



Association of
Independent
Museums

AIM Bulletin

June 2025

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Welcome to AIM Bulletin!

First AIM Museum Fundamentals awards made!

Funded by the Pilgrim Trust and The Julia Rausing Trust and launched in December 2024, the AIM Museum Fundamentals grant was designed to respond to the varied needs of many of our members.

It combines the valued collections care and conservation funding supported by the Pilgrim Trust with new funding from The Julia Rausing Trust. Applicants can apply for up to £20,000 to undertake a collections-based project.

From speaking with our members, we were acutely aware that funding to undertake 'back of house' museum activity was difficult to come by. The eligible activity areas have thus been designed to provide scope for developing a project under: collections care, conservation, documentation, physical and intellectual access, and raising capacity. This funding also provides time with a specialist mentor to help guide you through your project and offer specialist advice.

AIM's Programme and Grants Officer, Fiona Woolley said "The inaugural spring round was incredibly popular. We were delighted to receive 95 expressions of interest from which the panel selected fifteen projects to move forward

to the second stage. It was wonderful to see the ambition of smaller members and to hear the passion and need for the projects to take place."

The following thirteen projects received grants from the circa £130,000 available:

The Long Shop Museum £14,000

Redesign and redisplay of 'Made in Leiston' gallery.

The design and content of the new exhibition is based on audience research conducted over the last two seasons. The new displays will focus on unlocking the social history of the town and the people who lived and worked there over a 250-year span, and on technological change.

Dr Jenner's House and Garden £8,608 + Mentor

Collections audit, training, equipment, and database update.

This project is a key steppingstone in the restoration of the House and the longer-term strategic aims of the Trust as we work with international partners towards a global celebration of the eradication of Smallpox.

Wycombe Museum £18,669.44 + Mentor

Securing the Future of Wycombe Museum's Collection.

The primary aim of this project is to ensure the proper care and management of our nationally significant Chair collection by moving it from an unsuitable and deteriorating storage facility to a new, purpose-built space. This has been a long-standing ambition of the museum.

Front cover

*The Manor House and New American Gardens with views out to the Cotswolds.
Credit: Claire Takacs Photography.*

The American Museum & Gardens was created in 1961 by American Dr Dallas Pratt and Englishman John Judkyn. They divided their time between New York, France, and Britain and shared several interests, including an enthusiasm for decorative arts. Dallas and John wanted to open a museum to showcase the arts and crafts of early Europeans in America and to show a British audience that there was more to America than stereotypical depictions commonly shown in Western films popular in the 1950s and 60s. See the profile on page 19.





The Dacorum Heritage Trust Ltd £15,000 + Mentor
Collection care and workspace creation for the Ovaltine collection.

We aim to improve the storage and conditions of the art and advertising of Ovaltine. This unique collection depicts the evolution of the branding and marketing of Ovaltine. The Ovaltine Collection consists of 11,160 items (8.5% of the collection held at Dacorum Heritage).

Edinburgh Printmakers £13,000 + Mentor
Development of collections management system, plus collection re-housing.

This project will fund further steps towards museum accreditation and includes the rehousing of our permanent collection into ICON standard archival storage through funding the purchase of storage materials, the initiation and one year's subscription to a Collection Management System, and the funding of staff to undertake these two major transitions.

Shropshire Regimental Museum Trust £904
Remedial conservation work to Major Joan Cooke's RACO mess dress and purse.

This project compliments our Audience Development Plan which aims to broaden both our audience demographic and the depth of their engagement. Uniforms comprise a popular part of our displays and this significant addition will enable us to extend the scope of these displays together with the opportunity to enrich our Soldier Stories.

Museum of Cornish Life £15,000
Glass conservation and engagement project.

This project builds on a track record of making collections care and management a source for public pride and interest in the museum.

Museum of Policing in Devon & Cornwall £4,000 + Mentor

Phase 1 Inventory Project.

We will undertake an inventory, by location, of 20% of the collection by spring 2026. As part of this each object's primary information will be checked and updated if needed. Location, packing and labeling will be checked and improved where required. Fresh, high quality digital images will be taken, and a condition report completed.

Congleton Museum Trust £9,538.43 + Mentor
From archive to access: Securing and sharing Congleton's heritage.

The aim of the project is to bring Congleton Museum's collection work to a new level of digital maturity. We want to make the collection not only better preserved and managed, but also accessible, open to research, reinterpretation, and participation.

Clyne Heritage Society/Brora Museum £9,485.80
Improving collections care at Brora Heritage.

Until around 12 months ago, the Society was a small, volunteer-led and run organisation. It succeeded in raising c.£4 million pounds to renovate a derelict school and transform it into a museum scheduled to open in summer 2025. The goal of the project is to enhance the care and storage of objects by providing museum-grade enclosures for all stored items and to implement environmental monitoring in both storage and display areas.

Museum of Army Music £11,437.24
Understanding the Heritage of Army Music – A significance project.

We represent every British Army Regimental and Corps band from 1600s-present. This means representing multiple band histories over hundreds of years. The project will identify gaps in the tangible collection and retrospectively collect intangible information for the current holdings.



Elgin Museum £10,800 + Mentor

Conserving the Spey Coracle.

The Spey Coracle has been on display at Elgin Museum since at least 1868. It likely dates from the 18th Century or possibly earlier. Made of wicker, animal hide, horsehair, wood and metal, it is now showing its age. We want to prevent further deterioration and conserve the boat so that it can continue to be enjoyed as a key part of the museum's collection.



Interested in the next round?

If you are considering applying to the autumn round, there are two training events running on the 26 June and 2 July from 11-12:30pm where you can find out more. You can book on now via aim-museums.co.uk/events

Members are also welcome to book a 1-2-1 meeting to discuss their proposal with our Programmes and Grants Officer Fiona Woolley, fiona.woolley@aims-museums.co.uk.

Expressions of interest are welcome until Friday the 8th of August.

Celebrate AIM's 50th Anniversary

As we approach AIM's 50th anniversary in 2027, we're calling on all members – past and present – to help tell the story of AIM's journey. Do you have fond memories, milestones, or photos from your time with AIM? We'd love to hear from you.

- Share your favourite AIM memories – Did a conference, event, or initiative leave a lasting impact?
- Dig out old photos – Do you have pictures from past meetings, collaborations, or networking events?
- Reflect on AIM's evolution – How has AIM's development been reflected in your own organisation (or your role within it)?

Your stories and images will help us create a timeline of achievements, support a commemorative publication of AIM Bulletin and provide fantastic content for the 2027 celebrations. If you're keen to participate – or know someone who might be – please get in touch via editor@aim-museums.co.uk

Reviewing our financial support – have your say

As we near the end of a successful seven-year partnership with CFG (Charity Finance Group), we're taking the opportunity to review and refine how AIM delivers financial support to members. The collaboration with CFG provided great help to many AIM member organisations, but as the needs of our membership evolve, so must our approach.

What's Changing?

Over the coming months, we'll be refining our financial support approach to ensure it aligns with what members have told us they need in these challenging times. Whether it's tax planning, strategies for recruiting trustees with financial expertise, risk management, or growth-focused advice, we want to build a service that supports as many of our members as possible.

How Can You Help?

We've listened closely to feedback from those who took up the CFG partnership, but there's still an opportunity to help us shape this area of our support. As ever, we would love to hear from you on aimadmin@aim-museums.co.uk:

- What are your core financial support needs?
- What financial guidance have you found most useful in the past?
- Where have the gaps been in the current offering?
- What new support would help your organisation thrive?

Your input will directly influence the next phase of AIM's approach to financial support.

What Happens Next?

The current AIM/CFG partnership runs to end September 2025 with any new approach starting in early October. Watch out for updates through the usual AIM channels.



AIM and National Army Museum extend partnership

AIM and the National Army Museum (NAM) are delighted to announce the extension of their highly successful partnership, which will continue to provide AIM membership to Regimental and Corps museums for an additional three years.

Originally launched in April 2022, the partnership has already delivered significant benefits to many military museums across the UK. Thanks to the generous support of the National Army Museum, annual AIM membership fees will continue to remain fully covered for the duration of the extended agreement.

As AIM members, museums gain access to a wide and growing range of

services, including exclusive grants, micro-consultancies, Trustee support, regular online and in-person events, sector representation, and the latest insights and updates.

Julian Farrance, Head of Regimental Museums Liaison, National Army Museum said:

“I am thrilled that AIM and the National Army Museum have

extended this vital partnership. AIM membership provides military museums with an invaluable network of support, resources, and advocacy, essential as the sector continues to navigate post-pandemic challenges. I have seen firsthand the difference this collaboration makes, and I look forward to building on its success over the next three years.”

AIM Director, Lisa Ollerhead added

“This extension reaffirms the commitment of both AIM and the National Army Museum to empowering military museums, ensuring they thrive and continue to preserve and share the rich heritage of the British Army for years to come.”

News in brief

Art Fund Museum of the Year shortlist announced

Art Fund Museum of the Year champions brilliant museums and galleries across the UK. This year's edition considers impactful projects that spotlight the people who bring museums to life – from world-class programming to award-winning wellbeing teams, innovative partnerships with D/deaf audiences to incredible work with migrant communities, and significant contributions to local pride. These museums have made a lasting impact on a local and national scale. Two AIM members are featured on the list which comprises:

- Beamish, The Living Museum of the North (County Durham)
- Chapter (Cardiff)
- Compton Verney (Warwickshire)
- Golden Thread Gallery (Belfast)
- Perth Museum (Perthshire)

www.artfund.org/museum-of-the-year

Martyn's Law Resources and blogs

Associate Supplier United Outcomes have created a series of useful blogs covering various aspects of the new

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, also known as Martyn's Law. These articles discuss the current state, definitions and expected needs using easy to understand terms and examples.

In addition, the government has several primary resources for Martyn's Law including the Act's factsheet and the Protect UK website which has a specific area dedicated to Martyn's Law, as well as many valuable resources. (see links below).

homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2025/04/03/martyns-law-factsheet

www.protectuk.police.uk/martyns-law

united-outcomes.com/solutions/martyns-law

Walthamstow Pumphouse Museum and Markfield Beam Engine announce merger

Walthamstow Pumphouse Museum and Markfield Beam Engine and Museum have announced their merger under a new umbrella organisation, the Heritage and Communities Trust. The merger brings together two of Greater London's well-known industrial heritage sites. Both museums will retain their individual names and distinct identities while benefiting from shared resources,

expertise, and a unified governance structure. This strategic partnership creates the largest dedicated industrial heritage charity within Greater London in terms of public benefit and multi-site operation. The merger builds upon years of collaboration between the two Victorian-era sewage pumping stations, which are located approximately 45 minutes apart on foot along the River Lea.

The newly formed Heritage and Communities Trust will oversee both museums as well as two attractions at the Walthamstow Pumphouse Museum: The Tool House (a community maker space) and Supperclub.tube (a pop-up dining experience in a decommissioned Victoria Line carriage), with plans for further growth in the future.

New Joint Chief Executives of Historic England announced

Claudia Kenyatta and Emma Squire are to share the role of Chief Executive of Historic England following the retirement of Duncan Wilson in October 2025. The appointment was approved by Baroness Twycross, the Heritage Minister, and Susannah Storey, Permanent Secretary at the



Walthamstow Pumphouse and Markfield Beam Engine.



Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Lord Mendoza, Chairman of Historic England said: “The search process attracted over 200 candidates applying for the role, resulting in a very strong field making it through to the final stages. The panel and I were particularly impressed with their deep knowledge of the culture and heritage sectors, as well as insight and experience of the functioning of government.”

Claudia Kenyatta CBE joined Historic England as Director of Regions in 2018. Before this Claudia spent two years as a Director in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, most recently as Director of Corporate Strategy where she was responsible for strategy and planning, governance, evidence and analysis and oversight of the Department’s 45 Arm’s Length Bodies.

Emma Squire CBE joined Historic England in November 2023 starting a job share with Claudia Kenyatta as Director of Regions. Before this Emma spent nearly six years as Director of Arts, Heritage and Tourism at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport where she was responsible for policy on the art market, culture, heritage, tourism, libraries, museums, treasure and cultural diplomacy.

Asking For It

An award-winning exhibition has opened at the National Justice Museum, Nottingham. The free exhibition explores the history and impact of victim-blaming through a powerful series of photographs by Jayne Jackson that challenges the persistent culture of victim-blaming in cases of sexual and gender-based violence. Using a striking ‘mugshot’ format, historical styling, and heritage photographic techniques (see right), Jackson exposes the enduring narratives

that shift blame onto survivors of sexual and domestic abuse and reshapes public perceptions.

Asking For It was developed over three years through extensive research. The stories represented in the exhibition span decades – as far back as 1910. Photographer Jayne Jackson included heritage photography techniques to align methods more authentically with what would likely have been used at the time. She worked with wet plate collodian processes, medium format-cameras, and period specific film types. Each image contains subtle clues that something isn’t quite right, intentionally prompting the viewer to question them.

www.nationaljusticemuseum.org.uk

50% Off Bulletin Advertising

Associate Supplier members of AIM can now enjoy a 50% discount on *Bulletin* advertising for the remainder of 2025—but you must act fast! To secure this exclusive offer, simply book your ad space by **1 August 2025**. This is a great opportunity to boost your visibility within the AIM network at half the cost. Whether you’re promoting products, services, or special offers, *Bulletin* provides a trusted platform to reach key industry decision-makers.

Don’t miss out – book by 1 August and save 50% on your 2025 campaigns. To reserve your space, contact editor@aim-museums.co.uk





Health and Wellbeing in museums

NHS Lothian's Tonic collection.

Cre-Kiw

Ellie Muniandy, Senior Manager of Museum Development, shares how Scotland's museums and galleries are working to improve people's quality of life through health and wellbeing focused initiatives.

Health and Wellbeing is a key component of the Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries. The aim is for museums and galleries to improve the quality of life for people in Scotland through programmes which have a positive impact on their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

There is already significant work happening in this area. Museums and galleries are holding reminiscence sessions for people with dementia, offering mindfulness tours, promoting physical exercise, engaging in social prescribing initiatives, and tackling social isolation within their communities.

In 2020, MGS published a literature review and report on the impact that museums have on health and wellbeing. The research highlighted a wide range of benefits associated with engaging with museums, including reduced stress and anxiety, decreased isolation, an increased sense of identity, and a lower rate of developing dementia in later life.

Recognising these significant benefits, MGS aims to support the museum sector in fostering partnerships with health and social care providers through the Creative Minds Fund.

Launched in 2024 with support from The Baring Foundation, the fund supports museums and partnering mental health organisations to create engagement opportunities for people experiencing mental health issues. It focuses on developing inclusive programming, strengthening collaborations between Scottish museums and mental health organisations, and enhancing the museum sector's confidence and capacity to create more inclusive spaces.

Both Accredited and non-Accredited museums in Scotland can apply for up to £25,000. In addition to the grant, MGS provides funding for Mental Health First Aid training for up to two museum staff members involved in the delivery of the project. This training ensures that museum staff have the skills and confidence to continue supporting mental health initiatives after the project is completed.

The first round of funding was awarded earlier this year to six museum sector organisations, who shared £128,000 to support this work, including:

University of Stirling's Creative Collaborations: Student's Art and Wellbeing project: In partnership with ArtLink Central, this project will deliver creative workshops inspired by the university's art collection to support students dealing with mental health difficulties throughout the 2025/26 academic year.

Fife Cultural Trust's Wellbeing at the Museum project: Collaborating with NHS Fife's Psychology team, this project will offer creative workshops and volunteering opportunities based on Fife Cultural Trust's museum collections. Tailored for individuals experiencing anxiety and social isolation, the workshops will take place at Dunfermline Carnegie Library.

NHS Lothian Charity's Tonic Arts Programme: Focused on supporting NHS healthcare workers, this project will use the Tonic Collection – a diverse art and design collection displayed within NHS Lothian healthcare sites – to engage staff in art tours, artist sessions, and creative responses. The project aims to develop long-term resources and habits of creative mindfulness.

Speaking about their grant, Susan Grant, Arts Manager at Tonic Arts, NHS Lothian Charity said:

“This initiative will not only provide immediate support through these art-based activities but also leave a lasting legacy of resources for staff, patients, and visitors to benefit from for years to come.”

If you would like to talk to the MGS team about the work that Scottish museums are doing, contact inform@museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk

www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/funding/creative-minds-fund

Capital Improvements across Wales

The 2022 Museum Spotlight Survey reported that 57% of Welsh museums' collection stores are overcrowded, with a further 31% projected to be overcrowded within five years.

In response Welsh Government commissioned a review of collections management and a new grant scheme 'Collections Management Capital Improvements Grant Programme' (CMCIP) to support museums to make small-scale capital improvements to existing storage spaces or create new stores.

Eight successful applicants were awarded funding totalling over £421,300.

The Judges Lodging

The 'Works to enable store relocation and creation of new collections workspaces' project fits into a much larger programme of work being carried out at The Judges Lodging. The larger project aim is to achieve financial resilience by incorporating two holiday lets in the building. The CMCIP element focussed on moving collections, insulating rooms, replacing a ceiling, rewiring, upgrading the existing fire detection system, fitting out the collections work room and creating a new workspace.

MonLife

The team at MonLife have been working to improve three sites in their care: Abergavenny Museum, Caldicot Castle and an offsite store. The paper store at Abergavenny Museum has had new electronic roller racking and pigeonholes installed for better storage of fine art. By reconfiguring

the space, they have freed up an additional 20% to store collections. The furniture store at Caldicot Castle has been reorganised with new static racking, ensuring items are kept off the floor as well as being more accessible and the offsite store has also had new racking to increase its capacity.

Llangollen Museum

New storage areas and shelving have increased capacity by 25% and ensured there is space to ingest collections in the future. New display cases and stands have improved display conditions and capacity. A new environmental monitoring system now benefits the team and the building by having features including: a long sensor battery life, simple reporting process, and a screen showing the sensor locations with easy to interpret information for volunteer curators. The grant provided funds for portable dehumidifiers, oil filled radiators and three air conditioning units with heating.

Rhondda Heritage Park

The 'Creating sustainable storage at the Rhondda Heritage Park Museum' project worked on improving a Grade II listed winding engine store – 'Bertie' – by buffering the storage environment. Rhondda Heritage Park has a challenging local environment with an average 85% RH and 176 days rain annually. The aim of the project was to improve security, environmental conditions, relocate collections, better utilise buildings, and provide greater access to collections. This was achieved by focussing resources on the building fabric of 'Bertie' by installing a new window into the store and replacing the fire doors. Storage conditions were further improved with the purchase of three new display cabinets with hygroscopic salt drawers.

CofGâr, Carmarthenshire County Council

Internal building works were carried out and new storage furniture was

purchased to create more organised collection spaces with better accessibility. From studying the environments naturally being met by the building, the collections were grouped together and moved into the storage rooms with the most suitable conditions. The racking in the art store has increased its capacity by 50% and the collections are more accessible so less manual handling is required. Space has also been created for new acquisitions and future archaeological deposits.

Plas Newydd – National Trust

The work in the Grade I listed building has improved storage conditions, retrofitted non collections spaces to provide additional storage, updated the electrical system, improved collections security, repaired buildings damaged by water ingress and improved environmental conditions with the purchase of new data loggers and dehumidifiers.

By repairing water damage and purchasing new racking the team at Plas Newydd have moved most of the collection to the same floor and improved access for volunteers and researchers.

Llanerchaeron – National Trust

The 'Llanerchaeron Villa Collection Storage Project' has retrofitted three former non-collection spaces to expand collections storage by 50.26 sqm. Staff have improved collection storage by installing UV film, a plan chest, new supports for rolled carpets and racking to store collections. The reorganised stores are now more accessible, inclusive, streamlined and the viewable collection has been increased by 10%.

The new Meeting Room store can be used for conservation and collections management and the new environmental monitoring equipment indicate all three spaces are operating within acceptable levels.

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

AIM grants case studies

AIM Pilgrim Trust Collections Care

Dorset Museum & Art Gallery
£4,420

Safeguarding Archaeological Metalwork Collections

This project enabled us to move the Museum's archaeological metalwork collections to the Collections Discovery Centre (approximately 800 boxes), where they were audited. Pieta Greaves, an accredited conservator, identified the conservation issues with the collection, most significantly corrosion of iron objects. She also trained staff and volunteers to methodically go through the collection, repacking and ensuring the environment for the repackaged items was stable. Once completed, the boxes were then placed in new, appropriate storage in the onsite Collections Discovery Centre. In addition, volunteers have been able to identify objects of significance that require future remedial conservation, as well as objects for disposal due to loss of archaeological value.

This has been a very positive process that felt deliverable and manageable in terms of grant oversight and management, supported by clear and helpful guidance. For a small organisation with few collections staff, it has been a positive process with significant benefits and ongoing legacy outcomes. We were able to drive forward and prioritise a specific element of collections work. With this funding and focused resources, we relocated an important collection, completed a full audit, and then ensured appropriate packing, care, storage, and documentation, all within view of our audiences who have enjoyed engaging with this work. We have also rationalised the collection with a view to disposal where appropriate.

A critical output has been the training from a qualified professional, that means staff and volunteers can carry out this work with confidence for the long term. We now have a bank of resources that secures this position for future members of our team.

We have preserved an important collection and increased accessibility for research and display. This is already proving to be a significant legacy, as documentation progresses, and the collection is in use as part of our exhibition programme. All this work demonstrates our genuine commitment to our strategic aims for the collection.

Liz Selby, Director of Collections and Public Engagement and Claire Dixon, Executive Director

As Bulletin was going to press we were deeply saddened to hear of the death of Pieta Grieves. We were privileged to work with Pieta on many projects and her commitment and dedication to the sector shone through. The team at AIM share their deepest sympathies with her colleagues, friends and family.



Metalwork training with Pieta Grieves (left) at Dorset Museum & Art Gallery in August 2024.

Kingston Museum

£600

'Refresh'

A recent collections audit highlighted conservation issues with items on permanent display that were exposed to dust. Without a museum vacuum cleaner we were struggling to undertake an appropriate conservation cleaning routine.

The Collection Care grant enabled us to buy our own equipment, including all the necessary accessories and storage. We have also purchased a loan box and are actively offering the equipment to other small museums and heritage organisations.

With the funding, volunteers undertook a training day and learnt why dust was harmful to museum objects and the basic techniques for removing dust from objects using the new equipment. Together, the volunteers cleaned objects, including our Roman altar and a half-scale model of a Thames Skiff.

The day was a great success and will be repeated. Our volunteers enjoyed learning new skills and knowledge related to collections care. One commented "I really enjoyed learning new skills today and it made me want to learn more."

Seoyoung Kim
Curator



Cleaning a half-scale model of a Thames Skiff at Kingston Museum.

If you're a small or medium museum member inspired to make an application for a similar project, take a look at our AIM Pilgrim Trust Collections Care Audits and AIM Museum Fundamentals: aim-museums.co.uk/grants

Energy Action Group update

Market volatility has increased dramatically but uncertainty is reducing economic growth prospects and driving a recent drop in gas wholesale prices, now close to their lowest in two years, says Touchstone Energy's David Cooksey.

Electricity prices benefit from the same factors. Upward pressure on pricing is coming from the costs of de-carbonisation and the expansion of the electricity distribution grid. Increasing electrification presents challenges for heritage buildings, requiring management teams to proactively plan their future energy needs.

We are seeing a small but steady increase in gas meter removals and export metering as organisations reduce reliance on gas and incorporate renewables where possible. The combination of favourable volume related pricing and higher fixed costs requires consumers to proactively manage their energy needs and energy efficiencies.

In April 2025 water costs across England and Scotland rose by 25% on average. Prices are set to rise by a further 10% across the UK in the four years from April '26. With fresh water and drainage costs set by regional wholesalers and OFWAT, museums can only influence the cost of service by choosing their water retailer and reducing consumption by pursuing water efficiency measures.

The Energy Action Group (EAG) is busy negotiating new contracts for members with renewals occurring in Summer and Autumn 2025.

Touchstone, who run the EAG, have been tendering to energy suppliers and reaching out to participating members, presenting competitive comparisons across suppliers, durations and generation types for each museum.

Touchstone have recently entered the water market, seeking savings on costs, checking VAT billing and rationalising unstructured water supply portfolios to increase awareness, control and convenience.

We are always keen to hear from museums who are unfamiliar with the Energy Action Group service. If you would like expert assistance with your utilities, please get in touch. As well as brokering renewal contracts we can also advise on metering and energy reporting and targeting, to support your cost budgeting and sustainability objectives.

eaguk.org

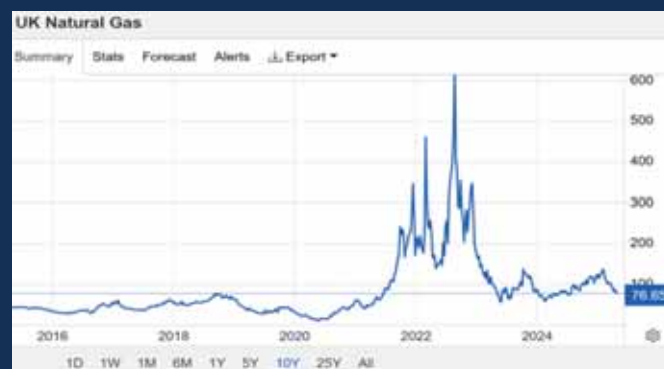


Table: UK Natural Gas prices (GBp/therm)
Trading Economics <https://tradingeconomics.com/commodity/uk-natural-gas> - 2nd May 2025

Amersham Museum opened a new permanent timeline exhibition telling Amersham's history through a chronological display in 2024. Now bedded in, it has been useful to reflect on our process and experiences, says Director Briony Hudson.

Illustrating history at Amersham Museum

Funding from the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust enabled us to create a new temporary exhibition gallery in the room housing our previous timeline exhibition. Although much loved, our inability to change its content and the text-heavy approach meant that for many it wasn't an accessible introduction to the town's history. External funding provided much-needed time and capacity for consultation and allowed us to employ external expertise. Our core team of staff and volunteers, and a project manager worked with our Young Curators group of 14–18-year-olds and local early career illustrator Elly Bazigos, to re-think our approach.

The Young Curators worked with the team to critique other timeline exhibitions, write the brief for the designer of our new display, and take part in workshops to select potential

objects to exhibit. Our decision to work with an illustrator was based on several factors: we wanted to convey both detail and atmosphere; to create an exhibition that engaged, inspired and intrigued visitors; and we wanted to literally illustrate people and moments in history for which we had no visual evidence. Elly's meticulous research of historical detail, vibrant style, and focus on the individuality of buildings and people made her a great fit.

Elly reflects: "Working with a client that trusted my work, in terms of visual appeal and historic accuracy, gave me the freedom to use my voice with the illustrations. Insight from the steering group helped me consider diversity and representation. I hoped that every illustration would help the viewer imagine the purpose, ownership and people behind the objects. Overall, I wanted to provide visuals that would delight and intrigue all age groups and abilities and set the tone for their museum visit."

Elly's approach reflected the project's perspective: "The illustrations provide a strong branding for the museum, as they steer away from the expectation of 'realistic' representations of the past, influenced instead by children's book illustration as opposed to 'textbook' representations. I chose to use traditional materials in a contemporary way, to emphasise the museum ethos. As we will never be able to 100% recreate the past, I think it's best to leave room for the viewer's imagination to be spurred by more playful illustrations. History is in the



stories that feature the objects on display, the illustrations allow audiences to access these stories with ease."

We have continued to work with Elly to create learning resources, including an interactive activity mat based on the timeline, primarily for use with SEND school visits. She has also worked with us to create a range of retail products based on key illustrations from the exhibition. Our brief for the display included an ability to alter or replace individual dated elements, and we hope to continue to do this in the future.

We're currently considering commissioning a portrait from Elly to add to the timeline of 'Ruthe of Meritania [Mauritania]', a West African woman recorded in the parish registers in 1575, for whom we have no other evidence and certainly not an image.

amershammuseum.org





How Bloomberg Connects elevates the National Portrait Gallery Experience

Bloomberg Connects provides free digital guides to museums, galleries, gardens, public art, festivals, historic sites, and more, expanding access to arts and culture around the world.

Transforming the visitor experience

One organisation embracing the possibilities of Bloomberg Connects is the National Portrait Gallery. When the Gallery reopened its doors in 2023, it wasn't just the building that had been transformed, the visitor experience had evolved too.

Rich, personalised storytelling

Through the free digital guide, visitors can explore the Gallery on their own terms. Curator and artist-led audio tours, alongside exclusive exhibition content, offer rich,

layered storytelling that reflects the diversity of visitor interests, from Tudor portraits to contemporary commissions.

Seamless onsite integration

Integration across the site is seamless. Staff and signage at key touchpoints, such as the check-in desk, gallery maps, and artwork look-up points prompt visitors to engage with the guide. Accessibility features are also built-in, helping to create a more inclusive and welcoming experience for all.

Building connections beyond the Gallery

Beyond the building, the Gallery continues to connect with audiences through smart offsite marketing embedding the digital guide into newsletters, social media, and a dedicated webpage to encourage exploration before and after visits.

A model for independent museums

For independent museums seeking to enhance accessibility, education, and visitor engagement, the National Portrait Gallery offers a compelling example of how Bloomberg Connects can make a meaningful difference.

Bloomberg Connects are the Headline sponsors of AIM National Conference 2025

www.bloombergconnects.org



Building a collaborative board

Ben Tucker from Minerva on how effective boards adapt their approach in challenging times.

There are very few meetings any of us attend these days that don't at some point reflect on the uncertainty of the times: financial fragility, funding

challenges, long-term sustainability . . . We all recognize how difficult it is at the moment. In response, there are a lot of leaders in the museum sector who are thinking creatively and resourcefully, building partnerships and exploring solutions.

At governance level, I'm not sure that I encounter enough boards that have reflected on what these challenges of

the times mean for how they behave and work. In my view good boards have been adapting by rebalancing away from oversight ("asking the difficult questions") to collaboration ("working with the executive to develop/deliver strategy").

In a period of time where there was more resource available, boards properly focused on ensuring compliance and providing oversight, but in a more

Making evaluation work for you

Dr Ellie King, Freelance Visitor Experience and Evaluation Consultant explores how evaluation and visitor experience are two sides of the same coin and how, by thinking strategically, it can be truly beneficial for your organisation.

In museums and heritage, evaluation often feels like the strange cousin at a family party: everyone knows they must be invited but no one quite knows what they are doing there. If you've come across evaluation before, it's probably in the guise of a National Lottery Heritage Fund project, or

through annual audience surveys you need to complete as part of your National Portfolio Organisation status. This often makes it seem like an add on, a requirement that sits separately from your actual work as an organisation, that isn't actually helpful.

Evaluation and Visitor Experience: Hand in Hand

As a freelance consultant I focus on interpretation work and evaluation. This work is based on my PhD research, where I developed a toolkit for conceptualising museum exhibitions, evaluating them, and then utilising this data in developing new exhibitions. For me, evaluation and interpretation are two sides of the same coin, and by taking a truly audience-focused approach, evaluation can act as a form of co-production in developing new exhibitions, programmes, and activities. They go hand in hand, and I believe that working as an evaluator makes me a better interpretation consultant, and vice versa.

testing period it becomes important to work together with, and support the executive in, taking courageous decisions, exploring new opportunities, focusing energies on what will make the biggest difference and – dare I say it – embracing risk. I'm not suggesting for one second that boards forget their role in ensuring compliance and propriety, but I do think this rebalancing is needed. What I see more often though is that boards retreat into the comfort zone of audit overdrive, poring over the details and demanding more and more data and papers from their executives, distracting them from activities that might actually be more beneficial in finding strategic solutions. Governance should always be about helping the organization thrive. It isn't an end in itself.

Over the past years, I've had the pleasure of working with a number of cultural organisations in developing boards that will support them in charting a way to a successful future. One such is the Cromwell Museum in Huntingdon which is planning a significant expansion including a capital development, and is contributing to the rejuvenation of the town centre. We've worked with them to find trustees who not only

bring technical expertise (finance, learning, museums) but who will more importantly put the effort in to understanding the nature of the museum's activity and take the time to learn and be available. Humility and courage are two factors rarely tested whilst recruiting trustees, but both are critical to performing well in the role.

In attracting good candidates for trustee roles, there are some things we've learnt that can help. Professionalising background materials for candidates does not need to cost a lot of money or take a lot of time but can make a big difference. A nicely presented document that sets out clearly the current context and strategy of the museum, and provides information about the current make-up of the board and the expectations of the role really helps. A crisp but actual job and person specification – even for a volunteer role – is really useful and provides re-assurance for prospective candidates.

It is also important to spread the net widely. You can post on LinkedIn, facebook and a lot of job boards without having to spend money. Galvanise current trustees to shake the trees,

and reach out to relevant stakeholders. Not everyone has the budget to use an agency although it's worth having the discussion. At Minerva, we've been finding creative ways of supporting clients in the sector with building their boards affordably.

Of course, getting the people appointed is only the start. Induction and ongoing professional development are important for supporting trustees in making an effective contribution, and fostering the right culture is critical. A topic for a different setting is the character and approach of the Chair, whose influence can range from extremely supporting to catastrophic. Very often the significance of the Chair appointment and the influence they have on wider culture is underestimated.

We realise that governance is a big concern for many AIM members and are always interested to get involved in a discussion or to provide support. Do get in touch with us if you want to talk at any time, and we look forward to seeing many of you at the conference next month.

www.minervasearch.com

Making Evaluation Work for You

For evaluation to be properly embedded within your work, it's crucial to consider it from the off, and take a completely visitor-centred approach to your displays, exhibitions, and activities. To do so, there are three main steps:

Planning your Visitor Experience

We can often get bogged down in thinking about the output of our projects, such as putting on a new display, or running an event. What's more important is thinking about the impact of what those activities will have on visitors: in an educational, experiential, and emotional way. Thinking through these three questions are a good way to identify the effect you're planning to have:

- What we want our audiences to know
- What we want them to feel
- What we want them to do

Conducting Evaluation

This article is not the place for delving deep into specific evaluation methods or questions, but I think what's important to note is that the evaluation needs to capture information on the interaction between you as an organisation (presented through your exhibits, activities, or programmes) and your visitors.

There are two key elements to this.

Firstly, you ideally want to know how the audience experienced your activities, in an educational, emotional, and experiential sense. Asking how audiences feel, how they would describe their experience, and the impact the experience had (such as learning, enjoyment, or memories) is a great starting point. Secondly, we need to understand what specific elements of your activity or exhibition encouraged that visitor experience. Asking visitors what influenced their other answers, what stood out to them, or what they would tell a friend about the day, are great ways of getting detailed insight into this interaction between you and your visitors.

Measuring Success

Most importantly, it's crucial to remember that there is no one best visitor experience. Your measure of success should be whether the audience picture of your activity, as collected through evaluation, matches your picture, as detailed in the planning stages. Did your audience know, feel, and do what you intended, or something different? And, most importantly, what specifically about your activity led to this impact? By understanding this relationship between what you've done, and what the effect of that was, you can close that feedback loop, and use these results in future.

Planned and executed well, evaluation can be a valuable tool for your organisation. Starting early, and incorporating it into your development practices, means it best serves you, not just your funders.

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The Mary Rose by Geoff Hunt, PPRSMA.

Exploring the story of the Mary Rose Trust, the dynamic heritage organisation providing the venue for this year's AIM Conference.

Dominic Jones joined the Mary Rose Trust in 2018 as Chief Operating Officer following a commercial background with Merlin Entertainments. He started his career working on a placement at Walt Disney World in Florida before taking a job as a ride operator at Thorpe Park in the UK. He became Chief Executive of the Mary Rose Trust in March 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Past – Mary Rose was ordered by King Henry VIII as he came to the throne in 1509. Her maiden voyage was in 1511, and she served Henry VIII for 34 years before sinking in The Battle of the Solent on 19 July 1545. All but 35 of the 500 crew died.

Move forward to the rediscovery of the wreck site in 1971, the formation of the Trust in 1979 and the decision to excavate and raise the ship and over 19,000 artefacts. On 11 October 1982, the ship was raised from the depths of The Solent in front of a worldwide audience estimated at 60 million. Her excavation and raising remains the world's largest underwater recovery of its type. The ship and her collection offer unparalleled insight into life 500 years ago and represent the largest Tudor collection of its type anywhere in the world. The ship and many thousands of her artefacts are on display in a purpose-built museum in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard.

Present – How do things look? As Dominic says: “I started my career in attractions, working on a rollercoaster and sometimes, I feel I am still on it. We have come through COVID but as the Mary Rose receives no core government funding, we remain reliant on visitors and fundraising to sustain our operation.”

He continues: “This hasn't stopped us, we have introduced immersive experiences, bringing the Mary Rose story to life. Dive The Mary Rose 4D opened to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the raising and allows visitors to experience what it was like to be a diver on the wreck site.”

He added: “We have had to work creatively and dynamically to ensure the future of the Mary Rose.”

What began during the pandemic as a groundbreaking joint venture between the Mary Rose Trust and the National Museum of the Royal Navy has blossomed into the award-winning Portsmouth Historic Dockyard Operations Ltd., revolutionised through strategic operations, marketing and ticket sales.

Today, this partnership continues to evolve, uniting with Portsmouth Historic Quarter to reimagine the Historic Dockyard through collaborative efforts in storytelling, site interpretation and community engagement.”

The Mary Rose has an award-winning learning programme and has recently completed a successful community engagement programme called Anchored in the Community. Made possible by funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, it has enabled the Mary Rose to work collaboratively to engage and inspire new audiences – those that wouldn't normally visit the museum or engage with history.

Future Dom continues: “Our five-year plan is all about lasting financial sustainability with objectives to help us deliver this. We will continue to develop the Museum so that the Mary Rose and her stories are around for future generations. Our next plan, ‘Mary Rose 2.0’, will focus on the stunning ship hall – which is truly unique – alongside other developments within the Museum itself. We hope to open the starboard side (the complete side of the ship) to the public, so watch this space. There is no doubt that the Mary Rose's story will always continue as new research and findings on the Ship and the collection uncover what we know about life 500 years ago. We know elements of the bowcastle, the front of the ship, remain on the seabed, so potentially we will return to the wreck site in future years.”

maryrose.org





The American Museum & Gardens

The American Museum & Gardens was created in 1961 by American Dr Dallas Pratt and Englishman John Judkyn.

Dallas and John divided their time between New York, France, and Britain and shared several interests, among them an enthusiasm for decorative arts. Dallas and John wanted to open a museum to showcase the arts and crafts of early Europeans in America and to show a British audience that there was more to America than stereotypical depictions commonly shown in Western films popular in the 1950s and 60s.

Nearly every visitor asks us why there is an American Museum & Gardens in Bath. John owned a business supplying antiques to American dealers through a New York show room. They already had a home at Freshford Manor near Bath, which John had made as a base for his antique exporting business as the best sources of antiques at the time came from the southwest and the proximity to Bristol's port made shipping them to New York easier. It made sense to set up their museum in the Bath area.

In 1958, Claverton Manor, outside of Bath, was put up for sale. The estate, which included 60 acres of garden, parkland, and woodland, provided the perfect opportunity to combine a museum experience with a country house visit. In addition to a fine exterior and magnificent views, it had room for a far larger collection than they had originally planned.

John and Dallas spent two years travelling around the United States sourcing objects to fill it. Through their





contacts they had access to outstanding examples of furniture and furnishings, ensuring that the collection was the finest possible. They shipped panelling, floorboards, window and door frames across the Atlantic. They asked their friend, London's finest furniture restorer, Nick Bell-Knight to help them transform the Manor House into a museum. They wanted the rooms to look as if their original occupants had 'just stepped out'.

Today we have over 12,000 objects in our collections. Highlights include our world- renowned American quilts and Renaissance maps; period rooms; folk art; Shaker; and Native American collections. These different types of styles and materials on display helped to bring about a revival of quilting and patchwork through Britain, and it generated an enthusiasm for the unadorned woodwork of the Shakers. Young artists and designers, such as Kaffe Fassett and Laura Ashley, found it a source of inspiration.

Visitor numbers to the American Museum & Gardens peaked in 1976 which coincided with the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence. Numbers declined over the following decades as travel to the USA became more accessible and visiting an American Museum in the UK wasn't as unique as when the museum first opened. Today, over 60 years later our mission of sharing American culture and arts remains all the more relevant.

With a new leadership team in place since 2021, we have focused on becoming more relevant to a much broader range of visitors. Through our special exhibitions and events, we have selected topics that cover contemporary issues, appeal to family audiences and feature high profile speakers such as Professor David Olusoga OBE. The result of this work has led to a significant increase in visitor numbers which have more than tripled since pre-covid to over 70k annual visitors. We have also implemented a range of site-wide improvements to support our environmental sustainability work, such as adding a well for ground source

water and opening a new woodland walk. We've also delivered an important Equity, Diversity and Inclusion plan.

With rising costs across the sector and without any government funding, financial sustainability remains a key focus. Even with our significant increases in income (+47% since 2019) we need to further grow visitor numbers and related onsite income as well as travel trade, private hire and increased fundraising – all areas of focus in our new 3-year plan.

Collection highlights

The Baltimore Album Quilt (left), dated 1847, is the largest and one of the most intricate quilts in the collection. Inspired by, and named for, popular autograph albums of the 19th century, these quilts feature individual blocks that are sometimes made by different stitchers and are often signed or inscribed

Walter Bigg's book *A Summarie and True Discourse of Sir Francis Drake's West Indian Voyage*, printed in 1589, includes several maps illustrating elements of Drake's journey (see opposite page). The pictures of fish and reptiles that decorate them are based on drawings by John White.

Clementine Hunter (1886–1988) (see header image) was born and lived in rural Louisiana. She began painting in later life and produced over 4,000 paintings. *Cotton Gin*, circa 1960. Credit: Cane River Art Corporation.

Period room Deer Park (see below) displays examples of the Federalist furniture style, circa 1800. The panelling and fireplace come from a house in Baltimore County, Maryland. Above the fireplace hangs a portrait by acclaimed African American artist Joshua Johnson. Johnson lived and worked in Baltimore. This is a rare portrait by Johnson of an African American subject, believed to be Episcopalian minister Daniel Coker. The portrait was one of the first pieces that Pratt and Judkyn acquired for the museum.

www.americanmuseum.org



Why every museum needs a Business Continuity Plan

What is Business Continuity Planning?

A relevant business continuity plan is a living document which is reviewed at least annually and tested periodically. It is a documented strategy for avoiding or minimising adverse impacts on your business operation should a disaster or failure occur. For museums and visitor attractions, whose work often involves public access, valuable collections, and scheduled events, downtime can lead to significant operational and financial consequences.

Business continuity planning isn't just for major corporations; it is essential for cultural institutions too. The main risks museums face is fire, flooding, power outages, cyber-attacks and staff shortages and a strong plan can help minimise disruption to visitors, protect income, and safeguard your reputation.

Is your current plan fit for purpose?

We would encourage museums to review their existing plans regularly. Key points to review and update would include;

- **Temporary relocation:** Do you have arrangements in place to move operations to an alternative site if needed? This could include transferring events, storage, or exhibitions.
- **Collections prioritisation:** Which exhibits are most critical to protect or restore first? Maintaining an up-to-date inventory of items, ordered by importance or irreplaceability, can guide urgent decisions.
- **Communications strategy:** How will you manage messaging during a crisis? Having access to PR support and a pre-drafted communications plan can help manage public perception and stakeholder trust.

- **Staff training and clarity:** Are all staff aware of the plan and their role in it? Regular drills and updates ensure the team knows what to do when it counts.

Business interruption cover

Business Interruption can cover loss of income or profit, should insured damage be incurred hampering operations. Careful consideration is required to this sum, which differs to the accounting version and must be accurate to avoid the pitfalls of underinsurance.

In addition, covers to provide indemnity for additional costs can be insured, known as 'Increased Costs of Working' and 'Additional Increased Costs of Working'. Whilst the former needs to be economic (i.e., you have to spend a pound to save a pound) to mitigate lost income, the latter cover isn't subject to an economic test and can provide funds for costs such as PR management.

There are also key extensions available to this cover which can be bespoke to the operations of a museum, such as loss of attraction following an incident nearby, or loss of utilities.

Considering the indemnity period

Another consideration is the period of Business Interruption cover that is required, known as the 'Indemnity Period'.

In determining a sensible timeframe for your museum or visitor attraction, key considerations include how long it would take to: clear and make safe any damaged buildings, navigate planning permissions for reconstruction (particularly if the building has listed status), a tender process for contractors, and a complete rebuild itself. These timelines also apply to securing and setting up temporary exhibition spaces or visitor facilities, such as modular buildings, which may need to be hired.

Depending on your museum's location, planning restrictions may also apply to temporary structures—so it's best to understand these in advance and ensure the right permissions are in place. Supply chain challenges remain significant in the construction sector, and the indemnity period in your policy begins from the date of the incident. If your policy offers less than a 36-month indemnity period, it's worth reviewing whether this would realistically cover the time needed to fully recover.

Summary

A Business Continuity Plan is critical for museums and visitor attractions to ensure an established plan exists in the event of disruption. If it is adequately reviewed and stress tested, it can reduce the impact on operations and provide much-needed clarity for all.

Business Interruption cover can act as a fundamental part of a Business Continuity Plan. In its simplest form, insurance cover is an act of risk transfer to put a museum in the same place as if a claim didn't occur. Cover can be arranged on a bespoke basis to provide financial indemnity in the event of insured damage to achieve this. Working with a specialist broker well-versed in the risks associated with the sector will ensure that the level and basis of cover is suitable, working in conjunction with a Business Continuity Plan.

For more guidance on Business Continuity Planning or Business Interruption insurance, speak with your insurance broker or get in touch with the specialist Hayes Parsons team.

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