Communicating Archaeology
Case studies in the use of, and engagement with, archaeological collections

SOCIETY FOR MUSEUM ARCHAEOLOGY 2021
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INTRODUCTION

This series of case studies has been compiled and published by the Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA), which is the Subject Specialist Network for British Archaeology in the UK. The Society was commissioned to provide an online downloadable resource that would afford museum archaeologists and others, insights into the wide range of use and engagement activities that archaeological collections are used to deliver. SMA is aware that the examples profiled here are but a few of the myriad of inspirational projects that are continually being created. It hopes, therefore, that it will be able to bring more to the fore in the future and that these will act as a prompt to others to share their endeavours on a public platform.

SMA’s Standards and Guidance in the Care of Archaeological Collections published in 2020 articulates why those that manage and care for these collections should endeavour to unlock their potential, so as to achieve maximum public benefit in meaningful and innovative ways. This type of activity can be used to deliver both societal and museum priorities, including those relevant to participatory best practice, creativity, inclusion, representation and diversity amongst others. It was with this in mind that the case studies presented here were chosen. In simple terms they demonstrate how archaeological collections can be made both accessible and relevant to a wide variety of people and how for some the outcomes will be archaeological or academic, but for others they may be creative or social. Readers will be able to recognise familiar themes relating to exhibitions, handling, collaboration, communication (online or otherwise), events and research, as well as health, wellbeing and decolonisation. Readers will also realise that not all of the projects profiled here were delivered within a museum setting. This is because SMA believes it is important for museum archaeologists and others to learn from each other and to share best practice across the sector – we are all archaeologists no matter what our employment setting or where our specialist interests lie. Above all, these case studies are a celebration of creativity, whether that be in the face of Covid-19, the advent of new technologies or changing societal, professional and organisational attitudes. They demonstrate how archaeological collections and the people that manage them can be, and are, at the forefront of proactively promoting change. In doing so they show how archaeology not only has the capacity to change the narrative about the way people think about the world but also the capacity to change the way they think about themselves.

It is with thanks to Arts Council England for its Subject Specialist Network Fund grant to the Society for Museum Archaeology, and to the individual contributors and organisations who were prepared to share their experience, knowledge, skills and understanding at such a time when the world is gripped by a global pandemic that the publication of these case studies has been made possible.

Gail Boyle and Jenni Butterworth (editors)
January 2021
**ABOUT THE EDITORS**

**Gail Boyle FMA FSA**  
Senior Curator of Archaeology and World Cultures (Bristol Museums)  
Society for Museum Archaeology: digital officer

Gail Boyle has had a successful career as a museum archaeologist for over 35 years. She has played a leading role in the delivery of a wide variety of innovative and complex museum exhibition, engagement and research projects and was awarded the Fellowship of the Museums Association in recognition of the significant contribution that she has made to the museum sector. Gail sits on several national heritage-related advisory boards, is Vice-Chair of Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society Council and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London. She has long-standing collaborative and teaching relationships with both the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England and has recently been commissioned as a contributor to a new Handbook of Museum Archaeology by Oxford University Press. As Chair of the Society for Museum Archaeology (2012–2018) she enabled the Society to provide professional advice and support on best practice and now helps to shape its future strategy at a national level: she has co-authored three SMA national surveys of ‘Museums Collecting Archaeology’ (2016–2018) as well as national guidance on the rationalisation of archaeological collections and is the architect and project manager of the Society’s ‘SMART’ project.

**Jenni Butterworth PhD**  
Heritage Consultant, Drakon Heritage and Conservation  
Society for Museum Archaeology: committee member

Jenni gained her doctorate in Landscape Archaeology from the University of Bristol, and worked in television production, until returning to the heritage sector in 2013. Jenni specialises in project management and coordination for Drakon Heritage and Conservation, a partnership which provides collections care, conservation, archaeology and project management services to museums, heritage organisations, private individuals and development-funded projects across the UK. She has edited or contributed to a number of recent heritage publications. Jenni is currently facilitator of the Historic Environment Trailblazer (for Historic England), the group of employers and professional bodies responsible for developing new apprenticeships for the sector.
DIVING DEEP –
HMS INVINCIBLE 1744

EILEEN CLEGG
Community Archaeology Producer,
The National Museum of the Royal Navy
**Institution or organisation**

The National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth is one of a family of national museums, partially funded by the Royal Navy.

**Project and team overview**

*Diving Deep: HMS Invincible 1744* was a National Lottery Heritage Funded (NLHF) project focussed on Invincible, a French ship captured by the Royal Navy in 1747 which became the blueprint for its 74-gun ships. The wreck was discovered in 1979 and is now a protected site. The core purpose of the NHLF project was to interpret the wreck for the public, alongside a LIBOR funded project to excavate the wreck.

The Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust (MAST) were the project guarantees, with the National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN) delivering the project outcomes, working together with other strategic partners, Bournemouth University (BU) and Chatham Historic Dockyard to excavate, conserve and then interpret and display the archaeology of HMS Invincible. MAST and BU Maritime Archaeology excavated and conserved the Invincible collection with the support of NMRN volunteers. NMRN managed the NLHF project and were responsible for delivering the travelling exhibition and project outcomes. Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust (CHDT) provided additional support and expertise as they hold the collection and archives from a previous archaeological excavation of HMS Invincible in the 1980s.

**Objectives and themes**

The overall vision of the NLHF project was to tell the story of the amazing ship HMS Invincible, her capture, the contribution she made to the British Royal Navy and ship design and her subsequent sinking and rediscovery nearly 200 years later.

Diving Deep aimed to inspire and enthuse people with her excavation; saving and celebrating a vital part of our maritime heritage with the help of a wide range of audiences. The project planned to unlock the heritage of Invincible so that it became fully accessible in a variety of different ways to those who visit a travelling exhibition in person or those who might visit a website and resources online.

Diving Deep’s four core aims were:

- An inspiring and active volunteer programme which would leave a legacy of a conserved collection.
- Researching and telling the story of Invincible and her legacy from excavation to conservation.
- A vibrant, innovative and inventive visitor experience in physical and online spaces.
- Inspire children and young people with the amazing story of Invincible.

The exhibition was the most public facing part of this project focusing on the archaeological excavation itself. It aimed to help the public, in particular families and young people, to understand the nature of this shipwreck and what was required to excavate her underwater, to essentially bring the archaeological excavation from the seabed to the land. The exhibition was designed to reach a wide range of audiences including those further away from National Museum of the Royal Navy sites, opening first at Chatham Historic Dockyard and then travelling to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. The project also planned to deliver a website directly linked to the exhibition, a platform to expand on the research completed and to provide legacy for the project after the exhibition eventually closes.

The active volunteer programme delivered the project from diving and excavating the wreck to designing and installing the exhibition. Inspiration for children and
young people was to be delivered by focusing on families as a core audience for the interpretation and exhibition of Diving Deep and also through a schools outreach STEM programme.

**Implementation**

Diving Deep was originally designed to be a three-year project run by a project manager, supported by strategic partners MAST, BU and CHDT and delivered by an active volunteer programme. However, it was expanded due to the restrictions imposed by Covid-19. Early on in the project, Rocketbox Design was appointed to deliver a temporary travelling exhibition for two locations and digital content to provide legacy for the project. At the time of writing, we have completed two years out of the three-year project. The exhibition has opened in its first location and the website is now live.

Volunteers completed a number of roles for the project, including the post-excavation and conservation of finds from the wreck, the research and interpretation planning for the exhibition, writing exhibition and website text, exhibition install and public outreach for the project. There were some very specific volunteer training needs; training in post-excavation conservation, museum text writing, social media training and visitor observation and evaluation was delivered early on. As it happened, this early and intensive training of volunteers proved invaluable when meeting significant challenges the project faced later on.

Much work was done to make the exhibition as accessible as possible to visitors with different sensory and communication impairments. A core element of the exhibition was a film of the excavation projected onto screens approximately three metres high that surround the visitor as
if diving on the wreck without getting wet. Because the film was a soundscape with no narration, a poem describing the sound was added using motion tracking. It appears on screen as naturally as the bubbles ascending to the surface. A dive seat (designed as it appears in the film) was connected to the speakers allowing the viewer to feel the soundscape much as you would feel sound vibrations underwater. Wall panels, images, fonts, colour contrasts as well as interactive activities were all tested with user access groups.

Impact and outcomes

Volunteer involvement at all stages of Diving Deep made the project very much embedded in both the Portsmouth and Chatham local communities. The volunteering programme was so active that it continued online during the Covid-19 lockdown, with volunteers researching and writing from home, providing vital purpose and having a positive impact on mental health during a period of time when people were isolated.

The exhibition, outreach programme, and schools STEM outreach interpreted underwater archaeology for visitors of all ages, allowing people to see some of the incredible archaeological objects excavated and understand the context from which they came. It developed understanding of underwater environments, the reasons behind different levels of preservation, the latest archaeological techniques and the ethics involved in raising and conserving archaeological finds from the seabed.

By focussing on the way in which a site is excavated we enabled the public to ask challenging questions rather than simply accepting what they see. They fed back their opinions and ideas in entertaining ways, for example by leaving us a message in a bottle in the exhibition.
Challenges and lessons learnt

- Although the project was well funded, it was also ambitious in its aims. With this in mind evaluation, particularly formative evaluation, was invaluable in helping to prioritise budget spend and keeping the focus on the core aims. This made NLHF reporting and payment requests straightforward as the project is on budget, on time and is fully meeting targets.

- Investment in volunteers with significant training ensured the exhibition’s success even during a pandemic. Because volunteers felt valued and were engaged they met their NLHF target of 750 days within the first two years of a three-year project, effectively banking hours when the project was busy to make up for times when the project was forced to slow down. Early volunteer skills acquisition enabled the project to continue during lockdown by simply moving online, making a positive impact on mental health and feelings of isolation. It also helped the National Museum of the Royal Navy to bring back volunteering safely and quickly after lockdown, lifting the morale of both staff and volunteers in such difficult times.

- The risks around Covid-19 meant that a significant amount of exhibition redesign had to be completed. We did not wish to remove hands on exhibition interactives because they are the elements that most engage children and young people. Therefore, as we couldn’t clean the exhibition we decided to clean the visitors. To encourage adherence to hand sanitising before and after touching every interactive and touch point we made hand sanitising an engaging interactive game. Visitors were told to sanitise by different characters for different reasons, for example, Shipworm tells visitors to clean hands or he will leave a trail of slime. Nineteen hand sanitising dispensers were designed into the exhibition and the marketing campaign around the launch of the exhibition challenged visitors to find them all and use them all. A truly touchy, feely, smelly exhibition using all the senses safely during a pandemic.

- The pandemic also meant that we had to rearrange the exhibition schedule from opening at Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust in July 2020 to opening at The National Museum of the Royal Navy in October 2020. It will travel to Chatham a year later than originally planned. This has meant that redesign work relating to new spaces and Covid-19 safety design work had to be completed early and online. Surprisingly working online from home created hidden costs: everything takes longer and so staff costs increased. Supplies cost more and took longer to acquire, drawing out the exhibition build schedule. All of these changes required significant revisions to budget planning and prioritisation but this had a silver lining, it focused minds on the project objectives and outcomes and tightened up budget creep.
Author

Dr Eileen Clegg is the Community Archaeology Producer at The National Museum of the Royal Navy. She has a doctorate in Archaeology from the University of Liverpool and a teaching postgraduate degree from the University of Lancaster. She has worked in museum education and engagement for over 10 years.

References

Diving Deep: HMS Invincible 744 project website

#Invincible1744
@Invincible1744
DEBORAH FOX
Senior Curator, Museums Worcestershire
Institution or organisation

Museums Worcestershire is a joint local authority museum service between Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council, which includes three museums and an offsite store. Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service maintains the Historic Environment Record (HER) for the county and provides advice and historic environment input for strategic and policy planning for Worcestershire. The latter is based at The Hive, a joint Worcestershire County Council and University of Worcester library, history and customer centre.

Project and team overview

The Lost Landscapes project was inspired by an earlier Historic England funded project which compiled existing evidence for Palaeolithic potential in the county and added it to the Historic Environment Record (HER) in order to better target and justify archaeological interventions through the planning system. Staff that had worked on the project were convinced that stories of mammoths at Strensham, lions on Bredon Hill, Neanderthals at Hallow and hippos wallowing in local rivers could, and should, be shared more widely.

A successful application was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF, now National Lottery Heritage Fund) for £74,900, for a project celebrating over half a million years of the area’s prehistory, from the time our ancestors first arrived in the Midlands through to the end of the last Ice Age 12,000 years ago. The intention was to present this challenging period, often difficult to understand and complicated by scientific terminology, in an engaging way to a general and family audience.

The project was a partnership between Museums Worcestershire, Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service (WAAS) and The Hive, led by Deb Fox for the former, Emma Hancox, the County Archaeologist, for WAAS, with archaeologist Rob Hedge as project officer. In addition to the HLF funding, funding was secured from Arts Council England, West Midland Museum Development, Severn Waste, CBA West Midlands and...
the Tomlinson-Brown Trust. Other partners included Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust, Worcestershire Archaeological Society, University of Worcester, the Portable Antiquities Scheme and individual geologists, archaeologists and collectors.

Objectives and themes

The Ice Age is, in one sense, a very engaging topic; mammoths and sabre-toothed tigers instantly spring to mind. It is however much harder to relate to the people of the Palaeolithic, separated from us by at least a thousand generations and inhabiting landscapes utterly different to those which we recognise today. It can be hard to visualise how these people lived from the few stone tools that survive, and challenging to get to grips with the scientific terminology and specialist language used in the archaeological and geological literature.

The Lost Landscapes project aimed to tackle this challenge and share our Ice Age story by bringing together specialists from different areas to develop:

- Two main exhibitions running concurrently at Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum and The Hive.
- Three pop up exhibitions at Worcestershire heritage sites.
- Artworks by professional artists and the community.
- Resources for interpreting the Ice Age to schools and community groups.
- A legacy website and publication about Ice Age Worcestershire.
- Blogs, articles, talks and lectures.
- Training for metal detectorists to identify Palaeolithic artefacts.
- Fun workshops for children and families.

Themes were explored relating to climate change through Ice Ages, glacial and interglacials and our own, present day and future, challenges as a species. The project explored the impact and scars that changes in climate have left upon our landscape and the impact of climate change not only on the Ice Age animals that roamed our county and but also the successive human species whose lives were bound to them.

The project sought to understand and interpret the development of antiquarian understanding of climatic changes during the Ice Age and examined Worcestershire’s collectors and collections, much of which were collected by the Museum of the Worcestershire Natural History Society (the forerunner of Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum), before the Ice Age and its time depth was properly understood.

Implementation

The HLF Lost Landscapes funding included an 18-month role for a project officer in 2017 and 2018, which was filled by an archaeologist. The county archaeologist managed the HLF project and The Hive and Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service activities and the senior curator project managed the Museums Worcestershire activities. The project culminated in two exhibitions in summer 2018: Ice Age at Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum and Origins of Us at The Hive.

Partnership was at the heart of the project and numerous specialists and funders worked alongside and contributed to the central project aims. The project benefitted from the expertise of academics, archaeologists, geologists, museum curators, illustrators, photographers, artists, creative practitioners and educators.

The Ice Age exhibition at Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum explored what Ice Age means, the animals of the Ice Age, antiquarians and the understanding of time depth, hominids and finally our present climate crises and concerns for
the future of our planet and our species. The exhibition was aimed at a family audience to enjoy over the summer holiday period. The exhibition included a Bubbenhall handaxe, the earliest human-made object found in the West Midlands on loan from Warwickshire Museum Service; a jawbone of a Condover mammoth, the last mammoths known to have lived and died in northern Europe on loan from Shropshire Museum Service; an original William Smith geological map on loan from a private lender and an enormous fluffy mammoth on loan from Dudley Museum Service.

*Origins of Us* at The Hive explored the way that archaeology, geology, and natural history have shaped our visions of ourselves. For over two hundred years, people have been examining the traces of Worcestershire’s landscape for clues to the greatest puzzles of all: how did we get here? When did we become human? What came before us? The exhibition examined how the museum collection came to be. Throughout the 19th century, artefacts from across Europe and the rest of the world found their way into the collections. But how did they get here? And who brought them? Moving through the history of the scholars who brought this distant world to life, the exhibition ended with an examination of current research, and alerted the public to the threats and opportunities that face Palaeolithic archaeology today. The exhibition included an enormous large-scale floor graphic of the William Smith geological map which enabled visitors to walk across the country’s geology and view it in more detail.

Eighteen months of engagement activities ran alongside the exhibitions with the aim of introducing our audiences to this complicated and little understood period in the county’s past while demonstrating its relevance to present and future global issues we face.

The Hive secured funding from Arts Council England for a digital art installation called *Through the Mists of Time* created by SDNA to encourage our visitors to explore our deep prehistory in an immersive and experiential way.

School sessions, school resources, workshops, talks, lectures, blogs, newspaper articles and a website enabled the sharing of Ice Age research at different levels, for different age groups and different interest groups.
Impact and outcomes

160,000 people visited The Hive in Worcester during the Origins of Us exhibition of which it is estimated that 20–30,000 engaged with the exhibition itself. 16,000 people visited the Ice Age exhibition at Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum with over half visiting especially for the exhibition and some 25% visiting for the first time.

One of the key aims of the Lost Landscapes project was to reach out to a broad spectrum of visitors from school children to adults. Both exhibitions successfully combined written information in the form of panels, and further information such as the booklet, interactive learning and the display of significant objects. This inclusive and engaging approach was popular with many visitors, and reflected in their comments:

‘Brilliant. What a splendid fusion of material for all ages, accessible, thoughtful and imaginative. Thanks!’

‘Fantastic! We sat in the cave and read stories, and positively loved the photographs of Worcestershire.’

‘…provided a better understanding of the ever-changing ‘climate’ of earth. Prior to today I didn’t know we are in a (brief) period of warmth in the current Ice Age! Superb exhibition!’

2,965 people attended 60 Lost Landscapes activities over the eighteen-month project ranging from formal lectures, public talks and flint knapping demonstrations to family cave painting and batik workshops. The number of those who engaged far exceeded expectations. In addition, 196 children from Key Stage 2 school and home education groups took part in scheduled visits to the exhibition at Worcester Museum and Art Gallery.
A total of 765 hours of professional support was promised to the project but the total number of hours actually given by staff and external specialists was almost double that amount with a further 480 hours of support given by volunteers. Evaluation feedback suggested that the project was a positive experience for staff and volunteers as well as visitors:

- While staff experiences of the exhibitions varied due to their working roles, everyone that responded enjoyed participating in the Lost Landscapes project.
- All of the responses suggested that all of the people involved in the project learned something of Worcestershire’s prehistory.
- All of the responses suggested that the Lost Landscapes project created opportunities for people to improve their skills within their roles.
- Some responses suggested that Lost Landscapes had allowed people to enjoy new skills and increase their understanding within different roles.

**Challenges and lessons learnt**

- The budget could have been spent five times over, so if we had the time again, we would have attempted to get more funding from other sources at the start of the project.
- It became apparent early on that the original plan to have a small display in The Hive to signpost to the museum exhibition was a mistake. The atrium at The Hive in Worcester is a vast space and it needed a high impact display to engage audiences and create a more equitable balance between the two sister exhibitions. This was rectified early on and the budget shuffled, but in future it would be planned from the start. It would also have been beneficial to have the same person responsible for both exhibitions as this would have made the inter-relationship between the two easier to manage.
- The marketing aspect of the project should have commenced earlier to ensure that the branding was in place when first events happened. The marketing company did an excellent job with the branding and our logo, Millicent the Mammoth, was commented on by many as being brilliant, but we should have gone out to tender six months earlier than we actually did.
- We received some feedback from misunderstandings around what was on offer at each venue, and from people who came to The Hive exhibition expecting the museum exhibition. The marketing campaign needed to strike the balance between presenting the two exhibitions as a single project, at the same time making clear the offer at each venue.
Author

Deborah Fox is Senior Curator at Museums Worcestershire, overseeing collections and interpretation across all sites. Deb is joint secretary of the Society for Museum Archaeology, a committee member of CIfA Archaeological Archives Group and Honorary Curator of Worcestershire Archaeological Society.

References

Ice Age Worcestershire website
OUR WARWICKSHIRE
REDISPLAY OF THE
MARKET HALL MUSEUM

SARA WEAR
Curator of Human History,
Heritage and Culture Warwickshire
Institution or organisation

Warwickshire Museum is part of Heritage and Culture Warwickshire (HCW) a partnership of the Museum Service, County Record Office (CRO), Learning and Community Engagement (LaCE), County Arts, Business Development and Visitor Services. HCW is a local authority service and currently has c.35 staff, both full-time and part-time, including Visitor Services and LaCE support staff. We have a county-wide remit, but most of our services are based in Warwick itself.

Project and team overview

*Our Warwickshire* was a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF, now National Lottery Heritage Fund) supported project (2015–2017) to refurbish the Market Hall Museum, a 17th-century Grade II* listed building in Warwick with a redisplay and reinterpretation of the collections in innovative and engaging ways. It also included development of *Our Warwickshire*, an online community hub to bring together local history and heritage. The focus for the Market Hall Museum was across the collections (natural history, geology, archaeology and social history, including costume and textiles). Our approach was multidisciplinary and thematic, rather than discipline-specific galleries and topics. It was a standalone project with financial and staff input from the local authority and a grant of £1.5 million from HLF. The project team was drawn from across Heritage and Culture Warwickshire with the two museum curators (Curator of Human History and Curator of Natural Sciences) leading on the Market Hall Museum project and County Record Office team leading on the online aspect, with an HLF-supported project officer. External designers were contracted for the 2D and 3D elements of the Market Hall redisplay and worked with the curators to develop their original concepts and storylines into displays and interactives which would engage audiences in multi-sensory ways.

Objectives and themes

The objectives for the project were:

- A focus on Warwickshire people and places, the human and natural landscape.
- Redisplay and reinterpret the collections in a multidisciplinary way.
- To be more inclusive in our approach to access, learning and interpretation.
- To develop audiences for the museum and other HCW services.
- With the *Our Warwickshire* community website, to become a community heritage hub for the county.
- To integrate interactive elements to the galleries, with a combination of digital and ‘low tech’ activities with a learning focus.
- To use digital labels that create alternative ways to access the interpretive text and displays.
Through research, discussions with colleagues in HCW and public consultation, we identified three over-arching themes – Living Here, Made Here and Getting Here. The multi-faceted narratives of objects and specimens meant that the two curators were confident that our collections could be interpreted under at least one theme, for example a medieval ceramic jug could be part of a display on local manufacturing in Nuneaton under Made Here, and as one of the household items used in 14th-century Warwick under Living Here. The themes were understood in their broadest senses, for example, under Getting Here we presented narratives of both human and animal migration, and explored geological evidence for the movement of the landmass of which Warwickshire is a part from the southern to the northern hemisphere over millions of years.

The Market Hall has three galleries and initially we considered one theme per gallery, but at the time of planning there was no lift to the first floor (this was later added to the project). The decision was made to explore all three themes in chronologically defined galleries.

♦ Origins to Romans (including geological time).
♦ Anglo-Saxons to 1836 (the founding year of the Warwickshire Natural History and Archaeological Society).
♦ 1836 to the present day.
For archaeology, the chronological division between the first and second galleries was a conscious decision to get away from the idea that everything changed in AD43, to illustrate elements of continuity between prehistory and the Roman period. It was important for us to highlight the work of archaeologists, which we focussed on in the 1836 to present day gallery through narratives around excavation (digital dig game), post-excavation research (video microscope for charred plant remains, coins etc) and the piecing together of information and evidence.

**Implementation**

The HLF grant provided an opportunity to work with designers, Redman and Workhaus, to bring our collected ideas, narratives and themes to fruition in physical form and take into account the layout and historical significance of the Market Hall building.

Two curators (of human history and natural sciences) lead on the interpretation and ensured there was a consistent narrative voice. Public consultation during the development phase of the project provided us with a list of key objects that were favourites of visitors and high profile objects, for example the 16th-century Sheldon Tapestry map of Warwickshire, a Roman denarii coin hoard, medieval jewellery. We started with more than one option for each theme and developed object lists, case layouts, graphics and texts. To an extent this was an agile process, developing narratives through our knowledge of the collections with the designer through the lens of their expertise in interpretive design.

Our approach to multidisciplinary narratives was to select a story, aspect or subgroup of the collections or specific objects and look at them from a wider perspective, as with the thematic format
of the galleries, we wanted to move away from subject-specific interpretation. An example of this was the Living Here theme in the Anglo-Saxons to 1836 gallery; we began with the theme of natural remedies and home medicines, placing apothecary jars from the decorative arts (on loan from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust) alongside excavated examples. Written recipes were provided by the County Record Office and plants mentioned in these were illustrated with herbarium sheets (for example Belladonna, Feverfew). Fossils were considered as ‘cures’, so we included a devil’s toenail (Gryphaea) and a shepherd’s crown (Echinocorys scutatus), and there is evidence (from Shakespeare’s son-in-law) that apothecaries in the 17th century would use coins such as silver pennies, groats and sixpences, as household weights and measures.

Touchscreens were integrated into the displays; as well as the digital labels, visitors could explore the Sheldon Tapestry map and access the Our Warwickshire website from the galleries. The presentation of early musical instruments included a listening station with recordings of contemporary pieces of music. The archaeology themed activities were designed to present ideas not only of past activities, for example, weaving wattle hurdles, but of the work of archaeologists. The dressing up costume (late-18th and early-19th century) was commissioned in adult and children’s sizes, to encourage social learning opportunities.

A mix of large format display cases, smaller desk top cases and drawers were designed and constructed by the designers Workhaus and Glasshaus and assembled on site. Construction took approximately two months, we then had approximately six weeks to install the displays.
There were changes and adaptations made throughout the development and installation processes: what looked good on paper sometimes did not quite work when it came time to mounting objects and graphics. However, the development phase planning, openness of all involved to consider new ideas and adapt made this a reasonably efficient process.

We used images as much as possible to illustrate the interpretive text and if feasible, replace it. The HLF grant allowed us to commission new work, for example an illustration of what the area which is now Warwick would have looked like 6,000 years ago (the archaeological evidence suggested a Neolithic causewayed enclosure).

Alongside the development of the exhibitions, a programme of community engagement lead by the LaCE team was undertaken, with a focus in each of the five county districts. A group of visitor services volunteers were also recruited and in the run up to re-opening, they were inducted into the interpretive strategy of the museum displays and the ethos behind the new approach to engagement, including using gallery handling collections with visitors.

Impact and outcomes

Councillors and other local representatives were members of the project-based access panel, to assess all aspects of the physical and intellectual access to the collections and spaces at the Market Hall. This support for the project from the county council and local councillors impacted positively on the museum’s profile. The public consultation in the period leading up to the reopening raised the profile of the whole service, but particularly the Market Hall Museum. It helped to increase interest in the museum and this was reflected in the visitor figures over the first three years. The work of the visitor services volunteers and events, such as fundraising to acquire a Roman denarii hoard in 2019, gaining international press coverage, built on our positive profile.

Prior to this project, the curators had experienced few opportunities to create and design new displays and exhibitions, it had not been a major part of the role (the rigid structure of the 1980s subject specialist galleries had made it difficult). Now that display changes were a key element of the new structure and ethos, it became an ongoing task. This has implications for resources, time, expertise and budgets, which are being recognised within HCW.

One of the aims of the interpretative strategy and design of the gallery spaces and cases was to create a flexible display space with content and narratives being changed on a regular basis. Out of an initially ad hoc programme of display case changes, a more strategic approach to planning developed, meaning that all aspects of exhibition and display planning would be addressed in a consistent and cohesive way.

With the installation of a lift (hard fought for in a Grade II* listed building), for the first time in the history of the museum, we could provide access to all the galleries, displays and activities.
Challenges and lessons learnt

- The main challenge was time, always time. Even with effective project management of design processes, there are inevitable delays and it doesn't matter what the timescales are, you will always end up putting the last few objects in a case 30 minutes before the grand opening event.

- The displays at the Market Hall Museum were designed to be flexible, so that a regular programme of changes and refreshes would maintain interest, particularly for repeat visitors. In hindsight, the first changes should have been part of the main planning process and expectations of the scale and scheduling of changes managed more effectively. The demands on staff time and resources were not fully appreciated at the outset. In addition, the decision was made early on in the development phase not to have a specific temporary exhibition area (we had lost our small in-house design team in an earlier restructure), but within two years it was obvious that we needed more than one or two case changes to maintain visitor figures and as a focus for LaCE events and activities over the summer holidays. We now have a biannual temporary exhibition in the ground floor gallery.

- It is important to ensure that interactives are renewable, with low tech, hands-on activities. This means having parts that can be replaced if damaged or lost. All interactives should be adaptable to changes in display case content or narratives: with digital elements it is essential that the museum staff are able to change content easily.

Author

Sara Wear is Curator of Human History, Heritage and Culture Warwickshire. She started as Keeper of Archaeology for Warwickshire Museum in 1999, becoming Curator of Human History in 2011 after a restructure of the service.

References

- Our Warwickshire website

Warwickshire Museum Service

@OisinTheDeer
(Heritage and Culture Warwickshire)
SHOULD WE DISPLAY THE DEAD?
VISITOR INPUT INTO MUSEUM POLICY

KATHERINE BAXTER
Curator of Archaeology, Leeds Museums and Galleries
Institution or organisation

Leeds Museums and Galleries (LMG) is a museum service made up of nine sites in Leeds, West Yorkshire, and run by Leeds City Council. It is the largest local authority museum service in England and Wales.

Project and team overview

This project came about because of the opportunity afforded by a temporary exhibition the museum was already developing, called Skeletons: Our Buried Bones. The exhibition focussed on human skeletons and what these once-living people could tell us about the past from the evidence on their bones. The exhibition, in partnership with Wellcome Collection and the Museum of London, was offered to Leeds City Museum as part of a tour, and discussions took place within LMG around the ethics of such a display. It was decided that we would go ahead and put the skeletal remains of 12 individuals on display but at the same time use the exhibition as an opportunity to ask visitors for their opinions on human remains in museums. The results of this engagement would steer our human remains policy going forward.

In terms of audiences, the project targeted regular museum visitors (generally a family audience), and our online audiences (young people and adults). The engagement project resulted in a final report with recommendations for the service.

There was no funding for this project, and it became part of the core work of the Curator of Archaeology, Kat Baxter, and the Exhibitions Curator, Ruth Leach, with support from senior management, registrars, the digital engagement officer and Leeds City Museum site staff. We also took on a history placement student from the University of Leeds who gave 10 days to plan and carry out interviews on the gallery, and we had support from our front of house team who were working in the gallery.
Objectives and themes

Skeletons: our Buried Bones was open to the public from September 2017 until January 2018 in Leeds City Museum, and was entirely focussed on human skeletons, something that LMG had never done before. In fact, until the exhibition opened, there had only been the remains of one individual on permanent display: Nesyamun, the 3,000 year old mummy of an Egyptian priest. LMG also did not permit photography of human remains on display, and this rule was relaxed for the first time for the exhibition. There was a feeling of reluctance to do too much with our human remains collection because of the ethical implications and the fear of generating complaints from visitors. But from past experience, where we had engaged audiences with human skeletons in workshops, we knew they did generate a lot of interest and enthusiasm, and could provide a hook to encourage interest in archaeology more widely. The main objective of this engagement project was to move away from second-guessing how visitors might react, and instead to use the exhibition as an opportunity to have a conversation with our audiences and let them guide our approach as a service to human remains going forward.

Our two primary objectives were very clear from the beginning. LMG wanted to find out:

- If visitors supported LMG in having and using human remains for display and research.
- If visitors felt comfortable with the public being permitted to take photographs of human remains on display.

The outcomes of these two questions would then feed into our human remains policy and our approach to human remains. Furthermore, LMG were also very keen to use this project to:

- Engage visitors with our human remains, and archaeological, collections.
- Inspire people to think about the ethical considerations around human remains, and to share their feelings with us.
- Give visitors a sense of ownership – the museum is theirs; their views are valid and they can shape the future of the museum.

Implementation

We thought about the different ways we could engage people with these questions, and the kind of data we wanted to capture. Although having conversations with people during events and workshops was incredibly insightful, we also needed to be able to record statistical data which we could easily measure and quantify. We wanted to reach outside of the museum as well as in the gallery, but the methods chosen needed to be easy to manage. Staff time and resources were in short supply. In the end we asked visitors their opinions on human remains in museums and the photography of these remains, in three measurable ways:

- Through free-text feedback cards in the gallery.
- Through a visitor questionnaire carried out on gallery.
- Over social media through responses to Twitter polls.
The exhibition itself was quite scientific in its approach, with individuals displayed in their anatomical positions for visitors to be able to compare pathologies. The discussion about ethics provided an alternative dialogue to the main one being presented.

Blank feedback cards were pegged onto a wire underneath two text panels asking specific questions about human remains. The questions were:

- Should museums collect human remains for display and research?
- Should we permit photography of human remains on display?

Blank cards and pencils were made available for the full run of the exhibition. Front of house staff collected them regularly and the exhibitions curator transcribed them into a document. Cards which were covered in drawings or irrelevant words, or were impossible to read, were discarded.

Feedback was logged, and later numbered, under the headings ‘supportive comments about the exhibition/human remains in museums’, ‘negative comments about the exhibition/human remains in museums’, and ‘UNDECIDED on ethics/miscellaneous’. The categorisation was useful to give a general overview of how visitors felt about the exhibition, but it masked much of the detail of many of the responses.

In total there were 183 usable responses left on feedback cards in the gallery. Many of these were detailed and very thoughtful, demonstrating that many visitors were keen to expand on the ethical questions raised. It was a very cheap and easy way to capture opinions and very effective.

Visitors could also respond by taking part in a short survey on the gallery. We took on a University of Leeds history student to carry out these surveys on the gallery as part of her degree placement. We designed
the gallery questionnaires based on an English Heritage survey carried out in 2009 (which is good for comparison), but with an added focus on photography, which was one of the areas LMG specifically wanted to explore. The 10 survey questions covered:

- Display and research of human remains in museums.
- Photography of human remains in museums.
- Whether the age of the human remains or knowing the name of the individual affected responses.
- Whether visitors were interested in museums and archaeology.

The survey also captured demographic data about the respondent’s postcode, gender, age and religion, so we had more of an idea of who was engaging with us.

In total 26 people were interviewed on the gallery. This was a lower number than LMG would have liked, but the interviews were held up for various personal reasons. But even though the results were limited, they still showed the same trends as the other methods.

The last way we engaged people was over social media. Although we got little engagement over Facebook, there was discussion generated on Instagram and Twitter, and the measurable responses were through Twitter polls. This digital engagement was quick and free, and it was key to reaching people who were not physically in the museum and would perhaps not choose to visit an exhibition about skeletons.

At the end of the exhibition, the curator of archaeology compiled all of the data into a final report with conclusions and recommendations for the museum service going forward based on the results.
Impact and outcomes

There were many positive outcomes for those who contributed and took part in these discussions. Visitors were engaging in depth with museum collections and using their collective voice to drive museum decisions around how we use these collections. The main outcome for LMG was that we got answers to our two questions:

Do visitors support museums having and using human remains in their collections?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>82.2%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do visitors think that museums should allow the public to take and share photographs of human remains on display?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While these two questions were the main focus of the research, a number of other issues were explored. Although the overwhelming public support for human remains was evident, many had concerns over respect and sensitivity, the age of the remains, the age at death and knowing the deceased’s name.

In light of the overall support for human remains and photography of human remains in LMG the following changes were implemented:

♦ LMG changed the photography policy and now allows visitors to take photographs of human remains on display, clearly flagging up that photography should be respectful.

♦ LMG is more proactive in considering using human remains collections in displays and education where appropriate.

♦ LMG will promote their human remains collection online, in a sensitive manner.

Papers on this project were given at the Skeletons, Stories and Social Bodies conference at Southampton University (March 2018), Death and Culture II at York University (September 2018), the Society for Museum Archaeology conference at University College London (November 2018), and Bradford University School of Archaeological and Forensic Sciences (October 2019).

This project raised the profile of our human remains collection and we have seen an increase in research requests. The final project report has been requested and shared widely. Projects such as this support the work being carried out across the sector in field and museum archaeology and give us data to support our work around the care and interpretation of human remains.

Challenges and lessons learnt

Although the project went well overall, we learnt many lessons along the way and there are some things we would do differently.

♦ We underestimated how much time it would take. Projects, even those that seem simple, always take way longer to run than you think, and this is especially difficult if you are adding this work on top of your usual workload.

♦ Putting decision-making in the hands of the public can be nerve-wracking. As museum professionals it can be difficult to let go and allow decisions to be made outside of your own opinions. It’s important to take a step back and let it happen without you.
You never know when somebody may be unexpectedly off work. We learnt this when a member of the team was away, and it directly affected how many people we could engage with, especially since it was a tight timeframe. Always have a back-up person in place to carry out the key tasks.

Asking open-ended questions like ‘what do you think?’ means more work for you. We were keen for people to share their thoughts freely but it took a long time to go through and analyse each response, instead of just sticking to the two main questions. It made processing the feedback cards and writing the final report very time consuming.

Accept that there will be limitations to your data. We did not engage with as many visitors as we would have liked, particularly through the gallery questionnaires. Most of our respondents were anonymous, so we didn’t capture who was responding and whether they were representative of our visitors or Leeds. Most of the engagement took place in the gallery, and so captured the opinions of those who had already chosen to visit the exhibition. These are all things that we would look at if we were to do a similar project in the future.

We should have widened out the discussion. Although we were looking at human remains, the feedback responses were always going to be focussed on British skeletons. It would have been interesting to look at the differences in visitors’ perceptions of human skeletons from the local area versus mummified remains from Egypt. This may be a project for the future.

Relying on statistics masks a lot of the nuances of discussion. Having public support doesn’t suddenly mean we will treat our human remains differently. There is a feeling among our visitors that human remains are more than museum objects, and that even if they do support human remains being collected and displayed by museums, this should only be done so with special consideration.

These results were a snapshot of viewpoints from a specific time and place. They are already out of date!

Author

Katherine Baxter has been Curator of Archaeology at Leeds Museums and Galleries since 2005, and is responsible for all British and overseas archaeological collections there. She is Vice-Chair of the Society for Museum Archaeology, and one of her main interests is the ethics and care of human remains in museums.

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Visitor Responses to Human Remains in Leeds Museums and Galleries: final report
Leeds Museums and Galleries 2018

Leeds Museums & Galleries Human Remains Policy
HORNIMAN MUSEUM AND GARDENS
ACCESS ADVISORY GROUP

CLAIRE MADGE
Access Advisory Group panel member,
Horniman Museum and Gardens
Institution or organisation

The Horniman Museum and Gardens is based in Forest Hill, South London and specialises in anthropology, natural history, living collections and musical instruments. The museum is sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and receives a large part of its funding in the form of Grant in Aid, it operates at ‘arms-length’ from central government as well as being a charity with considerable funding from Arts Council England.

Project and team overview

The Access Advisory Group (AAG) began in 2007. Since then the group has benefitted the Horniman significantly because it prompts the museum to solve access issues in areas from signage campaigns to public programming. It helps to ensure access is embedded in capital projects, discussing access questions and sharing best practice and pitfalls from members’ experiences of physical and intellectual access in other organisations. Members have joined museum interview panels and celebrated the museum’s good practice via social media.

From 2014 to 2018, the AAG focussed on supporting the redisplay of the museum’s anthropology collections as part of a major capital project. In 2014 the group was revamped with recruitment of a new chair and 12 of the current 14 members with an aim to help support the redevelopment of the South Hall which opened as the World Gallery in June 2018. As well as its usual role, the AAG was given a brief to design a display within the gallery. This involved selecting objects from the collection that related to a lived experience of disability, working on interpretation and case layout.

The AAG is usually facilitated by the museum’s community engagement team. During the World Gallery project the AAG worked with staff across the museum including curators, project managers, conservators, exhibition officers and with external design and exhibition teams.

AAG members are individuals who live locally to the Horniman and who have lived experience of disability (either being disabled themselves, having disabled children or family members or representing key disability organisations).

The basic running of AAG is funded from the Horniman’s core Access budget. The World Gallery was a funded with a £3.3million National Lottery Heritage Fund grant.
Objectives and themes

The overall aim of the World Gallery project was to replace the *African Worlds* display in the South Hall to increase the number of objects on display and, as a result, the museum aimed to attract a more diverse audience.

During development of the gallery, the AAG considered:

- General accessibility – physical, intellectual and sensory, focusing on features in the gallery, including signage, lighting and tactile maps.

The AAG was also tasked with selecting objects that would be displayed in a Community Perspectives case. The case would sit within the Perspectives area of the gallery and present objects grouped in a variety of categories, posing questions about how we classify the world around us. It would examine what anthropology is and explore fieldwork undertaken by anthropologists who collected or donated material to the Horniman.

The AAG did research in the museum collections.
- Objects and disability – you can’t make assumptions about which objects relate to disability because all objects tell stories.
- Disabled people have always been part of the story and played many roles in their communities, but their voices have often been excluded.
- The AAG played an important role in the Horniman Museum and in the design of the gallery.

The intention for the Perspectives case was that it would continue to be curated by external community groups. The AAG was the first group to co-curate a display and thus also wrote a toolkit to support future redisplay of the case.

The final Perspectives display contained objects linked to representations of disability and mental illness from different cultures. It was supplemented with an online exhibition entitled *Always part of the story*. The key messages of the display were:

- General accessibility – physical, intellectual and sensory, focusing on features in the gallery, including signage, lighting and tactile maps.
- Objects and disability – you can’t make assumptions about which objects relate to disability because all objects tell stories.
- Disabled people have always been part of the story and played many roles in their communities, but their voices have often been excluded.
- The AAG played an important role in the Horniman Museum and in the design of the gallery.
Implementation

Recruiting an impartial chair was crucial to the process. Museum sector research shows it is best practice to recruit an external, disabled chair to ensure impartiality and to benefit from their expertise and contacts. In this case, the museum sent out a role description and simple application form and recruited Barry Ginley, Disability and Access Officer at the V&A.

Some museums recruit panel members who are familiar with the museum, while others engage with groups who don’t usually visit the museum, or the chair can also help recruit members. Some museums focus on particular disabilities and have their own criteria. In this case, the museum recruited local people with daily lived experience of disability who were interested in museums, world cultures and making museums more accessible physically and intellectually. The museum sent out simple application forms with the option to complete them over the phone or in person.

The first meeting was held as an informal group interview for everyone to decide if it was for them. One panel member commented that working on a mixed disability group rather than a specific autism panel was of huge benefit. It helped raise awareness of the needs of different groups and what works for one might not work for another so allowed for a comprehensive approach that focussed on ‘access for all’ at its core.

The AAG usually meets four times per year, but the capital project sometimes necessitated meeting more often. It helped to break chunks of the work into specific meetings, such as a visit to the store for object selection and workshop with interpretation specialist. This meant the AAG members weren’t overloaded with work at meetings.

The group thought carefully about the timing of meetings. They were scheduled to avoid members having to travel in the dark or in rush hour. The Horniman scheduled meetings at useful points in project timelines (when they were able to provide concrete information but before binding decisions had been made). Paperwork was circulated two weeks before each meeting. Agendas were kept to a maximum of four items and always included an ‘Any Other Business’ (AOB) for members to share current projects, examples of best practice and so on.

It was important to provide adequate breaks and refreshments. For morning meetings lunch was provided at the end and lunch began afternoon meetings. This also gave opportunities for the group to socialise and gel together.

At the start of the project the AAG and museum staff agreed the group rules and purpose. This included clear communication of time commitment, project aims, needs of the group and rules on how communication would be disseminated and the decision-making process. For example, agreeing how far in advance the agenda would be sent out, agreeing how decisions were made if any group members missed meetings, and deciding group roles.

This included communication rules (we always raised our hand and said our name before speaking), and other rules to ensure everyone could contribute. Members were asked if they were happy to be contacted individually or as a group for support between meetings and their response was added to the group agreement.

The Horniman ensured it had the resources to run the group long-term, including staff time to coordinate the group; expenses – including payment for the chair, lunch and refreshments, members’ travel, access support such as British Sign Language (BSL).
interpreters; an accessible space for the group to meet; other benefits for members such as free access to paid exhibitions. For this particular project, additional costs such as transport for a visit to an external store to choose objects for display, documentation of project and payment for members’ original artwork were factored in.

Awareness and buy-in from the organisation at all levels was essential. At the Horniman, the Director: Collections Management & Special Projects is an internal champion who works with community engagement and other teams to identify issues the AAG should be consulted on. Advice from AAG is followed up by project leads and monitored by the quarterly internal Equality Action Group.

Inviting different colleagues to talk to the group including from the website and curators helped the AAG understand themes and gain deeper understanding of the objects selected for the Perspectives display.

It was much more effective if staff members, designers, architects heard advice from the group directly. But it was important to prepare staff in advance by sending them the group agreement, highlighting any communication strategies and chatting to them about any concerns. It was important not to overwhelm the group with too many new people at meetings, particularly at the start when the group was just beginning to gel.

**Impact and outcomes**

The AAG made a number of general recommendations that were taken forward by the Horniman Museum and exhibition designers:

- BSL subtitles of videos.
- Reduction of Wall of Voices video screens from six to three to make sure the introductory area was not overwhelming.
- Increased seating.

- Tactile map, and colour coding of different gallery areas that related to the tactile map to aid independent navigation of galleries.
- Wider entrance into gallery space so visitors could see what is inside.
- Reduction in size of floor projection to provide space to walk round it.

The AAG chose objects for the Perspectives display that explored themes around the lived experience of disability. The group also provided interpretation and helped with case layout. One member of the group also provided an artistic response to the masks on display. An online exhibition *Always Part of the Story* complemented the display and included a video explaining the AAG involvement and showed some of the objects that were chosen. The display also provided an opportunity to make community collaborations visible to general visitors.

A participant from the group commented that it gave them a much clearer understanding of how museums work and how gallery design works. There was also a huge sense of achievement and pride in the final display. The project facilitated new friendships and wider understanding of different lived experiences of disability.

The World Gallery has received positive reviews in the national press and was short-listed for a Museums and Heritage Award.

Horniman staff and the external designers learnt a great deal about how to make gallery spaces more accessible and the impact this has on disabled people visiting galleries independently. The project also highlighted issues with terminology in the Horniman’s object database and the importance of collaboration with external groups to create displays which are relevant and interesting to a wide range of disabled visitors.
Challenges and lessons learnt

- Clear communication around the museum process is essential: not all recommendations can be taken forward, for example, some objects chosen for display were removed after case layout because they didn’t fit, some members of the AAG were attached to objects they had chosen.

- The difficulty of distilling months and years of discussions around themes into small labels with limited words.

- Providing opportunities for all members of the group to contribute equally. Some members of the group are more vocal than others. Making sure everyone has time and space to contribute.

- Making more staff aware of the AAG as a useful source of advice and support.

- Understanding access needs of group and making sure they are supported to contribute.

- Negative language used to catalogue objects. Awareness of historical interpretation and objects that may depict negative representations of disability and how the group might be affected working on those.

- Building in enough time to make decisions. Some activities can take longer than expected. Importance of clear explanations of timelines. Some group decisions had to be made in order to fit in with exhibition deadlines.

- Paying expenses in a timely manner and clarity around free access to exhibitions explained to front of house staff.

- Define roles and responsibilities clearly: what is the museum responsible for and what is the group’s responsibility.

- Importance of evaluating the group on an ongoing basis.

- Meetings worked well because of good timekeeping, never running over allotted time. There were clear actions at the end of each meeting and progress checked at the next meeting.

- Training was important to support the group to carry out particular tasks like interpretation.
Author

Claire Madge was a panel member of the Horniman Museum’s Access Advisory Group, February 2014 – April 2018. She is a member of the National Lottery Heritage Fund Committee for London and South.

References

- World Gallery – Horniman Museum & Gardens
- Community Perspectives – Horniman Museum & Gardens
- Setting up an Access Advisory Panel
UNTOLD HISTORIES
MUSEUM TOURS

UNTOLD
HISTORIES
MUSEUM
TOURS

We’ll tell you what the labels won’t

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ANANYA MISHRA
PhD candidate, Faculty of English, University of Cambridge

DANIKA PARIKH
Research & Engagement Fellow, University of Cambridge Museums
Project and team overview

The Untold Histories Museum Tours were based at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), Cambridge from 2018 to 2019. The tours were independent of MAA, and organised by three graduate students: Ananya Mishra (Faculty of English), Danika Parikh and Akshyeta Suryanarayan (Department of Archaeology) from the University of Cambridge.

Our team of three developed, researched and executed the tours, although we had previously worked as research consultants for a digital-art project on the South Asian collections at MAA. We did not have any additional staff or volunteers, although we were supported by museum staff, especially the Outreach Organiser and the Senior Curator of Anthropology. We were given some seed funding (£113.85 each) by MAA to support our background research and launch the pilot tours.

The collections at MAA include a wide range of archaeological and anthropological collections from around the world. Our tours focused on displays from Fiji, Myanmar, China, Nepal, Tibet, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, and archaeological objects from Nigeria and Iran. In many instances, we focused on the language of the labels on the museum displays that described the objects.

The tours were open to all audiences above 16 years of age. We advertised the tours as a new kind of museum event, though not as overtly decolonial in content. The language we used – ‘Untold Histories; we’ll tell you what the labels won’t’ – communicated different things to different audiences. People who were following conversations around decolonisation attended out of interest; other people attended because they believed it to be ‘something different’ to try, and were often surprised by the nature of the content. We hoped to reach audiences unaware of these histories, as well as people of colour who did not feel regular museum programming catered to them.

Objectives and themes

The main objective of the tours was to narrate some of the violent histories that laid the foundations of museum collections in Britain. These stories were largely absent from museum labels or alluded to in ‘neutral’ language. We wanted to directly engage with visitors through a tour that provided critical insights into the history and nature of Western museums.

We hoped to centre the focus on collectors in labels, and consider the histories of the communities and original owners of the objects. Information on the latter was almost impossible to find given the nature of erasure both at the point of collection, and within archives. Therefore, we directed our efforts to critically examine the contexts through which objects came to be at the
The tour covered several important themes. These included:

- The acquisition of archaeological and historical objects.
- Museum storage and archival practices.
- The representation of cultures and their histories in photographs, museum labels and displays.
- Issues surrounding the display of sacred objects.
- Issues surrounding the display of human bodies, particularly of people of colour, either through human remains or through photographs that may be inappropriate, demeaning, or dehumanising.
- Current demands for the restitution or repatriation of objects.

We also discussed examples of museum practices at MAA which we believed were moving in a positive direction; for example, the removal of sacred objects from display, co-curation of museum displays with source communities, and updated displays and labels that named and recognised artists and craftspeople from source communities.
Implementation

Research and the writing of the tour spanned three months. The research included looking into the journals and diaries of anthropologists and collectors mentioned in the museum labels, tracking the history of some objects, as well as wider historical reading on British colonial expeditions and wars. MAA provided seed funding to support the research component of the tours, but the content was entirely independent and the museum had no editorial role.

We launched a set of three free tours as part of the Festival of Ideas in 2018. The Festival of Ideas runs throughout the month of October and is a major outreach event at the University of Cambridge by which academics can share their research with a wider audience. As a respected and valued part of the Cambridge cultural calendar, the festival was an excellent launchpad for the tours and helped us attract a large and diverse audience. The initial interest the tours generated by being featured in the festival allowed us to gauge audience interest in a longer programme, and helped to keep them going.

After the success of the first tours, we decided to offer them every two weeks at a charge.

We designed a logo to build a recognisable public presence using an image of a museum object that was featured on the tours. We ensured we had permission to use the image. We set up a Facebook page to have a social media presence. We printed posters to put around Cambridge which involved a small personal investment from us prior to ticket sales. Posters were placed in museums, university departments, outside cultural locations like theatres, and sites in Cambridge like the railings around churches specifically used for art and culture advertising.

We sold tickets through Cambridge Live, an external ticket portal. We benefited greatly from audience awareness of an online portal, familiar to local audiences for booking tickets for concerts and theatre, that highlighted our tours on their website. It generated significant advantages which outweighed the small fee for its use. We were able to outsource the administration for booking and charges, rather than deal with each individual ticket sale ourselves.

We initially charged £7 per ticket and £5 for students and concessions, and later raised our prices to £9.56 and £5.63 respectively to cover for administrative costs charged by Cambridge Live. Tickets had to be pre-booked and paid for in advance to minimise attendee no-shows. This also guaranteed that we were paid, and offered protection against potential hostile parties who booked tours with no intention to attend.
In Autumn 2019 we also began to offer group tours which could be pre-booked. Several university institutions and departments booked tours for their members. Colleges also booked group tours for their students as part of events during Freshers’ Week. Offering group tour bookings helped share some of the organisation, as the booker took on the responsibility to advertise the event to their members, and enabled us to sell out an entire tour with a single booking. We proactively approached colleges and departments to let them know about the possibility of booking a group tour.

As the museum is small and some spaces are narrow, we limited the number of people on a single tour to a maximum of 12 people. Given that the tours involved guiding audiences to interpret or read beyond the labels, we had to be mindful that everyone was able to read the labels in question at each stop on the tour.

Due to the emotive, and often distressing, nature of the histories we were sharing, the tours would often take a toll on us. We decided to have a ‘buddy-system’ and always delivered the tours in pairs, to support each other and provide emotional back-up.

We conducted most of the tours on the weekends, although group bookings were organised at a time convenient to the group. We always coordinated with the museum to ensure there were no potential clashes with other activities taking place during that hour.

We were unable to collect surveys or feedback forms from tour attendees, but invited them to leave us feedback in the museum comments notebook or email us directly.
Impact and outcomes

The tours ran from autumn 2018 to winter 2019, and over 200 people attended. They were mentioned in an article in *The New York Times*, featured on Cambridge 105 radio and in *Cambridge Edition* magazine, and were filmed for ARTE television channel. The tours won the University of Cambridge’s Outstanding Student Contribution to Education Award for Inclusive Practice in 2019. The nominator for the award noted that the tours ‘greatly enriched the museum experience of those students, staff and members of the public who have attended them.’

We received extremely positive visitor feedback. Attendees said that the tours were ‘illuminating,’ ‘thought-provoking,’ and ‘eye-opening.’ One noted that:

‘one specific thing this tour makes abundantly clear is the need to update labels. In addition to tours, printed labels are one of the main ways that viewers will learn about the collections, and when these labels employ language that is dated or euphemistic or racist, they can perpetuate inaccuracies and stereotypes. New labelling practices, especially in dialogue with the communities whose cultures and histories are involved, would contribute to a fuller understanding not only of the collections, but of the nature of the museum itself.’

Several attendees sent feedback to the museum requesting that the labels be updated.

A tour was organised for the University of Cambridge Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor, members of the Equality and Diversity Committee, as well as the Museum Director and Outreach Organiser to discuss funding for replacing the racist and problematic labels on some of the old exhibits in the museum. We argued that the labels work against current efforts to address colonial histories and redress issues of race and gender, and are contrary to the university’s mission and core values.

Several of the outdated labels and displays are now being updated or removed by curators. The museum had been planning to update these displays prior to the tours, so it is unclear whether the tours helped push this up the agenda. We did, however, draw the public’s attention to them and generate discussions and conversations around the labels, and are confident that the tour had an impact on how the attendees perceived museums, collections, and colonial British history.

People of colour who attended the tours described the experience as ‘empowering,’ particularly in terms of hearing histories of racism and colonialism spoken about openly, without equivocation. We would recommend this approach as essential for any similar projects being pursued.

With the aid of a BME Histories Grant (Social History Society, Economic History Society, Society for the Study of Labour History, and History UK) and University of Cambridge Public Engagement and Diversity Fund grants, Danika Parikh built upon the work of the tours with a project called RePresent. A pilot workshop was organised in September 2020, with members of local diaspora community group the Cambridge African Network. Participants wrote their thoughts about objects in the museum, and these were then added to displays as new community labels. This project further advanced museum-based decolonial and anti-racist engagement by voicing commentaries of museum objects by minority communities living in Cambridge.
Challenges and lessons learnt

- We were able to introduce a small survey in the ticket-buying process, which asked attendees where they had heard about the event. From the limited responses, email (targeted, newsletters, and events round-ups) and Facebook were the most effective way to reach audiences.

- While many welcomed our initiative and supported us, including MAA, we found it challenging to manage and execute the tours independently as we were doctoral students pursuing our own research. The efforts to manage, advertise and run the tours took considerable time away from our own PhDs.

- While delivering the tours, we sometimes faced push-back and hostility from attendees who challenged what we were presenting, or interrupted us mid-speech. As three young women of colour delivering a tour that spoke explicitly of colonialism and racism, we expected to make attendees uncomfortable, but were not prepared for some of the hostility we received. The decision to work in pairs helped to not feel isolated when audience members became hostile or shared views that were racist or supportive of colonialism. We also only took questions at the end of the tour and MAA gallery staff were also available on standby if necessary.

- Although the experience of giving the tours and the discussions with attendees afterwards were very rewarding, narrating violent histories of racism and colonial conflict was emotionally exhausting. We had to conserve our energy and scheduled tours only twice every two weeks, despite increasing demand. Attendees often wanted to stay for extended conversation and Q&As, so we had to plan for additional time for this.

- The pressure of ‘speaking for’ historically excluded people was stressful as it was a significant responsibility, as much as it was an incomplete endeavour as perhaps any act of ‘speaking for’ the disenfranchised. We were aware of the limitations of our own positions, and this demanded an exhausting amount of effort to make sure everything we said was extensively supported by historical and archaeological sources. We often felt that if we did not have flawless research, potential mistakes would be seized upon by attendees to negate the substance of the entire tour.

Authors

Akshyeta Suryanarayan is a postdoctoral researcher, focussing on prehistoric food-ways and cuisine in Bronze Age South Asia and the Arabian Peninsula. Danika Parikh is Research and Engagement Fellow for University of Cambridge Museums. She is a founding member of the European Society of Black and Allied Archaeologists. Ananya Mishra is a PhD researcher at the Faculty of English, Cambridge, working on comparative Indigenous literature from India, Australia and North America. She co-founded Bread Theatre and Film Company, which works to decolonise performance arts.

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Untold Histories Museum Tours – University of Cambridge Museums & Botanic Garden website


RePresent project website
BRISTOL’S BRILLIANT ARCHAEOLOGY – ANNUAL FESTIVAL

KATE ILES
Curator of Archaeology & World Cultures, Bristol Culture & Creative Industries
Institution or organisation

Bristol Culture & Creative Industries (BC&CI) delivers a wide range of cultural services for Bristol City Council. As part of this service BC&CI operates five museums, including Bristol Museum & Art Gallery and M Shed, as well as city’s archives. BC&CI’s museum service is the largest in the South West and is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO). In 2018-19 over 1.3 million people visited BC&CI’s sites, collectively making them the most visited free attraction in the region.

Project and team

Bristol’s Brilliant Archaeology (BBA) has been an annual one day public event since 2015. It celebrates everything archaeological in and around the city and takes place during the nationwide Council for British Archaeology’s Festival of Archaeology. The event is hosted at Blaise Museum and Estate, a historic house and parkland in Bristol, owned by the council.

The event is developed, produced and co-ordinated by Kate Iles, Curator of Archaeology & World Cultures and is part of BC&CI’s public programme. BBA has an overall budget of £1,000 which covers additional staff costs, equipment hire, materials and re-enactor fees. Funding comes directly from the BC&CI’s engagement budget.

Each year the event involves a huge team effort and multiple partners including museum volunteers, archaeology societies, local groups, professional archaeologists and heritage bodies. It focusses on everything archaeological happening in and around Bristol and is connected to different aspects of BC&CI’s collection each year. The event is targeted towards families, interested adults and the local community.

Objectives and themes

BBA fits into a service-wide plan of engaging audiences with collections: with no dedicated archaeology gallery at Bristol Museum, events like this are one of the main ways that we can achieve this. It also helps deliver the business plan for Blaise Museum, which involves working with local communities.

The theme for the event is archaeology in its widest sense. The only common factor is a connection to Bristol – this can be because a site is close by, because the research is undertaken locally or because there is a tie to museum collections. This means a huge range of archaeology is celebrated all in one place from the latest studies into ancient Egypt to information about local excavations.
BBA has several aims:

- To celebrate and promote everything archaeological that takes place in Bristol and the surrounding area. Organisations from across the city and beyond are invited to run a stall or activity promoting their work. Tours of the Blaise estate and the local area take place, including walks to one of the estate’s Iron Age hillforts and to the nearby grave of Egyptologist Amelia Edwards. Living history displays run by local re-enactors fill the lawns outside Blaise Museum and involve demonstrations, combat displays and a whole host of animals.

- To bring archaeology to a wide range of audiences. BBA takes place at Blaise, which is surrounded by an area that falls within the most deprived 10% in England (2019 English Indices of Deprivation). To reduce barriers to participation, the event and all activities are provided free of charge. BBA intentionally takes place on the first weekend of the school holidays to attract a family audience and many of the stalls feature family friendly activities. Talks, tours, journal sales and displays about local sites are also created to appeal to an adult audience with a specialist interest in archaeology.

- To include a range of engaging, multi-sensory and fun activities that inspire all budding archaeologists. Family activities always include craft, dressing up, storytelling and face painting. Over the years we’ve made medieval soap, Viking bracelets, Roman mosaics, prehistoric pots, Iron Age coins, Roman gladiator helmets, medieval tiles, ancient Egyptian masks, laurel wreaths, and much, much more. Visitors can try their hands at archery, watch survival skill demonstrations, take part in a mini excavation, chat to our re-enactors in the living history camp or even take them on in the arena. There’s also medieval music, an exhibition of historical reconstructions and an archaeological feast with different delicacies to taste each year.

- To involve everyone in its delivery. It creates an opportunity for university archaeologists, local societies, commercial units, friends groups, heritage bodies, re-enactors and others to come together to promote their work. It also gives professionals and volunteers the chance to meet up, work together and share ideas and resources.
Implementation

To deliver an event on this scale takes a huge amount of organisation and preparation begins well in advance. As Blaise Museum is also used for weddings, the date of BBA can sometimes be booked several years ahead.

Once the date is confirmed and circulated, the next step is to liaise with Bristol City Council’s parks department who manage the parkland where BBA takes place. We then submit an event plan; lost child policies; emergency procedures; insurance details; and a traffic management plan for sign off from the council’s site permissions team. We also begin a risk assessment covering everything that will happen on site. This includes setting up, vehicles on site, safeguarding children and vulnerable adults as well as starting fires, medieval cannons, Saxon weapons, animal welfare and every other hazard imaginable.

In the six months leading up to the event, we chair an events committee made up of representatives from university archaeologists, commercial units and local societies to discuss ideas and practical delivery. BC&CI then liaise with the groups responsible for delivering stalls, tours and talks and send out booking forms to keep track of what everyone is planning. These give information on the logistics of the day and help us to gather information on who is coming, what they hope to deliver and what support they may need. We then work with smaller or less experienced groups advising them on the best way to engage large audiences with archaeology.

The publicity campaign begins as soon as the information is gathered. We use all of our social media accounts and the Blaise Museum webpage to promote the event and ask that everyone coming also markets it through their channels. Closer to the time we
work with our in-house graphic designer to create digital and printed posters. These are shared on social media, and as posters and flyers in the local community.

A month before BBA we order and create the resources needed to deliver the activities. In the week before the event, a small team of dedicated volunteers and work experience students set up on site. Tasks include everything from gazebo checking to ironing Roman togas to creating festival packs for organisers.

On the day itself, the BC&CI team involves members of the front of house team, curators, learning officers and around 20 museum volunteers. Staff erect gazebos, marshal cars, set up an arena, hold a safety briefing, provide information for visitors and offer continuous support throughout the day.

Tours, talks and stalls are run by the wider team which involves 100+ volunteers from the Friends of Bristol Museum, Galleries & Archives, the Friends of Blaise, archaeological units, local archaeology community groups, heritage bodies, re-enactors and young people from the Bristol & Bath Young Archaeologist Club (YAC).

After the bustle of the event, work then begins to take it all down again, pack away and clear the site. By the time the weekend is over, it is time to start recruiting people to come again next year!

This process is usually repeated year after year but with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic everything changed and BBA went digital. We continued to work with all partners and offered technical support to all. The end result involved a packed nine days of online activity and a social media takeover across all museum channels. Local archaeology societies, community groups and YAC made online quizzes; commercial units created digital dig stories for Instagram; archaeologists from across the sector made short films about what they do; survival skills experts and re-enactors made films for YouTube; the Friends of Bristol Museum, Galleries & Archives created archaeological recipes; and archaeologists from the Ministry of Defence, University of Bristol and Bristol City Council planning team all gave online talks.
**Impact and outcomes**

Before BBA, Festival of Archaeology activity was spread across the city with various bodies offering small scale events that weren’t connected and that attracted low visitor numbers. BBA has changed this by creating an event that brings everyone together to share their passion with the public.

BBA has raised the profile of archaeology in Bristol and beyond. Over the past five years, BBA has grown to be the largest event of its kind in the region attracting more visitors with each year. In 2019, BBA attracted more than 2,000 visitors in just five hours, an increase of 400% from the first BBA in 2015. It is Blaise Museum’s busiest day of the year.

This event makes full use of Bristol Museum archaeologists’ expertise in engaging audiences with archaeology and archaeological collections. It puts us at the centre of activity in the city and provides opportunities for different groups to meet, exchange ideas and work together. Feedback from archaeologists and volunteers working at BBA is always positive. The University of Bristol describes it as an ‘excellent profile-raising opportunity for public engagement. Great opportunity to connect with the local archaeology groups and find out what opportunities are available’. As one archaeology unit explains: ‘commercially the exposure is a good thing. More importantly it is a great opportunity to engage with the public, showcase the work we do and promote archaeology.’

By involving so many different groups, we can offer a wide range of high quality, engaging activities that are extremely popular with audiences. Visitor feedback reflects this success with comments such as: ‘really lovely way of engaging the children in activities they may not normally encounter’, ‘amazing for low income families as no cost is involved’ and ‘brilliant fun and something for us and the kids’. This level of success would not be possible without everyone working together.
Challenges and lessons learnt

- Running an event on this scale is not without its challenges. Because BBA takes place across Blaise Museum and Estate, it has to be approved by the team who deal with all of the festivals that happen across the city. This means submitting a lot of paperwork which is very time consuming at first but gets quicker when updating it in following years. Certainly by the end of it you are prepared for anything.

- The main challenge however, has always been the weather! There have been years where it has been too wet for everyone to be outside; years when it was so windy that the gazebos buckled and had to all be taken down; and years where it was scorching hot and the ground was parched. No matter how prepared you are with a wet-weather plan, there are always last-minute changes and a lot of frantic moving around on the morning of the event.

- In terms of lessons learnt, starting preparations as early as possible is high up on the list. As BBA is also part of the Festival of Archaeology, which draws heavily on archaeological expertise nationally, it is important to book people early. This also means we can start promoting the event quickly too. Regular communication also helps. We keep in touch with the different groups throughout the year to share any news, ask for input and discuss ideas.

- The main lesson learnt has been the benefit of all working together. This is the only time that archaeology societies, local groups, professional archaeologists, heritage bodies and re-enactors come together in Bristol so it has been great to get to know each other better and develop working relationships. The combined effort has resulted in a huge variety of activities that we would not be able to offer if we were working alone and as everyone helps promote the event, we reach a wider audience than we normally would.

Author

Kate Iles is Curator of Archaeology & World Cultures for Bristol Culture & Creative Industries. She helps curate a large, multi-period archaeology collection and works across several museum sites including Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, M Shed, Blaise Castle House Museum and Kings Weston Roman Villa.

References

Bristol’s Brilliant Archaeology 2020 website
YOURDIG – COMMUNITY CO-CREATED EXHIBITIONS

CHRIS TUCKLEY
Head of Interpretation and Engagement, York Archaeological Trust/JORVIK Group
Institution or organisation

York Archaeological Trust (YAT)/JORVIK Group is a self-funded educational charity, archaeological organisation and museum operator. The group has a staff of around 200 people assisted by more than 300 volunteers, and has offices in York, Sheffield, Nottingham and Glasgow.

Project and team

The YourDIG programme comprises a series of collaborative exhibitions showcasing a range of community-led initiatives from across York and North and East Yorkshire. YourDIG enables communities to showcase their work and commitment to their own heritage for the benefit of the wider public.

YourDIG has been core work for the JORVIK Group since 2018. The engagement activity and exhibition materials have received support from Arts Council England’s Museum Resilience Fund, with additional funding from Tang Hall Big Local for their local project. YAT’s Interpretation and Engagement department has led the programme, with project management by a full-time community engagement manager, supported by the Exhibitions, Collections & Archives and Marketing departments.

Each YourDIG project has worked with at least one partner organisation (Southburn Archaeological Museum for YourDIG: Southburn; Tang Hall Big Local, Tang Hall Primary School and the Vindolanda Trust for YourDIG: Tang Hall; Converge for YourDIG: Converge; the University of York and York College for YourDIG: Melting Pot; the Help for Heroes Phoenix House Recovery Centre for YourDIG: Help for Heroes) and each has resulted in a temporary exhibition at one of our York venues.

Archaeological collections, normally those curated by YAT, have been a focus for each YourDIG project. The projects have tended to be based on existing working relationships with external partners, or have been suggested by discrete funding opportunities (as in the case of YourDIG: Tang Hall).

Objectives and themes

Community engagement has been at the heart of each YourDIG project, and the rationale for the community engagement work accomplished by YAT has developed over the course of the programme. An initial emphasis on sharing skills with the wider heritage sector aligned YourDIG with one of the goals of Round 2 of Arts Council England’s Museum Resilience Fund: that ‘leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are [...] appropriately skilled’. A complementary, emergent theme has been that of wellbeing, expressed in YAT’s core principle of ‘making lives better through heritage’. Key to this is the delivery of public value via the promotion of community wellbeing.

Implementation

YourDIG: Southburn, the first of the projects to be completed, established a format closely followed by the subsequent four, particularly in terms of how the resulting exhibitions have been mounted. YAT had previously collaborated with Southburn Archaeological Museum (SAM) in a number of outreach activities in the Yorkshire Wolds region, and partnership working between the two was given added impetus by YAT’s success in securing ACE Museum Resilience funding. SAM first opened in 2008 as a volunteer-run museum to display an archaeological collection whose core consisted of finds made by a tractor driver, Brian Hebblewhite, on local farmland. The museum managers were enthusiastic to co-operate with us for YourDIG, and early discussions in August 2017 identified the winter months (when SAM is closed to visitors) as a potential window for
a loan from SAM to go on display in York at our DIG attraction. Much of the engagement work for YourDIG: Tang Hall had already taken place between spring and autumn 2017, so the two exhibitions ran sequentially from January 2018 onwards.

Various YAT staff members attended SAM in the engagement phase of the project; advice on conservation and environmental issues had already been provided separately by our Conservation team. Members of the YAT Collections & Archives department visited to look at the museum’s facilities, discuss exhibition narrative and select items for display. The SAM volunteers also collaborated with the Collections & Archives team to draft label text, and visited York to mock up layouts for the display cases.

Installing loan items for YourDIG: Southburn © York Archaeological Trust

A space in a side gallery at DIG was sectioned off to make a small community exhibition room (with a floorspace of approximately 5m x 3m), and this has provided the venue for every YourDIG exhibition. YourDIG: Southburn consisted of two cases displaying finds from the farm with accompanying wall-mounted information panels, three larger wall-mounted text and image panels, a presentation on a video screen (a slideshow of images of the Southburn area interspersed with drawings and handwritten notes by Hebblewhite) with an accompanying ambient soundtrack recorded at Southburn. A listening station with oral history extracts recorded with Hebblewhite family members and Southburn volunteers, and a tactile table completed the exhibition.
The table featured resin replicas of chalk figurines of the Romano-British period, many examples of which have been found in the East Yorkshire region; one such figurine had been uncovered by Hebblewhite during an excavation in the 1980s. This figurine is damaged and its head missing, so a better-known and more characterful example from Withernsea was reproduced alongside it for the tactile table, together with resin panels that reproduced decorative motifs from the chalk figurines (with wax crayons and paper nearby for visitors to make rubbings).

The tactile table was developed as a means of making exhibition materials more accessible; an audio description of the exhibition was also included alongside the oral history recordings for the same reason. Furthermore, it was decided that admission to this and subsequent YourDIG exhibitions would be free, although usual admission charges would apply for access to the other parts of the DIG attraction.

DIG staff received training and an information pack before the exhibition opened, to introduce them to this new aspect of the DIG visitor offer. A launch event was held on an evening in the same week, with SAM volunteers and members of the Hebblewhite family present, celebrating and marking the culmination of the engagement phase of the project.

Impact and outcomes

One of the key moments in the evolution of the YourDIG model came about in the engagement phase for YourDIG: Converge, which incorporated a range of imaginative, artistic responses to the archaeological material selected for the project. Whereas the dominant narrative voice of the previous exhibitions (in text panels, video commentary, image captions and object labels) had been singular and authoritative (whilst allowing space for less formal content), the methods for engagement in...
YourDIG: Converge (facilitating creative writing, drama and music-making) generated abundant material for an alternative contextual framework, one in which multiple voices produced contrasting, non-specialist perspectives on the exhibits. For YAT, this project demanded a relaxation of control over the exhibition narrative, where previously it had been the preserve of archaeological experts (whether YAT’s own or those belonging to partner organisations). This produced a tonal shift towards a more fully co-created and co-curated exhibition model.

Working with Converge, a partnership between York St John University and local mental health service providers, also helped to cement a more general awareness within YAT of the UK heritage sector’s community wellbeing agenda. With this came the recognition that we needed better evaluative tools to demonstrate and measure the impact, outcomes and public value being delivered by our engagement work. This would apply not only to the work badged as ‘community engagement’ and carried out by the York-based Interpretation and Engagement team, but also formal learning or volunteering opportunities at our attractions, our events programme, and any public engagement activity carried out by our regional units in Nottingham and Sheffield.

The last YourDIG project to be completed before the Covid-19 pandemic, YourDIG: Help for Heroes, adopted an evaluative method for participant wellbeing taken from the UCL Museum Wellbeing Measures Toolkit, specifically through the use of its generic positive wellbeing umbrella tool before and after each of two creative workshops, along with its recommended ‘thoughts and comments’ questionnaire.

The YourDIG projects have fostered a renewed commitment on the part of YAT to trialling innovative and consistent evaluation methods. These will aid us in the effort to define and develop methods of carrying out unique community engagement that complements and supports all of YAT’s work.

Challenges and lessons learnt

♦ In the time-pressured environment of a busy attractions group and educational charity, it has paid to keep multiple options on the table when scheduling YourDIG projects. Some partners are more used to partnership working than others, and are more prepared for the organic ways in which such projects develop; there have been potential YourDIG partnerships that have stalled. The majority have grown out of existing relationships, but some suggested themselves when YAT fielded an unrelated enquiry, so an opportunistic mindset on the part of the Interpretation and Engagement team (where existing extramural projects could be adopted and given a community engagement spin, or where a funding opportunity has arisen) has helped to secure the wherewithal for such a varied programme.
We as an organisation have also been reminded of the degree to which, with a relatively small amount of direction from skilled group convenors, archaeology specialists and artists, community participants can engage enthusiastically with the technical side of archaeological sciences and experimental archaeology, generating high quality results in the process. This is exemplified in the work accomplished in the course of YourDIG: Melting Pot, for which A-level science students from York College reconstructed Viking-era cooking techniques at the York Experimental Archaeological Research Centre, then sent the pots for analysis at the University of York BioArCh laboratory. The results supported analysis of residues in pottery sherds from archaeological deposits, a key focus for the AHRC-funded Melting Pot: Food and Identity in the Age of Vikings project team, partners for this YourDIG project.

Author

Chris Tuckley is Head of Interpretation and Engagement for York Archaeological Trust/JORVIK Group, a position he has held since 2011. He has worked in a number of roles for JORVIK Group since 2004, and was awarded a PhD by the Institute for Medieval Studies at the University of Leeds in 2009.

References

YourDIG website
WORKING STONE, MAKING COMMUNITIES – TECHNOLOGY AND IDENTITY IN PREHISTORIC ORKNEY

MARK EDMONDS
Department of Archaeology, University of York

HUGO ANDERSON–WHYMARK
Curator of Prehistory, National Museums Scotland

ANN CLARKE
Lithic specialist

ANTONIA THOMAS
University of the Highlands and Islands
Project team and overview

Working Stone, Making Communities took as its focus the prehistoric and ethnographic stone tools of Orkney. The basic aim was to determine, as comprehensively as possible, the history and composition of relevant assemblages from across the region. We were also committed to communicating the results of our work to professional/specialist and wider audiences, using online media to promote new forms of engagement with the material.

This was a stand-alone research project, supported by a three-year grant (2013–2016) from The Leverhulme Trust. It was directed by Mark Edmonds with three contracted staff: Dr Hugo Anderson-Whymark (Curator of Prehistory at National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh) for three years; Ann Clarke (freelance lithic specialist) and Dr Antonia Thomas (Programme Leader for the MA Contemporary Art and Archaeology at the University of the Highlands and Islands) for 1.5 years each. Additional support in the design of the website was provided on a consultancy basis by Pat Gibbs. The project had no official partners but involved close collaboration with curatorial staff at the Orkney Museum, Stromness Museum, the Pier Arts Centre and National Museums Scotland, and with individual owners/custodians of artefacts of interest.

Objectives and themes

Stone tools have played a relatively minor role in narratives about the prehistory of Orkney. This is partly because the region is blessed with a remarkable record of upstanding settlements and monuments, primarily those dating to the Neolithic. But it is also because stone tools have been regarded as useful for dating and little more than that. We started from the premise that these artefacts had far more interesting stories to tell; stories that needed to be told in a way that would catch a wide and varied audience.
Drawing together the evidence from local, national and personal collections, Working Stone was designed to determine the range, size and character of prehistoric stone artefact assemblages in Orkney. It sought to track traditions of making and using different kinds of stone tools across the region from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age. It also explored the character and contemporary significance of a large number of the non-western stone artefacts that currently reside in museum archives and personal collections across the Orkney archipelago. Describing such a varied body of material was no small undertaking, but from the outset, our aspiration was to go beyond description, to explore how traditions of working stone were entangled in prehistoric people’s lives; how particular ways of making and using tools shaped the worlds in which they lived.

We were also interested in the social history of collecting and in the afterlives of things. Many archaeologists tend to emphasise questions of origin, focussing on the time when certain kinds of objects were first made and used. This was also an important theme in our research, but many of the artefacts we were looking at had evidently been collecting people from then until now, and these longer biographies were a no less crucial part of the story. It therefore mattered that we tracked how some assemblages had ended up in museums, how certain objects travelled out of the region and how others found their way onto local mantelpieces and windowills, where they remain to this day. That we were able to explore as much as we did was due, in large measure, to the generosity and support of people across the county, from curators and collectors, to individuals who simply wanted to share the stories of their stones with us.

**Implementation**

Working Stone was designed from the outset as an open access online resource. There may be no substitute for the experience of holding an artefact in the hand, but this is not really an option for most people and certainly not for the many artefacts that currently reside in museum stores. We saw the provision of different kinds of online access as our best option for overcoming some of these problems. This allowed us to combine material detail (analytical depth) with information on chronology, context, the history of research and the biographies of key individuals and institutions.

Working online opened up the potential for the development of a structure which allowed flexibility and non-linearity in the routes that people could choose to explore different aspects of the material: by period, by type, by raw material, by site, and via the biographies of individual excavators, collectors and institutions. Those who wished to could drill down to details on the character of different artefacts, while others could emphasise the social history of collecting or the relationship between raw material choices and geology. The website was also structured so as to allow people to find the most appropriate level for their visits. Depending on the amount of detail required, the site could be searched via short, paragraph-length statements, by longer pages of information and by more detailed stand-alone papers and data sheets, each one accompanied by a range of visual resources. The use of an online platform also allowed us to combine many different kinds of visual information; from maps and plans to photography and 3D models.

Background work prior to the start of the project had established the whereabouts of all major excavated assemblages, chance discoveries and other collections, and had secured permission to access most of this material for detailed recording. This included asking people across Orkney whether they would be willing to show us the objects that they had either found or had handed down to them, stone artefacts that they cherished at home. The trust and the welcome that many people showed us made the work a real pleasure.
The metrical, technical and photographic analysis of material formed the core of our work for the first two years of the project, alongside the design and construction of the website itself. Our analyses allowed us to establish a high level of comparability in the characterisation of stone tool assemblages from across the archipelago; those from ongoing or recent field projects as well as those excavated in the 19th and 20th centuries. Levels of contextual detail were inevitably varied, but even the oldest collections had sufficient information available to allow good coverage on many different aspects of the material. The third year of the project saw the bulk of the work undertaken to populate the website itself. This included the creation of a large number of 3D models and short video clips illustrating different stone-working techniques.

Work on the structure and content of the website went hand in hand with a variety of different forms of local engagement. This included workshop sessions in schools across the region, reaching children on six different islands. Talks to local societies and public workshops/handling sessions were also undertaken at different points throughout the life of the project. An additional form of public engagement saw the creation of a card game – Rock Stars – which was designed and produced by the team. A variant on the theme of Top Trumps™, the card game distilled information

Rock Stars card game © Hugo Anderson-Whymark
on a large number of Orcadian stone tools. A total of 500 packs of these cards were produced for free distribution to schools and museums across the region; five years down the line, they are still being used and enjoyed, teachers using them on their own and as a way of introducing children to the Working Stone website.

**Impact and outcomes**

Informal feedback and ongoing monitoring of the website demonstrates that it continues to be used on a regular basis. A basic analysis of access data shows that it is being used by local communities and by people across Britain and further afield. Closer analysis has not been undertaken, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the site continues to have value for both professional archaeologists and those beyond the discipline who nonetheless have an interest. The site also continues to be used in teaching at a number of schools across Orkney and in a number of university archaeology departments. The website has been hosted on a secure server with provision for maintenance until 2026, with the option to renew that support for a further 10 years after that.

In the year following the completion of the project (and outside the brief and the funding of the original research), Working Stone was re-cast as an exhibition entitled *Conversations With Magic Stones*, which was funded by in-kind support from local museums and galleries, and by a small grant from Museums Galleries Scotland. The show took in three different venues in Orkney, each one providing a vantage from which to look at different aspects of the material.

At the Orkney Museum in Tankerness House, the focus was on prehistory and on the social history of collecting. At Stromness Museum, the emphasis was on ethnographic encounters, exploring just how and why it was that stone tools from North America, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific region ended up in Orkney in some numbers. In both venues, material from standing collections appeared alongside objects loaned for the event by local people. These individual loans created a context for the communication of personal stories and biographical connections which ran alongside more conventional narratives. Each setting also saw the incorporation of work by contemporary painters, printmakers and sculptors. Their contributions sat alongside and responded to the more conventional material, encouraging new forms of reflection among exhibition visitors.

*Conversations with Magic Stones* took its title, with a slight adaptation, from a sculpture by Barbara Hepworth. Her work and words provided the frame for the third part of the exhibition, at the Pier Arts Centre, also in Stromness, serving as a lens through which to reconsider the significance that we attach, in the here and now, to the stone tools that were made, circulated and used by Orcadians across 8,000 years. Here the
emphasis was on questions of form, making and meaning, and a deliberate attempt was made to place apparently ‘mundane’ prehistoric stone tools alongside Hepworth’s work to encourage a shift in conventional ways of seeing. An online version of the catalogue from the exhibition was created.

Responses to the website and to the exhibition make it clear that there is much to be gained from an approach to prehistoric or more recent non-western artefacts that does not dwell exclusively on origins. The more recent entanglements of these objects brings home how important many of them are to the ways that people think about themselves and about the recent past (often understood in genealogical terms). A north American stone arrowhead may be valued for its origins, but it also matters just as much, if not more, for the story that it carries about a grandmother or a great uncle, who kept it after their return from working with the Hudson’s Bay Company. A few flint flakes found behind an Orcadian plough may (or may not) be recognised as pieces of the distant past, but they find a place on the family mantelpiece because of the link they provide to a particular patch of land and to a previous generation. Important in their own right, the inclusion of these more recent biographies also encouraged a more profound reflection on what traditions of making, using and curating artefacts may have meant to people in prehistory. The juxtaposition of archaeological and ethnographic material with the work of contemporary artists also did much to encourage reflection in new ways on matters of form, aesthetics and process.
Challenges and lessons learnt

- The development of the Working Stone website was a time-consuming process, made much easier by the skill, experience and creativity of the team involved. The nature of the medium certainly created challenges, from having to learn basic coding to securing use-rights for images (taken by us) of objects held in large institutional collections.

- While we were committed to open access, we would have benefited from a greater understanding of the time required to implement Creative Commons licences and the potential of sites, such as WikiMedia, to reach wider audiences. More important were the challenges that the medium posed for the ways we use text. Beyond a basic commitment to write clearly, the format of the website forced us to think seriously about how best to combine different pieces of text in a more creative, non-linear manner, so that visitors could build their understanding whatever route they took through the material.

- Our experience on this project also brought home how important it was to establish a basic framework or structure for the website as early as possible. This was amended and elaborated as the project progressed, but it really helped to have a clear sense of what we wanted the site to look like and how we wanted it to work. A collective endeavour such as this also required good and regular communication between participants, and a shared commitment to the laborious but essential process of content editing.

- We were also remarkably fortunate to have had the goodwill and help of museum and gallery curators, who took every possible step to help us with accessing material, as did the many individuals who shared their stones with us. Their involvement, their enthusiasm and their generosity made all the difference. That said, we probably underestimated just how long it would take to set up meetings, arrange access and secure permissions. Getting these balls rolling as early as possible and certainly before the official start of the project, ensured that we were able to deliver the site on time and in the form that we wanted.

Authors

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References

Working Stone – Orkney Stone Tools website @annclarkerocks
KNOW YOUR PLACE – CO-CREATING THE STORY OF BRISTOL

PETER INSOLE
Principal Historic Environment Officer, Bristol City Council
Institution or organisation

Bristol City Council is a unitary authority which provides a wide range of local government services for people and businesses in Bristol, which has an estimated population of 463,400.

Project and team overview

Know Your Place is the collaborative public information web-based resource for the historic environment in Bristol, set up in 2011. It was originally made possible with funding from English Heritage (now Historic England), for the City Design Group at Bristol City Council to work in partnership with the Geographic Information Services (GIS) team, Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives and local volunteers to create a web-based historic mapping resource.

Since 2011, Know Your Place (KYP) has been helping communities, researchers and developers to understand how Bristol’s unique neighbourhoods have developed. This understanding contributes to a wider debate and informed decisions about how the city should develop in the future. The resource helps to ensure that the historic environment brings the greatest economic, social and cultural benefits to the people of Bristol.

The numerous collaborations and partnerships that have resulted from the creation of KYP are evidence of the recognition of the value of the site in connecting people to their past and in raising awareness of the relevance of heritage to the contemporary city and the challenges it faces.

Implementation

Using an ESRI ArcGIS web map interface, KYP is managed as part of the city council’s Historic Environment Record (HER) and allows free public access to historic maps and images presented as layers of information that can be overlain to enable users to gain a rich understanding of the history of the city, their neighbourhood or street. In addition to presenting historic information from the archives, the resource invites users to upload their own information and images to further enrich this story of the city with the results of their own research, family archives or personal observations.

Access to further information and images from the city archives is provided as layers of points that can be switched on or off, populating these historic maps with coloured diamonds; red for the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery’s Braikenridge Collection of early 1800s watercolours, lime green for images from the Bristol Reference Library and so on. Clicking an individual point provides access to an image and further information often including links back to the original source or catalogue entry in the collections.

Objectives and themes

One of the main objectives of Know Your Place was to present the city’s historic maps so that they could be overlain to enable members of the public to easily gain an understanding of how the city has developed since the 1700s. From the outset the strap line for the resource was ‘learning and sharing information about historic Bristol’. The thousands of contributions from members of the public to the site’s community layer and the wide use of the website in Bristol schools and colleges is testament to the achievement of this objective.
The ‘Community’ layer of points is always displayed on start-up. It represents the information that is constantly growing as KYP crowdsources images and stories of places that are uploaded by members of the public. Anyone can choose to click a place on the map to create a new record, using a simple form to add details and images of a place. This public contribution record is then validated by the KYP project officer and a new point appears on the community layer to enhance understanding and appreciation of the area.

This way of adding information has also been used by volunteers to create many of the layers on KYP. Working remotely, volunteers gradually work through a collection of images from the archives, reference library or museum, undertaking their own research and adding this to the site. In this way over 10,000 images from the city’s archives have been added by volunteers so far. For example the ‘Loxton ink drawings’ layer consists of all 2,000 drawings created by Samuel Loxton in the early-20th century held at Bristol Reference Library and the ‘Vaughan postcards’ layer presents over 3,000 postcard images of places in Bristol collected by Roy Vaughan held at Bristol Archives. In both cases the creation of this content would not have been possible without the work of volunteers supported by library and archives staff.

New layers of information are being developed all the time. One of the most recent layers to be added has been the ‘Archaeological and architectural objects’ layer. This has been created by staff at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery and features 100 objects selected from their collections. The points that have been added to the map show where these objects were found along with an image of the item with associated links back to the museum catalogue. Although this is just a small sample of the thousands of objects within the museum collections, it does provide a flavour of the material that is behind the scenes at the museum and provides wider access to these objects, particularly as only a few of these artefacts are on permanent display. The layer also increases the archaeological content on the site, which also includes downloadable copies of archaeological fieldwork reports.
Further information can be added at any time and none of the layers is regarded as complete. This is particularly the case with the ‘Archaeological reports’ layer that is being continually updated as new fieldwork projects are completed and the ‘Community’ layer that is updated almost daily with new information submitted by the public.

Each of these layers present different ways of seeing the city and arguably caters for different audiences. However, they all help to tell the story of Bristol and the individual points are usually stories in their own right, particularly when linked to other sources of information. When a postcard image, ink drawing or archaeological object is connected to the place they depict they begin to reveal the relevance that these artefacts can have, particularly to the current residents of the site, building or street.

Multiple stories can be derived from a single image, often before all the individuals or items are identified. One example is a postcard from the Vaughan collection which shows the 25th Boys Brigade Band from the Dings area of Bristol. Another image from the Know Your Place ‘Oral History’ layer shows their club house, essentially a tin shed, which was a prominent early community facility in this post-war Bristol estate.

The postcard was sent sometime in the early 1900s, the dated postmark on the reverse is not legible, but the card reads:

‘Dear Ernie, I am looking forward to seeing you on Wednesday. Pringles does not start until 8 o’c. I think you had better meet me at Tyndall’s Park corner at 7.15. This will give us quite enough time to get good seats. I hope you had a good time with Mr Linton on Saturday. It was a good job it kept fine. Tell mother that you will be a bit late, but that I will see you home safely. Until Wednesday, 7.15 Ta Ta. Yours very sincerely, T Thornton Wills.’

The signatory, Thomas Thornton Wills, was a member of a prominent local family, who in 1911, was 27 and living with his parents on St Ronan’s Avenue, Redland. The reference to Pringles is likely to mean Pringle’s Picture House, located a relatively short walk from his home and the meeting point at Tyndall’s Park mentioned on the postcard. Pringle’s Picture House was one of four cinemas operated by Ralph Pringle in Bristol between 1909 and the 1920s. This one object on KYP with its text gives us a brief glimpse into early 20th-century life – and the postal system – in this part of Bristol. Further research might provide the connection of the correspondents with the 25th Boys Brigade.
Impact and outcomes

KYP has provided wider access to and encouraged greater participation with our archives. It has demonstrably generated a greater appreciation of the city’s heritage. The resources from the site, both historic maps and archive images are regularly used in support of planning submissions and numbers of unique page views to the website have increased over time and now average over 6,000 a month for the Bristol Know Your Place. This has been assisted by greater publicity in the local press and a social media presence. When BBC2’s A House Through Time television series featuring Bristol was broadcast, the KYP Bristol twitter feed that was live tweeting during the show had over one million interactions.

The resource has won several awards including a Historic England Heritage Angel award in 2018. It now covers several local authority areas in the west of England following a Heritage Lottery Funded KYP West project. Success has
led to many partnership projects including the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded Know Your Bristol and several other community-led initiatives.

*Know Your Place* is the result of a huge partnership that includes technical support, collections curators, academics and community volunteers. Getting the vision and scope of the project right at the beginning has led to subsequent success and although the original scope did not identify all these connections, the resulting resource has the flexibility and the management structures in place to ensure that the benefits of future initiatives can be realised.

By spatially locating images and information about the story of Bristol on a map of the city, the project has not only helped to widen access to these resources, but has also helped to increase the relevance of this material. This creates, and or strengthens, personal connections between the archives and our communities. Through enabling the co-creation of these stories of the city, allowing new audiences to tell these stories in new ways, KYP is helping to ensure that the significance of this heritage is passed on to this and future generations.

We are now developing story maps with partners to complement the data available on KYP. This is a separate facility that ESRI’s ArcGIS offers, which enables the creation of thematic content that cuts story lines across the map and through the layers like a digital heritage trail. Users read a story map like they would an online blog or news article, when scrolling through the text the accompanying map moves to the location associated with the point in the story. The story maps can include links back to the original point on the KYP resource or other web content so that users can explore the wider context for themselves. The stories can include video and audio content to present a rich narrative for the audience.

So far we have created a series of story maps that cover a variety of themes from the early origins of Bristol, to the development of the first council housing, as well as creating more traditional heritage trails like a walk along the River Frome.

**Challenges and lessons learnt**

- Many stories can be brought to a wider audience through a resource like KYP and work by community volunteers. However, this approach creates a cloud of information points, split over layers that can appear arbitrary to the user, as demonstrated by the occasional dismayed report that people can’t find what they’re looking for. Sometimes comments indicate a lack of awareness of what is available and the full potential of the site. A user survey indicated that 80% of users visited the site just to look at the historic maps and many hadn’t explored the information layers.

- Improving metadata and search functionality can help to address these issues, but when we talk about stories of place, it is reasonable for audiences to expect a thematic approach that isn’t really presented on resources such as KYP, so we have introduced some thematic content like the layers focussed on the world wars to address this.

- Developing story maps provides another way of presenting narratives from the data. Moving to a position where more users can write these stories to co-create a collective story of our city is one future objective.

- KYP is just the starting point for these narratives. It should be seen as a collection point that, because of its position within a core function of the local authority, comes complete with moderation, validation and custodianship.
Author

Peter Insole is the Principal Historic Environment Officer in the City Design Group at Bristol City Council. During 2010–11, Peter managed the English Heritage funded project to create Know Your Place, an online resource that won the ESRI UK Local Government Vision Award, 2011, the Urban Design Group Francis Tibbalds Award in 2014 and Heritage Angel Award in 2018.

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EGYPT’S DISPERSED HERITAGE – VIEWS FROM EGYPT 2019–2020

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**Institution**

The UCL Institute of Archaeology is one of the largest centres for archaeology, cultural heritage and museum studies in Britain. Founded in 1937, it actively pursues research on a global scale in the archaeological sciences, heritage studies and world archaeology.

**Project and team overview**

Egypt’s Dispersed Heritage was a stand-alone Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Follow-on for Impact award (£75,777) conceived by Heba Abd el-Gawad and Alice Stevenson, in collaboration with a series of artists and organisations in Egypt. The funding was awarded to UCL’s Institute of Archaeology and built upon the findings of a previous AHRC-funded project Artefacts of Excavation led by Stevenson which examined the history of the distribution of finds from British excavations in Egypt to museums worldwide. The project partnered with the Egypt Exploration Society and five UK museums – National Museums of Scotland, Liverpool World Museum, Manchester Museum, Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology, and the Horniman Museum and Gardens. These institutions shared information and images about the Egyptian collections they hold with artists and educators in Egypt, allowing the latter to develop their own responses to the colonial removal of Egypt’s heritage and build resources of benefit to Egyptian communities. Secondary audiences included the UK museum sector and their audiences to increase awareness of contemporary Egyptian concerns and communities in Egypt. The aims, then, were to:

- Centre Egyptian communities’ views, voices and validity in narratives concerning British-led excavation and export of Egyptian antiquities from Egypt to the world.
- Foster reciprocal dialogues with Egyptian communities in Egypt around the history of these exports and increase awareness among visitors to exhibits on ancient Egypt in the UK of these dialogues.
- Develop and deliver engaging outputs that would fulfil Egyptian communities’ educational and cultural needs by fostering partnerships between artists, community schools, and cultural initiatives in Egypt and six UK institutions with Egyptian collections and archives.
- Develop and showcase a model of transparency and accountability around the history of colonial archaeological collecting that is beneficial to Egyptian, UK, and international stakeholders.

This entailed working through themes of:

- Colonial archaeological practices: revealing the imbalances of power and instances of exploitation, racism, white privilege and white saviour narratives that have surrounded British-led excavations, and the collection, dispersal, and interpretation of Egyptian antiquities/artefacts.
Connections of continuity and change: acknowledging the emotional, environmental and geographical connections across Egyptian history as well as the numerous changes across Egypt’s diverse population.

Cultural stereotyping: challenging the Western socio-political and religious stereotyping of modern Egyptian and wider Middle Eastern and North African communities.

Auto-colonialism and Eurocentrism: recognising that the way ancient Egypt is engaged with by many Egyptians is itself understood through Western frames of reference.

Ethics of the treatment of human remains and their entanglement with eugenics: exploring the reasons why Egyptian mummified remains have been removed, studied and represented in Western institutions.

Implementation

Key to the success of the project was establishing modes of communication that allowed Egyptians to express their own feelings about the removal of their heritage abroad using idioms and expressions of cultural relevance to them. To this end we worked with a series of emerging Egyptian artists to produce comics, performances and graphic images based on information from our UK partners. These more informal modes of communication created a friendly context for addressing tough questions, thereby creating a more inviting space for dialogue. The artistic products drew on ancient Egyptian objects and archives in our UK partner museums, as well as the stories of their discovery and removal in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, but then placed them into contemporary situations of concern to modern Egyptian communities. This was facilitated by sharing designs and stories on social media, putting these historical moments into dialogue with the present. These elicited comments that brought Egyptian terms, names and references to UK collections.

An example is the comics of Nasser Junior. Twelve comic strips were released on Facebook and Twitter from February to October 2020, co-produced and co-delivered by project researcher Heba Abdel Gawad and Nasser Junior. Objects and archive images from UK partners were the departure point for scenes narrated wholly in Egyptian Arabic. Each comic was followed up by subtweets providing links to the UK museum that provided resources for the story, as well as to relevant resources for anyone interested in following up the histories and contemporary museum issues connected with each comic’s theme. A comic based on an archival photograph of Flinders Petrie in the Egyptian Museum at UCL, highlights the multiple narratives and subtexts that these comics were able to reference. Flinders Petrie is most often celebrated as a founding father of Egyptology and inventor of archaeological...
practices like seriation, but he is less often acknowledged as a eugenicist. To make its point on how to appraise the legacies of historic figures, the comic drew from Egyptian debates concerning the legacy of former President Hosni Mubarak following his death in February 2020. Mubarak’s passing prompted mixed emotions and these tensions were encapsulated in a common Egyptian meme at the time; ‘some things are in his favour, some things are against’.

This provided the punchline to the comic, in which Heba is seen introducing Petrie to Nasser as someone who had accomplished important work on ‘our heritage’ to which Petrie responds, ‘you mean our heritage?’, a reference to the appropriation of Egypt within Western narratives and the exclusion of Egyptians. Heba’s response to Petrie, ‘some things are in his favour, some things are against’, is presented as an Egyptian solution for how to evaluate such situations.

a) Heba: Nasser, let me introduce to you Petrie, an important archaeologist, with a grand legacy in archaeology

b) Heba: He played a major role in the archaeology of our Egyptian heritage

c) Petrie: You mean OUR heritage

d) Heba: And some things are in his favour, some things are against him

Petrie’s eugenics legacy comic. ©Nasser Junior and Egypt Dispersed Heritage Project
Two key principles shaped the process of comic production. The first was co-production rather than commissioning whereby the outputs were produced with, as well as for Egyptian audiences. Not only were the artists paid competitive international rates, they were equally perceived as project partners rather than commissioned artists. This meant that accountability was a two-way process and power between researchers and artists could be more balanced. Delivering the comics was not a top-down initiative whereby museums preselected the topics or the narrative. Rather, researchers shared with the artist a wide range of resources and together they prioritised the topics to be pursued based on local interests and requests from Egyptian audiences. This also had the benefit of encouraging questions driven by public need rather than academic or institutional needs.

Second, was the principle of co-agency. Co-agency was signified by the release of comics through the social media account of the artist rather than project or museum as a public recognition of his copyright and agency. Similarly, the artist was included in all interviews, podcasts, and public discussions discussing the comics ensuring his international exposure and visibility.

**Impact and outcomes**

- The outputs – comics, stories and comments from Egyptian audiences – were all shared with our UK partner institutions.
- At the National Museum of Scotland this led to the inclusion of Egyptian terms for objects within the museum database and to link objects to the comics. Museum catalogues often embody the information...
that is valued by institutions, and the inclusion of Egyptian perspectives within collection management systems provides longer-term interpretive authority between museums and Egyptian publics as the basis for future curatorial action. The museum also produced a dedicated webpage in Egyptian Arabic, the first foreign language page created for its World Culture collections.

- At Manchester Museum, a comic was co-planned and co-produced by project researchers, comic artists, and the museum curator. This was delivered as part of Manchester’s future permanent display, thereby embedding Egyptian voices and views in north west England where the majority of its migrant population is from the Middle East and North African (MENA) region.

- At the Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology, two comics that had been released on social media were transformed into panels for permanent display, and the introductory gallery panels were translated into Egyptian Arabic for visitor handouts.

- At the Horniman Museum, engagements with Egyptian community schools initiated the development of educational resources for UK children too. Ancient Egypt is the most popular programme offered by museum education departments, but classes can often reproduce stereotypes and are a missed opportunity to engage in positive views of a modern majority Muslim country. The project facilitated the purchase of new, contemporary objects for the handling collection.

- There was also considerable impact in Egypt with numerous requests for workshops and collaborations not just in Cairo, but also in more rural areas of northern Egypt such as Sharqiya and Fayoum, highlighting the importance and impact of social media project engagement in the first place and the success of relatable approaches. At these workshops our UK partners were able to join online through video links, opening dialogue between UK institutions and Egyptian communities.

Challenges and lessons learnt

The ideal model of co-curation is of equitable dialogue and a decenring of UK museum narratives. The practical realities of communication meant that the UK often dictated the terms of engagement because of:

- Incompatibilities and inequities in work cadences, including differences between periods of extended holidays (Christmas or Ramadan), timing of weekends (Friday/Saturday in Egypt, Saturday/Sunday in the UK), internet connectivity and reliability, and employment (employee versus freelance) workhours.

- Different scripts, Latin versus Arabic (written from right to left), posed technical hurdles for British computer systems not configured to accommodate other languages.

- Differences between financial cultures with UK administration a major barrier when dealing with cash economies.

- As the project was about initiating conversations and fresh dialogues, it did face issues of how to respond to new opportunities; grass-roots initiatives that emerged were not easily retrofitted into activities that had to be sanctioned by university ethical panels or had to fit into large museum’s interdepartmental, long-term planning schedules or agendas.

- Funding parameters are usually short term, but once these relationships are begun and momentum builds in the project sustaining that beyond the grant period can be problematic.

- Finally, as has long been recognised, setting up cross-cultural, transnational and multi-institutional dialogues of these sorts takes time, patience, trust and energy.
Authors

Heba Abd el-Gawad is the project researcher for the AHRC-funded project Egypt’s Dispersed Heritage at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL. She has previously held roles as co-curator of Two Temple Place’s 2016 Beyond Beauty exhibition, project curator of the British Museum’s Asyut Project, and more recently has guest curated Listen to Her! Turning up the Volume on Egypt’s Ordinary Women at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology.

Dr Alice Stevenson is Associate Professor of Museum Studies at UCL’s Institute of Archaeology and principal investigator for the Egypt’s Dispersed Heritage project. She has previously held positions as Curator of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology and Researcher in World Archaeology at the Pitt Rivers Museum. Her most recent book, Scattered Finds: Archaeology, Egyptology and Museums, is published by UCL Press (2019) and available on open access.

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Artefacts of Excavation project website

@excavatedegypt
CURATOR BATTLE 2020

MUSEUMS ASSEMBLE! It’s time for #CURATORBATTLE! 🌟

Today’s theme, chosen by you, is #CreepiestObject!

We’re kicking things off with this 3rd/4th century hair bun from the burial of a #Roman lady, still with the jet pins in place...

CAN YOU BEAT IT? 😈

MILLIE CARROLL
Digital Communications Officer,
York Museums Trust
Institution or organisation

York Museums Trust (YMT) is an independent charity that manages the museum collections and facilities that belong to York City Council. It is responsible for York Art Gallery, York Castle Museum, Yorkshire Museum and Gardens and York St Mary’s.

Project and team overview

When York Museums Trust went into Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, the whole organisation’s outputs changed, which meant digital communication was now the primary way our audiences could engage with us. Our core goal was to find interesting ways to share our vast and diverse collections with the public through social media.

Our content came from a collaboration between teams – curatorial, public engagement, digital and communications. During lockdown, 80% of Trust employees were furloughed, but the small number left from these teams worked hard to come up with interesting and fun ideas to get people talking and learning about objects in our care. One such idea was Curator Battle which ran on Twitter (#curatorbattle) from March until July 2020.

The idea was to challenge other museums and museum visitors to share objects from a given theme. It heavily relied on the input of cultural organisations around the world to take part in the online battles to be successful. No organisations were contacted in advance, but week after week we saw the same organisations taking part and this steadily grew throughout the campaign.

There was no additional budget allocated to the project, which was included in the core work of the teams involved.
Objectives and themes

The main objective for the project was to share our incredible collections with our existing audiences but also to increase the breadth and range of those who engage with us. Additionally, we wanted to become more social in the way we communicated, rather than a one way stream of information.

Many ideas were exchanged during ‘content crack team’ meetings, all highlighting fun and exciting ways to promote our work and collections as a Trust. Curator Battle was the most successful as it proved to be a way for the whole sector to come together during a difficult time. We realised that all organisations were frantically uploading videos, online exhibitions and resources to help keep the public entertained. So the idea of an online battle where organisations came together to create an interactive thread of objects, some which had never been seen before, was great for audiences but also for organisations taking part.

The themes, such as dullest, prettiest, creepiest and even ‘best museum bum’ were chosen to be fun in order to attract the wider public’s interest, but also vague enough so they could be interpreted in different ways, allowing museums with a variety of collections to get involved. This helped us reach our goal of encouraging a large number of museums to take part as well as becoming more sociable and reaching new audiences.

Although it was called Curator Battle we never picked a winner. We believed it wasn’t our place to pick the best object, nor did we want it to become a serious competition. Each cultural organisation that took part did it for the humour, camaraderie and engagement with the public rather than to win.
Implementation

In our content crack team meetings, communications staff members would suggest themes we believed would appeal to audiences online and from there curators would source objects that would fit. When we started the project we were all working from home, so we needed objects to include in the battle that already had good photography and had accessible information, which wasn’t always easy! Within the small team working on the project, it was a huge collaborative effort. We had curators and public engagement staff sourcing object information, the digital team sourcing images, and communications planning the content.

The Trust manages the social media channels for Yorkshire Museum, York Castle Museum and York Art Gallery. When we started the battle we began on the Yorkshire Museum’s feed as they had the best #DullestObject to include. The response was unexpected as it became the museum’s most engaged with post on Twitter ever until that point. Because of this we decided that it would be clearer to keep the Yorkshire Museum as the host of the battle and announce the future chosen theme.

Future battles included #PrettiestObject and #DeadliestObject before we battled for the #BestEgg at Easter. This theme took the project from a UK-based museum battle to an international one as world renowned museums like the State Hermitage, Russia, became involved. We knew then, by week four, that we had created something engaging for a huge online audience.

Following on from this success, we developed the implementation of this online project further. We had been receiving messages from organisations taking part and realised that museums were becoming busier due to furlough decreasing resources, so advance notice of the weekly themes would be preferred. Additionally, from our perspective of online engagement, it would mean that participation would be greater as museums would have had time to prepare content in advance of the battle. This led us to start a public poll the day before in which we pitched two themes to the public. This not only had huge engagement in itself and boosted excitement for the following day, but also gave organisations 24 hours to find objects to submit for the battle. The first poll we did was #BestHat vs #CreepiestObject, this led to our most successful battle of the series.
We ran the initial weekly series of Curator Battle for 19 weeks throughout lockdown until museums began to reopen and capacity changed again for many in the sector. Subsequently we launched a battle with BBC Arts for their #MuseumsPassion campaign in October 2020 and also held our own battle for Halloween. There has not been an official end to Curator Battle, as we hope to be able to hold special battles to celebrate certain holidays and times of year.

**Impact and outcomes**

The reach of this project was huge in terms of online and media engagement. The #CreepiestObject battle alone had a 50% engagement rate, meaning that one in two people actively engaged with the thread once seeing it on their social feed. This led to the following engagement statistics over the 19 weeks:

- More than 1.5 million people engaged with Curator Battle and York Museum Trust objects were seen by more than 5.4 million people on Twitter alone.
- In a survey of over 200 people, 50% of the Curator Battle audiences were engaging with York Museum Trust collections for the first time.
- Curator Battle positively benefitted many other museums involved. For example: Fairfax House, York, saw Twitter followers increase from 18 in March (before Curator Battle began) to 265 in April (afterwards) with Tweet impressions rising by 814%.
- The battles were covered by international media, including CNN, Guardian UK, China Global Television Network and BBC One’s *Have I Got News For You*.

We were keen to see the impact of this project on the audiences that we reached. We had a huge number of positive comments online, many stating how it was the highlight of their week during lockdown.
Therefore, we decided to create an online feedback form to measure if there was any impact on wellbeing. Over 200 people responded to us:

- 83% strongly agreed that Curator Battle helped them feel connected with others during lockdown, with the most popular reason to engage being ‘to be entertained’ and ‘to lift my mood’.
- In a time when audiences could not visit cultural venues physically, 86% of people surveyed stated that Curator Battle met their need for cultural activity during lockdown.
- Nearly a fifth of people surveyed also stated that they had never engaged with cultural works digitally before Curator Battle.
- 96% said they would seek out similar experiences even after lockdown, showing the effectiveness of the campaign.

**Challenges and lessons learnt**

- One of the main challenges of this project was the lack of resource when working from home. We knew we had many objects that would be perfect for a certain theme, however we were not able to go into the museums to take images. This led to us not being able to go live with certain themes we would have loved to have done. There was however no way to overcome this other than knowing for the future that we should build our collection of high-quality images as soon as possible.
- Additionally, time capacity was a huge challenge. We launched each battle at 10am on a Friday and the Digital and Communications Officer would be replying to posts throughout the whole working day to keep the thread alive and at the top of people’s newsfeeds. Not only was every Friday throughout the 19-week run dedicated to this project but as a team it required time from curators to find objects and the rest of the team to help with any supporting threads or information we created. It made the whole team realise that online engagement does require dedication and time from all departments to succeed and that a joint cross-departmental approach works best.
- Finally, another challenge was finding the right balance with our tone online. As this whole project was full of memes, jokes and quick content, we wanted to make sure our themes were light-hearted and would not be hurtful to anyone. This is again where input from a wider team was helpful and any potential issues addressed before launching.

**Author**

Millie Carroll is the Digital and Communications Officer at York Museums Trust. Her marketing and communications experience includes roles at The Tetley Contemporary Art Gallery, Leeds, and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, but her passion is creating and implementing social media campaigns. In her first year at YMT, Millie has been instrumental in reshaping how the organisation thinks about digital platforms and how they can be used to bring YMT collections and stories to a diverse range of audiences through engaging online content.

**References**

#CreepiestObject
#BestMuseumBum
#BestCat
#FabulousFootwear
LOST AND FOUND – TREASURES FROM THE ARCHIVE

LEIGH CHALMERS
Heritage Inclusion Development Specialist, Wessex Archaeology
Institution or organisation

Wessex Archaeology is one of the UK’s longest-established commercial providers of archaeological and heritage services, and an educational charity, with offices across the UK, Europe and the USA.

Project and team overview

Lost and Found was a digital heritage engagement project created during lockdown in 2020 to connect with members of the public and to give them the opportunity to engage with heritage in order to aid personal wellbeing.

The project was funded by Historic England’s Covid-19 Response Fund. It was led by Wessex Archaeology’s Heritage Inclusion Development Specialist, Leigh Chalmers, who develops and leads the organisation’s heritage for wellbeing programme of work. Wessex Archaeology staff from the Salisbury and Sheffield offices provided archaeological and technological expertise in preparing for, and participating in, the project sessions.

Objectives and themes

The Covid-19 pandemic forced us as practitioners and facilitators to redefine our thinking and challenged us to consider new ways of reaching audiences. Delivering a digital wellbeing course felt like a huge challenge, yet an important thing to do as so many support structures were shut down or postponed. Giving people something to look forward to and to contribute to in an accessible and inclusive way was the main driver in the creation of the project.

The project aims, reflecting the funding criteria, were:

- To inspire people through heritage.
- To create a new digital engagement product for our organisation which had a sustainable future.
- To put inclusion at the heart of our work by improving access to heritage material.
- To be innovative in creating a rich immersive heritage engagement experience.
- To create a toolkit for other heritage organisations to utilise.
- To protect the heritage sector by making valuable memories for all who came into contact with the project.

The project also sat within the New Economics Foundation’s Five Steps to Wellbeing: Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, Give.

Wessex Archaeology had run a pilot project right at the start of lockdown and learning from this, we had a very clear idea of what the project needed to achieve and what was possible. The obvious challenge was, of course, how to deliver a heritage wellbeing
project over a digital platform and get that all-important connection to the participants. Good wellbeing work relies heavily on the relationships between the participants and the team running the project. However, due to the pilot, some of the problems we might face were clear, so we had already taken the steps to solve or reduce these before embarking on this project.

We wanted to reach as many underserved groups and individuals as possible and to create a safe and welcoming space in which they could learn about archaeology and archaeological processes as well as giving them the opportunity to share, talk, be heard, listen and learn. The project aimed to respond to their needs and for us to work in a holistic way in terms of engagement and access.

**Implementation**

An online museum created by the public for the public, *Lost and Found* gave participants a unique insight into the work at Wessex Archaeology and presented them with an opportunity to meet some of the experts who work there. Over a series of live sessions we invited participants to curate an interactive digital museum using some of the objects and artefacts from the vast archive collection at Wessex Archaeology. From a selection of four objects, participants chose two and these were 3D-scanned and uploaded onto a digital platform called Sketchfab. This then sat within a new digital museum, The Museum of the Lost and Found.

Complementing this collection were a series of photographs, drawings and writings that were submitted by the participants following a series of optional home tasks that linked to each of the live sessions. The end result was an immersive project which facilitated not only learning and discovery but allowed for personal response and reflection.

Over the duration of each course, the archaeology and the museum became secondary to the personal objects and stories shared by the group. This was an intended outcome: archaeology was the means in which to engage, the response was all about the individual. Through the stories of the archaeological objects we were able to uncover the stories of the participants, this engendered a sense of connection and of understanding and brought people closer together.

We worked with eight groups, drawn from different organisations including charities, support groups, staff at a local hospital and a Young Archaeologists’ Club, over a period of six months. The project was delivered over a course of five live engagement sessions for each group participating. Each session had a clear purpose and outcome and the home tasks were reflective of what had happened in the session that day.
Before each course started, the engagement lead held a 30-minute welcome session – this was purely to give everyone a chance to practice joining a digital session. The sessions were hosted on a platform called GoToMeeting (similar to Zoom, but not used so widely) so it was important that people felt confident to join before embarking on the project. This was also when the engagement lead could meet participants ahead of the other staff, to go into a bit more detail about the project and put people’s minds at rest if they were feeling anxious or had any questions.

Most groups ran with five participants. This may seem like a small number, but we wanted to ensure that everyone had space on screen to be seen and be heard. Due to the nature of the course there were times when the participants spoke, often at length, and we didn’t want to rush anyone. By keeping numbers on the low side, it meant that there was time enough in each session, which lasted between 60–90 minutes each. Being on screen is as we have all found out, tiring. We didn’t want anyone leaving the session feeling exhausted.

In addition to the eight live engagement courses, we had two opportunities for the wider public to vote on their favourite objects. Short films about objects were hosted on our YouTube site and publicised via our various social media platforms for people to watch and vote.
The decision was made to open the museum early on in the project (rather than after the live sessions completed as originally intended) so that the groups we worked with at the start of the project could access their collection sooner rather than later and continue to feel connected to the project. At the time of writing, the museum has had just under 500 hits on our website, reaching audiences all over the world. The museum created by the public has fulfilled its ambition and is now a resource for the public.
Impact and outcomes

We took the bold step of asking for feedback at the end of every session, by sending a simple electronic feedback form that was based on the UCL Museum Wellbeing Measures Toolkit, with specific questions about the course added. Given that this project was delivered digitally it felt important to give participants the opportunity to feedback and to raise any questions they might have as soon as possible. We were then able to respond to any queries either during the week or at the next session, which meant that people felt like they were being heard and that their opinions mattered.

People felt that we were genuine. As one participant said, ‘you have made me feel that you are here because you really want to be, I don’t feel like that you just doing a job, it seems like you genuinely want to be here’, which of course, we were.

All of the staff who were involved in the project also filled in a feedback and evaluation form. We did this twice, once at the end of the first course and a second time three weeks before the project was due to finish. It’s really important to record your staff experience – and if it’s a wellbeing project then there is a fair chance that their wellbeing will have been impacted by taking part. In addition, staff are your best resource and they have amazing ideas – so give them the space to share this.

As a direct outcome from the project we have had one individual apply to be a Wessex Archaeology volunteer; numerous individuals setting up their own groups to continue to meet digitally for socialisation; a photography group has been set up by one of the charities we worked with, and we have given some of the organisations involved the confidence to embark on their own digital wellbeing programs having attended our sessions.
Challenges and lessons learnt

♦ Record your session: one of the upsides of delivering work digitally is that you can, with permissions, record the session. Doing this means you can be present the whole time while facilitating and don’t have to make notes. And although it is time consuming listening back to each session it is also incredibly useful in terms of picking up on feedback, evaluation, noticing connections within the group, and identifying individuals who might benefit from extra support.

♦ Don’t fill digital space: it’s easy to find yourself trying to fill the silence in order to keep the session moving along, but listening back to the recordings made it obvious that changing our practice to give the participants more room to think and respond would be beneficial.

♦ Know your collection: this is a bit like stating the obvious, but there were so many photographs, case studies, films and articles written about some of the objects we used during the project that, with more research time, could have been sent out to the groups as optional additional information for them to get access to. There is a balance here though as there is a danger of information overload.

♦ Celebrate: it is important to take the time to celebrate the achievements of the group and individuals, this isn’t necessarily about the end product but could be about a little moment that was significant for them; getting online, speaking up in a group, sharing a story, joining in. We facilitated this by inviting groups back two weeks after the course finished, this enables so much; reflective evaluation – they’ve have had a chance to miss the project and to process what it’s meant to them and what they gained from it. It’s also really good to catch up and hear their news and for them to share what they’ve been doing since the project has finished, and this can be anything, it doesn’t have to be about the project, this a moment where people get to meet again socially.

Author

Leigh Chalmers is Heritage Inclusion Development Specialist at Wessex Archaeology. Previously she has worked in community, heritage, early years, mental health and tourism. She was the Outreach Officer at Salisbury Cathedral and created and delivered their mental health community support offer. She has run several projects at Erlestoke Prison including Unearthed, a project about archaeology and identity. Leigh is the founder of TEDx Salisbury and continues to lead its work in ideas worth spreading.

References

The Museum of the Lost and Found

Heritage, Health and Wellbeing

The Heritage Alliance 2020
SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY AND TULLIE HOUSE MUSEUM INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH AGREEMENT

GABRIELLE HEFFERNAN
Curatorial Manager, Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery Trust

ELSA PRICE
Curator of Human History, Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery Trust
Institution or organisation

Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery Trust, Carlisle, is an independent charitable trust which cares for the collections of Carlisle on behalf of Carlisle City Council. We are also a National Portfolio Organisation and the lead organisation within the Cumbria Museum Consortium. Tullie House is a medium-sized museum, whose collections represent the Carlisle District, Cumbria and the western end of Hadrian’s Wall. Alongside our archaeology collections, we also care for social history, fine and decorative art, costume and a designated natural sciences collection.

Project and team overview

In 2018 we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Sapienza University in Rome. This MoU set out a collections-based collaboration focusing on our Roman collections, and more specifically our Hadrian’s Wall collections. It was designed to allow students from Sapienza University to visit Tullie House to carry out detailed research on aspects of the collection to support their undergraduate and postgraduate projects, and for professors and university researchers to do the same. Tullie House also helps to facilitate contact with, and visits to, other sites along Hadrian’s Wall to provide the researchers with uniquely high levels of access to collections, partnerships and curatorial input.

This project was initiated by the senior leadership at Tullie House including the Director Andrew Mackay and the Head of Collections and Engagement Anna Smalley. The project is overseen by the Curatorial Manager, Gabrielle Heffernan and facilitated by the Curator of Human History, Elsa Price with other members of the curatorial team lending ongoing support. At Sapienza University, Professor Emanuela Borgia acts as the project lead.
Objectives and themes

The objective of the agreement was to open up our collections for intensive study in an international environment. Tullie House’s Roman collection is hugely important in telling the story of the northwest frontier of the Roman Empire; it encapsulates the history both of Hadrian’s Wall itself and of the settlement of Luguvalium (Roman Carlisle), which was the only city on the northern frontier. This collaboration was intended to support high level research into the collection, and the development of partnership approaches to our Roman holdings. In its broadest sense, the project works towards the wider UNESCO heritage objects for the Frontiers of Roman Empire (established 2005) to better understand the frontiers of the Roman Empire at its height in the 2nd century. The frontier’s UNESCO sites currently include Hadrian’s Wall, the Antonine Wall and the German Limes.

In addition to this, the project aimed to provide support for students at different stages in their academic careers. It enables them to develop an understanding of museum practice, to build relationships with organisations across the wall, and provides near-unlimited access to our key collections. Furthermore, the museum supports funding applications (e.g. ERASMUS) that help students to visit for weeks, or months, at a time; this approach allows them to gain a better understanding of the context of the collection and to explore the wider region during their stay, which benefits both their studies and their personal development.

The project welcomes both very specific and much broader aspects of study that consider the local and the international context of the collections and the sites they come from. Alongside this, more discrete projects have taken place to look at very specific materials or object types such as the shoes of Birdoswald Roman Fort, or the Roman glass across the Tullie House collection. Lesser known sites, particularly along the Cumbrian coastal defence system, whose collections have not been researched since they were deposited in the museum as far back as the 1940s, have also been a subject of study.

Implementation

Each researcher and their topic of interest is introduced by the academic lead at Sapienza University. This initial discussion is followed up with a formal request, facilitated by a form, which allows the curator to examine the proposal’s suitability in more detail. Typically, this will lead to a conversation, either by video call or email, to discuss expectation, access, potential barriers and timeframes.
Many of the participating students have been awarded grants, either university, ERASMUS or regional, to cover their costs of travel and accommodation. Once they have arrived at the museum they are inducted and trained on the basics of object handling, location management and database searching. The first few research sessions are observed and managed by the curator until both parties are confident with how the work is being carried out. As the researchers stay at the museum for several months, they are fully integrated into museum life and invited to wider staff and museum-based meetings, briefings and projects which are of interest. They are fully welcomed as part of the Tullie House Museum team.

Researchers typically have access to curators at the beginning and end of each day for collections access and can easily book in 1:1 time to discuss their projects and the collections. They are also given access to the curatorial library and records. For wider context, Tullie House has been able to call upon its networks, particularly the Hadrian’s Wall network, to facilitate trips to the sites being studied. This has also included day research trips to other museums to examine parallel finds.

Researchers are asked to keep track of the objects they have examined and to add additional data to an excel spreadsheet that can be quickly uploaded to the Modes collection management database. Likewise, digitised images, drawings or other informal information are appropriately labelled and tagged to the database to allow for easy capture of their work. Their formal dissertations are shared with the museum on a shared drive, which also collects any additional information such as conferences or articles where relevant work was discussed.
Regular meetings are arranged between museum staff and the academic lead at Sapienza University to assess the project’s progress and discuss any concerns. This has ensured that any challenges are proactively managed, and that the project can continue to run smoothly.

**Impact and outcomes**

Over the past two years, the museum has hosted ten students, who have all completed successful research projects and added to international scholarship on the history and archaeology of Hadrian’s Wall and the Roman frontier. This includes a re-examination of the proposed identification of roof tiles at Birdoswald Roman fort and an in-depth re-examination of the Samian-ware from Bewcastle Roman fort.

In March 2019 the museum and Sapienza University convened an international study day in Rome to celebrate the outcomes of the students’ research and the future of the agreement. It is hoped that another conference will be convened in 2021, as planned talks in 2020 were understandably delayed.

The collaboration has helped Tullie House to add to its understanding of its Roman collection; some of the objects that were researched had not been studied since their acquisition and so this project has provided an excellent opportunity to revisit underused parts of the collection and celebrate their international importance. The partnership has also enhanced the archaeological record more generally, revealing objects omitted from excavation publications, such as a selection of lamps from Birdoswald. A current redisplay of one of our Roman galleries, funded by the Hadrian’s Wall Community Archaeology Project, has been able to take advantage of this new research and use some of the stories and collections uncovered by students during their visits in the themes and interpretation.
Furthermore, new interest in discrete collection areas has prompted a series of projects to better store and digitise the collections to make them more accessible in the future for researchers. For example, we worked with one student to study our Roman leather; this provided an opportunity to examine each leather shoe in the collection and to assess its condition, storage and documentation. This led to the museum arranging for a conservator to assess the collection, and the implementation of a volunteer project to clean and repack it, thus ensuring its care and accessibility in the long-term. A second project to repack paper archives has also been started, based on feedback from the project that the inaccessibility of some of our paper archives had hampered students’ research and put pressure on members of the curatorial team to support access.

**Challenges and lessons learned**

- The project has been a real opportunity for Tullie House to assess the status of its collections with particular emphasis on documentation, packing and accessibility. While this has given rise to several longer-term collections-based projects to improve overall conditions, it also presented challenges for the researchers. This has been largely managed by performing pre-visit checks on the collection so that researcher expectations can be managed. However, it has been important to factor in the amount of time that will be needed for members of staff to check object lists in advance of visits and discuss alternatives with the researchers if collections are not fully available for study. In the case of some students, it provided an additional opportunity to gain practical museum-based skills as they incorporated solving documentation or conservation issues as part of their project; this has been a great outcome but, again, required considerable time on the part of the curatorial team which must be factored in.

- Ensuring that project outcomes are retained effectively is an ongoing challenge. This is largely due to the projects’ results being in thesis format, which makes the data difficult to connect to museum databases. This is beginning to be overcome by proactively capturing data in translatable formats, such as Excel, which can be uploaded before the project is formally written up. Additionally, requesting that digitised data is uniformly labelled before being submitted, has allowed for efficient tagging to the database. An online file-sharing platform has also been established so that retrospective data, photographs and scans can be uploaded and manually entered to the Tullie House systems at a later date.

- Working internationally has also brought up the challenge of working in two languages; many of the student outcomes are written in Italian and so it has been necessary to ask for English summaries. This has worked well, but students have had to translate parts of their work, which has taken them time. Furthermore, having a wide range of students from different backgrounds, academic stages and English-speaking skills has also posed some challenges on both sides. As such, lines of effective communication are continually assessed and discussed with the Sapienza project lead.

- Hosting researchers for long periods of time is resource-heavy in terms of curatorial time and physical space. However, establishing trust, providing good training, and managing expectations are the key to overcoming these inevitable challenges. The additional challenge of Covid-19, for example, had halted our progress until discussions began on how we can share data digitally.
Authors

Elsa Price is Curator of Human History at Tullie House. Elsa holds a masters degree in Medieval Studies from the University of York, and worked with collections at the Grosvenor Museum in Chester before moving to Tullie House as Trainee Curator of Archaeology in 2018. She took up her current position in 2019, where she cares for the museum’s archaeology and social history collections.

Dr Gabrielle Heffernan is Curatorial Manager at Tullie House. She trained as a curator at the British Museum and Glasgow Museums, and previously worked with the archaeology collections at Hull Museums. Prior to this, Gabrielle completed at PhD in Egyptology at the University of Birmingham, and spent several seasons working as an excavator in Egypt.
## ENGAGEMENT TOP TIPS

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<th><strong>GENERAL</strong></th>
<th><strong>EXHIBITIONS, EVENTS AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT</strong></th>
<th><strong>ONLINE ENGAGEMENT</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate and communicate – partners inside and outside your organisation can help you succeed.</td>
<td>Start early, be flexible – now more than ever, flexibility in budgets and schedules is vital.</td>
<td>Be sociable on social media! The more you interact with your audience, the better your online engagement will be.</td>
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<td>The greater the support for your initiative at all levels of your organisation, the more successful it’s likely to be.</td>
<td>Ask for help – it can lighten the load and create new opportunities too.</td>
<td>Experiment – not every online idea will be successful but this is a great way to learn about what works.</td>
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<td>Love your project and believe in the good it can do.</td>
<td>Be bold – take advantage of unexpected opportunities.</td>
<td>Know your platform and have fun – play to its strengths and choose the right tone to encourage engagement.</td>
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<td>Be ambitious – think big and scale back where needed.</td>
<td>Be prepared to learn from things that don’t go according to plan – re-adjust and move on.</td>
<td>Prepare to dedicate time to a good idea.</td>
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<td>Evaluate all aspects of delivery so as to learn from what went well and not so well – use the results for advocacy.</td>
<td>Embrace new ideas and approaches that are brought to the table by others.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS</strong></td>
<td><strong>ASKING FOR VISITOR FEEDBACK</strong></td>
<td><strong>DECOLONISATION</strong></td>
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<td>Be clear about the outcomes you’re hoping for and realistic about the resources you can provide.</td>
<td>Give your visitors a voice: don’t be afraid to ask them what they think.</td>
<td>Pace yourself at the start – anti-racist or decolonial public engagement can be difficult, understand your own and your organisational capacity.</td>
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<td>Look for opportunities to connect people and research to your collections and trust in your research collaborators.</td>
<td>Appreciate the answers you are given and the opportunities for conversation and engagement they provide.</td>
<td>Develop a network of allies to support and inform your work.</td>
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<td>Provide a good quality dedicated space for research activity.</td>
<td>When asking for opinions, be clear what questions you want your visitors to answer.</td>
<td>Do your research – make sure you’re prepared for pushback from audiences looking for loopholes.</td>
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<td>Capture research on your collections in formats that your organisation and the wider public can benefit from easily.</td>
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<td>Use the research to advocate for your collections, additional resources and funding.</td>
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<tr>
<th>BUILDING COMMUNITIES</th>
<th>ENGAGING NEW PARTNERS</th>
<th>WIDENING ACCESS</th>
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<td>Make connections – look for opportunities to connect people and to create lasting legacies. Be flexible – community partnerships take time to build and may need to develop at your partners’ pace. Be prepared to let others take the lead and a degree of control. Know your community – the better you understand it, the more likely a project is to meet its needs and succeed.</td>
<td>Understand how to manage your resources – new relationships often need intensive initial work, but smaller support over the long term too. Give your collaborators and communities agency – involve them early, engage them as peers within the project. Be sensitive – transparency is important but respecting and recognising local circumstances is vital. Inclusion is sometimes far more important than radical change.</td>
<td>Community engagement strategies are for whole organisations, not just learning teams. Question your terminology – make sure it is clear and inclusive. Avoid delivering the unexpected by being clear about purpose, structures and meetings. If you ask for advice, ask early enough in a project to act upon it. Pay group members for roles that should be paid for and thank people for what they do. Make the most of your initiative by capturing processes and lessons learnt into a toolkit for future use.</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We are grateful to all the authors who have provided contributions to the case studies and generously shared their expertise and experience to benefit the sector.

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