

London Museum Development

Diversity Matters Programme

2018-2022

London Museum Development'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, London Museum Development asked museums to share their experiences of developing responsive and diverse programmes, exhibitions, collections, audience initiatives, workforce and trustee boards for all its visitors. 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.

Headstone Manor and Museum Case Study



Project Title:	Celebrating Diwali and Food in Harrow
Timescales:	September 2020-March 2021
Budget:	£1,000

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.

Overall area of diversity practice covered as part of project:		Yes
	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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Reaching diverse audiences to ensure its audience is more representative of its respective local community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Arts Council England's Creative Case for Diversity evidence area covered as part of project:		Yes
	Integrating diversity in the museum's programme	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Engaging a diverse range of people in developing/delivering programmes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Supporting diverse practitioners	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Protected characteristic group museum worked with as part of project:		Yes
	Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Religion and belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Contact details for further information:	Stacey Bagdi, Collections and Exhibitions Officer: Stacey.Bagdi@harrow.gov.uk	



Screen shot of the associated [online exhibition](#)

What were the project's aims?

The aim of the project was to:

- Co-curate an exhibition with staff at Mental Wealth and local South Asian residents

- Capture and accession personal stories and objects relating to Diwali and food within South Asian communities in Harrow within the museum's permanent collection
- Diversify and increase our collection and audience base.

Who did the museum work with?

The museum worked alongside [Mental Wealth](#) who support Mental Health and Creativity with South Asian Communities in Harrow from the ages of 35-60. Their aim is to change the perception of Mental Health within those communities and support those who need it. The museum also worked with charity [Re-Route](#), also based in Harrow, who supported Mental Wealth for those aged 18-30, and supported Mental Wealth with sharing information and assisting with the call out for stories, recipes and objects.

The museum and Mental Wealth also worked with 27 local South Asian community residents, as well as restaurant owners and businesses and local families to collect stories, recipes, videos, and activities to coincide with the co-curated exhibition (currently available online).

What did the project entail?

The project including working alongside the charity Mental Wealth (MW), who recruited as the museum had previously worked with them and the museum wanted to further embed its partnership and work with the charity going forward. The charity had a wealth of networks at their fingertips, which proved useful for their project – one example was knowing a local DJ who supplied music to us for free for the exhibition!

The project progressed well, with Mental Wealth running 4 sessions with participants to capture their stories for the exhibition. The museum was particularly surprised at willingness from the community to donate objects and share their stories with them, and although the museum had originally thought it would collect 5-10 objects, in fact they collected 42 individual objects from 11 individuals.

In order to recruit the participants, the museum, Mental Wealth and Re-Route did a call out on their respective social media channels and sent the information onto their wider networks and contacts. Following the initial sessions, Mental Wealth and museum staff then worked with participants to write the exhibition text, as well as design and print all the labels and panels for the exhibition, as well as prepare the objects for the exhibition.

The exhibition was due to open to the public over the Diwali weekend (13 November 2020), however, due to the announcement of the second lockdown, the Museum was forced to close. As a result, the museum had to reformat the project to an online exhibition, as the museum didn't want to miss the opportunity to respond to the Diwali celebrations going on in the borough, despite of the lockdown. As such the museum created a dedicated page to the project on our [website](#) and use that as a hub for all their outputs for the project.

The museum had also planned a few on-site activities, including a family activity designed by a local South Asian resident, but this also had to be re-designed to be delivered via on an online platform, to ensure the museum, its staff and its visitors adhered to the local lockdown rules. As a result 20 families were sent free Rangoli craft at home packs to enable them to do the activity at home. The museum also commissioned the Rangoli artist to do a video for the museum instead of the live art, so other families are able to view the video and participate in the activity in the future.

To go alongside the online exhibition, the museum also commissioned a three-part video series using the stories and objects they had collected, taking out some of the text from the panels to form the narrative and launched these online. Alongside these films, the museum worked with local individuals and businesses to collect 15 recipes which were designed into a free digital download booklet instead for all the museum's visitors to enjoy. The recipe book was also supported and edited by Mental Wealth. The museum now plans to post of physical copies of the recipe book to all the contributors and local community centres/organisations to thank them for their contributions as well as being available when the exhibition re-opens later in the year.

The museum also worked with two local vloggers to produce 4 associated cooking demonstration videos, which are available on the webpages and on the museum's [YouTube channel](#)) to further inspire their audiences to cook these recipes and celebrate Diwali in their own homes. The museum had also planned for a local South Asian photographer to take pictures of local food businesses, their food and recipes, however due to the lockdown restrictions, this aspect of the project proved difficult and as a result they commissioned the photographer to take photographs of the objects donated as well as the restaurants, which were then incorporated into the online exhibition and text panels of the onsite exhibition.

The museum was initially apprehensive about launching the Diwali project online, mainly due to the timing but overall the project page was packed with content and the general support and feedback they received from their participants gave them the motivation they needed to launch it on time. So far, the main exhibition webpage has received 649 views and the museum plans to launch the onsite exhibition to coincide with Diwali weekend later in 2021 (4-8 November) for at least 18 days, so contributors and other visitors are able to visit the exhibition in person.

What did the project achieve?

Outputs included:

Total number of participants worked with:	27
Total number of local businesses, artists, vloggers and restaurants who also contributed content to the exhibition:	26
Total number of sessions with participants:	4
Total number of co-curated events for general visitors:	1*
Total number of general visitors participating in the event:	20 families*
Total number of days the co-curated on-site exhibition will be open:	At least 18 days in November 2021
Total number of general visitors who have visited the online exhibition:	1,123**
Total number of objects and photographs permanently accessioned into the collection:	42

* So far, the museum plans to have more events for more families to coincide with the opening of the on-site exhibition in November 2021

** So far, figures provided are from November 2020-March 2021

Outcomes included:

- Many of the participants contributed to the project because they felt it was important to get other residents into the spirit of celebrating Diwali and to share with the wider community the happiness of the festival during lockdown

- The participants felt that their ideas, stories and objects were listened to, respected and valued and many have already said how happy they would be to contribute to other projects and exhibitions the museum decides to do in the future
- Those who participated that had not visited the museum before, or had only visited the museum for specific events, said they now wish to visit the museum in the future, when the museum is able to re-open to visitors, and visit its other exhibitions as a direct result of engaging with the museum on this project.

What impact did the project have?

On the organisation:

- Since engaging with this project, the museum has become more aware and receptive to diversity practices across all teams
- This project allowed the museum to collect over 40 new objects – as a result never has their collection seen such diversity in terms of new acquisitions. Each one of those objects not only tells the museum and its wider audiences about how Diwali is celebrated in Harrow, but it sheds light on the individual
- The project has opened the museums eyes about the potential ways they collect objects from locals and communities in Harrow going forward – as they had initially thought this would be the most difficult part of the project, however, they found people were very willing to depart with their items because the museum listened and recorded their stories to go with it
- The contemporary collecting aspect of the project, has given the museum staff the confidence to initiate further projects to collect more diverse material from other local communities
- The Diwali project has also allowed the museum to make more connections with its local communities and gather some rich stories and develop strong new relationships with community members, so much so they are still in contact with the museum and want to engage with them again further down the line
- The project also demonstrated to the museum that significant engagement can be achieved with limited resources
- The museum feels that a key aspect of the project's success was a strong partnership with Mental Wealth, as such they intend to embed a similar engagement model and form other strong partnerships with other charities to produce co-curated projects for most of their activities and exhibitions going forward. For example, staff have been given the confidence to engage with the Black Community on Windrush Day in a similar way – something the museum would not have never achieved before
- The project has also enabled the museum to partner up with a local community group in a more meaningful and targeted way as well as make stronger connections with other departments in the Council, which will benefit the museum going forward
- Finally, this project has allowed the museum to reshape their priorities, recognise their gaps (both in their audiences and collections) and educate themselves on best practice. Moving forward, and as a direct result of the success of the project the museum intends to rethink their Equality Action Points to ensure this way of working with local communities is embedded in their organisational practices.

On the participants:

- Working with Mental Wealth has allowed the museum to feel more confident in their levels of engagement with similar projects and community groups moving forward – the museum achieved a high increase of the number of people they engaged with from the South Asian Community in Harrow, just from this project alone

- More people visited their website and engaged with the project via Facebook from diverse visitor profiles rather than a single profile
- The relationship they built with Mental Wealth for this project, has enabled them to plan ahead to other project for May 2021 in line with Mental Health Week, working with the same and new participants, further demonstrating to their audiences the museum's commitment to building a meaningful legacy from the Diwali project, and enabling ways for participants to contribute to the museum's activities going forward
- The feedback from Mental Wealth, our donors and participants highlighted they felt empowered and gained a sense of place from working with us and want to do so again in the near future.

What lessons did the museum learn from the project?

Key lessons staff learnt included:

- The number of items the museum was able to collect and accession as a result of the project - for staff this was the most unexpected output – initially, they had estimated 5-10 acquisitions due to the fact current staff had not done this project before, however, they were overwhelmed with support from the community and were able to collect 42 objects from 11 individuals efficiently during the pandemic
- They found the most difficult part was connecting with local businesses and restaurants – this was something they wanted to do as it was new for them, however, the pandemic threw a lot more strain on the restaurants and staff were unable to just walk in and have a chat as they had planned. Nevertheless, they gained 4 new connections with restaurants/cafes and they have been supportive throughout and would like to work with the museum again – as such the museum feels this positivity from these 4 connections outweighs the difficulty they had
- In addition, the success story from the project was their recipe book – again something brand new for the museum – they had estimated 5 recipes, but they collected 15! These came from both individuals and businesses and the result was fantastic – the book has been downloaded 274 so far
- As such an important lesson for staff was not to underestimate the enthusiasm of those community members who do get involved (whether in smaller or larger numbers than planned) and what they are able to contribute as part of the project and to the museum's permanent collection.

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

1. Ensure you do your budget research and are able to provide more exact costings per items
2. Try to estimate how many individuals you could engage with by having initial conversations with the community
3. Be open to the partner making key decisions and as transparent in your communications with them as possible
4. Involve as many other staff members as possible in the project and be an advocate for this type of project to the wider organisation
5. Re-think your own practices and be open to education and changes how you engage with your local communities as a result of a project
6. Find at least one strong community partner for the project – individual or group you could work with on the project and be prepared to have meetings with the community partners at any time and continue to be as transparent as you can be when you communicate with them
7. Be realistic and set lower targets if this is a new project for you
8. Capture the stories behind the object rather than key facts about the object itself in order to understand that individual/group's place within the community.

Other photographs

Julie Dabasiya

Julie is Gujarati speaking Hindu/Indian and lives in Harrow Weald.

For Diwali, Julie shares her story and exclaims "as a child, my parents...always made Diwali a special celebration and I have continued to share this with my husband and daughter. We start the 5-day celebrations with decorating our homes with lots of lights and rangoli patterns outside the home. And of course, make some yummy sweets and savoury foods. Diwali is filled with lots of food, family, fireworks and visits to the temple for special Diwali prayers."



Julie and her family
@mehndibyjulie

This year Julie recognises Diwali will be different that previous celebrations and says "Diwali of 2020 will be very different experience! We will still try and make it as special as possible, our homes will still be decorated, diyas (candles) will still be lit and Rangoli patterns will adorn the outside. The one thing we will miss is visiting family, eating and praying with family, exchanging gifts with family and just being around family!"



Julie designing Mehndi on a customer

Julie is a Mehndi Artist, specialising in bridal Mehndi. For this exhibition she has donated a traditional decorated plate with two handmade diya (candle) holders, a handmade incense holder and two henna decorated tealights. Julie explains that she is "donating this... [as it] is a representation of Diwali for me and my family. Diwali is a celebration of light. We mark each of the 5

days by lighting diyas (candles), in and outside the home to ward off evil and invite the good."

When asked about what she loves about living in Harrow, she explains "Harrow has a very large Hindu community and a lot of my family also live in and around Harrow. You never feel out of place."

This label was co-written by Julie Dabasiya and the Curator.

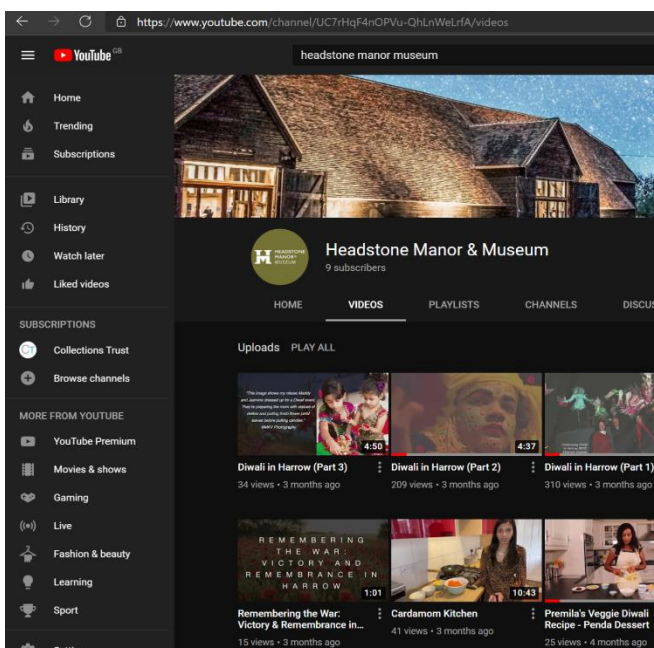


Photograph of one of the exhibition's text panels

Photograph of one of the objects donated



Photograph of one of restaurants who donated a recipe for the Recipe Book



Screen-grab of the content available on You-Tube



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