



Association of  
Independent  
Museums

# AIM National Conference 2026

10 & 11 June

Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens and Beamish,  
The Living Museum of the North

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# Welcome to Your Conference



This year's conference theme, *Independent Advantage: Rethinking your museum operating model*, speaks directly to the challenges and opportunities facing our sector today. What defines a truly successful museum is a question we return to often, but it feels especially urgent now.

We are operating in a political and economic climate that is constantly shifting. Financial pressures, changing audiences and rising expectations mean that standing still is not an option. If we are to survive and flourish, we need to be willing to think differently about how we work, how we use our resources, and how we deliver our missions.

Independent museums are well placed to do this. Our agility, creativity and strong sense of purpose are real strengths. But they need to be matched by clear, resilient operating models that support long-term success.

This year's conference programme has been designed with that in mind. Drawing on AIM's *From Fragile to Flourishing* research, it brings together practical examples, new thinking and honest discussion about what works. Across the two days, you will hear from organisations that are testing ideas, adapting their models and finding ways to build greater resilience.

Alongside the sessions, I encourage you to make the most of the opportunity to connect with one another. The conversations between sessions are often just as valuable as those on stage. Sharing experiences, challenges and ideas is one of the most powerful ways we learn as a sector, and I always find that the connections and discussions I have at conference leave me feeling refreshed and energised, feelings I hope you will share at the end of our two days together.

If you have thoughts about how AIM can better support you and your organisation, please do share them with me, the Board, or Lisa and the team. Your insight helps shape our work and ensures we remain relevant to your needs.

I know that attending conference is a significant commitment of time and resource. Thank you for choosing to be part of it, and for the work you do every day to sustain and champion independent museums.

I hope this programme provides both inspiration and practical ideas, and that you leave the conference feeling more confident about the changes ahead and how you will navigate them.

**Rhiannon Goddard, AIM Chair and Head of Public Engagement Projects and Business Management, Historic Royal Palaces**

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**Delegate listing:** Scan the QR code to see our delegate listing on our website. You'll also find a printed list at Reception.

The AIM Board are on hand throughout conference, do say hello!



Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens

## Conference Sessions Day 1 - Wednesday 10 June

9:30

### **Registration opens:**

Tea and coffee available

If this is your first AIM Conference, you're invited to join other 'first timers' for welcome coffee, hosted by Margaret Harrison, Head of Programmes at AIM.

**Masterclasses and breakout tours** – If you pre-registered for a masterclass and/or breakout tour, you'll find the list of attendees for each session in Reception. These are now fully booked.

Open  
all day

**Co-curated art workshop** – Throughout the conference artist Betty Barnet Brown will have a workshop open for you to drop in and participate in our co-created artwork. Under Betty's expert guidance, you will design a template that represents your organisation and cut this shape out of one of the lovely fabrics supplied. The workshop will be accessible whatever your ability or experience.



Pontop  
Room









10:00 –  
10:10



### **Welcome to AIM Conference:**

Rhiannon Goddard,  
AIM Chair and Head of Public Engagement Projects  
and Business Management, Historic Royal Palaces.



Theatre

 10:10 – 10:30  Theatre	<b>Welcome to venue</b> Lucy Jenkins and Jonathan Ward, Co CEO's of Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens	
 10:30 – 11:00  Theatre	<b>Keynote: Built for the future:  How museums can think long and act bold</b> Hannah Fox, Executive Director, The Bowes Museum  What kind of thinking do we need to steward sustainable independent museums? Drawing on the journey of The Bowes Museum, Hannah	reflects on what it means to imagine museums through a long-term lens. With 2092, The Bowes's 200th anniversary, as a strategic horizon, Hannah considers how thinking in generations can reframe today's choices — offering new ways to respond to short-term pressures while shaping lasting impact for communities, collections, and places.
 11:00 – 11:15  Theatre	<b>AIM Annual General Meeting and strategic update</b> Lisa Ollerhead, Director, AIM	Hear what your AIM membership powered over the last 12 months, what's in plan for the rest of this year and next, and the latest on member benefits. <b>Find all the papers for the AGM at <a href="https://aim-museums.co.uk/annual-general-meeting-2026/">aim-museums.co.uk/annual-general-meeting-2026/</a></b>
 11:15 – 12:00  Theatre	<b>Panel – Fragile to Flourishing</b> Dawn Langley and Anna Dinnen, Alchemy Research and Consultancy, Dominic Jones, CEO, The Mary Rose Trust, and Andrew MacKay, Director, Tullie	Setting the theme for our two days on operating models, hear from the researchers and case studies from our AIM-commissioned resources on what it means to be a sustainable independent museum.

 11:30 – 13:00 Seminar Room 1	<b>Masterclasses</b> – If you've booked a place on a masterclass, there will be time allowed at the end for you to get your lunch.  <b>Interpretation on a shoestring</b> Ruth McKew, Headland Design  We know the dilemma. Tired museum displays don't look good, but new exhibitions require investment. What's possible with small (or no) budgets? Grounded	in research for the Welsh Government, this hands-on session tackles the real problems museums face. We'll consider solutions for immediate improvements, smarter use of small grants, and a strategic approach to building captivating interpretation, all on a shoestring.
 Lecture Theatre 1	<b>Technology clinic for small museums</b> Rod Barlow, CEO, Rod Barlow Consulting  In this interactive session, delegates will pick up hints and tips in utilising inexpensive technology tools to make processes simpler, deliver a better quality experience for visitors and help keep information safe. Topics that will be covered include maximising the use of Microsoft 365, information security, obtaining free and discounted software, as well as a simple practical guide to AI. There will also be time for delegates to pose technology queries	or issues to the experts. This interactive session is designed for small museums or any museum responsible for implementing and supporting computerised technology.  <b>Continued overleaf...</b>



Seminar  
Room 2

**Beyond the label: Connecting museum visits with digital interpretation**

Cheryl Kwok, EMEA Onboarding and Relationship Management Lead, Bloomberg Connects, Esther White, Bloomberg Team Lead, Manahil Waseem, Collections Content and Support Officer, Art UK.

This masterclass explores how museums can use digital tools to enrich visitor journeys without detracting from the onsite experience. In particular, we will examine how to tell the stories of your institution and collections through layered interpretation — combining text, images, audio, and video — to support diverse visitor engagement styles and needs, ultimately encouraging discovery and meaningful engagement.

12:00 –  
13:00

**Lunch and Expo**



The Refectory

13:00 –  
13:40

**Breakout**



Seminar  
Room 1

**National Justice Museum on Tour – Using partnerships and national networks to build your brand**

Victoria Reeves, Chief Executive, National Justice Museum, and Gill Brailey, Freelance consultant.

From a 50% fall to an award-winning national programme partnering with the judiciary and attracting 7000 per year. Discover what made the On

Tour project so successful and how it enabled them to change the business model and grow the brand. Key takeaways:

- Building key partnerships, widening your brand and delivering a step change.
- Taking your people with you as you change your business model
- Applying for funding for resilience projects.



Seminar  
Room 2

**Reaching out with sound**

Dr Sylvia Hixson Andrews, Director, and Liz Rawlings, Steering Committee, Blandford Town Museum

Discover how NaviLens, an app designed for the blind and vision impaired, is benefitting many visitors

including neurodiverse, non-readers, or those who prefer to hear about objects whilst looking at them. Find out why Blandford Town Museum chose it, how they developed it for their needs and the ways in which this assistive technology can be used in a museum setting.



Beamish, The Living Museum of the North



Theatre

### **Taking people with you: leading through change in cultural organisations**

Andrew Mackay, Director, Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Katie McGivney, Cumbria Museum Consortium Manager, Michael McGregor, Director, Wordsworth Grasmere, and Luis Martins, CEO, Lakeland Arts

Develop practical strategies for leading museums through transformation whilst keeping staff,

volunteers, and partners engaged. This practical session draws on Cumbria Museum Consortium's experience and explores the power of partnership working, peer networks, and transparent communication in times of change. Hear their insights into inclusive leadership, how to balance commercial and charitable objectives and maintain morale during uncertainty. You'll leave with actionable tools to strengthen your resilience and collaboration.



Lecture  
Theatre 1

### **The road to financial diversification**

Emma Howe, Director and Darren Smith, Knowledge Transfer Partnership Associate, The Minorities

This session will explore the financial challenges that small and medium sized museums face and share a toolkit to help others to review, develop and assess

their income streams. In the last 12 months, The Minorities has improved its earned income by 72% and is far less reliant on any one revenue stream. This has involved a range of methods, including improving existing revenue streams with innovations to the operating models as well as opening up new ventures. Whilst not a cure all, the toolkit will aid participants to develop their own financial diversification.

13:00 –  
13:40

### **Breakout tours**

#### **Ushaw House & Chapels Tour**

Step inside centuries of history on a guided House & Chapels Tour at Ushaw. Wander through magnificent rooms, discover hidden stories and experience the quiet grandeur of Ushaw's awe-inspiring chapels.

Ushaw's story spans more than 450 years. Its origins lie in the upheaval of the Reformation, when an English Catholic college was founded in Douai in

1568. Forced to flee during the French Revolution, the college returned to England and eventually settled at Ushaw in 1808. Over the next century, an extraordinary complex of buildings grew up around the original Georgian house and represent some of the finest examples of Gothic Revival architecture in the country, including the largest collection of work by four generations of the Pugin family.

#### **Treasures of Ushaw: A library experience**

Enjoy special access to the magnificent Big Library, a breathtaking space designed by Joseph Hansom, followed by a curated viewing of up to 20 fascinating books and archival treasures. You'll discover pieces rarely seen by the public, each with its own story to tell.

Ushaw's Library contains over 50,000 books together with a wealth of archive material relating to their history, architectural design and alumni. Important holdings within the Library include the Nuremburg Chronicle of 1493, Isaac Newton's Principia Mathematica and a first edition of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*.

13:00 –  
13:40

### **Energising yoga**

Lone Wolf Vision

A practical and accessible yoga session designed to leave participants feeling refreshed, focused, and re-energised for the remainder of the conference. The session combines mindful movement, breathing techniques, simple balance and strength postures, and guided awareness practices.



Ushaw Big Library

13:45 –  
14:25

## Breakouts

- |                            |  |   |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| <p>📍 Seminar Room 2</p>    | <p><b>Moving from the passive to the active</b><br/>Melissa Linsey, Museum Manager, and Connie Search, Museum Assistant, Dacorum Heritage</p> <p>What happens when a museum goes dormant? When funding vanishes, advocacy falters, and institutional memory fades—especially when your core funder is in flux? This small museum and archive is facing</p> | <p>this exact reality. Now, they’re mapping a path forward. From re-engaging volunteers and local communities to improving relationships with local history societies, the council and MPs to redesigning the funding model, improving collections care, and proposing a bold new heritage centre, this is an active work-in-progress. This is a sector-wide challenge. Bring and share your ideas, your examples, and your strategies!</p>                               |
| <p>📍 Lecture Theatre 1</p> | <p><b>Wild spirits and wiser risks: rethinking entrepreneurship in small museums</b><br/>Dr Matthew Tanner, Specialist Consultant &amp; AIM Hon Vice President, Compass Heritage</p>   | <p>How can independent museums turn constraints into catalysts through bold, mission-driven entrepreneurship. This session explores practical ways to embrace creative risk, challenge cautious governance, and unlock new forms of value—without losing sight of charitable purpose. A provocative and energising call for leaders ready to think differently.</p>   |
| <p>📍 Theatre</p>           | <p><b>Resilience in action: shaping museum futures through innovation and entrepreneurship</b><br/>Erin Moran, Museum Futures Capacity Programme Officer, Museums Galleries Scotland, and Siobhan Beatson, Museum Curator, Ullapool Museum</p> <p>Sustainability and innovation are central to building museum resilience, demonstrated by stories</p>     | <p>emerging from Museum Futures, a pioneering Museums Galleries Scotland programme launched in 2025. This session introduces opportunities and guidance designed to strengthen skills and capacity across the sector. Participants will explore out-of-the-box thinking that helps museums to flourish, begin developing an individual action plan for their own organisation, and hear from one of our Innovation museums as they share insights from their journey.</p> |
| <p>📍 Seminar Room 1</p>    | <p><b>Storytelling, brand building, and creating a new museum rooted in your values</b><br/>Dr Chris Ferguson, Museum Director, and Claire Byers, Director, Executive Head of Brand and Communications, Ad Gefrin</p>  | <p>Visit England’s <i>Best New Tourism Business</i> in 2025, Ad Gefrin is the epitome of a multi-sensory storytelling brand that is rooted in place and wholly embraced by its communities. This session will draw on lessons from over 50 years of creating visitor-centred cultural destinations and museum experiences that can help you connect with, grow and sustain your audiences.</p>  |

14:25 –  
14:55

**Tea break  
and Expo**

 The Refectory

15:00 –  
15:40

## Breakouts



Seminar  
Room 1

### **Old stuff: an environmental story – how to use your collections to talk about the planetary emergency**

Clémence Aycard, Art Curator and  
Consultant, Climate Museum UK

Can carpets help us talk about climate change? What do trinkets, paintings or clothes have to teach us of our connection to nature? Can the past help us build the future we hope for?

In a world of increasingly alarming news, museums and historic houses collections are wonderful mediums to engage audiences with the planetary emergency. This practical session will offer a short introduction to environmental interpretation. We'll explore ways to interrogate any object in search of stories of our (somewhat broken) relationship with the world, and reflect on how collections can help us mend it.



Lecture  
Theatre 1

### **Generating income from your school visits**

Katherine McAlpine, Director and Gabriella Codastefano, Learning and Engagement Producer, Brunel Museum

For many years, the Brunel Museum's schools programme relied on external contractors meaning high delivery costs, limited flexibility

and a modest return. However, this work has been moved from a cost heavy outreach activity into a profitable, adaptable and resilient educational offer. The museum will share the steps they took, the challenges encountered and the measurable outcomes achieved, offering a model for cultural organisations seeking to build income generating school programmes without compromising on quality.



Theatre

### **The heritage hustle: Blending a passion for heritage with a dynamic mixed- economy approach**

Lucy Jenkins and Jonathan Ward, Co-CEO, Ushaw Historic House, Chapels, & Gardens

Fifteen years ago Ushaw faced the real threat of abandonment and dereliction. This session will show how a proactive and energetic approach to finding new opportunities has created a resilient, forward-

looking business model where heritage, mission, culture and commerce work hand in hand. Expect practical insights on diversifying income, engaging communities and balancing values with viability. This is a chance to hear how Ushaw has tackled a neglected estate through creativity, honouring the past whilst building resilience, embracing entrepreneurial thinking and turning heritage assets into thriving experiences – all grounded in purpose-driven practice.



Seminar  
Room 2

### **Troubleshooting governance - lessons from AIM Higher**

Margaret Harrison, Head of Programmes, AIM, Jonathan Durnin, AIM Higher Consultant, Paul Hitchcock, Chair, Foxton Inclined Plane Trust, and Jeremy Mitchell, Chair, Petersfield Museum and Art Gallery

AIM has been helping museums with good governance through bespoke consultancy for nearly 10 years. Many of these consultancies have been transformational for the museums that took part. One museum commented - *it has moved the organisation forward a huge leap*. AIM share the practical lessons they've learned about good governance and sustainability.

15:00 –  
15:40

### Breakout tours

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15:00 –  
15:40

#### Sound bath

Lone Wolf Vision

An opportunity to deeply relax and switch off from the demands of the day. Participants simply lie

comfortably on a yoga mat while being immersed in the sounds and vibrations of crystal singing bowls and other therapeutic instruments. Many people describe the experience as calming, restorative, and deeply restful.

15:45 –  
16:25

#### Panel – Shaping the standard: how museum Accreditation is changing

Theatre

Sarah Hartshorne, Senior Manager, Museums and Cultural Property (interim), Arts Council England, Tom Billington, UK Accreditation Committee Chair, Dan Hudachek, Head of Collections, Beamish Museum, and Jennifer Cragg, Museum Accreditation Advisor, Museum Development North

How do you ensure a museum standard used by over 1,700 museums remains relevant and useful in an ever-changing context? Join Arts Council

England and the Museum Accreditation partnership to explore how the redesign of the Museum Accreditation Scheme is progressing. Hear more about the focus of the revised Standard, and how it can help support the delivery and development of a 'well run museum'.

From insight to policy to practical implementation, this session will consider how the Museum Accreditation Standard 2026 will provide the latest evolution of this long-standing and valued scheme. We'll focus on governance and how the new Standard will be a useful tool to build strong practice, whilst offering a more user-friendly service.

16:25 –  
16:55

#### Beyond the buildings: Museums at the heart of regional change

Theatre

Rhiannon Hiles, CEO, Beamish, the Living Museum of the North

Beyond the buildings, Beamish is the beating heart of the North East – an anchor institution rooted in

community and connected globally. Through their new strategy, *Beamish to the Future*, they will deliver four key strands of work – inspire, connect, care and grow – shaping skills, wellbeing, opportunity and financial resilience, and reimagining the role museums can play beyond their buildings.

16:55 – 17:00

#### Day 1 Conference Close

The coaches will depart Ushaw at 17:10 to drop off at Travelodge, Marriot and Radisson Blu (for both Radisson Blu and Premier Inn).



Beamish, The Living Museum of the North

19:00

**Wednesday  
Social**



**Beamish, The Living Museum of the North**

This evening's social event at Beamish will be a trip back to the 1950s and Edwardian eras. Enjoy fantastic entertainment and discover the newest additions to the museum in The 1950s Town and explore the early 1900s Town with food served from the Tea Rooms.

**Coach times**



**If you're getting the coach to Beamish, the coach pick up times are:**

**18:30 Ushaw main bus stop**

**18:45 Radison Hotel (for both Radisson and Premier Inn)**

**18:50 Marriot**

**18:55 Travelodge**

**And the coaches for travel back to the hotels will leave Beamish at 22:10.**



# Useful Information

**Registration desk:**

**Day 1 – 9.30am Wednesday 10 June**

**Day 2 – 9am Thursday 11 June**

**Conference sessions:**

All sessions are taking place within the main building at Ushaw. See the agenda pages for more details on what is happening in which room and there's a note on the door to say what's happening in each room too.

**Exhibition:**

Trade stands are located at the Refectory and will be open both days of conference.

**Refreshments:**

Lunch, tea and coffee is included in your ticket price and will be served in the Refectory on both days.

**Masterclasses:**

If you pre-registered for a masterclass, you'll find the list of attendees for each session at Reception. The masterclasses are now fully booked.

**WiFi:**

Free WiFi is available throughout the site.

**Breakout sessions:**

Please see the signs in Reception or on each of the doors to the breakout rooms to find out where each session is taking place. There is no need to pre-book for the breakouts.

**Quiet Space:**

If you need a moment away from the conference sessions, or somewhere to catch up on work, then do feel free to use the breakout rooms when not in use, or there's a cafe on site as well as the chapel (see map).

**Breakout tours:**

The breakout tours are now fully booked. You'll find the list of attendees for each session at Reception.



**Delegate listing:** The delegate listing is available on the AIM website at [aim-museums.co.uk/the-aim-conference/delegates](http://aim-museums.co.uk/the-aim-conference/delegates) or you'll find the printed list at Reception.

**AIM AGM:**

This will take place from 11am - 11.15am on Wednesday 10 June in the Theatre and all AIM members are invited to attend. The agenda, minutes of the 2025 AGM and other information can be downloaded from [aim-museums.co.uk/annual-general-meeting-2026/](http://aim-museums.co.uk/annual-general-meeting-2026/)

**LinkedIn:**

We'll be posting during the conference and would love to hear from you too. Tag us **@AIM-Association-of-Independent-Museums** and use **#AIMConference2026**

**Coaches:****Wednesday 10 June:**

17:10 Depart Ushaw for Travelodge / Marriot / Radisson Blu (for both Radisson and Premier Inn)

**For the evening social pick up times:**

18:30 Ushaw main bus stop

18:45 Radisson Blu (for both Radisson and Premier Inn)

18:50 Marriot

18:55 Travelodge

**From Beamish to conference hotels:**

22:10 Depart Beamish for Ushaw / Radisson Blu / Marriot / Travelodge

**Thursday 11 June pick up times:**

09:00 Radisson Blu (for both Radisson and Premier Inn)

09:05 Marriot

09:10 Travelodge

16:10 Depart Ushaw main bus stop for Durham station

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## Map Key

- 1** Main entrance
- 2** Breakout room - Lecture Theatre 1
- 3** Breakout room - Seminar Room 2
- 4** Theatre
- 5** Breakout room - Seminar Room 1
- 6** Pontop Room - artist in residence
- 7** The Refectory
- 8** Cafe
- 9** Library Gallery

# What could you discover?

To find out more scan to visit our website ([www.riches.ukri.org](http://www.riches.ukri.org)) or find us at the conference

RICHES is the UK's Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science

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# RICHES

RESEARCH  
INFRASTRUCTURE FOR  
CONSERVATION AND  
HERITAGE SCIENCE

## The AIM team:

We're really looking forward to catching up with you in person! If you need help or have any questions, please visit the reception desk to speak to someone from the team.



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# MINERVA

We provide executive search and leadership services to clients and individuals who are seeking to make positive impact on society. Our clients span the cultural, social impact, education and allied sectors, and our reach is global. We are characterised by a people-focused approach and commitment to quality.

Our recent clients in the broader cultural sector include the Museum of London, Cromwell Museum, The Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, Dorset Museum, Royal Society of Sculptors, Dance City, and National Museums of Wales.

Diversity is central to all of our work and, since we started, over 50% of our appointees have been women and over 15% individuals coming from global majority backgrounds. Our broader services include leadership development and governance review.

Our ethos is central to all we do. Our team is diverse, honest, approachable, supportive and fun, and this informs all our work and enables us to strive for excellence.

As well as our core work, we support the sectors that we serve and are sponsors of the East London Art Prize as well as art residencies at the Van Gogh House in Brixton.

We're delighted to sponsor Conference and be involved once again in the AIM exhibition. We will have team members present throughout the conference and look forward to introducing ourselves to you.

[www.minervasearch.com](http://www.minervasearch.com)



Taking every detail into consideration, for comprehensive insurance cover

We're excited to be sponsoring the AIM Conference again! Come and say hello to the Hayes Parsons team.

[aim@hayesparsons.co.uk](mailto:aim@hayesparsons.co.uk)  
0117 929 9381



Exhibition Theatre at Ushaw House, Chapels and Gardens

# Conference Sessions

## Day 2 - Thursday 11 June

9:00 **Registration opens**

Open  
all day

**Co-curated art workshop** – Throughout the conference artist Betty Barnet Brown will have a workshop open for you to drop in and participate in our co-created artwork. Under Betty’s expert guidance, you will design a template that represents your organisation and cut this shape out of one of the lovely fabrics supplied. The workshop will be accessible whatever your ability or experience.

 Pontop  
Room

9:30 – 9:45 **Introduction to the day:**  Theatre  
AIM Director, Lisa Ollerhead

9:45 – 10:00 **It was 49 years ago today that the band began to play**  
Sam Mullins, AIM Vice President

 Theatre

In 2027 AIM will celebrate 50 years of transformational change through its advocacy and support for independent museums. By whom and why was AIM founded, what is the significance of this anniversary today and into the future, and how will this be marked and celebrated?

10:00 – 10:15 **A word from our sponsors:**  
Cheryl Kwok, EMEA Onboarding and Relationship Management Lead, Bloomberg Connects

 Theatre

10:15 – 10:45 **From insight to connection: rethinking research in museums**  
Enke Huang, Director & Lead Consultant, Daylight Perspective

 Theatre

What if research in museums was not simply a tool for evaluation, but a catalyst for transformation? This keynote challenges traditional approaches to audience insights and explores how museums can use research to navigate uncertainty, build

communities, strengthen partnerships, and shape more resilient futures. Drawing on cross-sector experience in audience research and place-based research, this session will present a more relational and action-oriented approach to insight generation, one that connects people, institutions and place. Through practical examples, attendees will leave with new ways to turn listening into strategy, and strategy into meaningful change. .

11:15 –  
12:00

**Breakout**



Lecture  
Theatre 1

**Growing Together: Embedding inclusion and collaboration in our museums**

Eleanor Moore, Project Manager, Growing Together and Sustainable Volunteering Officer, and Clare Ferdinando, Cultural Producer, Growing Together, Museum Development South West, Helen Jacobs, Head of Learning and Engagement, Royal West of England Academy

Discover how museums are building genuine inclusion—and making it stick. Learn the practical strategies behind their lasting change. This session provides the ideal opportunity to take a strategic pause and reflect on your organisation’s inclusion journey.

Museum Development South West, alongside a participant in the project at Royal West of England Academy (RWA), will share learnings gained from over three years of work funded by NLHF and ACE. What did the museums do? How did they get started and sustain progress?

Helen Jacobs, Head of Learning and Engagement at RWA, will reflect on changes - large and small, practical and symbolic, straightforward and less so – in RWA’s ongoing journey.



Seminar  
Room 2

**Flushed with success! Building accessible visitor facilities**

Rebecca Yorke, Director, Brontë Parsonage Museum

Despite opening to the public in 1928, the Brontë Parsonage Museum had no visitor facilities (ie toilets) until the beginning of 2025. In this session, Director

Rebecca Yorke will discuss the challenges of fundraising for the most essential of facilities; make the case for the role toilets play in widening access; share her tips for undertaking a capital project for the first time and explain how she took everyone with her on the construction journey. May contain puns.



Seminar  
Room 1

**A house in time unlocked: Developing stories and interpretation at Holst Victorian House**

Laura Kinnear, Curator, and Sabine Orton, Volunteer (previously Operations Manager), Holst Museum

Declining visitor numbers and an incoherent offer meant something needed to change if the former Holst Birthplace Museum in Cheltenham was to survive. Over three years, the small team delivered a first-class immersive visitor experience and a rebrand using technology, a small budget and a lot of inspired creativity! Find out how they got the permanent offer right and what they found that could inspire museums of all sizes.



Theatre

**Building a commercial model that is as unique as your museum**

Samantha Shotton, COO, Beamish, the Living Museum of the North

This session reveals how Beamish builds commercial spaces as distinctive as the museum itself—experiential, immersive and rooted in story. They will show how retail and catering can do more than trade: deepening engagement, extending learning and strengthening financial resilience. Through practical examples, they will explore design choices, partnerships and team culture that turn commercial activity into part of the visitor experience, delivering income while enriching the visitor journey.

11:15 -  
12:00

### Breakout tours

#### Ushaw House & Chapels Tour

Step inside centuries of history on a guided House & Chapels Tour at Ushaw. Wander through magnificent rooms, discover hidden stories and experience the quiet grandeur of Ushaw's awe-inspiring chapels.

Ushaw's story spans more than 450 years. Its origins lie in the upheaval of the Reformation, when an English Catholic college was founded in Douai in

1568. Forced to flee during the French Revolution, the college returned to England and eventually settled at Ushaw in 1808. Over the next century, an extraordinary complex of buildings grew up around the original Georgian house and represent some of the finest examples of Gothic Revival architecture in the country, including the largest collection of work by four generations of the Pugin family.

#### Treasures of Ushaw: A library experience

Enjoy special access to the magnificent Big Library, a breathtaking space designed by Joseph Hansom, followed by a curated viewing of up to 20 fascinating books and archival treasures. You'll discover pieces rarely seen by the public, each with its own story to tell.

Ushaw's Library contains over 50,000 books together with a wealth of archive material relating to their history, architectural design and alumni. Important holdings within the Library include the Nuremberg Chronicle of 1493, Isaac Newton's Principia Mathematica and a first edition of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*.

11:15 -  
12:00

#### Mindfulness walk

Lone Wolf Vision

A guided mindful walk through the beautiful grounds of Ushaw. Participants will be encouraged

to slow down, engage their senses, and explore simple mindfulness practices while walking. The session combines gentle movement, reflection, and practical techniques that can be applied to everyday life to help manage stress and improve focus

12:10 -  
12:50

#### Panel – Income with integrity

Emma McBeath, Museum Manager, Eyam Museum, Katy Haigh, Development Manager, The Rum Story, and Jenna Marrion, Safe Access Freelance Project Manager, AIM

Theatre

Museums are increasingly innovative in finding new ways to make money, but with ethical practice at the heart of organisations some ideas can appear controversial or even exploitative, especially when dealing with topics and historical events that are sensitive or challenging for contemporary visitors and professionals. Inspired by an audience question asked in one of last year's plenary sessions, this panel explores how museums are generating income without monetising trauma.



12:50 –  
13:50

**Masterclasses** – If you've booked a place on a masterclass, there will be time allowed at the end for you to get your lunch.



Seminar  
Room 1

**Employment law shake up:  
What museums need to know**  
Sarah Furness, Partner,  
Employment Law & HR, Hay & Kilner

How do proposed employment law reforms affect museum operations? The team at Hay & Kilner outline the key reforms and their implications and offer guidance on how to avoid tribunal claims by way of case studies which will be illustrated via practical demonstrations. Discover how to manage any risk and turn legal change into an opportunity.



Seminar  
Room 2

**What museum professionals need  
to know about commercial contracts**  
Celia Lloyd Davidson, Legal Director,  
Boodle Hatfield LLP

This session provides an overview of key risks in commercial contracts - red flag issues to look out for, sector specific considerations, and key updates from a legal perspective - all tailored to the museums sector.

12:50 –  
13:50

**Lunch  
and Expo**



The Refectory

13:50 –  
14:30

**Breakout**



Theatre

**Collections that connect:  
Shaping brand identity through Heritage**  
Caroline Pantling, Head of Heritage  
Services, The Scouts, Hannah Jenkinson,  
Archivist, Girlguiding, and Hannah Spinks,  
Archive and Collections Manager, The Duke  
of Edinburgh's Award

Working with heritage in non-heritage organisations can be challenging and rewarding! The Scouts, Girlguiding and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award share how they are using their collections to actively shape brand identity, strengthen organisational culture, and connect with new audiences. They will show how heritage can be a powerful brand asset which, when used creatively, can enhance relevance, identity, and connections with society today.




Seminar  
Room 1


**From hidden store to discovery centre:  
transforming a national chair collection**  
Roz Currie, Director, Wycombe Museum,  
and Amber Xavier Rowe, Head of Collections  
Conservation, English Heritage

High Wycombe's internationally significant chair-making heritage sits at the heart of Wycombe Museum, yet for years the chair collection was hidden in an unsuitable off-site store. In 2022 the museum began an ambitious transformation: creating the new Chair Discovery Centre, a combined working store and accessible space for visitors, researchers and communities. This talk explores how they tackled an "impossible" collections challenge through innovative sustainable-store design with English Heritage, ongoing fundraising and strong local partnerships. Hear their lessons on designing a low-energy store, pragmatic collections management and how the move has reshaped the organisation's sustainability and impact.

**Continued overleaf...**


 Lecture Theatre 1 **Building climate resilience in independent museums**  
Rachel Davies, Director of Operations, Gardens, Libraries & Museums, University of Oxford, Amber Rochette, Sustainability Manager, The Roman Baths & Pump Room, Bath & North East Somerset Council

It is increasingly important to understand how climate risks influence buildings, collections, staff, visitors and supply chains. This session will explore how to use climate scenarios, evaluate future climate hazards and the environmental impact of products. Gain practical tools for identifying vulnerabilities and learn how to integrate climate-risk thinking into everyday decisions. By recognising climate change as central to resilient operations, you will leave equipped to strengthen long-term museum sustainability.

 Seminar Room 2 **Rethinking the model**  
Gaynor Seville, Creative Director, and Gemma Outen, Programme and Engagement Manager, Whitaker Museum

The Whitaker re opened in 2021 after a major redevelopment, building a new hospitality wing for a café and commercial events. This was assumed to be an income generating machine to fund the museum operation. This session will explore how over a 4 year period the museum has changed it's business and operating model, become an NPO, outsourced the commercial hospitality operation, secured heritage lottery resilience funding, and is now breaking even and planning a new ambitious accommodation and studio wing to further develop the offer and diversify income streams.

### Breakout tours

 13:50 – 14:30 **Ushaw House & Chapels Tour**  
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13:50 – 14:30 **Gentle mobility yoga**  
Lone Wolf Vision

A slower paced yoga session focused on mobility, flexibility, balance, and relaxation. A welcoming environment suitable for all experience levels. The session is designed to help release tension from sitting, improve movement quality, and provide a calm reset during the conference day.

14:35 -  
15:15

## Breakout



Seminar  
Room 2

### **It's the beautiful Birmingham Botanical business model, bab!**

Jen Ridding, Head of Engagement and Learning, and Sara Blair-Manning, Chief Executive, Birmingham Botanical Gardens

Jen and Sara believe Botanic Gardens are essentially museums with living collections, requiring the same business modelling brilliance to thrive and flourish. In this informative, interactive and accessible session, delegates will hear honest reflections and the 'yes bab!' moments about the ambitious capital redevelopment programme, how the team have rebuilt Birmingham Botanical Gardens' brand and business resilience from the ground up.



Theatre

### **Curating retail**

Sue Hughes, Museum Development Advisor, Museum Development North, Olivia Thompson, Visitor Experience Co-ordinator, Middlesborough Museums, and Anya Kirkby, Consultant

MD North ran a successful retail training and mentoring programme in 2025. Hear from facilitators and participants how you can use your retail offer to tell the story of your site and increase sales. Take a quick look at visual merchandising and how to create unique, bespoke and story-led product ranges.



Seminar  
Room 1

### **Dynamic collections in a shoebox**

Rebecca Bennion, Documentation Officer, and Carson Murphy, Collections Manager, Museum of North Craven Life

How can you complete a collections audit when you're working in a space the size of a shoebox? Organise a Great Object Sort! Hear how this museum adapted their Dynamic Collections project to work miracles within a museum with cramped stores and limited table space, dealing with backlogs whilst engaging our volunteers and visitors.



Lecture  
Theatre 1

### **Connected Communities: valuing volunteers at Ushaw**

Pam Lovell, Charlotte Hutton, Alex Cave and Ushaw volunteers

Ushaw's Heritage and Culture team will deliver an engaging talk exploring the vital role of volunteering at Ushaw. They will draw upon their experience of working within the historic site and its community,

through its recent project 'Connected Communities'. The session will highlight the impact volunteers have across its collections, gardens, events, education, and visitor experience. Attendees will gain insights into the opportunities, personal development and sense of purpose that volunteering at Ushaw can offer directly from some of our volunteers, while learning how volunteers help sustain and shape the future of this unique cultural and historical visitor attraction.

15:20 -  
16:00

## **Panel and close Survivors' session**

Join members of AIM's Board to reflect and share key takeaways from the two days of conference.



Theatre

## **Coach times**

**Coaches will depart from the main bus stop at Ushaw at 16:10 for Durham train station.**



# Exhibitor Listing

You'll find all our exhibitors in The Refectory. Our exhibitors are looking forward to meeting you so do take the time to stop by and say hello during any of the breaks.

## Bloomberg Connects

### **Bloomberg Connects** **Headline sponsor**

Bloomberg Connects is an app featuring digital guides to hundreds of galleries, museums, and cultural spaces around the world. Offered free of charge to both organisations and visitors, we seek to connect users to compelling stories, help grow and engage audiences, and expand global access to arts and culture.

 [bloombergconnects.org](https://bloombergconnects.org)



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The UK's Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science (RICHeS) is an £80 million commitment from the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), investing in capability and capacity and unlocking access to facilities, collections and expertise. Meet the RICHeS team and explore what heritage science could do for you.

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Hayes Parsons Insurance Brokers is an independent, Chartered broker that has been providing insurance and risk management services to museums for over 30 years. We are delighted to be supporting the AIM Conference once again and look forward to meeting as many of you as possible.

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The Heritage Science Data Service (HSDS) provides core digital research services as part of the RICHeS programme, the UK's Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science. The HSDS will unlock potential for innovation in heritage science and conservation research and its capacity to advance understanding, preservation, and management of UK heritage.

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### Heritage Open Days

Heritage Open Days is England's largest festival of history and culture, running for ten days every September. It offers a free national platform of promotion and support to help heritage organisations and community groups reach new audiences and engage local communities. The festival is brought to you by the National Trust and supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery.

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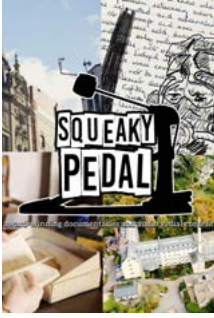
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### Squeaky Pedal

Squeaky Pedal is an award-winning film and animation company specialising in heritage storytelling. They create powerful, people-focused films for museums, broadcasters, and cultural organisations, bringing history to life through documentary, archive, and animation. Recent clients include Historic England, the National Army Museum, and the The Peace Museum.

- Pete Roch
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Vernon Systems has more than 30 years' experience in creating software for the museum, gallery and cultural heritage sectors. Their systems are used around the world by institutions to catalogue, manage and publish information about collections. The two collections management systems they have developed are: Vernon CMS, a mature desktop system, and eHive, a simpler hosted web-based system.

- Alex von der Becke
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# AIM National Conference 2026

10 & 11 June

Ushaw Historic House,  
Chapels and Gardens  
and Beamish, the Living  
Museum of the North

Art Fund\_

With thanks to our Delegate Handbook sponsors Art Fund