

Museums Worcestershire Annual Review 2025-2026

Key achievements in 2025-2026

Total visits **108,842**

Commandery 13.9% increase in visitors*

Worcestershire County Museum visits by children and young people up by 17%*

Museums driving the visitor economy 59,000-day trippers travelled into Worcestershire specifically to visit museums

Local spend by museum visitors **£2.36 million**

*Compared to 24/25

What does your museum mean to you?

"It connects people to their roots and gives them a sense of belonging."

"Helping to create a sense of place... and hopefully developing a sense of pride in the area." "Local heritage is a central element of providing a 'sense of place'."

"It helps to retain a sense of regional identity."

"It's good to take a moment to appreciate how things used to be done, reflect, enjoy and spend some quality time with people."

"We can learn from the past... to improve ourselves and value what we have today."

"Being able to highlight and showcase the history of an area to get a glimpse into how people used to live is intriguing."

"[It helps people] understand their local history and identity."

"Helping people connect to their city and its place nationally and in the world."

"A place that represents you as a local person."

"Local history makes people proud of where they live."

"These museums and art galleries enrich life."

The Commandery

Visitor satisfaction up from 78% to 82%

Visitor perception of value for money up from 64% to 88%

"I came into the Museum yesterday with a blind and partially sighted group. We thought the current [Victorian] exhibition was yet another superb exhibition, with carefully selected pieces, helpful interpretation and beautifully displayed."

Commandery Visitor, 2025

- Remembrance weekend saw the display of the Worcestershire Yeomanry's unique Faberge pear blossom. Visitors enjoyed a rare chance to see this beautiful work of art and the event raised money towards the new Worcestershire Soldier display which will open in 2028.
- Other successful events this year have included a well-attended Living History weekend, new craft workshops, the continuing partnership with Worcester Theatres and the launch of the national campaign promoting the 375th anniversary of the Battle of Worcester.

The Commandery continues to be part of people's special events, whether that's families coming together for a day out or being the chosen location for couples' wedding celebrations. Wedding bookings are up by 20% on 24-25.

Participation For All Ages

- Pikelets is The Commandery's first Early Years initiative offering a safe, welcoming and inclusive space for parents of pre-school aged children. Each session runs in a different part of the museum, encouraging through play fine and gross motor skills and language development.
- The Commandery has been recognised as a dementia-friendly venue after undergoing specialist training designed to help them provide excellent customer service for visitors with a range of accessibility needs.

Community Passes at The Commandery

A community pass scheme which enabled free entry to The Commandery was trialled to support the Medical Education Team at Worcestershire County Council. The team provides support teaching pupils with a wide range of physical, emotional and psychological health needs.

When young people were not ready for an institutional or clinical environment, The Commandery offered a place of calm and reflection for staff to bring young people to walk the gardens and explore the building.

It has led to students transitioning fully back into education.

“The Commandery has been a bridge between home and school and has been so beneficial in supporting high need anxiety students. A safe place like The Commandery is essential for Community visits to make trusted relationships.”

Teresa Chandler, Medical Education Team, Worcestershire County Council

Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum

Visitor numbers more than 70,000

Economic impact: £1.56 million

- The incredibly popular autumn exhibition Designing Terry Pratchett’s Discworld – the art of Paul Kidby saw fans travelling from across the UK and internationally to visit the exhibition with December 2025 being the Art Gallery and Museum’s busiest December on record.
- John Singer Sargent: An American in Worcestershire has brought works on loan from significant collections to Worcester, including the British Museum, Tate, Ashmolean Museum and Birmingham Museums Trust, ensuring that Worcestershire residents can enjoy great art on their doorstep.
- The events programme goes from strength to strength, welcoming new audiences and returning visitors. The year has seen talks, tours, workshops, Museum After Hours events, Quiz Nights and Craft Fayres in the Art Gallery and Museum.
- As part of our ongoing partnership with Play Worcester, we welcomed the Big Blue Blocks into Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum during February half term. Encouraging open-ended play, children came together to connect and build as well as explore the gallery spaces in new ways.

Your Worcester Gallery

A new permanent exhibition at Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum celebrates the story of the city through the words of those who live in it. It features familiar favourites from the museum collection and new objects added by local residents.

Through co-curation the exhibition is reflective of the Worcestershire population and represents the voices of the community the museum serves.

“To see WCFC represented in the museum makes me feel so proud of our sporting heritage. It’s a pleasure to be able to share these items”

Worcester City Football Club Historian, opening of Your Worcester, 2025

“Great. I learnt lots about where I live! I will be coming back!”

Visitor to Your Worcester, 2026

Worcestershire County Museum

Awards: Visit England Gold Award Tripadvisor Traveller's Choice Award

Increase in mental wellbeing through participation: 22%

"My dad who doesn't really speak much anymore came alive, he was chatting to the staff and ... they were all so kind to him! The range of different activities and interactions was fantastic, the dressing up was a real hit and the real life kitchen activities really made the experience come alive for my girls too! We particularly enjoyed the 50s room and the school room because you could live the experience"

Visitor to Worcestershire County Museum, 2025

- The introduction of heritage craft courses at the County Museum has had a positive start, with a silver ring-making course fully booked and many people booking on to regular blacksmithing courses which take place in the historic forge at the Museum.
- The County Museum had another successful year of events including outstanding Christmas and Halloween events with very positive feedback from visitors.

"Experiential tourism at its best!"

Blacksmith course participant, 2025

Stay and Play Saturdays at Worcestershire County Museum

The County Museum provided a safe space for new Saturday 'Stay and Play' sessions for Special Educational Needs children under 6 years old. Whilst children engaged in play lead by museum staff, parents/carers had the opportunity to connect with others having a similar experience and benefit from mutual support.

We supported 27 children, 29 parents/grandparents and made a positive connection with the Worcester Parent Carer Forum.

Museum Volunteers

67 volunteers

More than 4,000 hours donated

A huge thank you to all our volunteers for their significant contribution to the museums

"Volunteering at The Commandery gives me the opportunity to meet interesting people and learn something new in a beautiful building. Mostly importantly...it's fun!!"

Elaine Hampson

Career Development in Culture and Heritage

Museums Worcestershire proudly supports career development opportunities to local young people, providing a taste of all aspects of a job in museums and heritage.

- As part of our annual work experience programme for Year 12, we welcomed students from Stourport and Pershore High Schools to Worcestershire County Museum and students from Hanley Castle High School and The Chase Sixth Form at our Worcester City museums.
- Staff member Eleanor joined the service, studying for a Level 3 Cultural Learning and Participation Officer apprenticeship with Museums Worcestershire.

Museum collections

New items on display at The Commandery include a Queen Anne era gold ring (shown right) and a Tudor chafing dish.

This year has seen the acquisition of some key works into Worcester City's fine art collection, to strengthen Worcester's British Impressionism collection. These acquisitions were funded by the Shirley & Rolf Olsen Purchase Fund through the support of the Worcestershire Heritage, Art & Museums charity:

- In the Vegetable Garden by Alfred Parsons was painted at Broadway in Worcestershire where Parsons lived as part of the Broadway Colony of Artists which included John Singer Sargent.
- Gathering Flowers in a Meadow by Elizabeth Adela Forbes was acquired following the successful Elizabeth and Stanhope Forbes exhibition.
- La Pierre au Trois Croquis (The Stone with Three Sketches) by Pierre Auguste Renoir (shown below) has been added to the collection to illustrate the influences of British Impressionism.

Museum Learning

Students in formal learning engaged with the museums: 8,234

School visits from Worcestershire: 80%

Outreach boxes reached: 2,700+ students

"Thank you!" from us all for a great experience at the City Art Gallery. Year 3 were so enthusiastic. They loved it. For many it was their first ever trip to an art gallery/ museum - and it was a really positive one!"

KS3 Teacher (Worcester), Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum

“An unforgettable day of hands-on history brought vividly to life.”

School visit to The Commandery

“I just wanted to pass on my thanks to the museum for such a lovely workshop about toys. Paul was so lovely with the children and pitched at just the right level for them. The children really enjoyed it and said it was super!”

First school teacher (Redditch), Worcestershire County Museum

Thank you to all our visitors, Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council, and the many funders for enabling us to make a positive impact on the lives of so many Worcester and Worcestershire residents

Project funding awards to Museums Worcestershire in 2025-2026:

- Art Fund
- Arts Council England
- Elmley Foundation
- John Ellerman Foundation
- Museum Development Midlands
- National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Worcestershire County Council Public Health Team
- Worcester’s Town Deals Programme (department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities)
- Worcestershire HAF programme (Department for Education)
- Worcestershire Heritage, Art & Museums, including the Shirley & Rolf Olsen Art Purchase Fund
- Worshipful Company of Arts Scholars
- Wychavon District Council

Conservation of the painting Tugboats on the Thames by Ronald Ossary Dunlop was made possible with funds from Museums Worcestershire’s membership scheme.

The funding supported expert conservation and repair of the painting and the addition of an historically sympathetic frame. The painting will be displayed as part of the new Shirley & Rolf Olsen Gallery of British Impressionism

The pay-it-forward scheme advocated for and underwritten by Worcestershire Heritage, Art & Museums, the museums' fundraising and advocacy charity continues to provide access to charged exhibitions by students.

Tickets were used by students from many Universities including Worcester, Birmingham, Bath Spa, The Open University, University of the West of England and Loughborough as well as Worcester and Halesowen colleges

Worcestershire Heritage, Art & Museums Charity registration number: 1197448

Looking forward

- Museums Worcestershire will support the Mercian Regiment (Worcestershire) Museum and the Worcestershire Yeomanry Museum to deliver a new Worcestershire Soldier display at The Commandery and associated community programme, thanks to funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund and many individual donors.
- Work continues for the new British Impressionism gallery, and a gallery celebrating Worcester's history of gloves at the Art Gallery & Museum, made possible by generous philanthropists through Worcestershire Heritage, Art & Museum. The new gallery will be a key part of the new weddings and celebrations offer enabling people to hold their ceremonies and receptions at the Art Gallery & Museum for the first time.
- The charity has also supported Museums Worcestershire to secure funding from the Caldecott Trust and Rowlands Trust to fund a new Learning Centre at the Art Gallery & Museum, and its linked family space, based on illustrations of nursery rhymes from the City's collection.
- The Atchin Tan project at Worcestershire County Museum will support planning towards the next phase of the museum's work, while celebrating Worcestershire's historic identity and traditional heritage craft skills.

"Museums Worcestershire continues to demonstrate the vital role our museums play at the heart of Worcestershire's communities and the local visitor economy. Through inspiring exhibitions, engaging learning programmes and welcoming spaces, the service has connected people of all ages with Worcestershire's rich heritage and celebrated the stories that make our county unique."

Councillor Adrian Gregson, Chair, Joint Museums Committee 2025-2026