



NI  
Museums  
Council

# Newsletter

April 2024



## NIMC Members Go To Gaol On Study Trip to Dublin Museums

### For The Curious and Interested

Community engagement  
at Down County Museum.

### Let's Talk:

Focussing on curatorial  
and diversity programmes.

### Meet The Board

Introducing new NIMC board  
member, Jessica Hoyle.

[nimc.co.uk](http://nimc.co.uk)



@NIMuseums

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Cover photograph of NI Museums Council members with Brian Crowley in Kilmainham Gaol. Top left: Study trip participants being welcomed to MoLI, Dublin. © NIMC. Bottom left: For The Curious and Interested participants at The British Museum, © Kieron Black.

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# Director's Note



Dear friends and colleagues,

Without doubt, our sector has navigated many challenges over recent months, including financial constraints and shifting public spending priorities. However, through resilience and innovation, we have continued to serve our communities, preserving our cultural heritage and offering enriching experiences for visitors of all ages and backgrounds.

One of the most pressing challenges we face relates to sustainable funding. Museums are integral to preserving history and fostering education, yet without adequate resources, our ability to fulfill our mission is compromised. With the recent return of the NI Executive, there is an opportunity to advocate for increased funding and support. I am hopeful that our elected officials recognise the invaluable contributions museums make to society and will prioritise investing in our future.

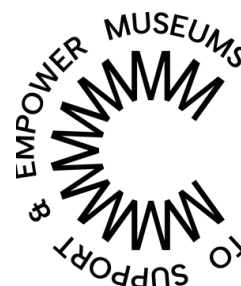
The recent launch of the NIMC 'Museum Trends Survey' signifies a pivotal moment for our sector. This survey will gather data from local museums across Northern Ireland, informing our strategic direction of travel, and critical asks of Government. By collaborating with stakeholders, including our members, visitors and politicians, we can develop plans to meet the needs and interests of diverse communities.

As we look ahead, it is crucial that we remain committed to delivering public good through excellence and innovation. While challenges may loom large, they also represent opportunities for growth and transformation. By embracing change and working together as one sector with one voice, we can ensure that Northern Ireland's museums thrive for generations to come.

I want to thank all those that have contributed to this edition of the NIMC Newsletter, and would draw your attention to Shirley Lennon's article on page 15, focusing on a British Museum touring exhibition at Down County Museum; 'For the Curious and Interested'. I hope you find it as insightful and inspiring as we did in the NIMC office.

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NIMC Director, Johnathan Dalzell



# News in Brief

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## NI Museum Council Annual General Meeting & Museums Forum Save The Date!

Afternoon of Tuesday  
24th September 2024

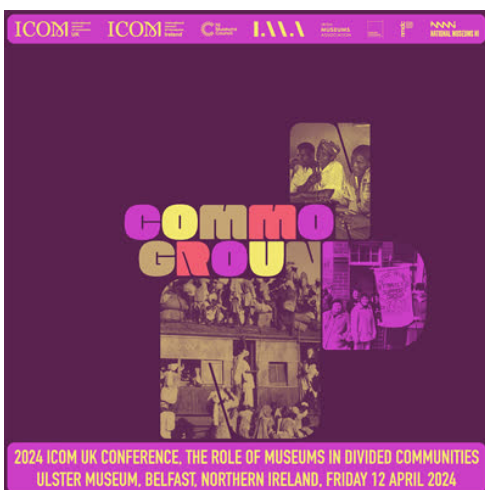
Programme and booking details will be announced soon!



## Global Voices Local Choices

Project partners NIMC, National Museums NI and ACSONI are pleased to share that we have recently received the final Global Voices Local Choices evaluation report from the project evaluators, Dave and Lorraine Thompson (Confluence Facilitation). Efforts are now underway to distill project outcomes and learnings into a stakeholder report, ensuring that we can collectively maximise impacts arising from this ground breaking project.

## ICOM UK Conference in Belfast – 12 April 2024



We have been working with ICOM UK and their partners to help shape this year's ICOM UK Conference 'Common Ground: the role of museums in divided communities', which will be hosted by the Ulster Museum, Belfast on 12th April.

This represents a valuable opportunity to hear from museum professionals from the island of Ireland, the UK and the global museum community. NI Museums Council are pleased to have offered four free places to our members who applied via expressions of interest.

Conference tickets are available via Eventbrite.

## Accreditation News

We are pleased to announce that HMS Caroline, a site of the National Museum of the Royal Navy, based in Belfast, have been using the Accreditation Standards to inform their policies, procedures, and development strategy for the museum. They have recently achieved Full Accreditation, for the first time, as part of the UK Scheme. Huge congratulations to the team who have worked hard to achieve this!

Arthurs Cottage has been accepted to the Accreditation scheme as 'Working Towards Accreditation' and we look forward to supporting Mid and East Antrim Museums towards completing the first application towards accreditation for the cottage.

Antrim and Newtownabbey Council run museums have been removed from the UK Accreditation Scheme; Museum at the Mill due to closure, and Sentry Hill due to non-engagement with the scheme.

Craigavon Museum Service has also been withdrawn from the Accreditation Scheme due to the closure of the service and the amalgamation of the collection with that of Armagh County Museum.

# Meet The Board

I am delighted to be kicking off this new newsletter segment. To introduce myself, I am Jessica Hoyle a recent addition to the board of the NI Museums Council, having joined in September 2023.

I am extremely passionate about the museums sector and have worked across various museums in the UK, including the Ulster Museum, which is part of National Museums NI. Since 2022, I have been working for Tourism NI as Experience Brand Development Manager. My role is to work with attractions and businesses to develop visitor experiences that epitomise the values of our NI tourism brand 'Embrace a Giant Spirit'; being big-hearted, original, telling our legends and stories and making connections to our land, water and sea. Our local museums embody all of these values and play an important role in protecting, celebrating and sharing the culture and heritage of Northern Ireland.

Some of you reading this will be aware that a Draft Tourism Strategy was launched at the end of 2023, setting out a 10-year plan for the sector. Within this, there are five themes that structure the growth trajectory: Innovative, Inclusive, Sustainable, Attractive and Collaborative. When I reflect on the role that the NI museums sector plays and my personal aspirations for it in the future, these five themes provide a common set of objectives that shape the work the sector is already doing, as well as opportunities for growth.

I truly believe that museums play a vital role in influencing change through innovation, using creative ideas to develop new programmes and services, as demonstrated in the Reimagine, Remake, Replay programme for instance. What's more, we continue to see a drive in the use of digital technologies, for instance digitising collections that will open new pathways for creative engagement, access, and storytelling.

When considering inclusivity, this is at the heart of what the sector does. The 2023 Museums Changing Lives in NI report found that 70% of museums across NI are engaged in work relating to health and wellbeing, placemaking and a space for reflection and debate. I'm keen to see this powerful contribution to social value continue by expanding and inspiring career pathways, breaking down barriers for engagement and representing increasingly diverse societies.

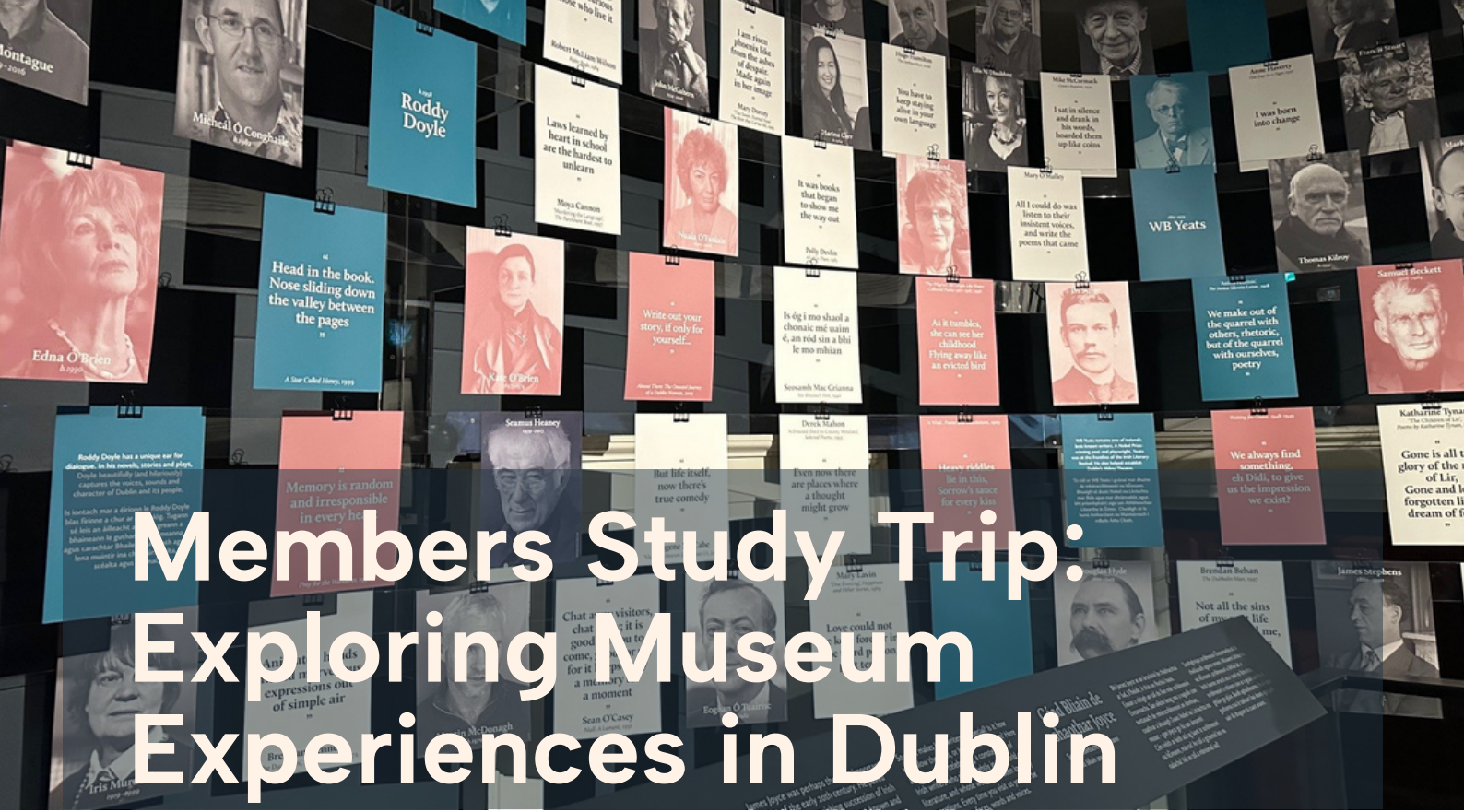


Sustainability is a rapidly growing consideration in all sectors at present and one of my main aspirations for the sector is that the importance of museums is properly recognised and funded to secure their sustainable future. Across all regions, museums hold important collections to tell stories of our heritage therefore I'm keen to encourage investment that delivers benefits right across NI; leading to a self-sustaining, agile and resilient sector.

When I think of the theme of attractive, it comes to two main strands. Firstly, drawing in communities to use their local museums. Secondly, to see local museums recognise the role they have as a tourism offer, extended beyond initiatives such as European Heritage Open Days. Both locals and visitors today seek authentic, immersive experiences that allow them to connect with the people and places they are visiting. This includes a desire to discover new and interesting places to explore, learn, and have a memorable time with friends and family. Museums are excellent spaces for achieving this and instilling community pride.

Finally, collaboration. To fulfil the potential of the museums sector in Northern Ireland we require a shared vision for the future, one which recognises the vital role that museums play, and will continue to play, in showcasing our history, heritage and stories past and present. We are strongest when we work together, build relationships and share best practice.

Our role at NI Museums Council is to support the sector and our members, not only as advocates, but by supporting training and development, empowering innovation, and encouraging a collaborative network. Personally, I look forward with excitement to how we can continue to work together as a sector to extend the impact of museums for everyone.



# Members Study Trip: Exploring Museum Experiences in Dublin

On Wednesday, January 31st, the NI Museums Council (NIMC) organised a study trip to Dublin, bringing together a diverse group of members eager to explore the rich cultural offerings of the city. Comprising both individual student members and staff from various member organisations, each participant brought their unique perspectives and motivations to the event.

The study trip, planned and delivered by NIMC, aimed to facilitate networking opportunities, foster peer-sharing, and provide access to new and temporary exhibitions in Dublin. This endeavour was made possible through the generous support of key partners including the Irish Museums Association, the Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI), and Kilmainham Gaol.

## Exploring Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI)

Our first destination was the Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI), nestled in the historic UCD Newman House near St. Stephen's Green. Despite being a newcomer to Dublin's museum scene, MoLI has left an indelible mark, notably winning the 2023 European Heritage Awards for Citizen Engagement and Awareness-raising. Led by our knowledgeable guide, Luke, we delved into the institution's fascinating journey from a Georgian home to a university and finally to its current incarnation as a museum.

MoLI, a collaborative effort between the National Library of Ireland (NLI) and University College Dublin (UCD), opened its doors in 2019 after nearly a decade of development. Luke shared with us about MoLI's resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighting its innovative approach to online educational workshops through "MoLI in the Classroom," ensuring accessibility to Irish literary heritage beyond physical boundaries.

The museum's exhibition, weaving together the threads of both historical and contemporary Irish literature, particularly pays homage to James Joyce and his profound connections to Dublin and the wider world. Through a blend of artifacts, interpretative panels, and immersive experiences like sound and moving images, MoLI brings the written word to life, inviting visitors to engage with Irish literary treasures in new and innovative ways.





Our visit continued with an exploration of MoLI's temporary exhibition spaces, including captivating showcases of literary connections with different cities and contemporary commissions like "Nightflowers" by Claire-Louise Bennett.

The tour reached its peak with a room showcasing Copy No.1 of Ulysses, alone in a glass cabinet. One final area is used by the visitor for self-reflection. Long earpieces hang from the ceiling playing sounds of Irish storytelling and visitors are encouraged to use them as inspiration to create their own stories using pencils and paper available on a central table.



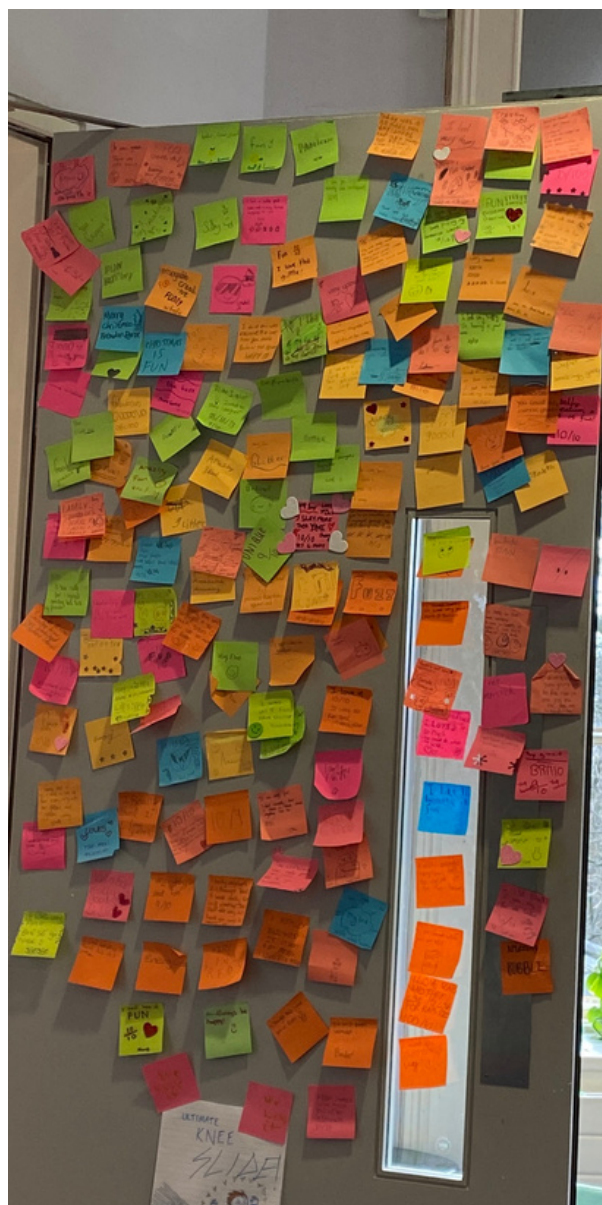


## Engagement at MoLI

After the tour we were met by Jennie Ryan (Head of Learning and Culture) and Lily Cahill (Learning Manager) who took us to the LitLab, a space dedicated to education, outreach, and family-friendly activities. We learnt about MoLI's emphasis on participant-centred learning and how it has fostered a collaborative and dynamic learning experience.

When a school student enters the museum, they bypass the exhibition and visit the LitLab first. Here they participate in a workshop exploring their relationship with writing and investigating ways to express themselves. The sessions are relaxed and allow the learning team to pull out the key themes that relate to each group and then apply these to a subsequent tour. This means that no workshops or tours are ever the same, each is unique and shaped by the participant as co-creator..

The museum's ethos of prioritising participants over collections extends to their work with community groups, which happens organically and is influenced by what is needed in the community rather than what the museum thinks it should do. MoLI staff explained that the museum works hard to avoid ad hoc projects designed purely to address the criteria of advertised funding opportunities. Instead, staff work holistically and try to embed themselves into Dublin city life, meeting groups, making connections, and forming ideas that inform the development of strategic programmes and themes. Every so often an idea will lead to a project, and it is then that the funding is sought. Jennie pointed out that if a particular funding stream requires them to alter their project beyond what the community has designed, they are not afraid to decline it.







## Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA)

Following a lunch break at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), we allowed for free time to explore the exhibition "Self-Determination: A Global Perspective" which runs until 24th April. The exhibition focuses on the nation-states that emerged in the wake of the First World War, exploring the role of art and artists in relation to the expression of national identities. We were pleased to find the inclusion of works by Belfast based Turner Prize winners Array Collective among the many thought-provoking exhibits found in this exhibition.





## Exploring Kilmainham Gaol

Our final stop at Kilmainham Gaol offered a poignant reflection on Ireland's tumultuous history, expertly curated by Brian Crowley. Brian spoke on themes and stories connected to Ulster and took us to areas not usually visited by the public. Brian's bespoke tour immersed us in the gaol's haunting narratives, from its 18th-century origins to its role during the Famine, Easter Uprising and Civil War. Brian explained how the construction, change of use, neglect and revival of the building can be seen today.

Particularly impactful were the temporary exhibitions — "hearts ne'er waver: The Women Prisoners of the Irish Civil War" and "Voices" by Margo McNulty — both shedding light on marginalised histories often overlooked in traditional narratives. Brian explained that as Ireland leaned away from the story of the Civil War in the mid-20th Century, many women's stories from this time were lost. When new exhibitions at the Gaol in the 1980's and 1990's sought to uncover this history, the floodgates were opened for donations and first-hand accounts. 'Hearts ne'er waver' features these forgotten histories of communities built within prison cells, escape attempts, theatrical performances, relationships, and hunger strikes that left many women unable to conceive.

'Voices' by Margo McNulty is an artistic response to this history and uses pieces from the collection as inspiration. The two exhibitions sit side by side to present a flow of modern and historical art, music, photographs, textiles, and objects.



## Reflections and Feedback

As the day concluded, participants shared their reflections, highlighting the invaluable insights gained from exploring diverse museum experiences and the opportunity to forge new connections within the heritage sector. The study trip not only broadened perspectives but also deepened understanding of the meticulous curation and storytelling behind emotionally charged histories on the island.

The NI Museums Council extends its gratitude to all participants, partners, and institutions involved in making this enriching study trip possible. As we look to the future, we invite all interested individuals to stay informed about upcoming events and opportunities through our website and social media channels. If you join NIMC as a member you can benefit from Museum Beat emails as well as discounted training and networking opportunities, including future study trips.

*"It is beneficial to hear how other museums develop their exhibitions and to see a variety of other museums and their collections. It broadens our perspective and helps establish new partnerships."*

*"I had not visited MoLI, IMMA or Kilmainham Gaol before so it was an unmissable opportunity to visit all three in one day. It also afforded me the chance to network with other professionals working within the heritage sector across the island of Ireland."*

### Exhibitions:

*"Nightflowers" by Claire Louise Bennett has concluded.*

*"Self-Determination: A Global Perspective" at IMMA runs until April 21st, 2024.*

*"hearts ne'er waver": The Women Prisoners of the Irish Civil War and "Voices" continue at Kilmainham Gaol until April 30th, 2024.*

### Photography:

*Dublin museums study trip images courtesy of NI Museums Council.*

*Page 6, Top: Changing wall of Irish authors, MoLI.*

*Page 6, Bottom right: Sound installation with 'pull and take' poetry sheets, MoLI.*

*Page 7, Top: Upper permanent exhibition, MoLI.*

*Page 7, Middle right: Storytelling themed room with hanging speakers, MoLI.*

*Page 7, Bottom right: Visitor's wall of stories, MoLI.*

*Page 8, Top: Temporary exhibition on Edinburgh as a city of literature, MoLI.*

*Page 8, Right: MoLI LitLab door with feedback sticky notes.*

*Page 9, Top: Entrance to IMMA galleries.*

*Page 9, Middle right: J & W Stewart & Stewart 'Building Stormont' (1924-1927) with Array Collective's 'Stormont-Na-Gig' (2023). IMMA.*

*Page 9, Bottom: Ilya & Emilla Kabakov 'The Mysterious Exhibition from the Children's Hospital' (1998). IMMA.*

*Page 10, Top: Inside Kilmainham Gaol.*

*Page 10, Middle right & bottom: exhibits from the Kilmainham exhibition focussing on women inmates.*





# Let's Talk: Curatorial and Workforce Diversity Programmes

For our March 'Let's Talk' session we were pleased to feature speakers and projects from England, Scotland and Wales.

Kate Woodward from Amgueddfa Cymru spoke about the Shifting Power project and shared reflections around youth engagement and some of the challenges faced from the perspective of the museum. Kate was joined by Izzy McLeod, who provided the perspective of a participant in the project. Izzy pointed out that working with young people requires skills in communication and the need for flexibility. They also highlighted the risk of the young people not feeling seen or supported in the sector once they leave the project.

This need for follow up support was ably met in the projects outlined by Markus Offer and Gabi Gillott from Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS). Over five years MGS has developed a series of projects and programmes that provide access to museum careers. They cover primary school through to vocational learning and employability programming. MGS has looked at where the museum sector loses potential workforce diversity, starting in primary education, and has endeavoured to provide a support structure at each step to improve the diversity of the future workforce beyond the traditional routes. Gabi and Markus covered the 'Workforce for the Future' and 'Delivering Change', 'Skills for Success; and 'Marseum' projects. We were particularly interested in the 'Marseum' project which can be easily utilised in the NI setting.

Jordan Keighley from Leeds City Museum spoke about the Preservative Party, a group of young people aged 14-24 who meet weekly to plan exhibitions.

The Preservative Party was created at the museum in 2010 as a six-week programme but has now become a core part of Leeds Museums and Galleries. Over 14 years the Preservative Party has created interpretation focused on mental health, homelessness, body image, LGBTQ+ history and racism. Their latest project, 'Overlooked', sought to uncover hidden histories from the museum archives including that of Angela Morley, who was the first openly transgender Oscar nominee, born in Leeds in 1924.

Jordan was a previous member of the Preservative Party and has now become a Youth Engagement Curator responsible for facilitating their work. As a former member, Jordan understands how the participants can offer insights and fresh perspective, often shaped through lived experience that cannot be found elsewhere.

Michael Powell joined us from the People's History Museum (PHM), Manchester. PHM describes itself as the national museum of democracy and explores radical stories of people championing change. PHM has endeavoured to democratise its interpretation through a four step process of creating a steering group, holding consultations, designing pop-up exhibitions, and employing community curators. Michael outlined the history of the 'Nothing About Us Without Us' exhibition, which explores the history of disabled people's rights and activism. Michael explained how the co-curation process was crucial in its success. The lessons learnt have changed the way PHM will create future content and Michael explained how they see accessibility and diversification of voices as a process that will continuously improve and evolve. Thanks to PHM for the use of their exhibition image above.



# Downpatrick Volunteer Wins Prestigious UK Award

A volunteer at the Downpatrick & County Down Railway, Jonathan King, has been crowned the UK & Ireland's Young Volunteer of the Year. This prestigious recognition was bestowed upon Jonathan at a gala ceremony in Brighton, hosted by the Heritage Railway Association.

Jonathan, a 24-year-old whose commitment to DCDR spans over a decade, has demonstrated remarkable dedication and selflessness, particularly during challenging times such as the recent floods that hit Downpatrick. His proactive involvement in safeguarding the railway and assisting local businesses in flood mitigation efforts has exemplified his exceptional leadership and community spirit.



*"Jonathan absolutely deserves this recognition," Gardiner remarked. "His exceptional contributions to the railway read like the CV of someone much older. His remarkable tenacity, generosity, and dedication make him a standout team player." -Robert Gardiner, Chairman of DCDR*

Jonathan has been a volunteer at DCDR since he was in his early teens and in January 2023 he was elected onto the railway's Board of Directors at the age of 23. He carries out his railway duties - both administrative and on-the-ground, whilst also studying a Law Degree at Trinity, regularly travelling back and forth between Downpatrick and Dublin.

Chairman of DCDR Robert Gardiner continued to highlight Jonathan's invaluable role during challenging times, stating, "In the face of the recent floods, Jonathan played a pivotal role in safeguarding the railway. Acting as a spokesperson for DCDR in the local and national media, he not only monitored floodwaters when others couldn't but also assisted local businesses in removing stock from flooded shops, purchasing sandbags from his own pocket."

He also recognised Jonathan's exemplary efforts during the summer of 2020, "In the challenging summer of 2020, amid a wave of vandalism and the ongoing COVID pandemic, Jonathan went above and beyond by serving as a night watchman, patrolling the DCDR site until the early hours. His tireless initiative is evident in his leadership of projects previously mentioned, and additionally, he has organised and represented the DCDR at events across Ireland, acting as a dedicated ambassador and expanding the railway's reach to a broader audience, putting the DCDR back on the tourist map after the period of enforced closure over COVID. His role as a social media admin and website editor since 2018 further demonstrates his commitment to promoting DCDR online."

In his own words, Jonathan attributed his success to the collective effort of the DCDR community and expressed gratitude to his mentors and supporters. He emphasised the importance of volunteerism in the community and our railway heritage and encouraged others to join the cause.

"This is a success for everyone at DCDR – it is a testament to how much effort our volunteers invest in training our younger members, and the support that we get from the wider community. Without the backing of countless individuals and donors, as well as several preservation groups from across Northern Ireland and the Republic, we wouldn't have such a thriving team which has the ability to pass on now-rare steam engineering skills. I'd like to pay particular tribute to the late Jim McGorrian (my grandfather and a founder member), Mike Collins, and Bob Edwards who mentored and inspired me, and without whom I couldn't have won this award."

He continued, "In addition, it was extremely heartening to see so many small railways award-winners and nominees. We know all too well at Downpatrick that few people are often burdened with a lot of responsibility in smaller groups due to a lack of resources and manpower. I have made countless lifelong friends in my time at DCDR, and I encourage anyone with an interest in learning new skills and becoming part of a tight-knit community to find out more about volunteering with us. Our long list of accolades demonstrates that DCDR is once again punching well above its weight in the preservation scene – an important part of our shared heritage which is often overlooked across the island of Ireland. The only problem is that we're going to have to get a larger trophy cabinet!"

Heritage Railway Association Chief Executive, Steve Oates, said: "The Lord Faulkner Young Volunteer of the Year Award is always the most fiercely contested category at the HRA Annual Awards. Almost all of them could be a winner and the judges have a huge challenge to select just one."

"So to win this award is a huge testament to the dedication and passion of Jonathan. His commitment to the cause during such a difficult time for the Downpatrick and County Down Railway shone out."

*"I'd like to personally congratulate Jonathan for all that he has done. I hope his achievements can act as an inspiration to others at a time when encouraging new volunteers to take their part in preserving our railway heritage is vital." – Heritage Railway Association Chief Executive, Steve Oates.*

Lord Faulkner, patron of the Young Volunteer award, said "I have been delighted to sponsor the HRA's Young Volunteer of the Year award for a number of years now. Men and women under the age of 26 are the future of heritage railways, and it's vital that we do what we can to encourage their involvement."

"It is heartening that my award attracts such interest and fierce competition; this year there were nine excellent applicants, and any of the four shortlisted would have been worthy winners. For Jonathan King to come through this process and win it outright is a testimony to what an exceptional person he is, and it's impossible to exaggerate his dedication and service to the Downpatrick and County Down Railway. He is an outstanding role model for other young people to emulate."

He continues, "Jonathan's dedication extends to hands-on restoration work, notably devoting significant time and effort to restoring the 80 class railcar set, showcasing his attention to detail and commitment to preserving historical authenticity".

Mr Gardiner finished, "Jonathan's victory comes as a very welcome spot of good news after the heritage railway suffered catastrophic flooding along with most of Downpatrick town centre, but more importantly is well-deserved recognition of his tireless dedication and contributions to the railway over the years. A huge congratulations to Jonathan, and well done to everyone else at this year's awards."

Photography thanks to DCDR.

Page 13, Top: From L to R – Lord Faulkner, Jonathan King, Morgan Young, and Paul Lewin (award host/compere).

Page 14, Right: Johnathan King working on carriage 749.



# 'For the Curious and Interested' Project Overview

by Shirley Lennon, Freelance Community Engagement Facilitator (Kenera Consulting).

## How We Became 'Curious and Interested'

A touring exhibition from the British Museum, 'For the curious and interested' is being hosted by Down County Museum. As lead partner, the museum worked with a group of specially recruited members of the local community to co-curate this exhibition. This article will focus on how the project developed and aims to reveal the impact it has had on participants and the museums involved. The exhibition is supported by the 'Sloane Lab: Looking back to build future shared collections', an AHRC Towards a National Collection Discovery Project that aims to use new digital technologies to link the collection together.

### 'For the curious and interested.'

Killyleagh born physician and naturalist Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753) left his collection to the nation on his death in 1753, intending for it to be preserved and used for the improvement of knowledge and 'satisfying the desire of the curious.' This exhibition reunites a selection of objects from the collection assembled by Sloane for the first time, including books and prints, cultural objects, and natural history rarities, which are now cared for by the British Museum, the British Library and the Natural History Museum.

Confronting the complex history behind Sloane's vast

collection, which was financed in part by profits from transatlantic enslavement, the exhibition reveals how and why objects from across the world were brought together and what it means to people today.

## Community Co-Curation

People from a range of backgrounds and different lived experiences in the local community worked alongside staff from the British Museum to shape the exhibition, offering new perspectives from personal experiences and cultural contexts.

The group enjoyed exploring the Down County Museum collection and galleries. Many had not explored a collection like this before. It was interesting to see how they interacted with the objects and the stories.



A labelling workshop with Down County Museum staff showed the group how complex the labelling process can be.

*As group member, Tom Bevan reflected, '[through] our discussions, we understood that labels are not neutral but hold cultural assumptions. Our inquiry concerned colonisation and we learned to question the given information and ask what had been disregarded. I will never read a museum label casually again.'*

Staff from the British Museum supported and guided the group throughout the project. The group used video conferencing technology so that Curator Dr Alicia Hughes could show the objects in London that became part of the exhibition in County Down.



Discussions with the community group helped to shape and develop the narrative for the exhibition. As well as including direct quotes from participants in the panels and labels, the exhibition was influenced at each stage by the community co-curators. This process will continue as the exhibition moves to Wales, where a different community group will co-curate the touring exhibition using the same objects, but through their own perspective.

## Facing difficult legacies

To gain insight into other museums' recent work addressing the legacies of colonialism in their collections, the group visited the Inclusive Global Histories exhibition at the Ulster Museum. This encouraged the group to face up to difficult aspects of museum collecting. Training in cultural awareness helped the group confront these challenging issues.

*'For me, a museum was always a sanctuary; taking shelter from what is by immersing myself in what was. I would never have been able to understand how it could make someone uncomfortable. Now I can.'* – Group Member Kieron Black.



*'I now realise how much we have all benefited from [the] transatlantic enslavement trade and that was very shocking. We can't undo the past. We must acknowledge what was done to start to heal our local and global historical legacy,'* shared Mary-Jane Burns



The group viewed a copy of Sir Hans Sloane’s book *A Voyage to Jamaica (1707; 1725)* in Belfast Central Library. Studying and reflecting upon some of the direct descriptions of the treatment of enslaved people written by Sloane was deeply disturbing.



A special visit to the three museums in London that care for the collection Sloane assembled provide opportunities to meet curatorial staff and see the objects in person. The group gained valuable insights which helped shape the exhibition.



### Responses to the objects

Each participant contributed in different ways to shape the exhibition. Kieron, a professional artist, often shared his artwork as his way of commenting on the issues raised. Mary-Jane’s poem, which was inspired by her work with plant materials as a wellbeing consultant, is displayed on an exhibition panel. Tom, another professional artist, created a piece for the family trails. Ralph, a retired botanist, brought his expertise and research skills to the interpretation of the vegetable substances. Olu, a care worker originally from Nigeria, brought thoughtful sensitivity to discussions. Toni brought

creativity and helped develop a family trail, while Kristine, originally from Latvia, used her photography skills to reflect on the project. The group dynamic and interpersonal relationships added considerable value and richness to the project.



*'As a resident of County Down, this project has been very emotional for me. I now view our history in a very different way.'*  
Mary-Jane Burns

### Showcasing the Down County Museum Collection

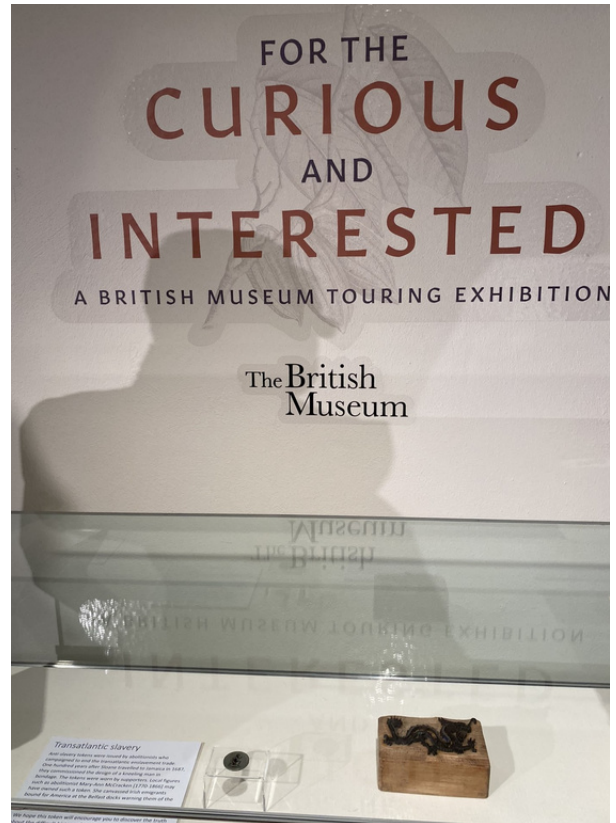
The community group worked with Down County Museum staff to identify, investigate, and display objects from the collection that made connections to those in the touring exhibition. The objects are on display in the exhibition with a digital slide show explaining the co-curated aspect of the project.

Having discovered more about the global reach of Sloane’s collecting practices, it was interesting to find this global reach reflected in objects in the Down Museum collection. Seeing a piece of an elephant’s tusk and 19th century carving tools made the group think about artistic practices of the West African Sapi artists who carved an ivory horn in Sloane’s collection more than 500 years ago. The group included an anti-slavery token aiming to highlight the continuing legacies of transatlantic enslavement on people today.

*'What better way is there than this coin to encapsulate everything the museums and the associated teams are trying to achieve with this project.'*  
*Kieron Black*

We hope Toni's reflection will encourage you to visit, the exhibition runs until 13th April in Down County Museum, Downpatrick.

*'I'm thrilled to be able to guide others through this amazing experience and spark their curiosity about the origins of these objects in the 'For the curious and interested exhibition.' It was fascinating helping to uncover the stories of the skilled artisans who made them and the communities they came from. It's time to share and acknowledge these unheard stories.'* Toni Campbell





### Photography

Page 15, Top: Community group in Belfast City Library. © Kieron Black.

Page 15, Bottom right: The group in Down County Museum with Curator Alan Freeburn. © Kristine Lesinska.

Page 16, Left: Curator, Dr Alicia Hughes, delivering an online workshop. © British Museum.

Page 16, Right: Community group in the Ulster Museum at the Inclusive Global Histories exhibition. © Shirley Lennon.

Page 17, Middle left: Dr Alicia Hughes and Olunmi Olisa with the ivory horn. © Tom Bevan.

Page 17, Bottom left: Community Group at the British Museum. © British Museum.

Page 17, Top right: Cartoon created as a response to the collection. © Kieron Black

Page 18, Bottom left: Ralph and Mary-Jane choosing objects in Down County Museum. © Shirley Lennon.

Page 18, Top right: Exhibition title and Anti-Slavery Coin chosen for display by the group from the Down County Museum collection. © NI Museums Council.

Page 18, Bottom right: Olunmi Olisa at the Natural History Museum. © Tom Bevan.

Page 19, Top: Ralph Forbes at the Natural History Museum. © Shirley Lennon.

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