

**Report To:** Museum Committee

**Date of Meeting:** Monday, 13 March 2023

**Report Title:** Museum Update Report

**Report By:** Alice Roberts-Pratt

**Key Decision:** N

**Classification:** Open

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### **Purpose of Report**

To update the committee on the museum's work since the last formal meeting

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### **Recommendation(s)**

- 1. To accept this report and recommend approval by Cabinet.**

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### **Reasons for Recommendations**

1. So cabinet understands and endorses the updates on the museum's work

## Introduction

1. This report summaries the work of the museum since the last formal Museum Committee meeting. It includes an update from the last informal meeting in November.

## Informal Meeting Update

2. The last informal meeting of the Museum Committee took place on 14 November 2022 at the museum. Hastings & St Leonards Museum Association gave an update on their work and fundraising efforts. The Association will return to a full events programme in 2023 and have started donating to the museum again after a pause to rebuild funds.
3. The remainder of the meeting was taken up with a briefing on the museum’s successful National Portfolio application. From April 2023 to March 2026 the museum will received £150,000pa from Arts Council England to deliver a range of activities including outreach and largescale events.

## Visitors and income

4. As stated in the previous report, public opening hours are Tuesday to Saturday 10:00 – 17:00 and 11:00 – 16:30 on Sundays year-round. On Mondays the museum is closed to the public but still welcomes school groups, volunteers and private events. As shown by the figures below, we are currently exceeding our visitor target by nearly 20%, with one almost one month remaining in this quarter. The asterisks on the Q4 and Total figures denote that these are not final.

Visitors	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Actual	6711	7648	6019	4788*	25166*
Target	5500	6500	5000	4000	21000
Previous Year	1419	4656	2146	4142	1227

### The museum shop, hires and weddings

The museum shop has continued to perform well. Sales of art supplies were particularly strong around the Hastings Open, and new items including gift tins, quality children’s publications and a range of low-cost “Adventurer’s” items have been very popular. Takings to date this year are approaching £22k. Total income including donations, room hire etc. is over £33k. This is income processed through the till system so doesn’t include anything that comes through the website or that we’ve invoiced anyone for.

Since the previous report, the museum has hosted four wedding ceremonies and ten event hires. For 2023, there are currently bookings for ten wedding ceremonies, and twelve events. There are also two wedding ceremonies booked for 2024.

## Projects

5. Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund project. Work continues on the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund project called *Democratising the collections for the 21st Century*. This

project has four strands working with home education, LGBTQI+, people seeking sanctuary and disabled people.

6.

Home education. Following the Christmas break there have been two workshops for the home education group. The first one was learning about the science osteoarchaeology. The second explored potential destinations and new uses for unprovenanced and unstratified archaeology in the collections which will inform our decision making around disposals. The archaeology in focus is the material currently stored offsite at Tunbridge Wells which is being brought back to the museum in batches for processing.

7.

The LGBTQ+ strand of the Esmee Fairbairn Collections Fund project came to an end on 24 February with the launch of our first ever queer history walking trail and map. The Queer History Collective selected eleven stories in the museum relating to LGBTQ+ history and have presented it in the form of in situ gallery labels and a professionally designed map. The trail and map were researched and designed by the group with support from E-J Scott (Museum of Transology), Katy Baird (Home Live Art) and Kasey Ball-Scott (HMAG). This is the first time LGBTQ+ history has been illuminated within the galleries on a permanent basis, and across collections. With Home Live Art and local facilitator, Deanne Naula, the Collective are currently looking to expand and explore options for their next project under NPO.

8.

We have continued to work with people seeking sanctuary through the Refugee Buddy project. The last output – an exhibition – is planned to open 20 June 2023, in conjunction with Refugee Week. The exhibition will feature photographs of *The Dove Café* (Refugee Buddy Project) by Nour Al Din Al Azou, a young artist with lived Refugee experience. Run by Sofia Goncalves, the Dove Café is a safe community space for Buddy Project participants, volunteers, and members of the local community.

9.

The Curating for Change co-production project is now concluding its first section of investigating and reinterpreting the museum's disability collection. The group has been researching and writing about their chosen disability-related object. To support this challenging work, the group have been involved in several handling sessions, engaging critically with the disability-related objects and their stories. In addition, the group have also participated in two sessions led by a disability historian. These sessions provided support and an introduction to those who have not yet researched on how to decode a history often hidden visually and in written scenes.

To continue supporting the group while they researched and wrote, one-on-one sessions have been arranged with the curatorial team, providing expertise and access to the collection and its records.

As the group concluded with writing the blog posts, thoughts have now turned to the next section of the project, exhibiting, and expressing their own lived experiences. To engage and gain a better insight into the museum method of writing labels, group members will be involved in a label writing session led by the senior curator and disability historian. The session will discuss the procedures and difficulties of writing labels in the museum and the challenges faced in interpreting disability collection and its terminology.

In addition to the session, the group will also be participating in an oral history training session. These two sessions will explore what oral history is and provide the group with training and equipment to collect their history and experiences. This work will later be exhibited in the final exhibition and collected to restore disabled voices and experiences to the museum's collection.

10.

African Caribbean Seaside memories project – working with local artists from the African Caribbean community to look at our archives and gather memories of their time at the seaside with a view to create a more inclusive history of Hastings.

11.

Artists in Residency – Agata Reid and Anne-Marie Watson have both spent a week at the museum, Agata working with our photograph collections to create work that will be shown at the museum. Anne-Marie’s drawings are handwritten, flowing texts which describe memories and reflections of past events and thoughts on present experiences, she has been sitting in the galleries responding to the environment around her and the collections. We will show her work once completed.

## Exhibitions and events

12.

*Jason & His Argonauts* (July-August 2022) This was the first of a series of exhibitions loaned from 2021 Visual Arts Centre. The exhibition featured fun, vibrant and thought-provoking artworks by Jason Wilsher-Mills, one of the UK’s leading disabled artists. Taking inspiration from his ancient Greek namesake, Jason worked with disabled communities around the UK, to explore themes of disability to co-create this amazing exhibition. The exhibition tells stories from these communities, mixing them with Jason’s own biography, creating new stories and myths.

*Hastings Open* closed 15 January 2023. We received over 400 entries totalling some 1100 art works. 84 works made the final show. Submission to the *Hastings Open 2022* exhibition generated £4,500 in entry fees. The exhibition featured paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, films, sculptures and illustrations by UK-based artists– many of them living and working locally. We would like to thank the judges, Angela Childs, Ellen Prebble, Euan Roberts, Fiona Denning, Kenton Lowe, Laetitia Yhap and Patricia Finnegan for their help and support. The next *Hastings Open* is tentatively programmed for autumn 2024.

*Donations: The Went Tree Trust* opened on 31 January. The exhibition showcases some of the significant and lesser-known objects and collections donated to the museum by the Went Tree Trust. Alderman Tree was Mayor of Hastings four times between 1891 and 1904. When he died in 1927 at the age of 82 he left a trust fund to buy objects for the museum collection. The significant collections include the Tressell collection, Burton collection, Baird collection, Badham collection, Taylor collection and the Windycroft collection. We also include our JMW Turner painting. The exhibition has been well received and it has given visitors the chance to see some of our local history that has either never been on display or very rarely. This was publicly opened by the mayor on 24<sup>th</sup> February, and the story was covered by the Hastings Observer.

13.

**Walkway past, current and next.**

*Photographs of a Victorian Voyage*, curated by Sarah French, closed 29 January 2023. Sarah gave two tours as part of the exhibition programming.

On the Walkway from 11 Feb – 12 March is *Old Town & Beyond*, featuring oils and watercolours by local artist and art teacher Mike Funnell.

On the Walkway from 18 March – 11 June is *Why I long to be a sex symbol*, featuring oil paintings by local artist and illustrator Thom Kofoed.

On the Walkway from 20 June – 17 September is *Portraits of the Dove Café* (tentatively titled) featuring photographs by Nour Al Din Al Azou, a young artist with lived refugee experience. For Refugee Week 2023.

Local artist Sinead Codd has tentatively booked the Walkway for a show in late September exploring the themes of climate change; pending a funding decision from ACE.

14. In addition to the temporary displays and installations mentioned above there have also been a number of others around the museum since September. These include the *Hastings Week display* in the ground floor walkway, *Pier 150* in the ground floor walkway, 'Object' in the ground floor walkway and the *Brassey Lobby*, Issam Kourbaj's *Imploded, burnt, turned to ash*, in the ground floor walkway, the *Home School* Lego display in the *Story of Hastings*, and *Marine Mammals* in the *Natural Science* gallery.

15. **Events programme.**

Hastings Week talks  
Highlights tours – *Photographs of a Victorian Voyage/Hastings Open Family Trail* – October/December/February  
Starlings Music Group – every Thursday  
Pop-up Aliens and Flying Saucers make and take  
Planetarium  
Lego Labs  
Relics Roadshow  
Room 101  
Dinosaurs in our storeroom  
Yoga at the museum  
Christmas Fair  
Homework Club  
Museum Book exchange  
Queer History Trail launch  
Ghost Hunting

16. **Schools and learning**

Last quarter we reached 1300 children (and counting) when our target is 500 students per quarter. This year we exceeded our targets by doubling the numbers as we engaged with over 3000 children despite the shortage in staffing. To be able to keep up with the demand (as we now work consistently with schools beyond Hastings) we are planning to hire Casual Learning Assistants in the new financial year, funded by the charges made for the work.

Our Education Offer consists of:

- 9 KS1 workshops and 14 KS2 Workshops (all linked to the curriculum, focusing on developing practical and critical skills and tailored to teachers needs)  
Feedback Example:  
*'A fantastic, informative and interactive session. Extremely well led and tailored to the age group'* Y2/3 Teacher, Staplecross Methodist Primary School  
*'Children were engaged throughout. It was particularly valuable to handle Roman artefacts- an opportunity we wouldn't normally have back in school. A really enjoyable day'* Y3 Teacher, Ninfield CE School
- 17 Loan Boxes (supporting classroom learning without replicating the onsite experience, with specially made Teacher Packs to enrich the experience with activities and background information)  
The boxes are unique (we have one for each topic) and booked months in advance. The waiting list for each of them can have over 10 schools.
- Lego Innovation Studio (adapted projects to fit in with our subject matter)  
Example feedback:  
*'Very funny educational programme, children enjoyed the hands on activities. Definitely will return'* Y3 & Y4 Teacher, Crowhurst Primary School  
*'It was just what the kids needed and pitched at the right level. We all thoroughly enjoyed it'* Y5 Teacher, St Pauls CE Academy

We pursue Outreach through project work:

- A Town Explores a Book Festival celebrating Mary Seacole's 200th anniversary of her solo trip from Jamaica to England. We are hosting annually the Writing Competition.
- Follow that Duck: Walkway Gallery exhibition of the Schools Collages telling the story of their duckling (800 children)
- Museum of Us: Exhibited at Durbar Lobby and collected responses of the community throughout summer
- Writing with the Kids: young mothers responded to our collections and exhibited their writing across our museum
- Mary in the Margins: Exploring the work of Marie De France with local schools transforming our museum to a medieval Abbey (400 children)
- Open Doors: Careers Talk to +16 young people (ongoing)

Key numbers will be available after the closure of the Financial Year.

Grants:

1. Museums & Schools Project (will be renewed)
2. Going Green Grant by Southeast Museum Development to develop in partnership with Bexhill Museum a Climate Change workshop which is in line with our NPO objectives
3. Wild Escape funding came in to celebrate all things animals in our collections during Earth Day and until July with workshops for schools.

Key priorities:

1. To expand our loans box collection due to high demand
2. expand our handling collection to cover and enhance the next set of workshops to respond to demand and complete this way our offer.

Partnerships:

In partnership with the National Literacy Trust we introduced:

1. The Book Exchange in Durbar Lobby which is a jewel for the gallery and is a vocal point with families.
2. We run the first science book club during Autumn term (500 children)



3. piloted the Book Boxes series to support teachers in class (to be part of our permanent Education offer)
4. This month we will be again a World Book Day distribution centre.

#### Awards:

We were nominated and shortlisted for the Little Bite Ankles Awards which is a key derivative of the addition of interactive baskets and stations across the museum.

Other learning offers - We provide trails and craft activities during the school holidays as well as the Museum Book Exchange which means children can borrow books for free.

17.

### Volunteering

Since September our volunteers have completed 681.5 hours of volunteering. Tasks being undertaken include completing inventory of various collections including the ceramics, the main stores, photographs, paintings, and postcards. They have been sorting through the archaeology collections ready for disposal, helping to man events such as Lego Labs. Our learning volunteer has been helping to develop loan boxes. Local studies volunteers have been essential in helping with research as well as taking inventory of the library. For the NPO we will be looking at increasing our volunteers to help with visitor services, collections and the outside spaces. We continue to be grateful to our volunteers for all their help.

18.

### Building

Below are the maintenance jobs completed, and quotes requested, for issues with the building since the last update.

Note that the security-related quotes are for options to improve security following last year's break-ins, and are for the main part still under discussion.

There are also ongoing issues with water ingress via the roof of the Durbar Hall. A contractor has been engaged by Mike Courtnage, HBC Principal Building Surveyor, who is advising and overseeing the work on this issue.

- 02/09/22 Security improvements to various doors - Quote only
- 07/09/22 Fit bars to exterior of higher-level windows to Brassey Lobby / Durbar Hall - Quote only
- 07/09/22 Repair of powered high-level window
- 07/09/22 Brassey Lobby external rendering repair
- 14/09/22 Repair/replace two exterior security lights
- 16/09/22 Security shutters for gift shop & lower walkway - quote only
- 16/09/22 Durbar Hall locks - quote only
- 21/09/22 Weeds cleared from the main flat roof of the museum and chimneys
- 22/09/22 Gas safety inspection and boiler service, including safety valve check.
- 28/09/22 Lower walkway interior downpipe repair

- 07/10/22 Local Studies lighting replacement with LED
- 15/10/22 Kitchen floor vinyl replacement
- 26/10/22 New key safe mounted to wall in office
- 03/11/22 Loose rubber strips on stairs replaced
- 16/11/22 Lower walkway rain downpipe leak repair
- 17/11/22 Painting of putty on ground floor windows following replacement with laminated glass
- 21/11/22 Removal of corroded and dangerous lanterns from front entrance
- 03/02/23 Repair to lead flashing on west side of gallery roof
- 03/02/23 Thorough weeding /vegetation removal of roof of Durbar Hall
- 01/03/23 Repair to office door closer

## Options

38. To accept this report and recommend approval by Cabinet.

## Timetable of Next Steps

39. Please include a list of key actions and the scheduled dates for these:

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
	Museum Committee	March 2023	
	Cabinet	April 2023	

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## Wards Affected

All

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## Policy Implications

Reading Ease Score: 43

Have you used relevant project tools?: Y

**Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:**

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Y
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	N
Risk Management	Y
Environmental Issues & Climate Change	N
Economic/Financial Implications	N
Human Rights Act	N
Organisational Consequences	N
Local People's Views	Y
Anti-Poverty	Y
Legal	N



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## **Additional Information**

What's in the Box Evaluation Report  
Hastings Digital Museum Final Report  
HMAG Learning Policy  
HMAG Volunteer Policy

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## **Officer to Contact**

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