



Association of  
Independent  
Museums

# AIM Bulletin

August 2023

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New AIM Trustees  
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launched

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A black and white photograph of three young boys in scout uniforms. They are standing behind a table with several cakes. The boy on the left is smiling and looking towards the camera. The boy in the middle is looking slightly to the right. The boy on the right is looking towards the camera. They are all wearing dark scout jackets with neckerchiefs and various patches.

# What's cooking?

**AIM Conference inspires new exhibition**

# Welcome to AIM Bulletin!

www.aim-museums.co.uk

## Making a difference with conservation grants

**The Pilgrim Trust was delighted to announce its renewed partnership with AIM earlier this year, when we awarded £414,000 towards its popular grant scheme for Collections Care Audits and Remedial Conservation over the next three years.**

We started this funding relationship back in 2007 and since then over 500 awards have been made. We are proud of the constancy of our funding relationship, particularly as trusts and foundations, in the face of challenges such as the impact of Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, have tough choices as to where they should direct their funds.

So why do we continue to support this programme? Does it make a difference? In our opinion the answer is a resounding yes!

The grant recipients are small and medium sized museums, with turnovers generally less than £100,000 and mostly volunteer led. The grants provide access to accredited conservation expertise that is not available in house, improves the care of collections, and develops the confidence, knowledge and skills of staff and volunteers with collections care practice.

The pages of this Bulletin regularly feature case studies demonstrating the good use that the recipients have made of the funds. The vast majority of the grants are under £5,000 – and that in itself is noteworthy. Contrary to popular perception, these days it is quite difficult to get small grants – many grant schemes have a de minimis threshold of £5,000–£10,000. In some quarters, there is a perception that the demand for small grants is not there and that such grants are not cost effective or too resource intensive to administer. This is why we highly value AIM as a funding partner with their connections, expertise and in-depth knowledge of the sector. They have designed a simple, straightforward programme tailored for members – many of whom are making their first foray into the funding landscape. These kind of grant programmes are an important part of the funding ecology and help to extend the reach of grants across the UK and to those with the least resources.

AIM's grants are a great example of how a small injection of funding can make substantive improvements for recipients. We look forward to continuing our relationship with AIM over the coming years.

**Sue Bowers**  
Director, Pilgrim Trust



## Front cover

This image of some very proud Cub Scouts is from a new exhibition *Growing up, digging deep: the story of Scouts, food and farming* which opened at the Food Museum in early June. The exhibition explores the story of food and the Scouts through three main themes: grow, make, and eat. The initial idea came together following AIM's National Conference in Port Sunlight in 2022, as Caroline Pantling, Head of Heritage Services for the Scouts explains on page 7.

# Conference 2023: Sun and inspiration in Edinburgh

**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.

Addressing the audience in his closing remarks, AIM Chair Andrew Lovett said

“There’s a well-rehearsed, but no less valuable, adage that ‘none of us are as smart as all of us’ and it could serve as AIM’s strapline. When we come together for this conference collective wisdom and experience bubbles to the surface, and together we are a mighty open source.”

AIM Director Lisa Ollerhead added

“It was great to return to Scotland for the first time since 2016, and to be joined by so many for a wonderful conference. The team are just crunching through the delegate survey as Bulletin goes to press and I am incredibly grateful to those who completed it or otherwise provided feedback.

It’s gratifying to see such a high overall satisfaction rate and equally good to see plenty of useful insights that can help inform our event at Black Country Living Museum next year. We want to maintain the high standards our conference has established, not least as we understand the investment that members make to attend.”

Other attendees highlighted the importance of conference to developing their network, and the mutual support on offer.

*“It can sometimes be difficult to make connections with other small independent museums . . . attending Conference allowed*



me to network with people working in and around the wonderful world of independent museums and reassured me that we are all in this adventure together!”

“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.”

Delegates also took to social channels throughout to share their session highlights. Following the opening plenary with the AIM Board, Isabel Churcher, Strategic Partnerships Manager at The National Archives Sector tweeted

“‘Too many memories and not enough dreams’ it’s so important for museums to influence better futures” Brilliant thoughtful session on the importance of museums and ‘the conversations you generate.’”

Joining conference online, Dominic Jones CEO of the Mary Rose Museum added

“I know I couldn’t make it in person but have to say the virtual Conference was incredible! If I was to borrow a quote from day one ‘independent museums are rockstars!’”

Trustee Camilla Stewart in Wolfson Hall.



## AIM Conference 2024 Speaker Callout

Can you help? We are looking for contributions to our breakout sessions for next year’s Conference. Always a popular part of the programme, these run for 45 minutes and focus on pragmatic advice, real-life examples, and ideas drawn from across the AIM community. For the 2024 event, breakouts will reflect on the following broad themes:

- Community-centred governance (boards making strategic decisions in response to community needs)
- The power of communities telling their own stories
- Building the business case for community (the economic, social and cultural impact of using museum assets for and with the community)
- Safe communities: staff and visitor wellbeing in museums

Find out how to propose a session at: [aim-museums.co.uk/aim-conference-2024-speaker-callout](https://aim-museums.co.uk/aim-conference-2024-speaker-callout)  
Deadline 29 September.

Following approval at the Annual General Meeting and after a successful and competitive recruitment round, four new Trustees have joined the AIM Board.

# AIM appoints new Trustees



**Alex Ratcliffe**



**Philip Dolling**



**Laura Crossley**



**Christine Bernath**

At the AGM Andrew Lovett OBE, AIM Chair expressed the thanks of the Board to Brian Gorski and Claire Browne for their many years' work as they step down and confirmed Rhiannon Goddard as AIM Deputy Chair.

The new appointments who join AIM Board meetings from July onwards are

## Alex Ratcliffe

Alex is Head of Change Strategy & Implementation at the Department for Business & Trade. Prior to this position and following roles in Higher Education, Alex worked in DCMS during the Covid-19 pandemic as the Private Secretary to the Minister responsible for museums and heritage organisations. Alex was part of the team that designed and implemented the Culture Recovery Fund. Alex has considerable experience of engaging with senior level stakeholders, and negotiating between MPs, ministers, organisations, and government departments.

## Philip Dolling

Formerly Head of BBC Events (2012 – 2019) Philip was responsible for the strategic direction and overall management of the BBC's live broadcast operations, covering major national occasions. Philip has experience of chairing and contributing effectively to committees at the highest level and has worked closely with DCMS, Cabinet Office, MOD, and the Royal Communications Team. More recently, his role as a Trustee with the National Museum of the Royal Navy has given him a first-hand understanding of the challenges of running a major operation during Covid-19 and how to deal with the issues arising from the tough economic climate. Philip also brings a thorough training in many areas of the law, marketing, rights, negotiation, and digital security.

## Dr Laura Crossley FRSA

Based in Lancashire, Laura is currently a freelance consultant, and has worked in museums for over a decade. Laura has a strong understanding of the needs of freelancers and the potential opportunity for AIM to champion this area of the sector. Laura has experience of strategic thinking and planning, both from senior in-house roles – most recently as Director of London Historic Buildings Trust (LHBT) and as Head of Content at National Football Museum (NFM) – and freelance consultancy. Laura has an excellent awareness and understanding of the independent museum and heritage sector, having largely worked in and with independent organisations, including in-house roles at Sheringham Museum and NFM. As a freelancer, Laura has worked with several independent museums, including Cambridge Museum of Technology, Stained Glass Museum, Wells Maltings, Long Shop Museum, Crewe Heritage Centre, and British Schools Museum.

## Christine Bernath

Based in London, Christine is Defence and Regimental Museums Partnerships Manager at the National Army Museum (NAM) and has 11-years' experience of working within the regimental museum sector across the breadth of the UK. Christine works with regimental and corps museums serving as their primary point of contact for any support they require from NAM. Christine is a Trustee of the Army Museums Ogilby Trust and has served as an active member of the Association of Scottish Military Museums, a founding member of the Wales and West Army Museums Network, and Chair of the Southern Army Museums Network. Since joining military museums, Christine was inspired to sign-up as an Army Reservist to better understand some of the inner workings of the military

As announced at Conference, an **Environment Hallmark** is being added to AIM's key characteristics of successful museums.



# Launching a new AIM Hallmark

The AIM Hallmarks combine the distilled experience of two generations of leaders of independent, innovative, and imaginative museums, with respected thinking and research.

Since they were first published in 2015, AIM has worked with museums and heritage organisations across the UK to put the Hallmarks' ideas into practice.

## **Draft Environment Hallmark text**

'Environmental awareness is embedded in your organisation and part of every decision. You understand the unique environmental position and potential of your building, collection, and programmes or activities.

You are committed to satisfying increasingly environmentally aware audiences and to telling climate stories. Your team has undergone appropriate training and takes steps to improve environmental impact that are achievable and appropriate for your organisation, while also understanding best practice, where to find resources and ideas, and being ambitious to do more.'

## **Considerations**

- Are we taking whatever steps we can to become more environmentally friendly – even if they're small?
- Do we incorporate the environment into all our decision-making and see it as a source of opportunities as well as challenges?
- Are we carbon literate? Do we understand our baseline environmental impact and how our activities and choices improve or worsen it – both in terms of 'net zero' and other frameworks?
- Do we understand how our collections relate to the environment and do we use them to educate and inspire our visitors on climate crisis and climate justice?

*We're looking for feedback on the draft text of the Environment Hallmark and the resources, support or signposting you would find most helpful. Please do let us know your thoughts on [aimadmin@aim-museums.co.uk](mailto:aimadmin@aim-museums.co.uk) by October 1.*

Inspired by a presentation at AIM Conference 2022, a new exhibition brings together the Scouts and the Food Museum.

# How AIM Conference led to a new exhibition

At AIM we know that conference provides a vital opportunity for member museums to network, listen, learn, and share with colleagues. But we don't always hear about the long-term connections made, or the inspiration that leads to creative action when delegates return home.

So, it was with great delight we heard about a partnership between the Scouts Heritage Service and the Food Museum that has led to *Growing up, digging deep: the story of Scouts, food and farming* which opened at the Food Museum in early June. The exhibition explores the story of food and the Scouts through three main themes: grow, make, and eat. From learning to use a horse and plough, responding to the needs of a country in wartime, to planning expedition menus and exploring new cultures, it considers how Scouts have evolved and responded to stay relevant.

The initial idea came together following AIM's National Conference in Port Sunlight in 2022, as Caroline Pantling, Head of Heritage Services for the Scouts explains.

"As most of our collection is in storage, we've always looked for opportunities to work in partnership with other organisations, particularly to tell stories that people don't expect, reach new audiences and be able to encourage Scouts to make use of their local heritage assets."

Following recent work with schools and other charities on how Scouts have

supported refugees and displaced peoples, Caroline's team knew they wanted to do another outreach project and develop work that could be replicated across the UK. But they had yet to settle on a topic.

"I was sitting (at AIM Conference) listening to Jenny (Cousins, Director of Food Museum) talking about their themes around *grow, make and eat* and their desire to become more embedded in their local communities.

By the end of her talk, I had almost written an exhibition structure on how we could work together! I briefly collared Jenny over a cup of tea, and we took it further forward just after Christmas. Jenny's presentation was a key driver to the development of the exhibition idea, which we opened 1 June."



"We curated the exhibition around The Food Museum's *grow make eat* themes over two rooms, all supported by a sustainable and flexible display system. We've material going from 1908 through to the Scouts helping at last year's Queen's lying in state. As you couldn't take food into

Westminster Hall there was a lot of stuff being thrown away, so Scouts contacted the Felix Project – a charity who distribute unsellable fresh food to those in need – and within 48 hours the food was being collected, saved, and distributed – a really nice community impact story."

Given the Scouts community is found all over the country, a ready-made infrastructure of potential audiences, Caroline is hoping to tour the exhibition and is currently looking for other venues.

"For us, it's a great opportunity to tell our more unusual stories, it's not all 'tying knots or going camping', there's a lot more to our heritage. We're an ongoing movement that's constantly evolving".

**Interested in finding out more?**

Contact Caroline on [Caroline.Pantling@scouts.org.uk](mailto:Caroline.Pantling@scouts.org.uk) or visit [foodmuseum.org.uk/events/growing-up-digging-deep-the-story-of-scouts-food-and-farming](http://foodmuseum.org.uk/events/growing-up-digging-deep-the-story-of-scouts-food-and-farming)

Top, the exhibition responds to Food Museum's *Grow Make and Eat* themes. Left, the plates on display have been decorated by local children in the Beavers.



The Food Museum provided the venue, with Caroline and her team curating and developing the exhibition and covering production costs. Caroline also reached out to the local Scout District, who have been closely involved in the exhibition, providing pictures of local Scout learning activities to add homegrown interest and engagement to the exhibition.

# News in brief

## Funding success for the Mapping Museums team

The Arts and Humanities Research Council has awarded £1million to the Mapping Museums research team at Birkbeck and King's College London for their project 'Museum Closure in the UK 2000-2025'.

The new research will use trans-disciplinary methods to analyse closure and collections dispersal within the UK museums sector. Its aim is to examine the geographic distribution of closure, to better understand types of closure (e.g., whether museums are mothballed or disbanded), and to document the flows of objects and knowledge from museums in the aftermath of closure.

The team will investigate the afterlife of collections, find out if museum exhibits are scrapped, sold, stored, or re-used, and examine 'outreach' and temporary museums. Above all, the project seeks to critically reassess notions of permanence and loss within the museums sector.

## AIM members recognised in King's first Birthday Honours

The first Birthday Honours under the reign of the new King acknowledged the outstanding contributions of professionals in the museums and heritage sectors. AIM members recognised included John Barnes, Chief Executive of Historic Royal Palaces, who has been honoured with an OBE

for his exceptional services to heritage.

John Reid, Chair of Trustees at Trimontium Museum has been recognised with an MBE for his services to culture and heritage in Scotland.

Prodaman Sarwal has been involved at Board level with the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust and Master Ropemakers Ltd for over 20 years and has been awarded an MBE for services to heritage and to the charitable sector.

Others on the honours list included Duncan Henry Wilson OBE, the Chief Executive of Historic England. Wilson, previously awarded the OBE in 2015, has now been appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for his significant contributions to heritage.

Rachel Tranter-Needham, Director of the Group for Education in Museums (GEM), has been awarded an MBE for her exceptional services to museums, heritage, and the arts.

## Her Majesty The Queen opens Garden Museum's British Flower Week exhibition

The theme for this year's exhibition was New Beginnings, inspired by fresh starts, budding new growth, changing seasons and an optimistic step forward for the floral industry. Her Majesty met the floral designers, toured the installations and was led around the Museum by Alan Titchmarsh, President of the Garden Museum, and Royal Florist Shane Connolly, who designed the floral arrangements at Westminster Abbey for the Coronation. British Flowers Week champions British-grown flowers, sustainable floristry and the talent in floral design found across the country.

[gardenmuseum.org.uk](http://gardenmuseum.org.uk)



Her Majesty The Queen meets Antony Burger, founder of Mahal Kita Flowers at the Garden Museum's British Flowers Week exhibition, photo by Graham Laddao.



## International Association of Transport and Communication Museums – save the date!

Taking place in London from 24-27 September, the IATM conference theme explores the Post Pandemic Museum and will look at three significant components for a sustainable museum in the post-pandemic world: relevance to the society around us, maintaining strong corporate relationships and operating collections as working assets.

Potential delegates can find out more and respond to a current call for papers at

[www.iatm.museum/iatm-45th-annual-conference-in-london](http://www.iatm.museum/iatm-45th-annual-conference-in-london)

## Developing a Community of Practice for the AIM/Art Fund Emotions research

Launched at the recent Annual Conference in Edinburgh, AIM and Art Fund are keen to establish a 'community of practice' for those using or planning to use the recent research report *Pleasure, Connection, Purpose: How museums can leverage emotions to build greater public support*.

The report, funded by AIM and Art Fund and authored by M.E.L Research, looks at how museums can better understand the emotions that drive public support and how they might use that knowledge across subsequent campaigning and museum work.

The Community of Practice will be guided by the priorities of the group, provide mutual support in planning how to use the research, and share lessons learned.

It is hoped that those participating will draw even more value from this fascinating report, as well as offer potential case studies for further dissemination in due course.

Three meetings will take place online over the course of a year, starting in September 2023.

*Interested in taking part? Simply sign up by the end of August 2023 by visiting [aim-museums.co.uk/pleasure](http://aim-museums.co.uk/pleasure)*



Print depicting a fish hawk from *Birds of America*, by John James Audubon. Image © National Museums Scotland.

## Birds of America lands at Compton Verney

*Birds of America* (1 July – 1 October 2023) reveals the artistry and legacy of one of the world's rarest, most coveted and – at almost 1-metre in height – largest books. Compton Verney is the first museum to host this exhibition, as it begins its UK tour from National Museums Scotland.

When it was first published as a series between 1827 and 1838, *Birds of America* was instantly recognised as a landmark work of ornithological illustration. It achieved international

renown, not only due to the epic scale of Audubon's ambition to paint every bird species in North America, which took almost 12 years to complete, but also the book's spectacular, life-sized illustrations.

Most of the works have never been shown in public and have undergone years of conservation treatment in preparation for this exhibition. Also featuring letters, books, manuscripts, photography, projections and films, the show explores how *Birds of America* came to influence natural sciences and asks what can we learn from its controversial legacy.

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



# Museums Galleries Scotland update

## Eithne Ní Chonghaile, Head of Strategy and Communications, Museums Galleries Scotland on collaboration and the importance of working together.

Pooling resources has never felt so important as museums face the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, but collaboration can bring additional benefits beyond savings.

These beneficial outcomes are outlined in the strategy for Scotland's museums and galleries collaboration priority area: "Scotland's museums and galleries will collaborate in and outside of the sector to tackle challenges, maximise opportunities, create efficiencies, and deliver mutual benefits for partners and communities."

The positive impact of collaboration can be seen in museums across Scotland. Some examples include:

### Sharing costs, maximising impact

The Govan Stones and Fairfield Heritage in Govan, an area in Glasgow, combined

their knowledge and resources to increase the impact of their marketing. This led to an exciting campaign which promoted both venues in adverts on the Glasgow Underground.

### Building partnerships

Successful engagement with charities, businesses, and community groups was essential to the success of the year-long Health, Wealth and Happiness project at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery.

### Collaborations outside of the heritage sector to help diversify the museum workforce

In partnership with Developing the Young Workforce, MGS are delivering the Postcode Culture Trust-funded project *Workforce for The Future*. We are working with museums and schools in lower Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) areas. The project will be delivered in eight different council areas in Scotland over two years. Pupils will work to co-create a resource with a local museum, learning about the diversity of job roles in the sector and increasing their employability skills.

### Highlighting the range of stories in an area

Museums and Heritage Highland worked with 15 museums to develop Museum of the Highlands, a digital engagement and education hub which

showcases hundreds of objects in creative and interactive ways.

### Increasing the diversity and reach of an events programme

MGS collaborated with VisitScotland, with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and Scottish Government, to offer funding to community groups to share their stories as part of the Year of Stories themed year. 180 projects received funding resulting in the delivery of over 1,000 events and activities. The recently published project evaluation highlights how the collaboration substantially increased the overall diversity and reach of the *Year of Stories Themed Year*.

For further information on collaboration the MGS website has advice guides, blogs, and training programmes to support museums with forging collaborations in and outside the sector.

If you are considering collaborations in the Scottish museum sector, then check out the map of museums and galleries in Scotland on the MGS website. The map is a directory for the sector with contact information for each museum and examples of work being undertaken.

**Pictured, Arctic Ventures – Forgotten Stories of Scottish Whaling at The Scottish Fisheries Museum, part of the Year of Stories 2022 events programme.**

**Having a Youth Trustee on the Council of Management has put a completely different light on the work of the Waterworks Museum Hereford explains Jill Phillips, Chair of Trustees and Governance Director**

# Forging ahead with youth recruitment

The Waterworks Museum Hereford is an independent working museum concerned primarily, but not exclusively, with the story of the supply of water for public consumption from earliest habitation to the close of the 20th century. The museum is recognised as a specialist museum that brings industrial heritage to life and is wholly run by volunteers.

We've recently had a Youth Trustee on the Council of Management and their inspiration to all the volunteers has been phenomenal and made a huge difference in changing attitudes and opinions.

## How did we secure a Youth Trustee?

We didn't actually! The first, Alex Rowe, walked into the museum one day and asked to become a volunteer. The museum Chair at the time recognised that the museum would benefit from a young person's perspective on how the museum was run and it wasn't long before Alex brought a new dimension to the team. Alex was subsequently nominated and winner of the West Midlands Museum Development Young Volunteer Award in 2019.

Alex was studying to become a Blacksmith at Herefordshire and Ludlow College which gave the museum a direct route to establish a link. When Alex finished his course and his term of Trustee work, another Blacksmith Apprentice became a volunteer and trustee, Stan Lawler. He is a member of the British Artist Blacksmith Association and has recently planned and led the hosting of members of this association at the museum, demonstrating forging techniques.



Top, Alex Rowe at Waterworks Museum Hereford. Above, Stan presenting his gift to the Lord Lieutenant during the Queens Award for Voluntary Service presentation. Photo taken by Richard Curtis.

## Advice for those seeking younger Trustees

To me, gaining contacts and building relationships is fundamental. As well as having the link to the Blacksmith Apprentice programme, we have also made a determined effort to engage with local recruitment events and have developed collaborative projects with other colleges in the area such as Hereford Art College and the New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering

in Herefordshire. This approach provides benefits for all partners; through discussing various projects that would support student skills development alongside the need or gap in volunteer skills for the museum.

An example being the recent interaction with photography students that wanted to gain experience of audio-visual skills for their career portfolios. These students interviewed and recorded our volunteer engineers with the engines they were responsible for. These fantastic records will be available in the future through online archives as part of our collection.

Seeking out the various post-16 colleges in your area is a good starting point. Be sure to consider what skill set is missing at your museum and identify or audit these as priorities for collaborative work and outline the dual benefits of these to possible contributors. Many universities require work placements, and these may well be for students in your area.

Finally, recognising that youth trustees are likely only to be on your Board for a short period is important, but we have found the gains immense in that time. Not just internally for the museum, but also in our outreach to other young people and in encouraging and motivating our future engineers and industrial skills base.

Stan Lawler spoke about this when he gave a speech as part of our presentation and celebration of receiving the Queens Award for Voluntary Service in October 2022:

"As the youngest volunteer here, I think that what we do best is to keep the doors open for the next generation".

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



# Heritage crafts recognised as being endangered

**The Heritage Crafts Association (HCA), the national charity for traditional heritage crafts, has declared silk ribbon weaving a critically endangered craft.**

Research has revealed that 17 heritage crafts are now critically endangered and at risk of dying out in the next generation. Silk Ribbon weaving, practised at Whitchurch Silk Mill, is one of those crafts at serious risk of no longer being practised in the UK.

## A New Collections Significance Toolkit for Welsh Museums

**It's been ten years since the Welsh Government published its last collections significance assessment toolkit, 'Why do we have it? A Significance Process and Template', and the world is now a very different place. The new toolkit takes a new approach. It's time to bring clarity, communities and conversations to the process.**

In late summer 2022, Welsh Government appointed Headland Design Associates to develop a new toolkit, which could be used across the sector but with the Welsh context at its heart. The team embarked on consultation with colleagues in Wales, first through an online survey and then conversations and focus groups.

The consultees were wide-ranging, from volunteer-run organisations, independent museums and heritage sites to those caring for local authority, university and national collections. Staff at Amgueddfa Cymru were involved throughout in an advisory capacity. Respondents gave feedback on the previous collections review and significance assessment projects they'd undertaken, the tools they'd used, what did and didn't work well, and whether they'd involved any associated communities.

There are five silk ribbon weavers in the UK, with two of these employed at Whitchurch Silk Mill. Other critically endangered crafts are arrow smithing, chain and straw hat making.

Heritage Crafts define critically endangered crafts as: “Those with very few practitioners, few (if any) trainees and a lack of viable training routes by which the skills can be passed on. Often, they serve very niche markets, and craftspeople cannot afford to step away from production to train their successors for fear those markets will disappear.”

The Red List of Endangered Crafts was created by the Heritage Crafts Association in 2017 to raise awareness about disappearing traditional skills in the UK. This is the first time they’ve updated the list since 2021. Since the publication of the 2021 edition, one craft (mouth-blown flat glass making) is known to have become extinct in the UK.

“The effect of the energy crisis, inflation, Covid-19 and Brexit has been tough on everyone, not least

the craftspeople who possess our most fundamental craft skills,” says Mary Lewis, who led the research on behalf of Heritage Crafts.

“We know heritage craft skills operate like an ecosystem; losing one part can devastate other parts of the system. If we allow endangered crafts to disappear, we seriously diminish the opportunities for future generations to create their own sustainable and fulfilling livelihoods and deal with future challenges.”

## “ The Red List of Endangered Crafts has made us realise exactly what we are at risk of losing. ”

In 2023, silk weaving has been classified as ‘endangered’, which means there are currently enough craftspeople to transmit the craft skills to the next generation but there are serious concerns about ongoing viability. There are now just three silk-weaving companies, including

Gainsborough, Stephen Walters, and Whitchurch Silk Mill.

Heritage Crafts Co-Chair Jay Blades MBE (best known for the TV series *The Repair Shop*), says: “When craft skills are in danger of dying out, it’s important that we know exactly where to focus our efforts.

“Over recent years, the Red List of Endangered Crafts has made us realise exactly what we are at risk of losing and has given our team at Heritage Crafts the information we need to direct our support most effectively.”

In the last few years, the recently retired Senior Weaver at Whitchurch Silk Mill passed on her skills to two trainee Weaver Tacklers. Shannon Bye and Olivia Goldsmith are now employed at the Mill full-time. However, the heritage skills that ensure the continuation of the Mill are still critically endangered. The Mill plays a huge part in helping to safeguard the future of silk weaving skills, teaching future generations this important heritage craft.

[whitchurchsilkmill.org.uk](http://whitchurchsilkmill.org.uk)

This consultation, alongside a study of existing toolkits from the UK, Australia, Finland and the Netherlands, informed the team’s thinking and contributed towards the formulation of the toolkit’s structure. At the beginning of 2023, pilot studies and training sessions tested the toolkit’s processes and feedback refined the guidance.

The aim was to produce an easy-to-use toolkit; something that would work for a wide range of users, from those with little to no experience of significance assessments, to those with prior knowledge. This fed into the development of a four-stage process: planning your approach; collections review; significance assessment and review and reassessment of the project. Tasks are organised clearly, guiding users through a logical process, with a set of tools that can be tailored to meet the needs of the organisation, its collections and those working on the project.

At the significance assessment stage, four Action Plans have been designed to help museums achieve different assessment goals: defining the status of collections; informing rationalisation; assisting with acquisitions and making interpretive decisions. Scored matrices are out and

conversations are in. Those using the toolkit are encouraged to take a more philosophical and qualitative approach, engaging in conversations with colleagues, communities and those with specialist knowledge to inform significance decisions. These conversations are guided by assessment criteria listed on Prompt Sheets for each Action Plan. The toolkit advises that external verification through peer review is then sought to confirm the assessment conclusions made.

Community involvement is highlighted as a key part of this process: the identification and engagement of people associated with collections to incorporate their thoughts, knowledge and lived experience. No greater importance is placed on potential national or international significance; objects with local and community relevance are of equal value, especially if they help to connect people with collections. Presenting opportunities for new voices to contribute their thoughts is vital to ensure we are making the right significance decisions for our communities and their collections.

[www.gov.wales/collections-significance-assessment-toolkit-welsh-museums](http://www.gov.wales/collections-significance-assessment-toolkit-welsh-museums)

# Spark! 2023/2024 session dates confirmed

Image by David Zanella on Unsplash

**AIM's Spark! programme is perfect if you are looking to reignite your creativity, re-energise your teams and face the future for your organisation with confidence.**

## Who is the Spark! programme for?

This is a programme for those who are motivating and leading the overall team in their museum. We particularly welcome people with a significant leadership role, including individual museum directors and other senior leaders. As the programme is funded by Arts Council England, priority will be given to applicants in England.

## Delivery features

The programme is delivered online to a cohort of around 12 participants and includes:

- 3 x 3-hour Action Learning Sets (two groups of six)
- 2 x 2-hour workshops to cover topics selected by you. We will work with you to shape the workshop content and adjust the programme to fit the varied needs, roles, and backgrounds of participants.

You will also be offered two, individual, hour-long coaching sessions.

## When is it?

Programme running October 2023 – January 2024, with applications due by 15 September.

- Workshop 1: 2pm – 4pm Tuesday 10 October 2023
- Action Learning Set 1: 10am – 1pm Friday 10 November 2023
- Workshop 2: 2pm – 4pm Tuesday 14 November 2023
- Action Learning Set 2: 10am – 1pm Friday 1 December 2023
- Action Learning Set 3: 2pm – 5pm Tuesday 16 January 2024

## How to apply

To register your interest and find out more email Margaret Harrison, Head of Programmes at AIM on [margaret@aimmuseums.co.uk](mailto:margaret@aimmuseums.co.uk) with:

- Your name, role, and organisation
- What you think will be the key challenges of the next 6 – 12 months
- What you hope to get out of the programme, both personally and for your organisation
- What the most challenging situation for you and your organisation has been in the last 18 months
- How many staff your museum has
- Whether your funding been cut, grown, or stabilised in the last 18 months

Participants are asked to make £100 contribution towards the programme, which will be invoiced once their place has been confirmed.

**Deadline for applications: Friday 15 September 2023**

**Richard Sagar, Head of Policy at CFG, shares the latest policy updates and looks ahead to what's on the charity finance radar for the rest of 2023.**



# School's out – for now

There are two certainties in life – death and taxes. If there were to be a third, I'd say policy changes. The first half of 2023 has kept the policy team at CFG on its toes, not least because the wheels of government continue to turn (albeit slowly!). If you're responsible for finance or governance, here are some of the areas you might want to keep abreast of . . .

## Charity Tax Compliance

HMRC has published a consultation on charity tax compliance. It's seeking views on tainted charity donations, approved charitable investments, non-charitable expenditure, and charity filing obligations.

The aims are to prevent donors from obtaining a financial benefit from their donation, prevent abuse of the charitable investment rules, close a gap in non-charitable expenditure rules, and sanction charities that do not meet Filing and Payment Obligations.

We support moves that tackle tax avoidance and abuse, but we believe it is also important that measures are proportionate and do not have an unnecessarily adverse impact on compliant charities. We're now working with sector partners to respond to the consultation and we're keen to hear from any organisation that might be impacted by the proposals. Please email to share your thoughts or concerns on the consultation questions.

## New service for accessing government grants

The government has launched its new 'Find a Grant Digital Service'. They

have made it simpler, faster, fairer and free to apply for government grants. The service can be used to access government grant funding, search and filter to find a grant that matches your needs, find out if you are eligible to apply for a grant, and how to find out how to apply.

So far, more than 200 schemes – worth over £5.3bn – have already been advertised. Soon all eligible government grants will be advertised through the online portal. And the government is working with the devolved administrations and local authorities to offer them the opportunity to advertise on Find a Grant too. If you want to be alerted when new grants are added, register for a weekly email.

## CFG responds to HMRC consultation on VAT relief

Following a survey of member charities, CFG responded to the government's recent consultation on VAT energy saving materials (ESM) relief. We've called on government to reinstate the relief, arguing that additional support is crucial for charities if they are to meet their environmental obligations.

A survey of members indicated the vast majority of respondents were intending to install ESMs (84%) with controls for central heating and hot water systems, solar panels and insulation being the most popular measures. Two thirds of respondents (75%) said that VAT relief was

important in deciding whether or not to install energy saving measures. We look forward to HMRC responding to the consultation and ultimately the VAT relief being reinstated.

## New powers from Charities Act 2022 come into force

A new wave of changes introduced by the Charity Act 2022 giving new powers and flexibility to charities came into effect on 14 June 2023. The changes concern: selling, leasing or otherwise disposing of charity land; using permanent endowment; and charity names.

We're now well into the second half of the year and looking ahead we'll be getting ready for our Gift Aid Awareness Day campaign on Thursday 5 October, and sharing the results of a survey on charity buildings and energy usage that you're sure to find interesting. Keep an eye out for more details on those and please get involved!

We'll also be working with our voluntary sector partners on our 'asks' of government ahead of the Autumn Statement. And we'll continue our work across different sectors on issues such as banking, investment and net zero, among many others.

No doubt there'll be plenty more to report on later in the year but, in the meantime, the CFG team would like to wish you a sunny and safe summer!

[www.cfg.org.uk/AIM](http://www.cfg.org.uk/AIM)

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# Practical tips to maximise your Museums and Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief claim

## The extension to the sunset clause of the Museums and Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief (MGETR) is great news, says Associate Supplier, Mo Suleman.

AIM, along with others in the sector, was successful in getting the sunset clause of MGETR extended for another two years. This is fantastic news and a great opportunity for organisations to claim cash back and prove the necessity of this tax relief to the sector. Having been involved with MGETR since its inception and made claims to HMRC during my time at

Derby Museums, I've picked up a few practical tips that can help maximise your claim, but also make the process easier by ensuring the information you need is readily available.

- Make a list of all the exhibitions that you have or plan to have. Where there is a major capital project, ensure you identify all the gallery/exhibition spaces that are created. This is important as there is a limit to how much relief is available per exhibition, so the more you can break down the better.
- Have a central point where this list of exhibitions can be saved. I would create a separate spreadsheet for each year, and then have a tab for each exhibition, populated with all the relevant information like Dates, Location, Touring or Non-Touring. Each tab should have a heading for

the type of expenditure it is e.g., staff costs, installation, transport, digital, loan costs, venue costs, insurance, admin etc.

- When a meeting takes place to discuss exhibitions or you incur a cost specific to an exhibition, make a note of it on the spreadsheet. This means that costs are easily identified by exhibition and any missing costs can be plugged into the spreadsheet.
- Encourage staff to record the time spent on each exhibition on a weekly basis. This should include thinking time, research time, discussions, brainstorming etc. A lot of work takes place which is often overlooked and not captured. Doing this weekly ensures it's fresh in the memory to capture as much time as possible.

**Mo Suleman, FFCA**

*Mo is offering to support AIM members claiming MGETR with a fee waiver/'no win no fee' approach. Contact him to find out more*

**Akhtar\_suleman@hotmail.com • 07725 070 235**

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# Spalding Gentlemen's Society

## Our Museum and Collections

Founded in 1710, Spalding Gentlemen's Society (SGS) is Britain's oldest provincial learned society and second-oldest museum. From a small coffee-house gathering the SGS quickly grew into a sprawling national and international membership network with a museum, library and archive at its heart. The 'Original Collection' of more than 5,000 items survives from the 18th century, largely intact (and in the original cabinets!), in the modern museum.

During the 19th century, collecting focused on the library and lending and discussing books became the Society's primary activity. In 1911 the members raised money to erect the purpose-built museum that remains our home today. The collections expanded rapidly and have continued to grow ever since. Visitors enjoy exploring our Edwardian 'cabinet of curiosities' which can now be visited virtually on our website.

The collections are eclectic, global and often unique. The 'Original Collection' is a key resource for the history of museums and collecting, and provincial life in the Enlightenment. We house early accounts of India, the Caribbean and the Americas; medieval manuscripts; Victorian ethnographic collections from Africa and Oceania; hundreds of early prints and maps; archaeological specimens from across the globe; an important textile and costume collection; more than 2000 glass plate negatives; and objects relating to the history of everyday life in Britain from the Iron Age to the 21st century.

## How we Operate

Despite our historic name, membership of the SGS is open to anyone over 18; our museum and activities are open to all ages.

We open free to the public five days a week, in addition to special events and tours. We're volunteer-run: the museum staff includes one full-time Collections Care and Administrative Assistant, and a part-time caretaker. Everyone else, including the Curator, Librarian & Archivist, Conservator, Treasurer, Engagement Coordinator, volunteer their time and expertise.

A team of approximately 90 volunteers play a crucial role in the museum. They act as stewards, conserve and digitise the collections, carry out object research, and help design and install exhibitions.

Our funding comes from the annual subscriptions of our members (400 and counting), visitor donations, and grant funders. In recent years funding from AIM, ACE, MDEM, and the Leche Trust have enabled us to open a collections store, with dedicated conservation and digitisation studios.

## Activities and Community

Our popular lecture series brings speakers to Spalding 12 times a year, while monthly coffeehouses and annual symposia provide opportunities for members and visiting researchers to share their work. We offer regular placements for GCSE, A-level and degree students. We also collaborate with university partners to co-supervise MA and PhD students whose dissertations draw on the collections, and maintain an active research programme focused on the collections and historic membership.

In recent years we have focused on highlighting the diversity represented in our collections and membership. New exhibitions have aimed at understanding the colonial networks from which our early collections grew, and have explored the numerous immigrant communities



who have played a role in Spalding's past and present.

We've recently begun a schools programme during term-time and in the holidays, expanding our programming for younger audiences and families. Art, poetry, music and hands-on conservation and archaeology workshops allow us to test new ideas and ways of ensuring the museum is open and accessible to everyone.

## Looking Forward

Our biggest challenge is our building which, while beautiful, is in need of extensive repairs and is no longer big enough to house the collections or allow us to continue to expand our programming and accessibility. We are currently at the start of a long-term capital campaign to stabilise our 1911 museum, expand into a neighbouring site, and grow our impact locally and farther afield. In a few years' time we aim to be the fully-open, public-facing museum and cultural hub so needed in South Lincolnshire.

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

From top, Collections and displays of SGS archive, library and museum collections; Eighteenth-century tidal clock made by William Bothamley of Kirton, Lincolnshire; Volunteers at work in the SGS conservation studio.



# AIM Membership Survey 2023

**The recently conducted AIM Membership Survey has provided valuable insights into the performance, perceptions, and needs of AIM members.**

With 194 valid responses received from individual members, freelancers, and Associate Suppliers, the survey provides a representative view of AIM membership in terms of museum size and geographic location.

## Performance and Perceptions

The satisfaction levels regarding the “value for money” offered by AIM have remained stable since 2016 and 87% of respondents rated AIM as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’ in delivering its core purpose of *helping heritage organizations prosper*, consistent with previous surveys. AIM is highly regarded for its knowledge, relevance, awareness of current issues, and provision of useful services.

This year’s survey also includes museum size segments, enabling the AIM team to better understand the differing needs and perspectives of members dependent on their size.

The top-rated AIM services include advocacy and representation to policy makers and funders, grant-giving programs, and being part of a like-minded community. Larger museums in particular value AIM’s sector research and place a greater importance on conferences and making connections with other members.

## Museums’ Needs

Open responses regarding the key reasons for being an AIM member aligned with the top-rated services, emphasising the importance of AIM as the voice of the independent museum sector, the value of being part of a community of like-minded museums, and AIM as a source of relevant support, practical advice, guidance, and grants.

The areas where members express the greatest interest in future support are developing staff and volunteers, improving digital activity, and understanding current and potential audiences. This represents a shift from the previous survey conducted during lockdown, perhaps reflecting post-pandemic priorities.

## State of the Sector

The Survey included questions on perceptions of performance first included in snap surveys during the pandemic, to assess how this has changed over time.

In terms of overall organisational performance over the last 12 months, 48% of respondents reported meeting expectations, 30% reported performance above expectations, and 22% reported performance below expectations. This represents a more positive outlook compared to earlier surveys, and/or organisations’ altered expectations given the current economic context. AIM is looking to explore this further, and more qualitatively, via the Membership Insight Group.

Half of respondents (53%) said their organisation can absorb increased costs in the short term or haven’t experienced any impact, while 20% cannot increase visitor prices without decreasing demand. The situation appears similar to the September survey, suggesting a degree of stability for AIM members.

A small percentage (3%) of respondents indicated that they are unable to meet increased costs, putting their organisations at risk. AIM has reached out to these respondents to offer further support.

Mitigation strategies to counter increasing costs remain consistent with the earlier surveys, with museums planning to reduce energy consumption, outgoings, and broadening strategies to increase income. Notably, fewer museums plan to reduce opening days/hours or make redundancies, while more are exploring income generation options.

Respondents planning to increase income aim to do so through retail and hospitality, events and corporate hire, and admissions. The percentage of respondents who believe they have no options to increase income has decreased since the previous survey.

A majority of respondents (68%) have not scaled down planned activity for the year, indicating a level of optimism for the future.



The AIM team (left to right): Matt Smith, Helen Farness, Margaret Harrison, Catrin Salvatore, Fiona Woolley, Christine Andrews and Lisa Ollerhead.

## AIM Bulletin

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