

Museum of Gloucester, Museum Development Plan: 2021-2026 Years 2 and 3 Progress Update – FEB 2024

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Priority 1 - Collections

Collections Review & Rationalisation

There are over 750,000 objects in the Museum collections. A full review of the collections is needed to understand what is currently held by the Museum. This review is in progress and is working in tandem with the former Folk Museum decant and other Museum-related projects as described throughout the rest of this document. The Museum is following SPECTRUM standards which is an important aspect of retaining Museum Accreditation.

A full review of the Museum collection takes time. The process involves condition checking, documenting, repacking, and relocating whilst continually planning the future storage needs of the service. By following SPECTRUM standards, the Museum will fully understand what is in the collections and how to care and manage it in the future; this will enable it to become more accessible to the public.

The service has updated the rationalisation process.

Rationalisation of objects is important if a museum is to continue to collect in the future. Museum collections need to remain relevant to its vision and objectives which evolve over time as well as to its communities and visitors. This process will take place throughout the review.



Figure 1: Packaged objects in storage at the Museum of Gloucester



Figure 2- Collection stored in the Museum of Gloucester basement

As part of the ongoing review of the Museum collections, the team were successful in their 2023 bid for £160,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project 'From Store to Store: Uncovering Gloucester's Archaeological Treasures' will see the archaeological stores opened, and the collection moved to a central unit where it can be sorted, reviewed, and repacked to ensure its long-term preservation, all alongside a co-created engagement programme.

During this project, all emptied stores will be cleaned and reconfigured. The collection will be rationalised therefore creating space to continue to collect archaeology into the future.

Former Folk Museum Decant

The former Folk Museum (now known as The Folk) still houses collections that are in the care of Gloucester City Council. August 2021 saw the lease signed, and the former Folk Museum handed over to Gloucester Historic Buildings Ltd, where Gloucester Civic Trust has now taken on the day-to-day operations of the building. It was agreed that the City Council would remove any collection in storage or not on loan by August 2026, giving the Museum service time to source additional storage and remove objects in their entirety, unless on loan to the Civic Trust.

Since 2020, the Collections team have been working to catalogue and move objects - to date, around 4,500 objects have been cleaned, catalogued, and moved to new locations, with a further 2,000 objects catalogued and repacked. The work has mostly focused on objects that were previously on display or in smaller stores. The primary focus going forward is on the stores which house the greatest number of objects (around about 18,000). The team has been working with a core group of volunteers to complete this work whilst also responding to several small emergency salvage situations.

The project was put on hold in 2021/2022, due to building work at the Folk that meant the team were unable to access the building for 9 months. The deadline for the full decant was pushed back to February 2027 to accommodate these works. There has also been a focus on staff training to ensure that collections are managed to SPECTRUM standards and to address longstanding collections' care issues and concerns.



Figure 3- Art Store at the former Folk Museum



Figure 4- Relocating artwork, Museum store, cleaning of Museum objects

Storage Assessment

Projects that are currently taking place or pending will help us understand the storage requirements for the immediate and longer-term future of Museum collecting.

The former Folk Museum decant, the Archaeology Centre project, the collections review, archaeological depositions review and update, along with the MEND capital works that are currently taking place, all contribute to understanding the current and future storage needs of the service. Once these projects are complete, the service will be clearer on its storage position.



Figure 5- Museum store

Accreditation

Museum Accreditation is a standard that increases a museum's credibility and value to funders, policy makers, insurers, the community, and peers. Accreditation demonstrates that a museum is meeting the professional standards set by the industry and is administered by the Arts Council of England. The Museum of Gloucester was granted its accreditation renewal in 2018 and renewals generally take place every 5 years through the submission of data returns to provide evidence of collections standards. Due to a national backlog, it is expected that a return will need to be submitted in 2024/2025. It is the intention to continue to ensure that the Museum of Gloucester maintains its status as an accredited Museum.

Collection Digitisation

The current Collections Management System used by the Museum of Gloucester is called Modes. Modes is widely known in the Museum sector for the management of Museum collections. For the Museum of Gloucester to enable the Museum collection to become more widely accessible, more notably via digital methods, a new Collections Management System will need to be sourced.

In conjunction with the City Council's IT department, the Museum team have been through a process to understand the different systems available that meet SPECTRUM standards and enable access to the collection via digital means. A preferred supplier has been identified to help allow better access, but implementation of this new system was delayed due to the 2021 cyber incident, where Modes became inaccessible for nearly 18 months. Since then, there have been several other priorities for the team as detailed within this progress report, however, a new Collections Management System is important and will be progressed in 2024/2025.



Figure 6 - Condition checking and cataloguing objects

Priority 2 – Public Programming

Education

Education in museums is important as it connects the community to the Museum and provides inspiration for adults and children of all ages. The Museum of Gloucester has built positive relationships with schools within Gloucester and the surrounding areas, and these relationships means that the Museum can respond to societal challenges, and educational programmes can provide opportunities for more isolated, vulnerable, and marginalized members of society, to take part in activities and gain experiences.

The Museum education offer has continually grown from a basic loans box offer to investment from the Cultural Recovery Fund in 2021 where new sessions were designed, and resources updated. In 2021/2022, the focus was about building relationships and therefore a smaller number of school sessions were delivered. In 2022/2023, 32 school sessions were delivered onsite which saw 1,686 school children visit the Museum.



Figure 7 - Students learning via loans box

During 2023, the Museum participated in a pilot project called 'Wild Escape' which was supported by Art Fund. This project saw the taxidermy collection travel outside of the Museum, visiting schools where students created comics that told of the escape from the Museum to a better environment. The nationally funded project saw a grant of £3,000 provided to the Museum to engage with school children across KS1 and KS2 in the lead up to Earth Day 2023. Examples of some of the work produced during this project can be seen here - [The Wild Escape — Museum of Gloucester](#)

The education programme is currently undergoing re-imagination to make it more memorable, engaging, inspiring and an immersive experience for school children of all ages. Audience research on the requirements of education providers has been conducted with ongoing consultation and relationship building continuing to be a priority. The Engagement Officer is in the process of recruiting a pool of casual facilitators called 'Museum Inspirers' to support the delivery of the new learning programme. The new programme will consist of sessions at the Museum, outreach, loans boxes, pre/post visit resources, online resources, and virtual sessions. This new programme will be launched in stages, with the initial launch taking place in April 2024 (start of the summer term) with sessions at the Museum. A priority piece of work due to be undertaken is the rationalising and cataloguing of the education and handling collections.



Figure 8 - Wild Escape project

Exhibitions & Events

The current exhibition programme structure will see three exhibitions take place annually in the main exhibition space on the first floor of the Museum.

A blockbuster touring Summer exhibition aims to attract a family audience, an audience and season that helps maximise footfall and income generation. The Autumn/Winter exhibition programme aims to showcase objects held within the Museum collection, with the New Year/early Spring exhibition currently showcasing photography as part of the Royal Photographic Society partnership.



Figure 9 - Ladybird Exhibition 2021

Exhibitions are the main driver of footfall and are essential in encouraging visitors to return to the Museum. A wraparound programme keeps visitors engaged and provides an opportunity to generate further vital funds through the Museum café and shop.

There have been many exhibition highlights since the MDP was adopted in 2021. Below is a list of exhibitions that have taken place, along with attendance numbers:

Exhibition	Visitor Numbers
2021 - Ladybird Book Artists	5,950 – Summer
2021 – History, Her Story, Their Story, Our Story	3,040
2022 – RPS IPE162	1,167
2022 – Titanic Honour and Glory	3,939 – Summer
2022 - 1980s – Britain Money Changes Everything	890
2023 – RPS IPE163	1,564
2023 - May The Toys Be With You	6,097 - Summer
2023 - Buttons, Badges, Blazers	3,426

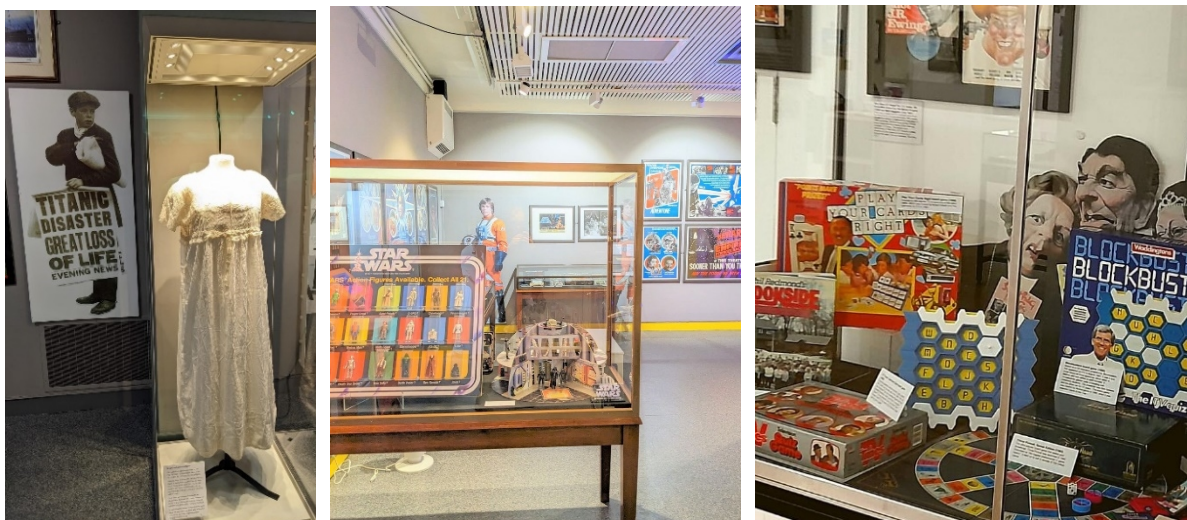


Figure 10 - Titanic Exhibition, 1980s Exhibition, 1980s Exhibition

Two of the listed exhibitions had a greater level of importance in telling the story of Gloucester and its communities.

History, Her Story, Their Story, Our Story showcased a diverse collection of work by artists inspired and mentored by renowned British photographer Vanley Burke. History, Her Story, Their Story, Our Story depicts creative responses to the question 'When was the first time you saw someone of different ethnicity to you?' This City Voices partnership project that included Gloucestershire Archives and Fresh Air Foundations, culminated in an exhibition of artwork at the Museum of Gloucester.



Figure 11 - History, Her Story, Their Story, Our Story

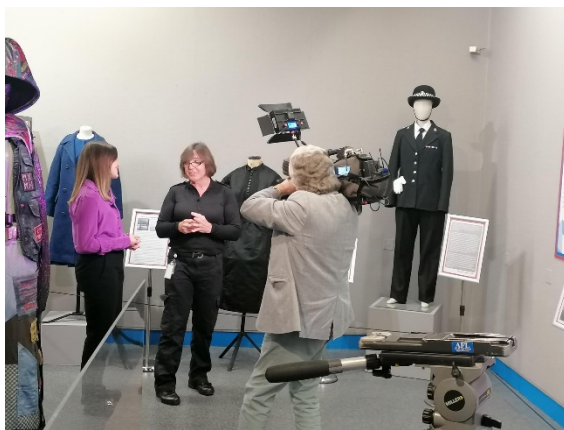


Figure 12 - Buttons, Badges and Blazers Exhibition

The Autumn 2023 exhibition was also notable as this was the first collections-based exhibition since late 2019. Buttons, Badges and Blazers showcased a selection of costumes from the Museum's collection of 4,500 costumes. Costumes on display came from as early as the 16th to the 20th century. Prominent pieces on display included 16th century judicial robes, robes worn by the first female magistrate as well as uniforms of police officer, prison wardens, water bailiffs and midwives. There were also several high-profile loans on display from members of Gloucester's community such as the uniform of the first openly transgender

police woman in Gloucestershire and the uniform of the first female World Cup Rugby Referee. Two young artists were commissioned to produce two contemporary pieces in response to the exhibition. You can view some behind the scenes footage from one of the contemporary artists here - <https://youtu.be/InyOWKPyWuk>



Figure 13 - Costume designed by Katie Taylor, workshop, costume designed by Sam Bates

This exhibition was funded by an Arts Council England Project Grant. The Museum received £21,500. In addition to this, South-West Museum Development provided a £1,000 grant for the conservation of 2 rugby caps dating back to 1887 and 1928, enabling them to be put on display as part of the exhibition.

In late 2023, South-West Museum Development awarded the Museum £7,200 as part of their Small Grants, Big Improvements funding programming. These funds were used to appoint a consultant, Rob Bowman, to review the entire engagement, events and exhibitions programme and help place audiences and communities at the heart of our ethos and activities. The outcomes of this piece of work will include:

- Increased and more diverse engagement across programming.
- Improved understanding of how to respond to the needs of audiences.
- Greater coherence across programming, rather than standalone events and activity.
- Greater confidence in exploring radical ideas and themes that resonate with audiences through our programme
- Improved connectivity with other strands in the cultural service.

This work continues to take place at the point of writing this progress report, but the new Programme Framework the consultant is writing will be critical in ensuring that the Museum continues to grow commercially and remain relevant.

Community Gallery

The Community Gallery, which is located on the ground floor of the Museum, is a space where community groups and artists can showcase their work. Led by the Museum Engagement Officer, there has been a series of exhibitions within this space, including:

- The Rush Brothers, identical twins who have found different mediums through ceramics and sculptures to explore who they are and how they feel
- 'Women at the Well' – artwork that enters into a journey of reflection, faith, hope and action – encountering various stories of 'Women at the well'. This community-led group were formed in 2021, all women who read stories about women at wells in the Bible and the Qur'an.

Further information about the Community Gallery exhibitions can be seen here - [Community Gallery — Museum of Gloucester](#)



Figure 14 - Exhibition by Rizpah Amadasun, exhibition by The Rush Brothers

Priority 3 – Audiences

Audience Development

This will be an area for growth as the MDP progresses into its 4th year. The audience relationship framework includes:

- Acquire – We seek out our audiences and get them to pay attention to us.
- Engage – We help them connect to us through entertaining content and a relevant offer.
- Convert – We make it easy and desirable for them to visit and buy from us.
- Retain – We make them want to visit and buy from us again.

In 2023, the Tourism and Destination Marketing team took on the responsibility of Museum marketing. A dedicated part-time Marketing Officer was appointed, and work is to start in building out the marketing strategy, so that it delivers a simple marketing system, deliverable with the resources available, focusing on the above framework.



Figure 15 - History line up outside the Museum of Gloucester - credit Paul Nicholls.

Decolonisation Project

As part of the Museum's commitment to decolonisation, collections staff started to research and investigate the records to see what objects connected to the Transatlantic Slave Trade were in the collections. It quickly transpired that due to incomplete and poor record management in the past that this was turning into a much bigger project than originally expected. This contributed to the decision to carry out a major inventory and cataloguing project across all of the collections, highlighting and amending problematic language and flagging objects with difficult and controversial histories as a part of that process – essentially bringing the decolonisation process into our everyday practice.

The Museum had made a previous commitment to hold a temporary exhibition at the Museum, but through this process the project team including the City Archaeologist (lead for the Historic Monuments Review) decided that instead of discussing the results of the Review, that it would be an interesting approach to look at one key figure in Gloucester's history. George Whitefield (1714-1770), an Anglican cleric and evangelist was selected. The Museum presented both sides of his story, including the things that he is praised and commemorated for, but also highlighting his links to slavery. The public were then asked a series of questions about this approach and encouraged to leave feedback. Most of the public agreed that this was a good approach – sharing all parts of a person's or place's

history and not just highlighting the positive. This approach is now being built into the collections management processes, as well as in any interpretation and displays done by the Museum team.

Partnerships

New partnerships are being formed regularly. Below are just a small handful of partnerships that that have been developed:

In 2021 the Museum of Gloucester announced a 3-year partnership with the Royal Photographic Society, committing to a series of International Photography Exhibitions in 2022, 2023 and 2024. The International Photography Exhibition is the world's largest running photographic exhibition. Now in its 165th edition, the IPE portfolio is a powerful presentation that demonstrates the breadth of contemporary image making and storytelling today. Themes of identity, cultural heritage, global societal issues, gender politics, mental health, the natural world, and the human condition can all be seen on display.

VOICES Gloucester (previously City Voices) partnered with several Gloucester based organisations, including the Museum of Gloucester, on a project called 'Threads'. 'A Costume for Gloucester' was a community project that brought together over 100 stitchers to showcase Gloucester's unique heritage, history, and culture. The final costume went on display at the Museum of Gloucester as part of the Buttons, Badges, and Blazers exhibition and has been accessioned into the Museum's permanent collections.

In 2023, Young Gloucestershire were approached as part of the Museum's commitment to working with young people. Young Gloucestershire were consulted about two projects as a springboard for future engagement – the Buttons, Badges & Blazers Costume Project and the Archaeological archives project. The Museum Project Officer and Engagement Officer joined meetings of the Young Gloucestershire Youth Board – a group made up of 12 young people aged 16-24. The Youth Board advised on the format of the engagement and events programme, giving ideas and advice on what type of events would attract young people and also about what would attract a young person to volunteer. They have expressed an interest in helping us with some of the physical decorations works behind the scenes and in the stores as well. This is an important partnership that will continue to build in the future.

The Museum, as part of the wider cultural services team, have continued to work closely with Gloucestershire Sight-Loss Council to ensure that the Museum is accessible to visitors who may have a level of visual impairment. Museum staff have received visual impairment training, whilst the Museum continues to engage with the Sight-Loss Council on day-to-day aspects of the Museum to ensure we are inclusive of the broadest possible audience. This includes advice on:

- exhibition and event planning,
- use of colour in the décor and exhibits
- new partnerships

South-West Museum Development have provided several opportunities for peer networking and staff development through various projects. Rebuilding Foundations saw 10 Gloucestershire Museums develop skills and knowledge around volunteer management, safeguarding and ED&I. More recently, the Travelling Together project saw 8 Museums from across the South West region come together to further develop skills and knowledge to ensure that museums are accessible to all.

Volunteer Development

Volunteers play an important role in the Museum of Gloucester, especially supporting the decant of the former Folk Museum and in supporting the collections review. The Museum has always attracted volunteers because it is seen as an entry point for those wanting to gain experience in working with Museum collections.

From April to December 2023, Museum volunteers provided 1,185 hours of support to this service. These hours have predominantly supported the former Folk Museum decant but have also contributed to the set-up of exhibitions and events.

Volunteers will continue to play an important role as we move into 2024/2025. The collections review will continue but the 10-month Archaeology Centre project will be reliant upon the support from volunteers, with a recruitment drive supported by the appointed archaeology contractor. If successful, we are expecting in excess of 4,000 volunteer hours contributing towards this project alone.



Figure 16 - Volunteers working on the costume collection

Priority 4 - Sustainability

Entrance Relocation

When writing the MDP, the intention was to act on previous conversations held with the Library service about creating a shared entrance to both the Museum and the Library, as there is a redundant entrance that sits between both venues. If progressed, both services would benefit considerably due to footfall and different types of audiences moving between services. Since then, the Library service has announced that it will be relocating to the former Debenhams unit, therefore, these plans are now on hold until the City Council understands the plans for the former Library building.

Museum Transformation

The MDP identified that in order for the Museum of Gloucester to remain relevant, it would need to identify and deliver a 'transformation project'. At the time of writing the plan, the specifics were not detailed - it was clear that the Museum needed change across the board.



In planning for future transformation, the Museum building needs to be fit for purpose. In 2021, £2m worth of investment was identified as being needed to bring the Museum building up to standard. At the same time, Arts Council England announced its 'Museum Estates Development Fund' – a capital fund targeted at non-national accredited museums and local authorities based in England. These funds were to undertake vital infrastructure and urgent maintenance backlogs which may be beyond scope of day-to-day maintenance budgets. A bid was submitted and accepted with Arts Council England awarding the Museum £387,500 of a total project budget of £470,350. Works include upgrading the distribution boards, upgrading lighting to LED, lift repairs, drainage improvements, dehumidification improvements, roof recovering, as well as improving the air handling in both exhibition spaces therefore improving

environmental conditions, enabling the Museum to attract loans of national importance. These works have started and will be complete by the end of March 2024.

Museum Website

The Museum website was upgraded in 2022 after receiving funding as part of the final round of Cultural Recovery Funding. During the last 12 months, there has been changes to enable better navigation in finding events, exhibitions, and items for sale. A new online store has been launched to enable customers to purchase Gift Shop products from home, and new donation options have been launched, including Adopt an Object. Work is ongoing to further streamline the sitemap of the website, to better integrate the new ticketing system and to update out of date information and images.

Carbon Neutral by 2030

The Museum has taken steps to support the Council's ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030. The MEND capital works are significant in that lighting changes will reduce energy consumption and changes to boilers and radiators will mean that spaces/rooms can be temperature controlled independently, rather than having to heat the whole building at once. New TRVs allow for even better temperature control.