

Museums Worcestershire in 2022-2023

“The impact that a museum can make on the lives of individuals and communities should not be underestimated.

Museums Worcestershire has this year worked across so many communities; reaching out, engaging, and welcoming, using the incredible museum collections to find common ground and the historic buildings to provide safe spaces for learning, entertainment and simply getting together.”

Councillor Marcus Hart, Chairman of the Joint Museums Committee 2022-2023

Our Museums – Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum

A grant from Art Fund was pivotal in realising the ambitions of the *Japanese Masters* project.

The support enabled us to develop an inspiring exhibition, bring important artworks from Tate and Bristol Museum & Art Gallery to Worcester, and provide resources and workshops for schools, groups and families, audio tours and events.

“Absolutely stunning. Many of us need exhibitions like this – it nourishes the mind, heart and soul thank you.” Visitor to *Hokusai’s Great Wave: Reflections of Japan* exhibition

A commitment to broadening access to exhibitions included a collaboration with Sight Concern and INSight on the development of audio tours, gallery sessions and braille labels.

“The exhibition with the wonderful audio description brought everything back to me and I felt quite emotional going round, not just with the memories but with grateful thanks to the effort you have put into making this more accessible to people like me.” Visitor to *The Magic of Middle Earth* exhibition

Responding to feedback, development of a programme of themed trails, activity bags, workshops, events, and sensory bags has provided Worcestershire families with more ways to enjoy their Art Gallery & Museum, and to connect with their world.

“Thank you for putting on the Mary Anning workshop. No one else likes fossils in my class but I’ve been able to make a friend my age who likes them too.” Young participant in the *Meet Mary Anning* workshop

Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum exhibition catalogues that accompanied the *Canaletto: A Venetian’s View*, *Benjamin Williams Leader: A Homecoming* and *From the Cornish Coast to the Malvern Hills* exhibitions were acquired by the prestigious Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art library.

Canaletto: A Venetian’s View exhibition – October 2022-January 2023

From the Woburn Abbey Collection, Worcester City Art Gallery thanks His Grace the Duke of Bedford & the Trustees of the Bedford Estates.

With funding from Art Fund, The Elmley Foundation, Arts Worcestershire, Worcester City Council.

Partners and participants: Compton Verney, Tate, Birmingham Museums, Hereford College of Art, University of Worcester, Sight Concern, Home Educators, InSight, Ukrainian guests

5,771 tickets were pre-booked online

9% of bookers also donated

16,500 Art Gallery & Museum visitors, the most December visitors since 2011

9 art college and university students visited Venice Biennale

162 learning session participants

37% session increase in positive mental wellbeing

66% of visitors were from outside Worcester. As part of their visit to Worcester, 65% also visited city restaurants and cafes, 44% also visited city shops and 20% also visited city pubs and bars.

The economic impact for Worcester was £480,000.

“What a privilege to see such international treasures here in Worcester.”

“Fantastic! It is brilliant to be able to view this exhibition in Worcester – thank you for bringing this work to our city.”

Our Museums – The Commandery

“Extremely enlightening and we absolutely loved the museum and the approach to talking about history. We leave the Commandery wiser and knowing a bit more about our city’s history. Well worth a visit!” Commandery visitor

900 visitors attended the annual Living History event, and 200 children enjoyed an Easter trail.

Worcestershire Poet Laureate, Leena Batchelor, became The Commandery’s first Poet in Residence.

New audio benches enable visitors to sit in view of Fort Royal Hill and listen to the thoughts of Royalist and Parliamentarian soldiers involved in the Battle of Worcester.

Continuing our approach to diversifying income, *Commandery Quest*, an interactive Escape Room experience launched in November 2022. So far 375 players have taken on the Quest which has brought in more than £6k in new income.

“The right level of challenge without being impossible. Lovely to have it housed in a historic building and be tied into the building’s history. Highly recommended.” Escape Room player

The Commandery’s Civil War collections became the focus of community-led welfare sessions for Ukrainian refugees.

The guests were curious to learn about the history of their new home including, unexpectedly, difficult times of conflict and war such as the Battle of Worcester in 1651 and its parallels to the conflict in Ukraine.

“Coming from a different country, I really learnt a lot about my new hometown. Thank you.” Ukrainian guest attending a welfare session at The Commandery.

Working with *Action for Children*, The Commandery created a ‘mini Pride’ event for *Trancakes* and *Safe Space* – support groups for young people exploring their gender identity, and their parents and carers.

“A huge thanks to the Commandery for all their support...making sure that the space was suitable and safe for everyone attending. For most of the group, it was their first time in The Commandery, and they felt welcomed by the team.”

Ness Cole – *Action for Children, West Midlands*

Our Museums – Worcestershire County Museum at Hartlebury Castle

The County Museum attracted 22,000 visitors representing a 12% increase on pre-pandemic attendance; a huge achievement at a time when visitor numbers across the museum sector were struggling to return to pre-Covid levels.

168 visitors attended a Gypsy, Roma & Traveller themed event, funded by the John Ellerman Foundation, involving storytelling, craft activities and performance by *Crystal's Vardo* theatre, bringing new audiences to the museum.

76 looked-after children and their families enjoyed a magical visit to Santa's grotto.

"Amazing place for children and adults, such a variety of things to do and very informative. Staff are such a great crowd of people. Will definitely recommend and be back". Visitor to Hartlebury Castle

"I loved today. We had a tea party, rode a rocking horse and had a blast!"
Simon, aged 7

The historic blacksmith's forge is now in regular use for *Introduction to Blacksmithing* courses which support the museum's funding as well as participants' wellbeing.

"The course was very hands-on and was great fun, and the art of working with metal was far more therapeutic than I expected." Blacksmithing course participant

Continuing our work with people living with dementia and their carers, the *Suitcase Stories* model using museum objects to support communication

through reminiscence was brought on-site to the museums with sessions delivered at Worcestershire County Museum and The Commandery.

Hartlebury Castle is now the chosen location for *Age UK's* local dementia day centre.

“The residents had an amazing time, it really uplifted them and improved their mood, not just on the day of the session, but afterwards, too.” Support worker from a residential care home

Make Time sessions at Worcestershire County Museum organised formal creative activities, offering a solution to local issues of loneliness and social isolation and helping participants to develop new skills.

A 12% improvement in wellbeing was reported across the sessions.

“Working with my hands is relaxing and distracts me from daily concerns.”

Make Time participant

Volunteers

More than 3,000 hours given across the museums by 31 volunteers.

“What I love most about volunteering here is knowing that I’m making a difference. Being outdoors and connecting with others is great for my mental wellbeing and I’m always learning new things.” Gardening volunteer at The Commandery

Training the workforce of the future – two year 12 students and two university students enjoyed work experience, taking part in the day-to-day experience of everything that happens in a museum.

A huge thank you to all our volunteers, who make a significant contribution to the museums.

Museum Collections at the Heart of Community Engagement

The *Glove Affair* project, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, demonstrated how museums could improve people's lives by using links to heritage and culture to tackle serious social issues.

By partnering with local welfare groups, the project took museum collections out to isolated communities; offered wellbeing and welcome sessions for refugees; and piloted the use of science collections to build confidence in looked-after children.

It also helped preserve and share the legacy of the gloving industry, Worcester's greatest global output.

"We are still smiling remembering our beautiful session at the museum. The adults said that they enjoyed the environment and the children all wanted to come back again and were either 'very happy face' or 'excited face'. Comment following session with looked-after children

Learning

4,373 students visited the museums.

128 outreach boxes loaned to schools, supporting at least 3,840 children with their classroom learning.

The Art Gallery & Museum trialled new self-led resources, feedback from these will inform the development of a new schools offer.

The Commandery learning team delivered 87 school sessions – *Get Ready for Battle* was the favourite, with 37 sessions during 2022/23.

New learning volunteers supported educational visits.

“The resources were brilliant, the children loved that they could get involved practically. Being in role as Florence Nightingale kept the children engaged throughout. They have remembered so much from the visit and are applying this knowledge in lessons now.” Teacher, Worcestershire County Museum outreach session

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, funded by the Department for Education, is open to children from reception to year 11 who receive benefits-related free school meals or have been referred. 69 children took part across the 3 museum sites. This was extended by Museums Worcestershire to enable whole families to participate in activities together.

“It’s great that there is something linked to history on offer for families through HAF. My son loves coming here!” HAF participant parent

Museums as Environmental Educators

210 school children visited the Art Gallery & Museum to see the *Watermark* exhibition of contemporary artworks exploring the theme of flooding, curated by Meadow Arts. Students also engaged with the *Severn Rising* climate change awareness game.

The retail team lobbied suppliers for an environmentally friendly option to plastic wrap on greetings cards and sourced environmentally conscious suppliers for the museum.

Our local-authority property teams installed energy-efficient heaters at the County Museum and energy-saving LED lighting at the Art Gallery & Museum. New glove archive pod at the Collections Store uses LED lights and is insulated and heated by an energy efficient thermostatically controlled system to save power.

“Museums allow people to study what came before us, to celebrate achievements and learn from mistakes. Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum holds a natural history collection that catalogues species present in 19th-century Worcestershire. Many samples are not present today in areas of the county or may not bloom in the months that they once did. Our land is still green and pleasant, but far less diverse than it was during the time of William Blake or even the time of Edward Elgar.” David Nash, Social History Curator

Worcestershire Heritage, Art & Museums

Charity registration number: 1197448

One year old, the new charity spearheaded a fundraising campaign to bring two major acquisitions by Dame Laura Knight into Worcester’s collection.

The paintings had their first viewing in the exhibition *From the Cornish Coast to the Malvern Hills*.

These acquisitions enhance Worcester’s British Impressionist collection, with the ambition that Worcester becomes a centre for its study and display.

Beulah No.2 and Lake Windermere and the Langdale Pikes were purchased with support from Art Fund, the Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, Worcestershire Heritage, Art & Museums Charity and kind donations from Art Gallery & Museum Members.

Thank you to all our visitors, these are your buildings and your collections, we hope our work helps you to enjoy them.

Thank you to our Councils, supporters and funders for enabling us to make a positive impact on the lives of so many of our communities.

Thank you to the team at Museums Worcestershire who pour their enthusiasm, expertise and dedication into making our museums welcoming and inclusive spaces for everyone to enjoy.

Looking Forward

Work with our partners, the Military Museum trusts, towards the new display of the Worcestershire Soldier exhibition at The Commandery.

Funding from the Towns Fund and Worcestershire Heritage, Art & Museums enables the planning of future developments at the Art Gallery & Museum including a new gallery for the permanent display of the fine art collection.

Development planning for Worcestershire County Museum will forge new health & wellbeing programming for Worcestershire residents.