

Subject Specialist Networks

Implementation grant project summaries 2007-08

Archives in Museums

The network has identified that museum staff and volunteers need advice, support and training to help make their archive collections more accessible to users. Using the grant the network will develop a comprehensive skills sharing programme, drawing on its cross-domain membership.

Professional archivists will work with museum colleagues to develop and deliver training sessions on the care and interpretation of archives in each of the nine MLA regions, Scotland and Wales. Participants will be provided with training materials to take what they learn back to their museum, helping ensure the project has a sustained impact.

British Aviation Preservation Council (BAPC)

BAPC are using their grant to embed the Inspiring Learning for All framework across the BAPC network. A number of pilot sites will be established to take the project forward.

The sites will work with schools in their area to provide learning opportunities within selected National Curriculum areas (based on citizenship, history and/or science). A Learning Officer, working with the schools and the pilot sites, will develop education packs for primary age children. Museum staff and volunteers will receive training in order to deliver sessions to the schools based on these education packs.

British Cartoon Forum (BCF)

The BCF is dedicated to the preservation, conservation, critical analysis and public exhibition of British cartoons, comics, caricature, cartoon animation, and related artefacts and resources. This project is a detailed mapping exercise to identify and list collections of British cartoons and related resources held in libraries, archives, museums, and by private collectors, in Britain and overseas.

The resulting catalogue will be given the widest dissemination, by the web and other means. This will:

- benefit the public and increase access to the collections

- raise awareness of the importance of cartoon collections among the institutions holding them
- encourage advocacy of the subject
- attract new members to the BCF
- encourage joint projects and exhibitions between BCF members.

Dress & Textiles Specialists (DATS)

The network will use the implementation grant to run workshops on identification of materials. DATS members acknowledged the urgent need for training in analysing the fibres, weaves and techniques found in dress and furnishings. The grant will be used to hold three workshops on the theme of 'back to basics'. They will focus on:

1. Textile types and weaves
2. Dyes and printing
3. Lace and whitework

The workshops will enable members to improve the documentation and interpretation of collections and make them accessible to the widest audiences.

Fire Heritage Network

The network are going to organise a three-day residential training course to promote and improve museum skills, processes and collections care. The syllabus will include museum documentation procedures, general collections care and management (multi-discipline), conservation and preservation of photographic archive materials and an introduction to conservation/care of vehicular exhibits.

The course is aimed generally at 'entry level' museum staff and volunteers who, though they may have relevant experience, don't have related qualifications. Participants will leave with improved knowledge, confidence and awareness, which will be put to good practical use. It will also raise levels of interpretation and display awareness and generate access to otherwise 'deep store' collections in need of care.

Friendly & Fraternal Societies & Associations

The network feels that fraternal collections are little displayed, inadequately interpreted and often misunderstood. The project will enable the network to support sector professionals in identifying, interpreting and displaying the world of friendly and fraternal societies and associations. This will allow the public to encounter these collections, understand the vital role the organisations played in their families' lives, interact with the symbolic language and understand how they empowered and integrated communities.

Medical & Healthcare

The Medical & Healthcare network aim to develop professional and public awareness of, and access to, their collections in the UK. To do this they will develop a strategic approach to collecting and disseminating information nationally. The network will strengthen collecting policies by identifying, across the sector as a whole, strengths, gaps and duplication.

The network's project will enhance the information available in the public domain about collections by developing strategies to publish collections information via existing websites, such as Cornucopia, and by improving individual institutional data. The project will also identify and target key areas to enhance audience participation. It will do this in two ways. Firstly, by using the 'Revisiting Collections' methodology developed by MLA London and the MDA. Secondly, by embedding this methodology in the sector by training museum staff with this toolkit.

Rural Museums Network

The network's project, "Turning Green: sustainability in rural museums", is an opportunity for rural museums to join with their audiences and explore the concept of sustainability past and present. Guided by the network's Building Relevance programme, the project is about bringing a new topicality to rural museums and their collections. This will help to raise their public profile and appeal.

The work will be achieved through partnership working both in and out of network. They will draw upon external expert assistance in the global warming and sustainability fields and make use of contemporary communication methods.

Plastics

From radios to nylons, most museums collect plastic objects. The story of plastics is popular with visitors but museums usually collect plastics for the function of the artefact rather than its material. Curators can be less confident with them than traditional materials which often leads to their being kept in store or poorly interpreted. This grant will enable the development of a series of workshops for curators and an electronic handbook on the identification, care, use, display and interpretation of plastics.

Screen Heritage

Many institutions in the UK hold collections of moving image artefacts and objects. These include scripts, designs, photographs, costumes and props as well as equipment and buildings. Currently there is no directory of these artefacts, which are dispersed across many different collections, sometimes in unexpected places. This makes it impossible for researchers and others to be certain of accessing relevant material.

The British Universities Film & Video Council (BUFVC) currently manages a highly respected database of moving image and related media collections called the Researcher's Guide Online. The Screen Heritage Network will use

the grant to build on this database and create a directory that embraces this wider range of collections.

Social History Curators Group (SHCG)

The SHCG will use the grant to develop templates of practical learning resources that will help to develop the skills of social history curators. Part of their work will be to create “loan boxes” for curators to help them develop their knowledge of the materials commonly found in social history collections. Each box will contain samples of one kind of material (eg a range of different types of wood, metal, ceramic, glass, or plastic) alongside associated handling collections and paper-based learning resources.

The resources will include a toolkit of how to expand the box into a fuller facilitated training session. The handling collections will be borrowed from partner museums, or donated by them from objects identified for disposal. The boxes will be available for loan to a single member institution, or to a network for either independent learning or facilitated learning as part of a more formal seminar.

The Association of Curators for Collections from Egypt and Sudan (ACCES)

ACCES will use the grant to run regionally-based workshops on ‘Partnership through Collections’. The workshops will cement long-term relationships between specialist and non-specialist curators, encouraging discussion and promoting exchange.

The workshops will address topics under generic themes, such as best practice in managing collections, maximising new opportunities, increasing and enhancing user engagement, and best practice in developing, preserving and sharing specialist knowledge on collections. Debate outcomes will be disseminated on the ACCES website (www.acces.org.uk) and at conferences to reach the widest museum and subject specialist audiences.

Theatre Information Group

Reliable theatre production history information (who performed what, where and when) is essential to the study and practice of the performing arts across the creative and education sectors. At present there is no agreed method for doing this, so online audiences are faced with a bewildering mix of approaches, systems and institutions.

Previous Renaissance funding has enabled the Theatre Information Group to develop a national description standard for performances. This grant will enable them to deliver a fully developed database, which will contain authoritative data about historical theatre productions. It will be built around the existing People's Network Discover Service (PNDS).

Understanding British Portraiture

The network will use the grant to develop the first comprehensive online resource in this subject area. It will draw together collections, research and

expertise to facilitate the sharing of skills, knowledge and learning at all levels. The network will develop practical toolkits to increase and enhance the active use of collections. Templates and models developed by the network will ensure its growth and sustainability.

The project will directly benefit users, ranging from individuals wanting to look into a particular local portrait or artist, to the local museum professional wanting to create an exhibition with an accompanying learning and access programme for the first time.