

# Museum Development London & Art Fund Re-set Projects 2022–23



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## Introduction

Continued generous funding from The Art Fund, enabled Museum Development London to provide its 2022–23 Reset Programme, designed to help museums to analyse and assess their current position and to identify priorities for activity to support post Covid recovery through a short, facilitated self–assessment process. The deadline for applications was 04 July 2022 and funding for x6 participants was available. Five applications for the programme were received, all of which met the selection criteria and were successful.

### **Museum Development Organisational Health Check**

Participating museums were asked to use the Museum Development Organisational Health Check in order to review their operations. The Healthcheck is a self–assessment toolkit that looks at six themes related to a museum’s operational areas:

1. governance and leadership
2. financial planning and resources
3. people development and management
4. working practices
5. audiences
6. collections

Museums are encouraged to carry out the self–assessment with a team that is representative of the whole workforce, where possible. Two of the five successful applicants, having previous experience of the LMD Survive and Thrive programme, opted to carry out their Health Check without facilitation from the MDO. The remaining three Health Checks were facilitated by the MDO, via zoom, each session taking approximately ½ day.

The full MDN Healthcheck can be viewed online at <https://wh1.snapsurveys.com/s.asp?k=159224228947>

Self-assessment findings are entered into the MD snap chat survey and then forwarded to the MDO.

### **Advisory Reports**

Working from the self-assessment findings and drawing on expertise from specialist colleagues the MDO compiled an Advisory Report for each museum. This report set out the three main priorities for the museum going forward and provided guidance towards resources, training and contacts that can help the museum to make improvements. The Advisory Reports formed the basis for discussions regarding the funded Recovery Project.

Audiences, as for the Recovery Grants in 2021–22 was a priority for all 5 of the museums. 3 out of 5 indicated that this is their top priority as they seek to find new ways to encourage audiences back to their museums. Governance & Leadership, Financial Planning & Resources, People Development and Management and Collections were also cited by this year's cohort as priorities.

The Advisory Reports will hopefully provide a really useful starting point for future MDO advice to these museums and participants will be encouraged to refresh their self-assessment in the coming year.

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## How did agreed Projects relate to Priorities identified in Advisory Reports?

Four of the five agreed projects for museums included audiences as a key priority for the Reset grants. Two projects also included collections related work but this complemented the audiences focus – relating to cataloguing and research to bring stories to life for a wider range of audiences. Significant elements of People Development and Management were also included in two projects. These also complemented the audience focus of projects; both projects including staff training, intended to improve the visitor experience and increase and diversify audiences.

Priorities addressed as part of the Reset Projects

| Identified priority               | Number of Museums Addressing this priority as part of their Reset Project |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Audiences                         | 4   |
| People Development and Management | 2   |
| Collections                       | 2   |

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## Project Summaries

### Brunel Museum

Brunel Museum identified three strategic aims for the Reset Project from the Advisory Report:

- to ensure better trained and knowledgeable staff
- to promote improved relationships between staff, volunteers and trustees
- to increase visibility and profile of the museum, based on a robust marketing strategy

Self-led training sessions held for staff and volunteers, looked at profiling audiences and their expectations. A new i-pad and stand was purchased to gather survey data from walk-in customers adding to the museum's understanding of its audiences. The new flyer, see right, will extend the reach of the museum's marketing and appeal, it has already been extensively distributed around London.

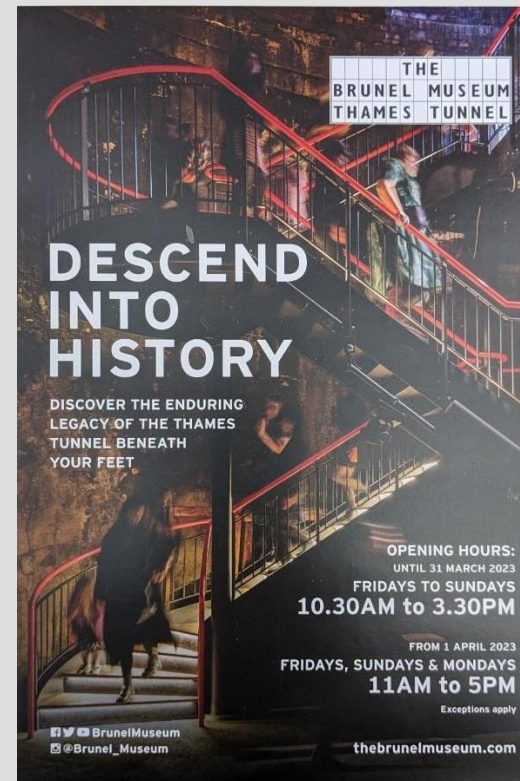
A group visit to the London Metropolitan archives for volunteers, staff and trustees helped to develop both the team's understanding of Brunel museum collections and these might be incorporated into future tour programmes. It also provided an incredibly valuable bonding exercise:

*"It was fantastic to see the watercolours, as well as meet some of the team that I hadn't met before."*

A follow-up social was held in January, after a museum Community Open Day.

The Museum also updated its Collections Documentation Procedural Manual (CDPM) to include more detailed and precise information and updated the collections catalogue on its website with additional content on the Thames Tunnel watercolours and sketches.

### Reset Project



## Gunnersbury Park Museum

Based on the self-assessment activity and Advisory report, Gunnersbury Park Museum set out to create a framework / toolkit for monitoring, evaluation and impact measuring.

The project team consisted of the Head of Heritage & Museum Services, the Communities Programmes Officer, the Formal Learning Manager, the Senior Curator for Exhibitions, and the Visitor Experience Duty Manager. This team represents a spread across collections / exhibitions, public programme, community engagement, formal learning, general visitors and senior management. Freelance specialist Thanh Sinden, (<https://hoalotus.com/>), was commissioned to work with the team to create a framework for monitoring, evaluation and impact measuring and deliver training to the team. Thanh delivered training for staff and compiled a list of recommended existing toolkits as owing to delays in recruiting the team didn't have time to have a full bespoke toolkit written and designed. The existing resources and toolkits are available for the team to use straight away.

Thanh, along with her associate Sheauran Tan, delivered 3 sessions with the team – an initial in-person meeting to discuss aims, objectives, needs and current skill levels; an online workshop to explore different toolkits, resources and methodologies as well as drilling down in to the needs of the team; and an in-person training session to explain how to use the new framework and identifying the best methodologies to use for different purposes.

## Reset Project





## Havering Museum

The Havering Reset project addresses two of the three areas identified by the organisational health check toolkit in August 2022; principally collections, but also audiences.

### Collections:

- Review the Collections Policy.
- Research and develop stories behind objects.
- Develop a contemporary collecting strategy.

### Audiences:

- Reflect the rapidly changing demographic of the London Borough of Havering.
- Consult & engage with diverse audiences.

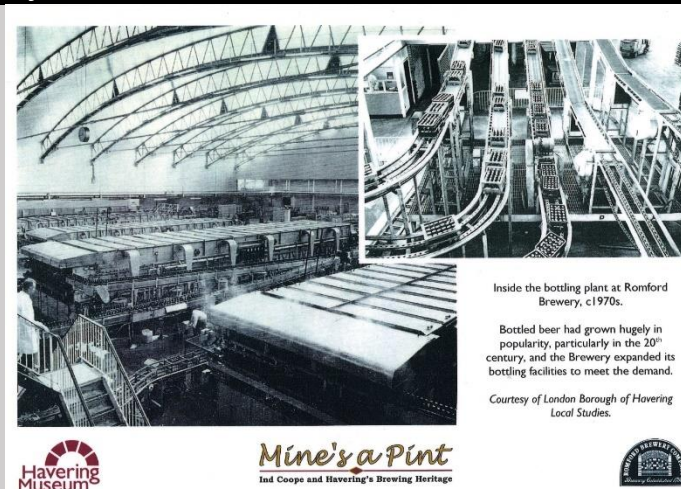
The project represents the first phase of a longer term project that will tell stories about the working lives, industries and businesses of the people of Havering. This theme offers a vehicle through which to develop a more proactive and engaging collections and research strategy that will appeal to the diverse communities of the Romford area. This theme will also build on strengths and address weaknesses within the collection.

This project focussed on the last 60 years, i.e. within living memory. New material was gathered and archived material digitised, relating to the former Romford Brewery. In addition the Collections Team identified five case studies of workplaces operational in the last 60 years to work on:

- Betterware Romford
- The Harold Hill Industrial Estate Harold Hill
- Roneo & NeoPost Romford / Hornchurch
- The Dolphin Leisure Centre / Romford
- Upminster Telephone Exchange Upminster

The Working Lives project has and will continue develop more engaging means of presenting and telling the story of work and industry within the Borough. The project has also fostered closer ties with the London Borough of Havering's Local Studies Library.

## Reset Project





## Markfield Beam Engine

The Markfield Beam Engine project aims were to:

- Give the volunteer team access to training and make sure they feel valued
- Trial MBE ability to offer skills development and training to young people
- Improve structures for induction of volunteers and improve safeguarding
- Test new opening patterns
- Pilot new events aimed at engaging the local community
- Gather data from the target audience to help inform future planning

Surveying its volunteers led MBE to create a new tea & coffee area and a new volunteer handbook which includes new safeguarding information for them. New posters and flyers, a volunteering open day and adverts were used to recruit new volunteers. Volunteer steam and guided tour training sessions, helped MBE to double the number of volunteers happy to lead guided tours of the site. A social event was held for around 60 attendees including MBE volunteers as well as teams from partner organisations.

Despite struggling to recruit young volunteers to support half-term activities the museum has built contacts with the local secondary school who are keen to work together in future. A new partnership with UCL volunteering enabled the half-term activities (MBE's first opening for school holidays), to go ahead, including: a new kids activity area with crafts and toys that link to the engine and museum, four special open days, a new sign, poster and leaflet displays. As a result MBE welcomed nearly 200 visitors over the 4 days.

Through the project MBE has invested in making the museum more visible to its key target audience, local families using the park.

## Reset Project



## Valence House Museum

The project set out to provide all staff, from front of house to participate in a variety of training that would help them develop in their role and/or Careers, in order to create a well-trained service, with confident and knowledgeable staff, collections that are better understood and cared for and better audience engagement.

The project grant was timely, Barking and Dagenham Council having just completed a staff appraisal programme focused on Continual Professional Development (CPD). The resulting Personal Development Plans of Heritage staff informed the project content and a programme of group and individually targeted training sessions was devised to benefit as many staff members as possible:

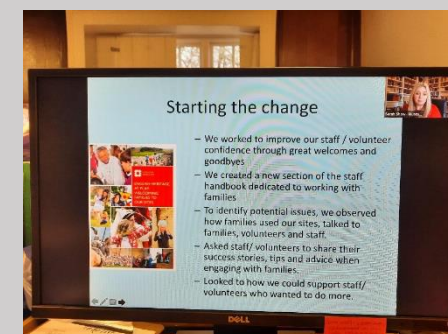
- Four group sessions for front of house, engagement and interpretation staff to upskilled them to support data entry, production of marketing materials, and to improve the visitor welcome. These sessions resulted in better experiences for family audiences and enlivened tours, activities and interpretation.
- Six role-specific training sessions were identified to support individual staff taking on new responsibilities following a recent restructure of the service. These staff have benefitted from improved knowledge and skills to give them the confidence to undertake their new responsibilities.

A number of benefits have resulted from the programme, including:

- Improved staff confidence / motivation / skills / sense of worth
- Staff empowered to suggest / implement user-led improvements
- Skills to build effective relationships with non-users
- Collections better understood / users better supported
- Better understanding SEND needs and improved programming
- Improved visitor experience

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## Reset Project



## Impacts of the projects

The museums taking part in this year's projects have already seen a number of positive impacts from the process, including improvements to: relationships within teams, (particularly with volunteers), volunteer management, visitor data gathering and feedback, reaching new audiences, better marketing, collections and research strategies. Museums also reported that these projects have resulted in improvements to processes and increased confidence, motivation and autonomy for staff.

*"Making our museum more appealing to our target audience of local families is key to helping us reverse the trend of falling visitor numbers."*

*Emma Stell, Markfield Beam Engine*

*"The Reset Grant Project Working Lives has provided the first significant investment in the museum's permanent displays since opening in 2010."*

*Ian Browne, Havering Museum*

*"The impact of this that we will be in a better position to report on and advocate for our work. Staff across the Museum and Front of House teams have received training on developing and delivering evaluation and impact measuring. They have been upskilled and developed confidence as a result."*

*Ellie Lewis-Nunes, Gunnersbury Park Museum*

*"As extensions of the training sessions on audiences, we have also focused as a team on how to improve our customer service, how to promote our shop and how to invite Gift-Aid and other donations from visitor groups, through a combination of group discussion, data analysis and roleplay exercises. We will continue to hold these team sessions on a monthly basis to improve communication and encourage further knowledge exchange among staff, volunteers and trustees."*

*Robert Keirle, Brunel Museum*

*Staff empowered to suggest / implement user-led improvements “A great training session that encouraged us to come up with new ideas on attracting families to site... We have decided to create new activities for families inside and outside the museum.”*

*Marie Douglas, Valence House Museum*

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## Museum responses to the Reset process

All of the participating museums indicated that they would be willing to undertake the Healthcheck process again:

*“Yes, going through the whole process you could really see how each step informed the next. From the self-assessment helping us clarify issues that need to be tackled, to the advisory report with so many useful resources on next steps, to the grant application the whole process felt like a distillation of ideas and helped us stay focused.”*

*Emma Stell, Markfield Beam Engine*

*“The process prompted discussion about areas and activities within the museum not previously addressed. And provided a set of priorities to work through.”*

*Ian Browne, Havering Museum*

*“It’s rare to have the opportunity to shape a grant-funded project around a particular need the organisation has – and to have the opportunity to work as team to identify the priority issues and decide on the one to create a project about.”*

*Ellie Lewis-Nunes, Gunnersbury Park Museum*

*“As a workforce composed almost entirely of part-time staff, the organisational health check was an excellent opportunity to bring the team together to reflect on our combined progress as a museum, and discuss areas for improvement in detail.”*

*Robert Keirle, Brunel Museum*

*“It is very insightful to have someone external to your organisation asking questions and giving prompts to encourage you to assess your strengths and weaknesses. It forces you to view things through a slightly different lens.”*

*Leeanne Westwood, Valence House*

The Advisory Reports were well received and are seen as both useful documents to share within organisations '*a useful document to present to senior managers to give them an overview of the service SWOT*' and as a rich source of resources to inform future improvements '*The wealth of resources and links provided has formed the basis of an organisational checklist and complemented the strategic review process that was also underway. It will now be a case of organising time and resources to work through it. This may be done through a steering group.*'

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