



Association of
Independent
Museums

AIM Bulletin

February 2025

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tickets on sale



Firing the imagination!

TimeScape Rhayader

Rural mid Wales' newest attraction

Welcome to AIM Bulletin!

Advocacy with urgency

AIM Director Lisa Ollerhead looks ahead.

Many of you will be looking ahead. From the end of winter to better weather, eager audiences . . . but perhaps also increased costs. Messages coming from the media and Westminster Government perhaps echo winter gloom rather than forthcoming sunny days as conditions continue to challenge. How should we respond?

I wrote recently about the value of advocacy – what AIM does on your behalf, and with sector colleagues, and how you can advocate for your own organisation – particularly through using our Economic Impact Toolkit. We continue our advocacy work with ever more urgency this year and are asking you to do so as well. In part, this is because we are preparing for a Comprehensive Spending Review in Westminster, which will set spending levels for the coming years, including for Arts Council England, and via settlements to the devolved governments. We expect this to be announced by June, which gives a bit of extra time to make the case. At the national level we are hearing strong messages that economic growth is the priority. The creative industries have been identified as a British success story, one of eight industries the Government will focus on over the next few years. Museums are part of this – a foundational sector, in the language of the Industrial Strategy – and we are working with Art Fund and National Museum Directors' Council at speed to ensure we can make

the argument effectively as to why museums and heritage need to be supported for the creative industries to do better.

At AIM Conference last year, I was asked for tips on advocating to local decision-makers. I believe the key to any advocacy work is understanding what the people you're advocating to *want*, and being able to tell them *how you will help them to achieve it*. At the local level, your councillors and councils, MPs, and other voluntary organisations likely all want the same thing as you: a happy, healthy, educated and inspired community. Local advocacy is showing how your museum or heritage site helps make that happen.

We encourage you to contact and involve your MPs. Letters from MPs to Government are taken seriously because they show something is important to a local area and its constituents. You can use the Economic Impact Toolkit to show your financial value to your local area (a language local and central government speak best, or at least most), audience data you collect shows who visits and how much they enjoy it, and anecdotes about particular exhibitions, programmes, activities, or visitors demonstrate your contributions. If your MP hasn't been to your museum recently, invite them in to see what you do, and ask them to share it with DCMS and ask for support for museums, now, and in the future. Our recently redesigned website holds useful resources that can help in your advocacy work, including the Economic Impact work and *Pleasure, Connection, Purpose* research published in 2023 on how museums can build greater support.

Finally, a belated Happy New Year from myself and the team. And do let us know how you get on with your MP!



Front cover

This Dragon made as a millennium project by artist Richard Taylor is an Ouroboros, representing cycles of regeneration, renewal, and hope. Her recycled scales were beaten by people both local and abroad, and marked to celebrate someone they loved. The mix of arts, heritage, and symbolism that she embodies creates an impactful metaphor – she fires the imagination! Read more on TimeScape Rhayader/Amserwedd Rhaeadr Gwy on page 18. Photograph by Ruth Rees.

We sought reflections from our incoming Chair Rhiannon Goddard and our outgoing Chair Andrew Lovett OBE on their time in the independent sector.

Reflections from the Chair

So brilliant, so different

Rhiannon's 20+ year career started in education at Somerset House Trust and the Gilbert Collection and has included roles in organisations of all scales prior to her taking up her current position as Head of Public Engagement Projects and Business Management at Historic Royal Palaces. She joined the AIM Board in 2018, became Deputy Chair in 2022 and Chair in January 2025. So, what would she see as key changes across the independent museum sector since that time?

"I think when I started out museums were focused on collections and their preservation, audiences perhaps came second to that, in some ways. There has been a real shift towards inclusivity and community engagement – making collections relevant to diverse audiences, addressing contemporary issues and really thinking about issues like climate change and social cohesion. Independent museums are well positioned to be the lifeblood of a community."

Rhiannon sees the impact of COVID as exemplifying this change, as well as highlighting a role for AIM in underscoring the value of heritage organisations to their communities

"When a lot of museums went online (during the pandemic) they found that they had large audiences for their work, giving them the chance to reflect on how they are serving their

communities. I think that's part of the advocacy work that AIM must do, talk more about the benefits that museums can bring alongside caring for history, showing how important museums are to their audiences, advocating for how culture and the arts in general can create social cohesion and that 'political with a small p' work they can do within communities. That is a job for AIM."

In addition, Rhiannon has seen the ongoing strengthening of AIM's professional support for its members over her time on the Board.

"I really like the AIM Hallmarks because they show the rounded way that that museums are working and the different spheres they work in, in a way that I had not really seen from other sector support bodies before. AIM's strategic focus on sustainability and equipping museums with the tools for financial resilience has grown in strength over the years."

What does Rhiannon see as the role of the Chair?

"You have to be both a strategic thinker and an active advocate, championing the mission externally but also empowering the board and team to have a clear vision and drive that progress."

It's important not to get into the weeds, to help strategic direction and allow the staff to grow, develop their own skills, and respect their professionalism.

You are there to provide guidance, for them to bounce off, rather than tell them how to do their job.

And what gives cause for optimism in these challenging times?

"It is a tough time for the sector, but independent museums are very resilient, resourceful, and able to adapt, it's what makes them different, and it gives me hope for the future. For me one of the USPs of museums is they enable you to discover stories you don't know in a way that doesn't feel didactic, or like you're at school. They offer an alternative learning environment that is experiential, and immersive and most importantly is built around real objects that give you a sense of connection to the past. I think it's that museums can give you an emotional connection to those stories and histories that makes museums so brilliant, so different and so worth investing in."



How far we've come, and how far we can go

Andrew Lovett OBE started working in museums in 1996 and is currently Director and Chief Executive of Black Country Living Museum. He was recently appointed to Arts Council England's national council. He joined AIM Board in 2016 and became Chair late 2019.

What's the most notable change that you've seen across the independent museum sector since you joined AIM Board?

I think they have become ever more sophisticated, in all aspects. Whether it's operations, governance structures, leadership, marketing, storytelling, wherever you look they've become more attuned to visitors and less insular. They recognise that they are just one of many ways in which people can spend their time or money. And a greater awareness of their good in society, you know, the role we've got to play.

How do you feel AIM has changed?

I think it has continued to grow more self-assured in its voice. We've taken a seat at the table with other, what you might think of as serious players such as Heritage Lottery or ACE or the MA or Art Fund. I think in the same breath people would now talk about AIM. And I'd like to think that our listening is better attuned to members.

What is the most effective approach to the role of chair? And are there any past examples you think of?

I think that adage of 'none of us is as smart as all of us' rings loudly. We are in a world where it is easier to learn from each other, I think that's a good thing: ideas gain currency by being shared. I also think regarding the board as a *team*. People brought and working together. The chair must also be supremely self-assured about the value of the organisation to be able to

talk confidently on a public stage or to policy makers or whoever it might be.

Finally, I remember, to set the tone of the relationship, saying to Emma (Chaplin, previous AIM Director) when I first joined and Lisa subsequently, 'I'm not your line manager.' I said that because it had been said to me by an incoming chair here (at BCLM) and I hadn't ever thought of it.

You asked about a particular person, there's two people always come to mind. One is my old boss in the Lake District, a guy called John Toothill who unfortunately died in 2017. As a young man in my twenties I used to watch and listen to him, read things that he had written, I took heed from all that. In those days, the national parks were mainly just committees of their Local Authority, John had the foresight to think the parks would benefit if they were independent and proposed a private members bill to Parliament. Eventually this led to the independence of all the national parks across the UK. I remember thinking, gosh, you can affect policy change; it seemed a very

distant, incalculable, impossible thing to do because you were trying to change government's opinion. And I just took note in my callow youth and that stays with me.

And people like Sir Ken Robinson, who died in 2020. As an orator he was kind of an intellectual stand-up comedian. What stuck with me was that you could, through the best choice of words, humour, and storytelling, be an immensely powerful voice of change; an influence and a persuader.

What makes you optimistic about the future of the independent sector?

Independents are good at not feeling they've got a right to exist.

We don't lose sight of the cause and the purpose. That gives me optimism about the future, alongside the people that are running them. One of the wonderful things about museums is they show how far we've come, don't they? And, therefore, surely it gives you optimism about how far we can continue to go.





Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum by Ryan McGoverne.

Supporting LGBTQ+ inclusion in Scotland's museums

Museums Galleries Scotland marketing team members Joe Setch and Robyn Evans highlight the organisation's efforts to support LGBTQ+ inclusion.

February is LGBT History Month, a time for reflecting on the queer lives that came before us. LGBTQ+ people are an integral part of Scotland's story; but LGBTQ+ people, communities, and themes aren't always represented in our museums and galleries. This exclusion perpetuates inequalities and reinforces narrow interpretations of our shared past.

As the national development body for the museum sector, we're working to create cultural spaces which are safer, fairer, and more representative of modern Scotland. Several LGBTQ+ inclusive projects, exhibitions, and events have been made possible thanks to the Scottish Government and funding body grants which we award to museums and galleries.

We've funded the Living Memory Association's 2022 *Queer Edinburgh* exhibition, LGBTQ+ music events at St Cecilia's Hall, Concert Room & Music Museum, and a custom mannequin for drag queen Ellie Diamond's 'Denise the Menace' costume, now on display at The McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery & Museum. We've hosted talks on queering historic houses and exploring LGBTQ+ themes with younger audiences, created a short film on how Perth Museum's inaugural *Unicorn* exhibition focused on LGBTQ+ inclusion, developed an advice guide on creating content for Pride Month, and commissioned museum workers to write about their experiences of developing LGBTQ+ inclusive projects.

Scotland's museums and galleries are all at different stages in their journeys toward LGBTQ+ equity. We strive to amplify the efforts of those that are leading the charge – places like Glasgow Women's Library, which has been collecting LGBTQ+ materials and creating space for LGBTQ+ voices since the 1990s

– and provide support and encouragement to those that are just starting out.

The design gallery at V&A Dundee has been transformed through the introduction of Lavender Labels which offer insights into Scotland's queer history, while the Hidden Histories trail at the National Museum of Scotland reveals the LGBTQ+ stories behind objects such as an ancient Greek vase, a Japanese scroll, and a WWII Enigma encoding machine. The Watt Institution in Greenock worked with Clyde Pride LGBT Youth Group to develop *Pride: a Queer History*, a digital exhibition which constructed a Progress Pride Flag from elements of the museum's collections, while in 2023 Dumfries Museum held an exhibition which celebrated the life of local LGBTQ+ icon Dr Flora Murray, a pioneering suffragette and surgeon.

We understand that visibility is vital, and that queer people are more likely to imagine the possibility of exploring museums and galleries if they see themselves reflected in their promotional content. So, we recently organised a photoshoot which featured two women and a child visiting the Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum and the Carnegie Library & Galleries in Dunfermline. We wanted these images to evoke the idea of a queer family, creating a bank of inclusive marketing materials which we then gifted to the venues involved. We reinforce this focus on visibility in our one-to-one marketing support sessions with museums, where we advise organisations to attract and appeal to more diverse audiences by creating inclusive and accessible content.

LGBTQ+ inclusion isn't just important. It's necessary. To survive in this world of rising costs and cuts to culture funding, the museum sector needs to engage with broader audiences. In an increasingly diverse Scotland, museums and galleries can capture the imagination of their communities and ensure their continued relevance by giving space to LGBTQ+ people and perspectives. It's our hope that, with our support, the nation's cultural venues will thrive as assets for all members of society.

Talk to the team on marketing@museumsgalleriesScotland.org.uk



Image by Roswitha Cheshire

“Ghost Ships” at The Historic Dockyard Chatham

Leveraging an anniversary to empower community storytelling

On 30 March 1984, the iconic main gate of Chatham Dockyard was padlocked ending 400 years of shipbuilding and Royal Navy presence in Chatham. Four decades later Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust commemorated this anniversary with a year-long programme of events and activities.

One highlight was *Ghost Ships*, an innovative dance-theatre experience that reimagined the Dockyard’s 400-year history. Produced by Medway’s Icon Theatre in co-production with ZooNation: The Kate Prince Company and Amina Khayyam Dance Company, and supported by The Historic Dockyard Chatham, this production served as a powerful tool for community engagement. Its unique fusion of Hip Hop, traditional Kathak, spoken word, projections, and original music illustrated some lesser told stories of Britain’s role in slavery, the lives of female sailors, immigration, and the impact on local people of the Dockyard’s closure in 1984.

Drawing an audience of over 2,000, the production featured 150 community performers and professional dancers,

including many from underrepresented groups such as ethnically diverse, d/Deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse individuals.

"I saw people from 8 to 80, both in the audience and on the stage. I saw amateurs and community groups performing with the most highly talented professionals. This gave me hope in a world where I often find very little." Audience member

Breaking down barriers

Ghost Ships focused on co-creation— collaborating directly with local groups such as the Medway African & Caribbean Association and the Sahara Foundation and workshops and rehearsals were tailored to accommodate participants of all abilities.

"I will never forget it, such an intense, emotional, thought-provoking experience to co-create with a big group of people of such diversity, all of whom are bringing their own skills, experience, commitment, and sense of fun to the endeavour." Community participant.

400 free tickets were distributed to young people from low socio-economic backgrounds, removing the financial barrier and building confidence in engaging with cultural organisations.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, 97% stating they felt more connected to their community.

"The storytelling through dance and physical theatre especially by the ZooNation cast is full of energy, tricks, and drama. Some very powerful scenes—well done for tackling the big issues addressed in the show." Audience member

A lasting legacy

For many involved, this project opened doors to deeper cultural exploration, instilling newfound confidence and

community spirit, particularly among young adults – an audience notoriously difficult to engage with traditional museums.

At the Historic Dockyard there has been a shift in visitor demographics: 71% of the *Ghost Ships* audience were first-time visitors and 10% of these have since purchased annual tickets.

“*Ghost Ships* model of innovation and inclusivity demonstrates the powerful role of the arts in connecting and inspiring diverse communities.”

"The show highlighted Chatham's diverse 400-year history and its considerable global influence – both positive and negative. By embracing live theatre and dance, we moved beyond conventional museum approaches to present a more dynamic historical narrative, making our stories accessible and engaging for those who might typically bypass a museum setting."

Paul Barnard, Deputy Chief Executive, Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust

Ghost Ships was described as “irresistible” by *The Telegraph* and “a vigorous, piercingly sharp enactment” by *The Times* as well as earning the Diversity Award from the Medway African & Caribbean Association. As museums continue to seek meaningful ways to connect with their communities, *Ghost Ships* model of innovation and inclusivity demonstrates the powerful role of the arts in connecting and inspiring diverse communities.

thedockyard.co.uk

Latest New Year honours

Several AIM members were included in the King's New Year's Honours.

Tony Butler, Executive Director of Derby Museums Trust and Dr Paul Roberts archaeologist and former keeper at the Ashmolean Museum were both recognised with an OBE. MBEs were awarded to Kimberley Streets, CEO of Sheffield Museums; Mark Fane, former Chair of The

Garden Museum; Francis Galvin, former Chair of Elizabeth Gaskell's House; Mark Fane, former Chair of the Garden Museum and Thomas Muir engagement and exhibitions officer, Orkney Museum. Edwina Sassoon received the MBE for services to the visual arts, museums and gardens. Michael Davies, founder of the Rayleigh Town Museum received a BEM. The full list of awardees is available on UK Government website.

AIM is keen to support nominations celebrating the breadth of great work

in independent museums and heritage. Nominations are submitted to a committee, for our sector usually the Arts and Media Committee, currently chaired by John Booth, Chair of National Gallery, and King's Trust. It's crucial in making a nomination to show how the nominee has made an individual and unique contribution to their community and the nation by going beyond the demands of the job.

For more detail on making a nomination visit honours.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/how-to-nominate

Heritage science might not be a term you hear every day, but its impact is profound. We spoke to Caroline Peach of the National Heritage Science Forum and Carla Burrell Senior Engagement Manager, RICHeS to find out more.

Heritage Science special

So what is Heritage Science? The simplest definition is the scientific study of heritage. A more expansive definition by ICCROM describes heritage science as “the interdisciplinary research domain of the scientific study of cultural and natural heritage. Drawing on diverse humanities, sciences and engineering disciplines, heritage science is an umbrella term encompassing all forms of scientific inquiry into human works and the combined works of nature and humans that are of value to people.”

The key points are that heritage science involves people from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, and that it is used to help understand, care for, and preserve heritage, as well as help to provide new ways for people to learn about and enjoy heritage.

Applications range from the big (think impact of climate change) to the very small (think nanomaterials for use in conservation treatments). It includes everything from analysing the chemical composition of ancient (and modern!) paintings to using advanced imaging techniques to detect structural issues in historic buildings.

The field combines expertise from chemistry, physics, materials science, and digital technologies to answer questions about our past and ensure its survival for future generations.

For example, heritage science can be used by museums to inform conservation treatments, reduce energy consumption, reveal new information about collections, and support outreach activities.

SS Great Britain – conservation methods, energy consumption and outreach

Between 1997 and 2005, a system to slow corrosion of the SS Great Britain, the world’s first iron ship, was developed by sealing the dry dock with a glass roof and keeping the environment at

20% relative humidity. Although effective, this was highly energy intensive and so as part of their *Voyage to Carbon Neutral* project (aiming for carbon-neutrality by 2030), the Trust upgraded their ship conservation technology to minimise energy usage and reduce carbon footprint.

Upgraded sensors and software have helped to understand energy use and control it better. More efficient fan technology and a new heat recovery system for the desiccant on the dehumidifiers has led to energy savings.



The sealed dry dock at SS Great Britain.



Overall, the project reduced energy consumption and associated emissions by around 25% across the whole system, and by more than 40% on key individual components. The total carbon dioxide emissions were reduced by more than 150 tonnes per year. The project led to the Trust being chosen as joint winner of the Museums + Heritage Sustainable Project of the Year in May 2023. It has also engaged visitors and students taking part in the 'Future Brunels' outreach programme with its technology advancements.

www.ssgreatbritain.org/the-ssgbs-expedition-to-a-greener-future

Newport Medieval Ship Project – understanding materials, revealing the ship's origins, developing how a technique can be used

In 2002, the wreck of a fifteenth-century ship was found in the mud of Newport's River Usk. In November 2023, scientific research (oxygen isotope dendrochronology analysis of the ship's timbers) has helped to establish when the ship was built, revealing that timbers from the hull were made from oak trees that were felled in the winter of 1457-58.

"It allows us to really focus on that 1457-58 period for historical research

but it shows this type of analysis has real potential to refine various parts of the construction sequence of the Newport ship." Dr Toby Jones, Curator.

This information could help with the charity's long-term goal of rebuilding the vessel. Once restored, the ship could become the only 15th-century maritime exhibit in the world. The research has shown the potential for using this dating technique for other vessels and timber structures that previously didn't date with traditional ring dendrochronology.

www.newportship.org

pottery and archaeological ceramics experts on Roman pottery-making, giving participants from the local area a feel for what daily working life was like in this period of the distant past.

Participants had their own workshop-made pottery x-rayed like the archaeological finds. The results were presented in a pop-up exhibition at Chester Farm Estate, Wellingborough.

chesterhouseestate.org/about/news/new-exhibition-revealing-the-skills-of-northamptonshire-potters-past-and-present

These examples show that organisations of all sizes can benefit from heritage science and in many instances, use it themselves.

But the exciting thing is the forthcoming opportunities that are expected to arise from the development of RICHES (Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science). RICHES is a programme of investment by UK Research and Innovation into the development of a UK-wide infrastructure for conservation and heritage science research.

The first phase of funding supports new scientific research facilities and better access to scientific reference collections. However, the likely game-changer for the independent museum sector will be the development of the Heritage Science Data Service (which will provide a portal for finding equipment and expertise) and the

66 Heritage science involves people from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, and that it is used to help understand, care for, and preserve heritage. 99

MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) – Community engagement

Radiographic analysis of Romano-British Upper Nene Valley pottery revealed the variety of techniques used in making Romano-British ceramics. Findings drew into question accepted understandings of the Romano-British economy. In addition, the results were the used for workshops facilitated by master

existence of an access fund from 2026 which will enable people to apply for funding to use the research facilities.

So, the thinking starts now. 2026 might seem like a long way of off but now is a good time to think about how you would like to use science. What are the problems that science can help you to solve? What would you like to know more about within your collections? What help would you →

need to understand the possibilities of heritage science research? Partnerships can be a terrific way to develop and carry out a heritage science research project – who would you like to work with?

Introducing the RICHeS Programme

The Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science (RICHeS) programme represents a transformative milestone for conservation and heritage science in the UK, with an unprecedented £80 million investment from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). RICHeS is dedicated to advancing conservation and heritage science through cutting-edge research, state-of-the-art facilities, fostering collaboration and increasing access to facilities, collections and expertise.

RICHeS research infrastructure connects researchers to heritage science facilities, resources and services across the UK. Through RICHeS, you do not have to rely on one central facility. Instead, you can access expertise, collections and facilities from institutions across the four nations. Beyond its physical network, RICHeS virtual infrastructure: the **Heritage Science Data Service** will provide a digital foundation for sharing and

accessing data, ensuring that the benefits of heritage science research are far-reaching.

How does heritage science benefit museums and their communities?

For museums, heritage science offers a wealth of benefits. Advanced analytical techniques provide insights into the materials and methods used to create artefacts, enabling more effective conservation strategies. These methods also help mitigate challenges like environmental damage, ensuring collections are preserved for the future.

Beyond preservation, heritage science enriches visitor experiences by contributing to interactive exhibits and educational initiatives that bring history to life. Museums can use these insights to create engaging programmes that connect audiences to the past in meaningful ways, fostering deeper appreciation and understanding.

Innovative practices in the independent museum sector

Smaller organisations and independent museums are leading the way in adopting innovative heritage science practices. For example, initiatives like the Royal Society's Places of Science scheme have empowered small museums to engage communities with local science stories. By blending



Professor Alice Roberts at the RICHeS launch.

science and heritage, these projects create accessible, meaningful experiences that resonate with diverse audiences. Norton Priory Museum in Runcorn is integrating cutting-edge research with public engagement, allowing visitors to explore history through a scientific lens while celebrating the richness of human culture. Norton Priory's involvement highlights how independent museums can play a significant role in pioneering innovative approaches to storytelling, education, and community engagement.

Find out more about heritage science

National Heritage Science Forum

Established in 2013, the National Heritage Science Forum (NHSF) is a membership organisation and charity which connects UK heritage organisations, academic institutions, and research laboratories. Its mission is to support collaboration in the use of science and technology to better understand and care for our cultural heritage, and to demonstrate the benefits that heritage science can bring to society.

www.heritagescienceforum.org.uk

Icon, the Institute of Conservation

Icon's Heritage Science group brings together individuals who are interested in how science benefits the conservation, management, and interpretation of cultural heritage. The group provides heritage science resources and runs events.

www.icon.org.uk/groups-and-networks/heritage-science.html

Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science (RICHeS)

A programme of investment, launched in October 2024, which will provide access to heritage science facilities, including equipment, expertise and data, across the UK.

www.riches.ukri.org

Launched last year, The Museum Data Service (MDS) aims to connect and share object records across all UK museums. We spoke to David Dawson, Director of Wiltshire Museum, an early adopter of the service to find out more.

Building a collections eco-system with the Museum Data Service

How would you explain the MDS to the uninitiated?

Well, it's bringing together catalogue information from museums across the UK. Many Museums are busy documenting their collections but haven't got them on the web where they are accessible. The MDS is tackling that fundamental issue for researchers of 'where's the stuff?'

And from a museum perspective, it's a way of getting your collections online for free.

If you're a researcher looking for something all you need to do is type in the name of a place or person and you can find stuff that you had no idea existed.

Wiltshire Museum got involved early, one of 12 museum early adopters working with Collections Trust on all the difficult questions together, helping draft guidance to make life easier for other museums.

How easy is it to get records onto the Service?

If you've got your collections documented on a computer, then your info can go onto the website. There's a team at the Collections Trust, or a Data Wrangler to give him his job title, who will help make it work. It's fun to look at who is on there already,



The launch of Museum Data Service at Bloomberg Mithraeum.

from large organisations like the Science Museum Group, with over 150,000 records, to the Aldbourne Heritage Centre, an entirely volunteer run museum, who happen to be using Modes and they were part of the Museum Data Service on the day it opened.

What other benefits does the Service offer?

One is backup. So, if you've got all your collections data on one computer and it goes wrong, you've lost it. With MDS you can upload your data and it'll be kept safe. You choose what data is

publicly available, and what is kept confidential.

It's still early days, but the possibilities are huge, for example as catalogue records are full of names of people and places, technologists will be able to issue AI to extract that information and create maps out of them, which is something that we'd never be able to do ourselves.

The Museum Data Service means our collections can be drawn into an ecosystem, far greater than if they're just on a shelf in a museum.

Find out more at museumdata.uk

Associate Supplier, Colin Mulberg outlines how working with partners benefits both visitors and venues.

All together now

Better visitor offers through partnerships

Many museums and heritage sites see themselves as competing with other heritage and cultural attractions, all jostling for the attention and custom of visitors. Yet most visitors are not making a single, one-time only purchase but are looking for a range of cultural experiences, either over a short period or throughout the year. In most visitor markets, there is room for more than one cultural option, so venues are not necessarily in competition.

Mutual Benefits

Working together has a greater presence, flags up the benefits of a cultural visit and gives more value. It takes time, effort and often money for visitors to travel to a specific location, so it is attractive to have more things to do. Working with partners provides a stronger visitor offer and creates a 'critical mass' of experiences that makes a visit worthwhile.

Many venues are familiar with partnership working through schemes such as heritage open days, arts/sculpture/design festivals and coordinated summer family programmes. These schemes encourage visits to more than one venue and benefit from joint marketing with a higher profile than can be achieved by individual venues on their own.

Working with partners increases the pool of ideas and approaches, especially if partnering with arts and creative



Oxford University Museum of Natural History partners with local caterers and coffee roasters.

Photo © Colin Mulberg

organisations. This can expand your visitor programme and activities, without having to do everything yourself. In some cases, your contribution could be to host or simply support an event run by others, lending status and credibility as well as joint marketing.

Partnership working can therefore reduce costs as activity, organisation and expenditure is shared, and provide extra reach and channels for promotion.

Working Together

Review local activities where your venue could add value while improving your offer to visitors. For example, linking in with festivals, events, and celebrations (e.g. town/city festivals, anniversaries, annual fairs, art trails, Christmas, etc.) where you can contribute to existing provision and local life.

Cross-promotion with partner venues encourages visits and could include incentives such as discounts at partner venues on admission, café, shop, or specific activities. The partnership could be expanded through complementary exhibitions, coordinated programmes or joint ticketing for shared events.

Working with partners is a useful way of expanding activity and attracting new and diverse audiences. For example,



Photo © Colin Mulberg

Soldiers of Shropshire Museum at Shrewsbury Castle work with a range of local partners.

local adult groups, societies and classes in art, photography, history/heritage and over 50s activities could partner with you for visits, as a host venue or as a source of inspiration.

Soldiers of Shropshire Museum at Shrewsbury Castle uses a mixture of these approaches. It has hosted local theatre performances, been part of the town arts trail, plays a key role in local events (e.g. Queen Elizabeth book of condolence; armed forces remembrance and memorial services), is part of holiday provision for families and runs sessions with a variety of local groups.

Many museums and heritage sites have commercial partnerships with local businesses, promoting the local economy and reducing carbon miles. Some venues without on-site catering arrange a discount at local independent cafes, providing a benefit to visitors and driving footfall. More extensive partnerships involve markets and fairs bringing together local makers and producers (e.g. makers markets). Partnerships can also increase venue hire bookings.

Identifying Partners

A first step to setting up any partnership is to determine what you want from the process and what you can offer

potential partners. It is also worth looking at current and past partners to review the nature of your partnership to see if there is scope for expansion or to revive past contacts.

Take time to identify partners that will fit with your aspirations and situation. On-line research (e.g. Tripadvisor; Google Maps) will reveal other cultural venues and attractions, along with local and regional clubs, societies, organisations and networks, adult education classes, etc. that are worth exploring further.

Many local and regional authorities have lists of voluntary/charitable organisations in their area. Development bodies such as regional Museum Development Network and Local Enterprise Partnerships may also be able to advise, including looking for commercial partners.

Filter and review the list of potential partners, assessing what a partnership could look like, how it matches your aims and what benefits you could give to the partner. This can then form the basis for initial exploratory discussions and some trial partnership activities.

Colin Mulberg Consulting

www.colinmulberg.com

From Cupboard to Catalogue

Getting the Horner Collection Online

Caitlin Greenwood,
Heritage Development
Officer at the Museum
of North Craven Life
on the transformative
nature of their recent
digitisation project.

The Horner Collection

The Horner Photographic studio was a commercial photography studio in Settle, North Yorkshire. Founded by Michael Horner in 1864, it passed to

his brother Anthony, then just 16 years of age, following Michael's death from tuberculosis in 1869. Helped by his mother, Anthony developed the studio into a thriving business. His son, Edward Holmes Horner, ran the studio until his own death in 1960. The Horners specialised in portraiture, especially the ever-popular carte de visite, and landscapes. They also produced stereographs, postcards, prints and other commercial photographs of local landmarks, businesses, events, and discoveries. They documented the dedication of lifeboats bound for Hornsea and Anglesey, the construction of an immense, domed chapel at Giggleswick

School, and recorded the army volunteers leaving by train from Settle Station in 1914.

On Eddie Horner's death, the studio was sold twice in rapid succession as a viable photographic business. The eventual owners found on the premises many glass plate and film negatives of the Horner photos, preserved in their original boxes. They created a list of the surviving material, reproduced the most popular images for sale and published a small selection in a pamphlet to accompany an exhibition. Following their retirement, the collection was stored in their home.



www.aim-museums.co.uk



In 2021, the Museum of North Craven Life in Settle purchased the collection. Determined to keep the collection in the local area, we obtained an award from the ACE/V&A Purchase Grant Fund and raised the remaining funds through a community crowdfunder. We were aware that the Horner Studio was locally important, but the crowdfunder was the first glimpse of how strongly our community felt about the collection: In less than a month, over 100 people had donated to save it, raising two and a half times the minimum we needed to match the purchase grant.

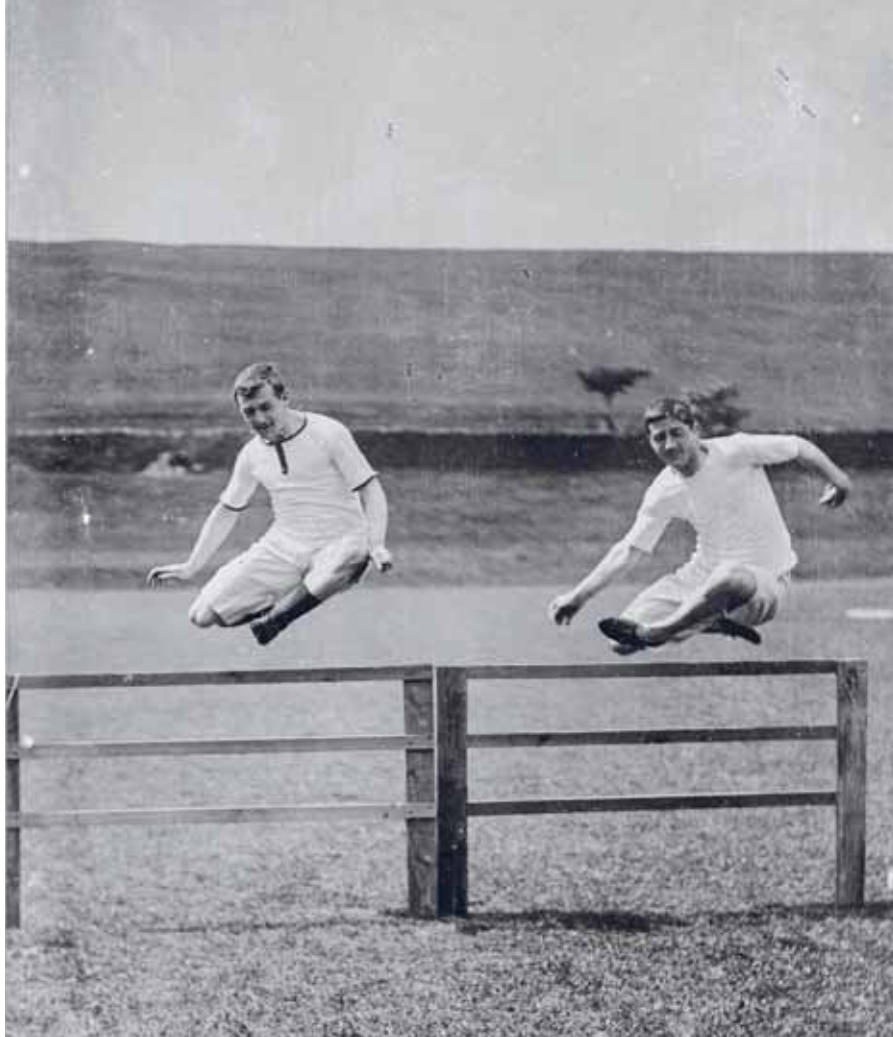
The Project

We now knew how deeply people cared about the collection. We immediately applied for ACE Culture Recovery Funding to set up a pilot project to assess how we should rehouse, digitise and catalogue the collection.

With further support from an Art Fund Reimagine grant, we were able to work with an experienced photographic historian and technician, Dr Damian Hughes, who led a team of volunteers through the delicate, two-year process of listing, rehousing, scanning, and describing the collection. As the collection covers a span of almost 100 years, it has examples of many different photographic technologies, most notably wet plate collodion, gelatin glass plate and gelatin film, and modern colour film. As objects, each of these has different packaging needs, as well as different scanning requirements to best capture the image, and volunteers have become adept at recognising these.

A photographic negative is both a physical object and carries an image that must be processed before the positive photograph can be viewed. To capture this, we decided that each record should include two images, one a scan of the negative itself, and one a digitally inverted positive, showing what we would recognise as a photograph. Where an unusual photographic process was used, or the plate or film had been extensively re-touched and altered, we recorded a third image to capture the details of the process.

We created a new catalogue template in Modes Complete for recording each negative. This allows us to control key



A great deal of technical skill and sunny weather was required for this shot from the collection
SETCL : 2022.1.14.2a – Men Hurdlers, ca 1900-1925.

words and standardise certain fields while removing irrelevant fields, to ensure consistency of entry, which is undertaken by volunteers with oversight from the collections team.

The Online Catalogue

From the outset, our aim was to produce an online catalogue of the Horner collection. After some research, we decided to pilot CatalogIT, populating the system with data exported from our Modes records to create a fully illustrated, searchable version of the catalogue accessible via our website. We launched the first tranche of over 1500 images to the public in November 2024 and the response has been overwhelming. We've heard from people across our region who have identified buildings, caves, farms, and people. One of our accounts team recognised her own father in a photograph and was able to tell us about his involvement in the pictured fundraising event. Some members of the community have systematically examined every photograph in the collection and provided us with an extensive list of identifications and corrections, for which we are extremely grateful. Crowdsourcing the

information in this way has revealed in a month far more about the collection than the museum team could have discovered in years of research and has strengthened our bonds with the community.

Our next step is to work with the community to develop a co-curated interpretation plan for a permanent exhibition about the collection. In the meantime, we are testing new ways to enable more people to discover the collection, via a mailing list and our social media accounts where we post a Horner photo and story each week. A partnership with our local paper to print a photo every week as part of their nostalgia section, will ensure that local people who are entirely offline can also access the collection.

It's no exaggeration to say that the Horner project has been transformative for the Museum of North Craven Life. We have acquired a collection of outstanding local importance, gained key skills in working with historic photography, and made new and profound links with our local audiences.

To view the catalogue, visit
<https://hub.catalogit.app/13427>

How The Trimontium Museum streamlined its cataloging and enabled remote volunteers to bring stories of this Roman fort to life.

Bridging Continents

Trimontium empowers its volunteers with CatalogIt

The Trimontium Museum in Melrose, Scotland, showcases the history of the largest Roman fort north of Hadrian's Wall. As Scotland's only museum dedicated to the Roman era and the Iron Age, it features an extraordinary collection of Roman military artifacts, offering a glimpse into life on the edge of the Roman Empire.

When Thania Flores, Trimontium's Heritage Environment Resources Officer, joined the museum in 2020, she recognised the need for a robust collections management system. For over 30 years, the museum had relied on dedicated volunteers using handwritten records and ledgers enriched by their deep institutional knowledge. However, the absence of a CMS left the historic collections without a modern cataloging system.

Enabling global volunteers

Trimontium needed an affordable, cloud-based system that could support its team of 70-100 global volunteers. "Our CMS needed to be accessible from anywhere because we always wanted to have remote volunteers working on the collection," said Thania.

Thania began researching Content Management System (CMS) options, including AIM Associate Supplier CatalogIt. "When I found CatalogIt they were one of the only CMS's that was cloud-based and user-friendly," said Thania.

Trimontium's CMS search was also driven by "The Digital Romans," a project launched in September 2022 with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project aimed to create digital resources and promote accessibility. "We wanted to create a digital place where all of the collections could live," said Thania. Trimontium's collection and historic site are owned by three other organisations, including the National Museum of Scotland, so Thania's goal was to document the whole collection in one CMS. "That way researchers and others don't have to look in multiple places for the material. Instead, everything is in one place."

After testing CatalogIt's free trial, Thania found it was the best fit. "Our experience with the system has been really good!" said Thania, who has worked with almost 25 volunteers on the cataloging efforts for the Digital Romans

project. "CatalogIt being cloud-based has allowed us to connect to remote volunteers from as far as Ecuador, Turkey, Italy, and the USA who are enthusiastic about getting involved with Trimontium but cannot otherwise do it because of distance," said Thania. "We intend to continue working with volunteers to enrich our CatalogIt entries over time."

Digitising the past to inspire the future

After adopting CatalogIt, Trimontium launched an online catalog on the CatalogIt HUB as part of the Digital Romans Project, which concluded in Autumn 2024. The project aimed to digitise at least 4,000 objects, and Trimontium surpassed this goal, cataloging over 4,300 artifacts, books, and archives. Volunteers contributed to about 20% of the entries and captured photographs of the artifacts for the catalog. Currently, about 5% of the collection is accessible to the public, with more entries being shared as Thania and her team continue to enrich the catalog. "Having the whole collection under one digital umbrella can help researchers, school children, and anyone who is looking for information find it in just one place," said Thania. "It's a resource for the present and future for anyone interested in Roman history in Scotland."

Find out more about CatalogIt here: aim-museums.co.uk/suppliers/catalogit



The Trimontium Museum is Scotland's only museum dedicated to the Roman and Iron Age.

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Stuart Walker



Looking up at Driggsby the fin whale from the Phase 2 Carlisle Gallery.

Project Tullie Futureplan

Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery (rebranded as Tullie in 2022) is a former local authority museum, which became an independent charitable trust in 2011.

Although the organisation is progressive, entrepreneurial, and successful, like most museum trusts, it needs to be more financially resilient and less reliant on support from the local authority. Project Tullie was created to respond to this challenge. In 2018, Tullie was awarded a Resilient Heritage (RH) grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to undertake a futureplanning exercise which led to the creation of Project Tullie and the successful draw down of just under £13m of capital funding to date.

The Futureplan addresses the complexity of the Tullie site: originally the home of the Tullie family in the 17th century, it was significantly expanded to create a museum, library, and school of art in 1897, and then, as the library and art school relocated, it expanded again in 1990 and 2000. Whilst the building grew and developed, the museum collections did likewise and we now hold an astonishingly diverse collection of over one million objects, from prehistory to pre-Raphaelites, the Roman archive of Hadrian's Wall to the archive of the Blue Streak ballistic missile. The RH grant helped create a vision to deliver audience growth and provide greater collections access. The vision had to be relevant to today's communities but also resonate with the founding principles of Tullie as a centre for education, inspiration, and civic pride. We therefore adapted our successful manifesto to reflect our newly co-developed values of creativity, wellbeing, and self-discovery.

The Futureplan has been a tremendous success. Phase 1 was hit by the pandemic but nevertheless successfully concluded in 2021. Phase 2 is a much larger scheme with a budget of £4.6m funded by the UK Government via grants from HM Treasury (administered by Arts Council England), the Town's Fund and the Future High Streets Fund. Phase 2, opening in February, will transform the ground-floor visitor experience by creating a new, significantly larger, entrance and welcome area and giving the museum high-street frontage for the first

time. This has been achieved by acquiring new property and skillfully connecting the existing museum to the new premises.

The project also delivers a new destination shop, an exciting new introductory gallery celebrating the city of Carlisle and enhanced provision for Tullie's sector-leading community engagement activity. Thanks to additional funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Phase 2 will also include a refurbishment of Tullie's much-loved Cafe.

Phase 3 of Project Tullie is a £6.8m project that will transform Tullie's 850sqm first floor Border Galleries (originally opened in the 1990s) into an 'Active Gallery' that will fundamentally change the way visitors engage with the museum's collections. This innovative gallery will display over 100,000 of the Museum's 1 million + collection and include changing displays, interactive trails and hands-on activity that will encourage greater connections between visitors and objects – aiming to double paid visitor numbers, enabling greater financial security for the museum.

This phase will also see the Museum's learning spaces significantly improved through the creation of a new outdoor classroom in Tullie's 'Secret Garden.' The project is funded through a £4.4m contribution from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and over £2m of match funding secured from public and private sources. The project is currently underway and is expected to complete in 2026. Further phases are in the pipeline.

In terms of lessons learnt, there are many, but the key ones are that getting started is hard – it took us three attempts to secure Heritage Fund success but each time we became stronger. We worked collaboratively with The Heritage Fund and their advice was invaluable. You need to be confident and resolute with your vision and recognise that in terms of fundraising, success breeds success.

Finally, co-produce rather than consult – people should be part of the journey and should shape every step you take. This is challenging but hugely rewarding – for everyone.

Phase 2 will open in February with Phase 3 already in motion. Do come to Carlisle and give us your opinions on whether we are delivering on what we set out to do.

Andrew Mackay, Director

tullie.org.uk



Ruth Rees Photography

‘Stories change minds and museums are good at telling them.’

We profile TimeScape Rhayader/Amserwedd Rhaeadr Gwy, rural mid Wales’ newest all-weather attraction.

2024 was a good year. We reopened after redevelopment, got Levelling Up funding to employ four temporary staff and finished by celebrating the community play which started everything off 30 years ago. ‘The Lost Harp – Y Delyn Golledig,’ by Peter Cox

was the first time that local stories were publicly told and valued. That inspired change.

We created CARAD, (Community Arts Rhayader and District) an independent charity running arts and heritage projects for social benefit. We bought two industrial units, one becoming an arts venue and one a new Rhayader Museum and Gallery. The Heritage minister opened it in 2009, calling us, ‘A flagship organisation and shining example of community arts and heritage work in Wales’. Six months later our core funding was cut as part of significant Wales wide cuts.

In 2012 we restructured. Two Trustees took on volunteer management roles supported by a part time Finance Officer. Volunteers opened the Museum four days a week and curated six exhibitions a year. CARAD’s income came from Trusts and Foundations or from delivering the cultural and community engagement elements of partners’ environmental projects.

During lockdown, our activities changed from being largely outreach to digital and we evaluated how to tell our stories in changing times. We wanted to show their relevance to and influence on national and

international concerns around identity, community resilience, land use and climate change. A Welsh Government capital grant and an Art Fund revenue grant gave us six times as much exhibition space. However, spiralling costs meant that the display content and creative design was done by our volunteer managers, which was challenging but incredibly satisfying. Over sixty volunteers of all ages worked with us, many of them disabled or neurodiverse. We renamed the museum TimeScape Rhayader/ Amserwedd Rhaeadr Gwy.

We harnessed our diverse creative experiences to tell stories about the people and politics, nature and community, faith, and folklore of Rhayader and the Elan Valley's reservoirs and uplands. Stories that inspired national change. We ask visitors to consider their views and what personal choices they will make to affect our futures.

2024 was also the Year of the Dragon. A hugely significant object in our collections is our giant copper Dragon made as a millennium project by artist Richard Taylor, a powerful sculpture with great dynamic energy. It is an Ouroboros, representing cycles of

regeneration, renewal, and hope. Her recycled scales were beaten by people both locally and abroad and marked to celebrate someone they loved. She has been central to our community activities. Because she was on a trailer, millions of people have seen her at agricultural shows, arts and food festivals, carnivals, large civic celebrations in Wales and England and on television. She has her own festival which coincides with the Welsh Museums Festival and now, a

27% despite shorter opening times, volunteers by 37% and local visitors by 40%. We start 2025 as we began 2012, being volunteer led, determined to positively affect our community's future but seeing more cuts to mid Wales' cultural organisations.

The possibilities are fantastic. Museums are brilliantly placed to look outward, to reach every child and design creative projects that can inform and change people's perceptions of today's challenges.

“ We ask visitors to consider their views and what personal choices they will make to affect our futures. ”

permanent home in TimeScape. The mix of arts, heritage, and symbolism that she embodies, creates an impactful metaphor. By building stories around her about the natural, built, emotional, and ideological world around us we have found a powerful way to engage people. She fires the imagination.

We opened fully in July 2024 for three days a week, with a paid supervisor supporting volunteers. Reviews are inspiring, visitor numbers up by

Stories change minds and museums are good at telling them. We can empower our communities and help achieve our legislator's good intentions. We just need the resources to be able to do that effectively.

**Cath Allan, Chair of Trustees,
CARAD – Community Arts
Rhayader And District
TimeScape Rhayader/
Amserwedd Rhaeadr Gwy**

carad.org.uk



Outdoor boards artist Suzybee Brady.

Have you got your tickets yet?!

Tickets are now on sale for our 2025 Annual Conference – *Museums in Motion: Building resilience for a changing world.*

After last year's sell-out event we're excited to launch ticket sales for this year's conference taking place on June 18th and 19th at the Mary Rose Museum, in partnership with Portsmouth Historic Quarter and the National Museum of the Royal Navy. Join hundreds of your heritage professional, volunteer and trustee colleagues to explore how independent museums are tackling the challenges of today's world with creativity, energy and optimism.

If you've been before you'll know that AIM Conference is renowned for being approachable and practical, often highlighted as one of the most welcoming and friendly in the sector. Always highly rated, last year saw 97% seeing it as good/excellent value and 98% that it met or exceeded their expectations.

The packed and exciting programme is designed to inspire fresh ideas that you can apply to your own organisation. Conference also offers plenty of networking opportunities, a supplier

expo, and social events for connecting with colleagues, familiar and new. Sessions will cover a variety of topics, including:

- Organisational transformation
- Community collaboration and engagement
- Preserving endangered crafts
- Managing risk
- Generating new income streams
- Decarbonisation strategies
- Navigating a polarised world
- Growing volunteer numbers
- Building staff well-being
- Responding to the climate crisis

What participants say

"Friendly, relevant, and useful!"

"A really inspiring and helpful couple of days."

"Thought-provoking discussions... great to see familiar faces and make new connections."

"I've gained many ideas to try out within my own organisation."

Who should attend

AIM Conference is open to everyone working in the heritage sector, from all types of heritage organisations across the UK, not just independent museums and no matter your career stage or the size of your organisation. First-time



AIM Chair Andrew Lovett OBE handing over the conference reins to Dominic Jones, CEO of 2025 host sponsors Mary Rose Museum at Black Country Living Museum in June last year.

attendees can look forward to a welcome coffee session on Thursday morning.

Early Bird tickets now available

We really appreciate that attending conference is a significant investment when budgets are tight. As ever, the best value ticket option for members is our all-in-one early bird, available now. We've also a number of Conference Bursaries available to help with managing costs.

We are grateful to our headline sponsor, Bloomberg Connects, our host venue sponsor, the Mary Rose Museum, and our gold sponsors, Hayes Parsons Insurance Brokers, and Minerva.

aim-museums.co.uk/the-aim-conference

AIM Bulletin

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Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
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Registered in England No. 1350939

Charity No: 1082215

VAT Registration No: 355372196

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Page layout by Dorchester Typesetting

Group Ltd, Dorchester, Dorset

Printed by Lavenham Press

AIM Bulletin is printed on Edixion offset, uncoated paper with ISO 14001 environmental certification and covered by the European EMAS standard. This product is made of material from well-managed, FSC®-certified forests and other controlled sources.

