



ICOM UK 2024 Conference

Common Ground in Northern Ireland

Accreditation Awards

Four local museums maintain Full Accreditation.

Apple Blossom Art

Community engagement bears fruit in Armagh.

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Cover photograph of NI Museums Council Museums Forum event ©NIMC thanks to Peter Carson. Top left: ICOM UK Conference at Ulster Museum © NIMC. Bottom left: North Down Museum staff Arlene Matthews Donna Wilson Stephen Brown Jonathan Magee Moira O'Rourke Ruth Verner Carol McClean celebrate the museum's 40th Anniversary, © ANDBC.

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Chair's Note



Dear friends and colleagues,

Welcome to this new edition of the NI Museums Council (NIMC) Newsletter. I am delighted to open with a reflection on the success of the Museums Forum, a pivotal gathering that has set the stage for impactful developments in our sector. Held by NIMC in September, the Forum brought together a vibrant cross-section of museum professionals, board members, and community stakeholders from across Northern Ireland. We were delighted to welcome the Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons to our event as we showcased the valuable work being done in our museums sector.

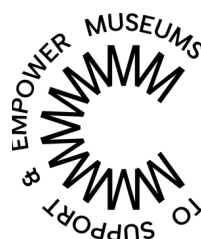
Through thoughtful presentations and discussions, we explored how museums are crucially interwoven with our communities, as well as their roles in economic and social recovery, sustainability, and innovation. This Forum has laid a strong foundation for shaping Northern Ireland's new Museum Policy, ensuring it reflects the diverse voices and needs of our communities.

The insights and commitments from the Forum will be integral to the policy's formation, guiding us in supporting an inclusive, resilient, and dynamic museum sector. I am grateful to everyone who contributed to these discussions and shared their perspectives, helping us envision a future where museums serve as cultural anchors and places of shared heritage, learning, and connection.

On behalf of the Council, I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to our outgoing Director, Johnathan Dalzell. Johnathan's leadership and dedication have significantly strengthened the Council's efforts in supporting our sector, especially in times of challenge and transformation. As he moves on to a new role on secondment, we wish him every success in this next chapter and know that his contributions will continue to benefit the wider cultural landscape. We are pleased that we are in the final stages of Director recruitment and look forward to sharing that news with you soon.

Thank you all for your continued dedication to Northern Ireland's cultural heritage. I hope this newsletter serves as a source of inspiration and insight, and I look forward to seeing how we, as a community, bring our shared vision to life.

NIMC Chair, Nora Douds



NI Museum Council Museums Forum 2024



On the 24th September the NI Museums Council (NIMC) hosted its annual Museums Forum. After the Covid-19 pandemic and sectoral capacity forced the forum to be held online, this year marked a return to an in person event at Cultra Manor at the Ulster Folk Museum.

Over 60 members of the NI museums sector attended to hear presentations of good practice and to discuss the upcoming Department for Communities (DfC) Museum Policy. Members of the DfC Policy Team joined us to meet with the sector and to hear our thoughts about the key areas that the new policy would need to cover.

The NI War Memorial, Ballymoney Museum, National Museums NI and Lisburn Museum brought objects and resources from their museums to showcase the good work that is being done and the variety of objects that our museums have to offer their communities.





To kickstart the day we were joined by Minister for Communities Gordon Lyons who spoke about the good work being done by the sector before presenting Accreditation awards to Armagh Robinson Library and No' 5 Vicars' Hill and FE McWilliam Gallery and Studio (Page 7). He also touched upon the work being done by the Executive which parallels to that of the museum sector, including anti-poverty.

The day was split into sessions covering five themes, each aligning with the NI Museums Council (NIMC) Corporate Strategy. Each session began with a presentation that reflected the theme and continued with a roundtable discussion focusing on how a new Museums Policy could best support museums in delivering on key strategic goals.

Theme 1 – Museums are connected to their communities and cultivate a shared sense of place.

Agrippa Njanina and Takura Donald Makoni spoke on the impacts of the Global Voices, Local Choices partnership project.

Theme 2 – Museums enrich peoples lives and create opportunities for enjoyment, learning and fulfilment.

Michael Fryers shared NI War Memorial's work on Victory Voices and intergenerational practice workshops.

Theme 3 – Museums drive transformation to make us more sustainable, inclusive, and innovative.

Carol Conlin and Inna Shynkevich shared experiences community engagement programmes at Armagh Robinson Library (Page 16).

Theme 4 – Museums contribute to economic and social recovery.

Lisa O'Neill of Armagh Planetarium and Observatory discussed participating in the JobShare scheme.

Theme 5 – Museums develop, protect and promote their collections and collections knowledge for the benefit of their audiences.



On behalf of National Museums NI Clare Ablett introduced their sustainable disposal of transport collection items in partnership Hydebank Wood.

The primary aim of this year's forum was to explore how a Museums Policy can best support museums in meeting the sector's strategic goals. Therefore at each roundtable, delegates were asked to discuss the theme presented and to respond to a core question of "How could/should a Museums Policy support museums to deliver against this theme?"

We thank presenters and delegates for providing insightful feedback which covered many areas, including education, infrastructure, funding, community engagement and collections. Your insights, ideas, and experiences are crucial to shaping this new policy, ensuring it is relevant, responsive, and impactful. The Policy Team collected this data and have been liaising with the NI Museums Council to discuss how to investigate and integrate the themes and information further.

Photography

Page 4, Top: Museums Forum delegates in discussion in Cultra Manor. © NI Museums Council thanks to Peter Carson.

Page 4, Bottom Left: Paul Allison of the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum discusses the Yours, Mine and Ours project with the DfC Museums Branch and Policy team. © NI Museums Council thanks to Peter Carson

Page 4, Middle Right: Jamie Austen of Ballymoney Museum shares handling collection items with DfC officials. © NI Museums Council thanks to Peter Carson.

Page 4, Bottom Right: Michael Fryer and Keith Beattie chat about the NI War Memorial's work with the DfC team. © NI Museums Council thanks to Peter Carson.

Page 5, Top: The DfC Minister Gordon Lyons addressing the Forum. © NI Museums Council thanks to Peter Carson.

Page 5 Middle Right: Agrippa Njanina sharing thoughts as part of the round table discussion feedback. © NI Museums Council thanks to Peter Carson.

News in Brief

Fermanagh County Museum Awarded a £42,000 Reimagine Grant from Art Fund

The Art Fund's Reimagine Grants program awarded £1 million to help museums and galleries across the UK tackle funding challenges and strengthen community engagement. Projects include support for sensory exhibits, mental health workshops, and school partnerships, among others.

The initiative, created in response to funding cuts, aims to bolster museums' resilience and foster creativity through community-focused projects. This year's grants are supported by Art Fund's members and partners, with calls for additional government support to sustain these crucial community spaces.

Fermanagh County Museum in Enniskillen, has been awarded £42,000 for Art In Our Hands – to reimagine how Fermanagh County Museum's collections are enjoyed through a participatory programme of creative activities that empowers and uplifts the community. In partnership with the Oak Healthy Living Centre, the project will use art and artefacts to enhance wellbeing for rurally isolated groups, people with health conditions or have experienced trauma. Museum staff will lead workshops with museum artefacts, behind-the-scenes visits and tours, culminating in a co-curated exhibition at Enniskillen Castle.



On 1st May 2024 the Cultural Philanthropy Foundation launched Culture Makes... to much applause across social media. The UK wide campaign aims to highlight 8 types of Impact by Culture and Heritage: economic impact, social benefit, innovation, educational benefit, physical health, community building, and mental health and wellbeing. This simple tool is hoped to help articulate the wide variety and depth of value that can be felt from the cultural and heritage sector, particularly in the face of continued financial difficulties.

The campaign takes a democratic approach, so anyone interested can add their voice, be that an institution or an individual. Going forward, Culture Makes will have two main strategies for delivery, both across social media. First, Collective Actions, which occur on the third or fourth Friday of the month, celebrating one of the 8 types of impact. Secondly, actions from campaign ambassadors, which take place at any time over the 8 months.

It would be great to spread the word about the excellent work done here in Northern Ireland through this campaign. Anyone interested in being involved will be provided access to a detailed Ambassador guide, filled with dates, definitions and ideas; as well as brand templates. Please take a look at [#CultureMakes](#) to see what others have been up to so far.

More information and sign up can be found at culturalphilanthropyfoundation.co.uk.

Accreditation News

We are pleased to share that four local museums have been recognised with Museum Accreditation Awards – an award for museums whose return applications have been assessed in 2024 and have maintained their Full Accreditation status. Museums who received Full Accreditation this year included; Local Council museums; Fermanagh County Museum, F.E McWilliam Gallery and Studio, and Mid-Antrim Museum, as well as Independent museum; Armagh Robinson Library and No. 5 Vicars' Hill.

Eva Lynch, Accreditation Adviser and Assessor at Northern Ireland Museums Council said "We are pleased that the dedication of our local museums to governance, collections care, and visitor experience has allowed them to maintain the Accreditation Standard. We trust this will support their ongoing growth as valuable resources for both visitors and the local community. Accreditation is a recognised national standard that reassures all stakeholders."

The Accreditation Scheme defines good practice and identifies agreed standards, thereby encouraging development. It is a baseline quality standard that helps guide museums across the UK to be the best they can be, for current and future users. Museums are required to submit their Accreditation return applications every 5 years to ensure they are continuing to maintain the standard. Although Accreditation is a national standard, it's not a 'one size fits all' model. The expectations vary for museums of different types, sizes and scopes.

Two Accreditation awards were presented on Tuesday 24th September at Cultra Manor, National Museums NI. The presentation was attended by the local museum sector and NIMC members. Department of Communities Minister Gordon Lyons and Nora Dowds, Chair of Northern Ireland Museums Council presented the museums with their Accreditation certificates on the day.

On Monday 21st October representatives for Fermanagh County Museum; Sarah McHugh and Councillor John McLaughry, received their Accreditation certificate on site at Enniskillen Castle in the new William Scott (1913–1989): 'From Life to Art' exhibition. Mid-Antrim Museum representatives Elaine Hill and Sophia Dudrow also received their Accreditation certificate onsite in the museum at The Braid, Ballymena on Thursday 17th October.

Milford House Museum was removed from accreditation because of changes to its governance.





ICOM UK Conference at the Ulster Museum: Bridging Divides Through Museums

On Friday, April 12, 2024, the Ulster Museum in Belfast hosted the ICOM UK Conference, which focused on the theme 'Common Ground: The Role of Museums in Divided Societies.' Organised by a steering group of stakeholders including NI Museums Council (NIMC), the event drew delegates from across the UK, offering a full day of insightful local and international speakers and case studies.

NIMC Development Officers Eva Lynch and Catherine Doran were among the attendees, joining colleagues to explore the significant role museums play in fostering understanding and reconciliation in divided communities. Reflecting the high interest in the topic, the event was fully booked. As part of its professional development initiative, NIMC secured four tickets for its members, integrating the conference into its 2024 training program.

The conference underscored the aim of museums not to dictate a single narrative or provide solutions but to present diverse perspectives that can contribute to a positive future. Discussions highlighted the role of conflict legacy and transformation in tourism and economic growth, the importance of reclaiming traumatic spaces for commemoration, and working at local levels to unlock community stories and humanize conflicts beyond statistics and politics. Museums and the heritage sector were shown to be crucial in creating spaces for learning, understanding, healing, and bonding.

Keynote Speakers

The day was divided into three sessions, featuring keynote speeches from Maeve McLaughlin, Manager of the Bloody Sunday Trust and Director of the Derry Model Project, and Nusrat Ahmed, Lead Curator at the South Asia Gallery, Manchester Museum.

The first keynote speaker, Maeve McLaughlin, detailed how Bloody Sunday Trust was set up in 1997 to campaign for a public enquiry but now has a role in conflict transformation. Maeve explained how the Museum of Free Derry is connected to its heritage by being situated on the site of the murders and by employing family members of the victims.

Maeve covered the creation of the Dialogue Model, leveraging insights and experiences as a blueprint for fostering dialogue among various groups, including former combatants, ex-members of the British Army, women's groups, and addressing parole issues. By facilitating dialogue, local resolutions can be reached. Maeve underscored the notion that peace is a continual process and how museums can create spaces for uncomfortable conversations and an opportunity to talk and reconcile with those you were told were your enemy. Furthermore, she advocated for incorporating this narrative of political and cultural heritage, along with reconciliation efforts, into tourism development strategies.

The second keynote address was delivered by Nusrat Ahmed, Lead Curator of the South Asia Gallery at Manchester Museum. Nusrat discussed the extensive collaborative curation process behind the Manchester

Museum South Asia gallery, emphasizing its epic scale. The exhibition delves into the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan and the profound impact of empire and colonialism on personal narratives. Nusrat acknowledged the existence of counter narratives and designed the exhibition to reflect the diversity of perspectives, highlighting the absence of consensus on these historical events.

Session 1: Old Wounds – After Conflict

Chantal Umuhoza, Curator at the Institute of National Museums of Rwanda (INMR), discussed the history of Rwanda and the 1994 Tutsi genocide. She explained that Rwanda was colonized by Germany and later Belgium, who divided the population into ethnic groups, sowing divisions that eventually led to the genocide. Over a period of 100 days, extremist Hutu forces killed more than 10,000 people daily.

Since 1994, Rwanda has embarked on a long journey of recovery. Annually, beginning on April 7th and lasting for 100 days, the country holds a commemoration period. Groups have been established for those who lost their families, providing a sense of community and support. Additionally, all museums in Rwanda collaborate on initiatives to reconcile communities.

David McGivern, Director of the Roddy McCorley Republican Heritage Centre in Belfast, explained that the Roddy McCorley Society was established in 1972 during the conflict to foster community. Starting in three council garages, West Belfast has since evolved into a cultural tourism area.

At the heritage centre, visitors can explore the republican history museum, which houses a collection of archives and artefacts. The exhibitions are designed to be truthful, personal, and non-offensive, creating an inclusive environment dedicated to addressing the conflict. The collection includes personal stories of those affected, humanizing the narrative and offering multiple perspectives.

Gerry McConville, Director of the Falls Community Council, shared the organization's transformative journey from its roots as an anti-poverty initiative to its current multifaceted approach. Today, in addition to addressing poverty, the council implements anti-sectarianism programs and maintains a community archive preserving the stories of Falls area residents. During his presentation, Gerry highlighted the St. Colmgalls regeneration project, situated in a former school bearing the visible scars of past conflict. This project encompasses rented office spaces, conference facilities, and a robust program of social engagement. Looking ahead, the next phase involves establishing a visitor centre, which hinges on fostering positive relationships within the Falls



"Photo: Session 1 Old Wounds – After Conflict.
© NIMC.

community and extending invitations to Loyalist and Unionist activists. These collaborative efforts are essential for the centre's success and its role in promoting understanding and unity.

Finally, Karen Logan, Senior Curator of History at National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI), provided insights into the "Troubles and Beyond" exhibition. Karen addressed the ethical considerations inherent in the exhibition's content, emphasizing the responsibilities regarding victims, survivors, and community relations.

During her presentation, Karen delved into the complexities arising from the lack of consensus on the Troubles. She underscored the challenge of navigating a landscape where there exists a shared history but not a shared memory. This nuanced perspective underscores the importance of approaching the exhibition with sensitivity and a commitment to fostering understanding and reconciliation.

Session 2: Borders and Boundaries

Julie Andrews, Director of Linen Hall Library, covered various projects, including the digitization project 'Divided Society 1990-1998,' exhibitions on the social impacts of the Troubles, and intergenerational work. She also highlighted the 'Changemakers' exhibition, which explores contemporary and historical issues that students and young people have campaigned on from the 1960s to the present day.

Elma Hasimbegovic, Director of the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Board Member of the Balkan Museum Network, took the floor next. Elma's primary focus lies on the Siege of Sarajevo from 1992 to 1995, echoing Karen's earlier point about the absence of consensus regarding the historical events and facts.

Elma elaborated on the museum's approach to promoting shared heritage and illuminating the daily lives of civilians during the siege. Rather than relying solely on institutional collections, the museum prioritizes object-based collections donated by citizens. They have distilled their approach into four guiding principles:

- *"Bottom Up" methodology, emphasizing community involvement and grassroots perspectives.*
- *"Flexibility" to adapt to the evolving needs and narratives of the community.*
- *"Networking" to foster collaboration and exchange among museums and other organizations.*
- *"Strengthening contacts and collaboration" to broaden engagement beyond museum walls and encompass wider societal organizations.*

These principles underpin the museum's efforts to provide a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of history while fostering connections and collaboration across communities and institutions.

Niall Kerr, Head of Heritage and Community Relations at the Nerve Centre, shared insights into the organisation's past endeavours in creative media and arts, highlighting their seamless integration within the sector. He discussed the impact of large-scale projects like "Our Place in Space," which provide opportunities for global engagement, alongside local initiatives such as filmmaking, which empower individuals by nurturing creative skills, confidence, and self-esteem within their communities.

Niall also delved into the "Making the Future" program, a five-year endeavour utilising collections to spark dialogue across diverse backgrounds, prompting reflection on our collective past, present, and future as a society. Additionally, he introduced "We Can Do Better," an arts project aimed at reimagining Northern Ireland's post-conflict future through street art and augmented reality. As part of this project, the team has developed an immersive AR app for Downhill House, enriching the visitor experience and fostering deeper connections to history and heritage.

Brenda Malone, Curator at the National Museum of Ireland (NMI), shared insights into the Conflict and Legacy network and the museum's transition towards greater citizen curatorship. By prioritizing communities, NMI is actively working to decentralize its authoritative voice.

This shift has enabled NMI to establish a Traveller community collection and embark on curating the National Centre for Research and Remembrance. This center, slated to become a national site of conscience, is being developed in collaboration with survivors of the Magdalene Laundries. By engaging directly with affected communities, NMI aims to foster inclusive and authentic narratives that reflect the diverse experiences of Ireland's history.

Session 3: Four Nations: For Communities

Nia Williams, Director of Learning and Public Programmes at Amgueddfa Cymru (National Museums Wales), discussed the museum's Strategy 2030, centred on the vision of becoming a museum accessible to all. Central to this strategy is the development of the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan and the LGBTQ+ Action for Wales, reflecting the organization's commitment to inclusivity as a core principle.

To realise these objectives, Amgueddfa Cymru has implemented various initiatives. For instance, they launched Bloedd AC, providing paid opportunities for museum activists aged 18–26. Additionally, they introduced 'Reframing Picton,' an interpretative exhibition that confronts rather than conceals difficult stories within the museum collection. These efforts underscore the museum's dedication to addressing challenging narratives and fostering a more inclusive and diverse representation of Welsh history and culture.

Dr. William Mitchell, Project Coordinator of the Action for Community Transformation (ACT) Initiative, shared insights into their work with former combatants and civilian members of the UVF. He emphasized the sensational discourse surrounding the history of loyalism perpetuated by the media and politicians, highlighting the necessity to challenge preconceptions of the community.

As part of their efforts, the ACT Initiative has developed the 'Unheard Voices: Ordinary Men, Extraordinary Time 1972–75' exhibition. This exhibition amplifies the voices of individuals convicted of political killings, shedding light on their experiences. Notably, it reveals that the average age of these individuals was only 18.5 years old, challenging stereotypes and offering a nuanced perspective on the complexities of conflict and its impact on young people within the community.



Dr. John Giblin, Keeper of the Department of Global Arts, Cultures, and Design at National Museums Scotland (NMS) discussed their Exchange Community-Led Collections Research initiative aimed at diversifying voices within their archives. This effort seeks to include perspectives that were previously absent.

In addition to facilitating this research, NMS also recognizes its duty of care to participants, offering emotional support to those delving into challenging topics. This echoes Brenda's point about the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) providing welfare assistance to individuals sharing stories of the Magdalene Laundries.

Moreover, John emphasized that the motivation for decolonization efforts should not solely revolve around improving collection information. Instead, their most successful projects prioritize skills development, participation, and career opportunities as primary motivations. Further details on their project work are available on the NMS website.

Anne Bradley, Curator of Social and Oral History at the National Coal Mining Museum for England, discussed an exhibition commemorating the 40th anniversary of the strikes, acknowledging the persisting diversity of perspectives. The local experiences were categorized into three groups represented in the exhibition: those who went on continuous strike, those who initially struck but returned to work, and those who did not participate in the strike at all. The museum aimed for the exhibition to focus on people rather than politics and to highlight experiences rather than opinions.

To achieve this goal, the exhibition design company opted not to use a curatorial voice. Instead, they conveyed the story through people's quotes, allowing for the potential of refreshing panels in the future. Given the enduring division within the community regarding individuals' actions during the strike, the exhibition was designed with fixed zones. This design feature enables visitors to explore the entire interpretation or select specific components according to their comfort level.

The ICOM UK Conference at the Ulster Museum underscored the vital role museums play in bridging divides and fostering reconciliation. By presenting multiple perspectives and creating spaces for dialogue, museums can significantly contribute to healing and understanding in divided societies.

"Photographs: Page 8 Top and Page 10 Top: ICOM UK Conference 2024 at the Ulster Museum. © NIMC.



Education and Outreach Forum 2024



On May 2, 2024, museum professionals from across the island of Ireland gathered in Dublin for the 2024 IMA-NIMC Education and Outreach Forum. This annual event, established by the Irish Museum Association (IMA) in 2006, has become a cornerstone for museums focused on learning and outreach to exchange experiences and foster networking opportunities. In 2020, the NI Museums Council (NIMC) joined as partners, enhancing the forum's scope and facilitating cross-border collaboration.

Over the past 16 years, the forum has become a staple in the museum sector calendar, reflecting the evolving challenges faced locally and globally. Themes have ranged from responses to economic pressures and climate emergencies to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Since 2020, a recurring focus has been the sector's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Initially, discussions centred on rapid adaptations to new challenges. By 2024, presentations showcased the pandemic as a model of what the sector can achieve when priorities shift from routine tasks to addressing urgent needs.

ElInnovative Approaches and New Horizons

The first session, "The Art Library: An Innovative Approach to Sharing Artworks with Isolated Communities," was delivered by Meadhbh Healy from the Glucksman at University College Cork. Developed

during the pandemic, the Art Library project loans pieces from the UCC Art Collection to schools, libraries, and emergency accommodation centres. This initiative has evolved, with artists now working with groups in these centres to create new art reflecting themes important to the communities.

In "Heritage 4 Health - Social Prescribing Post Covid," Beth Frazer from the Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) highlighted the Heritage4Health project. Partnering with Spring and 10 Healthy Living Centres, NIEL developed a social prescribing pilot project, resulting in four case studies and a podcast now available for public access.

Maria Cagney, Curator of Education and Outreach at the Hunt Museum, presented "How (Dis)Ability is Driving Positive Change at the Hunt Museum." Over two years, the museum co-created projects with visually impaired and autistic audiences. The 'Seeing without Sight' initiative harnessed the lived experience of people with visual impairments to co-create multi-sensory solutions and allow them to be co-producers rather than consumers.

Through touch, the team investigated objects and co-created audience descriptions. The participants recorded 9 descriptions, with the museum working with them on their pace, intonation and how to memorise when there is no visible script to read from. 3-D models were created by the University of Limerick and our own Lisburn Museum provided textiles for some of the pieces to add relevant texture. Maria explained that outcome of the project has been interpretation that has benefitted all visitors, not just those with visual impairments.

Maria also touched upon the work undertaken by the museum to secure autism friendly accreditation which included training and development of extensive pre-visit resources. The Hunt Museum is also provided a 6-month paid role for somebody with autism and the creation of working groups consisting of people with autism to assist the museum in their future work.



"Photo: Beth Frazer NIEL spoke of one of the Heritage 4 Health visits to Armagh Robinson Library and Armagh Cathedral. © NIMC.

Community Engagement and Cultural Bridging

The "In Conversation" session titled "In Focus: Ukraine" featured the Museum Culture Club (Kerry County Museum) and the Ukrainian Creative Hub (Museum of Literature Ireland) giving examples of work done in both rural and urban spaces.

The Culture Club project addressed the needs of the approximately 8,000 Ukrainian refugees in Kerry, removing barriers such as entry costs, language and lack of awareness of family activities. Claudia Köhler, Education, Community & Outreach Officer of Kerry County Museum, explained how the museum recruited three Ukrainian volunteers, waived entry fees for those from the Ukrainian community and sought translators. The museum then worked with the community to identify what they wanted and where their skills lay resulting in a programme of cultural activities. Claudia handed over to Olena Tsarenko, a participant in the programme, who gave a moving testimony on what the activities have meant to her and the mental health and wellbeing of the Ukrainian community.

Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) has provided free memberships for their local Ukrainian families and developed the Ukrainian Creative Hub, providing a space for creative expression and community engagement. Lily Cahill, Learning Manager at MoLI, explained how the work began in October 2022 with one participant but has developed into a three Phase project. Assisted by interpreter Kate van Khauste, the wide range of topics of the workshops, from hand crafts to writing a collective poem, encouraged participants to chat, share their creative works, and showcase their talents.



"Photo: A moving 'In Conversation' with representatives from MoLI, the Ukrainian community and Kerry County Museum. © NIMC.

Dr Kirstie McAdoo from Airfield Estate introduced "Soil Your Pants for Science! The World of Soil Experience," a unique exhibition teaching children about soil. The World of Soil Experience, a unique interactive exhibition where the public are transported "underground" for soil experiments, worm hunts, and planting activities. For those who can't visit, the website features fun citizen science experiments that can be tried at home and used in schools.

Glebe House and Gallery, a historic home in Donegal, has long been a hub for educational programming, attracting around 2,000 visitors annually from May to September.

In "Glebe Gallery Ancient Classroom" Adrian Kelly, Director of the Glebe Gallery Ancient Classroom, explained that increasing demand and the limitations of the historic building necessitated additional space. In response, the team designed and commissioned an outdoor classroom, which can be reserved by educational facilitators and accommodates up to 30 children. This innovative space allows students to learn in a natural setting while providing protection from the elements. The outdoor classroom has been a resounding success, welcoming over 4,000 children and adults in 2023.



"Photo: Shirin Murphy and Helen Jackson presented on 'Re-imagining the Islandmagee Witches'. © NIMC.

Narrative Techniques and Historical Engagement

In Session 7, "Story vs Storytelling," Catherine McGuinness, Research and Education Officer at Cavan County Museum, emphasized the vital role of storytelling in bringing museum collections to life. She noted that while museum collections often lack impact without accompanying stories, educators are seldom trained in traditional storytelling methods.

The "Border Talk" project addressed this gap by partnering with the Armstrong Storytelling Trust and Storytellers Ireland to offer four rounds of storytelling training for museum educators. Catherine highlighted that Irish storytelling is distinct from traditional museum education, focusing on narrative rather than history, with a conversational style and flow. This approach can be used to educate, reminisce, and tackle difficult topics, serving as a healing tool and bridging generational and cultural divides.

In "Re-imagining the Islandmagee Witches," we explored an exhibition and engagement program designed to introduce the story of the 1711 Islandmagee witch trials in Carrickfergus to new audiences. This initiative was a collaborative effort

between Carrickfergus Museum and a multidisciplinary team from Ulster University. Dr Helen Jackson, Senior Lecturer in Interactive Media, and Shirin Murphy, Collections Access Officer at Carrickfergus Museum, outlined the project's development, which began with research focused on incorporating new technologies and creative works.

One of the highlights was a Virtual Reality (VR) experience, allowing users to immerse themselves in the story and understand what it felt like to be accused of witchcraft in 1711. The exhibition employed a range of interpretative techniques and activities to make the historical narrative accessible and engaging. A key focus was providing a platform to discuss contemporary issues related to gender, social inclusion, and disability.

Helen and Shirin noted that the exhibition attracted an unexpectedly broad range of age groups, demonstrating its intergenerational appeal. However, they acknowledged that their evaluation process had limitations, particularly in gathering detailed feedback on the VR experience. This underscored the need for more comprehensive evaluation methods in future projects.



"Photo: Hannah Parker and Bronagh Murray presented on HERoNI's Archaeology 20230 project. © NIMC.

The penultimate session featured Hannah Parker and Bronagh Murray, curatorial archaeologists from the Historic Environment Record of Northern Ireland (HERoNI). They discussed "Archaeology 2030: A Strategic Approach for Northern Ireland," which aims to make archaeology accessible and valued by everyone, supported by a robust, connected sector. Their year-long outreach included events aligned with European Archaeology Days, NI Science Festival, and the European Association of Archaeologists' annual conference held in Belfast in 2023. HERoNI's move to the Titanic Quarter in Belfast allowed them to exhibit unseen items from their collection. Hannah and Bronagh shared that they couldn't predict public interest and emphasized the need for more outreach to enhance accessibility and diversity.

In the final session, "Making Our Own Histories," Helen Beaumont discussed the Decade of Centenaries Artist in Residence project (2021–2024). As an Education & Outreach Officer at the National Museum of Ireland, she detailed the museum education team's involvement, which included the Young People's Assembly. This initiative collaborated with five post-primary schools across Ireland to create a manifesto for the country's future.

Helen also highlighted the public engagement program, inviting groups to participate and create art designed to evoke audience responses. A wall of names at the exhibition honours the contributions of these participants.

The 2024 IMA–NIMC Education and Outreach Forum showcased the resilience, innovation, and dedication of museum professionals across Ireland. Through shared experiences and collaborative projects, the forum continues to inspire and drive positive change within the museum sector and the communities they serve.



"Photo: Helen Beaumont discussed the Decade of Centenaries Artist in Residence project (2021–2024)© NIMC.

NIMC Training Update

Since our last Newsletter the NI Museums Council has collaborated with the Irish Museums Association (IMA) to deliver the 2024 Education and Outreach Forum (pgs. 12–14) and has assisted with the delivery of the ICOM UK Conference in April (pgs. 8–11), including subsidising places for four of its members to attend.

We invited a Dementia Ambassador to deliver an online Dementia Friends information session on behalf of the Alzheimer's Society. We have also invited GLAM Cares NI to present on wellbeing in the sector and Kids in Museums to look at Creating Family Friendly Museums.

Our LET'S TALK: FOBP event featured speakers from the Natural History Museum who covered the 'Fixing Our Broken Planet' project and invited members to join the Community of Practice. LET'S TALK: Redevelopment & Reimagining's focused on new projects in the sector, including a speaker from the recently opened Perth Museum.

At our Museums Forum and AGM (pgs. 4–5) on 24th September we enjoyed a keynote from Department for Communities Minister Gordon Lyons and inspiring presentations from across the sector.

We worked with National Museums NI to host free sessions on Collections Care and Copyright in November.

Our upcoming training events include:

- *LET'S TALK: Funding – 13th January 2025, online.*
- *Members Dublin Study Trip – 21st January 2025, EPIC Irish Emigration Museum*
- *Poverty Proofing – 30th January 2025, online.*
- *LET'S TALK: Museums and Digital – 25th February 2025.*
- *Fixing Our Broken Planet Study Day – Save the date: 11th March 2025, in person the Ulster Museum.*
- *Members Study Trip – 9th May 2025, Hillsborough Castle*

If you would like to know more about any of these sessions, please reach out to catherine.doran@nimc.co.uk

Or if you would like to hear about upcoming events, please join our mailing list and visit our website and social media.



Apple Blossom Art Exhibition in Armagh Robinson Library

Armagh Robinson Library Continue Warm Relationship With Local Ukrainian Families.

The Global Voices Local Choices Project has provided a positive legacy for Armagh Robinson Library and members of the local Ukrainian community. Local families were willing to work with the museum on a new project this year. The project centred on the themes of identity and integration, with the families choosing to paint pictures of apple blossom because County Armagh is known as the orchard county of Ireland and because they have been made very welcome to County Armagh. Their intention is to bring their artwork back to Ukraine to hang in their own homes.

The project started in February 2024 with eight members of the local Ukrainian families, four adults and four young people, working with acrylic artist, Patricia McMurray. In addition to the eight artworks, a special poem to complement the exhibition was written by local man, Malachi Kelly, and was on display.

The Museum's Education and Outreach Officer, Ursula Monaghan, said, "Armagh Robinson Library is very keen to support outreach programmes which make a genuine difference in people's lives. Being actively involved in the delivery of this project, I have witnessed at first-hand the positive benefits that these families have received, by providing them with a platform to connect with the heritage of Armagh, and create their own positive perspective of the beauty of Armagh, as their place of refuge and safety, at a time when they are dealing with the trauma of war in their own country."

Participants commented on the artwork:

"While painting the picture, I experienced feelings of peace of mind, admiration and gratitude. Prolonged internal pain continues to leave wounds in our hearts, but a person's natural desire for love, goodness and beauty heals and awakens feelings of tenderness, purity and sincerity. For me, the branch of an apple tree is the flowering of life" (Olena Kulaga)

"Blooming apple tree" (Nicole Kulaga)

"I love botanical illustration because it is so delicate and beautiful and has a scientific meaning at the same time. Apple blossom reminds me of my birthday time in Ukraine and at the same time apples are symbol of County Armagh, land that became refuge for me and my sons for two years already. Of course apple blossom also means that spring is in full bloom which promises many sunny happy days for the nearest few months" (Maryna Opanasenko)

"I see in this blossom something deeper than just a beautiful flower, the image of the king bloom symbolises the cyclical nature of life and the eternal process of renewal. It reminds us that despite the fickleness of time and place, our roots and our heritage will always remain with us and will continuously evolve, just as the apple tree does through the seasons" (Inna Shynkevich)

*"Nature is very strong and brave!
Even during war flowers bloom"
(Oksana Llashenko)*

*"Spring looked at my little
window" (Daryna Llashenko)*

*"Весна, спокій, цвітіння!"
"Spring, calm, bloom"! (Sofiiia Rubas)*

*"Beautiful dreaming blossoming
apple tree landscape. The beauty
of nature even in children's
dreams" (Valeriia Rubas)*

Funding for this project was made possible thanks to the support of the Esme Mitchell Trust and Social Enterprise Academy, as part of the outreach project 'Steps to Sustainability'.



During European Heritage Open Day weekend in early September, Armagh Robinson Library and No 5 Vicars' Hill were delighted to host an exhibition on Ukrainian embroidery ideated and curated by their friends in the Ukrainian community.

Photography, page 16 top: Apple blossom artists with project coordinator Ursula Monaghan and artist Patricia McMurray. © Armagh Robinson Library (ARL), thanks to Ian Maginess.

Page 17, Bottom: Ukrainian families pose with embroidery. © ARL, thanks to Ian Maginess.

North Down Museum Celebrates 40th Anniversary

The Northern Ireland Museums Council is proud to celebrate a major milestone for one of its member institutions, as North Down Museum marked its 40th anniversary with a special event on Wednesday, 16 October. The event commemorated 40 years since the museum first opened its doors as The Heritage Centre on 16 October 1984. Over the last four decades, the museum has grown into a vital cultural resource, earning official museum accreditation in 2007, which it has retained ever since.

The anniversary event was attended by The Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Alistair Cathcart, along with past and present museum staff and other invited guests.



"The Mayor, reflecting on the museum's growth and significance, stated:

"Since the museum's completion in 1989, our heritage service has grown from strength to strength, evolving from a small visitors' centre into a fully accredited museum service. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed over the years – our supporters, donors, and visitors. Most importantly, I'd like to acknowledge the hard work of the museum staff, both past and present, for their dedication in maintaining and expanding this vital community service" – Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Alistair Cathcart

Museum Manager Arlene Matthews also spoke at the event, expressing pride in the museum's continuous development and the dedication of its staff.

"Here at the museum, our staff are dedicated to continuously improving and evolving our service, discovering new artefacts and history throughout the borough and finding new and exciting ways to tell these stories. We see the museum as a place where everyone is welcome to visit, to learn, and to share."
 – Museum Manager Arlene Matthews

To coincide with the anniversary, North Down Museum has launched a special exhibition titled North Down Museum at 40. This exhibition takes visitors on a journey through the museum's history, from its humble beginnings as a modest collection housed in just two rooms to the vibrant institution it is today, attracting over 70,000 visitors each year. The exhibition is housed in the museum's Community Gallery and will be open until 2 February 2025.

This anniversary celebration not only marks a reflection on the museum's past but also signals its continued commitment to providing a welcoming space for learning, exploration, and the preservation of local history. As North Down Museum enters its fifth decade, it remains a cherished part of the community and a key contributor to Northern Ireland's cultural heritage.



Photography

Page 18, Top: Staff, friends and supporters gathered to celebrate North Down Museum's 40th Anniversary.
 © NI Museums Council.

Page 18, Bottom : North Down Museum Manager Arlene Matthews, with The Mayor of Ards and North Down, Councillor Alistair Cathcart, and NI Museums Council Development Officer Eva Lynch. © ANDBC.

Page 19, Bottom: 'North Down Museum at 40' exhibition in the museum's Community Gallery, open until 2 February 2025. © NI Museums Council.

Objects, Exhibitions and Why History (Still) Matters:

'Cabinets of Curiosity' at Queen's University Belfast, and the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

Queens University Belfast history student Zoe Peden shares her experience co-curating an exhibition with Armagh Observatory and Planetarium.

Whenever I tell someone that I am studying a history degree, they generally assume that I must want to go into teaching. I used to agree with them, but a second-year history module, 'Cabinets of Curiosity: Museums Past and Present' at Queen's University Belfast, changed that. I selected this module because it included a collaboration with the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (AOP) in creating a student-led exhibition. This experience allowed me to see a whole new side of my degree and to interact with brilliant staff in the museum and heritage sector who clearly loved what they did.

In February, our class went on a day trip to AOP, where heritage staff Matthew McMahon, Heather Alexander and Rok Nežič, each led workshops on archivist work and handling objects safely, label-writing and creating an engaging exhibition space, and the history of astronomy at Armagh respectively.

When I was told that the exhibition would be student-led, it certainly wasn't a misnomer. AOP staff explained the provenance behind several objects, and their connections to Armagh (where known), but selecting objects for inclusion in the exhibition, writing the corresponding labels, and encouraging the public to engage with them, would be our responsibility.

The collaboration and effort required behind the scenes to make exhibitions as engaging for the public as possible is astounding. Despite my fear that I was too inexperienced and under-qualified to curate an exhibition, being able to bounce ideas between the members of my group, build on tutor and peer feedback, which invaluabley improved early label drafts, and justify my own creative decisions was liberating.



My group chose for the display a stereoscopic viewer owned by a former director of the Observatory, Joseph Alfred Hardcastle. The human story behind the object drew me in. Hardcastle died in 1917, before he was able to take up the post in Armagh, but his wife Theresa brought the viewer with her to Armagh, where she helped ready the living quarters of the observatory for its next occupant. More than that, though, Theresa made a significant contribution to the observatory and its meteorological records during her time there. I felt that, through our object, we could shine a light on her life and achievements. Researching this object led me to interesting places: from the AOP website to museum catalogues and articles on the emergence of VR technology in Victorian Britain. I wanted to make people see the importance of our objects. I wanted to illustrate that they were pieces of a person's life, and to engage a modern-day audience with that person's story through an object they once owned.

On installation day in May, a small group of students travelled with our tutors to AOP to install the exhibition. Once we were satisfied with the arrangement of objects and labels, and the stories they were telling, the glass cases were closed.

I hope the resultant exhibition gives passing visitors pause and enables them to draw connections between the past and present. Collaboration was key in telling these stories and I definitely enjoyed the collaboration between our module and AOP. When people ask me what I might do when I finish my degree, I now know what to tell them.



Photography: Pg 20 top: AOP welcome QUB History students. Middle: Zoe Peden.

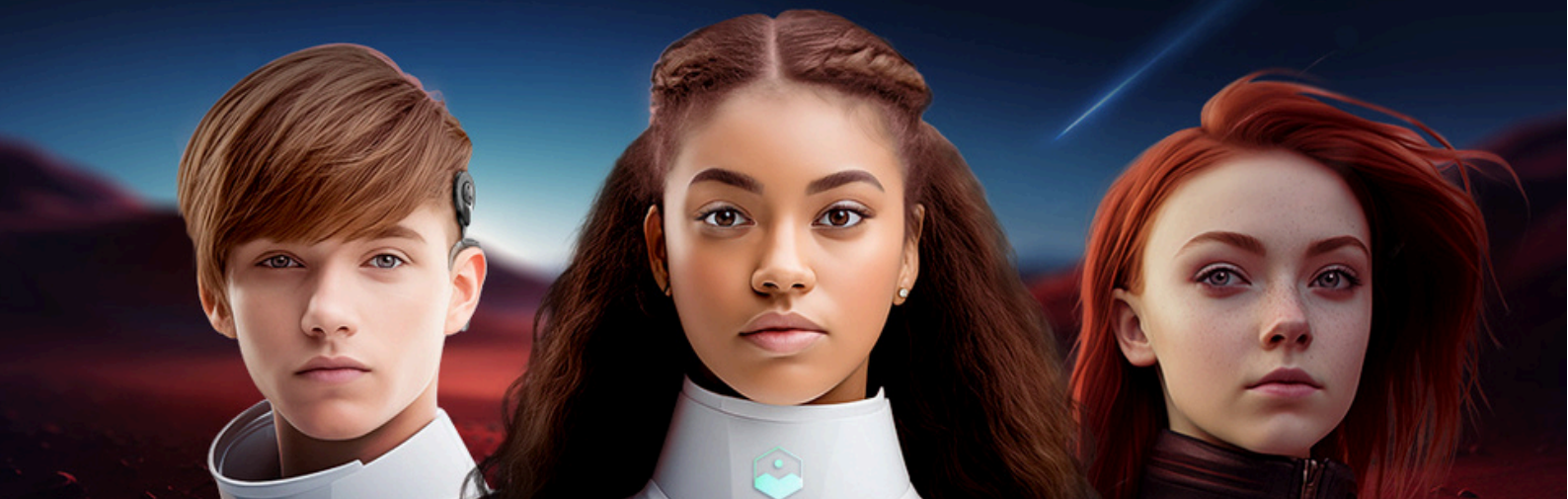
Pg 21 Top right: Stereoscopic viewer formerly owned by Joseph Alfred Hardcastle (JAH 17).

All photos thanks to Zoe Peden.

Pg 21 Bottom: QUB students at Armagh Observatory.



MARSEUM



Back in January 2024, Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) launched a new, freely accessible learning resource Marseum in collaboration with Daydream Believers. Marseum has been designed to inspire young people to grow their confidence, develop employability skills and learn more about museums and galleries.

As part of the first human settlement on Mars in 2050, learners will help design a new exhibition for the first museum on the Red Planet. After learning about the purpose of museums, the Marseum Mission crew will create an exhibition to showcase stories from Earth to the young people of Mars.

The learning resource is designed as a teacher-led learning experience, which is then enriched by the support and input of a local museum. Museum based educators and learning officers can easily adapt the resource as a learning experience solely delivered by a museum. Marseum is split into five teacher-led sessions, approximately two hours long, with a three day museum-based experience at the end.

Marseum was created in collaboration with Daydream Believers as part of the Workforce for the Future project, delivered in partnership with Developing the Young Workforce. We are working with museums and schools in lower Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) areas. The project is being delivered in 8 different council areas in Scotland over two years. With the support of Marseum, pupils are working to co-create a resource with their local museum, learning about the diversity of job roles in the sector and increasing their employability skills. Working with first and second year pupils who are pre-subject choices allows for flexibility in the curriculum to enable effective participation in this project.

The Marseum resource is free and available for anyone to download from the MGS website, to use, and run their own project, thanks to the support of Postcode Culture Trust. Funds are raised by players of People's Postcode Lottery and awarded by Postcode Culture Trust.

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