

Museums & Galleries Month 2008

Ideas and Innovation is the national theme for Museums and Galleries Month 2008. In the North West, we are using this opportunity to celebrate and promote the contribution museums and galleries make to the region's cultural heritage.

The third weekend in May welcomes entertaining evening events at three museums across Manchester. Dubbed 'Museum Nights', the late openings will allow venues to collaborate on a national campaign and host new events to attract new audiences.

- ★ On Friday 16 May, The Manchester Museum is hosting an evening inspired by the Lindow Man exhibition, of 'flash fiction', creative writing with some bog related storytelling.
- ★ Music fans can head to the Whitworth Art Gallery on Saturday 17 May for live music.
- ★ Sunday 18 May, Gunther von Hagens' Body Worlds exhibition at the Museum of Science & Industry is the inspiration for a comedy night.

The Harris Museum & Art Gallery, in Preston, unveils the redevelopment of

Harris Museum & Art Gallery



its Ceramics and Glass Gallery, on Wednesday 14 May. The collection will be entirely re-presented to tell a wider range of stories about how ceramics and glass have been made and used in Britain through the ages.

Bolton Museum & Archive Service is celebrating 125 years since Bolton Council appointed a professional curator with a series of free lunchtime talks.

Renaissance North West is organising a Museums & Galleries Month

debate. Chaired by Professor Jennifer Latto, Chair of the HLF North West Committee, panel members from across the region will discuss Do Museums Matter?

16 May, 4pm, Urbis, Manchester, to book a place contact: Jennie Crawford j.crawford@manchester.gov.uk

For more information about Museums and Galleries Month visit: www.mgm.org.uk

PROFILE: ALEX SAINT Strategic Audience Development Consultant



I believe that museums and galleries should make a tangible and visible difference to the communities they serve, and that is what makes the Renaissance in the Region's transformational agenda appealing.

Working as consultant to help shape and deliver the audience development strategy, I know that the real agents of change are talented and committed museum professionals and it is a privilege learning from and sharing ideas with them.

Many venues can now confidently assert that visitors are responding with enthusiasm and in ever-larger numbers to the improved services and 'new ways of doing'. We have solid research evidence, and we are applying it ever more creatively to inform strategic planning and day-to-day decision-making.

So how do we maintain, develop and spread that? I am convinced that partnership holds the key to our enjoying greater impact, visibility and value – with visitors and stakeholders – and it is the work I do to help ignite new collaborations that adds value. Developing the Standpoint benchmark for Greater Manchester Museums Forum; co-ordinating Manchester Museums Marketing Consortium in its work to deliver to the City's 'original modern branding' and to build links with cultural tourism partners; and exploring new ways of segmenting the visitor market, are just some examples of the dynamic collaborations currently challenging, inspiring and driving me.

Alex Saint works with Andrew Palmer as joint Strategic Audience Development consultants for Renaissance North West.

Pilot Training Programme for Museum Professionals

The Centre for Museology at the University of Manchester, in partnership with Renaissance North West has been awarded funding from the North West Universities Association to pilot a training programme for museum staff working in the region. The pilot will begin in November and will enable 7 participants, who are relatively new to the museum profession, to acquire knowledge, understanding and skills for personalised professional development.

For more information contact Helen Rees Leahy, Director, The Centre for Museology: helen.rees@manchester.ac.uk, or visit the website: www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/museology/



Steve Devine

Manchester Museum

Contact us

Emma Anderson, Renaissance North West Manager
0161 235 8822 e.anderson@manchester.gov.uk

Myna Trustram, Renaissance North West Research Manager
0161 235 8849 m.trustram@manchester.gov.uk

Jennie Crawford, Renaissance North West Communications & Events Officer
0161 235 8810 j.crawford@manchester.gov.uk

Katie Athey, Renaissance North West Project Support Officer
0161 235 8825 k.athey@manchester.gov.uk

Jane Fletcher, Renaissance North West Education Development Manager
01228 618767 / 07854 921522 jane@carlisle.gov.uk

Alex Saint & Andrew Palmer, Renaissance North West Strategic Audience Development Consultants
alex@alexssaint.com / andrew@palmersquared.co.uk

Carli Douglas, Collections for the Future Development Officer: Roman Heritage
0161 306 1772 / 07867 528370
carli.douglas@manchester.ac.uk

Kaye Tetlow, Collections Liaison Officer
01772 53407068 / 07500 065537
kaye.tetlow@mus.lancscc.gov.uk

Paul Fraser Webb, Collections Review Consultant
paul@paul-fraser-webb.co.uk

www.mlanorthwest.org.uk/museumslibrariesarchives/museums/renaissancenw/

RENAISSANCE
NORTH WEST
museums for
changing lives



Events & Training

7 April, 12 May and 2 June Pest Management FREE
Various locations. For the one nearest you contact Diane Rushbrook, diane.rushbrook@mlanorthwest.org.uk

8 April, 13 May and 3 June Environmental Monitoring FREE
Various locations. For the one nearest you contact Diane Rushbrook as above

24 April Archives in Museums FREE MLA North West Offices, Warrington. Contact Diane Rushbrook as above

7 May Storytelling as a technique for developing family audiences FREE Lancashire Conservation Studios. Contact Diane Rushbrook as above

15 May North West Federation Annual General Meeting followed by **Shout It From the Rooftops session**
Atkinson Art Gallery and Southport Arts Centre, Southport. Contact: Emma Varnam, emma.varnam@tameside.gov.uk or visit www.nwfed.org.uk

16 May 4pm Do Museums Matter? A Museums & Galleries Month debate FREE URBIS Manchester. Contact Jennie Crawford j.crawford@manchester.gov.uk

20 May 1 - 4:30pm Launch of Museums Association Disposals Toolkit FREE Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle. Contact Jennie Crawford as above

21 May 10:30 - 2pm Museums Association Sustainable Collections workshop FREE Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle. Contact Jennie Crawford as above

30 May Working with Large Objects FREE Museum of Science & Industry, Manchester. Contact Kaye Tetlow, kaye.tetlow@mus.lancscc.gov.uk

6 June Writing for the Public (and displays) FREE MLA North West Offices, Warrington. Contact Diane Rushbrook as above

10 June Storytelling as a technique for developing family audiences FREE Ellesmere Port Boat Museum. Contact Diane Rushbrook as above

11 June After Accreditation: What Next for Documentation? FREE MLA North West Offices, Warrington. Contact Diane Rushbrook as above

24 June 1 - 4:30pm Launch of Museums Association Disposals Toolkit FREE Manchester Museum. To book a place ring the MA on 020 7426 6955

25 June 10:30 - 2pm Museums Association Sustainable Collections workshop FREE Manchester Museum. To book a place ring the MA on 020 7426 6955

2 July Labeling and Marking MLA North West Offices, Warrington. Contact Diane Rushbrook as above

17 July Working with Costume FREE
Lancashire Conservation Studios, Preston. Contact Kaye Tetlow as above

The 2008 Curating for the Future conference will take place 8-9 September, at the University of Manchester. It explores the theme of Relevance, Meaning and Responsibility in using our collections. The programme will be announced in the July issue of the Renaissance North West newsletter.

www.mlanorthwest.org.uk



RENAISSANCE
NORTH WEST
museums for
changing lives

Issue Five – April 2008

A single
Renaissance plan
for the North West

Delivering Collections
for the Future

Museums & Galleries
Month 2008

A single Renaissance plan for the North West

“ We have chosen to prioritise... funding for the Renaissance programme, which will ensure that we can conserve, and build on, the great advances that we have made in our regional museums. Regional museums can provide the first experience of museum visiting for those who cannot travel to the national museums. If children go to museums, they are much more likely to go as adults. ”

Margaret Hodge, Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport



Whitworth Art Gallery

Claire Wood

We have submitted the Renaissance North West Business Plan for 2008-09, which builds on the achievements of the last two years, to MLA Council.

A major theme of this plan is increasing engagement. So next year we are investing nearly £1million in developing learning services to reach more children and young people across the region, delivering imaginative and creative learning opportunities for all, from toddlers to school leavers and adult learners.

The North West Hub venues are doing this through a range of strategic partnerships: with museums in Greater Manchester, Preston and across Cumbria, and with regional schools, agencies and Children's Services. Some museums are now up to capacity with school visits, so we are focussing on developing the quality of the learning experience – and developing dialogues with teachers to inform this. We are also taking learning services out to schools to engage with children in different ways. By the end of March 2009, we hope to have compelling evidence that shows the powerful impact on children of experiencing the 'real thing' – working with museum objects, exploring real works of art, visiting our impressive museum and gallery spaces.

£350,000 will be spent on supporting posts, opportunities and resources through the ambitious Collections for the Future programme, including the provision of Accreditation advice. Regional museums will also benefit from Renaissance North West.

Virginia Tandy, Director, Manchester City Galleries, (Hub Lead)

A new era for MLA Council

“ *MLA Council is intent on putting culture at the heart of new communities: helping schools ensure every child has a right to experience a variety of high-quality culture; leading our sector for the Cultural Olympiad; advancing museums' strategies for improvement; finding new ways to share information in a digital age; and ensuring that services exceed public expectations.* ”

Roy Clare, Chief Executive, MLA Council

The MLA Board has decided to scale back funding to the nine regional MLA agencies and to replace them with a unified structure. By April 2009, smaller regional MLA expert teams will be better placed to work with other cultural services and a joined-up government presence in each region. The changes pave the way for the outcome of an ongoing regional

review chaired by Culture Minister, Margaret Hodge. MLA Council is fully engaged in the review and strongly supports the twin objectives for greater operational effectiveness and cost-efficiency.

It heralds a new era for MLA Council, which is being reconfigured as a single national entity based principally in Birmingham, and which intends to run itself more economically to maximise front line investment.

There will be consultation with local government, community groups and sector specialists to identify the best way of maintaining and enhancing the various MLA functions in the North West. This process will consider how functions are best provided, working in collaboration with other organisations and partners regionally and nationally.

Clare Connor, Chief Executive, MLA North West

www.mlanorthwest.org.uk



“ *The Museums Association’s Collections for the Future report put a voice to the opinions of the sector, and this is reflected in the way that the principles of the report are being championed by the Collections for the Future Steering Group in the North West. It’s really encouraging to see how the report’s recommendations are being put into practice, particularly with the work on Effective Collections to review collections in the region and improve their use.* ”

Sally Cross, Collections Coordinator, Museums Association

The Collections for the Future Steering Group, established in the North West in 2006, is responsible for developing issues arising from the Museums Association’s 2005 Collections for the Future report. The Group oversees the region’s Renaissance plans concerning collections care, management, interpretation and display programmes, with a view to widening access and user engagement.

Led by the University of Manchester, the Steering Group’s membership represents a cross-section of regional museums including Bolton Museum & Archive Service, National Museums Liverpool, the Wordsworth Trust and Museum Services in Blackburn & Darwen, Lancashire and Cheshire.

Collections for the Future is occasionally portrayed as a ‘back to basics’ campaign, looking inwardly at collections and ignoring the outward facing and central involvement of users and audiences. In the North West, we are developing new and innovative ways of working that put users at the heart of collections’ activity and make best use of available resources.

The group delivers the Museums Association’s Collections for the Future and more recently, the Effective Collections agendas via three strands of investment: supporting the development officer posts and contracts, the provision of small grants, and a programme of events that stimulate debate around collections issues, including the Curating for the Future conference.

For more information visit:
www.mlanorthwest.org.uk/museumslibrariesarchives/museums/renaissancenw/collectionsforthefuture/

It’s Your Choice

Through support from the 2007 Collections for the Future Challenge Fund, Towneley Hall in Burnley developed It’s Your Choice – an exhibition of stored objects selected by visitors. Galvanised by the grant, staff took digital photographs of little-known collections and made them available on a touch-screen situated in the Hall. Visitors searched the collections and chose paintings, natural and social history objects – some of which had never been displayed. Visitors also supplied feedback about why they had picked the objects. Some said it was for personal and nostalgic reasons, an interest in local history, or because they had discovered a work by their favourite artist.

At a basic level, the process enabled Towneley Hall to update its documentation system for Accreditation. Strategically, staff were able to consult users and mount a popular and innovative display. When the exhibition closes, it will be evaluated with the hope of running it again as other parts of the collection are documented.

Musical Stones of Skiddaw

The star exhibit at Keswick Museum and Art Gallery is a large antique xylophone made of rare ‘hornfels’ rock from the mountainside of Skiddaw, near Keswick. Between 1827 and 1840, stonemason Joseph Richardson chipped the stones into separate notes, to make a 14-foot long, 1.5 ton instrument. The xylophone toured music halls in Britain and Europe until 1914, when it was deposited at Keswick Museum.

Since 2005, the Stones had only toured with an orchestra once because the Museum did not have cases to transport them. With support from the Challenge Fund, the Museum customised 11 wheeled travelling cases, so that the Musical Stones of Skiddaw can tour safely, preserving and increasing access to the collection for future generations.

Visit www.myspace.com/musicalstones





Grosvenor Museum

Chester's Roman Heritage

Sue Hughes, Director at the Grosvenor Museum, has been working with Carli Douglas, the Development Officer for Roman Heritage, since March 2007. The collaboration produced a display of locally excavated Roman metalwork from the Museum's collections, alongside replica material loaned from Chester's Roman Tours Ltd., an organisation based next door to the museum.

Though recently conserved, much of the Museum's Roman metalwork had never been displayed and remained in storage. Carli negotiated the loan of a secure display case from the Manchester Museum. Sue examined the collection with 'soldiers' from Roman Tours Ltd. and worked with them on the interpretation. The display examines how archaeology – in this case the daily use of replica Roman armour – can help visitors understand museum collections.

Zoom on a Loom

Also supported by the Collections for the Future Challenge Fund, Zoom on a Loom is an exciting, interactive project at Queen Street Mill Textile Museum. From the comfort of a new soundproof booth, visitors can control a CCTV camera that hovers above a working weaving loom. When the loom is at rest, visitors can listen to oral history recordings that feature retired mill workers talking about their experiences alongside digital video of archived film. Redeveloped interpretation panels in the booth and in the weaving shed provide photographic and contextual information to enhance the visitors' experience.

Having overcome the complex technical and installation considerations, the Museum is looking forward to learning how its visitors respond to the new, multi-sensory and layered interpretation at this Lancashire site.

COLLECTIONS REVIEW PILOT STUDY

“ *When museums look at underused parts of their collection it is important that they do not automatically decide to dispose of them.* ”

Paul Fraser Webb,
Collections Review Consultant, Renaissance North West

Renaissance North West, through the Collections for the Future Steering Group, recruited Paul Fraser Webb to establish the mechanisms for peer review, and create a 'safe' environment for the discussion of museum disposals.

Paul has developed the tools museums need to assess their collections, and to help them get external, specialist advice from National, Hub and Designated Museums in the region.

He also worked closely with the Museums Association to ensure his research fits within the new Disposals Toolkit and the Effective Collections agenda.

Two pilot projects are being supported to test Paul's research:

- ★ Salford Museum & Art Gallery is assessing its Egyptology collection by reviewing its provenance, significance, how it is cared for and accessed by the public, with the aim of increasing the use of the collection.
- ★ The Print Loan Collection at Gallery Oldham is being reviewed to maximise stewardship of the collection, with a view to giving the Gallery the authority and confidence to address any future suggestions for disposal.

In addition, Paul has established a Collections Review Board, which will continue to facilitate a 'safe environment' where museums can discuss and review their policies and procedures. It will also act as a 'critical friend' when a museum is seeking an objective opinion on difficult decisions.

“ *It is very useful to have an external body that can be called on to provide advice, arbitrate and provide an objective external viewpoint. Having such a body based in the region will help enormously.* ”

Delia Garratt,
Acting Head of Collections, The National Waterways Museum



Salford Museum & Art Gallery

Claire Wood

For more information contact Paul:
paul@paul-fraser-webb.co.uk

To download the MA's disposals Toolkit visit:
www.museumsassociation.org