



MUSEUMS CHANGE LIVES

MA Museums
Association

Wales

Our shared commitment to and passion for Museums Change Lives is more important now than ever.

At this time of continued uncertainty, alongside endemic inequalities and divisions, more museums, small and large, with different audiences and governance, are stepping up to the plate, using their fabulous collections and creativity to build socially engaged practice. They are supporting people with dementia, combatting loneliness by bringing people together, offering training and learning opportunities, engaging with children and families, and celebrating Welsh culture, language and heritage.

For so many museums this is embedded in their DNA and driven by a deep sense of purpose. What emerges from the examples here for me is that museums are becoming places with porous walls, working with communities and partners of all shapes and sizes to harness our fabulous collections and amazing spaces, led by a crystal clear goal of changing lives for the better. What brilliant people. What inspiring stories. What incredible collections.

Please do share your own examples with us so that we can draw on them too in order to inspire others.

Maggie Appleton
President (2018-21)
Museums Association

FOREWORD



Welsh museums are a network of important community resources and the case studies in this booklet demonstrate how much value they bring to Wales and how vital they are to their localities.

Powerful, innovative examples of creating positive change for individuals and communities through museum collections, projects, activities and programming are happening across Wales. Museums look after Wales's cultural memory – the objects and stories that inspire us to learn from our past, in order to understand our present and make a better future. Day in, day out, often with no great fanfare, Welsh museums support their communities, and help deliver key social and government agendas in areas like community cohesion, the economy, health and wellbeing, learning, and skills development.

Welsh museums certainly change lives – and we hope the case studies here demonstrate just how crucial they are to communities across the country.

Victoria Rogers

President (2016-21)

Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales

**MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION
INSPIRING
MUSEUMS TO
CHANGE LIVES**

01. Enhancing health and wellbeing

- Museums enhance our quality of life and improve our mental and physical health.
- Museums work in partnership with health and wellbeing organisations to support a range of people in society with different needs.
- Meaningful participation and volunteering promotes wellbeing and self-confidence and can broaden the horizons of participants, the museum and the public.

02. Creating better places to live and work

- Museums help us to value the places where we live, work and visit and help us to understand where we have come from.
- Museums create a sense of belonging by engaging with communities and encouraging active public participation in decision-making.
- Museums use engagement, learning and collections to generate understanding within and between different groups and communities in society.
- Museums generate partnerships with community groups, charities and third-sector organisations to create spaces that are open and accessible to all.

03. Inspiring engagement, reflection and debate

- Museums work with the public as active and creative participants in the life of the museum – using it as a space for exchanging opinions, experiences, ideas and knowledge.
- Museums help us to understand and negotiate the complex world around us, encouraging us to reflect on contemporary challenges such as discrimination, conflict, poverty and climate change.
- Museums use their research and collections to challenge assumptions, foster debate and motivate people to contribute to positive change in the world. They are not neutral spaces.
- Museums inspire learning and creativity for children and adults and work actively to ensure that a broad and diverse audience can access these opportunities at any stage in life.

01.

**ENHANCING
HEALTH AND
WELLBEING**



ART IN COVID-19 FIELD HOSPITALS AMGUEDDFA CYMRU – NATIONAL MUSEUM WALES

When the Covid-19 pandemic began in 2020, Public Health Wales announced that it would build field hospitals across Wales to double NHS capacity. Unlike permanent hospitals, these buildings were repurposed, sometimes temporary spaces that have one thing in common, the walls were bare. Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales’s challenge was to transform some of these spaces into art galleries.

By working in partnership with Arts Council Wales, and with support from the Welsh Government, Amgueddfa Cymru devised Celf ar y Cyd, a series of ambitious visual art projects that challenge us to share the art collection across Wales during the crisis. By working with health boards across Wales, our brief was to make people feel at home, and to act quickly so that the spaces would be ready to receive their first patients.

As the Covid-19 pandemic worsened over the winter, and the pressure on NHS staff increased, we continued to take the art collection into hospitals to provide inspiration and solace for staff and patients.

At the start of February 2021, a new Staff Haven facility opened at the UHW Health Hospital site in Cardiff, partly funded through a charity run by Welsh footballer Gareth Bale and his family, to support NHS staff wellbeing.

We invited hospital staff to choose which artworks they would like to see and overwhelmingly, the favourite theme was nature. A selection of paintings was made which attempt to bring the magic of the outdoors, indoors, using huge reproductions of the paintings which stretch from floor to ceiling.

The next stage of the project will be to bring poetry to the walls, and new writing is being commissioned from two Welsh poets, Hannan Issa and Elan Grug. Inspired by the paintings, the poetry will be written to offer fresh perspectives and new ways of thinking about art, the natural landscape, and the importance it has to us all, particularly in hard times.

Amgueddfa Cymru continues to hold conversations with health boards across Wales to find new approaches to ensure that the art collection can be used by NHS teams and patients in a way that works for them, both online and in the workplace.

INTERGENERATIONAL MEMORY CAFES MONMOUTHSHIRE MUSEUMS SERVICE

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The programme is an exceptional template for other inter-generational projects to follow and will be used as an example of such to other Dementia Friends groups throughout the UK.

Ian Thomas
Alzheimer's Society

Across the whole of the UK, the number of people living with Dementia is increasing. Monmouthshire Museums Service has been looking for new ways to include people living with Dementia in its programmes, building upon our successful volunteer-run reminiscence programme.

When we were approached by our local secondary school to help deliver the Welsh Baccalaureate Community Volunteering Challenge, it seemed an ideal opportunity to create a project that brought young people and people living with dementia together: intergenerational memory cafes.

Our first cohort of 10 young people were trained to use handling objects as conversation triggers and provided with Dementia Friends awareness sessions. The students worked together with museum staff to research and organise a series of two hour themed memory cafes that included music, handling objects, costume and afternoon tea.

The cafes have been well attended and received, and have also benefited the students, some of whom received a young volunteers award and stayed on to mentor the next cohort.

The Memory Café project has also resulted in an expansion of our programming for people living with dementia, including creative workshops and partnerships with our local health authority.

Are we making a difference?
We hope so.

“
Makes those living with dementia feel human again.

Carer of participant on the creative workshops course



BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE CYNON VALLEY MUSEUM

In November 2019 Cynon Valley Museum in partnership with local charity, Cynon Valley Pals, introduced the Sunflower Lanyard Scheme to the museum. Originally implemented across airports, the scheme is a more discrete way for staff to acknowledge members of the public who may need additional support on their visit. The scheme was introduced to the museum by Cynon Valley Pals, who were advocating for its use across the community.

It was launched following a period of consultation and workshop sessions with the charity, with Cynon Valley Pals sharing their lived experiences and answering questions about the scheme.

The success of this launch has created a successful relationship with the charity. The museum has built on the scheme introducing sensory information into its galleries. The signs are designed to give an expectation of what is to come in the museum, reducing the anxiety of

unknown spaces and potential for sensory overload.

Today the museum continues to work with Cynon Valley Pals as part of a project funded by the People's Health Trust. The museum is working with local families supported by the charity whose voices will decide how the project unfurls, while developing new skills and continuing to engage with the museum and local community.

The partnership remains one of learning and exchange. Today we are continuing to learn and build upon best practices. Through this working partnership we have done more for the museum and the community than both could ever have done alone.





HIDDEN NOW HEARD MENCAP CYMRU IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ST FAGANS NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND REGIONAL MUSEUMS

Hidden Now Heard was a three-year (2015-17) National Lottery Heritage Fund oral history project led by the learning disability charity Mencap Cymru. In partnership with St Fagans National Museum of History and regional museums across Wales, the project captured the untold and often painful living memories of patients, their relatives, and staff from six former long-stay hospitals in Wales.

“

I think by having a person with a learning disability present it can help put people at ease, not just the former patients but the support staff because we have shared experiences as people with a learning disability.

The Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 called on local authorities to establish long-stay hospitals for people with both mental health conditions and learning disabilities. Dubbed “colonies” for the “mentally defective”, many of those who were admitted were misdiagnosed and became isolated from society. Mencap Cymru played a lead role in the closure of these long-stay institutions in Wales.

Early in the project development, St Fagans worked closely with Mencap Cymru to train their staff in the ethics and techniques of collecting oral testimony, and to develop accessible consent and copyright forms. The

project generated 97 oral history recordings with 85 individuals – all of which are now archived at St Fagans – and nine temporary exhibitions in regional museums and public spaces across Wales.

Reflecting on her role as project officer and interviewer, Sara Pickard from Mencap Cymru said: “We felt that having someone like myself as part of the interview would help us get the best interview possible. In some cases, me being there has helped our interviews. I think by having a person with a learning disability present it can help put people at ease, not just the former patients but the support staff because we have shared experiences as people with a learning disability.”

Mencap Cymru and St Fagans have further developed this model as a framework for Our Social Networks – an ongoing oral history project that explores the friendships and relationships experienced by people with a learning disability living in Wales today. The recordings generated by this project will also become part of the national collection at St Fagans.

02.

CREATING

BETTER

PLACES TO

LIVE AND

WORK

LITERATURE AND TRAUMA DYLAN THOMAS CENTRE

Literature and Trauma is a community creative writing project run by Swansea Council's Dylan Thomas Service, which builds on the Dylan Thomas Centre's longstanding relationship with local refugee communities. In the early 2000s, after Swansea became a "dispersal area", we began working with displaced people, launching anthologies of creative writing by refugees, asylum seekers and local people, and holding celebratory community events.

Thanks to funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, we began more sustained engagement with organisations including Swansea Asylum Seekers Support Group, African Community Centre and City of Sanctuary, and most importantly with displaced people themselves. As a result, the Literature and Trauma sessions began in 2017, led by Cameroonian writer Eric Ngalle Charles; his personal experience of displacement and asylum proved crucial in providing a safe space for participants to express themselves.

During the Literature and Trauma sessions, people tell their unique stories through poetry and prose. Holding the workshops in our Learning Space ensured provision of play facilities for any accompanying children, thereby allowing their guardians to focus on



their writing, while free bus tickets removed the barrier of travel costs. The resulting work has featured in cultural events, local media, and been read on BBC radio.

The workshops deliver clear social impact, enabling attendees to feel part of the wider community, to access cultural venues and orientate themselves in a new city. Our venue has become a focal point and safe space for a committed and gifted group from this often-neglected community.

Having had the opportunity to work closely with asylum seekers and refugees, we are now working collaboratively to expand on these opportunities. Our new Blooming under the Tall Tales project, supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, will focus on working with asylum seekers, refugees and community organisations to develop family programmes around our collections.

“

As a friend, or as a family now, we just try to encourage people to come to this project to share their story if they want. I like to tell people what we've been through. We have lots of problems in our life, but still we are here now. We have a chance to speak in front of people. Before that I was nervous. But Eric always told me, 'It is only you that can tell your own story to other people'.



A SPACE FOR COMMUNITIES CYNON VALLEY MUSEUM

The Cynon Valley Museum has sought to establish itself in Cynon Valley since its reopening in 2016. The museum has worked to host local artists and art groups, recruit volunteers locally reflect the community, and make the museum more relevant to the daily lives of the public, creating new ways to bring people through the museum's doors.

To do this the museum sought to move beyond the restrictions of its own identity, to reflect the identities of the communities in Cynon Valley by utilising the museum as a venue for organisations working to benefit the local community. The museum took a proactive approach to this, building relationships with potential groups such as Project Unity, a LGBTQIA support group. Working with the group they expanded their programming from monthly coffee afternoons to include talks, awareness events and displays in the museum.

Over a three-year period, the museum increased room use by 460% from 205 hours in the 12 months to March 2018 to 965 hours over an 11-month period to February 2020.

The museum has become a centre of the community and witnessed a diversification of purpose, becoming relevant to the people of Cynon Valley. The museum has also become a classroom, meeting space, playgroup, support group, yoga class and more. The museum has grown, it has learnt more about its community, becoming more inclusive on this journey. It has become a space for many needs, it has become a canvas for our communities' co-existing identities.

LLANELLY POTTERY STORIES PARC HOWARD MUSEUM IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FUSION

Parc Howard Museum was gifted by Lady Howard Stepney to Llanelli in 1912 as a hub for arts, culture and wellbeing at a time of high unemployment and social unrest. Llanelli is a proud post-industrial town at the crossroads between rural and industrial South Wales. Ambitious regeneration schemes have put it on the map for culture, sport, and the environment. But falling visitor numbers to the museum revealed there was a problem.

The Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, managed by the Museums Association, supported our project to use collections differently for social good and create positive changes within the organisation. The Parc Howard collection of Llanelly Pottery (1839-1922), all made by hand and brimming with human stories, was an interesting place to start this journey.

The Llanelly Pottery Stories project experimented to see what people enjoyed. Partnering with the Fusion programme helped promote what we were doing through community networks. A 40% increase in visitors within a year and being a finalist in the 2019 Kids in Museums Family Friendly Award were surprising outcomes.

We also wanted people to see they could make a difference at their museum. A new permanent pottery

exhibition was co-created with information and material collected through reinterpretation sessions with specialists; workshops with the National Autistic Society; family centre programmes; and local history societies. These uncovered fascinating past stories about migration, identity, language, health, working lives, and inequalities, which resonated with contemporary issues.

While the pandemic has paused completion of the exhibition, it has been an opportunity to try something new: online resources for schools. A new curriculum, soon to be rolled out in Wales, allows for the pottery collection and the community stories we collected to inspire cross-curricular themes and an entirely new visiting experience.

These will be available later in 2021.





SAVING TREASURES; TELLING STORIES PARTNERSHIP LED BY AMGUEDDFA CYMRU – NATIONAL MUSEUM WALES

The Saving Treasures; Telling Stories heritage partnership project, between Amgueddfa Cymru, the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales (Fed) and the Portable Antiquities Scheme in Wales (PAS Cymru), received funding through National Lottery Heritage Fund's Collecting Cultures programme (2015-2020).

Twenty-eight museums across Wales were able to acquire 168 important

archaeological artefacts, recently discovered by members of the public, for their collections. The project also brought together metal-detector clubs, local museums and communities around the new stories revealed by these discoveries.

Six community archaeology projects, led by local museums, engaged key target groups and communities, including young carers, dementia groups, men's groups, WIs, veterans suffering with PTSD, young writers, local school groups, museum volunteers, heritage groups, metal-detectorists and landowners. Each project responded in creative ways to significant finds made on their doorsteps. Over 100 activities were undertaken, involving 123 volunteers, and new museum exhibits were co-produced.

Young career and student journalists helped to develop stories and content to enhance the PAS Cymru website as an engaging resource on portable heritage in Wales, including linked social media and film content.

The project developed a strategic collecting network and longer-term collecting culture in Wales for archaeological finds, involving training, skills-sharing and volunteering opportunities. It also developed

new collaborative working practices, acting to reinforce partner interests and roles.

An external evaluation report has captured the feedback received from participants and contributors, also outlining the wellbeing benefits felt by diverse participants from engagement with the project.

“
I really enjoyed the whole experience being involved in the project from early on to its conclusion...it certainly brings history back to life.

Nick Mensikov

Metal-detectorist talking as the finder of a hoard about his involvement with the community archaeology project led by Abergavenny Museum.

03.

**INSPIRING
ENGAGEMENT,
REFLECTION
AND DEBATE**

SHEEP EXHIBITION AND FUTURE LANDSCAPES SYMPOSIUM CEREDIGION MUSEUM

Ceredigion Museum is located in the heart of rural Wales, where the double crises of climate change and Brexit uncertainty have had a polemic effect on local communities with vested interests in the upland regions of the county. In response, the museum's Sheep exhibition, which was highly commended in the Museums & Heritage Awards 2020, included the Future Landscapes symposium to facilitate dialogues between the various stakeholders.

The Sheep exhibition explored the history, heritage and culture of sheep farming communities, through the lens of contemporary art, supported by artefacts from the museum's collections. Funding from Art Fund and Garfield Weston enabled the museum to borrow works relating to sheep by Henry Moore, Joseph Beuys and Menashe Kadishman. Displaying these high profile works raised the profile of the exhibition to attract wider audiences.

Artist Ffion Jones was commissioned to work with sheep farmers to make a film in collaboration with local farmers, creating a voice for the farming communities, which are traditionally a very hard-to-reach audience, into the museum.

Building on this outreach work and the high profile of the exhibition, the Future Landscapes symposium brought together artists, curators, academics, farmers, ecologists, environmental campaigners, policy makers and others to discuss the issues around the heritage and future of Ceredigion's uplands. The walks, talks and world café-style discussions enabled people to engage within a mutually respectful and active listening context to find shared values and build bridges.

The legacy of this ground-breaking event is ongoing; the museum hosts monthly People's Practice meetings, virtually during lockdown, to keep the dialogue open and an alliance of more than 30 land-based practitioners was set up from the symposium called Cynefin (habitat), with the aim of sharing resources and knowledge around the land and environment.



REVEALING THE SECRETS OF THE JAPANESE FLAG

FIRING LINE MUSEUM

The Firing Line Museum received funding from the Welsh Museums Federation to deliver a project to reinterpret Japanese flags from the Royal Welsh Regimental Collections. As a starting point, Tamayo, a Japanese translator and student from Cardiff University, was recruited to investigate an artefact within the museum; a single Japanese flag that had been captured by The Welch Regiment in Burma.

As Tamayo skilfully researched and revealed the name of the original owner of the flag, identified the community it originated from and identified official stamp marks that had been left on the flag, it quickly became apparent how much of the artefact's symbolism and emotional resonance had been lost in its transition from captured flag to museum artefact.

Working collaboratively with the Brecon Regimental Museum of The Royal Welsh, access was provided to similar artefacts. These Japanese flags were historically signed by members of a Japanese soldier's community as they embarked into conflict. The act of translating signatures gave new life to these artefacts, making sense of how the Japanese flags relate to each other and allowing us as museums to create new interpretations based on Japanese narratives that contextualise the traditional (and very limited) regimental meaning placed on them.

This has been a new approach to curatorial projects for both museums leading to new interpretative strategies to widen the audiences who engage with our collections. The Covid-19 pandemic may have temporarily postponed these redisplay projects but this project has helped to pave the way for how the stories of regimental artefacts are interpreted in the future.

The funding also enabled us to produce a short documentary film that followed the progress of this project, which can be viewed at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=yHkeSnH58W8>





PEOPLE OF BUTETOWN MUSEUM OF CARDIFF

The People of Butetown project was a collaboration between the Museum of Cardiff and a collective of community artists. Taking the centenary of the 1919 Race Riots as a starting point, it shared stories of the prejudice and racism experienced by the community, and celebrated its resilience and creativity.

The project began with an event, including talks and displays from the museum, Butetown community, Glamorgan Archives, Cardiff Libraries, Race Equality First and the Heritage

Cultural Exchange. The event encouraged learning and reflection about the riots, challenged long-held misconceptions and encouraged attendees to share, discuss and debate the riots themselves and the impact they subsequently had on the community.

Recognising that the riots and their impacts have long been ignored by the city, and knowing that it had very little in its collection that could help it represent them in its displays (especially from the point of view of the communities of colour caught up in the violence), the museum commissioned artists from the community to work with the community to creatively respond. The resulting documentary film (by Gavin Porter, with music by Anthony Ward), painting (by Kyle Legall), series of photographs (by Zaid Djerdi) and poem (by Ali Zay) have been taken into the collection and now form part of the museum's permanent displays, schools resources and programming.

People of Butetown is an example of the museum's commitment to supporting communities to tell their stories through their own voices and to ensure Cardiff's untold, ignored or hidden histories are heard.



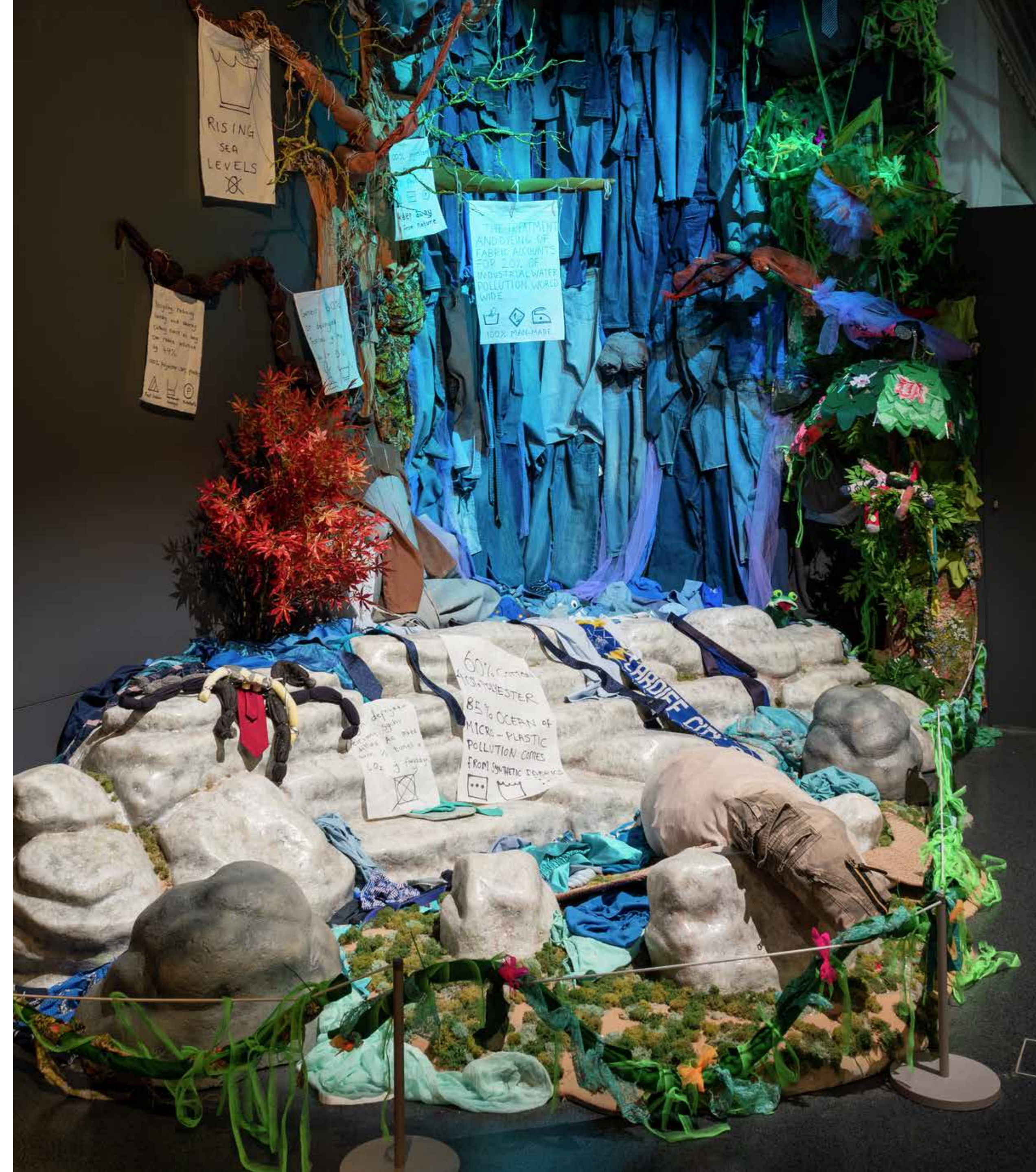
DIPPY AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM CARDIFF

AMGUEDDFA CYMRU – NATIONAL MUSEUM WALES

In 2019 Dippy, the Natural History Museum’s iconic diplodocus dinosaur skeleton embarked on a road trip around the UK. For the Welsh leg of the tour, he visited National Museum Cardiff. The remit from the Natural History Museum was that every partner venue should use Dippy as a way to inspire visitors to engage with contemporary environmental issues and engage with an underrepresented audience.

We have a Youth Forum at each of our museums across Wales. Young people aged 14-25 are encouraged to be partners in decision making and organising activities. The forums explore the views of young people and address issues that they think are important. Youth-led projects across the museum are part of the Hands on Heritage initiative, made possible by the National Lottery Heritage Fund’s Kick the Dust grant.

Tasked with a way of making Dippy relevant to their peers, the young people chose to raise awareness and inspire positive action around the climate crisis. They identified the environmental impact of the fashion industry as their “big issue” because of its massive environmental cost. They decided to link this with dinosaurs by fashioning a dinosaur from waste clothing and fashion items destined for landfill.



Once the theme was identified, the group explored art within the collections that either engaged with environmental issues or used fabric and found objects, as well as working with local sculptural artist Megan Broadmeadow.

“
It’s been really fun,
working together as
a team creating art to
steer environmental
change.”

Youth forum participant

The forum decided to involve the public in making elements of the exhibit as a way of raising awareness of the issues. They developed and delivered making activities with families visiting the museum during the summer holidays. In addition, day-long workshops were run with young people from partner organisations including Llamau and The Prince’s Trust. These workshops also focused on using fashion to raise awareness and spread positive messages.

Young people were integral to the whole project; a young writer and activist delivered writing workshops with the group to develop the exhibition text, and illustration and design students from Cardiff Metropolitan University worked with them to develop the 2D design of the exhibition.

During the project development, Youth Climate Strikes announced a global day of action, so banner-making workshops were held for young people and families in preparation for the strike.

Participants developed new making skills, including sewing and screen printing, alongside skills in planning, team working, creating project plans, research and event planning.

They have also continued their activism around climate change.

Working in this activist way also had a positive impact on the museum. The exhibition in part influenced the decision by the organisation to declare a global climate and ecological emergency,

reconfirming its commitment to reducing its carbon footprint.

The museum is currently working to develop a new schools programme linked to climate change and activism as a legacy of the project.



Image credits

Front cover: discussions on the heritage and future of Ceredigion's uplands, image courtesy of Ceredigion Museum; p.3 Museum of Butetown portrait © Museum of Cardiff/Zaid Djerdi; p.7 artwork on the wall of a Covid-19 field hospital, image courtesy of Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales; p.8 Pixabay; p.9 image courtesy of Cynon Valley Museum; p.10 ward teapot from Bryn y Neuadd Hospital. More than 20 associated objects came into the St Fagans collection as a result of the Hidden Now Heard partnership project, image courtesy of Amgueddfa Cymru; p.12 Eric Ngalle Charles (centre) with participants in the Literature and Trauma project, image courtesy of Dylan Thomas Centre; LGBTQIA flags, image courtesy of Cynon Valley Museum; image courtesy of Parc Howard Museum; participants in the Saving Treasures; Telling Stories project, image courtesy of Amgueddfa Cymru; p.18 image courtesy of Ceredigion Museum; p.19 Japanese flag, image courtesy of Cardiff Castle Museum; p.20 Museum of Butetown portraits ©Museum of Cardiff/Zaid Djerdi; p.21/22 displays created by the youth panel for the Dippy exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff, images courtesy of Amgueddfa Cymru.

MUSEUMS CHANGE LIVES