

## Playful Museums Festival 2023

Playful Museums returns with dynamic Early Years programming to engage children & their carers

## Science Festival Climate Tour

Museums take the climate change conversation to local communities

## Reimagine, Remake, Replay

Ground-breaking creative programme connecting young people with heritage comes to an end

## Global Voices Local Choices

Enriching local museums with diverse cultures & perspectives

# 1993–2023

NI Museums Council:  
Supporting &  
Empowering Local  
Museums for 30 years



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Cover photograph of the sundial at Armagh Observatory by Neil Keery ([www.keeryphoto.com](http://www.keeryphoto.com))

# Director's Note



Dear friends and colleagues,

with this April 2023 edition of the NI Museums Council newsletter, it is my privilege to reflect briefly on our 30-year anniversary! Much has been achieved over the last three decades to empower and equip local museums. I am delighted that the launch of our new corporate logo & brand has coincided with this milestone, providing a timely reminder of our role and purpose, which is just as important and necessary today as it was in 1993. As a representative council and advocate for local museums, this new logo

conveys our mission to support and empower local museums in Northern Ireland, expressing the theme of 'Stronger Together'.

You can read more about the design concept and get a glimpse into the development process in the News section of our re-developed website. As ever, we are grateful to the Department for Communities for their financial support, which enabled the brand and website development project, providing a clear and convenient resource for our members, stakeholders, and for the general public.

In addition to our new logo, brand and website, we have also redesigned this Newsletter. We hope that in time we will be able to include more content from our membership, and that the newsletter will provide an effective means of communicating the positive impact that our local museums deliver for society. We are happy to provide editorial support and guidance, so if you have ideas for articles or other contributions, please get in touch!

There is much to celebrate over the last few months, including the culmination of 'Reimagine, Remake, Replay', a ground-breaking creative programme to connect young people with heritage through museums and digital media. We have also partnered with the NI Science Festival for the first time to deliver a programme of 'climate conversations' across a range of our member museums, and we are collaborating with The African and Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI) and National Museums NI on the 'Global Voices, Local Choices'



programme, which seeks to enrich local museums with diverse cultures and perspectives.

The 7th Playful Museums Festival spanned 24 individual events across 12 local museums in February, and continues to be extremely popular with young families and nursery groups. You can read more about each of these programmes, and more besides in the pages that follow.

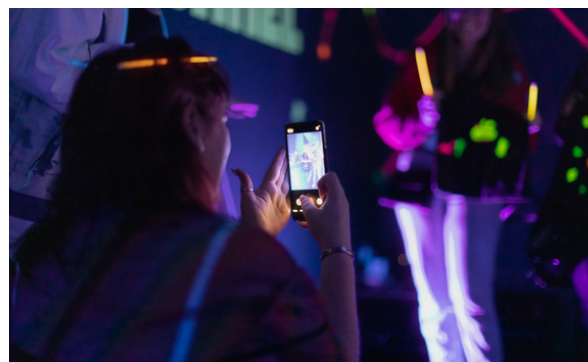
2023–24 is set to be a challenging year from a financial perspective, for ourselves at NI Museums Council as well as most other public sector organisations. We know that our member museums are also experiencing similar pressures.

Whilst the outlook is certainly difficult, it is not unexpected. We have been planning over the last year to focus our efforts on research and advocacy that will best capture and communicate the broad value and public benefits arising from local museums. We have already begun to apply for a range of new funding streams, to develop our work in partnership with our member museums and a range of other organisations. We also look forward to launching a revised 'Museum Trends' survey, and developing a first NI Museums Council Research Strategy.

This renewed focus on data-driven advocacy & programming comes at a critical time for the sector, and will be an important strand of our work over the coming years. Despite the challenges, we are planning for a productive year ahead, and look forward to working to promote the value of museums across NI.

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NIMC Director, Johnathan Dalzell



We are seeking article contributions, opinion-pieces, and other content suggestions for the NI Museums Council Newsletter, both from our members and general readership. Please do get in touch if you would like to make a pitch or share your thoughts: [info@nimc.co.uk](mailto:info@nimc.co.uk).

#### Photography

*Top: Reimagine, Remake, Replay – Virtual Reality event; Middle: Late Shift event at North Down Museum; Bottom: Playful Museums Festival*



# News in Brief

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## Accreditation guidance review



NI Museums Council works in partnership with Arts Council England, Museums Galleries Scotland & the Welsh Government to manage and coordinate the UK Museum Accreditation Standard.

We are currently undertaking a UK-wide review of Accreditation Guidance to ensure that the Standard is accessible and clear. As ever, NI Museums Council will seek to champion local museums throughout this process.

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## Museum Trends



Preparations are well underway for the Museum Trends 2023 Survey, which was previously undertaken in 2015 and published in 2016.

We have managed a number of stakeholder consultation events, which have proven extremely useful in planning the new survey.

This survey will help NIMC to be an effective advocate for local museums, and museum professionals. The previous survey will be altered substantially, to reflect current and future data needs, and to better inform and support the sector.

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## Annual General Meeting & Museum Learning Forum

The 2022 Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 28th September at The Linen Hall in Belfast. We were delighted to celebrate the full accreditation of the Linen Hall and Carrickfergus Museum, and host a Museum Education Forum, which explored a range of education programmes, and discussed future development potential.



## Culture, Arts & Heritage Strategy

NI Museums Council is contributing to the development of a new Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy, which is being led by the Department for Communities.

In particular, we are pleased to see an emphasis on developing a sectoral focus on research and education, and have contributed to a sectoral submission to the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland, as well as the draft Culture, Arts and Heritage Research Strategy.



## NI Museums Council joins the Climate Heritage Network



NI Museums Council has joined the Climate Heritage Network, which is a voluntary, mutual support network of government agencies, NGOs, universities, businesses and other organisations committed to tackling climate change. The network works to re-orientate climate policy, planning and action at all levels to account for the specific context of culture, arts and heritage.

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## New NI Museums Council logo



The new NIMC logo & brand pack is now available for grantees and partner organisations. The pack contains the full range of logos, associated colour palette and brand guidelines.

More detail about the design concept and process can be found on our new website ([www.nimc.co.uk](http://www.nimc.co.uk)), within the News section.

The brand pack is available upon request: [info@nimc.co.uk](mailto:info@nimc.co.uk)



## Public Consultation – Disability Action Plan

The draft NI Museums Council Disability Action Plan is now available for consultation. You can download the draft Action Plan from the news section of our website ([www.nimc.co.uk](http://www.nimc.co.uk)). We are keen to hear from any and all stakeholders, and will ensure that every perspective is considered before the plan is finalised.



## Armagh Observatory becomes an accredited museum

We are delighted that Armagh Observatory is now a fully accredited local museum! During the three-year application process, Armagh Observatory evaluated its procedures, attitudes and policies, helped its employees to upskill and recruited staff with prior training in the sector.

Matthew McMahon, Museum Collections Officer at Armagh Observatory (pictured to the left, above), said "We're delighted to be recognised by the UK Museum Accreditation Scheme and would like to thank the NI Museums Council."





# Climate Tour



The NI Museums Council was thrilled to collaborate with the NI Science Festival and a range of local museums to deliver a touring programme of 'climate conversations' during February 2023.

The Climate Tour developed from the NIMC 'Museums Challenge: Climate Change' grant programme, which was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and the Department for Communities.

Our goal was to support local museums by providing a platform for the community to learn about and discuss the impacts of climate change on their local area.

Local museums participating in the event include The Linen Hall in Belfast, Down County Museum in Downpatrick, Armagh Observatory and Planetarium, Springhill House in Magherafelt, and the F.E.McWilliam Gallery and Studio in Banbridge.

Each event addressed a different thematic focus, with the support of expert panellists from a wide range of organisations, including the Agri-Food and Bioscience Institute, the Alliance Party, Belfast Climate Commission, Historic Environment Division, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, National Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Queen's University Belfast and Ulster Wildlife.

Each panel was chaired by award-winning environmental writer, Mark Lynas, exploring politics, ecology, agriculture, biodiversity and future perspectives.

The programme included a mixture of live audience events, and recorded sessions that are now available on our YouTube channel. The live audience events attracted around 100 attendees across three venues, with over 20% of survey respondents indicating that this was their first visit to the museums. 100% of survey respondents indicated that they learned something, and would recommend future NIMC events to friends, family and colleagues.







*The Climate Tour photography was by Neil Keery ([www.keeryphoto.com](http://www.keeryphoto.com))*

*Left, top: Iain Greenway, Director of the Historic Environment Division, speaking about the impact of climate change on built heritage, to an engaged crowd at Springhill (National Trust).*

*Left, bottom: Melina Quinn (nature conservation advisor, National Trust NI), Prof Mark Emmerson (Queen's University Belfast), Simon Gray (peatlands officer, Ulster Wildlife) and Mark Lynas (award-winning environmental writer) at Down County Museum.*

*Right, top: Debbie Caldwell (Belfast climate commissioner), Dr Amanda Slevin (Queen's*

*University Belfast), Mark Lynas and Kate Nicholl (Alliance MLA and Chair of the All-Party Group on Climate Action) speaking about climate change politics at The Linen Hall in Belfast.*

*Right, middle: Kevin Duncan (land-use and farming advisory, National Trust NI), Dr Peter McEvoy (director of land-use, Ulster Wildlife), Mark Lynas and Prof Elizabeth Magowan (director of sustainable agri-food science, Agri-Food and Bioscience Institute) at Armagh Observatory and Planetarium.*

*Right, bottom: Dr Annika Clements (director of nature, climate and environment, Ulster Wildlife) talking about the impact of climate change on local marine biodiversity at Springhill in Magherafelt.*



# Reimagine, Remake, Replay

September 2022 saw the culmination of the award-winning 'Reimagine, Remake, Replay' (RRR) project, which sought to engage young people in heritage through cutting edge digital technologies and creative media.

RRR was a ground-breaking four-year collaboration between NI Museums Council, The Nerve Centre, National Museums NI and NI Screen, alongside Fermanagh County Museum, North Down Museum, Mid-Antrim Museum, Newry & Mourne Museum, Causeway Coast & Glens Museum Service, and Tower Museum.

The expansive programme was developed around the re-framing and re-interpretation of heritage through the lived experience of 16–25 year olds, who are often under-represented in museum audiences:

## Reimagine

The young participants took the lead in developing new exhibitions and events, using museum collections & other forms of heritage as a stimulus to create music, art, film and creative new interactive experiences.

## Remake

The participants learned and developed new skills through the use of advanced digital technologies. 3D scanning, design and printing techniques, and virtual reality were used to re-interpret and showcase museum collections in innovative new ways, increasing the visibility and relevance of heritage to younger audiences.

## Replay

Museum collections and sites were used to inspire film-making, gaming, photography and storytelling projects that reached thousands of visitors through a range of events and exhibitions.

We look forward to taking a detailed look back through the project later this year with the publication of a dedicated case study.





# The Late Shift

The Late Shift made a return in November 2022, having previously ran in 2018 and 2019, thanks to funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The Late Shift programme aimed to encourage new audiences to visit local museums, often through unique out-of-hours events. Three local museums were involved in the 2022 programme, offering a range of creative new experiences: Armagh County Museum, Armagh-Robinson Library and North Down Museum.

The events were funded from ticketing revenue that had been generated from the 2018 and 2019 programmes, aiming to test and validate sustainable new approaches of engaging new audiences.

We're pleased to say that each of the museums have used their Late Shift experiences and learnings to plan and deliver further self-sustaining out-of-hours events to connect and engage new and existing audiences.

## Armagh County Museum – 'Paint & Sip'

These sessions were open to over 18's and were sold out across each Friday in November. During each session a professional artist engaged the participants in a painting activity that was themed around a different artist. Participants enjoyed having a go at re-creating famous artworks whilst listening to the music that inspired the artist's work.

The sessions took place in the heart of the museum's galleries, with art from the museum's collection surrounding the participants and providing further inspiration. Complimentary drinks were available throughout the evening creating a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere.

An associated survey revealed that the majority of participants had never visited Armagh County Museum before.



*"The Late Shift gave us the grounding & confidence to host another event...the main focus this time is Classic Album Sundays. It has proved very popular as the event is sold out!"*

*Sarah Millsopp, Museum Services Co-ordinator,  
Armagh County Museum*

## **Armagh Robinson Library – Healing Place of the Soul Yoga Classes**

To resonate with its Greek inscription carved above its main door, ΨΥΧΗΣ ΙΑΤΡΕΙΟΝ, (The Healing Place of the Soul), Armagh–Robinson Library hosted four sessions of yoga, mindfulness and relaxation during November 2022. Two classes were given in English by yoga teacher Karen Wasson. These were aimed towards people who may not be free to visit the Museum during its normal opening hours.

The Museum used these as tester classes to find out the level of interest to hold more classes in the 18th century setting of the Long Room. For the two English classes, several books were on display before and after the yoga itself.

Most were on the theme of medicine and meditation and referred to the physical and mental benefits of exercise. They brought interest, discussion, and laughter.

The museum hoped to further widen their audiences by welcoming new communities in Armagh. They trialled two free classes in Ukrainian by yoga teacher Lyudmyla (Lucy) Holub. Lucy delivered classes to 10 Ukrainians in their own language. She also worked with the Museum to help with the physical and mental wellbeing of the newly arrived, through yoga. Many of the Ukrainian visitors took the time to speak with each other before and after the yoga having not met previously.

The sessions took place before Armagh's Georgian Festival, and everyone was invited to visit the Museum's two buildings on Georgian Day. Museum staff were very pleased to welcome back some of the attendees – both those from the English and Ukrainian sessions.

As well as engaging new audiences, the museum gained valuable experience of planning and delivering these events. Armagh Robinson Library hopes to offer similar events in future and found that valuable relationships have been developed, with members of the Ukrainian community now interested in joining the Global Voices Local Choices project along with the Library and NI Museums Council.

*"Thank you for the lovely morning at Armagh Robinson Library. The collection of books, beautiful building and location made it an ideal venue to relax and enjoy yoga."*

## **North Down Museum – 'Made in AND' late night Christmas shopping**

On 24th November North Down Museum welcomed over 100 people to their "Late Night Shopping" Launch event, to open their Christmas Made in AND (Ards and North Down) craft shop. This event offered visitors the chance to experience the Museum in a completely different way, with a wide range of art and crafts from over 30 local artists on display and for sale.

Visitors were invited to the Museum between 7–9pm for an evening of music, artist talks / demonstrations and shopping. The museum café – Coffee Cure, was also open, and offered a wide selection of refreshments including mulled wine, providing a lovely pre-Christmas atmosphere.

Responses show that 50% of the visitors had never been to the Museum before. As well as new audience engagement, the museum the Café reported positive sales and the museum sold over £575 worth of local arts and crafts.

The Museum plans to run this event again in winter 2023 and is now offering a series of Arts Nights on Friday evenings.



# Playful Museums Festival



The Playful Museums Festival took place in February, for a 7th consecutive year! The Festival was created to reach children under 5 years of age, along with their parents and carers, and to introduce them to heritage through play.

This year's programme included 24 events organised across 12 local museums, involving nearly 500 participants, and at least 350 under 5's.

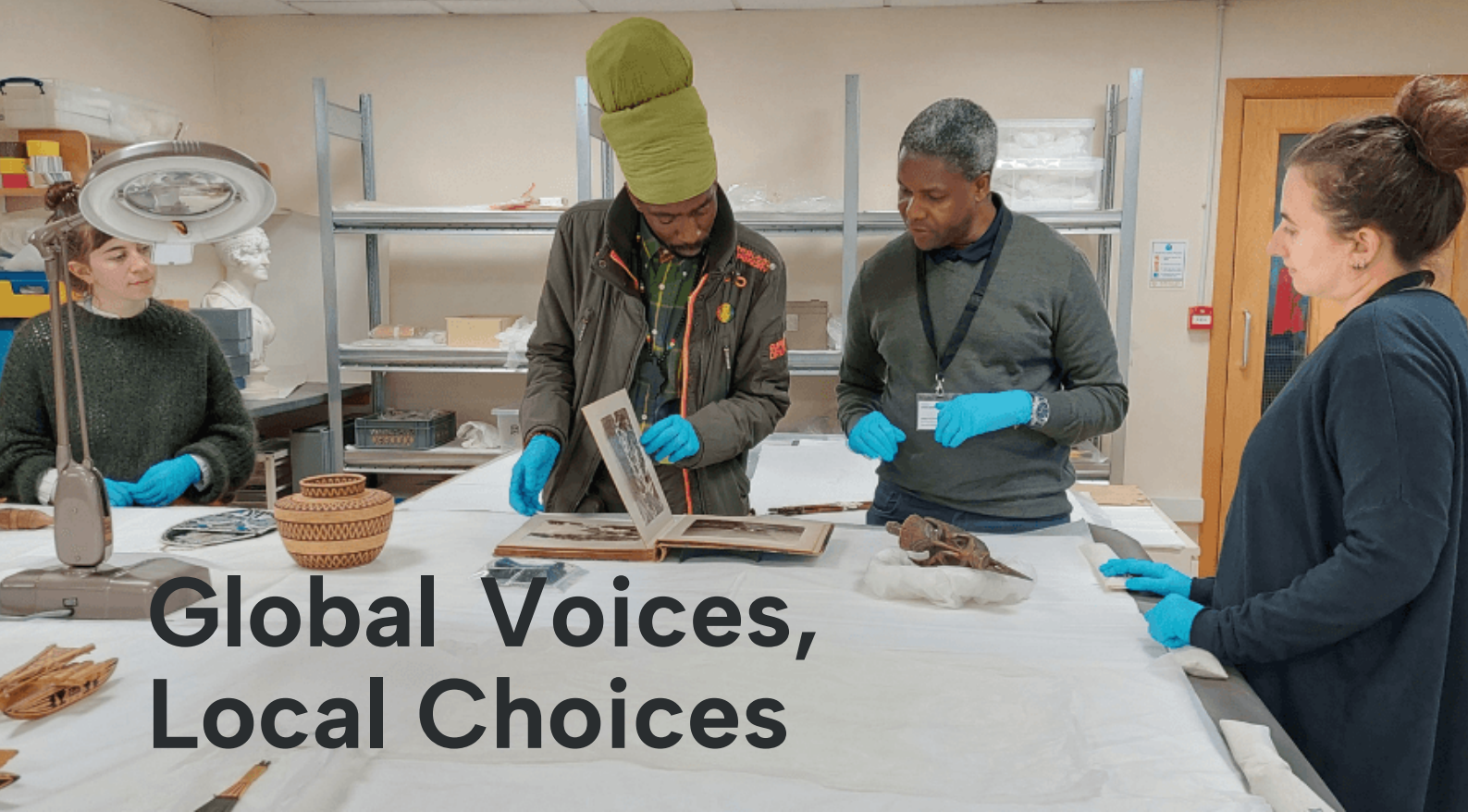
The Festival included an eclectic mix of music, stories, art, sensory activities, play and even baby yoga. Early years experiences are formative in child development, and our local museums created a vibrant and engaging festival programme, providing a wide variety of positive first time experiences in museums.

With 98% of visitors agreeing that their child enjoyed the visit, it is clear that the Festival continues to be a success. NI Museums Council has commissioned an independent evaluation of the Playful Museums Festival, which will allow us to thoroughly review and redevelop the Festival for future years. We have just published a number of Festival case studies on our website, and look forward to building on the excellent work over the last 7 years!

*"Absolutely fabulous morning of activities which engaged children and parents"*







# Global Voices, Local Choices

NI Museums Council, in partnership with National Museums NI and the African and Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI), is working on a creative new decolonisation project, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

The partnership seeks to engage marginalised communities, ensuring that they have a fair opportunity to engage with and interpret National Museums NI's World Cultures collections. The project will raise awareness and understanding of these collections and explore how a decolonisation approach can be implemented in a fresh, creative and inclusive way. The project will also build new relationships between the participant museums and marginalised groups in their locality, fostering trust, understanding, and showcasing local museums as safe welcoming spaces for all communities and backgrounds.

The programme comprises a series of engagement workshops that will culminate in an exhibition of a World Cultures object that the community group has chosen, alongside their creative responses, interpretation and reflections.



The project partners have been working with a group of five local museums: Carrickfergus Museum, Tower Museum, Armagh Robinson Library and No. 5 Vicar's Hill, Fermanagh County Museum, Causeway Coast and Glen Museum Service and the Ulster Museum to connect with local marginalised groups. Group workshops have been underway since December 2022 across several local museums.

Once the groups have had their first introductory meeting with the project team and their local museum, the community groups tour the Inclusive Global Histories gallery and handle World Cultures items in the collection.

Participants then spend time in their local museum with members of the project team, museum staff and professional creative facilitators to reflect on their chosen collection item. Facilitators have been supporting the groups to focus on the meaning and cultural significance of the various World Collection



artefacts, and how they are interpreted and expressed today by people who value them as objects reflecting their history, identity, and culture.

We look forward to the selected World Culture items and group responses being displayed in the local museums this summer. It is hoped that these responses whether through art and crafts, music and dance, poetry or creative writing, will contribute to a better understanding of the artefacts, and our communities.

*Global Voices, Local Choices will bring diverse cultures and perspectives into Northern Ireland's local and national museums, removing barriers to promote understanding and insight for all partners and participants.*



## Photography

*Page 13, top: Project partners select World Culture collection items for group consideration. Photo taken by National Museums NI.*

*Page 13, left: Members of the Causeway Multicultural Forum discuss items from the National Museums World Cultures Collection.*

*Page 13, right: Members of the Active Citizens Engaged group consider a set of shackles, and other items as part of a collections based workshop in the Ulster Museum.*

*Page 14, left: Members of the Causeway Multicultural Forum handle and discuss a range of collections items.*

*Page 14, top right: Project participants take part in a tour of the Inclusive Global Histories exhibition in the Ulster Museum.*

*Page 14, bottom right: Nic Wright of the Causeway Coast and Glens Museum Service assisting participants as they explore and reflect on collection items.*





# Museums Challenge: Climate Change

In 2019 the UK committed to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. This is an ambitious undertaking, impacting on every area of policy and requiring collaboration across public and third sector organisations to support the transition to a low carbon economy. Museums have a valuable role to play in reducing their carbon footprint, raising awareness and increasing community engagement to achieve a net zero future.

NI Museums Council sought to support and encourage local museums to develop sustainable, carbon-conscious policies, and to become safe and valued spaces for climate change dialogue and education.

The Department for Communities and National Lottery Heritage Fund NI supported this effort with a generous funding package of £100,000, allowing the NI Museums Council to offer grants up to £20,000 to local accredited museums. We will highlight some of the fantastic work that was undertaken through this programme over the next few Newsletters.

## 'Think Globally, Act Locally' – Armagh Robinson Library and No.5 Vicar's Hill

The Georgian Armagh Robinson Library was founded in 1771, and is the oldest public library in Northern Ireland, holding a collection of 46,000 diverse printed works, including rare medieval manuscripts, maps, and a wide range of botanical books, which inspired elements of the 'Think Globally, Act Locally' project.

The project sought to:

- Raise awareness of the climate emergency, and explore climate action; and
- promote the sustainability of the building, and encourage biodiversity in its grounds.

New LED lighting was installed throughout the building, which will significantly reduce energy consumption over a long time-frame.

The former registry at No.5 Vicar's Hill includes a walled garden to the rear of the property, which sweeps down to a wonderful view of the city below. A new wildlife garden was planted to support a diversity of native plants, insects and bird species. The planting scheme was developed with reference to the historical botanical texts in the museum library, ensuring that the museum collections were reflected in the outside space. Signage was also developed to help visitors identify the new plant species, and associated wildlife.

## Outcomes

- Armagh Robinson Library has enriched its visitor experience through the new wildlife garden, offering a revitalised space that promotes biodiversity, reflecting the museum collections in a creative new way that allows visitors to learn about native plant species and pollinators.
- Visitors have been informed about the climate emergency, and simple actions that can be taken to make a positive contribution to sustainable energy consumption, and to support local biodiversity.





- Volunteers can now contribute to the work of the museum in new ways, through tending to the wildlife garden.
- The museum has reduced its carbon footprint through long-life energy-efficient LED lighting.

The Armagh Robinson Library Assistant Keeper, Carol Conlin said "We wish to thank our funder and all the contractors who have worked with us on this project. We are keen to protect the planet in effective if modest ways. Shrubs and plants were chosen with care, blending eighteenth century planting with twenty-first century environmental knowledge. We hope that our visitors will enjoy the garden as part of their visit to No.5, and will see that we are using natural resources with respect."

### Photography

*Left: The Armagh Robinson Library Long Room, including the new LED lighting, by Neil Keery ([www.keeryphoto.com](http://www.keeryphoto.com)).*

*Right, top: NI Young COP26 Climate Ambassador pictured with local school students during the One World Festival at Armagh Robinson Library.*

*Right, middle: Armagh Robinson Library and No.5 Vicar's Hill Keeper, Canon Shane Foster, Emma Foster and NI Museums Council Director, Johnathan Dalzell at the launch of the new wildlife garden.*

*Right, bottom: one of the new flower beds in the wildlife garden at No.5 Vicar's Hill.*



## 'Climate Change: Our People's Story' – Tower Museum

The Tower Museum launched a community-focused project to crowdsource local reflections & strategies for sustainable living.

Local communities contributed with oral histories, videos, and short films that were showcased in the museum exhibition space. The various contributions spanned historical accounts of change relating to climate and local landscapes, as well as emotional responses to what has been lost, and may yet be lost to future generations. A strong intergenerational focus was managed through facilitated sessions, creating a rich tapestry of local thoughts, reflections and dialogue.

I remember a really hot summer in 1976. We hoped that would continue at the time but it didn't. But what we are seeing now is more frequency in extreme weather events. The local flooding of 1987 and 2017 were a 30 year event. Now we are planning for 8 year events. We have to accept this if we accept the way things are at the moment. There is massive work ahead of everybody.  
**Ciaran McLaughlin (50s)**

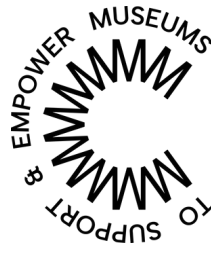
The rising sea levels is a massive problem and if you can see what 2050 might look like in the council a lot of areas might be underwater if things keep going the way they are going. As well as there being a refugee crisis around the world due to climate change people here will also lose their homes as a result of it.  
**Maeve O'Neill**

We're not going to change the climate overnight. It's not going to be a quick fix. It's going to be a long term thing and we need to start educating ourselves more. It's us adults in particular who need start changing our lifestyles and having conversations with other people.'  
**Jim O'Neill (66)**

Following on from their involvement in the Museums Challenge: Climate Change programme, the Tower Museum has incorporated 'climate change' into their core programming and is taking the lead on Carbon Literacy Training for other museums and heritage sites across the City of Derry, and the wider district. By seeking to share their insight and experience with other organisations, the Tower Museum is highlighting the risks that climate change presents to the culture, arts and heritage sector.







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