

Museums Worcestershire Annual Review 2021-2022





Museums Worcestershire is a partnership between Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council.

Museums Worcestershire in 2021-22

- **Relevant** – Visitors returned to their museums quickly after lockdown, with all venues having bumper visitor months by the summer, bucking the national trend and bringing £1.9million of secondary spend to Worcestershire
- **Ambitious** – To move forward with recovery and development projects, we successfully bid for £294k of external funding and launched a new fund-raising charity
- **Dedicated** – We continued to support our communities including care home residents, looked after children and those eligible for free school meals

“To be able to welcome back our visitors after lockdown with such a poignant and thought-provoking exhibition was really special for us.”

Claire Cheshire, Curator of the Titanic exhibition

“Brilliant – I felt very safe with Covid precautions and the displays were wonderful. I loved it.”

Commandery visitor

Image shows Learning Co-ordinator Su conducting a Suitcase Stories session with the aid of a screen to protect care home residents during the pandemic.

Our Museums - The Commandery

Highlights

- August Bank Holiday activities saw visitor numbers higher than pre-pandemic levels and Halloween tours had their most successful year yet
- Theatre in the garden returned with Worcester Theatres' *Elsie and Norm's Macbeth*
- A new Murder Mystery evening event received great feedback and attracted new visitors
- Trialled pre-booked sessions for families during February half term.
- Launched a new school session focusing on the history of democracy and Worcester's important contribution
- Co-ordinated holiday sessions for local children eligible for free school meals
- Hosted Worcester City Council 'Volunteer thank you' celebrations.

Improving the visitor experience

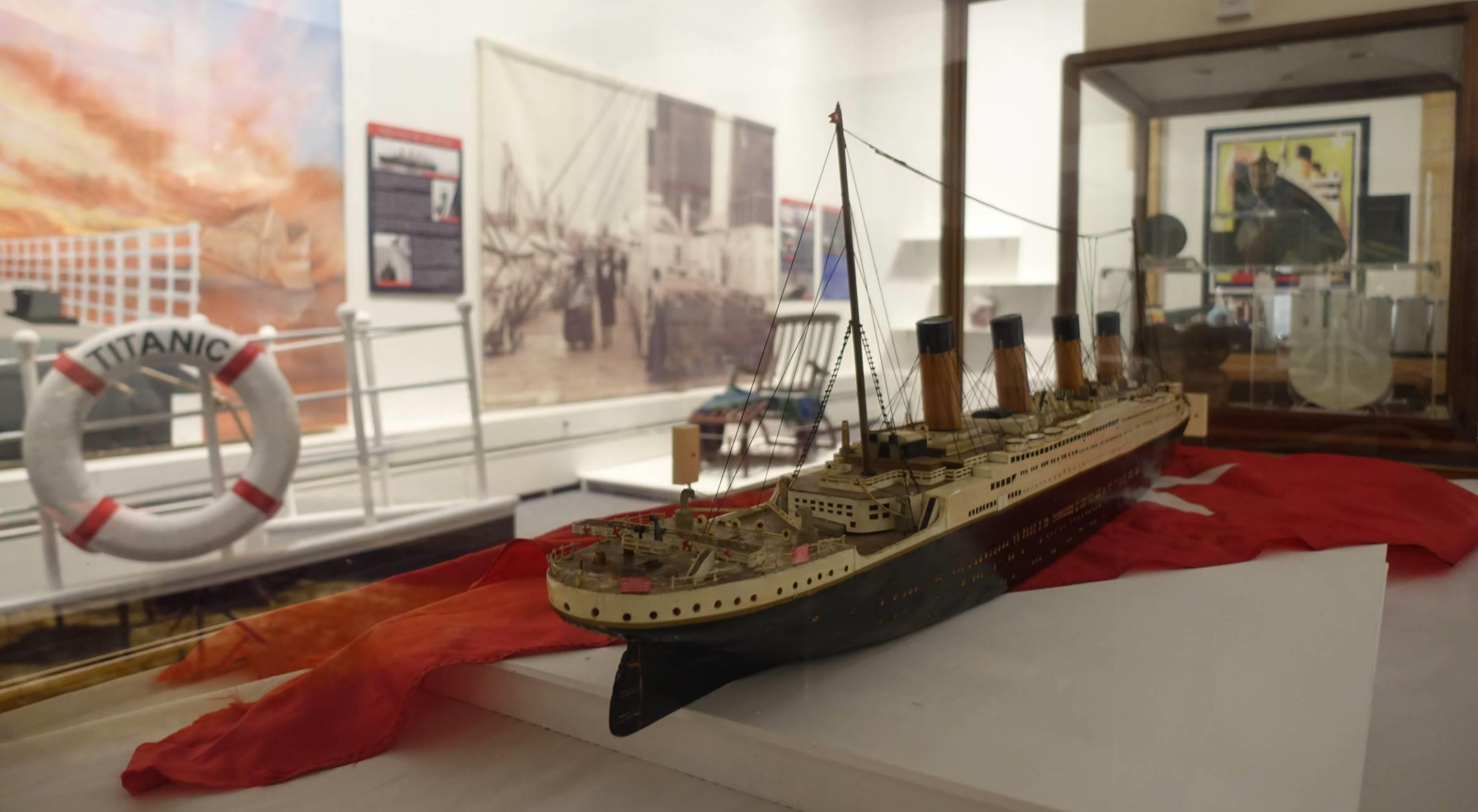
- A new costume room for visitors to enjoy dressing up as characters from the Commandery's past
- Picnic blankets and deckchairs to enable visitors to relax in the Commandery gardens
- New Visitor Welcome volunteers help deliver great customer service and interpret the building for visitors.



"Very good indeed! The reception guide is keen, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable, very helpful and kind too. Exhibits well-presented and interesting. Café good and reasonably priced, very clean."

"Our 7-year-old has loved learning about the civil war – he especially loved the dressing up and trying to lift the real pike! I first came here at about his age, so it's been wonderful to come back."

Visitors to The Commandery



“We were delighted with the experience. We were greeted at the entrance by a very friendly and helpful member of staff and the museum was extremely well organised with Covid safety measures in place throughout. A great visit and will definitely be returning for future events!”

Visitor to Titanic Honour & Glory exhibition at Worcester Art Gallery & Museum

Our Museums - Worcester Art Gallery & Museum

Exhibition highlights

- The hugely popular *Titanic Honour & Glory* exhibition led to the busiest May and June on record
- A successful programme of Covid-safe events saw the return of in-person *Museum after Hours* and *Bite Size Talks*
- New family trails and intimate *Gallery Tours* were designed to cater for new audiences that emerged over the pandemic
- Substantial press, media and local excitement greeted the display of the *Queen of Your Hometown* costume worn by Worcester's Ginny Lemon on *RuPaul's Drag Race* TV show. Ginny Lemon has kindly donated the costume to the County Museum collection where it joins costumes worn by Vesta Tilley.

Improving the visitor experience

- Upgraded environmental monitoring means we can continue to bring to Worcester significant works from national collections, such as the outstanding *Skyscape* exhibition with loans from the Ashmolean Museum
- Alongside other Covid-precautions, new HEPA air filters gave our visitors the confidence to return and enjoy the exhibitions.



“Today I popped over to @museumsworcestershire to check out the iconic look from the Queen of my Hometown @ginnylemon69 Serving Worcestershire Sauce realness in homage to the original King of music hall Vesta Tilley. It’s amazing to see queer representation in my local community”
Visitor to the Art Gallery & Museum via social media

“World class exhibition. Well presented, excellent information. Thank you for bringing this to Worcester”
Visitor to Skyscape exhibition

Our Museums - Worcestershire County Museum at Hartlebury Castle

Highlights

- New exhibition *Captivating Costume* opened featuring highlights from the county's superlative costume collection
- Pre-booked event days were very popular with several sold out
- Successful trial of a free Museum introductory talk for visitors was well received and will now be a regular offer
- *Heritage Open Days* welcomed over 1300 people.

Improving the visitor experience

- Enhanced activities for children include an interactive dolls house and a *Hartlebury Hat* display
- Introduction of an illustrated *Family Guide* to the museum
- New additions to the outstanding Gypsy caravan collection include the Vardo Ethelinda, and a new display of scale-model vehicles handmade by volunteer Ced Lewis.

"Absolutely superb. Brought my 84-year-old mum who loved the 1950s exhibition – many happy memories of her youth and courting days with my dad, who sadly died last year. Wonderful afternoon."

"So great stepping back in time. Guides super helpful and friendly. Thank you for being wheelchair friendly for my daughter too."

Visitors to Worcestershire County Museum at Hartlebury Castle





“Wonderful, helped me make amazing memories with someone I care for very much.” *Visitor to Worcestershire County Museum*

Supporting our Communities' Recovery

“Starting during lockdown and then through reopening we have trialled several pilot projects. The learning from these pilots will feed into the longer-term development of our sites and reinforces our commitment to make a difference in our communities”

Laura Hines, Learning Operations Supervisor

- *Suitcase Stories*, the third phase of an intergenerational project using reminiscence to work with those living with dementia, was successfully completed in December 2021. The three phases have brought in £200,000 of funding, reached over 1000 participants and worked with 36 artists. Our results have been shared with over 300,000 supporters and fellow professionals online
- Thanks to funding from the *Holiday Activities and Food* programme, we delivered 176 summer and winter sessions for local children eligible for free school meals, ensuring they had fun, a great lunch and encouraging them to get involved with their local heritage
- An early-years project, in partnership with Worcestershire Children First and a local nursery, gave very young children time to explore the Art Gallery & Museum through arts-based workshops
- We partnered with Sight Concern to deliver workshops for children with visual impairments and their families.



Hand in Hand with our Communities

City and County collections have been at the heart of community engagement and consultation through the John Ellerman funded *Vardo* project, Esme Fairbairn funded *Glove Affair* project, and working with diverse communities including our county's Gypsy, Roma & Traveller community, looked after children, and newly-arrived refugees from Afghanistan.

A Glove Affair – reaching out

- Reflects our commitment to increase access and make a difference for a wide audience with underutilised museum collections
- Advances this year include public-focused interpretation and piloting workshops with underrepresented audiences
- The collection has been researched using the words of Worcester people and sessions have been developed in a manner that is approachable by groups that either cannot or do not engage with history, heritage or art
- We have fostered partnerships with community organisations, establishing beneficial relationships that can be developed in the future
- Most recently the project has worked with refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine.

“Glove Affair joined the Loneliness and Isolation Group, headed up by Worcestershire County Council, and has taken an active part in exchanging ideas on how to help combat chronic isolation.”

David Nash, Social History Curator



Those Who Helped Us Support Local Recovery

We were really pleased to welcome our dedicated volunteers back to the museums: total number of volunteer hours given 1,958

At The Commandery volunteers have given over 280 hours supporting events, visitor welcome and gardening
Volunteers have also been able to add to the school experience by taking groups around the building for a Civil War tour.

“It was great to have the volunteers take the children round the self-led tour. The children really enjoyed the day.”

Primary School Teacher

A huge thank you to all our volunteers, who contribute significantly to all our museums

Thanks also to our partners who have helped us to support our communities:

- The Art Gallery & Museum hosted the Heritage Lottery funded *Worcester Life Stories* exhibition, part of a partnership project between Worcester City Council and the NHS, which puts those people living with dementia and their families, at its heart
- Our partnership with the Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust continues to support the vision of a unified visitor attraction with regional and national appeal
- Culture Recovery Funding from the Department of Culture, Media & Sport via Arts Council England supported us to test new ways of reaching audiences as recovery from lockdowns progressed.



Supporting Heritage Recovery - Digital Connections

- Learning materials created during the pandemic have helped to strengthen our pool of digital resources for education partners
- Followers increased by 15% across social media channels
- The audience for the Research Worcestershire blog doubled over the pandemic
- A dedicated webpage supports the digital training resources and films created by the teams at Museums Worcestershire and Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service as part of the Historic England funded *No one Left Behind* project. Practical training in areas such as exhibition planning, income generation, marketing and volunteer recruitment originally designed to support the heritage sector in Worcestershire recover after the pandemic is now benefitting organisations and individuals wherever they may be based.

“We are really grateful for your continued interest in the wellbeing of all museums and heritage centres in the county. We really don't feel left behind!”

Recipient of support from the No One Left Behind project



Museum Collections

- Artist Kurt Jackson generously donated a painting from his 2021 Art Gallery & Museum exhibition, with the work being selected by front-line staff
- The City's significant British Impressionists collection was augmented by the acquisition of work by Paul Nash, Augustus John, and James Abbott McNeill Whistler, with support from the Museum Members
- Conservation to the city's samurai armour, funded by Weston Loan with the Art Fund and with support from the Museum Members, was carried out ready for its display in the 2022 exhibition *Hokusai's Great Wave: Reflections of Japan*
- Conservation of 16 specimens collected during the nineteenth century voyage of HMS Challenger alongside cleaning conservation of a pair of terrestrial and astrological globes from the County's Tickenhill collection have meant that the objects could all be displayed in the *Skyscape* and *Return to Oceania* exhibitions.



Museums Worcestershire on tour

- The much-loved *Chadding on Mounts Bay* by Stanhope Forbes travelled to Penlee House for *their Discovering Anchor Studio* exhibition
- Dame Laura Knight's *The Yellow Dress* was displayed at the Milton Keynes Gallery as part of a major retrospective of Knight's work
- *Canal, Hill, Rail* by Carol Rhodes was included in the *Butterfly Effect* exhibition at Midlands Art Centre
- The *Ice Age* exhibition went on tour to Museum in the Park in Stroud

The City and County's collections on tour have been seen by more than 75,000 people.

Learning

- As lockdowns ended, the learning team continued to deliver online wellbeing sessions, online workshops for schools and distributed activity bags through local food banks
- Since reopening in May 2021, we have welcomed almost 2,500 children from 98 schools to the museums
- Home Educator sessions returned quickly to the Art Gallery & Museum after lockdown with activities including the creation of a fish from recycled materials which featured in the *Return to Oceania* exhibition
- Online work experience modules received over 750 views, enabling young people to gain valuable support with their career planning that they would have otherwise missed
- Two students from the University of Worcester joined the Commandery for work experience. They researched and developed a talk about its history as the School for the Blind, helped with events and created resources for family activities.

“The children were engaged and learnt a lot from each session because they were interactive and visual. Perfect for their learning.”

Year 5 Teacher

“The opportunity for work experience provided by the Commandery has been valuable in terms of gaining an insight into the heritage sector.”

Beth, University of Worcester Student



Museums Worcestershire Leading the Way

Two staff spent time with British Museum teams and later hosted a British Museum member of staff in Worcester, as part of the *Knowledge Exchange* programme which offers staff the opportunity to share knowledge, skills and best practice.

Our Registrar, who has a specialism in World Cultures, had a digital exchange with the Oceania team at the British Museum as part of the research into Worcester's significant collection, exhibited in the *Return to Oceania* exhibition at the Art Gallery & Museum.

"I just wanted to say such a huge thank you for last week's Knowledge Exchange... You are setting the standard for what museums should be like – educational, engaging and most importantly fun! I had such a fantastic week and really look forward to continuing the links with Museums Worcestershire."

Celine Nonde, Membership and Supporter Events Coordinator, The British Museum



Georgie Stevens is the Vardo Project Curatorial Officer, based at the County Museum and its nationally significant collection of Gypsy Vardos. The project aims to build histories, knowledge, community relationships and engagement, and educate visitors about the Gypsy, Roma & Traveller community and its culture with the aim of dispelling myths and challenging negative stereotypes.

Georgie comes from a Romani background and was brought up with the knowledge of traditions, crafts and skills embedded within Romani culture.

As well as learning more about the County's collection, Georgie has advised and supported other museums about their interpretation of GRT collections. These wider networks will help us uncover more context to the collection and raise its national profile.

Building Resilience

We continue to diversify income streams to build the service's resilience.

- The Commandery saw their best year for weddings so far
- A brand-new cafe, *Little Al's at the Balcony*, opened at the Art Gallery & Museum in January 2022. They have already won Visit Worcestershire's *Sustainable Tourism* award and promise to be a real favourite with visitors
- Another strong year for *Commandery Coffee* as visitors attracted to the lovely canal-side garden during lockdown continue to return. The installation of a new accessible toilet/baby change next to the café enables the operators to open independent of the museum opening hours, giving them new opportunities to build their business
- Both cafes support local suppliers and are committed to sustainable practices
- A new ticketing system swiftly put in place for reopening, continues to enable pre-booking for popular events meaning our loyal visitors can secure their place
- Sourcing and displaying a wider range of products has led to an increase in spend per head at both City Museum shops.



Worcestershire Heritage, Art & Museums Registered Charity

“As a long-term resident of the city, I am very keen to support the Art Gallery & Museum’s development by helping to build a superlative art collection, which in turn will enhance the cultural life of Worcester.”

Professor Rolf Olsen, donor

A new fund-raising charity (registration number 1197448) was launched to support the work of Museums Worcestershire and has received its first donation, from Worcester philanthropist Professor Rolf Olsen.

The donation will be used to purchase new works of art and lay the foundations for a new gallery within the Foregate Street building for the City’s art collection.

The new Charity is independent of Museums Worcestershire’s funding Councils, overseen by a group of trustees.




WORCESTERSHIRE
HERITAGE, ART AND MUSEUMS
REGISTERED CHARITY

*Worcestershire Heritage, Art &
Museum Trustees with the
Museums Manager*



Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)
The Hollow of the Deep-Sea Wave off
Kanagawa, 1831, from the series 'Thirty-six
Views of Mount Fuji'
Woodblock print
Bristol Museums & Art Gallery

Looking Forward

- Working in partnership with Worcester City Council on significant developments at The Commandery and the Art Gallery & Museum funded by the Towns Fund
- An ambitious programme of exhibitions welcomes Hokusai's Great Wave, Tolkien and Canaletto to the Art Gallery & Museum
- A focus on the outstanding Vardo collection at the County Museum to learn more about the collections and improve the transport gallery and its interpretation, hand-in-hand with the community
- Working with our partner charity to acquire significant pieces for the City's art collection, including some key fundraising campaigns.

“It is remarkable how Museums Worcestershire quickly pivoted to find new ways of working during the pandemic and are now building on this to take the service forward.

Hard work and focus has led to swift recovery, but not at the expense of partners or communities, who remain at the forefront of the service’s work and ambitions”

Councillor Lucy Hodgson, Chair of the Joint Museums Committee 2021-22

Thank you to all our visitors, our governing Councils, and all our funders for enabling us to build on new ways of working during the pandemic; to move forward and support our communities and partners during this period of recovery.

Thank you to the Museums Worcestershire team who pour their enthusiasm, knowledge and dedication into welcoming visitors and working alongside our communities.