

Museum Development Fund 2006 – Hidden Histories: Opening up Collections

In June 2006 a total of £48, 827 in grants of between £2000 and £5000 was awarded from the Renaissance-funded Museum Development Fund to 11 non-hub museums across the region to work on projects that make direct links between collections and audiences. The Hidden Histories projects are underpinned by the recommendations of the 2005 Museums Association report, Collections for the Future.

Below is a summary of the funded projects and an update on how they're going. The final project reports will be available on the website in December 2006.

Project: Your History - On The Road

Applicant: Cumbria Coast Learning Network: The Beacon, Allerdale Borough Council, Cumbria County Council's Daniel Hay Library and Whitehaven Record Office and Local Studies Library, Maryport Maritime Museum, Helena Thompson Museum, Senhouse Roman Museum, Haig Colliery Mining Museum, Florence Mine Heritage Centre, Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway Museum, Millom Folk Museum, Muncaster Castle, The Rum Story, RAF Millom.

Award: £5000

Contact: The Beacon, t: 01946 592302, e: thebeacon@copelandbc.gov.uk, w: thebeacon-whitehaven.co.uk

The Cumbria Coast Learning Network are creating an outreach exhibition and marketing materials promoting the heritage resources and services offered by the Network's partners. This will increase community awareness of services offered by museums, libraries and archives within West Cumbria, and facilitate access to collections through the exhibition, hands on opportunities and by encouraging collections based enquiries and access requests.

The exhibition will tour West Cumbria on Cumbria County Council's Access Bus for one month, visiting those areas which are disadvantaged or rurally isolated in addition to the market towns. It will visit nurseries, schools, day centres, village halls, hospitals etc providing mini outreach activity sessions or reminiscence as appropriate.

Project: Revealing the hidden histories of Englesea Brook's banners

Applicant: Englesea Brook Chapel and Museum, near Crewe

Award: £5000

Contact: t: 01270 820836

e: engleseabrook-methodist-museum@supanet.com,

This exciting project will bring together children and adults from different walks of life to investigate, research and promote further interest in the wonderful

collection of banners (religious, band of Hope and linked to Trades Union Movement) currently displayed at Englesea Brook Chapel & Museum.

We aim to:

- encourage participation of a good cross section of our visitors in the project especially those who would not otherwise be likely to visit.
- provide children with the opportunity to work with people of a wide variety of ages and experiences and to learn from each other and together.
- broker a working relationship with a professional artist in order to interpret and implement the project in the most artistic and appropriate way possible and to integrate a new and professional dimension into our work and thereby attract others.
- To produce displays both permanent for the museum and mobile for transport to other sites, libraries, churches, schools, colleges and conferences (eg. Methodist conference) to promote our museum and some of its treasures.

Project: Interpreting our Ivory collection

Applicant: Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool

Award: £4950

Contact: t: 01253 478170, e: grundyartgallery@blackpool.gov.uk,

w: blackpool.gov.uk

The Grundy wants to improve access to its collection of 18th and 19th century worked ivory pieces backed up by a robust interpretation of the ethical issues surrounding the collecting and showing of ivory. We are researching the origins of our collection and developing interpretation that will enable audiences to understand the historical context of the collection. This will include charting the 18th and 19th century trade routes between Britain, the colonies of the Ivory Coast/West Africa and the Far East, and we feel that this project will be an effective springboard for study of the world as a global community. We will link this to the study of citizenship, History and Geography at Key Stage 3 and the appreciation of world cultures at Key Stage 2.

We have four schools on board for the pilot programme: two primary and two secondary, and they are all very enthusiastic about working with the gallery. We are having our first meeting with the teachers in early September. Our researcher has started looking into the background of our ivory collection, the ivory trade of the 18th and 19th centuries and the trading history of the Bancroft family (the majority of the ivory in our collection was a bequest from the family of a local shipping merchant). This summer holiday period is giving us a chance to look at the collection again and discover for ourselves just what we have.

Project: Different Landscapes II

Applicant: Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester

Award: £4940

Contact: t: 0161 606 0108, e: education@msim.org.uk w: msim.org.uk

In this project a group of homeless men will take part in a film making course inspired by the objects they have chosen from the collections and linking those objects to events from their own lives. These films will be displayed in the Collections Centre, the Museum's public open storage facility, alongside the objects chosen from the Museum's object or archive collections.

This project builds on the partnership between MSIM and the English Churches Housing Group (ECHG), which developed during a successful film making project in 2005 (the project was runner up in the Inspiring North West Culture Awards). Through increased confidence, developing new skills and engaging with learning activity, the men will increase their employability, their potential to find housing and their ability to contribute to society. The project will also provide them with positive activity away from crime and drug or alcohol misuse, and as such will form part of their Drug Rehabilitation Requirements (DRR), demonstrating the value of museum and archive activities to the Probation Service.

Project: Curated by...

Applicant: Prescott Museum, Knowsley

Award: £3000

Contact: t: 0151 430 7787, e: prescot.museum.dlcs@knowsley.gov.uk,

w: knowlsey.gov.uk

'Curated by....' is a project intended to open up the stored collection of the museum to a greater number of people. We will do this by inviting local community groups and schools, some of which we already have links with as well as some new ones, to use our collections to put on temporary displays within the museum. Community groups will also create displays based on their own collections. We'll also produce listening posts based around the project and the museums collections to give access to collections which are physically inaccessible to some visitors.

We hope to open our first community-curated exhibition in October, and an exhibition curated with a local school is scheduled for November/December.

Project: Once Upon a Tide

Applicant: Salford Heritage Services

Award: £5000

Contact: t: 0161 736 2649, e: Salford.museum@salford.gov.uk,

w: Salford.gov.uk/museums

The project aims to conserve, interpret and make more accessible one of the hidden gems of Salford Heritage Services collections - an early medieval log boat (c.1085), at present unseen by the visiting public. Aligned to the

preservation and interpretation of this unique object will be a programme of formal and informal learning activities focusing on Salford's maritime heritage, with a particular focus on Salford's docks and the Manchester Ship Canal (formerly the River Irwell) from which the boat was originally dredged in 1890.

Audience development work and learning activities will be innovative and partnership-led with a focus on the theme of migration and travel. This theme will be explored, in particular, by working with local refugees and asylum seekers, young people and the under-fives – audiences that Ordsall Hall often struggles to attract.

So far, we have identified schools where there are high percentages of minority ethnic and traveller children, particularly those who are refugees and asylum seekers to target in the project. We have been working closely with Book Start (through Sure Start) to deliver the 'Row Your Boat' sessions with local parents, carers and under-fours. 14 sessions covering every ward in the City have been arranged between September and November; all of these are new audiences.

We will be working with a group of young homeless men from a hostel in Broughton, Salford, on the photography and crafts side of the project.

Our Collections Team are currently researching specialist boat conservators who will restore and conserve the log boat, and volunteers have been identified to help research the significance of the boat.

Project: Thrown Together

Applicant: Senhouse Roman Museum, Maryport

Award: £5000

Contact: t: 01900 816168, e: romans@senhouse.freeserve.co.uk,

w: senhousemuseum.co.uk

The project will explore the different examples of Roman pottery at present held in storage and make connections through an evolving exhibition developed in collaboration with our target audience and supporting activities. The project will involve working with local community groups of adults with learning difficulties, Maryport Library (through their recently established Roman Resource Centre), day centres, care homes and local and visiting families.

The participants will be encouraged to explore a number of themes inspired by Roman pottery including; pottery manufacture, trade links within the Roman empire, what pottery can tell us about how the people lived and worked.

So far we have had one full week of pottery workshops and are looking forward to building or own kiln and firing the pots very soon.

Project: Re-drawing the Map
Applicant: Warrington Museum and Art Gallery
Award: £4800
**Contact: t: 01925 442733, e: museum@warrington.gov.uk,
w: warrington.gov.uk/museum**

Redrawing the Map is the redisplay and interpretation of Warrington's Human History Gallery. This gallery is the last preserved evolutionary display in the UK and as such is of considerable significance to students of museology. We are conscious that this interpretation is less accessible and inappropriate for today's diverse society, and we have significant items languishing in store. There has been little attempt to involve BME groups in engaging with existing collections or to introduce contemporary items to the display that reflect current beliefs.

We are commissioning an expert evaluation of the ethnographic collections to contribute to a conservation management plan, and inviting representatives of local BME groups to visit the galleries to give their interpretation of the items on display or from the reserves. In addition there will be an outreach oral history project to record the memories of minority ethnic elders, following successful pilots with older white Warrington residents.

Project: Minding the Gaps
Applicant: Gallery Oldham
Award: £3062
**Contact: t: 0161 911 4653, e: ecs.galleryoldham@oldham.gov.uk,
w: galleryoldham.org.uk**

Minding the Gaps is the project that Gallery Oldham is using to assess the extent of post-war objects in its collection, discovering the gaps and encouraging community participation in interpretation and collecting.

Our front of house staff are currently completing an inventory of unaccessioned objects. Our next step is to set up a community panel to inform the development and interpretation of our collections. This panel will be invited to select objects from the whole collection that are particularly relevant to them and to interpret these objects. By making this work publicly accessible we hope to stimulate debate among our users about how we develop our collections. We hope that the community panel will also programme exhibitions in our new community gallery from February 2007.

The first stage of the project allows the Gallery's front of house staff the chance to work in the stores and get to know the collections better. Working in pairs they have already added 1000 items to the inventory of unaccessioned items.

Project: From Archives to Airways

Applicant: Lancashire County Museum Service (Judge's Lodgings and Lancaster Maritime Museum)

Award: £4625

**Contact: t: 01524 64637, e: Lancaster.citymuseum@mus.lancscc.gov.uk,
w: lancsmuseums.gov.uk**

Lancaster Maritime Museum and the Judges' Lodgings is working in partnership with Litfest in Lancaster and BBC Radio Lancashire. We are commissioning three writers to create three ten-minute pieces for radio based on a period of research on material relating to Lancaster's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the reserve collections and archives of the Lancaster Maritime Museum and the Judge's Lodgings.

The writers' work will result in ten minute pieces that we hope will be broadcast on Radio Lancashire in November during this year's Litfest Festival. There will also be a live panel discussion around some of the issues raised by the pieces and the writers' and listeners' responses to the project. This sets the context for further work taking place in 2007.

This will be a lead-in project tied to the 'ABOLISHED?' programme of exhibitions and events marking the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 2007.

Project: Made in Mid Cheshire

Applicant: Salt Museum, Northwich

Award: £3450

**Contact: t: 01606 41331, e: Cheshiremuseums@cheshire.gov.uk,
w: saltmuseum.org.uk**

The Salt Museum is developing an exhibition exploring the history of manufacturing in mid Cheshire. We are hoping to use the development of this exhibition as an opportunity to collect historic and contemporary material currently missing from our collections. We're also restoring to digital format a number of historic films that have been inaccessible for some time. We are working with young people on Modern Apprenticeships at Mid Cheshire College to reflect current manufacturing trends and engage an audience that don't currently visit. We also want to promote the contribution of people with disabilities to local manufacturing by making links with local groups. We will also be looking at the discovery of polythene made by ICI in Northwich in 1933 – a story which is not widely known about in the area. We will be borrowing some early polythene samples made by ICI at the time from the Science Museum.