



London Museum Development

Diversity Matters Programme

2018-2022

London Museum Development's (LMD's) Diversity Matters Programme encourages London's non-national museums to embrace Arts Council England's [Creative Case for Diversity](#) and engage a more diverse range of visitors with the collections they hold, as well as support them with long standing issues about the diversity of their boards and workforce. Over the four years London's non-national museums will be encouraged to make diversity a key issue in relation to the programming, audience development, leadership and workforce of museums. The national agenda focuses on increasing opportunities for people from protected characteristic groups¹ and overcoming the challenges and the barriers to participation and engagement across socio-economic barriers and across geographic location.

As part of the wider programme, LMD asked museums to share their experiences of developing responsive and diverse programmes, exhibitions, collections, audience initiatives, workforce and trustee boards. The following case study is showcased on the website as it addresses one of the four key areas of diversity practice:

- How museums have worked with its diverse visitors to diversify its public programmes, events, exhibitions and collections to ensure it is more responsive to its respective local community
- How museums have reached more diverse audiences and ensured its audience is more representative of its respective local community
- How museums have developed a more diverse board of trustees that is more representative of its respective local community.
- How museums have recruited and retained a diverse workforce which is more representative of its respective local community.

Name of Museum Case Study



Project Title:	India's Gateway: Gujarat, Mumbai, Britain & Redbridge
Project Timescales:	March 2013 – January 2017

¹ Diversity is defined by Arts Council England through protected characteristic groups, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and the Equality Duty 2011. These protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation as well as class and socio-economic status.

<p>Project Budget:</p>	<p>£128,000</p> <p><i>This project was funded by Arts Council England to produce a final exhibition that travelled to 6 museums. The Museum Manager also received a £2,500 India travel grant from the British Council to support the project.</i></p>
<p>Area of diversity practice:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with diverse visitors to produce, present and distribute its public programmes, events, exhibitions and collections to ensure it is more responsive to its respective local community • Reaching diverse audiences to ensure its audience is more representative of its respective local community
<p>Protected characteristic group museum worked with:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race • Religion and belief
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Photograph of Patel family outside their new house, Ilford, 1975

What were the project's aims?

Since opening in 2000, Redbridge Museum has a long track record in working with local communities. The borough is the 4th most ethnically diverse in the country with 65% of the population from a non-

white British background (2011 census). This process of 'hyper diversity' has accelerated in the past 5 – 10 years and the Museum's programming has tried to reflect this. Rather than treating these communities as homogenous, the Museum looks to focus on specific experiences and locate people in their local and international historical contexts. For this project, it meant connecting the story of local Gujarati communities (many of whom had moved from East Africa in the 1970s) to Redbridge's strong historical links to the East India Company in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

The project had the following aims:

- To explore the 400 year old links between Gujarat and Britain, the first place of British contact in India
- To draw in both Gujarati and non-Gujarati visitors and both regular and occasional visitors
- To produce an exhibition of a high professional standard in both content and presentation, matched with a broad range of stories reflecting the experiences of local people
- To facilitate collaborative working between the lead photographer, the partner Museums and local Gujaratis.

Who did the museum work with?

Over 35% of the borough's population are South Asian with increasing diversity within those communities. As part of the project Redbridge Museum worked with 65 people including three Gujarati elders groups, two Hindu caste community organisations, three local business, one Hindu faith school, one Hindu mandir and about fifteen local individuals.

All were recruited through direct approaches from the Museum with a mix of cold-calling, using previous contacts, introductions from community members, local authority and parent organisation colleagues as well as personal contacts. This approach is identical when developing projects with a local community from whatever background.

As far as possible, the Museum tried to ensure there was a range of ages, backgrounds and life experiences represented in the final exhibition. Understanding the particular nuances of historic experiences was important as was recognising the differences within the Gujarati community. Many were East Africans who had moved to the UK in the 1960s and early 1970s, for example, and this was complemented by the voices of the 2nd generation who had grown up in the UK and by those who had come directly from India in the past few years. The wider project also highlighted different Gujarati communities across England, whether that was Ugandan Asians in Leicester or Muslim textile workers in Bradford.

What did the project entail?

During 2014-16, the project 'India's Gateway' was developed as a collaborative venture between the photographer Tim Smith, local communities, creative professionals and curators from six English museums which led to an exhibition exploring and celebrating the 400 year-old relationship between Gujarat in western India and Britain. At Redbridge Museum, the core displays of photographs by Tim Smith was complemented by material from the Museum's own collections including oral history films and newly collected objects and photographs loaned by local residents.

The project had three phases. The Museum Manager visited Gujarat in January 2014 on a research trip after successfully applying for a British Council travel grant. Here, he explored the historic links that the London Borough of Redbridge has to Gujarat through local 17th and 18th century East India Company merchants (EIC) in the cities of Surat, Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Photographs from these areas featured in the exhibition alongside material related to local EIC employees. Through a contact at the V&A, the Museum filmed in one of the largest modern textile mills in India and also interviewed an academic on the Gujarati textile trade. Finally the Museum met up with a Redbridge family with 2nd generation links to Gujarat who were undertaking a religious ceremony in their ancestral village. This visit was photographed for the final exhibition. These and other local links were then discussed with the project photographer, Tim Smith, who travelled to Gujarat in January 2015. Tim followed up many other leads from the other participating museums as well as his own research and his vivid photographs taken in Gujarat formed the core of the exhibition.

Finally, an intensive period of local community engagement was undertaken by Redbridge Museum during 2016. This was particularly centred around the Hindu festival of Navratri which took place in the weeks before the exhibition opened. Although the timings were challenging it did ensure there were events that the Museum could visit where there would be large numbers of Gujaratis. The Museum undertook a mix of oral history filmed interviews, informal discussions, photographing events and individuals, scanning of family photographs and borrowing personal items for the exhibition. As is common with this type of project, this became a collaborative effort after suggestions from local individuals and groups for what to include in the final exhibition. Due to the number of people involved, there were normally one or two meetings and several emails and telephone conversations.

What did the project achieve?

Outputs included:

- 1,536 visited the exhibition which ran at Redbridge Museum from October 2016 – January 2017. This was augmented by four short films created by the Museum and a family events programme. A high-quality exhibition catalogue was produced by the exhibition photographer and was sold during the run of the exhibition
- The exhibition was seen by a further 263 school children as part of planned educational sessions
- A talk by the photographer Tim Smith which attracted 45 attendees; half-term events which attracted 31 people and a Libraries family festival event which 45 children and parents.

Outcomes included:

- The exhibition and associated events attracted a more culturally diverse audience which matched the local area
- An extensive visitor evaluation was carried out as part of the project. The exhibition at Redbridge Museum received over 224 written comments, far more than any other display venue and one of the highest recorded for any temporary exhibition at the Museum, which suggested the exhibition deeply resonated with many visitors. This was born out by the qualitative findings which showed that 81% of visitors would be highly likely to recommend the exhibition to friends of family.
- Many visitors were appreciative of the mix of exhibits. This was gratifying as the Museum had worked hard to redesign the core display of photographs to include films, personal objects and local photographs which reflected Redbridge
- An indication of the positive outcomes can be gained from the comments left by visitors when asked about the importance of the exhibition. These fell into several broad categories. Gujarati's themselves were pleased that their contribution to local and national historical events had been recognised "because my family contributed positively in this borough"

- Visitors were interested to learn about the historic links between India, Britain and Redbridge for the first time or to understand the local differences within South Asian communities
- One of the most reflective comments came from a 2nd generation Gujarati who felt that the exhibition had gone beyond a shallow celebration of multiculturalism: “As cheesy as it sounds, I feel a part of Ilford rather than just the Indian community. [The Museum] is not presenting us as a 'festival' or 'fun activity' but talking about our history which isn't done often.”

What impact did the project have?

- The project re-established ties to groups the Museum had first worked with in 2004 while building new relationships with others. Discussions were had with one of the group's leaders on supporting her work around dementia and this is something the Museum hopes to build on for the future
- The Museum's collections were made richer through the digital donations of a range of Gujarati family photographs from the 1970s and 1980s. Some of this material was subsequently re-formatted in summer 2017 for an exhibition exploring the links between India and Redbridge to coincide with the 70th anniversary of Indian Independence. It is hoped these will be incorporated into the planned redisplay of the permanent Museum in the next two years and so better reflect the local British South Asian experience. The display was also visited by Redbridge Council's new Chief Executive as well as an ACE relationship officer so this was useful advocacy for the Museum's role
- In terms of exhibition visitors, 35% were new visitors and 45% had links to Gujarat which indicates the target groups were reached
- From both a curatorial and audience viewpoint, the project made clear how the Gujarati story (like many British BAME communities) is tightly woven with British history.

What lessons did the museum learn from the project?

The museum felt it learnt the following lessons:

- It reinforced Redbridge Museum's approach to working with local people
- In terms of public evaluation of the exhibition, there were several comments on the limited size of the Museum's temporary exhibition space and the desire for larger displays. This is a constant refrain in all its evaluation and is a tricky one to overcome. For the India's Gateway exhibition, the Museum did carve out another space in the foyer of the main exhibition area as a temporary measure. This was further improved upon after the exhibition and is now a regular feature.
- It was important to provide an opportunity for exhibition visitors to speak to a member of Museum staff and share their stories. The exhibition area (as opposed to the main Museum) is an un-invigilated space and resources did not permit staffing. However, we do know from previous exhibitions where a member of staff sat in the space, visitors really value conversations and this is something we will try to include in future
- The research visit to India was an invaluable part of the project but was by no means essential. Clearly this was a rare opportunity but elements could have been recorded in India through local community contacts.

What tips does the museum have for other museums undertaking a similar project?

The Museum would offer the following tips to other museums:

- As ever, time is always the most precious resource so allowing space to talk to as many people as possible is crucial. Don't be disheartened when things don't work out as well as first hoped and always make sure you explore as many avenues as possible. While the project may be the most important thing to the Museum it won't be to the people you are trying to work with, who will all invariably have many things going on in their lives. At the same time, impressing upon people the importance of an exhibition deadline can work wonders to focus minds
- The engagement phase was timed to coincide with a particular Gujarati festival to ensure staff could reach as many people as possible in one fell swoop. It may seem obvious but when undertaking research the Museum visits the places where the target audience meets, whether that's a park, a church, a community hall, a mosque or a shop in order to ensure maximum exposure. This can be outside the working day, for example evenings or weekends. Within a small team, it is good to utilise every member of staff to hand out leaflets or drop in for a chat. It also helps to have pop-up banners, publicity leaflets and even an exhibition guidebook to explain the future content of the exhibition
- Undertaking research beforehand and getting to know the specifics and diversities of a community beforehand is useful in order to avoid tokenism. Developing a diverse workforce can be helpful in preventing 'groupthink' and assist in gaining new contacts outside of the Museum, something which is probably easier in a smaller, leaner institution such as Redbridge.
- Most importantly, staff must develop an interest and empathy for people and spend time in getting to know their contextual histories while never losing sight of the individual person. To understand a locality and its residents, Museum staff must get out of the building and become curious about what's around them. The curious museum is often the most successful and always questioning 'why' something is the way it is should underlie the museum's approach.

Other photographs



Photograph of Madhvani family, Barkingside, about 1978

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