

Locked down, but not locked away

Annual review 2020-21





How does one introduce an annual report of a year that will surely go down in history?

I started in my new role as Head of Leeds Museums & Galleries in June 2021, having previously been Head of Collections & Interiors at the National Trust for Scotland, as the service began to emerge from the restrictions of the Pandemic. This report will stand as a record of some of the extraordinary achievements of our brilliant team over the course of the year.

Given that our sites were open to the public for four months of 2020-21, it would make no sense to follow the same format as previous years. Rather than lament what we could not do, I would rather celebrate what we did do.

This report is titled **Locked down, but not locked away** precisely because so much was done to stay creative, engaged, and relevant throughout the year. In a selection of stories, we give a snapshot of how our team rose to the challenge.

We embraced the potential of digital technology to stay engaged with our communities in new and creative ways – our learning team has even won a Museums and Heritage Award for the support they provided schools and home

educators during and after Lockdown. We were also there for those with less access to digital media, providing craft packs and more.

Our curators have been collecting material that shines a light on the experiences of Leeds people during this unprecedented year. We launched our new podcast, Museums n'That and opened our venues and exhibitions to virtual visitors.

The year also saw the sad loss of my predecessor John Roles after a long illness. It is clear from talking with his friends and colleagues how highly he was regarded, both for his vision as a leader and his warmth as a person. He is missed.

Finally, I would like to thank all the colleagues, partners, and communities whose contributions large and small have helped make our achievements possible.

David Hopes
Head of Leeds Museums & Galleries

When relaxing at home, be sure to filter out the waffle.
Credit: Beth Smith

2020-21 was a year of Lockdowns and site closures, which required us to transform the way we work. We have changed the usual way we present our year's activity to reflect this.



Our nine venues were able to open in a limited way for four months in 2020-21

We were able to re-open sites during July and August 2020 following the end of the first national Lockdown. This continued until we closed again in early November 2020 with the second national Lockdown, followed by Tier 3 restrictions in Leeds and the third national Lockdown, which continued until May 2021.



Despite Lockdowns, our venues remained popular

In 2020-21, despite Lockdowns and reduced visitor capacity when open, our museums welcomed **284,000 visitors**.



Keeping our heritage safe

Even during the depths of Lockdown, essential work tasks have continued at our sites to ensure the safety and security of the buildings and museum collections.



Keeping close to our communities throughout Lockdown

- During the 2020-21 year the community team personally checked in with, ran online sessions with, and connected with our isolated community friends **2378** times.
- Young people aged 0-19 engaged with us digitally or socially distanced in person **11,671** times.
- Our informal learning opportunities and our live broadcasts for under 5s, adults and families engaged people **169,808** times.



Our award-winning digital learning and engagement supported schools, home educators and more

- **9191 pupils** (KS1-KS5) through digital engagement.
- **18%** of our digital visits are now from outside Leeds, even including schools and individuals from other countries.
- We trained **370 teachers**.
- We trained **2113 museum professionals**.
- We produced **2781 digital learning resources**.
- MyLearning.org recorded a **48% increase** in pageviews, with over 2 million hits.



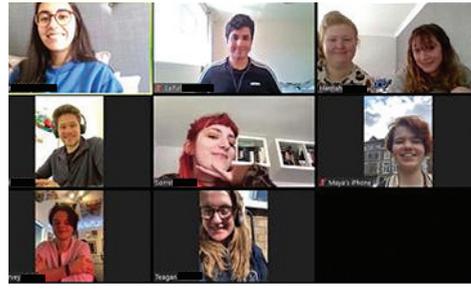
We are expanding the reach and scope of our internet presence in new and exciting ways

- Our website attracted **1,185,745 page views**.
- We reached **294,629 followers** on social media.
- We launched our new podcast, Museums n'That, which has currently been downloaded over **10,000 times** across the world.



We opened in brand new ways to virtual visitors and shoppers:

- Our new virtual visits can be found at: museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/virtual-visit
- We opened our new online shop: museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/shop
- Our collections and exhibitions are now also available to view on Google Arts & Culture: artsandculture.google.com/partner/leeds-museums-and-galleries



A snapshot of an unprecedented year

As England went into Lockdown, our amazing staff worked like never before to ensure we continued to provide a museum service during the dark days. Many of our activities were re-invented for a digital audience, but we also stayed actively involved with communities without ready access to digital communication.

Engaging with young people through the Pandemic

When Leeds Art Gallery closed its doors in the first Lockdown, we quickly realised the impact this would have on many of the young people we work with. Our Youth Engagement Officer arranged to meet with the gallery's Youth Collective online to assist them with the transition.

Before the Pandemic, the collective met at the gallery monthly, but we have delivered 50 online workshops during Lockdown. It quickly became apparent these meet ups would be a lifeline to the members of the group because of the challenges they were experiencing. This had a huge impact on their well-being and attendance has remained high.

We have maintained our engagement with national campaigns through our social media platforms to respond to Mental Health Awareness Week and National Volunteers Week. The group have continued to produce artwork and research our collections for our Art In Focus series. They worked in partnership with film maker Nick Singleton to produce a film. They also worked in partnership with another artist, author and illustrator, Nick Hayes.

We have engaged in some lively conversations about artists' practice focussing on artists in our collections and have received lovely comments including from artists Sara Barker and Bob & Roberta Smith.



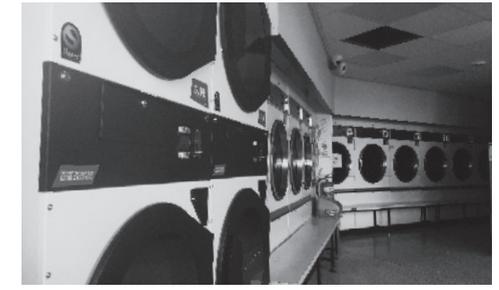
Exploring the impact of Lockdown on young people's mental health

We also continued to support the Preservative Party (our volunteer group of young people aged 14-24) with their Open Minds online exhibition for Leeds City Museum

They were working on Open Minds before Lockdown, and during Lockdown they often posted online about what they were doing to look after their own mental health, particularly as the group includes young people with additional needs.

When we entered the first Lockdown in March, many of the group decided they would still like to work together remotely, so our WhatsApp chat was been very active, and we organised a weekly video conference. As the first Lockdown lifted in summer 2020, we met in groups of six in parks, and even managed a visit to Leeds Discovery Centre and Leeds City Museum.

The Preservative Party modified their original plans for a physical exhibition, and transformed it onto an online one and curated three short films about mental health, including one about isolation, drawing on their common experience.



Documenting the Pandemic for future generations

When Lockdown began, we realised how important it was to capture this chapter of Leeds's story for posterity. We put a call out on our social media accounts asking people to share their experiences around the Pandemic. We also directly contacted community groups we work with.

The response has included a lot of digital images: empty street scenes; home tutoring; signs in windows (some poignant, some humorous, but all very human). We also have two short digital clips: the NHS show of thanks by clapping from 26/3/2020; and a street gig sing-along on Inglewood Drive in Otley. We have also had submissions from local artists who have created works in response to the current crisis. These include iPad paintings, digital photographs, and digital doodles.

We have also been collecting signs from shops not accepting cash during the outbreak for fear of transmitting the disease. These will be displayed in an exhibition called 'Money Talks' at Leeds City Museum in February 2022 to capture this change to how goods have been paid for during the outbreak.



Giving new life to Leeds's tradition of 'museum windows'

Unable to meet up when Leeds entered the first Lockdown, many people sought creative ways of connecting with loved ones and neighbours. We tried our best to support this. Museum Window was one of these initiatives.

In the 1930s, Leeds City Museum, then on Park Row, highlighted objects in their weekly 'Museum Window' display, with accompanying articles in the Yorkshire Evening Post. Inspired by this, we asked people to create their own Museum Windows, and to share them on Twitter.

Around thirty were created, on terraced streets, high rise flats and leafy suburbs across Leeds. We even saw a great window created in Brighton.

Some were made around specific subjects, such as bugs, birds or Moomins. Others told a broader story of the interests of the person who created them.

The scheme came to an end as the first Lockdown eased. To mark the project, we recreated one of the windows in the Collectors Cabinet in Leeds City Museum. Megan, age 6, installed her Museum Window in July 2021 and it will be in place until February 2022.

The windows provided a way for people to join in a creative group activity while physically isolating. Museum Windows was the first in a series of projects to mark the 200th Birthday of Leeds Museums & Galleries in 2021.

Bags of Creativity to bridge the digital divide

We often hear about a digital divide, and this lack of access to digital media became even more acute during the height of Lockdown. That's why we took a lead on the Bags of Creativity scheme for the Leeds Cultural Education Partnership together with IVE and Artforms.

Our bags of creativity were designed to provide creative activities and art materials for young people without digital access. They went out to 1300 vulnerable children and young people (including 300 from Leeds Libraries' Holiday Hunger programme) across Leeds during the summer holidays. This was designed to complement other holiday activities being supported across the council. We recruited teams of 20 local creative practitioners, artists and organisations to design the activities. Child development specialists, Dr Karen Dunn and Di Chilvers gave training and mentoring to these local teams to ensure that activities were both tailored to the contents of the bags and engaging for children in each age range. The bags were distributed via our partnership in Children's Services social care teams.

Community craft packs for Lotherton locals

Lotherton's assistant community curator devised a creative way to keep in touch with the local community through a free craft box scheme. The 70 packs, which included a piece of plain white cotton and a variety of different sewing and craft resources, were designed for vulnerable people who are experiencing the difficulties of self-isolation.

Each individual received a phone call from a local volunteer who discussed their needs. The volunteers modified the materials and resources for each person and encouraged them to decorate the cotton square with a thank you message or image, highlighting anyone who cared for them during the Lockdown period.

Once the packs were organised and distributed, a volunteer buddy assisted them in their creative project to help them produce a thank you square. On completion the squares were sent back to Lotherton's History Group volunteers to be stitched together. The pieces will eventually form a large banner which will be on show at local libraries before being displayed at a Nurses' Picnic in 2022, celebrating the hard-working nursing staff of Leeds and beyond.

Creating a new painted rock garden at Temple Newsam

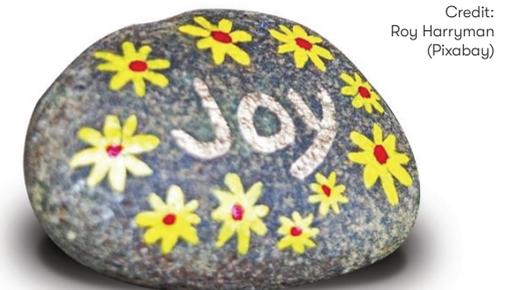
During Lockdown, the Temple Newsam estate became a lifeline for local people seeking to get out of their houses and take healthy exercise in the fresh air. A local Facebook group was set up called Temple Rocks, encouraging local families to paint and hide rocks around Temple Newsam, Halton, Whitkirk and Crossgates.

The Facebook group grew fast and now has about 1000 members.

They began to create a rock snake in the plantation woods at Temple Newsam.

Due to Lockdown there were no summer bedding plants grown for the walled garden. Our fantastic Visitor Assistants got in touch with the group to see if they would be interested in creating a painted rock garden, which they did.

The snake has now been cemented down in the main playground at Temple Newsam as a lasting reminder and the project has been the subject of a small community exhibition in the Book Room at Temple Newsam House.



Credit: Roy Harryman (Pixabay)



Award Winning Support for Schools and Home Educators through and beyond Lockdown!

The impact of Covid has been immense for families and schools. Over the course of the pandemic our Learning and Access Team worked to support schools and home educating families through a wide range of digital resources and interventions, as well as working closely with 18 schools in Leeds to support them to access the museum collections, spanning millions of years of history. Tailoring their work to the needs of staff and pupils, the team also helped some of these schools to partially or entirely redesign their curriculums to embed local and diverse histories and make the most of digital opportunities. The impact of this work on the pupils will be seen for many years.

This work has been nationally recognised with a Museums & Heritage Award in the Learning Outreach category, with judges praising our 'Breadth, engagement, diversity - the work by this learning department is hugely impressive, consistently brilliant and comes from a position of confidence.'

Supporting home educators during Lockdown: #MuseumFromHome

#MuseumFromHome was a fantastic initiative to share short educational films about our collections on social media during Lockdown. We used real museum objects from our school loans boxes to create films for Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Each week had a theme, and each day showed a different object and discussed what it could tell us about the past with links to more information on our other channels. We were one of the only museum services in the country to be using real museum objects in our digital engagement, and MyLearning.org already provides many of the supporting resources necessary for a comprehensive online programme and offer.

These gathered a strong social media following of individuals and families, and the playlist on YouTube has been popular with schools. Within three months of launching, they attracted nearly 77,000 views on social media, and 12,000 likes, shares and comments. The films have longevity as we can still use them as additional resources for our loans boxes. We have been linking the content of the films to artworks from the art gallery, and adding them to MyLearning for long term use.

#MuseumsFromHome was a brilliant way to continue our museum learning activity during Lockdown. The continuing programme has attracted a wide interest in Leeds and been recognised as an example of excellence further afield. It has also provided a permanent legacy of learning resources for schools.



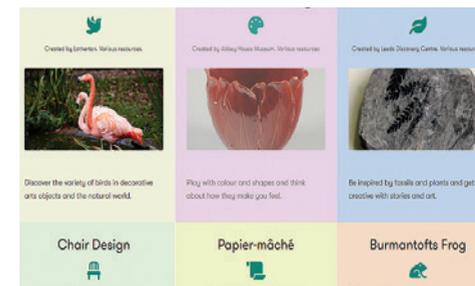
A 'Virtual Classroom' for our digital schools workshops

Our main focus over the summer of 2020 was working to develop a digital offer for schools to begin in September. We did a lot of reflective thinking around what makes a good digital experience, which themes or workshops would work digitally and how (as a museum service that deals in the 'real') we were going to convey the power of object-based learning through digital means.

We now have a Virtual Classroom offer: www.museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/engage/learn/learning-workshops/

The 1hr live broadcast workshops cover our most popular themes at each museum, are interactive and can be delivered from the museum or from home (in case of further Lockdowns). They use films of spaces within our museums and galleries, 3D photography of objects, and sensory activities planned in advance with the teacher. Member schools can also draw on the objects within their loans boxes to bridge the blended learning gap. For other schools, we suggest the teacher gathers objects and sensory materials we can draw on throughout. We also offer shorter 20 min, 'ask an expert' slots where we can 'pop in' to the classroom digitally focusing on a single object or to answer questions

By innovating the way we deliver our services for schools, and responding to their changing needs during the pandemic, we are showing our commitment to an inclusive, rich and varied curriculum, even when it's difficult to visit our buildings.



Developing Recovery Curriculums with local schools

Cultural organisations are in a strong position to support schools in their 'Recovery Curriculums' – these are an initiative aiming to help the emotional recovery of young children from the pandemic as well as addressing the gaps in formal learning many have experienced in Lockdown. Leeds has begun working with a small number of such schools, underpinned by Discover Arts Award. The schools we are working with are from low income areas where the schools recognise the need to develop 'cultural capital', the attainment gap has grown, and where a high proportion of children will have had little access to home learning provision. We have developed a series of cross-service, cross-collection, nature based resources focusing on Social and Emotional Learning within PSHE, a major area schools are working with as they bring pupils back into school. They are designed to promote collaboration, creativity, self-esteem and expressive communication skills.

The resources are freely available on our website and on MyLearning:

www.museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/engage/learn/recovery-curriculum/

www.mylearning.org/stories/museum-moments/1291?

Schools can choose to use individual free resources from either website, or engage on a deeper level with wraparound live broadcast workshops, and the embedded Arts Award. We will continue this offer throughout academic year 2020-21 to support our local schools and teachers where the need is greatest.



Creating new digital audiences

It is a truism that crises can provide opportunities. We have always recognised the importance of developing new audiences through digital media, but the Pandemic provided a massive new impetus.

We created a brand new [Virtual Visit](#) section on our website, and also on [Google Arts and Culture](#). Virtual Visit became the face of our organisation, a hub for activities, video workshops, learning resources and a podcast. We saw digital visitors move between exhibitions that they wouldn't traditionally have seen, due to physical distance barriers.

Through nine exhibitions and hundreds of ideas for things to do at home we welcomed 51,000 visitors from over 100 countries to our museums and galleries online. Our 65+ years audience jumped to our third largest demographic online*, our #MuseumfromHome videos were such a hit that we were invited to Steph's Packed Lunch on C4 and our new podcast Museums n'That is just about to launch Series 3. We've had volunteers apply to work with us on the back of the digital content we've created in the past 12 months and Leeds Library Service is planning to archive a digital interactive walking map created for the Fast x Slow Fashion online exhibition.

2020 generated new ways of thinking and gave us the opportunity try new things. Our on-site programming, interpretation and engagement strategies have a new lease of life and that likely wouldn't have happened otherwise.

*Google analytics comparison between 23 Mar – 1 Jun 2020. For the same number of days prior, 11 Jan – 20 Mar 2020 65+ age group were our lowest age range demographic.

Our first ever podcast

In 2020, we launched our new podcast, Museums n'That, which has currently been downloaded over 10,000 times across the world (11% of our listeners are in North America).

Hosts Megan Jones and Sara Merritt sit down with people who work behind the scenes at museums and galleries all over the country and cover topics from video game history to bog bodies and winding caterpillar guts out of their anuses. What separates this from other museum podcasts is the informality and trademark Yorkshire welcome, breaking down the 'stuffiness' too often associated with museums and galleries. Because we all just really want to know the fun bits.

Our listeners agree, with reviews like: 'I love it when a podcast can both teach you something and make you nearly spit your tea out at the same time' and 'a beautiful balance of hilarity, silliness, information and curiosity'.

We record and produce in-house. Our target audience is people who feel intimidated by museums or too anxious to ask questions once they're there, but it's also been very popular within the museum sector. Now more than ever it's vital that museums and galleries are relevant and relatable, and Museums n'That sets a tone that we hope the rest of our sector will follow.



John Roles, 1957-2020

John Roles, our Head of Service from 2004 to 2020, died in November 2020 after a long illness. We miss him.

When John joined us from Brighton Museums in 2004, we had seven sites and were receiving around 350,000 visits a year. In 2018/19, before the Pandemic hit, we welcomed just shy of 1.7m people to our now nine sites - a huge achievement of his leadership. It was thanks to the significant capital investment he helped secure, both from Leeds City Council and from external funders such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund, that we were able to open Leeds Discovery Centre, our new collections store, in 2007 and Leeds City Museum the following year. Numerous other projects are part of John's legacy including the visitor centre at Kirkstall Abbey, the Fashion Galleries at Lotherton Hall and a new roof at Leeds Art Gallery.

But John was always about people. He oversaw significant ongoing investment in staff teams and programmes across our service. He championed our learning and community programmes which were at the heart of his passion for museums - to bring people of all ages and backgrounds together with each other and with museum collections.

John was someone who could straddle the roles of boss, colleague, mentor, and friend with ease.

He developed a leadership ethos of enabling colleagues to run with ideas, to take risks and to back us up if it went wrong. This was hugely empowering and brought out the best in people. He was also a great sounding board for ideas. He would listen if anyone had a problem and offer his insight as to a way forward. He had a quieter style of leadership than many - he didn't feel he always had to take centre stage. John would often sit quietly in a meeting and then suddenly come out with some nugget of wisdom and everyone would take note.

He was hugely supportive of the wider sector and especially close partner organisations in West Yorkshire and beyond. It's clear that his standing in the museum sector was significant, probably beyond what John himself thought in his usual modest style, until he read the wonderful comments in his retirement card from colleagues up and down the country.

Many of us remember John's great sense of humour and his enjoyment of the ridiculous, coupled with a sharp intellect. We liked going to meetings with him because he was fun to be around. He was famed for saying things how they were, which may have on occasion included the odd expletive. He was generous, warm, and encouraging. He would always make time for people. He cared about the people he worked with, and they him.

John's work was very important to him, he was incredibly dedicated, and he achieved a huge amount throughout his career. He leaves a strong legacy - for Leeds Museums and Galleries, for local people, communities and for culture in Leeds.



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