



Association of  
Independent  
Museums

# Impact Report 2023

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

Charity Registration No. 1082215  
Company Registration No. 1350939

# Chair's Introduction

2023 has been a positive year for AIM – the new Arts Council England National Portfolio, in which we receive core funding as an Investment Principles Support Organisation, began in April 2023, providing certainty and enabling a period of strategic thinking. Following a couple of great away days with the Team and the Board, we'll be focused on growth through further strengthening our *partnerships*, *community*, and *voice* over the coming years.

As ever, a major part of our work this year has been grant making and we were pleased to open a new scheme *Connected Communities*, supported by Arts Council England through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's Know Your Neighbourhood programme; continue the National Lottery Heritage Fund *New Stories*, *New Audiences*, now in its third and final year; and introduce the Welsh Government Anti-Racist Wales programme-funded *Re:collections*.

Research is another increasing focus for AIM, and alongside informing our advocacy work, we see it is a crucial spur for innovation and strategic thinking. In 2023 we published two vital new reports: on how museums can connect emotionally with audiences, and an important and practical update of our 2016 admissions research, helping museums around the UK to set charging policies.

Perhaps less positively but no less important, we also supported a number of museums at risk and commissioned new guidance on supporting museums who have no option but to close to do so in a managed and dignified way.

National conference continues to be a major part of our activities and following a wonderful event in Edinburgh last summer, I am excited to welcome our AIM community back to the Black Country Living Museum in 2024; I promise another two days of informative sessions, practical support and good humour.

AIM is a team effort and in 2023 whilst we enjoyed consistency amongst the staff we said goodbye to three Board members: Claire Browne, Brian Gorski, and Gurminder Kenth. Appointing four new trustees brought new perspectives and experiences to our engaged and ambitious Board.

As ever I am grateful to the AIM Team and the trustees for their support to me, and newly appointed Deputy Chair, Rhiannon Goddard, and for their time, expertise, and continued enthusiasm.

I also wish to thank our funders for their support for AIM's work and generosity to our members, including Arts Council England, the Welsh Government, the Pilgrim Trust, and the Worshipful Company of Arts Scholars through the Arts Scholars Charitable Trust.

My final thank you is to the AIM Members, for their continued belief in what we do. Each member makes an investment in the Association, and we strive to ensure a great return on that investment.

The goal is to be an organisation of consequence, and it is inspiring when we join the dots looking back and realise how much, together, we have achieved.

Thank you.



**Andrew Lovett OBE**  
Chair







**Vital grants,  
practical help and  
accessible expertise  
- 2023 in numbers**

## Our Grants

We awarded 114 grants worth a total of £730,573



114  
Awarded



730,573  
Value



223  
Applications



### Connected Communities

Funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport Know Your Neighbourhood Fund through Arts Council England (ACE), AIM's Connected Communities scheme offers support to projects seeking to improve community connections through high-quality volunteering opportunities and/or reducing loneliness and increasing social bonds.



5



£336,413



21

### Pilgrim Trust Conservation Grants

We support small museums in partnership with the Pilgrim Trust through three grant streams - Collections Care Audit, Collections Care and Remedial Conservation - providing much needed funding for basic collections care. £130,262 of funds was distributed to 39 member museums.



39



£130,262



84

### AIM Arts Scholars Brighter Day Grants

The AIM Arts Scholars Brighter Day grants were developed to help museums recover from the ongoing effects of the pandemic. Nine awards were made, totalling £29,369.



9



£29,369



25

### Re:Collections Grants (Wales only)

Funded from the Welsh Government Anti-Racist Wales Culture, Heritage and Sport Fund to support museums to deliver the Culture, Heritage and Sport goals and actions from the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP) and Programme for Government, the Re:Collection programme delivers bespoke consultancy, mentoring, workshops, grants and opportunities to share experience and learning.



3



£54,300



8



### New Stories New Audiences

In our second round of the New Stories New Audiences grant, funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund, £169,039 was awarded to 15 member museums.



14



£169,039



34

### AIM Training Grants

Our popular Training Grants attracted over fifty applications in 2023, and led to the award of 43 grants to support training across the membership.



43



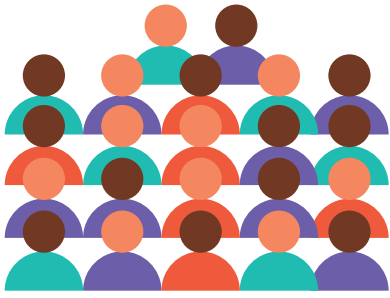
£11,189



51



# Our Programmes



22 participants

## Spark!

14 participants were supported through places on the 2023 Spark! training programme which includes three action learning sets, two workshops and two individual coaching sessions.

22 applications | 14 supported  
(8 offered places on April 2024.)

**“...time well spent, an opportunity to share challenges in a free-speaking environment, network with my peers, reflect on my own leadership behaviours and take away some ideas for improvement...”**

## Network for Resilience Wales (NRW)

Funded by the Welsh Government, the Network for Resilience in Wales enables participants to attend a two-day residential, full day workshops and fortnightly lunch time catch ups.

2 residentials | 18 supported

**“As a new leader I found this programme very useful...meeting other leaders and learning from the experience of guest speakers and the course leader; practical advice.”**



19 Consultancies

## AIM Higher micro-consultancies

We provided 19 AIM Higher consultancies in England and Wales supporting individual museums to identify and tackle governance challenges.

**“ (This) careful assessment of our situation has been extremely helpful... enabling us to think through what constitution works for us and good governance practice”**

## Network for Resilience in Wales Rising Leaders

Aimed at new leaders, applications are open to staff of Museums, Archives or Libraries working in Wales. 15 participants attended 12 sessions including a residential.

1 cohort finished and 1 started in 2023.  
1 residential  
12 sessions  
15 supported in each cohort

**‘...extremely well rounded... invaluable.’**



# Our Events

**215** Delegates

## AIM National Conference, Edinburgh

“I had a fantastic, informative two days in Edinburgh. It was a wonderful opportunity to not only meet other professionals in the sector, but also hear their stories, trials, and triumphs. I’ve gained many ideas to try out within my own organisation, and have confidence that we, too, can make things happen.”

**10** Participants

## Heritage Trustees 101, Oxford

‘I learnt what the role of trustee can look like, and how varied it is! That there is no particular type of person who is ideal to become a trustee - everyone has something to add.’

**370** Supported

## Hallmarks at Home

17 online workshops  
370 supported

‘Very enlightening and loads of great advice and ideas!’



## Welsh specialist skills workshops

12 workshops  
65 supported

## Trustee Induction workshops

Wales 15 attendees  
England 15 attendees

## Supplier Spotlights

4 workshops  
23 attendees

## Grant support sessions

### NSNA

3 workshops  
37 attendees

### Connected Communities

7 workshops  
93 attendees

### Pilgrim Trust

2 workshops  
24 attendees

### Re:Collections

6 x 3-day bespoke consultancies  
7 workshops  
23 attendees

“I feel more confident in taking our anti-racist work forward”



# Our Communications

AIM published two significant new reports in 2023.



## Pleasure, Connection, Purpose

*Pleasure, Connection, Purpose* - Leveraging emotions for museums' was the result of a co-commission with Art Fund to explore how museums can use emotion as a catalyst to action across a vast range of activities.

## Research into admissions pricing policy in museums and its impact

Working with a range of sector partners AIM led on the commission of a new report by DC Research and Durnin Research on admissions pricing policy *Research into admissions pricing policy in museums and its impact*. Research findings were shared at AIM Conference and via a number of popular sector webinars.



## Growing AIM's presence

AIM's integration of its communications efforts again saw progress. Given a period of change in the social media space, we focused efforts on building our LinkedIn and weekly enews. LinkedIn grew by 18% in 2023 and our weekly enews now has 4600 members and more subscribed.

**32500** followers on social media channels

**4600** weekly enews subscribers

**7100** average monthly users of AIM website





Building our  
community





# Our Community

## AIM origins

In the 1970s and 1980s new thematic museums began to spring-up, driven by the enthusiasm of individuals and communities fascinated by the history on their doorstep and the desire to celebrate and preserve it. This resulted in an extraordinary blossoming of a new type of museum – the independents: or as Sir Arthur Drew of the Standing Commission for Museums and Galleries famously put it, “the primordial slime of the museum world.” The Association of Independent Museums was established in 1977 to represent the interests of these new museums. We are now widely recognised as a major heritage organisation, with a membership of over 1,000 institutional museum and heritage organisations of all sizes.

What AIM does is important because what our members do is important. Found on our nation’s high streets, in cities and villages, town and countryside they are the repositories of community memory and a symbol of community togetherness. A strong and effective independent museums sector continues the work of AIM’s pioneers decades ago, enabling people to take control of collections to celebrate, commemorate, and educate people on the past. From the smallest museum on the shortest High St, to some of the UK’s largest visitor attractions, we work hard to ensure every AIM member feels seen, heard and included.

## Membership

AIM membership is predominantly made up of small museums with fewer than 20,000 visitors annually. However, the diversity and scale of membership is remarkable, and includes some of the largest and most visited museums in the UK, many of which hold Designated collections.

Category	Jan 24
Associate Supplier	48
Individual / MDO / Freelancer	72
Large Museum	43
Largest Museum	43
Medium Museum	133
Non-Prof Supp Org/Library/Arch	24
Small Museum	745
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1036</b>

## Helping Heritage Organisations Prosper

We exist to foster strength, resilience and mutual support, listening to our members and helping them with the tools, networks, and resources they need to flourish. Based on our Hallmarks of Prospering Museums, our support, and our challenge, to our members allows museums to define their “best” practices within their unique contexts and strive to achieve it. Our pragmatic approach acknowledges the challenges of running charitable businesses, and aligns with the realities faced by museums. Our intention is to make membership a valuable investment for museums, and we continually evaluate our effectiveness in serving our members’ audiences. AIM’s public benefit lies in enhancing the effectiveness and success of our members who in turn play a vital role in preserving local history, supporting communities, and inspiring future generations. They engage with us to access best practice, participate in sector debates, and to receive support, making AIM an equally crucial stakeholder for decision-makers, philanthropic funders, and bodies providing public investment.

In 2023 AIM was proud to award a total of £730,573 to 114 recipients across our six live grant schemes. This support of almost three quarters of a million pounds, provided by AIM with responsive and flexible grantmaking processes, makes an important difference to museums and their communities across the UK, enabling them to care for their collections, serve their audiences, and improve their skills and knowledge.

Events such as our National Conference provide a popular and enjoyable opportunity for members to get together, and in 2023 over 200 Delegates and speakers from across the UK headed to a beautifully sunny Edinburgh for two days of exploring the advantages, and challenges, currently facing independent museums.

Themes emerged around how best to harness and nurture the passion and ‘start up energy’ of being an independent; valuing wellbeing as fundamental to good business practice, as well as a key outcome that museums can deliver; ensuring AIM’s focus continues to balance strong advocacy work alongside its well-regarded reputation for pragmatic support; and the powerful role creativity can have in articulating the urgency of sustainability.

Our Hallmarks at Home online events strand also drew in good attendance across the year and has become a firm favourite for members since its introduction during the pandemic.

We also launched a new event series, Heritage Trustees 101 with events running in-person as well as online. The sessions are intended to provide a networking space for those either seeking to become a board member of an independent organisation, or those seeking to recruit them. This strand is aligned to our popular trustee induction workshops.







Powering up  
our partnerships



## Our Partnerships

Our key partnerships include the development agencies for museums in the UK: Arts Council England, Museums Galleries Scotland, and the Welsh Government, alongside important grant funders including National Lottery Heritage Fund, Pilgrim Trust and Worshipful Art Scholars Trust. In addition, we deliver value to our members and beyond through close work with Museums Development, National Army Museum, Charity Finance Group and more.

### Public investment

**Arts Council England** is an important partner and much-appreciated funder for AIM. We joined the National Portfolio in 2018 and in 2023 continued our membership under the new Investment Principles Support Organisation designation. AIM receives £305,520 annually, the highest level of support of museums-specific IPSOs and in the top ten of the forty-strong IPSO portfolio in terms of investment amount. This money is crucial to how AIM operates, supporting core costs as well as programmes, and demonstrates the external value placed on AIM's work as part of developing the museums sector as a whole and helping individual museums to flourish.

The **Welsh Government** has supported AIM for many years, with continued delivery during 2023 of two major leadership programmes, *Network for Resilience Wales*, which started in 2016 for senior museum professionals to support one another, and more recently *Rising Leaders for Wales* which brings earlier career museums staff together with those from aligned sectors for peer support and professional development. AIM was also delighted to be selected as a delivery partner for Anti-Racist Wales, with our *Re:Collections* programme helping museums to commit to anti-racist practice. The Welsh Government has also joined with AIM to produce research of UK-wide relevance to the sector.

**Museums Galleries Scotland** (MGS) is an important partner for AIM and appeared at the 2023 National Conference in Edinburgh to speak about the new Scottish Museums Strategy. MGS was also a contributor to the funding for the research on admissions published at the end of the year.

At the end of 2023 AIM ran the third and final round of our **National Lottery Heritage Fund** (NLHF) programme *New Stories, New Audiences*, a strategic investment in museums across the UK which has supported small museums to explore their collections with their communities. NSNA combines peer support and capacity-building with grants, a model that supports museums to build sustainable projects, which we have rolled out across other grant streams since.

In 2023 AIM introduced our major new grant scheme, *Connected Communities*, which is part of the **Department for Culture, Media and Sport** Know Your Neighbourhood programme. This programme, which was open to all museums, offered in round one large grants up to £100,000, and enables museums working in specified areas to carry out projects combatting loneliness and supporting high-quality volunteering opportunities, with the aim of building partnerships and systems in the local areas.



Other generous grant funders include **Pilgrim Trust** and **Arts Scholars Charitable Trust** with whom we are able to offer some of our most popular grants, and in particular support our members to care for collections, as well as make their organisations more inclusive and resilient, and work with local communities.

### Partner supported innovation

In 2023 we offered two schemes (*Re:collections* and *Connected Communities*) building on the grant model we piloted with NLHF *New Stories, New Audiences*, which combines project grants with capacity-building, and we look forward to continuing work with this model which helps upskill museums and enable them to improve their practice in multiple areas as well as deliver exhibitions, research, and programming.

With this model we are truly partners to our grant funders, using their funding to support museums in a more holistic way and create sustainable sector benefit. Over the coming years we expect to seek more partners to fund this kind of work, leveraging our support expertise and grant making capacity with the resources of philanthropic and other funders.

### Building the network

More widely, we are focusing our partnerships on organisations that can enable our members to access other kinds of support and knowledge than where AIM specialises. We are seeking increasingly to work with other Arts Council IPSOs to promote rounded support for small museums in particular. We work in partnership with a number of organisations with different specialisms and audiences to provide our offer, including the *Charity Finance Group*, *Cultural Governance Alliance*, *Heritage Craft Funders Network*, *ICON*, *Museums + Heritage*, and the NLHF funded *Steps to Sustainability* programme. We also intend to start looking further than cultural support organisations to link our members with wider civil society.

Finally, we continue to have an important partnership with *Museum Development* in England, and look forward to building on this with the five newly commissioned MD services from April 2024.

AIM and the *National Army Museum* (NAM) continued its partnership benefitting over 100 Regimental and Corps museums. AIM membership fee costs for relevant, new and existing members are now generously covered by the National Army Museum.







Strengthening  
our voice



## Our Voice

We're proud to be the voice of the independent sector. And we ensure government, funders and stakeholders understand its unique challenges and strengths. Through the commissioning of novel research, focus groups and survey work with members and beyond, we continue to inform and strengthen our work.

In 2023 we worked alongside a range of Arts Council Sector Support Organisations as well as the *National Museums Directors' Council*, *Art Fund*, the *Museums Association*, and *Heritage Alliance* to inform and influence policy and political colleagues in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Welsh Government, and Scottish Government.

Feedback on Martyn's Law, assessments of the impact of energy reliefs, and how the RAAC issue was having an effect on the sector were a few key areas of consultation across the year.

Research is vital to AIM's work and alongside informing our advocacy work, we see it is a catalyst for innovation and strategic thinking. This year we published two vital new reports: on how museums can use emotional drivers throughout their work, and an update to our 2016 admissions research, helping museums around the UK strategise effectively when considering their charging policies. As well as commissioning innovative research we again leveraged the insight and support of our well established Membership Insight Panel and 'state of the sector' surveys to ensure that, when we talk on behalf of our members, we have the crucial access to data and evidence. We are also pleased to sit on sector advocacy groups and arrange visits both to and with our members for relevant ministers and key civil servants to discuss and help bring to life the needs of our part of the sector.

Our multi-channel communications continue to grow and are crucial in supporting both our advocacy efforts and the research that informs it. The bi-monthly print Bulletin remains a popular focus for many of our members' benefit, and comprises sector news, views and comment pieces alongside 'How to' advice and guidance, member profiles and regular grant recipient case studies. Produced for bi-monthly distribution, it is priority mailed to our organisational members and a wide range of opinion formers and key sector stakeholders. Content and features are regularly re-purposed online and are promoted through our popular weekly e-News and across AIM's social media channels.

Those channels have again seen growth in engagement, with **32.5k following** AIM's social media channels, and **4.6k subscribed** to our weekly e-news by the close of 2023, and an average of **7.1k monthly users** of AIM's website.





# Association of Independent Museums

## Trustees / Directors:

Sajida Carr  
Mhairi Cross  
Sarah Duthie  
Rhiannon Goddard  
(Deputy Chair appointed 15 June 2023)  
Brian Gorski MBE (resigned 15 June 2023)  
Nathaniel Hepburn MBE  
Emily Frankish  
Gurminder Kenth (resigned 31 July 2023)  
Andrew Lovett OBE (Chair)  
Charlotte Morgan  
Elizabeth Power  
Camilla Stewart  
Christine Bernath (appointed 15 June 2023)  
Laura Crossley (appointed 15 June 2023)  
Philip Dolling (appointed 15 June 2023)  
Alexander Ratcliffe (appointed 15 June 2023)

## Director (Executive):

Lisa Ollerhead

## Hon. President:

Sir Neil Cossons OBE

## Hon. Vice Presidents:

Sam P Mullins OBE  
Michael Day CVO  
Matthew Tanner MBE

## Company Incorporated:

1 February 1978

## Charity Registration:

30 August 2000

## Charity Registration Number:

1082215

## Company Registration Number:

1350939

## VAT Registration Number:

355372196

## Registered and Contact Office:

AIM Office  
c/o National Waterways Museum  
South Pier Road Ellesmere Port Cheshire  
CH65 4FW  
United Kingdom

## Independent Auditors:

Crowe UK LLP  
Chartered Accountants  
Black Country House  
Rounds Green Road  
Oldbury  
West Midlands  
B69 2DG  
United Kingdom

## Principal Bankers:

Barclays Bank plc (Barclays Corporate)  
Chesterfield  
Derbyshire  
S40 1LS  
United Kingdom

Aldermore Bank plc  
1st Floor, Block B Western House  
Lynch Wood Peterborough  
PE2 6FZ  
United Kingdom

## Telephone:

+44 (0) 333 305 8060

## Email:

[aimadmin@aim-museums.co.uk](mailto:aimadmin@aim-museums.co.uk)

## Website:

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

## Social Media:

@Aimuseums





Association of  
Independent  
Museums

#### Image Credits

Cover | Black Country Living Museum

P2 | Andrew Lovett OBE at Black Country Living Museum

P3 | Image by Darren Andrew showing artist Lela Harris looking at her work at the opening of the Facing the Past exhibition at Judges' Lodgings Museum

P4 | Schoolchildren at Facing the Past exhibition; Specialist conservator working on collection at Stained Glass Museum

P5 | Royal Engineers Museum Making African Connections workshop

P10 | Food Museum's Learning Manager

P11 | Object cleaning at David Livingstone Birthplace Museum

P13 | First aid training at Trimontium Museum

Charity Registration No. 1082215

Company Registration No. 1350939

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

Cover image © Bowes Museum