



NI
Museums
Council

Newsletter

September 2023



The Wild Escape

Museums explore the natural world & celebrate Earth Day

nimc.co.uk



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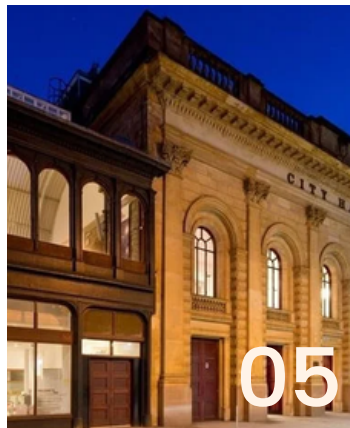
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Cover photograph courtesy of The Linen Hall – The Wild Escape.



Dear friends and colleagues,

I am delighted that you are able to read about some of the inspiring and impactful work happening in and through our member museums within this September edition of our newsletter.

Local museums have been engaging children with the natural world through arts, crafts and a UK-wide celebration of Earth Day. You can read more about the programme of events, and the surprising true story of an elephant trundling through the streets of Belfast during the second world war, which was the inspiration for the NI War Memorial's project.

We have included a wide range of updates on new exhibitions, conference trips and projects, including the Global Voices, Local Choices programme, which seeks to bring diverse cultures into perspective throughout Northern Ireland's local and national museums.

We are also looking forward to welcoming everyone to our Annual General Meeting and Museum Forum on Tuesday 26th September from 1pm. The programme will be held online this year, so do plan to be in attendance, as I am sure that you will benefit from what promises to be a diverse and valuable series of presentations, including the launch of the Museums Association's research report into the social impact of museums in Northern Ireland; insight to Lisburn Museum's experience of hosting a touring exhibition from the British Museum, and much more. You can find details about the full programme, including booking instructions through the events page of our website www.nimc.co.uk.

NIMC Director, Johnathan Dalzell



News in Brief

Police Museum NI awarded Full Accreditation



We are pleased to announce that the Police Museum NI was awarded Full Accreditation in July. We look forward to working with, and continuing to support the museum as it grows and develops.

Museum Trends



We are looking forward to circulating the final questionnaire for the Museum Trends 2023 Survey within the next few weeks. This will be an opportunity for member museums to ask any final questions, or contribute to the content or structure of the survey before it is launched.

Guidance for the 'Museum Impact Statement' was recently circulated: <https://nimc.co.uk/news/museum-trends-survey-2022-23-update/>. We encourage all museums to undertake consultations, in preparation for this submission.

The final component of the Museums Trends Survey will be an EDI questionnaire that will be circulated to all museum staff and volunteers.

The Museum Trends 2023 survey will help NIMC to be an effective advocate for local museums, and museum professionals. To that end, we ask that all museums plan to engage with the survey.



Access and Inclusion Grant Programme now live

We are extremely grateful to the Department for Communities for supporting a programme of Access and Inclusion grants for another year. Whilst the time available to submit applications was limited, we were pleased to receive a number of high quality applications from local accredited museums, who had the opportunity to apply for capital grants of up to £30k, which can be used to improve museum facilities, and ensure equitable access for all.



Playful Museums Small Grants

We are delighted to announce that the Playful Museums Festival will return in February 2024, with the generous support of Art Fund. We anticipate that grant application guidance and application forms will be available shortly, with an application deadline of Friday 20th October. We are keen to see the Festival programme grow to include museums that have not previously participated, so don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions.



ICOM UK Conference – Glasgow

ICOM UK Conference 2023 – Addressing Legacies of Colonialism 17 & 18 April 2023

NIMC Development Officers, Eva Lynch and Catherine Doran, along with our National Museums NI colleague, Agrippa Njanina (Community Engagement Officer, Global Voices Local Choices), embraced the opportunity to attend the ICOM UK conference held in Glasgow in April.

Initially planned for 100 people, the popularity of the conference theme meant that on the first day we joined around 170 other museum professionals from across the UK and various parts of the world. The engaging sessions explored how museums can meaningfully address the legacies of colonialism.

A common theme throughout each session was how to manage expectations. We were reminded that decolonising is a long-term process, and it is hard work. It is important to understand that it is not a project that should be rushed towards an end point without carefully considered planning: If you don't feel confident, seek advice; If you are starting from scratch, build up to it rather than diving straight in.

"A marathon, not a sprint" was a sentiment shared by nearly all of the speakers, with Jenny Williams suggesting that we approach Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity as a gym; you begin by 'picking up the weight that's right for you' and building up our strength from there.



The first session, titled 'Centring the Enslaved' was a great start to the conference. It drew upon the thoughts and experiences of a diverse panel, including Paul Gardullo, National Museum of African American History and Culture (USA); Zandra Yeaman, The Hunterian (UK); and Nelson Cummins, Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (UK).

There were several important messages arising from the discussion, including the need to tell the unvarnished truth, and not shy away from issues of discomfort (Zandra Yeaman holds the interesting title of 'Curator of Discomfort' at The Hunterian, Glasgow). The panel also touched on rethinking all museum practices: visitor services, recruitment, collecting, collections care, and audience engagement, because "decolonising collections is everyone's business".

"Museums are where we educate and agitate. We have a responsibility to tell the unvarnished truth and use them as a conduit to open the conversation beyond the sector"

Zandra Yeaman, Curator of Discomfort at The Hunterian, Glasgow

Sessions throughout the first day highlighted the importance of understanding who is doing the decolonisation work in museums, and recognising the limitations of one person's knowledge and capacity to bear the load. This underlined the importance of collaboration, and lived experience as a critical component of the decolonising process. The potential of museums to educate, agitate and to instigate critical dialogue; essentially providing a venue for difficult conversations, was also recognised. It was however highlighted that many museums do still function in the context of a colonial system.

Zandra pointed out that "Museums are where we educate and agitate. We have a responsibility to tell the unvarnished truth and use them as a conduit to open the conversation beyond the sector". Museums are where we go with families or with school, they are places within which we can learn about aspects of history that we may not learn anywhere else. This was reinforced by Lisa Williams, Edinburgh Caribbean Association, who noted that if we fail to teach our children their own history and the impacts that Britain had on other countries, we do them a disservice as we send them out into the world ill equipped to speak with people who have a much deeper understanding of international relations.

The importance of carefully considered language was seen as critical when addressing the possibilities of pushback from the community, staff, or volunteers, and the potential for defensive interpretations of collections and stories. We are not trying to rewrite history, we are simply completing narratives and finding new ways for people to emotionally relate to the past.

We were reminded not to focus on the trauma of enslavement and to also look at the richness of black culture before and after this period. Project Myopia was started at Edinburgh University by Dr Rianna Walcott, who wanted to crowdsource a diverse curriculum by asking students and lecturers what they wanted to study, and to avoid 'ghettoising black authors into black studies'.

Between sessions we enjoyed the networking opportunity to meet other members of the museum and heritage sector, sharing ideas, learning from each other, and working towards a more equitable future for museums.

Towards the end of the first day, a facilitated reflection session was useful in allowing participants to consider what we in the sector can practically do. There were discussions around what creates discomfort, and what to do with discomfort when it arises, and why rethinking collections with the help of communities is important. We particularly liked the point that decolonisation should not be seen as



rewriting history, but that it should recognise an element of history that enhances the story and aids our understanding of the present.

The second day of the conference included tours and free time to explore a selection of museums in Glasgow. Keen to learn more about 'Curating Discomfort', Eva and Agrippa visited The Hunterian Museum, which is within the University of Glasgow. Founded in 1807 by Dr. William Hunter, a Scottish anatomist and physician, The Hunterian is the oldest museum in Scotland. The museum houses a wide range of collections, including art, archaeology, anthropology, geology, and natural history.

Upon exploring their motivations for opening 'institutional' and 'curatorial' discourse around collections, and planning changes to become a more ethical museum, the Hunterian embarked on 'Curating Discomfort' as an intervention, rather than an exhibition. The intervention attempts to reassess the traditional interpretation of collections, to help reshape curatorial thinking and create narratives that address the legacies of our history.

For this intervention, the Community Curators group was formed by six people of different geographical backgrounds who have been in Glasgow for different lengths of time. They are academics, community activists, social justice campaigners and educators. They speak to this work as individuals with different interests and priorities. Over six months, they operated as a community to oversee the 'Curating Discomfort' intervention. They discussed and interpreted objects with new perspectives, viewing the museum display as a first step towards making the museum a more relevant and meaningful place for everyone.

We valued the opportunity to see this example of decolonisation practice. The input from the Community Curator's provided great insight to the collection items and the stories that they tell.

A DECLARATION OF DISCOMFORT

Most museums are monuments to a system that privileges some people over others and creates a narrative about the identity of nations or cities that institutions seek to project and protect.

Museums hold collections from donors who benefited from the practice of racial slavery, violent endeavours, forced removal and the systematic oppression of indigenous peoples.

Museums are political places.

'Curating Discomfort' puts forward discomfiting provocations and interventions to help us understand that museums have perpetuated ideologies of white supremacy. This is a political, economic and cultural system in which white western ideas control the power of the texts, the material resources and the actions that continue to underpin notions of cultural superiority.

Colonial systems, such as the British Empire, used these ideologies to justify the enslavement and colonisation of peoples and lands around the world. Museums developed within this context and they remain spaces that celebrate and memorialise colonial systems. Collections, displays, and labels are a political act that have legacies rooted in colonialism.

We are only now recognising that we are not neutral and that we have, without consideration, been complicit in perpetuating the ideologies of previous centuries.



CURATING DISCOMFORT IN THE HUNTERIAN'S COLLECTION

A museum's collection is a political act: what is collected, how it comes to the museum and how it is documented and interpreted are all the result of the context in which museums operate.

As part of Curating Discomfort, we have been looking closely at our collection, and the objects selected for this intervention have been chosen because they have something to say about the legacies of slavery, colonialism and empire.

Any object can be interpreted from a number of perspectives, and there is never just one story to tell. These two small objects show just how rich our interpretation can be, if we look closer. We encourage you to explore the rest of the Hunterian Museum, and other museums like it, with a critical eye and to consider how these legacies might be apparent in the objects on display.

Photography

Page 5, top: NI Museum Council Development Officers visit the Burrell Collection in Glasgow.

Page 5, top: 'Centring the Enslaved'. ICOM UK conference session in Glasgow Concert Hall.

Page 6, top: development Officer Eva Lynch in the upper level of the Hunterian Museum.

Page 7: panels and displays from the 'Curating Discomfort' exhibition at the Hunterian Museum.

Page 8, Statue of the 1st duke of Wellington with traffic cone, outside GOMA.

Page 9, top: Burrell Collection exhibition themed on 'Flowers', which uses an animated projection of falling flowers to 'bring the room to life'.

Page 9, bottom: Stained glass windows in the refurbished Burrell Collection building.



GOMA Visit

"GOMA is a place where you can see and enjoy art that belongs to the people of Glasgow. You can make art, you can discuss art, you can experience the rich heritage of Glasgow..."

Quote from the entrance sign to GOMA. Interpretation on the inside, however, explains how this was not always the case.

While Eva and Agrippa visited the Hunterian, Catherine took the opportunity to visit the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) in the 18th century neoclassical building that it shares with the city library in the centre of Glasgow. GOMA is free to enter and consideration has been given to accessibility and children's spaces, with art spread across several floors in brightly lit galleries with contemporary signage and lift access.

During Catherine's visit, the special exhibition was 'Slow Dans' a series of three 7m high video installations by Elizabeth Price presenting a fictional past, parallel present, and imagined future, exploring social and sexual histories, and our changing relationship with the material and the digital.

Opened in 1996 with a radical vision, the Director Julian Spalding chose to exclusively exhibit works from living artists.

A thriving local artistic community, including artists such as Douglas Gordon, the first Scot to win the Turner prize, was initially ignored and considered a 'fad' by the museum's leadership. This initial approach has now been relaxed, which means that visitors can enjoy artists such as Beryl Cook, Andy Warhol and Stanley Spencer, alongside Scottish artists such as Ian Hamilton Finlay. As the artistic collection developed so too did the connection to local communities in Glasgow. Recent programmes have highlighted artists with a Glasgow connection and projects focused on social justice, the exploration of sectarianism, LGBTQ+ art, violence against women and issues related to asylum seekers and refugees.

Whilst many visit to enjoy the wonderful art on display within, others make the journey to photograph the famous statue of the 1st Duke of Wellington, which stands outside. An errant traffic cone placed upon the Duke's head provides some additional intrigue and comedic relief. Much to the council's annoyance, the people of Glasgow continue to replace the traffic cone each time it is removed. As well as being a display of local humour, the cone is also used to reflect global events, and has been painted in Ukrainian colours over recent times. The Olympic Games, the Scottish Referendum and the EU have also influenced alternative traffic cone colour palettes.

The Duke's traffic cone is now firmly embedded in Glaswegian culture; a vivid reminder of the museum's mission to reflect local artistic expression.



Burrell Collection Visit

The NIMC / NMNI team regrouped in the afternoon, and took to the outskirts of Glasgow, to visit the Burrell Collection. Situated in the beautiful surroundings of Pollock Park, the recently refurbished Burrell Collection is a purpose-built museum housing a vast and eclectic collection of art and artifacts from around the world.

As well as providing a dramatic setting for the collection, the building boasts a range of impressive 'green' credentials, having implemented a number of innovative sustainability measures. We were pleased to see that, since our visit, the museum was awarded Art Fund Museum of the Year.



As attendees of the conference, we were given an overview of the museum by Keeper Dr Sam Gallacher, along with tea and biscuits (they know how to please their guests), and a wonderful tour of the galleries facilitated by representatives from the front of house, curatorial and conservation teams.

The collection was amassed by Sir William Burrell, a wealthy industrialist and philanthropist, over the course of his lifetime. During our visit the staff demonstrated their pride in the collection, the building, and the work of the museum. Since reopening, the collections are displayed by themed exhibitions such as colour, flowers, and death, rather than by type or origin. We found this an interesting and evocative approach to the interpretation of items and their stories.

The museum aims to be family friendly and fun, with several interactive and film-based displays to bring art and objects to life. We particularly liked how the museum balanced the needs of the collection with that of the public, for example: choosing the inner galleries with less natural light for the art works, but bringing these to life with animated projections that surrounded the works.

Before wrapping up our trip and heading to the airport, we made time for a lengthy perusal of the museum shop, which sells carefully selected items with a clear connection to the collection itself. We all agreed that it was a very worthwhile trip. We found inspiration in many areas, made connections, and all have hopes to visit and explore Glasgow and its environs more in the future! Word on the grapevine is that next year's ICOM UK conference will be held in Belfast, with opportunities to share all that the NI Museum sector has to offer!



Community Led Collecting & Curation

Study Day, 28 March 2023, Royal Museums Greenwich Prince Philip Maritime Collections Centre, London

In March 2023 the NI Museums Council sent three of its members to attend a study day at the Royal Museums Greenwich state-of-the-art conservation studio in London. The event explored community led collecting, interpretation, and curation, providing participants with the knowledge and skills to implement community led strategies in their museum.

The workshop was led by Mike Sarna and Navjot Mangat. Mike and Navjot have worked in a range of museums including Horniman, Victoria and Albert and the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago. Mike has been Head of Interpretation and Navjot has held the role of Curator of Social Practice, with a focus on participatory practice.

The morning session looked at case studies from Royal Museums Greenwich and the Horniman Museum, highlighting the planning, delivery, challenges and successes of community led work.

The presentations were followed by some time for self-reflection, and encouragement to break down actions into manageable tasks that could be implemented in the participants own museum. Participants were encouraged to explore barriers, design strategies, and to anticipate and respond to tensions, including ownership of outputs and payments for contributors.

"... few museum practitioners pay participants for their time, except perhaps travel expenses – but if you are using community knowledge, that is expertise which needs to be remunerated."

Participants enjoyed a behind the scenes look at the collections and storage facilities, followed by a tour with the Curator of Contemporary Collecting.

We are delighted to hear that the three participants from NI have already begun to incorporate what they learnt into their museum practice.

"As a take-away from the day, I plan to help develop a store tour for collections that are in off-site storage in Mid and East Antrim. Our museum service as a whole has been committed to making collections more accessible and for me this was a key part of the day which I could take back and implement in practice. As a result of the study day, I will be more aware of the communities who used, made and donated these objects in the planning process."

"The study day has reinforced my focus on linking collections and communities and I will help keep this to the forefront when developing projects."

Participants applied for a place on this study day and all event fees, travel and subsistence were covered by the NI Museum Council. If you are interested in attending a future study day or event, please check the NI Museums Council website and emails regularly.



New Exhibitions

A British Museum Touring Exhibition is now open at the Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum, until 12 October 2023: 'Egyptian hieroglyphs: unlock the mystery'.

A must-see collection of ancient Egyptian artefacts are now available to view in Lisburn Museum, courtesy of an exciting partnership with the British Museum.

Visitors can explore the incredible story of the international race to decipher hieroglyphs. The exhibition comprises nine ancient Egyptian artefacts from the British Museum's collection, including an extract from the Book of the Dead, which belonged to the priestess Nestanebetisheru, and a 3,000-year old limestone lintel revealing the name of Pharaoh Ramses III.

This free family-friendly exhibition guides visitors through the story of decipherment using video, games, interactive displays and a replica of the famous Rosetta Stone. You can also explore a series of themed displays throughout the galleries looking at Lisburn's Egyptian links, as well as linen from Tutankhamun's tomb. There will also be a chance to view Egyptian figurines collected by a local linen family – the Hills.

To complement the exhibition, Lisburn Museum has developed 21 exciting family-friendly workshops, a self-guided trail and a dedicated schools programme.

To find out more go to: www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/egyptian-hieroglyphs



Other must see exhibitions in local museums that opened this summer include: 'The Derry Girls Experience' in Tower Museum, Derry; 'Peace Heroines' at The Linen Hall; and 'Eilís O'Connell: A Family of Things' at FE McWilliam Gallery.

Photography

Top: Unveiling of specially commissioned linen piece with hieroglyphs meaning 'Lisburn Museum' at the exhibition opening.

Right: Heiroglyph rubbing, one of a number of interactives in the exhibition.



The Wild Escape



During spring this year, NI Museums Council were pleased to support the delivery of The Wild Escape activities at four local museums through funding from Art Fund. The UK-wide participatory project engaged children with the UK's natural environment, drawing inspiration from the art and objects in museums, and the creative learning opportunities that they afford. The project culminated on 'Earth Day' (Saturday 22nd April) with a weekend of activities across the UK for all ages, demonstrating the sector's response to urgent challenges facing our environment, with a positive call to action.

We are delighted that these activities met the key priorities of The Wild Escape Grant; to strengthen connections with nearby primary schools and families, connecting (or reconnecting) with the widest possible group of school children through creative activities or workshops designed for KS2, and to support children and young people to build their knowledge and understanding of the natural world and the effects of the climate crisis on the UK's biodiversity. The projects had many other positive outcomes and impacts; read on to find out more about the activities at each museum!



- Just over £8,000 of funding allocated for this project.
- 689 direct participants
- 8 freelance artists/practitioners involved in delivery
- New relationships built with National Trust, Belfast Zoo, World of Owls and Forage Ireland.



NI War Memorial – An Elephant Never Forgets

A baby elephant ambling through the blitz-proned streets of Belfast during the second World War, at the heel of a local zookeeper, seems on first reading to be a quite fantastical notion. However, this was the reality for local residents, who became accustomed to the sight of Sheila the baby elephant trundling through the streets to the comparative comfort of a home during the Luftwaffe raids.

Sheila's story has inspired a feature film, theatre shows, and operatic renditions, as well as providing the inspiration for Michael Morpurgo's book 'An Elephant In The Garden'.

The NI War Memorial leant on this unique local history to develop their Wild Escape project. They held a series of creative workshops in partnership with Belfast Zoo, and local artist Dawn Crothers, that enabled five primary school classes to explore Sheila the Elephant's Second World War adventure and learn about how elephants are cared for today in Belfast Zoo. The children created artworks that imagined Sheila's journey to an ideal habitat, rich in biodiversity.

To celebrate Earth Day, schools were invited back to the museum to view their artworks on display and to meet a very special guest – Sheila Hughes, who as a young girl in 1937 was chosen by Belfast Zoo to meet the baby elephant, lending her name in the process.

" 'They had great fun with the animals, at the museum and with the artist.... They loved the story about Sheila the elephant and learning about WWII. They loved learning about drawing an elephant. They were able to listen much better than normal. They learnt to take pride in their work and to give it a go."

Belvoir Park PS teacher

The Elephant Never Forgets project brought schools and families into the museum to explore the museum collection. 144 children (aged 7-9) took part in the workshops. These workshops were developed to be sustainable; using less energy and producing less waste, while harnessing the creative potential of an artist working alongside museum professionals.

The children were also introduced to their local zoo through outreach visits to their school. This helped the children to learn more about the natural world, and the effects of the climate crisis on the UK's biodiversity. Five schools received outreach visits from Belfast Zoo.

The pupils enjoyed their experiences, with one pupil from Belvoir Park PS saying 'I liked going to the museum,' another from John Paul II PS said that they really enjoyed 'Dawn the artist showing us how to draw an elephant' and 'I liked dressing up.' A pupil from Harmony PS said 'I liked it when the person spoke about Sheila.'

The museum team encouraged the participating schools and families to come together on Earth Day at the NI War Memorial Museum, where they took part in a range of activities, and viewed their works of art. The opening of the exhibition, and associated celebration activities were attended by 46 people including the Deputy Lord Mayor. Members of the public were encouraged to learn about the project and view the exhibition online and in person. The use of digital platforms helped with communication and accessibility, and the exhibition has been viewed 168 times on YouTube at the time of writing.

The museum team was pleased that there were a number of unexpected, yet very positive outcomes from this project. Through the museum's new relationship with Belfast Zoo, they expanded the museum's historical knowledge of Sheila the elephant. In doing so they met Mrs Sheila Hughes (95) after whom the elephant was named. Through Belfast Zoo, museum staff were able to see a photograph of the baby elephant's christening ceremony, enriching Sheila's story for those that visit the museum in future.



The team interviewed Sheila and added her amazing story to the museum's expanding Oral History collection. Sheila attended the launch of the exhibition on Earth Day and was presented with a framed picture of Sheila's christening day by two children involved in the project. She spoke to the children about what it was like to meet Sheila the elephant, her wartime experiences, and her life-long love for animals and the environment. She really enjoyed the experience and wrote a very touching letter to the museum staff, which you can read below.

The team also met a relative of the 'Elephant Angel', Denise Austin, the woman who saved the elephant during the Blitz. This relative was made aware of the NI War Memorial, and the project through media coverage, and is now staying in touch to help expand upon Sheila's story.

Participation in The Wild Escape project has developed wider impacts for the museum. Staff members have taken part in Carbon Literacy training, which has strengthened the environmental commitments they made in our Strategic Plan 2023-27. They have worked with artist Dawn Crothers to create an online tutorial for their YouTube Channel, and launched this at their Drawing Day event. Sheila the elephant's story now regularly features in their schools programme, and is extremely popular with the children. The museum is considering featuring Sheila's story in their new exhibition.

Dear Jenny,

I am totally whomed at not having got this letter off to you before now for giving myself, plus three members of my family, such a beautiful day at the War Museum on the 22nd of April.

It was so enjoyable to see so many children having such a lovely time. For me that occasion couldn't have happened at a better time. As you know, my beloved daughter Caroline had died just a month before the museum project and the fact that I was playing a part in it helped so much to lift my broken heart, even for a few days, so I thank you and your wonderful team for doing that! I also

Thank you for taking us out to a lovely lunch afterwards - and then later you kindly sent me a lot of photographs, taken of all that happened during the day. I feel totally spoiled!

All the children I saw and spoke to were just lovely, obviously enjoying what they saw & were doing, particularly making the elephant brooches, one of which, as you know I was presented with. Plus a lovely framed photo of me christening Sheila.

My goodness, what a wonderful ^{day} joy, and your team gave me altogether, a day I shall never forget.

The reason for such a long delay in getting back to you is because of the incredible amount of letters, cards & phone calls I have received since Caroline died, many of which need replying to, so I hope you will understand and of course, no post on a bank holiday week-end.

With my love & best wishes to all the team
Most sincerely
Sheila



Mount Stewart – Biodiversity Butterflies

Over the Earth Day weekend Mount Stewart encouraged visitors of all ages to take part in a range of 'Wild Escape' activities.

Using the rich ecosystem of the formal gardens, the team delivered sensory tours and art demonstrations that captured the imagination of younger visitors in particular, encouraging them to create a "Biodiversity Butterfly" using mixed materials. This included embroidery with local artists Emma Whitehead and Janice McHenry on the front lawn, and squirrel facts and ephemeral art making at the Squirrel hide.

Visitors were also encouraged to explore coastal biodiversity through the taxidermy on display in the Lookout, and to find different types of creatures on the collection trail.

The team deployed a variety of visitor feedback mechanisms for families to complete, which guarded against 'survey fatigue' and ensured that commentary was specific to different spaces and interactions.



From their evaluation the team learned that not only did new family groups visit the house and gardens for the first time, but also that returning families visited areas that they would not normally visit because there were child-specific activities available.

There were many visitors that planned their visit specifically because of the Wild Escape event, through advertising on social media and on-site during Easter activities. Other visitors that chanced upon the extra activities, without prior knowledge, were really pleased and excited about the positive impact that the Wild Escape programme had on their visit and experience.

The team were very pleased with the outcomes of the event, with no negatives other than the inclement weather!





Mid-Antrim Museum – Wild About Wellbeing

Mid Antrim Museum partnered with local artist Carly Wright and Primary 7 from Ballykeel Primary School to deliver the 'Wild about Wellbeing' project. This project used the museum's Tullygrawley collection to support the wellbeing of children, and create an artwork based on nature in the local environment. The project contributed to the school curriculum topic of 'the rainforest', using local nature and vibrant colours to emphasise differences and to promote awareness of wellbeing.

Artist, Carly Wright, assisted the participants to create an artwork through mindfulness activities, which encouraged the children to 'take 5' so that creativity could be inspired by connecting with and observing nature. The activity was developed by the artist to focus on positivity and self respect. The final artwork was then put on display in the museum gallery for wider community access. The museum had not worked with this local school or facilitator, and none of the children had visited the museum before participating in the Wild Escape activities.



The Conclusions from Mid-Antrim Museum's evaluation report by Linda Logan identified a range of positive outcomes arising from this project:

The school workshops produced an artwork for the wider Wild Escape project, which was also incorporated into Carly's solo exhibition at Mid-Antrim Museum. In addition to achieving objectives of working with a local school and artist that the Museum & Heritage Service have not worked with before, there is clear evidence of a positive contribution to the professional development of both Carly and school teacher, Mrs Gregg, who felt more confident about using art to support curriculum learning in a more open-ended, relaxed practice, following the Wild Escape project.

Carly gained experience and confidence in a classroom setting, which has inspired an interest in working with children and young people, using art therapy to address emotional challenges. An unexpected outcome of Wild about Wellbeing was that the class were keen to see 'behind the scenes' of Carly's exhibition. To show them more, Heritage Development Officer, Elaine Hill, took the class to see the exhibition gallery, giving them a greater understanding of Mid-Antrim Museum and how exhibitions are created.

School workshops also offered pupils an opportunity to observe nature mindfully, and contribute towards an open-ended shared artwork. The theme of the artwork raised awareness of climate change and the importance of protecting the natural environment, which was reflected in project feedback comments that mentioned the rainforest and animals that live there. An 'owl workshop' reinforced this learning, by discussing local owl habitats and bringing the topic to life, with live animals to enhance understanding.



Feedback from the pupils and the class teacher highlighted that Wild about Wellbeing did benefit participants, making them more aware of the natural world. The majority of pupils agreed that they learned something new about nature and the environment, and that they found the project relaxing and beneficial for their wellbeing, and would participate in a similar project again.

The project also included a foraging walk on Earth Day, which gave participants an opportunity to learn more about local biodiversity and foraging. Feedback indicated that participants enjoyed being outdoors and paid more attention to nature, and that the walk benefited their wellbeing. It also raised awareness of the importance of protecting the environment, and how native plants can be used for food.

Whilst the Wild Escape programme at mid-Antrim Museum was a short-term project, it has provided a framework that could be easily adapted for other schools and community groups. The project engaged a school and artist local to Mid-Antrim Museum, which had the advantage of reducing the project's carbon footprint, with low travel miles, and sustainable materials used. In addition Ballykeel Primary School received herb boxes from the Museum & Heritage Service, so that they have additional plants for their eco garden to increase biodiversity.

The use of Mid-Antrim Museum's Tullygrawley collection in the school workshops contextualised the museum collection, and highlighted the relevance of material from almost a century ago, which children are still using to learn about the importance of being in, and observing nature.

Showcasing Wild about Wellbeing through the finished artwork in Mid-Antrim Museum will encourage the families of participating pupils to visit the exhibition, increasing the accessibility and relevance of the museum in the local community. The Museum & Heritage Service are keen to encourage and build sustainable relationships with the local community, so the museum could be a venue for other community-based projects in the future.

A big thank you to each of the local museums who participated in The Wild Escape, and for completing evaluations that have been used to bring together this article.

Photography

Page 12 Top: Artwork workshop at The Linen Hall. Right: Biodiversity Butterfly creations from Mount Stewart.

Page 13 Top: Pupils from Belvoir Park PS take part in An Elephant Never Forgets workshop at NIWM.

Page 14 Middle: Sheila Hughes with children on Earth Day in NIWM.

Bottom: Letter of thanks penned by Sheila Hughes and received by NIWM.

Page 15 Top: Sensory garden tour at Mount Stewart. Centre: Biodiversity butterfly activity Mount Stewart. Bottom: Evaluation butterflies Mount Stewart.

Page 16 Top: Artwork created by Carly Wright and Ballykeel PS at Mid-Antrim Museum. Bottom: World of Owls demonstration with Ballykeel PS.

Page 17 Top: Foraging walk with Forage Ireland at The Braid.



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 the creative new 'Global Voices, Local Choices' decolonisation project, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. Here, Agrippa Njanina, Community Engagement Officer for the project, shares the latest updates from two of the participating museums.

Coleraine Museum

The Causeway Multi Cultural Forum and Coleraine Museum are thrilled to have launched their Global Voices Local Choices (GVLC) display at Coleraine Town Hall in May this year. The display is part of the World of Stories exhibition led by Dr Nicholas Wright, the Community Engagement Officer for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. The World of stories exhibition highlights the experiences of people from different parts of the world who have settled within the borough.

This particular GVLC display features three well-designed door size panels with moving creative writings and poetry by members of the Causeway Multi Cultural Forum (CMCF). The panels stand over a beautifully decorated Muslim prayer mat on loan from the Ulster Museum world cultures collection, which was selected as the focal point of the exhibition by the CMCF. This mat inspired the writings by the group who were supported by author and poet, Nandi Jola.

CMCF includes people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, with the selection of the prayer mat representing a strong display of

willingness from non-Muslim participants to learn from the experiences of their Muslim peers.

The mat is installed with its niche facing Mecca; the place of pilgrimage for Muslims. The group agreed to do this in observance and respect of the norms of the Salah – the prayer of blessing to Allah (God). It was revealed in group discussions that where possible the devout Muslim prays five times a day and the mat provides them a clean and comfortable place to do so wherever they are.

The sessions at Ballymoney Museum, where the group met in the evenings, provided an opportunity to address some of assumptions made in the absence of discussion. In their reflections, the group discovered countless underlying similarities in culture and religion, which are expressed differently on the surface. By creating safe spaces within museums, communities can come together for reflection, to be more informed about each other, and foster cross-cultural learning. This has been a success of the project so far.

A few response to the exhibition have been received from visitor so far. A visitor was surprised by the lack of visibility of ethnic minorities, unaware of their significant presence in the area. They described the exhibition as a window to the world and emphasised the need for Northern Ireland to broaden its horizons. Launching the exhibition, the Mayor of Causeway Coast and Glens, Councillor Ivor Wallace said: "This wonderful exhibition from our Museum Services is a timely reminder of just how diverse our community is".



Fermanagh County Musuem

Individuals from various new and marginalised communities in the Fermanagh and Omagh area have come together through the Global Voices Local Choices project at Fermanagh County museum, meeting regularly over the past few months.

With the help of African Caribbean Support NI, the group explored the experiences of ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland.

Through an exploratory visit to the Ulster Museum in Belfast, the group toured the Inclusive Global Histories Gallery. They explored the World Cultures collection and selected a "Bundu" mask from Sierra Leone for further reflection and as the basis for their exhibition in Fermanagh County Museum. The group engaged with facilitators in a series of workshops to produce artworks inspired by the mask. These artworks were created while talking through ideas of beauty, identity, similarity and difference.

"My first impression on picking up the mask was how light it was which meant the artist worked very delicately. The next feature was the face which had strange beauty. The combs on the side were attractive features and the birds on the head were a very interesting addition. The hair was another attractive aspect of the art work." said one participant.

Another's impressions of the African mask were "-- the face was serene and peaceful similar to a Buddha, the design was very delicate and the work of a skilled artist." She liked the birds which she felt symbolised the ability to fly away.

The project continues to highlight the significance of diverse interpretations and values when attached to objects. It shifts the focus from the traditional narrow perspective of collectors and curators to the contemporary societal value placed on these objects.

The team in the County Fermanagh Museum acknowledged the importance of recognizing community expertise, as it brings forth knowledge that curators may not possess, ensuring that cultural knowledge and lived experience are factored into our interpretation of artefacts and their stories.

Global VOICES, LOCAL CHOICES

An exhibition curated by individuals from new and marginalised communities in the Fermanagh & Omagh area

at
**Enniskillen
Castle**

**5 August -
24 September**



West African: The Mende
BUNDU Mask
Kindly lent by National Museums NI



Esmée Fairbairn
Collections Fund

“

We all have tags [labels], then we live our lives by them. During this project it was about coming together as a community, we came together and we put our tags aside. This project was something we could do together. It was important to come into a museum to do that. In the museum, we don't feel different, we feel part of a community.....”

The participants were keen to thank Esther Ogunleye (African Caribbean Support Organisation NI); Professor Elizabeth Crooke and Dr Stephanie Harper (Ulster University) for their input and support throughout the project.

The Bundu mask and the group creative responses are currently on display in Fermanagh County Museums, closing on the 22nd September to coincide with 'Culture Night' in the town.



The other participant groups and local museums have also been working hard to complete their workshops and displays. We look forward to providing a full update on these at our Museum Forum on 26th September, on our social media, and within our next Newsletter.



Photography

Page 18 Top: Agrippa Njinana speaks about the contribution of the Global Voices Local Choices project at the World of Stories exhibition opening in Coleraine Museum.

Right: Project partners and participants discuss the display in Coleraine Museum

Page 19 Top: Participants work on their creative responses as part of a workshop in Fermanagh County Museum.

Bottom Left: Flyer for the project in Fermanagh.

Page 20 Top: Participant feedback. Middle: ACSONI lead workshop. Bottom: Workshop materials used by project participants in Fermanagh.

Education & Outreach Forum 2023



IMA – NIMC Education and Outreach Forum 23rd June 2023 President's Hall, Law Society of Ireland, Dublin

On 23rd June, 65 delegates from across NI and the Republic of Ireland attended the annual IMA-NIMC Education and Outreach Forum, which was hosted by the Law Society of Ireland in Dublin.

The forum is coordinated in partnership between the IMA and NIMC and has become a staple event in the museum calendar. It provides a space for museum practitioners and educators from across the island of Ireland to come together for a day of discovery and knowledge sharing. Speakers were chosen from a range of submissions that explored projects in museum learning and community engagement, with a particular focus on community collecting and curating.

A key take-home point from the day related to how museums use their collections to connect with people and tell their stories, whilst also tackling the wider societal issues of anti-racism, decolonisation, climate change, academic inequity, and wellbeing.

Dr Jo Day, Assistant Professor in Greek Archaeology & Curator of UCD Classical Museum, and Dr Bridget Martin, School of Classics UCD, presented 'Working towards inclusive education in the UCD'. Their presentation outlined how the only Classics based museum in Ireland is tackling perceived barriers and increasing engagement with the topic amongst its least represented school groups.

In 'Follow Your Nose', Julie Forrester (Artist-Facilitator, Crawford Art Gallery) outlined an online project with children from migrant communities during Covid-19 lockdowns. By allowing the participants to choose the direction of their learning and engagement, the project took several unexpected turns before coming together for an in-person event.

Dervila Roche spoke to her role as 'Historian in Residence for Children' in Dublin City Council, explaining how she is combining user need with the varied histories of the museums and historic buildings to create experiences for the children of Dublin.

Following the lunch break, Shauna Allen (PhD candidate, University College Cork) presented on a collaborative climate change project, which integrated a community call to action. Shauna focused on how to tell the story of local climate change impacts through collaboration and by using sustainable interpretation techniques in exhibitions.

In the presentation 'Unseeing Traces: Artefacts from the Kingdom of Kongo', Mark Maguire, Adam Stoneman (Irish Museum of Modern Art) and private collector, Nasser Aidara, described the processes involved in presenting an array of objects from the Kingdom of Kongo to the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA). They addressed the topics of citizen curation, the learning and engagement work around the exhibition, as well as the relational legacy between IMMA and the wider community.



Jennie Ryan, and Lily Cahill from the Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) were next up and spoke about their student project to create a collaborative poem which is out of this world! Jennie and Lily ran online sessions with 12 students tackling issues such as homelessness, the ongoing refugee crisis and environmental sustainability. The students then worked together to create a final poem which has been etched into EIRSAT-1, Ireland's first satellite, which will be launched into space in 2023.

The day finished with 'An Elephant Never Forgets' from Hannah Gallagher (NI War Memorial) detailing the collaborative 'Wild Escape' project between the museum, local schools and Belfast Zoo. You can read more about this project on pages 13 and 14 of this newsletter.

Photography:

Page 21 Top: Participants enjoy opportunity to sit together and networking at the E & O Forum in The Law Society's Presidents Hall.

This page Left: Hannah Gallagher shares NI War Memorial's The Wild Escape project with participants.

NIMC Training Update

In the last quarter we have delivered four training events, two online Let's Talk sessions, and the Education and Outreach Forum with IMA to a total 108 participants.

'Introduction to SPECTRUM' and 'Rethinking Cataloguing' were both delivered online by Sarah Brown of the Collections Trust, covering recent changes to the Spectrum standards and procedures. Break out sessions allowed the participants to delve into challenges that they face in their own cataloguing systems, and to consider ethical issues related to language and community contributions.

Two in-person sessions were delivered by Siobhan Stevenson of Legacy Conservation, focusing on the practicalities of 'Environmental Monitoring' and 'How to use Environmental Data'. The sessions were held at the Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum and The Argory. Participants enjoyed a tour of the Argory, and a presentation from Ciaran Toal on the Egyptian Hieroglyphs exhibition on loan from the British Museum.

Our Let's Talk: 'Playful Museums' and 'Student Placement' sessions provided an opportunity for members to explore how we engage with young learners, from Early Years to Higher Education.



Siobhan Stevenson delivered Environmental monitoring training at The Argory.

Upcoming Training

- The 3Rs of Volunteer Management: Recruit, Retain & Reward for Museums. Wednesday 20th September, online.
- NI Museums Council Forum and AGM. Tuesday 26th September, online.
- Introduction to Developing an Impact Evaluation Plan for your Museum. Thursday 28th September, online.
- Applying to Funders. Tuesday 17th October, online.
- Let's Talk: Social Prescribing. Tuesday 21st November, online.
- Queer Possibility. Thursday 14th December, in person at NI War Memorial, Belfast.

To find out more and make a booking, you can visit the events page of our website at www.nimc.co.uk/events.



Whitehead Railway New Acquisitions

Whitehead Railway Museum acquired items with support from NIMC's Collecting For The Future Grant scheme.

NI Museums Council were pleased to support the acquisition of a Great Northern Railway (Ireland) brass locomotive number plate 207 and a cast iron Belfast and Co. Down Railway monogram with funding from the Esme Mitchell Trust.

The buffer beam number plate from the icon GNR(I) locomotive No.207 Boyne, which once hauled the Belfast - Dublin Enterprise Express, has now been incorporated into the museum's exhibition about the Enterprise. It is hoped that the BCDR cast iron monogram from Belfast Queen's Quay station will eventually be displayed alongside platform barrier gates from that station.

This purchase has not only enhanced the museum's capacity to enrich stories about the railway, but has also encouraged them to think more about using items for outreach activities.

Ian Sinclair, Curatorial Committee member at the museum revealed:

'The weekend after we acquired both objects, we were attending a model railway exhibition in Bangor and took the opportunity to display them.

We were pleasantly surprised at the interest in them, and questions about what they were, from the public, enabling us to engage with the public in a way we had not tried before and bringing back memories for many of them. It proved to be a more effective way of promoting our Museum rather than just handing out a leaflet.

Based on this experience, we hope to bring more small objects to events like this and strike up more conversations with the public, encouraging them to visit our Museum.'

Reminiscence from members of the public at the Bangor model railway exhibition:

Re. 207 number plate: "I remember travelling to Dublin behind 207"; "What a shame we didn't manage to preserve that loco"; "I photographed Boyne many times"

Re. BCDR monogram from Queen's Quay: "I must have walked through past that hundreds of times"; "I remember getting the train from Queen's Quay on day trips to Bangor"

Encouraged by these acquisitions the museum volunteers are hoping to progress plans to restore the Queen's Quay station platform barrier gates, and find a suitable location for them in the museum.

Photography

Top left: With the 207 number plate are RPSI Curatorial Committee members Brian Griffith (left) and Richard Kenny. They are standing in front of the boiler of another ex-Great Northern Railway (Ireland) locomotive which is currently undergoing restoration

Top right: Ian Sinclair holding the BCDR monogram in front of the platform barrier gates from Belfast Queen's Quay station. Thanks to Whitehead Railway Museum. © Whitehead Railway.

Members Together: Northern Ireland

27 June, 1400-1720

Hybrid: Ulster Museum, Belfast & Online

#MANorthernIreland

MA Museums
Council



MA Members Together Meeting – Northern Ireland

We were pleased to participate in the MA's first hybrid event for their NI members, which took place in June at the Ulster Museum.

Starting off with an 'In Conversation' session, the NI Museums Council had a chance to share updates and insights through Development Officer, Catherine Doran, who is also an MA Rep. Catherine contributed to the 'In Conversation' session with Stella Byrne (NHLF) and Gillian Findlay (President, MA), discussing current challenges facing museums in Northern Ireland.

Joshua Robertson presented on the MA's Climate Justice work and the recently launched 'Museums Essential course'. This was followed by the MA's Geraldine Kendall Adams giving an overview of the research she undertook on behalf of the MA with India Divers this year. Their study focused on museums and social impact, and the results will be launched at the NI Museums Council Forum on September 26th.

Agrippa Njanina (NMNI) and Dr Nic Wright (Causeway Coast and Glens Museum Service) presented an update on the Global Voices, Local Choices project. You can read more about Global Voices, Local Choices on pages 18 – 20 above.

Karen Logan (NMNI) and Caoili O'Doherty presented on the Conflict and Legacy Interpretive Network for



museums, which aims to present the themes of conflict and legacy in an ethical way that promotes public benefit. The network was created through a joint proposal led by the Bloody Sunday Trust / Museum of Free Derry, the Ulster Museum and Healing through Remembering. To date they have worked with stakeholders to create a set of guiding principles and objectives, as well as a project website: <https://conflictlegacy.org/>.

The day ended with Victoria Millar (NMNI) delivering a session on the ground-breaking 'Bad Bridget' exhibition at the Ulster American Folk Park. The exhibition tells the story of the thousands of women who left Ireland for America between 1838 and 1918, many of whom became embroiled in lives of poverty and crime.

Photography

Top: Catherine Doran, Stella Byrne and Gillian Findlay in conversation.

Right: Dr Nic Wright presenting on A World of Voices.

Kids in Museums Digital takeover day at The Linen Hall



By Lydia Kempton, Kids in Museums Youth Panel

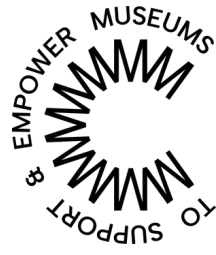
Friday 7 July was Kids in Museums Digital Takeover Day – when young people take over museums’ social media content for the day. I took over at the Linen Hall Library in Belfast, one of around 50 participating museums in the UK. I tried a variety of activities, from touring the library and gallery to viewing both an amazing exhibition by artist Susan Hughes and the Queen’s Film Theatre archive.

The exhibition focused mainly on Hughes’ connection to her father through nature and the observational work she has done to capture the supernatural and fantastical in the landscape. Not only did the collection showcase a variety of wildlife, but also Hughes’ flair for a range of different artistic mediums, from collage to oil painting. I shared my thoughts about the exhibition and some of my favourite artworks on the Linen Hall Twitter account.

I also explored the Linen Hall’s collection of QFT programs from 1990 to 2023. This was a fantastic opportunity to view how the relationship between Belfast and film culture has changed over the years. As a visual person, I was intrigued by the innovative graphic design, displaying shifting aesthetic sensibilities throughout each decade. Inspired by the immersive décor, I challenged myself to capture the ambiance of the setting in a painting that I shared online. Takeover Day was a great opportunity for me to not only get up close and explore such a rich collection, but also consider the development of Northern Irish history through visual means. Thanks for letting me take over, Linen Hall!

Join the next Kids in Museums Takeover Day on Friday 17 November 2023. Catch up with everything that happened on 7 July in the Kids in Museums Instagram Highlight.

Photography: Painting by Susan Hughes.



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