

**Wessex  
Museums**

# **Impact Report**

2022-23

# Introduction to Wessex Museums

Wessex Museums is a thriving partnership of museums across Dorset and Wiltshire – Dorset Museum, Lydiard House Museum, STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway, Poole Museum, The Salisbury Museum, Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, and Wiltshire Museum.

We believe that by working together we can...

- Strengthen the cultural offer of our museums and our region.
- Push out of our comfort zones to do things in new ways.
- Share important stories from across our region from a range of perspectives.
- Share and learn from successes and mistakes, build relationships, and enhance our reputation with partners and stakeholders.
- Increase our organisational resilience.

**Our charity, the Wessex Museums Trust (WMT), exists to build the resilience and relevance of the museums in our partnership and across the region.**

## **Our mission is...**

To support museums to **connect, inspire and add value** to people's lives.

## **Our vision is...**

**Museums thriving through collaboration.**

## A Message from our Chair, Gill Donnell

As Chair of this successful partnership, I am extremely proud of the achievements of staff and volunteers across our partner museums as well as within the partnership.

Whilst our talented CEO, Kristina Broughton, will detail the successes of exhibitions, hosting a regional conference and expanding even further our alliance, I believe the achievement of our long-held ambition to be an independent charity and securing our second National Portfolio Organisation funding is a testament to the huge amount of hard work that goes on behind the scenes.

Our new look collaboration, including the three Swindon Museums offers us even more opportunities to further develop and grow in this amazing sector, striving to share our knowledge and add value to the lives of those in our diverse communities through access to our world-class collections.



## Reflections from our CEO, Kristina Broughton

2022/23 will forever be remembered by Wessex Museums as *'the year of Hardy'*, as we delivered our most ambitious, partnership exhibition to date. But the year was certainly about more than just that!

The year kicked off with the opening of the *Hardy's Wessex* exhibition in all four of our partner museums at the end of May. This was a culmination of four years of hard work by colleagues across the partnership to bring this ambitious project to fruition. *Hardy's Wessex* was more than just an exhibition, it led to new partnerships with multiple organisations inside and outside of our sector, included a diverse extended public programme with everything from podcasts to walking routes, and all in all was a fantastic example of what the Wessex Museums can achieve through collaboration.

Wessex Museums continued to prioritise underserved audiences through our work as a partnership, exemplified through our *Bridging the Gap* project which reached its conclusion in 2022/23. The project brought about a step change in knowledge and understanding of EDI for staff and volunteers in our partner organisations. It upskilled staff in inclusive community practice and improved representation and agency for underserved communities in our museums. *Bridging the Gap* has fundamentally changed our work with underserved communities to be more inclusive, community-led, and evaluated for impact; this in turn has shaped our plans for the next three years and beyond.

Our partnership will also look different as we move forward. Wessex Museums Trust (WMT) fulfilled its long-held ambition to externalise from BCP Council in March 2023, helping to ensure that WMT is more independent, equitable and sustainable. At the same time, we formally welcomed the three Swindon Museums (STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway, Swindon Museum & Art Gallery, and Lydiard House) into the Wessex Museums partnership. The addition of the Swindon Museums to the partnership will bring complimentary skills and extend our audience reach both in terms of geography and diversity.

For everything that we have achieved and for all we hope to achieve in future, we are grateful for continued funding support from Arts Council England to make it all possible. In February we received confirmation of a second NPO funding award of £1.4m for the period 2023-26. This core funding is critical to WMT and will enable us to continue to add value to our regional museums and support them to connect, inspire and add value to peoples' lives.



## 2022/23 Key Achievements



*Bridging the Gap* work placements for disabled young people in all partner museums.



Wessex Museums Trust fully externalised from BCP Council in March 2023.



*Hardy's Wessex* exhibition opens in all 4 partner museums and 8 satellite museums simultaneously.



3x Swindon Museums join the Wessex Museums partnership.



Regional sector conference hosted by Wessex Museums and attended by 90 people.



5x EDI Bite Size training videos created for staff and volunteers, and viewed more than 400 times.

# Our Funding & Income

2022/23 was the final year of Wessex Museums operating a mixed financial management structure, whereby the partnership’s funding and income was managed across two organisations:

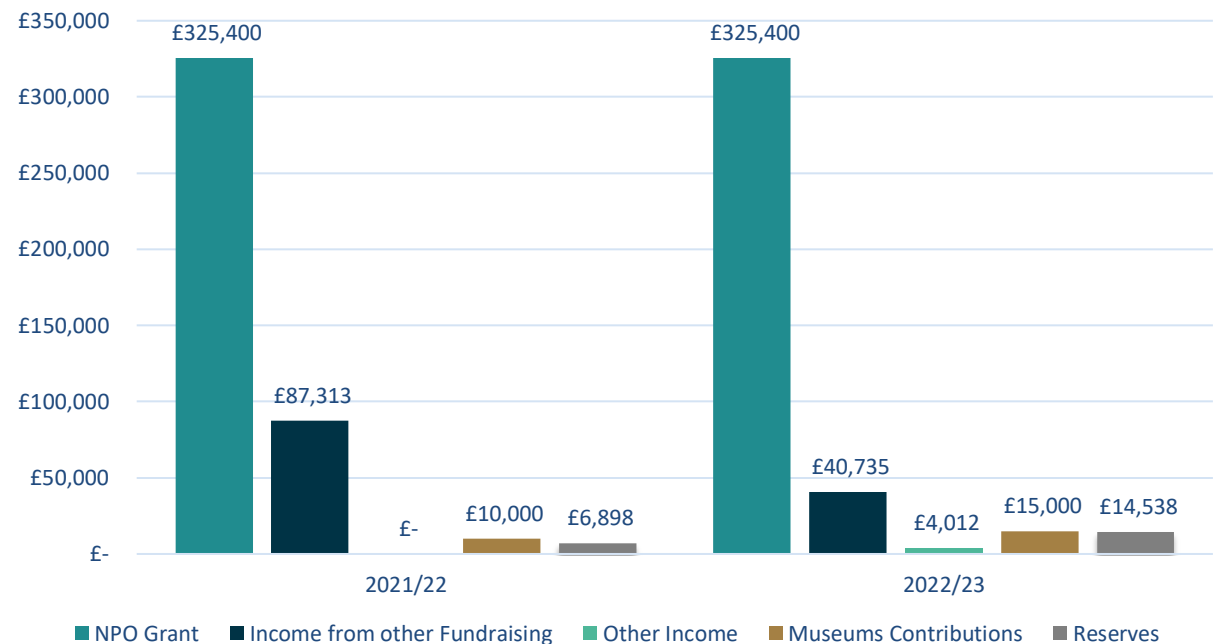
Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole (BCP) Council held the funding agreement with Arts Council England (ACE) for the partnership’s National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) grant up to 31 March 2023. Wessex Museums Trust (WMT) managed all of the partnership’s other funding including museums’ contributions, funding raised directly through the charity, funding to support NPO activity delivered by the Trust, and the partnership’s reserves.

In 2022/23, the **partnership’s turnover** (excluding match funding and in-kind support) across both organisations was:

**£399,685**

This is down by **7% from the previous financial year**, due to reduced fundraising activity during the final year of our NPO programme. However income from events exceeded £4k for the first time and WMT’s reserves more than doubled from the previous year through savings, and residual grant funding and museums’ contributions.

**Wessex Museums Funding Profile**



## Summary of Fundraising & Income Generation for the Year

During 2022/23, Wessex Museums achieved more than **£44k in fundraising and income generation in addition to the NPO** from a variety of sources, including sponsorship, events income and public donations. Grants from Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) continue to be the greatest contributors to WMT's income.

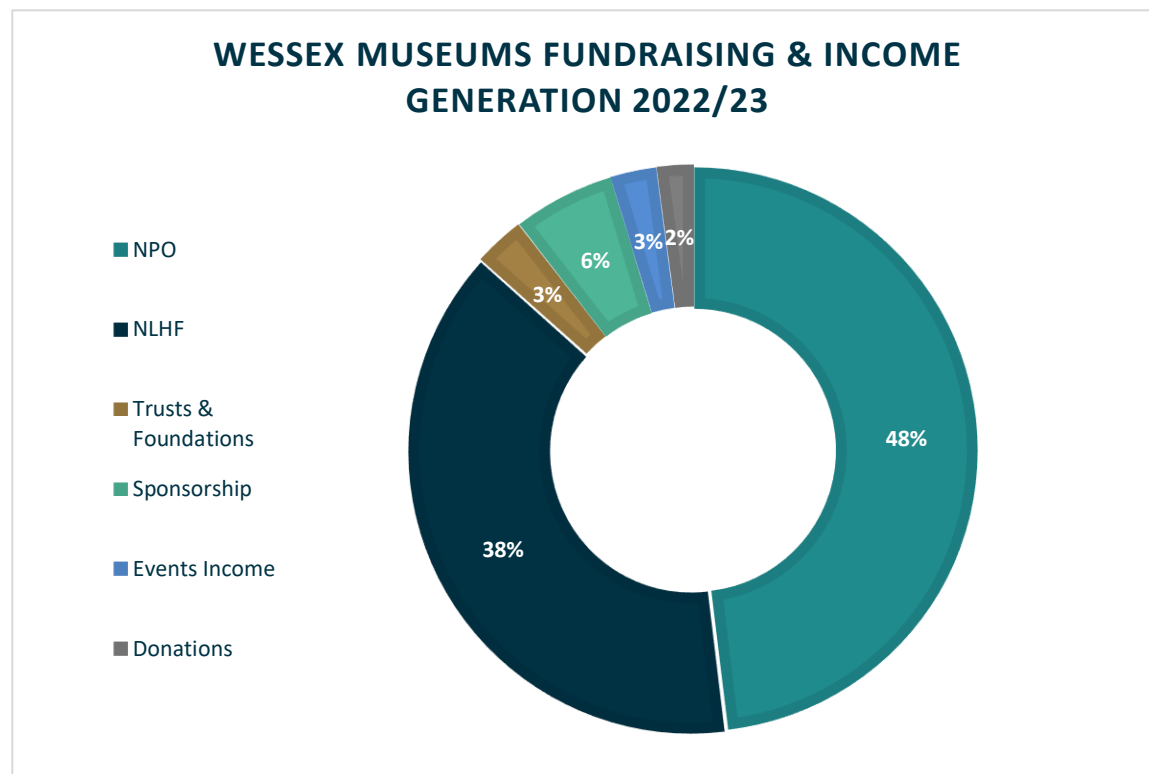
### NPO2

In November 2022, WMT learned that we had been successful in securing £1.4m in funding from Arts Council England as a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) 2023-26. The funding is the partnership's second NPO and secures our collaborative programming for a further three years from 1 April 2023 (next financial year).

NPO funding continues to be the partnership's main source of funding and accounts for more than 80% of our total funding profile and represents critical core funding for Wessex Museums Trust to continue to operate effectively as an independent charity. Diversifying the charity's income is an on-going priority.

### Sources of income in 2022/23 have included:

- **£ 1,765 in public donations.**
- **£5k secured through sponsorship for Hardy's Wessex.**
- **Over £2k raised through WMT's first chargeable events.**
- **£2.5k from trusts and foundations for Hardy's Wessex.**



# Delivering our Strategic Plan

2022/23 marked the final year of Wessex Museums' three-year strategic plan and NPO grant programme. It was also the first full year of re-opening in the partner museums post pandemic.

As such, it was a priority for WMT to fulfill its commitments in the strategic plan that had been disrupted and/or delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Our focus was on:

- **Engaging underserved audiences** in our local areas.
- **Improving access** to our world-class collections.
- Delivering excellence through our **partnership programming**.
- Developing **digital content** that supports different models of engagement and **income generation**.
- **Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)** and **environmental sustainability**.
- **Workforce development**.
- **Building an evidence base** for the impact of our work as a partnership.





# Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Wessex Museums committed to a new intersectional EDI framework in 2021 and this framework continues to guide the practical actions we are taking to dismantle prejudice and discrimination in our organisations.

## Key achievements against our Wessex Museums EDI action plan for the year:

- **Work placements for disabled young people** offered in each of the partner museums.
- **Allyship group** for the partnership established.
- **5x EDI bitesize training videos** produced for staff and volunteers.
- **EDI action planning surgeries** provided to support the partner museums.
- **Governance review of WMT** with a view to diversifying the independent trustee membership.
- **Training in co-production/co-creation**, community-led engagement and delivering deliver focus groups with underserved audiences.
- **Decolonisation of collections pilot projects** undertaken in each partner museum.
- **Decolonising Collections framework** developed for the partnership.
- **EDI terminology guide** developed for the partnership.
- **2x advocacy events** delivered with a focus on EDI and decolonisation.



## Connecting with Communities

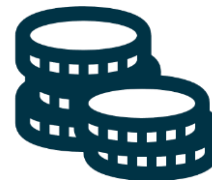
Throughout 2022/23, Wessex Museums continued to prioritise engagement with underserved audiences. The *Bridging the Gap* project funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and delivered between 2021-23, was a catalyst for inclusive community practice across our partnership. This coupled with investment in learning and engagement staff capacity and resources through our NPO, enabled us to connect with more new communities and develop our community-led practice.

### Key factors to our success were:

- Dedicated roles of the **Community Curators** and **Wessex Engagement Lead** to oversee implementation of key developments in enabling change in how the museums engaged underserved audiences.
- **Projects that provided clear momentum and structure** for engaging underserved audiences, in some cases for the first time.
- **Training, advice, coaching** and mentoring provided through the Engagement Lead.
- **New relationships and strengthened partnerships** as a result of intensive and collaborative work with communities to co-create new collections and exhibitions.



Our partner museums engaged and collaborated with more than **3300** people from our underserved communities.



Wessex Museums invested **£128,340** in our Connecting with Communities workstream.

## Work Placements for Disabled Young People

In our partner museums, disabled young people were recruited to work placements that helped them learn new skills in communications, engagement and collections management. Our Access and Inclusion consultant supported museum staff through training and resources so they could welcome disabled young people into our partner museums. Our participants and museum colleagues found the experiences to be life changing. By shifting the museum mindset towards embracing inclusivity, participants were supported to learn critical skills that helped them to be “work ready”.

## Digital Learning

As part of *Bridging the Gap*, we produced a series of digital videos that were designed to enhance formal learning engagement in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and at KS3. Each video was written and presented by a young person who researched how hero objects in museums could tell a new and unexpected story for children and young people. We worked closely with members of LEX (Learning & Engagement Exchange), training them in digital media skills and helping them to enable young people to lead on the creation of the digital content. As our digital learning resources evolve, we will continue to support the emergence of fascinating stories that can be used to draw teachers into the museums’ websites to explore the wider learning offer.

## Key Achievements:

- A series of **videos featuring hero objects** from across partner museums that highlight new and unexpected stories for KS3 pupils or within the STEM subjects.
- In-depth **review of digital learning provision** across the museum partnership that has led to refresh of museum learning pages.
- We have a **robust framework** for recruiting, managing and supporting disabled young people in **museum work placement programmes**.

# Building Resilience

## Externalisation from BCP Council

In 2023, WMT achieved its long-held ambition to externalise from BCP Council to become a fully-fledged organisation in its own right. The rationale for the transfer was to provide greater equity for the constituent partners and to support the charity's future resilience. The transfer involved the TUPE of two members of staff and a commercial settlement allowing a final transfer of the partnership's assets held by the Council to WMT, and was completed at the end of March 2023.

A governance review was undertaken by WMT alongside the transfer to ensure that the Board of Trustees was fit for purpose moving forward. The outcome of the review includes extending the Board of Trustees to include two more independent trustees.

The central staff team was also enhanced to support the financial and administrative workload previously supported by BCP Council, with the appointment of a part-time Finance & Admin Officer.

## Swindon Museums

In 2022, WMT formally welcomed Swindon Museums (Swindon Borough Council) as a Wessex Museum partner. Swindon Museums brings 3 regional accredited museums to the partnership – STEAM Museum of the Great Western Railway, Swindon Museum & Art Gallery and Lydiard House Museum, attracting a combined total of more than 100k visitors each year.

It is an exciting and mutually beneficial expansion of the partnership, which almost doubles its size, bringing together a total of 8 accredited museums of similar sizes and outlooks across our region. Swindon Museums join the partnership with the aim of reshaping its museums into venues that better represent and are more relevant to their local communities. As part of our consortium they will support Wessex Museums' aim to extend and deepen our reach in the region, particularly engaging new and more diverse audiences.

## Skills Sharing & Training

Wessex Museums continues to deliver on its commitments to supporting professional development for the workforce in our partner museums. During 2022/23 we funded access to training and development opportunities in areas such as EDI, fundraising, community engagement, evaluation, co-production, digital skills (see *Digital* below) and sustainable exhibitions.

## Regional Conference

Wessex Museums delivered its second regional conference – *Museums Matter* – at Dorset Museum in September 2022. The conference focused on the hot topics currently facing regional museums, from decolonisation, to inclusion, to the Climate Emergency. The conference was attended by 90 people representing 25 separate sector organisations from across the southwest and received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

## Digital Skills

During 2022/23 we began a full audit of digital skills in the partner museums with a view to providing on-going training and development opportunities for staff and volunteers in the digital space. Skills sharing opportunities were delivered through formal training, 1-2-1 mentoring support and knowledge exchanges. The skills audit will conclude in 2023 and inform a new partnership-wide digital skills development plan.

## Key Achievements:

- Podcasting and Twitter **knowledge exchanges** delivered for the partnership
- **4x new sector case studies** published on website
- Enabled staff to access **18 separate training and development opportunities** during the year.
- Developed **5x EDI bite size training videos** for trustees, staff and volunteers, which have been **viewed 446 times** to date.

## **Digital**

Wessex Museums continued our commitment to digital skills and content development across the partnership during 2022/23. The Hardy's Wessex exhibition was the perfect platform for developing new digital content and in the process testing new ways of working, developing our skills and broadening our audiences.

### **Digital Hardy's Wessex**

Through Hardy's Wessex, Wessex Museums achieve many firsts in digital, including first digital student placements, first podcasts, first born digital, co-created exhibition content and first partnership-wide digital marketing strategy. Learning and insights from the project has been shared with colleagues across the partnership and through the evaluation report, knowledge exchanges and sector case studies on our website.

### **Website & Social Media Review**

In 2022 we undertook a complete review of Wessex Museums' digital presence with a view to clarifying our core audience and developing relevant content as part of our next strategic plan period. The review concluded that Wessex Museums should prioritise the sector audience and the website has been refreshed to reflect this. During 2023, we will focus on refreshing our social media channels to better serve our target audiences.

## **Environmental Responsibility**

In March 2022, the partnership agreed a new environmental responsibility framework to support our partner museums to embed sustainability across their organisations. Since that time, 5x staff have trained and achieved Carbon Literacy certification and 1 as a certified Carbon Literacy trainer. However, we recognise that we have a long way to go to meet our target of net zero ahead of the UK target of 2050. Financial and staffing pressures currently facing our organisations have stalled our progress in developing meaningful environmental responsibility action plans for each of our partner museums and for WMT as we had planned – this will be a priority for 2023/24.

# Our Programming

## Hardy's Wessex

In 2022/23 our partnership-wide exhibition, *Hardy's Wessex: the landscapes that inspired a writer*, came to fruition after a year's delay due to the pandemic. The exhibition which was 4 years in the making, ran between May and October 2022 and spanned four partner museum venues (Dorset, Poole, Salisbury and Wiltshire). It explored how the Wessex landscapes inspired the author Thomas Hardy, with each exhibition focusing on a different social theme, from animal welfare to women's equality.

Hardy's Wessex was the partnership's most ambitious project to date and a test bed for collaboration and new ways of working against the exhibition's four strategic aims:

- Aim 1:** Creating a home-grown exhibition
- Aim 2:** Delivering economies of scale
- Aim 3:** Engaging, growing and diversifying our audiences
- Aim 4:** Raising our profile

The exhibition was attended by more than **28k people** and was accompanied by an extensive public programme of talks, podcasts, workshops, and family activities, that reached a further **2.8k+ people**.

### Key Achievements:

- Assessment and **conservation of 31 exhibition objects**, plus **specialist conservation cleaning of a further 12**.
- Organised **4x major loans from national museums**, with support from the Weston Loans programme.
- Creation of **9x Hardy walks** with the Thomas Hardy Society, Ramblers and local youth groups.
- Collaboration with Arts University Bournemouth to **engage over 120 young people in co-creation of exhibition elements**.
- Distribution of **1000 'Wessex Words' booklets**, to encourage reading of Hardy across local libraries.
- **Satellite exhibitions** held in **8x smaller venues** across the Wessex region.
- **8x online talks** delivered, attended by more than **500 people** and generated **£1.7k in income** for WMT.

## **My World My Future**

*My World My Future* is a digital exhibition, launched in March 2022 on the Wessex Museums website. It showcased the voices and creative responses of underserved young people in Dorset and Wiltshire through engagement work carried out during 2021/22 with our four partner museums on a project called *Create and Collect for Climate Change*. It expressed their concerns on environmental issues and the climate emergency and focused on their ideas for positive action to mitigate the impact of climate change.

The digital exhibition was accompanied by project videos, events and displays in the partner museums and an online talks programme. The project has been included as an example of best practice in the learning resources for participants on the Carbon Literacy for Museums training programme designed and delivered by Museums Development NW.

### **Key Achievements:**

- Webpages attracted **255 unique page views**
- **2x online talks**, attended by **52 people live**, and **51 on YouTube**.
- Working together with Students Organising for Sustainability, we hosted **our first Instagram Live talk**.
- Produced **9x related YouTube videos**, attracting **418 unique page views**.
- Project features as part of **Museums Development NW Carbon Literacy Training** for Museums learning resources.

## **The World of Stonehenge at The British Museum**

The World of Stonehenge exhibition was held at The British Museum from February to July 2022 and **featured 10 objects loaned from our three independent partner museums** – Dorset Museum, The Salisbury Museum and Wiltshire Museum. The exhibition showcased the Wessex region and highlighted the significance of the collections held by the Wessex Museums on an international stage.



# Our Collections & Interpretation

## Decolonisation

During 2022, our partner museums continued work on their decolonisation pilot projects through research-based approaches exploring decolonial themes, the provenance of collections, museum legacies and working alongside underserved communities to undertake contemporary research. The work has produced new research, established new connections with museums around the world and engaged new and more diverse communities in reinterpretation and redisplay in our partner museums and online. Case studies for each museum's project will be published on the Wessex Museums website in 2023/24.

### Summary of Decolonisation Pilot Projects:

**Dorset Museum:** A project highlighting key people that have been underrepresented in Dorset's history, starting with a local man, John Brown who escaped slavery and ended up in Dorchester as a practicing herbalist. The project will produce new research, interpretation and display.

**Poole Museum:** Improving collections documentation as part of a broader multi-faceted approach to decolonisation of the World Cultures collection, to increase transparency, encourage debate and gain a better understanding of the museum's origins.

**Salisbury Museum:** Linked to the museum's major redevelopment, a Black History Interpretation Group is working with the museum to explore and interpret stories, shaping the narrative of Black history and slavery in the new Salisbury Gallery.

**Wiltshire Museum:** A project to retell the story of the Britton 'Celtic' Cabinet through new interpretation and display in the Story of Devizes gallery. The cabinet, was commissioned by an extremely wealthy Jamaican sugar plantation owner, owning 2-3,000 slaves, and was part of Wiltshire Museum's founding collection.

We recognise that the pilot projects are only the beginning of this important work. The Decolonisation Working Group started development of a **partnership framework for Decolonisation of Collections**, drawing on best practice from across the sector and the experience gained through professional mentoring and delivery of the pilot projects. The framework, which will be completed in 2023, will support the partner museums to develop their own action plans to embed the work of decolonisation in their collections management.

## Virtual Collections

Across our museums, we have **500,000 objects catalogued** and have **exceeded our target of 100,000 digital images**. We continue to put more of our collections online, creating a Virtual Wessex Museums Collection, enabling us to share our collections, promote research and develop innovative exhibition programming.

In early 2023, Wessex Museums procured an open-source system to enable cross-searching and display of data from the collections management systems of the four Wessex Museums partners. Supported by funding from Arts Council England (ACE), the system has enabled us to export data from the museum collections management systems into a data repository, to create interfaces to enable search and presentation of object records and to use those object records to create online exhibitions. We anticipate the staging site to be completed in late-2023.

The Virtual Collection is planned in the context of FAIR principles, the AHRC Towards a National Collection initiative and the work of the Collections Trust. As these initiatives come to fruition, it is intended that the open-source tools developed by Wessex Museums can be adopted by a wide range of museums to reduce the barriers in enabling online access to collections.

# Looking Ahead

Another three years of National Portfolio Organisation funding from Arts Council England will enable Wessex Museums to continue with our mission to support museums to connect, inspire and add value to peoples' lives. We have a rich and diverse programme planned, and our focus on EDI and engaging underserved audiences remains central to our work across all four of our strategic aims.

## Our plans for 2023/24 include...

- **Swindon Museums** – Our new partners will benefit from specialist EDI and community engagement support and the creation of new staff posts in collections and community engagement.
- **Trustee Recruitment** – Following our governance review, we will recruit 2x new independent trustees to join the WMT Board.
- **Fashioning Our World** – Project led by Salisbury Museum and supporting work at Dorset Museum, to create opportunities for young people to explore sustainable fashion through the collections held by our partner museums.
- **Lest We Forget** – Community co-created exhibition focused on the Black experience of the World Wars in Wiltshire, opening at Wiltshire Museum in November 2023.
- **Hardy's Wessex** – Our partnership exhibition on the life and work of Thomas Hardy will open at Swindon Museum & Art Gallery in February 2024.
- **Elisabeth Frink: a View from Within** - Home grown, touring exhibition on the life and work of the Dorset based artist Elisabeth Frink, led by Dorset Museum and opening there in November 2023.
- **Work placements for underserved communities** extending the programme delivered through our successful *Bridging the Gap* project.
- **Decolonising Collections Framework** – An agreed partnership-wide definition and approach to decolonising the collections in our museums.
- **Wessex in 100 Objects** - Community co-curation project to explore and showcase our museums' collections and the story of the region by choosing objects that will later feature on our online Collections Showcase, micro and digital exhibitions.
- **Digital Learning** – Further develop our digital learning content and resources online through a coordinated partnership approach.

# Wessex Museums

Sharing • Collaborating • Enhancing



[wessexmuseums.org.uk](http://wessexmuseums.org.uk)



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