

Wessex Museums Trust (charity number 1171104)
Trustees Report
For the Year Ended 31 March 2023

Administration

Charity name	Wessex Museums Trust
Registration number	1171104
Registered address	Albert Goodman LLP Goodwood House Blackbrook Park Avenue Taunton Somerset TA1 2PX
Names of charity trustees:	Glyn Coy David Dawson Adrian Green Elizabeth Selby Gillian Smith Michael Spender Susan Wills
Partnership manager	Kristina Broughton
Accountants	Albert Goodman LLP Goodwood House Blackbrook Park Avenue Taunton Somerset TA1 2PX

Structure, governance and management

The Wessex Museums Trust is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) registered with the Charity Commission in January 2017 (No. 1171104). The Trust is governed by its constitution last updated in January 2017.

The Wessex Museums Trust Board consists of four nominated and three appointed trustees. The four nominated trustees are appointed, one each, by the four appointing bodies (Poole Museums – BCP Council, Dorset Museum, Salisbury Museum, Wiltshire Museum). Nominated trustees are appointed for a three year term. The three appointed trustees are independent and selected on the basis of the skills, knowledge and experience they can bring to the effective administration of the Trust Board. The three appointed by the trustees serve for a term of three years.

Trustees are elected at a meeting of the Trustee Board, usually the AGM.

The trustees may serve for up to three consecutive terms.

The charity trustees are responsible for managing the affairs of the CIO. They also oversee the management and delivery of the Wessex Museums Partnership's National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) programme funded by Arts Council England (ACE). Currently the funding agreement for the NPO is between Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP Council) and ACE, as the Wessex Museums Trust was not yet constituted as a legal entity at the time the NPO grant application was awarded. However BCP Council has given the Wessex Museums Trust delegated authority for the management of the grant funding and programme, through a legal partnership agreement.

The day-to-day operations of the Trust are managed by the Partnership Manager and a team of four (3.8FTE) further central staff members who work across the consortium: a Fundraising & Development Manager, Marketing & Digital Officer, Finance & Admin Officer and Engagement Lead. All three posts are funded by a combination of the consortium's NPO grant, National Lottery Heritage Fund, and partner museum contributions made to the Trust. The three staff fully funded by the NPO grant, which as described above, is held by Poole Museums – BCP Council, were employed by BCP Council during the year. The Engagement Lead funded in the main by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, was employed by one of the partner museums. The Finance & Admin Officer was employed by the Trust. All staff members regardless of their employer work on behalf of Wessex Museums Trust and are line managed by the Partnership Manager.

The Wessex Museums Trust Board meets 6 times per year. The Board invites an 'observer trustee' from the meeting host when held on site in a partner museum to ensure engagement with the partner museums' boards. The minutes of the Wessex Museums Trust Board meetings are also distributed to and form a regular agenda item on the boards of each of the partner museums.

Trustees give their time freely and receive no remuneration or financial benefits.

The Wessex Museums Partnership maintains a risk register in respect of delivery of its NPO programme and the charity's affairs. This includes organisational risks in respect of the Wessex Museums Trust as the governance and management body of the NPO. The risk register is reviewed at every Board meeting.

Objectives and activities

The objects of the Wessex Museums Trust are set out in its constitution and are summarised as follows:

- To support for the benefit of the public the building, establishment and maintenance of accredited museums in Dorset and Wiltshire, their artefacts, art, specimens, documents and other associated material, including the collection, storage, research and conservation of all such material; and
- to advance the education of the public (in particular but without limitation to those living in Dorset and Wiltshire and those geographic, ethnic, disabled and other communities who do not traditionally attend museums) in particular (but not limited to) by providing information about the history, heritage and culture of Dorset and Wiltshire and support to the provision and improvement of the facilities, collections, exhibitions, formal and informal learning opportunities, public events and other educational activities, including in digital form, available to the public in museums in Dorset and Wiltshire and within the communities of Dorset and Wiltshire and across the internet.

The Wessex Museums Trust is a thriving partnership of the four leading museums across the counties of Dorset and Wiltshire: Poole Museums Service, Dorset Museum, Salisbury Museum and Wiltshire Museum.

Wessex Museums exists to build the resilience and relevance of the museums in our partnership and others across the region. Our mission is to support museums to connect, inspire and add value to people's lives.

Achievements and performance

The achievement and performance of the Wessex Museums Trust are set out in our Annual Impact Report for 2022/23 (Appendix A).

Financial review

During the year the charity generated income of £101,203 (2022 - £97,625) from a combination of grants, sponsorship, donations and sale of merchandise. Against this there were costs for the operation of the charity, as well as programme and project delivery costs. The deficit in the year of £35,592 (2022 – surplus of £19,129) included a deficit of £43,992 for restricted funding and a surplus of £8,400 for unrestricted funding, leaving closing reserves at the year end of £15,198 unrestricted funds (2022 - £6,898) and £9,677 of restricted funds (2022 - £53,569).

Reserves policy

Wessex Museums Trust are particularly aware of the need to cover contingency liabilities such as gaps in funding streams, cash flow and meeting the cost of redundancy payments to staff in the event that the organisation were forced to close. It achieves this by aiming to hold enough free reserves to cover these contingencies.

The level of free reserves has been set by Trustees taking into account the following:

- The need to secure ongoing core funding from sale of charitable activities and grants. Plus ensuring that if payment is late in arriving, we have funds to cover running costs.
- Project funding is often short term and at risk of changes to funding programmes. Additionally, in-kind support currently received may not be available in the future.
- Sufficient funds should be readily available to provide working capital to enable the organisation to bid for additional funding streams which may be paid in arrears.
- Working capital i.e., project funding to continue short term projects or start new ones, although at that point it could be made a designated fund. (An amount decided each year)
- Funds should be available in order to build capacity and contribute to improved productivity and sustainability of the organisation.
- The smooth running of the charity.
- Funding should also be available to deal with contingencies which might arise in the day to day running of the organisation including: Contingency costs (An amount decided each year), sickness cover, maternity/paternity leave, recruitment costs.

It is anticipated that 3-6 months would be a required level of reserves, which at the current level of expenditure would equate to £34k - £68k. Current reserves are £24,875 and are being accumulated towards the desired level.

Declaration

This Trustees report for the Wessex Museums Trust for the year ended 31 March 2023 was approved by the trustees on 21 September 2023 and signed on their behalf by:

Glyn Coy

Wessex Museums Trust

Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees
For the Year Ended 31 March 2023

**Independent examiners report to the Trustees of Wessex Museums Trust**

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts for Wessex Museums Trust ("the charity") for the year ended 31 March 2023

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the charity you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the 2011 Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the charity's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the charity as required by section 130 of the 2011 Act; or
2. the accounts do not comply with these records

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Michelle Ferris BSc (Hons) FCA DChA

Albert Goodman LLP
Chartered Accountants
Goodwood House
Blackbrook Park Avenue
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 2PX

Date: 9 October 2023



Receipts and payments accounts

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For the period
from

01/04/2022

To

31/03/2023

Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds	Total funds	Last year
	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £	to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Grant payments	-	33,240	-	33,240	-
NPO Grant	-	41,456	-	41,456	51,700
Donations	7,739	1,273	-	9,012	23,465
Art Fund income	-	2,495	-	2,495	22,460
Partner Museum contributions	15,000	-	-	15,000	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	22,739	78,464	-	101,203	97,625
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	22,739	78,464	-	101,203	97,625
A3 Payments					
Accountancy	2,679	-	-	2,679	1,164
Legal support	6,469	-	-	6,469	-
Insurance	722	-	-	722	460
HR fees	1,722	-	-	1,722	1,722
IT setup and annual support costs	2,414	5,000	-	7,414	-
Salary/ contractor costs	-	50,262	-	50,262	54,805
NPO Conference	-	1,215	-	1,215	-
NPO Partnership Exhibition Development	-	4,559	-	4,559	-
Project Costs	-	-	-	-	216
Hardy exhibition	-	56,528	-	56,528	3,635
Research	-	-	-	-	2,000
Subscription	72	-	-	72	280
Fundraising regulator	-	50	-	50	50
Climate Emergency	-	-	-	-	4,329
Training	-	1,293	-	1,293	1,728
Learning showcase	-	399	-	399	-
Evaluation	-	3,150	-	3,150	8,107
Stripe refunds	216	-	-	216	-
Operational costs	45	-	-	45	-
Sub total	14,339	122,456	-	136,795	78,496
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total payments	14,339	122,456	-	136,795	78,496
Net of receipts/(payments)	8,400	- 43,992	-	- 35,592	19,129
A5 Transfers between funds	(100)	100	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	6,898	53,569	-	60,467	41,338
Cash funds this year end	15,198	9,677	-	24,875	60,467

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	Barclays	15,198	9,677	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
	Total cash funds	15,198	9,677	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK	OK
		Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B2 Other monetary assets	Details			
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
B3 Investment assets	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
B5 Liabilities	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
	Accountancy fees	Unrestricted	1,665	
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees	Signature	Print Name	Date of approval	
	Glyn Coy	Glyn Coy	21/09/2023	

Impact Report

2022-23

Introduction to Wessex Museums

Wessex Museums is a thriving partnership of museums across Dorset and Wiltshire – Dorset Museum, Lydiard House Museum, STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway, Poole Museum, The Salisbury Museum, Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, and Wiltshire Museum.

We believe that by working together we can...

- Strengthen the cultural offer of our museums and our region.
- Push out of our comfort zones to do things in new ways.
- Share important stories from across our region from a range of perspectives.
- Share and learn from successes and mistakes, build relationships, and enhance our reputation with partners and stakeholders.
- Increase our organisational resilience.

Our charity, the Wessex Museums Trust (WMT), exists to build the resilience and relevance of the museums in our partnership and across the region.

Our mission is...

To support museums to **connect, inspire** and **add value** to people's lives.

Our vision is...

Museums thriving through collaboration.

A Message from our Chair, Gill Donnell

As Chair of this successful partnership, I am extremely proud of the achievements of staff and volunteers across our partner museums as well as within the partnership.

Whilst our talented CEO, Kristina Broughton, will detail the successes of exhibitions, hosting a regional conference and expanding even further our alliance, I believe the achievement of our long-held ambition to be an independent charity and securing our second National Portfolio Organisation funding is a testament to the huge amount of hard work that goes on behind the scenes.

Our new look collaboration, including the three Swindon Museums offers us even more opportunities to further develop and grow in this amazing sector, striving to share our knowledge and add value to the lives of those in our diverse communities through access to our world-class collections.



Reflections from our CEO, Kristina Broughton

2022/23 will forever be remembered by Wessex Museums as '*the year of Hardy*', as we delivered our most ambitious, partnership exhibition to date. But the year was certainly about more than just that!

The year kicked off with the opening of the *Hardy's Wessex* exhibition in all four of our partner museums at the end of May. This was a culmination of four years of hard work by colleagues across the partnership to bring this ambitious project to fruition. *Hardy's Wessex* was more than just an exhibition, it led to new partnerships with multiple organisations inside and outside of our sector, included a diverse extended public programme with everything from podcasts to walking routes, and all in all was a fantastic example of what the Wessex Museums can achieve through collaboration.

Wessex Museums continued to prioritise underserved audiences through our work as a partnership, exemplified through our *Bridging the Gap* project which reached its conclusion in 2022/23. The project brought about a step change in knowledge and understanding of EDI for staff and volunteers in our partner organisations. It upskilled staff in inclusive community practice and improved representation and agency for underserved communities in our museums. *Bridging the Gap* has fundamentally changed our work with underserved communities to be more inclusive, community-led, and evaluated for impact; this in turn has shaped our plans for the next three years and beyond.

Our partnership will also look different as we move forward. Wessex Museums Trust (WMT) fulfilled its long-held ambition to externalise from BCP Council in March 2023, helping to ensure that WMT is more independent, equitable and sustainable. At the same time, we formally welcomed the three Swindon Museums (STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway, Swindon Museum & Art Gallery, and Lydiard House) into the Wessex Museums partnership. The addition of the Swindon Museums to the partnership will bring complimentary skills and extend our audience reach both in terms of geography and diversity.

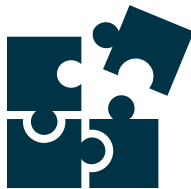
For everything that we have achieved and for all we hope to achieve in future, we are grateful for continued funding support from Arts Council England to make it all possible. In February we received confirmation of a second NPO funding award of £1.4m for the period 2023-26. This core funding is critical to WMT and will enable us to continue to add value to our regional museums and support them to connect, inspire and add value to peoples' lives.



2022/23 Key Achievements



Bridging the Gap work placements for disabled young people in all partner museums.



Wessex Museums Trust fully externalised from BCP Council in March 2023.



Hardy's Wessex exhibition opens in all 4 partner museums and 8 satellite museums simultaneously.



3x Swindon Museums join the Wessex Museums partnership.



Regional sector conference hosted by Wessex Museums and attended by 90 people.



5x EDI Bite Size training videos created for staff and volunteers, and viewed more than 400 times.

Our Funding & Income

2022/23 was the final year of Wessex Museums operating a mixed financial management structure, whereby the partnership's funding and income was managed across two organisations:

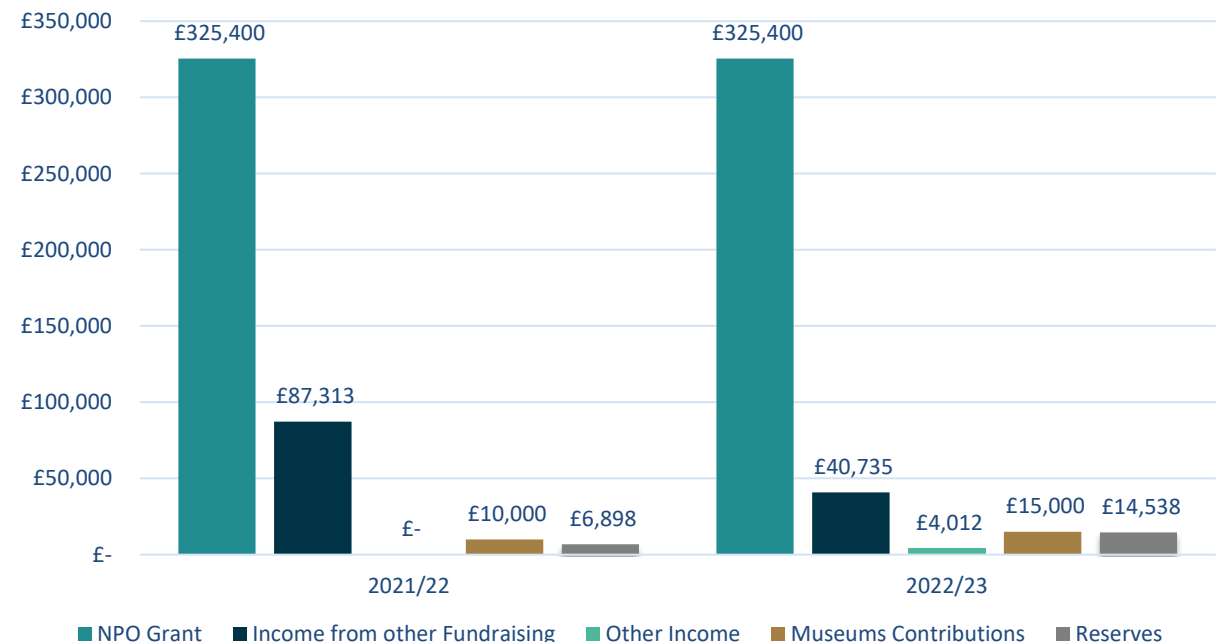
Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole (BCP) Council held the funding agreement with Arts Council England (ACE) for the partnership's National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) grant up to 31 March 2023. Wessex Museums Trust (WMT) managed all of the partnership's other funding including museums' contributions, funding raised directly through the charity, funding to support NPO activity delivered by the Trust, and the partnership's reserves.

In 2022/23, the **partnership's turnover** (excluding match funding and in-kind support) across both organisations was:

£399,685

This is down by 7% from the previous financial year, due to reduced fundraising activity during the final year of our NPO programme. However income from events exceeded £4k for the first time and WMT's reserves more than doubled from the previous year through savings, and residual grant funding and museums' contributions.

Wessex Museums Funding Profile



Summary of Fundraising & Income Generation for the Year

During 2022/23, Wessex Museums achieved more than **£44k in fundraising and income generation in addition to the NPO** from a variety of sources, including sponsorship, events income and public donations. Grants from Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) continue to be the greatest contributors to WMT's income.

NPO2

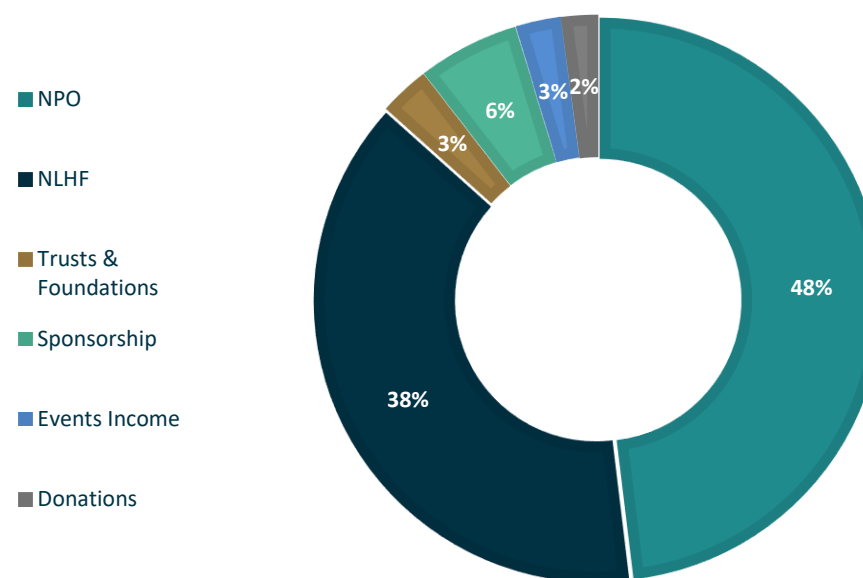
In November 2022, WMT learned that we had been successful in securing £1.4m in funding from Arts Council England as a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) 2023-26. The funding is the partnership's second NPO and secures our collaborative programming for a further three years from 1 April 2023 (next financial year).

NPO funding continues to be the partnership's main source of funding and accounts for more than 80% of our total funding profile and represents critical core funding for Wessex Museums Trust to continue to operate effectively as an independent charity. Diversifying the charity's income is an on-going priority.

Sources of income in 2022/23 have included:

- **£ 1,765 in public donations.**
- **£5k secured through sponsorship for Hardy's Wessex.**
- **Over £2k raised through WMT's first chargeable events.**
- **£2.5k from trusts and foundations for Hardy's Wessex.**

WESSEX MUSEUMS FUNDRAISING & INCOME GENERATION 2022/23



Delivering our Strategic Plan

2022/23 marked the final year of Wessex Museums' three-year strategic plan and NPO grant programme. It was also the first full year of re-opening in the partner museums post pandemic.

As such, it was a priority for WMT to fulfill its commitments in the strategic plan that had been disrupted and/or delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our focus was on:

- **Engaging underserved audiences** in our local areas.
- **Improving access** to our world-class collections.
- Delivering excellence through our **partnership programming**.
- Developing **digital content** that supports different models of engagement and **income generation**.
- **Equality, diversity, and inclusion** (EDI) and **environmental sustainability**.
- **Workforce development**.
- **Building an evidence base** for the impact of our work as a partnership.



Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Wessex Museums committed to a new intersectional EDI framework in 2021 and this framework continues to guide the practical actions we are taking to dismantle prejudice and discrimination in our organisations.

Key achievements against our Wessex Museums EDI action plan for the year:

- **Work placements for disabled young people** offered in each of the partner museums.
- **Allyship group** for the partnership established.
- **5x EDI bitesize training videos** produced for staff and volunteers.
- **EDI action planning surgeries** provided to support the partner museums.
- **Governance review of WMT** with a view to diversifying the independent trustee membership.
- **Training in co-production/co-creation**, community-led engagement and delivering deliver focus groups with underserved audiences.
- **Decolonisation of collections pilot projects** undertaken in each partner museum.
- **Decolonising Collections framework** developed for the partnership.
- **EDI terminology guide** developed for the partnership.
- **2x advocacy events** delivered with a focus on EDI and decolonisation.



Connecting with Communities

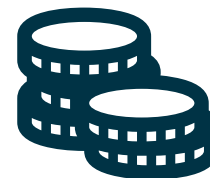
Throughout 2022/23, Wessex Museums continued to prioritise engagement with underserved audiences. The *Bridging the Gap* project funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and delivered between 2021-23, was a catalyst for inclusive community practice across our partnership. This coupled with investment in learning and engagement staff capacity and resources through our NPO, enabled us to connect with more new communities and develop our community-led practice.

Key factors to our success were:

- Dedicated roles of the **Community Curators** and **Wessex Engagement Lead** to oversee implementation of key developments in enabling change in how the museums engaged underserved audiences.
- **Projects that provided clear momentum and structure** for engaging underserved audiences, in some cases for the first time.
- **Training, advice, coaching** and mentoring provided through the Engagement Lead.
- **New relationships and strengthened partnerships** as a result of intensive and collaborative work with communities to co-create new collections and exhibitions.



Our partner museums engaged and collaborated with more than **3300** people from our underserved communities.



Wessex Museums invested **£128,340** in our Connecting with Communities workstream.

Work Placements for Disabled Young People

In our partner museums, disabled young people were recruited to work placements that helped them learn new skills in communications, engagement and collections management. Our Access and Inclusion consultant supported museum staff through training and resources so they could welcome disabled young people into our partner museums. Our participants and museums colleagues found the experiences to be life changing. By shifting the museum mindset towards embracing inclusivity, participants were supported to learn critical skills that helped them to be “work ready”.

Digital Learning

As part of *Bridging the Gap*, we produced a series of digital videos that were designed to enhance formal learning engagement in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and at KS3. Each video was written and presented by a young person who researched how hero objects in museums could tell a new and unexpected story for children and young people. We worked closely with members of LEX (Learning & Engagement Exchange), training them in digital media skills and helping them to enable young people to lead on the creation of the digital content. As our digital learning resources evolve, we will continue to support the emergence of fascinating stories that can be used to draw teachers into the museums’ websites to explore the wider learning offer.

Key Achievements:

- A series of **videos featuring hero objects** from across partner museums that highlight new and unexpected stories for KS3 pupils or within the STEM subjects.
- In-depth **review of digital learning provision** across the museum partnership that has led to refresh of museum learning pages.
- We have a **robust framework** for recruiting, managing and supporting disabled young people in **museum work placement programmes**.

Building Resilience

Externalisation from BCP Council

In 2023, WMT achieved its long-held ambition to externalise from BCP Council to become a fully-fledged organisation in its own right. The rationale for the transfer was to provide greater equity for the constituent partners and to support the charity's future resilience. The transfer involved the TUPE of two members of staff and a commercial settlement allowing a final transfer of the partnership's assets held by the Council to WMT, and was completed at the end of March 2023.

A governance review was undertaken by WMT alongside the transfer to ensure that the Board of Trustees was fit for purpose moving forward. The outcome of the review includes extending the Board of Trustees to include two more independent trustees.

The central staff team was also enhanced to support the financial and administrative workload previously supported by BCP Council, with the appointment of a part-time Finance & Admin Officer.

Swindon Museums

In 2022, WMT formally welcomed Swindon Museums (Swindon Borough Council) as a Wessex Museum partner. Swindon Museums brings 3 regional accredited museums to the partnership – STEAM Museum of the Great Western Railway, Swindon Museum & Art Gallery and Lydiard House Museum, attracting a combined total of more than 100k visitors each year.

It is an exciting and mutually beneficial expansion of the partnership, which almost doubles its size, bringing together a total of 8 accredited museums of similar sizes and outlooks across our region. Swindon Museums join the partnership with the aim of reshaping its museums into venues that better represent and are more relevant to their local communities. As part of our consortium they will support Wessex Museums' aim to extend and deepen our reach in the region, particularly engaging new and more diverse audiences.

Skills Sharing & Training

Wessex Museums continues to deliver on its commitments to supporting professional development for the workforce in our partner museums. During 2022/23 we funded access to training and development opportunities in areas such as EDI, fundraising, community engagement, evaluation, co-production, digital skills (see *Digital* below) and sustainable exhibitions.

Regional Conference

Wessex Museums delivered its second regional conference – *Museums Matter* – at Dorset Museum in September 2022. The conference focused on the hot topics currently facing regional museums, from decolonisation, to inclusion, to the Climate Emergency. The conference was attended by 90 people representing 25 separate sector organisations from across the southwest and received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

Digital Skills

During 2022/23 we began a full audit of digital skills in the partner museums with a view to providing on-going training and development opportunities for staff and volunteers in the digital space. Skills sharing opportunities were delivered through formal training, 1-2-1 mentoring support and knowledge exchanges. The skills audit will conclude in 2023 and inform a new partnership-wide digital skills development plan.

Key Achievements:

- Podcasting and Twitter **knowledge exchanges** delivered for the partnership
- **4x new sector case studies** published on website
- Enabled staff to access **18 separate training and development opportunities** during the year.
- Developed **5x EDI bite size training videos** for trustees, staff and volunteers, which have been **viewed 446 times** to date.

Digital

Wessex Museums continued our commitment to digital skills and content development across the partnership during 2022/23. The Hardy's Wessex exhibition was the perfect platform for developing new digital content and in the process testing new ways of working, developing our skills and broadening our audiences.

Digital Hardy's Wessex

Through Hardy's Wessex, Wessex Museums achieve many firsts in digital, including first digital student placements, first podcasts, first born digital, co-created exhibition content and first partnership-wide digital marketing strategy. Learning and insights from the project has been shared with colleagues across the partnership and through the evaluation report, knowledge exchanges and sector case studies on our website.

Website & Social Media Review

In 2022 we undertook a complete review of Wessex Museums' digital presence with a view to clarifying our core audience and developing relevant content as part of our next strategic plan period. The review concluded that Wessex Museums should prioritise the sector audience and the website has been refreshed to reflect this. During 2023, we will focus on refreshing our social media channels to better serve our target audiences.

Environmental Responsibility

In March 2022, the partnership agreed a new environmental responsibility framework to support our partner museums to embed sustainability across their organisations. Since that time, 5x staff have trained and achieved Carbon Literacy certification and 1 as a certified Carbon Literacy trainer. However, we recognise that we have a long way to go to meet our target of net zero ahead of the UK target of 2050. Financial and staffing pressures currently facing our organisations have stalled our progress in developing meaningful environmental responsibility action plans for each of our partner museums and for WMT as we had planned – this will be a priority for 2023/24.

Our Programming

Hardy's Wessex

In 2022/23 our partnership-wide exhibition, *Hardy's Wessex: the landscapes that inspired a writer*, came to fruition after a year's delay due to the pandemic. The exhibition which was 4 years in the making, ran between May and October 2022 and spanned four partner museum venues (Dorset, Poole, Salisbury and Wiltshire). It explored how the Wessex landscapes inspired the author Thomas Hardy, with each exhibition focusing on a different social theme, from animal welfare to women's equality.

Hardy's Wessex was the partnership's most ambitious project to date and a test bed for collaboration and new ways of working against the exhibition's four strategic aims:

- Aim 1:** Creating a home-grown exhibition
- Aim 2:** Delivering economies of scale
- Aim 3:** Engaging, growing and diversifying our audiences
- Aim 4:** Raising our profile

The exhibition was attended by more than **28k people** and was accompanied by an extensive public programme of talks, podcasts, workshops, and family activities, that reached a further **2.8k+ people**.

Key Achievements:

- Assessment and **conservation of 31 exhibition objects**, plus **specialist conservation cleaning of a further 12**.
- Organised **4x major loans from national museums**, with support from the Weston Loans programme.
- Creation of **9x Hardy walks** with the Thomas Hardy Society, Ramblers and local youth groups.
- Collaboration with Arts University Bournemouth to **engage over 120 young people in co-creation of exhibition elements**.
- Distribution of **1000 'Wessex Words' booklets**, to encourage reading of Hardy across local libraries.
- **Satellite exhibitions** held in **8x smaller venues** across the Wessex region.
- **8x online talks** delivered, attended by more than **500 people** and generated **£1.7k in income** for WMT.

My World My Future

My World My Future is a digital exhibition, launched in March 2022 on the Wessex Museums website. It showcased the voices and creative responses of underserved young people in Dorset and Wiltshire through engagement work carried out during 2021/22 with our four partner museums on a project called *Create and Collect for Climate Change*. It expressed their concerns on environmental issues and the climate emergency and focused on their ideas for positive action to mitigate the impact of climate change.

The digital exhibition was accompanied by project videos, events and displays in the partner museums and an online talks programme. The project has been included as an example of best practice in the learning resources for participants on the Carbon Literacy for Museums training programme designed and delivered by Museums Development NW.

Key Achievements:

- Webpages attracted **255 unique page views**
- **2x online talks**, attended by **52 people live**, and **51 on YouTube**.
- Working together with Students Organising for Sustainability, we hosted **our first Instagram Live talk**.
- Produced **9x related YouTube videos**, attracting **418 unique page views**.
- Project features as part of **Museums Development NW Carbon Literacy Training** for Museums learning resources.

The World of Stonehenge at The British Museum

The World of Stonehenge exhibition was held at The British Museum from February to July 2022 and **featured 10 objects loaned from our three independent partner museums** – Dorset Museum, The Salisbury Museum and Wiltshire Museum. The exhibition showcased the Wessex region and highlighted the significance of the collections held by the Wessex Museums on an international stage.

Our Collections & Interpretation

Decolonisation

During 2022, our partner museums continued work on their decolonisation pilot projects through research-based approaches exploring decolonial themes, the provenance of collections, museum legacies and working alongside underserved communities to undertake contemporary research. The work has produced new research, established new connections with museums around the world and engaged new and more diverse communities in reinterpretation and redisplay in our partner museums and online. Case studies for each museum's project will be published on the Wessex Museums website in 2023/24.

Summary of Decolonisation Pilot Projects:

Dorset Museum: A project highlighting key people that have been underrepresented in Dorset's history, starting with a local man, John Brown who escaped slavery and ended up in Dorchester as a practicing herbalist. The project will produce new research, interpretation and display.

Poole Museum: Improving collections documentation as part of a broader multi-faceted approach to decolonisation of the World Cultures collection, to increase transparency, encourage debate and gain a better understanding of the museum's origins.

Salisbury Museum: Linked to the museum's major redevelopment, a Black History Interpretation Group is working with the museum to explore and interpret stories, shaping the narrative of Black history and slavery in the new Salisbury Gallery.

Wiltshire Museum: A project to retell the story of the Britton 'Celtic' Cabinet through new interpretation and display in the Story of Devizes gallery. The cabinet, was commissioned by an extremely wealthy Jamaican sugar plantation owner, owning 2-3,000 slaves, and was part of Wiltshire Museum's founding collection.

We recognise that the pilot projects are only the beginning of this important work. The Decolonisation Working Group started development of a **partnership framework for Decolonisation of Collections**, drawing on best practice from across the sector and the experience gained through professional mentoring and delivery of the pilot projects. The framework, which will be completed in 2023, will support the partner museums to develop their own action plans to embed the work of decolonisation in their collections management.

Virtual Collections

Across our museums, we have **500,000 objects catalogued** and have **exceeded our target of 100,000 digital images**. We continue to put more of our collections online, creating a Virtual Wessex Museums Collection, enabling us to share our collections, promote research and develop innovative exhibition programming.

In early 2023, Wessex Museums procured an open-source system to enable cross-searching and display of data from the collections management systems of the four Wessex Museums partners. Supported by funding from Arts Council England (ACE), the system has enabled us to export data from the museum collections management systems into a data repository, to create interfaces to enable search and presentation of object records and to use those object records to create online exhibitions. We anticipate the staging site to be completed in late-2023.

The Virtual Collection is planned in the context of FAIR principles, the AHRC Towards a National Collection initiative and the work of the Collections Trust. As these initiatives come to fruition, it is intended that the open-source tools developed by Wessex Museums can be adopted by a wide range of museums to reduce the barriers in enabling online access to collections.

Looking Ahead

Another three years of National Portfolio Organisation funding from Arts Council England will enable Wessex Museums to continue with our mission to support museums to connect, inspire and add value to peoples' lives. We have a rich and diverse programme planned, and our focus on EDI and engaging underserved audiences remains central to our work across all four of our strategic aims.

Our plans for 2023/24 include...

- **Swindon Museums** – Our new partners will benefit from specialist EDI and community engagement support and the creation of new staff posts in collections and community engagement.
- **Trustee Recruitment** – Following our governance review, we will recruit 2x new independent trustees to join the WMT Board.
- **Fashioning Our World** – Project led by Salisbury Museum and supporting work at Dorset Museum, to create opportunities for young people to explore sustainable fashion through the collections held by our partner museums.
- **Lest We Forget** – Community co-created exhibition focused on the Black experience of the World Wars in Wiltshire, opening at Wiltshire Museum in November 2023.
- **Hardy's Wessex** – Our partnership exhibition on the life and work of Thomas Hardy will open at Swindon Museum & Art Gallery in February 2024.
- **Elisabeth Frink: a View from Within** - Home grown, touring exhibition on the life and work of the Dorset based artist Elisabeth Frink, led by Dorset Museum and opening there in November 2023.
- **Work placements for underserved communities** extending the programme delivered through our successful *Bridging the Gap* project.
- **Decolonising Collections Framework** – An agreed partnership-wide definition and approach to decolonising the collections in our museums.
- **Wessex in 100 Objects** - Community co-curation project to explore and showcase our museums' collections and the story of the region by choosing objects that will later feature on our online Collections Showcase, micro and digital exhibitions.
- **Digital Learning** – Further develop our digital learning content and resources online through a coordinated partnership approach.

Wessex Museums

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