learned transferable skills that I feel will enable me to enter any career in the arts. Project management, co-production, working with designers and artists, managing events, content writing, managing a budget. These are all really desirable skills.

Freya I have always wanted to be a curator or work in interpretation. So, for me one of the most important parts of my Fellowship was having this experience and knowing I can do this work and do it well have been amazing for my confidence going forward.

What advice would you give any future Fellow?

Amelia You're probably not going to know what you're doing for the first few weeks, that's ok, nobody does. Try to soak up and learn everything you can, ask questions (even if they seem stupid), be curious, and most importantly, enjoy it!

Freya I would have two pieces of advice for any future Fellow.

1) Is to say yes to as many new experiences as possible that you can work on or help with. These experiences can shape you so much and give you so many opportunities to grow. At the same time, 2) take care of yourself. You do not want to burn out or hurt your condition so learn when to say no, step back and take care of you.

What's your favourite object in your host museum, and why?

Amelia The Unhidden shirt that we acquired as part of my display because it represents a new direction in contemporary collecting. The shirt embodies not only beauty, but accessible beauty, the idea that you can be disabled and fashionable.

Freya My favourite objects are a watercolour by Sarah Biffin. She was an amazing artist and fascinating figure and businesswoman in the late 18th – early 19th century, one of my favourite time periods. The other would be the home-made



One of Freya's favourite objects in the collection is a home-made wheelchair.

wheelchair we have. It is a red kitchen chair with pram wheels attached, that was made for a working-class girl by her family in the mid twentieth century. I love it, as although we do not know the girl's name there is so much we can learn about class and self-expression through this chair.

curatingforchange.org

AIM administers grants including AIM Arts Scholars Brighter Day Grant funded by the Arts Scholars Charitable Trust and AIM's Conservation and Collections Care and Collection Audit Schemes, funded by the Pilgrim Trust.

AIM grants case study

AIM Pilgrim Trust Collections Audit

Army Flying Museum

The Army Flying Museum holds a mixed collection of artifacts, art, documentary, and photographic material relating to the history of Army aviation from the late 19th century to the present day.

In 2018/19 the museum underwent a NLHF-funded refurbishment which allowed us to construct a purpose-built archive and strong room allowing us to better manage our collections. Out of this move came an understanding

that we had a significant amount of photographic negatives which have not been used to their potential.

The conservation audit awarded by AIM and the Pilgrim Trust enabled us to work alongside an experienced specialist photographic conservator who could assess our negative collections. The conservator Sarah Allen, from Lux and Livre, provided expert advice and a comprehensive report on the preservation requirements of our large negative collections. In

addition, recommendations were made for short-, medium- and long-term objectives which we have already begun to implement. The application process was simple and the communication between AIM and the museum was both helpful and responsive.

The audit grant has been vital to the understanding of our negative collections and their preservation for the future.

Kyle Thomason
Archivist



Image by Drew Beemer on Unsplash

Acting for the future

Dr Jenny Peachey,
Senior Policy Advocate,
Carnegie UK on future
generations, wellbeing,
and relevance.

Future generations and museums

Our great-great-grandchildren have no power in today's society: they can't vote, instigate a protest, or argue with us about how we are spending our financial and natural resources. Yet the decisions we make today will impact them. We take out loans for them to pay back. We use up natural resources they will not be able to access. We make laws that will govern them. MacAskill, who has written about future generations, argues that "future people count, there could be a

lot of them, and we can make their lives go better."

The fact that the future counts, as well as the past, is an essential quality of museums. These institutions were founded because we want future generations to learn and to care. Be that to care for the natural world through learning about crabs, to care about peace through learning about the impact of war in a local community.

Wellbeing and future generations

At Carnegie UK we want to create a future where:

- Everyone has access to the services and support that they need (social wellbeing)
- Everyone has a decent minimum living standard (economic wellbeing)
- We are all able to access a quality

local environment and collectively we live within our planetary boundaries to secure the environment for future generations (environmental wellbeing)

- We all have a voice in decisions that affect us (democratic wellbeing)

In other words, we'd like to see a future where focus on economic growth is tempered by an equal weight being placed on social, economic, environmental, and democratic wellbeing. Where wellbeing is the focus of government and decisions are therefore made on the basis of whether they will improve the quality of our lives.

Curating conversations about the future we want

Collections in a museum serve not only to connect us to objects, but to connect us to ideas, people and places across time and space through

those objects. Objects are the “what” of museums, the connections they facilitate are the purpose or “why” of museums. As such, museums can provide an entry point for connections and conversations about the kind of community, locality, or world that visitors or communities want to leave for future generations.

For example, an iron griddle at the Carnegie Birthplace Museum in Dunfermline could serve to prompt discussion not only about how things were done in the past, but about the proliferation of single use items today and the impact they might have on our planet’s future. This could lead to a question about, “Is this the kind of future you want to leave your children?”

Collections and “things” may be static but the conversations they could generate are potentially limitless.

Who are you engaging about the future?

Who do you picture when you hear the phrase “future generations”? People like you; people not like you, or a mixture thereof? This is important to think about when

“ Museums can provide an entry point for connections and conversations about the kind of community, locality, or world that visitors or communities want to leave for future generations. ”

considering objects in a collection: how many were collected by the kind of people (and reflect the values) you seek to serve, speak to, and engage today and in the future?

In the words of Nina Simon, “relevance is a key that unlocks meaning,” with the challenge being that different kinds of people find meaning in different kinds of things. It follows that relevance evolves all the time: it requires constant attention and work in relation to who you are for and who you want to reach.

Nina Simon asks curators to consider, “How do you invite people outside your circle into what matters to you?” My question to you is, how will inviting them in help you refine or strengthen the story you’re telling, or how you’re telling it, about your “why”?

Questions for reflection

- What would paying attention to the wellbeing of future generations look like in your museum?
- How might that framing lead you to act now and evolve for the future in ways that feel different from current or past approaches?

Further reading

Report: Carnegie UK (2023)
Learning from Wales’ Future
Generations Commissioner

Website: The Future
Generations Commissioner
for Wales – Acting today for
a better tomorrow

Book: MacAskill (2022)
What We Owe the Future.



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"The work we did with Hilary has genuinely been the foundation of everything we've done since; when things got really tough, the values we wrote and the Plan that came out of it, that's what we return to!"

Liz Power, then Director Water & Steam Museum
 now Director Historic Buildings & Places



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Transform your visitor experience with Bloomberg Connects – the leading-edge (and free) museum app

For more than two decades, Bloomberg Philanthropies has been helping museums build digital tools to share their collections and exhibitions – creating meaningful museum experiences and increasing audience engagement around the world.

Our recently-launched app, Bloomberg Connects, renews this commitment, offering museums a free, cutting-edge digital platform. With multimedia content, way-finding, multilingual capabilities, and robust accessibility features, Connects allows you to tell your story your way.

With more than 2.3 million app users around the world, all Bloomberg Connects partners gain access to new audiences and become part of the worldwide Connects network. More than 300 international museums and cultural institutions are now a participating, from intimate period homes to global art destinations. In the UK alone, there are more than 100 guides, including the Imperial War Museum, Dulwich Picture Gallery, Sir John Soanes Museum, St Ives Museum, the De Morgan Collection, and the Old Operating Theatre, and the impact is real: “Integrating the Bloomberg Connects app into our visitor experience has been transformative,” explains a representative from the Sir John Soanes Museum. “We’ve been able to explore the use of audio guides and provide valuable supplementary information about our spaces, collections and exhibitions in an engaging and accessible way. Excitingly, it feels like we’re only just getting started!” And a fruitful collaborations with partners like ArtUK have made it even easier for museums and collections to join, thanks to direct assistance in building their guides.

Bloomberg Connects is free for museums and their audiences and allows visitors – *on-site or anywhere in the world* – to

experience art works, historical and newly-commissioned artist interviews, audio recordings, and even performances and festivals. In-app features and an intuitive, easy-to-use backend make for seamless customization for exhibitions, collections, and tours, with accompanying audio descriptions and accessibility tools providing analysis and contextualization for seasoned art audiences as well as first-time visitors.

The backend of the Bloomberg Connects app is designed with flexibility in mind, making it easy on you and your colleagues to upload and update your content. Beyond that, our in-house content specialists work alongside our partners offering best practices and advice to help you succeed. With technology that automatically offers your content in more than 30 languages, and tools that create transcripts and captions for your media, we’ve tried to maximize impact while minimizing the additional steps. In addition to offering the necessary technology, we also try to build institutional capacity through training sessions and help-desk services, while Bloomberg Connects marketing campaigns build awareness and exposure to new audiences.

Bloomberg Connects partners are at the forefront of digital developments in the museum world. Our engineers, researchers, and data analysts work closely with our content and outreach teams to ensure you have the tools needed to share your treasures with local visitors – and the real-time data to understand audiences and drive programming. As we continually update and enhance the app, we integrate user and partner feedback, continually evolving as technology allows and ensuring maximum ease of use for our partners. We create the technology so our partners can focus on what you do best, developing compelling and provocative exhibitions and programming.

www.bloombergconnects.org/for-partners

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Bloomberg Connects are Headline Sponsors of the AIM National Conference 2024

AIM Associate Suppliers **Minerva** on approaches to diversifying your trustee recruitment.



Image by Headway on Unplash

Building a diverse Board

We all recognize the contribution that excellent trustees make in the cultural sector – they help executives develop and deliver strategy, they can be a vital support during difficult and challenging times, they bring relationships and expertise and often a critical piece of new thinking that can unlock puzzling situations.

At the other extreme, we also know the flipside and have seen boards struggle with their remit, become less focused, extremely risk-averse and/or confrontational in their approach.

In the context of a volunteer model of governance, there can also be challenges around engagement and resourcing: sometimes executives feel so absorbed in producing papers for committees and boards that they wish they had a little more time for the actual day-job, and on the other hand, trustees can worry about their responsibilities in a context where regulation is perplexing and burdensome, and finances are extremely tight.

Building a diverse board is a critical part of achieving this balance. A broad range of skillsets and perspectives is vital. Increasingly, we see a need to balance out core professional skills (legal, HR etc.) with broader strategic, organisational growth and income generation experience. In the current

world, every museum and gallery needs to think about being nimble and balancing their core mission with income generation, and it doesn't help for boards to become too 'back-officey' in their thinking. Managing risk and holding the leaders accountable should be a natural part of the primary role, which is to support the executive team in developing and delivering strategy.

When we talk about diversity, we tend to think in terms of well-recognised protected characteristics. A huge amount of work has been done ensuring on gender balance across boards in the sector over the years, and it is far less common to see a board meeting that brings together the retired male mafia from the local area. Similarly, there are huge efforts to broaden ethnic diversity and bring to the table people from global majority backgrounds. This is of course much easier for organisations located in regions of the country which have ethnically diverse populations, but it is an aspect that many of our clients in the cultural sector are seeking to improve.

And there are of course other aspects of diversity, including disability, age, and sexuality, all of which are critical elements in the lived experience of audiences, and boards benefit from bringing this richness of voices into their discussions. One

of the biggest challenges we see is building the pipeline of people from under-represented backgrounds who are confident and ready to contribute at governance level.

We run a scheme called **Board Prospects** which seeks to build this pipeline. In our programme, participants who either have a protected characteristic or who are younger, serve as shadow board members for a year or two with an organisation, participating fully in committees and board meetings as appropriate, and receiving mentoring from within the board as well as participating in CPD activities. Three times a year we bring together participants for online sessions where they hear from experts on matters such as charity finance or how best to contribute. Participating organisations are drawn from the cultural, educational, and social impact sectors, and we are particularly keen to increase the numbers of organisations participating from the cultural sector. The scheme is provided pro-bono as part of our commitment to improving diversity in the sectors we serve.

We are also keen to improve the scheme all the time, and to learn from boards who are successfully building diversity.

Read more at www.minervasearch.com/diversity/board-prospects

Prior to the release of an in-depth report, Art Fund highlight some initial findings following their successful Wild Escape project.

Lessons from The Wild Escape

The Wild Escape brought 532 museums, galleries, and historic houses together with schools, artists, and thousands of young people to take creative action to support nature. The programme sought to highlight nature in collections – inviting children to find animals, birds and minibests in paintings, sculptures, and exhibits, study them, and then respond with their own drawing imagining the animal escaping to a positive future. The results were subsequently brought together in an interactive artwork made by BAFTA winning games studio PRELOADED which launched over the Earth Day weekend in April.

Later this month Art Fund will publish a report covering the creativity the project inspired alongside an analysis of the impact of the TWE funding, celebrating both innovation and the replicable models that have emerged.

Key learning: We know volunteer and learning teams work hard to deliver programmes like TWE and it often takes more capacity than anyone expects. The result is little (or no) capacity left to tell the community what happened, or when they can join in. We are working on a set of related recommendations that are feasible to add to the running of an event that help enable review and promotion.

The project was inspired by feedback from museums demonstrating a shared priority to reconnect with schools, and to encourage young visitors to experience collections. We're thrilled to report that's what has happened, and 85% of respondents to the teachers' survey said they were planning to return to the museum.

Key learning: Teachers liked using editable resources, adaptable to lesson plans.

We know that TWE enabled school visits to museums; rich and varied experiences that lead to teachers wanting to make repeat visits. We also found wonderful examples of activity in the classroom and community, through online or offline activities, that were also hugely valuable.

Key learning: To reach and nurture new audiences, it is valuable to take the museum to where the young people are – through assemblies, online sessions, and web-based resources. These digital encounters build up the picture of the museum as a positive and relevant place.

The Wild Escape supported Carbon Literacy training, and 'train-the-trainer' sessions for participating organisations. Our report will summarise the commitments made by participating organisations and individuals, the impact of working collaboratively in communities to support nature, and our sector's potential to join the conversation about the climate emergency. Teachers also reported that they felt inspired and equipped to make a difference about biodiversity loss.

"This project did so much more than create awareness of the importance of our environment and how humans must take more responsibility for the direct impact we have on it. It also led to so many other interesting conversations

and mini research topics." Participant from a museum and art gallery, Scotland

This, the largest collective project undertaken to date by museums, galleries, and heritage sites, showed the sector working together to share concerns about climate change and biodiversity loss. The project was amplified through partnerships with BBC, RSPB, WWF-UK, National Trust, English Heritage, Museum Development UK, the Roots & Branches project, and inspired by the BBC's Wild Isles series. 73% of participating museums, galleries and historic houses agreed that they had connected or built relationships with local organisations outside their sector as a result of taking part.

Key learning: Collaborating with local partners can increase your visibility in the community – use social media tools as well as face-to-face meetings and events, offer your building as a meeting point, and signpost new audiences to what you're doing.

Diolch yn fawr/a huge thank you to everyone who helped make The Wild Escape happen!

Once published the report will be available at artfund.org/explore/the-wild-escape, where you can also find links to related films and explore the collective artwork. If you would like more information about The Wild Escape, or any aspect of Art Fund activity, get in touch at museums@artfund.org.



The Wild Escape was made possible by lead support from Arts Council England's National Lottery Project Grants, with additional support from Art Fund, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Kusuma Trust, Foyle Foundation and a group of generous individuals and trusts.

Colin Mulberg highlights how to make the most of connections to your local area to help tackle many of the issues facing museums.

Promoting Localism

Museum and heritage venues face numerous challenges, and a common thread among them is the imperative to focus on the local. By promoting the local area, venues can cultivate stronger connections with visitors, embed themselves within the community, foster partnerships, generate income, support local businesses, contribute to a sense of place, and help address the climate emergency.

The enduring impact of the pandemic has underscored the necessity of forging deeper ties with local visitors. The ongoing decline in tourist visits, influenced by factors such as the cost-of-living crisis, inflation, and international events like airspace closures, indicates a prolonged period of reduced international and national tourism. To navigate this, venues must pivot towards their local audience, capitalising on the sustained interest in local activities that emerged during the pandemic.

Encouraging repeat visits becomes crucial for venues looking to thrive amidst reduced tourist numbers. Give visitors a range of incentives to return – for example, think in terms of seasons for local audiences and not just single events, encourage year-round use, especially outside of peak season. Local audiences often visit for a variety of reasons, and some may visit little and often (e.g. to use the café).

Becoming embedded in the local community requires outreach and partnership initiatives, transforming venues into versatile community assets. This could involve hosting various activities, collaborating on events, leveraging marketing expertise to promote partners, and contributing to local/regional activities and networks. Looking to be highly visible in your local area will help ensure that your venue is used, valued and supported. Bow Street Police Museum, London is a great example of a small museum working to become more prominent in its local area. It has negotiated discounts for visitors at a local café and pub; offers local residents discounts on admission; runs talks for local businesses and joint walking tours with other local venues; participates in local events; holds local participation meetings with the local council, residents, businesses and police and hosts yoga classes in its galleries.



Bow Street Museum working with Royal Opera House to boost its local profile © Bow Street Police Museum/Royal Opera House.

Local procurement emerges as a strategy aligned with post-pandemic preferences, where visitors value the uniqueness of and stories behind locally sourced products. Museums and heritage venues can champion local producers, supporting local businesses and economies while actively contributing to environmental goals by reducing carbon footprints. By tapping into local/regional business networks, these venues can also play a role in business development.

A focus on localism not only aligns with visitors' values but also adds value to their experience. It provides reasons to visit, promotes venues, and enhances a sense of place and local pride. This approach proves highly attractive to visitors and becomes a compelling story worth sharing.

In conclusion, navigating the challenges faced by museum and heritage venues involves considering a strategic shift toward localism. From encouraging repeat visits to becoming integral parts of the local community, championing local businesses, and actively contributing to sustainability goals, prioritizing the local narrative offers a range of possibilities to consider.

*Colin Mulberg is Director of Colin Mulberg Consulting
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