

Research Strategy 2018-2022

Introduction

Cornwall Museums Partnership is a charity which exists to help museums to thrive.

Between 2018 and 2022 we will invest nearly £4.5m to promote innovation, help museums to raise standards, improve museums' business performance, and develop and share new knowledge about museums' collections to inspire a wide range of people. We will extend our partnership working, collaborating more closely with our partners in Higher Education in particular. We are keen to invite proposals from external partners who can help us to unlock the potential of Cornwall's museum collections and better understand museum practice.

Put simply, we want to help museums to make people's lives better by ensuring that Cornwall's unique cultural identity is shared with and enjoyed by as many people as possible. We will support museums to:

- Contribute to life-long learning, self-expression and creativity;
- Entertain and inspire people, bringing communities together and informing individual and community identity;
- Create a sense of belonging and active public participation in decision-making;
- Revitalise local economies, offering employment, training and work experience opportunities.

From 2018-2022 we will:

- Promote innovation in museum practice;
- Help museums maximise the potential of digital technologies;
- Diversify the museum workforce;
- Improve skills in the museum workforce;
- Improve the understanding of Cornwall's museum collections;
- Advocate for the value of museums;
- Support museums to deliver great visitor experiences, for a wider range of people, both onsite and online.

Vision

Our vision is that Cornwall's museums will be a strong network of sustainable organisations, at the heart of Cornwall's culture, creating memorable and enjoyable experiences for all. They will be valued as having a unique role in connecting communities to their heritage and culture, in sharing Cornwall's unique stories with its visitors and in bringing ideas and cultural experiences from around the world to Cornwall. Museums' partnerships with business, public and voluntary sector organisations will be recognised as making considerable contributions to Cornwall's economy, skills base, community cohesion and wellbeing. Cornwall Museums Partnership will be recognised for pioneering a new model of collaborative leadership which promotes innovation and resilience in the cultural sector.

Mission

Our charity exists to help all museums in Cornwall to thrive, for the benefit of everyone living in and visiting Cornwall. We develop and manage collaborative programmes of work which are designed to help museums raise standards, engage with more people and to be sustainable and resilient. We help museums to do the things that some find difficult to do on their own including advocacy, audience development, fundraising and workforce development.

Museums in Cornwall

Cornwall's museums house collections of local, national and international importance which connect audiences to Cornish culture and Cornwall to the world.

Telegraph Museum Porthcurno's collections have been Designated in recognition of the international role Porthcurno played in the development of global telecommunications. They form the most comprehensive record of submarine telegraphy in the world. Historically, as the centre of global communications, the telegraph station at Porthcurno is one of the most significant surviving sites in the development of this technology. The collection spans 150 years, charting the development of telecommunications from submarine cables to fibre optics, and highlights the crucial role that Cornwall plays today as an international communications hub.

The **Royal Institution of Cornwall** runs one of the UK's oldest museums, celebrating its bicentenary in 2018. The strength of the collection is its diversity and the opportunity this provides to engage audiences with Cornish history and its global impact. Outstanding elements include the world class geological collection (being prepared for Designation), the archaeological collections, diverse social history including photographic collections, fine and decorative arts including Old Master drawings and contemporary works. The Courtney Library includes rich sources of information from c 30,000 manuscripts and rare books about Cornwall.

Penlee House Art Gallery & Museum specialises in the work of the Newlyn School and Lamorna group artists and their contemporaries in St Ives, offering a unique opportunity to view the world-famous Cornish art of the late 19th and early 20th century in context (Designation application in development). Its collection includes under-exploited archaeology and ethnography, and early collections of natural history and archaeology. Its photographic collection now includes the collection of the Gibsons of Penzance and Scilly, an unrivalled collection depicting daily life in Cornwall and Scilly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Falmouth Art Gallery holds one of the SW's leading art collections with an outstanding collection of over 2,000 artworks that range from Pre-Raphaelite and British Impressionist paintings to contemporary prints, photography, and a children's illustration archive. It has the largest contemporary collection of automata in a public museum. The gallery also cares for the **Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society's** collection of 279 Henry Scott Tuke paintings.

Wheal Martyn is a World Heritage Site Area Centre and holds a unique collection of the globally important china clay mining industry. The museum is a focal point for 'Clay Country' culture keeping alive the heritage of local bands, choirs and chapels which are fast disappearing. The collection's main strengths include locomotives and vintage lorries, Cornwall's largest working waterwheel, and an important archive of photographs, films, maps, technical drawings, and documents. The 26-acre site includes two former Victorian

clay works, designated as a Scheduled Monument by Historic England and a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Helston Museum holds the largest social history collection in Cornwall, with reputedly one of the most significant costume collections in the South West. The collections are an eclectic mix of mostly 19th and early 20th material covering the history of the town and The Lizard, including a fine photographic collection which is currently undergoing digitisation, and the original early 19th century equipment used by local man Henry Trengrouse, inventor of the rocket powered line throwing device for saving lives at sea.

Cornwall's Regimental Museum, housed in Bodmin's imposing Victorian Army Barracks, is the national home of the heritage of two army regiments, the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and the more recent Light Infantry. It tells the local, national, and international stories of these regiments as well as the story of Cornwall's own volunteer and militia regiments, connecting with every community in the county. It houses the finest military collection in the South West and holds important archives and photographic material.

Wider collections in Cornwall's museums reflect the diverse lives and landscapes from which they are collected. They tell the story of Cornwall's individual culture, the industries that have grown and declined, the creativity and innovation of its people, their every-day lives, and the richness of the natural environment.

The focus of museum collections can be categorised into 3 main subject areas;

There is an abundance of **archaeological finds** and documentation of heritage sites testament to Cornwall's rich early history, and the unchanged landscape that has preserved material evidence of ancient lives. Over a quarter (27%) of all museum artefacts in Cornwall are associated with archaeology. **Perranzabuloe Museum** in Perranporth, tells the story of Cornwall's patron saint; St Piran, from which the town is named and where remains of an early Christian church can be found. **Penryn Museum** holds finds from Glasney College; the ecclesiastical power house of mediaeval Cornwall, so significant to be severely decimated during the dissolution of the monasteries.

Natural History makes up 20% of the collections, including; botany, zoology and geology. Of note being the extraordinary and rare Herbarium held at **Lawrence House Museum** which contains 6 volumes of over 1,000 locally collected and pressed plants assembled by William Wise in the 1880s-1920s. **Liskeard Museum** is located within the Mining World Heritage Site contains a wide-ranging collection of geological samples and artefacts, resources that shaped the mining landscape and fuelled the fortunes of Cornwall.

Social History forms the majority of collections; artefacts, photographs, oral history and archives detail the often every-day lives of the people living and working in Cornwall. In total this makes up 43% of collection items, as it includes the trades and industries and significant lives and inventions that have shaped the development of the county. Cornwall is recognised for its extensive coastline and maritime heritage. **Mevagissey and St Ives Museums** contain a wealth of artefacts relating to maritime industries such as fishing and boat building. **King Edward Mine** and **Geevor Tin Mine**, offer the visitor the opportunity to explore mining heritage through the heritage buildings and working machinery. The artefacts and photographic collection at **Lostwithiel Museum**, provides a comprehensive record of agriculture in this once wealthy market town. Local events, traditions and customs are well represented, typified by **Padstow Museum's** Obby Oss costume used as part of an anarchic May Day celebration.

The remaining 10% includes a range of artefacts that fall outside these generic categories; fine and decorative art, costume, numismatics, world cultures and science and industry.

Collectively, these collections constitute Cornwall's national collection and are integral to the understanding of Cornwall's distinctive cultural heritage. The proud history, unique culture and distinctive language of Cornwall make up the unique identity of the Cornish, affording them the same status under the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities as the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish.

Particular research interests

Together, Cornwall's museum collections are arguably the Duchy's most untapped cultural resource. At a time when the debate about Cornish identity has become particularly charged, they provide the key to understanding and exploring our region's distinctiveness and what it means to be Cornish in the 21st century.

Our aim is to support museums to maintain and enhance their collections for the knowledge and inspiration of future generations. We are interested in supporting a wide range of research activity at museums in Cornwall; we are interested in supporting both collections focused research and activity which explores museum practice. Our initial scoping work tells us that there are particular gaps in knowledge and opportunities in the following areas:

- Natural history
- Visual Arts
- Industrial heritage
- Cornishness and Cornish Identity
- Governance and leadership in the cultural sector
- Diverse histories¹ including Cornish Women's History
- Sustainable Volunteering
- Engagement with heritage through digital technology

Current activity

There are currently a range of research projects taking place at museums in Cornwall. These take a variety of different forms for example:

- From 2018, NPO consortium museums² will expand their volunteer-led research programmes, enabled by new investment in Trainee Curators across the partnership. These trainees will recruit and support Citizen Curators at 5 consortia museums. Supported by an experienced curator, trainees and their volunteer Citizen Curators will become Wikimedians-in-Residence transforming the information about Cornish culture and heritage available online. We have ambitions to adopt open knowledge principles in the dissemination of our collections research, setting free the huge knowledge held within the walls of our museums.

¹ By diverse we mean all of the 'protected characteristics' in the Equality Act 2010 and other communities or groups who have experienced disadvantage.

² Museums taking part in Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation activity namely Penlee House, Falmouth Art Gallery, Telegraph Museum Porthcurno, Wheal Martyn, Royal Cornwall Museum, Helston Museum and Cornwall's Regimental Museum

- Our commitment to research includes museum practice. Throughout 2018 and 2019 we are working with Professor Eleonora Belfiore (Loughborough University) on the Fun Palaces Ambassadors Action Research programme sharing new insights into community engagement, volunteering and museum practice. CMP is the only museum partner in this important Paul Hamlyn supported research project.

We are interested in supporting a range of research activity from shorter projects to Collaborative Doctoral Awards. If you have a research project or proposal you are interested in talking to us about, please get in touch.

Contact Emmie Kell CEO Cornwall Museums Partnership

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