

North East Museums Quarterly Activity Report 2026-27

Period: Quarter 2 (1 July to 30 September)

1 - Venue Activity

Arbeia Roman Fort

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

After the Fire

(30 March – 27 September 2026)

The 2026 exhibition, *After the Fire*, explores the redevelopment of the southern section of Arbeia following a catastrophic fire at the very end of the third century that destroyed a large section of that area of the fort. After the debris had been cleared away, many buildings had to be rebuilt. The new layout reflected the very latest in fort design from the eastern Empire. The headquarters building was no longer in the centre of the fort, but at the end of an impressive processional way. The two main roads now divided the military accommodation into four quarters. One of these quarters contained a single barrack and a large courtyard house which was probably the commanding officer's house. This building has been partially reconstructed on site. *After the Fire* reveals the story of this building through the archaeological finds, charting its use from prestigious accommodation to a civilian workshop.

The exhibition links to the launch of the second volume of Arbeia's archaeological report which will cover the history of the fourth century fort.

Summer Events Programme

Events included:

Out There Adventures. This included the opportunity to try on replica Roman armour, helmets and equipment, handle the weaponry of a Roman Legionary or British warrior, see what life might have been like in Roman occupied Britain, and try throwing spears at your enemy! There were lots of hands-on artefacts, both military and civilian, to give visitors a tangible sense of life at the time.

Rent a Peasant. Louisa Gidney offered activities linked to the *After the Fire* exhibition. She also brought along some of her sheep and talked about the importance of sheep to the Romans.

Guided tours of the archaeological site took place every Thursday 23 July – 27 August inclusive. These were very well-received with excellent feedback from participants.

Excavations at South Shields Roman Fort – Volume 2

Volume 2 of *Excavations at South Shields Roman Fort* is currently with the publishers, and will be available later in the year. This volume looks at the late Roman fort, from the year 300 up until the end of the Roman period, and beyond that into the early medieval period. The book lays out all the evidence from the structures and the finds recovered during the excavations of 1983 – 2016 in the south-east corner of the fort, and uses the information to provide the most up-to-date interpretation of the history of the site. The project was led by Nick Hodgson, an ex-staff member working on the publication as a volunteer, who wrote the structural report and found funding for specialist reports such as C14 dating. Six other volunteers, some short term and some long term, assisted in writing the finds reports, cataloguing pottery, drawing finds and producing the page illustrations. This will be a major publication of a very important site, and thanks to external funding will be available both in hard copy and in open access digital format.

Learning & Engagement:

The learning team will be working with Alex Croom, Bethany Goodman, (archivist from Vindolanda Trust) Amber Films and New York Primary School on the community engagement element of the Archives Revealed Project. This will include an in-school information day exploring archive material, maps and objects linked to Arbeia, a visit by New York Primary to Arbeia and Vindolanda and an exhibition, produced by the school which will be displayed in the schoolroom at Arbeia.

182 visitors have participated in *Ways to Play* activities at Arbeia.

Volunteers:

At **Arbeia**, **113 hours** supported archaeological research, the herb garden, Archives Revealed activity, site maintenance and a corporate volunteering group.

Recruitment is underway for roles supporting the Arbeia Herb Garden, research activity, and upcoming exhibitions, including the Masterpiece programme.

Strategic relevance: Volunteer activity is supporting the venue, adding capacity to exhibitions, collections, visitor engagement and the care and interpretation of South Tyneside's heritage.

Discovery Museum

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

From Bosnia to Tyneside opened on 10th July in Destination Tyneside

Through film, family photographs and personal objects, Smajo Beso shares the story of his childhood escape from the war in Bosnia. By 1995, 1.2 million Bosnians had fled their country, and an estimated 4,500 refugees were formally resettled in the UK during what was then Europe's largest refugee crisis since the Second World War.

Things that Go opened on 1st August in a brand-new temporary exhibition gallery. Discovery Museum's brand-new gallery space launched with a playful transport exhibition for families with younger children. From boats and bicycles to tractors, trains and planes, explore the exciting world of transport through hands-on play and a myriad of museum objects. Dipping into Discovery Museum's world-class collections for new and exciting objects to see, Things That Go will inspire the next generations of museum goers, thinkers and tinkerers.

Union flag acquisition

North East Museums has acquired a rare Union Flag ensuring it remains in the UK, with the support of several generous funders. The flag was flown from HMS *Royal Sovereign*, flagship of Newcastle-born Vice-Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood at the Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805. Two stakeholder and press events were held in August. This will be on display in Discovery in October 2026 for 2 weeks to coincide with both Trafalgar day and half-term.

Learning & Engagement:

Learning Summer Holiday Programme

Over the summer the learning team Provided a wide range of Holiday activities – with Much Taking place in the Play + Invent Space. These Included -Family Lego & Knex Drop sessions on Mondays. STEM Family challenges on Tuesdays Discover a Story sessions on Wednesdays and Time Travel Club on Thursdays tied to our partnership with the TNA. We also provided the Discovery Garden Trail (Inspired by the St Oswalds - Peter Rabbit trail).

We have delivered 21 sessions to around 800 adults and 1100 children. The charged activities earned around £626 .The Garden Trail engaged with around 185 Children and earned £185

Parent Zone – Lego Build and Talk - 7 August

The Play + Invent space was hired by the learning team to Parent Zone – they delivered a session, commissioned by the LEGO group, helping Parents understand the importance of talk through Play (and using Lego). They engaged with around 70 Children and 40 adults. We charged them £320 to hire the space.

After delivering this across the UK at other venues they advised Discovery was their most well attended event.

Work experience Weeks July 2026

Over 2 weeks in the beginning of July, Discovery Museum and the Carpathia Room was the base location for North East Museum's Work experience Programme. Over 2 weeks We worked with around 30 young people providing them with information and Guidance around careers in Museum's and the Cultural sector. Young people visited different NEM venues and worked on a Live Project linked to their Chosen venue.

Home educator sessions – 8 July

The learning team delivered Home Educator sessions, exploring STEAM to Green: Wind and Ships and Shipbuilding

Tiny Sparks – July & September

Our facilitated Under 5 learning sessions continue to run on Fridays with the Summer term block completing in July and Starting again in September

School engagement: July - September

The Core Learning Programme will have expected to engage with around 2500 children and earned around £2500 between July and September 2026

Learning Summer Holiday Programme (as reported in Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects). Over the summer the learning team Provided a wide range of Holiday activities – with Much Taking place in the Play + Invent Space.

Communities:

Discovery Museum continues to provide an important base for community engagement in Newcastle, supporting activity with groups experiencing barriers to participation as well as broader health and wellbeing work.

The venue's accessible social-history and science collections provide opportunities for facilitated visits, reminiscence and collections-based activity. This sits alongside wider Newcastle partnerships with organisations including Karbon Homes and recovery and mental-health services, demonstrating the role of museum collections as a resource for wellbeing, connection and ongoing engagement.

127 engagements took place through Community Group visits to Discovery Museum in addition to the targeted engagement work that took place in delivering the from Bosnia to Tyneside exhibition.

Volunteers:

Volunteer activity at Discovery Museum was relatively modest during Q2, with volunteers contributing 51 hours between 1 July and 21 September. The majority of this activity supported visitor engagement, with 42 hours contributed to guided tours linked to Charge! A further 9 hours were provided through a Percy Hedley work experience placement, supporting administration and providing an opportunity for workplace experience.

While recorded volunteer hours are lower than at some other North East Museums venues, activity at Discovery demonstrates the value of volunteering both in enhancing interpretation and visitor experience and in providing accessible work experience and skills-development opportunities.

Great North Museum: Hancock

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

Treasure: Hidden, Lost, Found (28th of March – 20th of September 2026): The museum's major exhibition for 2026, *Treasure: Hidden, Lost Found*, opened to the public on the 28th of March. Developed and curated by the in house GNM:H team, the exhibition invites audiences to step into the fascinating world of treasure and see some amazing archaeological finds from across the North of England. The exhibition explores what makes something valuable - culturally, historically, and personally – and asks questions about who owns the past and what stories do objects tell?

Picture This: Someone Like Me (12th of March 2026 – 17th of January 2027): *Picture This: Someone Like Me* is an artwork exhibition that creatively showcases postgraduate research happening at Newcastle University. Developed on collaboration with two Newcastle University PhD candidates, the exhibition features illustrated artworks and personal reflections that explore the many different pathways into research and challenge common ideas about who researchers are and where they come from.

WanBel Global Exhibition: Commemorating Papua New Guinea's 50th Anniversary of Independence (23rd of May – 20th of September 2026). The museum developed an exhibition featuring treasures from Papua New Guinea for September 2026 in collaboration with the Mariwai Project. The exhibition was visited by an official delegation from Papua New Guinea, including Ms Shiva Lynn Borgas, International Representative for the PNG National Cultural Commission and Special Envoy on Art for the Prime Minister's Office.

Unearthed Treasures (30th of April – 31st of December 2026): Beacon Films presents a series of films exploring what treasure means. Eight young filmmakers took on the challenge of creating a film about treasure - what it is, and who or what

defines it. This is the second in a series of films being created by a group of D/deaf, D/disabled and Neurodiverse film makers from the region who have been inspired by the museum, collections and the stories they can tell.

The Odyssey: A Ten-Year Journey Home (25th of July - 1st of October 2026): A small exhibition was placed in the Shefton Gallery. This was intended to coincide with the release of Christopher Nolan's film, *The Odyssey*.

This summer we also hosted **Peter Rabbit: Tales on Tyne** (15th of July – 14th of September 2026): The museum was one of the hosts for the trail organised by St Oswalds Hospice. The museum hosted one large Peter Rabbit sculpture as well as 4 small 'Fluffles' across the museum. Weekend Peter Rabbit inspired crafts sessions were run at the museum over the summer holidays and over 58555 visitors had the opportunity to see the sculptures.

Events and holiday activities: In addition to a packed programme of drop in events over the summer holidays, the museum also hosted some high-profile events including:

- **Discover Festival** (13th of June 2026): Newcastle University's Discover Festival returned to Great North Museum: Hancock. Visitors were invited to explore a world of ideas through interactive activities and exhibitions designed to inspire all ages.
- **Family Twilight – H2Optimistic** (10th of July): Visitors were invited to explore the theme of water, exploring its amazing life-giving qualities, how humans and water have co-existed throughout history, and what steps we can take towards a bluer future - all through games, experiments and art. 185 people attended the event.
- **NOVUM Festival** (8th and 9th of August): The festival is developed and managed by Newcastle City Council, co-created with local communities and brought to life by regional, national and international artists. It encourages everyone to explore and see Newcastle differently. Activity at the museum included: Vinyl 4 Teenz, Wheelie Proud Flag Making, Beats, Cycles and Song. Over 3,300 people came to the museum to take part in the activities

Learning & Engagement:

Mini Wonders: We have completed the final cohort of 8 families delivering the Art Fund and Nesta's Mini Wonders programme. We applied for and received £5000 funding from Art Fund for a follow-up programme applying the principles developed in Mini Wonders.

We will be working with family support services to align sessions with the two-year check for children and look at how we can support areas of child development going forward.

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Other engagement with Early Years include our termtime family under 5s programmes – Museum Mice, Nurture Nest and Curious Crawlers – welcomed 95 carers and children during this period. We ran a Baby Takeover in July for 127 babies and carers. Our Mouse Tales sessions for under younger children and their families (including a relaxed session to coincide with the museum's relaxed early opening) welcomed 238 people during the school summer holidays.

Events led by the Learning team in the summer include: Time Odyssey project funded by Art Explora. 848 children took part in school Time Odyssey visits and 122 people attended family sessions through the school summer holidays. We are continuing to run the LEGO Build the Change project and ran family drop-in sessions through the summer welcoming 1398 people on site at the museum and 746 people at the Newcastle Quayside Carnival.

The museum hosted 6 young people for work experience during June and July as part of the Northeast Museums work experience programme.

Communities:

Great North Museum: Hancock has a strong community reach, providing an accessible venue for groups from Newcastle and across the wider region. Its collections offer multiple entry points for community engagement, including natural history, archaeology and world cultures, and support both organised group visits and wider programmes designed to engage communities that may be less likely to visit museums independently. The venue also contributes to NEM's developing Museums of Sanctuary work, including the cross-NEM **Chat Time** programme, which uses collections as a stimulus for conversational English.

Volunteers:

At Great North Museum: Hancock, 855.66 hours were contributed across an exceptionally broad range of activity. Significant areas included collections and library volunteering, environmental data, *Treasure: Hidden, Lost, Found* gallery stewarding, learning provision, Peter Rabbit craft activity, LEGO Build the Change, family events and work experience.

Strategic relevance: Volunteers add significant capacity to high-profile exhibitions, collections, family programmes and learning delivery while supporting the partnership between North East Museums and Newcastle University.

Hatton Art Gallery

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

Fine Art 100 Exhibition Series – Lines of Action (20 June – 1 August 2026)

Curated by staff from Newcastle University's Fine Art Department, this is the final exhibition in the *Fine Art 100* series celebrating 100 years of the Fine Art Course. This year's exhibition explores the film and video archive, creating dialogues with works contributed by Fine Art staff and work from the Hatton's collection, in the field of expanded drawing. The exhibition examined the notion of the 'line' as an organising principle, explored through a diverse range of media, including photography, painting, collage, printmaking, film, and sculpture. Contributing artists included: Jane and Louise Wilson, Rita Donagh, Lyn Hagan, Wolfgang Weileder, Georgina Starr, Tracey Tofield, Catrin Huber, Katie Cuddon, Theresa Easton, Richard Hamilton, Rachel Maclean, Nick Fox, Simon English, Richard Talbot, Andrew Burton, and Uta Kogelsberger.

Strata: Master of Fine Art Degree Show (15 – 29 August 2026).

Bringing together the practices of first and second year Master of Fine Art and PHD students, this exhibition was displayed throughout the Fine Art department, with works by four students displayed in the Hatton. On 14 August there was an opening event which was attended by 269 people.

The Potter's Canvas (19 September 2026 - 16 January 2027)

This exhibition looks at how 20th-century British ceramicists used drawing, painting and mark-making to transform the surface of clay.

While often regarded as a sculptural medium, many artists also saw clay as their canvas. Pioneer studio potters used minimal, elegant brushwork to enhance form but, as the 20th-century progressed, decoration took on new significance, becoming an important part of the making process and a way to convey ideas and subvert expectations. By pairing ceramics from the Shipley Art Gallery with paintings and prints from the Hatton Gallery for the first time, the exhibition examines how the worlds of pottery and painting shaped each other.

The exhibition features over seventy works, highlighting the exceptional quality and range of the Shipley's collections with ceramics by Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew, Lucie Rie, Hans Coper, James Tower, Gordon Baldwin, Carol McNicoll, Alison Britton, Stephen Dixon and Philip Eglin, alongside paintings and prints from the Hatton's collection by Patrick Heron, William Scott, Adrian Heath and Victor Pasmore. The exhibition also includes key works on loan from the Laing Art Gallery such as a vase by Elizabeth Fritsch and a still life by Winifred Nicholson.

Events and holiday workshops. During the summer holidays, each week there was an art workshop for children on fun drawing, doodling as art, line drawing, collage and weaving. All sessions were well attended with an average of twenty

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children participating at each one. There was also an Art Cart out each day in the learning space for children's use.

In addition to this, there were six art workshops for 12–18-year-olds on mark making in drawing, monoprint, line drawing, abstract linear artwork, drawing and printing. These were quite well attended with about six young people attending each one. There was a workshop for adults and older children led by the University's Confucius Institute on Chinese painting. The Hatton team are planning on working with the Confucius Institute again in the future.

There were two art workshops for adults in partnership with the National Archives, one on floral imagery and one on marine imagery. Both were very popular. The Hatton team intend to use this model again in the future.

A tour of the Gallery and exhibition was given on 19 September as part of Heritage Open Days with the emphasis on the history of the venue.

Learning & Engagement:

Learning. Schools from across the region participated in workshops including, North Fawdon Primary School and Gosforth Academy. Outreach sessions were also held at Ravenswood Primary School in Newcastle on collage. Approximately for 180 pupils participated in the sessions.

Secondary schools visited the Gallery during this period, including Burnside College (Wallsend), Emmanuel College (Gateshead), Newcastle College, and Our Lady & St Bede Catholic Academy (Stockton). The Hatton also worked with the Farrell Centre in providing workshops looking at maps of Newcastle through the ages for forty-three Year 8 pupils.

The Learning Officer and a placement student from the MGH course visited South Tyneside College to see a display by the Games Design students as one piece of work was based on the Hatton Gallery.

The Hatton's Home Educated art sessions run once a month and continue to prove popular, with approximately ten children attending each week. Recent sessions have included: screen printing, collage, Kurt Schwitters, and painting.

University-wide and Student Engagement

- The Hatton took part in the University's Discover Festival in June. There was a watercolour painting workshop which was attended by 265 people.
- Master of Fine Art exhibitors have attended gallery briefings and worked with the Hatton team to realise their exhibition, which opened on 15 August.

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- A group of students are engaged to work with L-INK young people's group, to develop designs for a poster which will be screen printed and will advertise L-INK's forthcoming architectural intervention in the Hatton's atrium to coincide with the Hatton's Spring 2027 exhibition which revisits the Hatton Pavillion ten years after its original tour.
- A workshop entitled 'Values in Action' was held in partnership with the University's Communications team. Participants created imagery based on the University's values using watercolour.
- MA Students from Newcastle University's Media, Culture, Heritage Department visited Hatton Gallery on 23 September for an introduction to the Gallery and a tour of the current exhibition.

L-INK young people's group

For their next project they will create a large-scale installation in the glass atrium entrance to the Hatton Gallery.

The project will introduce the group to works in the Hatton's collection – including Richard Hamilton's *Man, Machine and Motion* and pivotal exhibitions such as Pasmore and Hamilton's *an exhibit* – and will make connections to other transient or relocated structures, including Kurt Schwitters' Merz Barn Wall and the Hatton's 2017 Pavilion.

To prepare for the exhibition, L-INK have been working collaboratively to explore and research the Hatton's history through its historical exhibition programme and reputation for connecting art, design, architecture and installation, with reference to the Basic Course taught by Pasmore and Hamilton during the 1950s and 1960s.

As part of their research and development, eleven group participants visited London where they were introduced to a variety of different galleries, exhibitions and art/project-spaces, each with different ways of presenting artworks and exploring exhibition narratives. The group were able to visit Tate Modern, Hayward Gallery, Young V&A, Serpentine Galleries, and the ICA.

One participant said,

"It was amazing to get to go and immerse myself in art with a group of people all similarly interested. I particularly loved hearing everyone's different perspectives on exhibits. I found my own thoughts and feelings being challenged as we talked, and my own understanding of art and exhibitions has grown massively from this experience. I especially found taking the time to note how curators had chosen to install the exhibits, really insightful, and there were many times where someone from the group would say "I would

have done that differently.” The London trip was probably the highlight of my whole summer.

Something Like a Festival – BALTIC. On 14 August, L-INK joined forces with BALTIC’s young people’s group, the Young Producers, in delivering a screen-printing workshop for the public as part of BALTIC’s Festival for Young People. In preparation for the event, the group researched the history of the Hatton’s exhibitions, making use of the Archive and historical exhibition poster collection. Over 500 people attended the event, and several young people have joined the L-INK 2026-27 project as a result of the workshop. L-INK will continue to build their relationship with the Young Producers with the aim to collaborate once again during the British Art Show in 2028.

L-INK Taster Workshop. Sixteen young people took part in a taster workshop at the Hatton on 26 September, led by artist Mani Kambo in collaboration with architects Clare Harper and James Perry. The workshop focussed on temporary structures and collaborative intervention and introduced the Hatton’s 2027 exhibition which revisits the Hatton’s Pavilion ten years after its original tour. HarperPerry were the architects who worked on the original Pavilion, and Mani Kambo was a L-INK participant and Pavilion volunteer during the tour of 2017. The group will also have the opportunity to speak with artist Toby Paterson, who designed the Pavilion, as part of their autumn workshops.

Communities:

The Hatton has a particularly important emerging role in **creative health**. Work with Newcastle Recovery Academy is developing into *Recovery through Ceramics*, a proposed 12-week programme for people in addiction recovery, with health-sector funding supporting the activity. This represents a significant progression from individual engagement sessions towards a sustained programme in which creative practice and gallery spaces are being used intentionally to support recovery and wellbeing.

The Creative Age Dementia group, organised by Equal Arts, have had weekly art sessions at the Hatton.

The Explore Art Group, which is a lifelong learning group for older adults, also ran regular sessions at the Gallery.

A training day for and by NHS staff was held in September on the theme of using music. Sixteen people attended.

Volunteers:

At **Hatton Gallery**, volunteers contributed **56 hours**, primarily supporting *Lines of Action* and the transition to *The Potter's Canvas*.

The Learning Officer hosted school work experience students across two weeks (w/c 29 June and w/c 6 July).

Young people's group L-INK regularly volunteer at the Hatton.

Strategic relevance: Volunteers add significant capacity to high-profile exhibitions, collections, family programmes and learning delivery while supporting the partnership between North East Museums and Newcastle University.

Hexham Old Gaol and Moot Hall

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

Hexham Old Gaol Summer Activities

Northumberland Learning team developed and printed a fun 'Escape the Gaol' trail for Hexham Old Gaol aimed at younger children and families. Visitors picked up a copy of the trail and searched for clues to solve the mystery as to who was responsible for the gaol-break. The trail will be available until the end of the season. To accompany this as part of the summer holiday offer, visitors could make their own paper manacles and play a card game exploring how prisoners could spend and earn money while in the gaol.

Heritage Open Days

The national Heritage Open Days initiative saw activity being delivered across the Northumberland Group venues.

In Hexham the museum staff conducted free tours of the Hexham House of Correction, which were fully booked. The tours were a chance for visitors to see the newly refreshed interpretation panels in the building designed by artist Jonny Hannah as an outcome of the Historic England People and Prisons project.

Hexham Old Gaol Reimagined Project

Hexham Old Gaol Reimagined project, funded through Art Fund and the Linder Foundation continues to develop. Artist Jonny Hannah is working closely with the Northumberland team to tell the story of England's first prison, alongside the events and inmates that shaped the last 700 years of Hexham's history. Alongside the development work Jonny has been hosting a series of workshops and evening quizzes in the town to raise awareness and interest in the project as we move towards the end of the museum season and the beginning of the new museum fit

out. Jonny also has been conducting a series of workshops with prisoners from HMP Northumberland over the Summer, the resulting work from which will feature as the first temporary exhibition in the museum's community display space. Northumberland Community Connector has also been facilitating regular heritage inspired workshops with local community groups and is working on a Spook Night shop window exhibition with Gateway into the Community.

Hexham People & Prisons Project

Funded through Historic England our People and Prisons Hexham project has now completed. Running alongside the Hexham Old Gaol Reimagined project, People and Prisons looked at a wider context of Hexham crime and punishment through history. The three outcomes of the project were new interpretation panels in the House of Correction, bringing up to date terminology and context, an online virtual tour of the House of Correction, allowing the public virtual access to an inaccessible building, available via a QR code, and finally a Crime and Punishment trail map of Hexham connecting 700 years of remarkable stories centred around our 3 Hexham venues – the gaol, the Moot Hall and the House of Correction. In July Jonny Hannah hosted an open studio event in the Moot Hall to share work and plans with the community which was attended by 82 local residents.

Communities:

Hexham Old Gaol added 3 new groups to our community pass scheme in Q2 – these were CNTW mental health St Georges Ward, Morpeth, Rainbow Care Group (dementia care) and Helix Men's Mental Health group.

Hexham People and Prisons Project – outreach with additional needs groups inspired by the project (Historical Photography, Cyanotyping and the Sun sessions in July) 23 learners and 12 support workers.

Laing Art Gallery

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

Sublime Landscapes (20 December 2025 – 5 December 2026). This free exhibition is currently showing in the Barbour Watercolour Gallery and has been positively received by visitors. The exhibition features landscape watercolours and prints from the Laing's collection responding to the potential for landscape art to be awe-inspiring. The exhibition includes some of the largest works on paper in the Laing Art Gallery's collection in Charles Napier Hemy's enormous *Betrayed by the Moon* and Emma Stibbon's *Whaling Station*. The exhibition also presents the first opportunity to see three new acquisitions presented by the Contemporary Art Society in 2024-25. These are: *Totes Meer* by Christine Baumgartner, and *Broken Terrain* and *Reynisdrangar* by Emma Stibbon. The acquisitions were selected both due to their

resonance with the historic watercolours collection and with the aim of building the Gallery's holdings of contemporary works on paper by women artists.

Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer Portrait Award 2025 and Exploring Identity (touring from the National Portrait Gallery) (28 March 2025 – 5 September 2026).

This main gallery pair of charging shows charts the history of the art of portrait painting from the 16th century to the present day, exploring a range of historic, modern and contemporary portraits. Celebrating people, these portraits provide an insight into the changing attitudes towards personal identity and its depiction in portraiture. The exhibition offers free entry to young people aged 21 and under.

Alongside this exhibition a highly popular series of three artist-led portraiture workshops for participants of all abilities, a curator's talk for members of FLAG and two special edition Make and Muse sessions for children aged 7-12 featuring live music and a tour by the exhibition's curator.

Linking Project End of Year Student Exhibition. The Linking Project end of year celebration exhibition took place in the Laing's Art Studio during June and July. The exhibition showcased the collaborative artworks of the participating pupils which were created with their partner school during their visit to the Gallery. The exhibition was accessible to the public, schools, families and teachers and received positive feedback. This year's project is now complete and saw around 600 pupils from schools across the North East take part. The team have opened recruitment for next academic year, and seven schools have already signed up.

The Linking Project Pupil Advisory Board. As part of the Linking project this year, the learning team were tasked with setting up a pupil advisory board to gain feedback from participating pupils. The team went into Sacred Heart Primary School in Fenham in July to interview pupils who had been part of the project this year. The most frequently received feedback was that they loved being in the Laing and looking at the artworks. They were also excited and nervous to meet their new friends, but they found that the project has really helped their confidence and they would love to do it again.

Events and holiday activities. July saw the start of the new programme for Art Camp using a themed format which ran over five weeks during the school summer holidays. This new format aimed at 7–12-year-olds has been successful in increasing bookings and has received positive feedback from young artists, parents and carers. There were approximately 240 children engaging with this programme over the summer, including many returning participants.

Learning & Engagement:

Schools and Engagement. School visits during July were good in what is usually a quieter period of the academic year as schools are often busy towards the end of

term. In the weeks preceding the summer holidays, there were eight facilitated workshops and eleven self-led visits.

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- "I thought we were just going to stick felt and fabric on paper – it was amazing we turned wool into felt and took fabric home! Just like the material painted in the portraits!"
- "I can't draw. . . but look, this is the best drawing I've ever done! A heron! And look how cool-my t-shirt is. . . on the back. I'm wearing it. . ." Showed his mum the copper flagon which was his inspiration.

The Make and Muse programme for families also returned for the summer holidays, with the learning team delivering three sessions per week. Uptake on these sessions wasn't as high than in previous school holidays due to increased competition for family events throughout the city centre. However, there were still around forty families participating in the activities.

Little Artists and Little Artists Plus+ programmes for under 5s has been very successful through term-time and the summer holiday period, with all classes selling out. Throughout this period, approximately ninety children aged 1-5 and their parents/carers attended these events.

Communities:

On 21 August a tour of the *Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer Portrait Award 2025* and *Exploring Identity* exhibitions was given by the exhibition curator. This was part of the GO-SEE-DO programme run by Gateshead Arts Team for the Art Diamonds group of retired adults. During this period there were also visits from an older people's group (facilitated by the NEM Communities team) and a group of English language students on the Embassy Summer programme.

On 22 July, there was the launch of Chat Time at the Laing. These are informal, relaxed sessions are run by the NEM Communities team and provide an opportunity an opportunity to explore the Laing while building English language skills. Museum Socials events were also held in July and August.

The Laing provides an important visual-arts dimension to community engagement, with its collections offering opportunities for creativity, conversation and wellbeing. Its role complements wider NEM creative-health activity, particularly where making and responding to art can provide accessible ways for participants to explore experiences and build social connections. This contributes to the wider shift towards sustained engagement and using museum and gallery collections to support health and wellbeing outcomes.

Volunteers:

The learning team hosted school work experience placements in July (w/c 6 July). There were three students.

Two musicians have recently registered as volunteers to provide live music for events (including the special edition Make and Muse sessions in August).

A volunteer who supports the Saturday Art Classes on the first Saturday of every month.

At Laing Art Gallery, volunteers contributed 418.67 hours, including 261.5 hours through L-INK young peoples programme, alongside painting conservation, stores cleaning and object rehoming.

Morpeth Chantry Bagpipe Museum

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

Northumbrian Pipers Society continue their regular fortnightly piping recitals in the museum, and the Northumberland Young Pipers group have plans to rehearse monthly from December in the museum.

Morpeth Heritage Network continue to host their quarterly meetings in the museum and we will be hosting a local book launch in September.

Heritage Open Days:

The Chantry hosted costumed poetry readings and a free Northumbrian Pipers recital.

Segedunum Roman Fort

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

Following the Eagle

(28 March – 3 October 2026)

Following the Eagle brings together five rare bronze Roman military diplomas, including three never displayed in the UK before. The bronze diplomas (awarded after 25 years military service) reveal the diverse identities, careers, and long-distance movements of soldiers across the Roman Empire, including a Syrian archer stationed in Britain and a member of the Praetorian Guard who may have travelled with the Emperor Septimius Severus when he came to Britain.

Alongside the diplomas, the exhibition displays an exceptional range of artefacts that illuminate how Rome's soldiers, as well as objects and ideas moved across the Empire, including religious practices from North Africa and rare glazed pottery from Asia Minor. Many of the pieces of military equipment and domestic goods have added inscriptions, recording details such as peoples' names, their place of origin and their rank. The inscriptions provide an insight into the lives of every-day people, including an incredible curse tablet where a Roman soldier took against many of his fellow companions.

The Eagle itself is featured in a section that includes part of a rare Roman military standard and eagle-decorated horse armour. These offer audiences a richer understanding of how the iconic eagle symbol unified soldiers serving thousands of miles from home.

Rediscovering Segedunum Project

Work is underway on this project funded through the DCMS Wolfson Foundation to significantly improve the interpretation of the World Heritage Site and address the issues with deterioration of some of the archaeological remains. New external signage will present information from recent research that has revealed important information about this fort – the most excavated on Hadrian's Wall. This includes the 80-metre section of Hadrian's Wall that demonstrates how the Romans dealt with the natural challenges of the landscape, the Branch Wall with its likely temple or monument stretching out into the River Tyne, the bathhouse, rediscovered in 2014, and the water tank and related water management systems that provided the soldiers, their horses and the baths and hospital buildings, with fresh water.

Hadrian Celebration

The *Hadrian Celebration* on the weekend of 15 and 16 August included the opportunity to meet the Emperor Hadrian and members of the ARC (Autonomous Reenactor Collective), complete with cavalry horses. This living history presentation was themed around Roman sports, skills and competition. There was a rolling programme of activities which included archery, Roman ball and hoop games, and weapons training.

Learning & Engagement:

Ways to Play Activities

162 visitors have participated in *Ways to Play* activities at Segedunum, linked to the *Following the Eagle* exhibition, including Roman diploma and brooch making.

Step Outdoors & Play

Under 5s' sessions in partnership with Rise North East have taken place at Segedunum. Feedback from participating families has been very positive, for example-

'Great opportunity for young kids to explore the outdoors & visit historical sites. Staff are marvellous and my children's confidence has grown attending the sessions.'

The pilot project has now come to an end with Rise, but due to the popularity of the sessions we have continued to offer under 5s' *Stay & Play* sessions at Segedunum.

Work experience weeks

7 Year 10 students took part in work experience placements with the Learning team at Segedunum in July.

Home Educators

A Home Educators' day will be held at Segedunum on 15 September, with a tour and a Roman Pottery session available for home educated young people.

Communities:

Segedunum's strong connection with Wallsend and its local communities provides an important foundation for place-based engagement. Its Roman and local-history collections create opportunities for participants to explore both the distant and more recent history of the area. The venue can act as both a cultural destination and a community resource, supporting NEM's ambitions to deepen engagement with North Tyneside residents who may not traditionally engage with museums.

Partnerships with Helix Arts delivering Falling on your feet sessions at Segedunum and Hope Church use of the venue brings 512 engagements in addition to 329 engagements through targeted Community programmes working with North Tyneside communities through care homes, Age UK NT, NT hospitals, and North Tyneside carers.

Volunteers:

At **Stephenson Steam Railway**, volunteers contributed **3,255 hours**. Conservation and running activity accounted for **1,768 hours** and train operations a further **910 hours**, demonstrating the essential role volunteers play in maintaining the railway's operational capacity. Volunteers also supported the Waggonway Tea Room, woodland activity, learning and the Stephenson Railway Youth Group.

Strategic relevance: North Tyneside demonstrates the significant operational value of established volunteer programmes alongside the potential for volunteering to increase capacity around exhibitions, learning and youth engagement.

Shipley Art Gallery

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

Crafty Kids. Crafty Kids continues to meet weekly with many families becoming regular attendees and even continuing to meet outside of the sessions, having formed a supportive community. The sessions are structured, so families explore the galleries and collections and develop artistic skills. This has been planned to increase families' confidence around attending cultural venues with their children.

Holiday Activities. From age 3+ and during the holidays, children can 'graduate' from Crafty Kids to Family Crafting. This has been well attended, with many families

returning week-on-week. The focus is on developing artistic skills and creative self-expression. Many families have fed back that the Shipley is an accessible space for neurodivergent families. The Sensory Space further enhances families' visits, offering a welcoming and inclusive environment supported by the Warm Spaces initiative. This summer the Family Crafting sessions have included opportunities for families to exhibit their artwork for part of the holidays, raising awareness of the programme and boosting community pride.

There was also programmed self-led activities throughout the summer, such as Explore and Draw which is suitable for all ages. This encourages people to explore the galleries, drawing as they go. The flexibility this activity offers has made it inclusive and diverse.

Family Art Class. Family Art Class takes place once a month and offers the opportunity for families to develop a wide range of artistic skills. There have also been opportunities to exhibit in the past as part of Shape Festival. In the school holidays, there is Holiday Art Class which caters for the same age group and focuses on a wide range of artistic techniques.

During the summer there have also been a wide range of family classes led by freelancers, focused on skills such as illustration, sculpture and mixed media. These classes were an opportunity to work closely with local artists, and to engage with the collections. Artists included Pui Lee, Bethan Laker and Paul Raymond. In

September, Northern Print ran a 'Positive Vibes' printmaking class.

The Kids Hub continues to run creative LEGO coding classes which combine STEM and creative design.

Learning & Engagement:

Adult Classes. The successful adult art and craft programme continues, and during this period workshops included needle felting, watercolour, print making, fused glass and hand embroidery. Approximately thirty learners attended over this series of classes. Self-led adult groups include drawing and painting, scrapbooking, Knit and Natter and HARP Art. These all have a focus on artistic skills development, social integration and wellbeing. MotherFolk writing circle further explores creative wellbeing and self-expression by offering a supportive environment in which mothers of babies can explore creative writing.

Specialist craft groups also meet, such as North East Modern Quilters, Gateshead Art Society and the lacemakers group. These have long standing relationships with the Shipley and are focused on skills development, engagement with the collections, and preservation of traditional crafting skills.

School workshops. There were three facilitated workshops in July. A further three workshops were scheduled to take place, however, due to building closures for two days the learning team were unable to facilitate these sessions on site at the Shipley. The plan is to rebook these workshops for the forthcoming term.

DesignLab Nation V&A Project. In July, the DesignLab Nation project at the Shipley Art Gallery in partnership with the V&A Museum in London came to a close. To celebrate the end of the project, the students' work was displayed in the Gallery, with support from the project artist Victoria Franka. The final day of the project was a celebration day at the Shipley where the participating students attended an afternoon at the Gallery to view the display of their work and celebrate their achievements throughout the project. They were also able to collect certificates presented by the V&A. The project received fantastic feedback from both students and teachers. The work was on show in the Shipley's main gallery from July to September.

As part of the end of the project, the learning team have been completing evaluation with teachers, pupils and the V&A. The team hosted a teacher CPD event at the Shipley Art Gallery in July to celebrate the end of the project with regional teachers and art practitioners, with representatives from the V&A also in attendance to talk about the success of the project. Following on from this, the learning team visited the V&A in August to present at a national partners' day.

Communities:

Recovery Connections are continuing to visit the Shipley on Friday mornings and participate in creative activities inspired by the collection. The Shipley were invited to be part of the Inclusive Recovery City Gateshead board, which was launched on the 3 July with a Recovery Festival on Baltic Square. North East Museums had a stall and presented resources from the Shipley.

The weekly informal English practice sessions for refugees and people seeking asylum has been relaunched as NEM-wide programme Chat Time on 16 September. This will continue to be fortnightly on Wednesdays.

The team are working with HerbHub to develop the Shipley Backyard and turn it into a nature and creativity wellbeing space. They have created eight resources for the Gallery and these will become part of the Museums, Health and Social Care Resource. Planting took place in July for most of the beds and will continue to develop the site. Two workshops were held in September to introduce community groups to the back yard and the resources.

Team Unity group from Teams Life Centre visited for six weeks doing different creative activities exploring the Shipley collection, including drawing, painting, printing, ceramic and textiles. The group is a day care service through Gateshead Council's Integrated Adults and Social Care Day Services for people with learning needs. There is an interest in them coming back later this year for more sessions. There were five to six people plus two carers per session.

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Young Women's Outreach Project visited the Shipley in July over two weeks and took part in exploring the gallery followed by a textile and ceramic activity. They returned to the gallery on 6 August for another session. There were eight young women and two staff per session.

Volunteers:

The learning team have been supporting a Newcastle University MGH student this month across both the Laing and Shipley on a twenty-five-day placement from 1 June-3 July.

The learning team hosted school work experience students across two weeks (w/c 29 June and w/c 6 July). There were approximately six students.

Volunteers at Shipley Art Gallery contributed 47 hours, supporting Creative Conversation, Drawn Together and family craft activities during the summer holidays. Strategic relevance: Volunteers enhance the gallery's capacity to deliver inclusive creative activities and support community participation through arts engagement.

South Shields Museum and Art Gallery

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

Let's Play – under 7's activities and the experience of being a mam

(20 June – 8 August 2026)

Let's Play was a free family exhibition and play space developed in collaboration with local mothers from Bright Futures in South Shields. It was a welcoming, drop-in space where families could feel at home in the museum. It encouraged creativity, exploration and learning through play. It also celebrated women's stories, experiences and achievements., and connected local voices with nationally-significant loans from the British Library. Participants selected objects from the Ann Oakley Archive and Mike Braybrook Archive, which spoke to them about issues they found particularly relevant. It was primarily funded through the Arts Council grant to the South Tyneside Cultural Partnership, with generous contributions from the Catherine Cookson Foundation and the British Library through the Dorset Foundation, in memory of Harry M Weinrebe. The contents will return framed in a different way for the spring and summer of 2027.

Colmans: 100 Years of Fish and Chips (1 August – 19 September 2026)

This exhibition commemorated the centenary of South Shields' much-loved Colmans fish and chip business. From its beginning in its first permanent premises on Ocean

Road in 1826, the family business is now in its fifth generation. The exhibition featured archive photographs alongside first-hand accounts from family and staff, captured through the museum's ongoing oral history programme. The mixture of interpretation panels, audio and visual content and stunning graphics, as well as some diving seagulls (!) provided a fitting celebration of the award-winning business.

Mignard: The Power of Posing (29 August – 7 November 2026)

Pierre Mignard's *The Marquise de Seignelay* (1691) offers visitors a rare opportunity to experience a stunning portrait, layered with meaning, from the golden age of French culture. The artwork on loan forms part of the National Gallery's Masterpiece Tour 2025–27, a nationwide partnership bringing works from the national collection to audiences across the UK. South Shields Museum & Art Gallery is one of just four partner venues selected to display a masterpiece, creating new opportunities for local audiences to experience internationally significant works of art close to home. The museum previously hosted a Claude Monet painting from January – March 2026, as part of the Masterpiece Tour. This led to a 37% increase in visitor numbers (19,966 in total) compared to the same period the previous year. A third masterpiece will be coming to the venue next year.

The exhibition, named *Mignard: The Power of Posing*, explores the power of portraiture and how artists use pose, clothing, expression and setting to communicate identity, status and personality. It invites visitors to look beyond the surface of a portrait and discover the stories hidden behind it. Every gesture, glance and carefully chosen accessory offers clues about the sitter's life, ambitions and the image they wish to portray.

Pierre Mignard's masterpiece is supported by a display of a variety of portrait paintings from the North East Museums' collections. Visitors are encouraged to spend time with each portrait, meeting the gaze of its subject and looking closely at the details that reveal character and personality. By exploring the choices made by both artist and sitter, the exhibition asks the question to its visitors, what story would their portrait tell?

Alongside the exhibition, visitors can discover a collection of original poetry inspired by *The Marquise de Seignelay* portrait. The works were created by young people from the New Writing North Writers' Group as part of a sensory writing competition celebrating the arrival of the masterpiece. The competition attracted 23 entries, which were judged by a panel of representatives from North East Museums, the National Gallery, Arts Council England and Royal Holloway, University of London.

The winning piece has been selected to accompany the painting in the exhibition space, while every submission has been brought together in a booklet and accompanying audio recording, which visitors can read and listen to in the gallery. The exhibition also presents a pioneering AI engagement opportunity developed in partnership with the National Gallery and Dwel. Dwel is a voice-first AI companion,

that in this instance enables visitors to ask the painted portrait questions and explore the picture's content in a variety of ways.

Learning & Engagement:

National Gallery Masterpiece Tour

Artwork and poetry produced by children, young people and families taking part in the Masterpiece Tour learning and engagement programme has now gone on display at the Museum. Poetry produced by young writers at New Writing North has been compiled into a booklet. Artist Julia Collar has interpreted the winning poem by Sophie Su into a sensory interactive to sit alongside the Mignard painting. The artwork of six young women from Bright Futures (an alternative education provision to support young women who face barriers to mainstream education) has been displayed alongside work from students at Mortimer College EBSNA Hub. Weekly workshops are taking place from September with 6 children and their carers from Hadrian Primary School who have been identified as at risk from, or experiencing, Emotional Based School Non-Attendance. Artwork produced by participants will be added to the exhibition.

Wellness Weekend activities are taking place throughout September, with a bookable programme of slow looking, Qi Gong and meditation sessions and drop-in family activities inspired by the *Marquise de Seignelay* portrait and accompanying paintings within the exhibition.

Advocacy

The team delivered a workshop on the *Sensory Journeys* project in South Tyneside as an example of a digital / in person hybrid delivery model at the Group for Education in Museums (GEM) *Learning is Digital?* conference at Bletchley Park.

Communities:

South Shields Museum & Art Gallery provides one of the clearest examples of community engagement progressing into **co-production and public-facing museum content**.

The regular **Time Travellers** programme continues to bring adults together at the museum through arts and heritage activity. Initially developed in partnership with Age UK South Tyneside/ACTS, it has progressed into an open public programme, demonstrating how targeted work can establish a sustainable route into wider museum participation.

A major highlight has been the ACE-funded work with young mothers from **Bright Futures**. Following weekly workshops, participants co-created the summer exhibition *Let's Play: Mini-me*. The programme addressed gender equality, working

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motherhood and representation, and included a national partnership with the British Library, demonstrating how targeted engagement can lead to significant public outcomes. Bright Futures participants had an opportunity to meet sociologist Anne Oakley during her July visit. The group is now collaborating on the next phase of the programme.

NEM is also developing work with **WHIST**, following support for the organisation's successful National Lottery Heritage Fund application. Participants will develop heritage skills including oral history, podcasting and archiving, with work contributing to a showcase exploring WHIST's 40-year history.

Volunteers:

At **South Shields Museum & Art Gallery**, volunteers contributed **183 hours**. Activity included collections photography, front-of-house and venue support, learning and university placement activity. The *Mignard: The Power of Posing* programme also generated volunteer activity through gallery stewarding, briefings and the Wellbeing Weekend.

Recruitment is underway for roles supporting the Arbeia Herb Garden, research activity, and upcoming exhibitions, including the Masterpiece programme.

Partnership work with South Tyneside College is enabling students to engage with collections and develop creative outputs, with plans underway for a new Digital Content Creator role.

Strategic relevance: Volunteer activity is supporting the venue, adding capacity to exhibitions, collections, visitor engagement and the care and interpretation of South Tyneside's heritage.

Stephenson Railway Museum

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

Model Railway Weekend

This popular event in the Stephenson Steam Railway's calendar took place on the weekend of 25 and 26 July. This year there were even more layouts and hobby traders, and as an added bonus, miniature live steam trains! The event filled the museum's main display hall. The model railway layouts covered a variety of different scales including O, OO and N gauges.

Also on offer were steam train rides on the site's 7 ¼" miniature railway, as well on the full-size passenger service with return trips to Percy Main. On the Saturday the latter included the chance to ride on a 'train set' style formation or consist, involving a mixture of passenger carriages and freight wagons.

The show was organised in partnership with the Blyth & Tyne Model Railway Club, which held its own exhibition, *RailEx NE*, at The Parks Sports Centre in North Shields on the same weekend. A joint ticketing offer provided entry into both events, and a free shuttle bus ran between the two venues. 282 visitors came to the event at the Stephenson Steam Railway.

Engine Shed Sessions

In recent years the Stephenson Steam Railway has developed a reputation as an exciting venue to enjoy live original music performed by local bands. On Friday 14 August the *Engine Shed Sessions* brought together an eclectic lineup of talented local bands and artists, each performing their own original music. The event was a real celebration of local talent. A bar provided drinks throughout the evening. The bands which performed were *The Magnetic North Band*, *AJ Potter and the NE Rails*, *Pete Bell*, *Raydiculous* (Ray Rowley), plus talented young musicians from *Traxx Rock School*, based at a studio on the nearby Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate.

Ale By Rail 2026

The second annual *Ale By Rail* event took place on Saturday 15 August. It ran from 2pm to 11pm. The passenger train service and the miniature railway ran throughout. Drinks on offer from some of the region's leading breweries included local beers, craft ales and ciders. Street food was supplied by local vendors. Local bands and musicians provided additional entertainment. 350 people enjoyed this day festival and feedback was very positive, echoing the success of last year's event.

Learning & Engagement:

At the Stephenson Steam Railway 329 visitors have taken part in *Ways to Play* activities such as a *Bioblitz* and *Nature Calls* linked to the Woodland Walk, and a family trail exploring jobs on the railways.

Under 5s' sessions in partnership with Rise North East have taken place at Stephenson Steam Railway. 32 Under 5s and 25 parents or carers took part in outdoor active play activities. Feedback from participating families has been very positive.

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The pilot project has now come to an end with Rise, but due to the popularity of the sessions we have continued to offer under 5s' *Stay and Play* sessions during school holidays at Stephenson Steam Railway.

Communities:

Stephenson Steam Railway is developing a particularly strong relationship with **North Tyneside Arts Studio (NTAS)**. Monthly sessions at the museum are continuing, creating sustained opportunities for participants to engage creatively with the venue and its collections. Importantly, the partnership is progressing beyond regular activity, with NEM and NTAS exploring a potential funding bid for a three-year environmentally themed programme. This provides a good example of community engagement developing into a longer-term strategic partnership.

Volunteers:

At **Stephenson Steam Railway**, volunteers contributed **3,255 hours**. Conservation and running activity accounted for **1,768 hours** and train operations a further **910 hours**, demonstrating the essential role volunteers play in maintaining the railway's operational capacity. Volunteers also supported the Waggonway Tea Room, woodland activity, learning and the Stephenson Railway Youth Group.

Strategic relevance: North Tyneside demonstrates the significant operational value of established volunteer programmes alongside the potential for volunteering to increase capacity around exhibitions, learning and youth engagement.

Woodhorn Museum

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects:

Woodhorn Triathlon. 356 participants and supporters took part in the annual Woodhorn Triathlon on the first weekend of July, organised by VO2 Max Racing. The event was quieter than recent years due it not being a National or World qualifying event, however organisers were pleased with the turn out and are try new sports events in 2027 based at the museum.

Classic and Vintage Car Rally (Woodhorn Museum). Woodhorn Museum's annual Classic and Vintage Car Rally was delivered in partnership with NECPWA in July 2026. The 2026 event attracted 1021 visitors (including vehicle exhibitors), on a par with the 2025 event. The event is highly weather dependent but generates strong income though annual pass sales, cafe, retail and food concessions.

Woodhorn Colliery Mining Disaster Commemorative Concert (Woodhorn Museum). On 14th August 2026 Woodhorn Museum commemorated the 110th

anniversary of the Woodhorn Mining Disaster with two performances by Ashington Male Voice Choir. The choir performed a coalmining heritage-inspired programme and the event was attended by an audience of 118.

Pop-up Ashington Group Hut (Woodhorn Museum).

Summer 2026 saw the Pop Up Ashington Group Hut family learning initiative draw to a close after 2.5 years. Housed in Woodhorn Museum's historic Cage Shop building, the space was designed to refer to the Ashington Group Hut by theatre designer Imogen Cloet and offered a suite of daily craft activities inspired by Ashington Group paintings devised by artist Paul Merrick. The initiative connected family audiences with the story of the Ashington Group (Pitmen Painters) and offered visitors space and time for creative connection and wellbeing. In Q2 1187 Participants (563 adults and 624 CYP) took part in the activity.

Wild Wednesdays – Summer Holiday Activities:

Wild Wednesdays took place every week of the Summer holidays at Woodhorn for the 4th year, attracting a steady increase in numbers of visitors each time. Over 6 weeks 1556 visitors took part in activities. The drop-in activities ran throughout each day including Gelli Plate Printing with the Woodhorn Weeders, a nature themed craft activity in the learning room, different external guests each week from local nature organisations and facilitated Bug hunts around the museum grounds and wild wood. Woodhorn's Wild Wednesday was part of NoCC's Holiday Activity Fund, providing free visits and cafe vouchers for participants.

Heritage Open Days. At Woodhorn Museum, the venue hosted the Northumberland Wildlife Trust Nature for Wellbeing Fair alongside displays and demonstrations of traditional skills from local heritage groups including Lacemaking and Rapper Sword Dancing. The event was also the last chance to see the 'A Community of Coal' exhibition trail by Woodhorn Museum collection volunteers the 'Museum Marras'. The audio stories and illustrations of the objects featured in 'A Community of Coal' will remain available on the NEM website. The event was free entry (no Annual Pass required) and attracted 525 Visitors.

Ashington Group Collection ACE Designation Application (Woodhorn Museum):

In Q2 our stage one application to the ACE Designation scheme for the Ashington Group Collection (Pitmen Painters) was successful. There is now some work to undertake with the Ashington Group Trustees (within the next 12 months) before a stage two full case application can be made.

Miners' Banner Conservation Project (Woodhorn Museum):

Conservation work continued on Woodhorn's mining banner collection with conservator Laurie Endean-Olsen. The West Sleekburn Banner was completed, and the annual Miners' Banner rotation took place in late June. The Backworth Banner became a project priority during Q2 as it was selected to be featured in a forthcoming episode of the BBC programme 'The Repair Shop on the Road'. 'Before'

and 'after' filming sessions for the production company were accommodated with members of Backworth Male Voice Choir and Backworth Miners' Welfare Club attending a 'reveal' filming event in August. The Miners' Welfare Club also donated £1000 to support the conservation costs.

Learning & Engagement:

Woodhorn learning team hosted two work experience students, who spent time across a range of departments and supported their sessions at Discovery Museum too.

Woodhorn learning team supported delivery and promoted Northumberland venues at a CPD session for 7 PCGE students and lecturers at Discovery Museum.

Communities:

Summer Holiday Poverty-Proofing Programme: Woodhorn took part in Northumberland County Council's Holiday Activity Fund over the summer holidays, providing Adult annual passes and holiday hunger food voucher in Woodhorn café. Attendance: 127 adults and 140 children

Summer Storytime with Ashington Family Hub: Woodhorn's weekly term time Under 5's Storytime sessions were taken over through the holidays by Ashington Family Hub. Each session features stories and craft activities and were very well attended. Community passes were issued to low-income families through the Hub who visited the sessions each week. Attendance: 89 adults and 109 children

Woodhorn added 3 new groups to our community pass scheme in Q2 – these were CNTW mental health St Georges Ward, Morpeth, Rainbow Care Group (dementia care) and Helix Men's Mental Health group. In total 165 community passes were used at Woodhorn in Q2.

Internal Community Initiatives at Woodhorn:

- Chat Time (English language conversation practise for speakers of other languages) 3 sessions delivered in Q2
- Support Social – Quarterly information sharing session for people working with refugees and asylum seekers (3rd July)
- Coal Town Poetry Open-mic – quarterly volunteer-run event at Woodhorn. Approx. 30 attendees.
- Creative Writing Group – monthly volunteer-run workshop on 1st Friday of the month. Started August 2026. 7 participants and 2 support staff/volunteers.
- Woodhorn Weeders – Age-UK green social prescribing gardening volunteer group – weekly every Wednesday morning
- Supported visits to Woodhorn for CNTW: A Way Through (people in recovery from drugs and alcohol), new mother's mental health unit from Morpeth Beadnell Ward, Helix Arts men's mental health group. 29 adults and 7 support staff.

Outreach Community Initiatives:

- Object loans boxes – targeting older people / those with dementia.
- Men's Pie Club Ashington collaboration alongside Full Circle Food – meeting weekly at Full Circle Food to make a pie
- Learn English Together (St. Andrew's Church, Ashington) object handling sessions to coincide with the ESOL curriculum. (9th July – topic on “Ashington”) 10 learners and 2 volunteer tutors.
- YMCA Future Sounds Festival event attended with a gazebo of activities on 22nd August - 99 public engagements (adults and children).
- Skills Fest at Northumbria University attended on 14th July (presenting aspects of the Museums Health and Social Care resource to inspire young student nurses to think creatively about healthcare in older people / those with dementia). 15 students and 1 lecturer.

Volunteers:

At Woodhorn Museum, volunteers contributed 341 hours. The Woodhorn Weeders accounted for 299 hours, demonstrating the continuing strength of this established programme and its contribution to the museum environment.

Woodhorn Museum Marras (Collections Volunteers). The Museum Marras contributed 49 hours of volunteering, supporting cataloguing and inventory work, as well as the annual Mining Banners changeover at the end of June. The Marras also took part in Heritage open Days in September taking visitors on a tour through their 'Community of Coal' collection items on displays in Coal Town exhibition.

Woodhorn Weeders (Age Uk gardening volunteers). The Weeders worked alongside our learning team throughout the summer holidays on wild Wednesdays, as well as maintaining all planters on site, our Wild Wood and Serenity Wood areas. The Weeders also took part in Heritage Open Days, hosting a stall at Northumberland Wildlife Trust's nature for Health Fair and taking the public on tours of the wildlife areas on site.

3's a Crowd Music Volunteers. Our Musical volunteers Threes Company continue to grow a regular following with their monthly lunchtime performances in the cafe.

Strategic relevance: Woodhorn's programme combines substantial practical volunteering with visitor-facing and creative activity, supporting site presentation, participation and opportunities for community involvement.

2 – Communities (Cross-venue partnership working)

Community engagement remained strong across North East Museums in Q2, with 3,455 engagements delivered through 178 community workshops, events and other engagement activity up to 18 September. Activity combined targeted work with specific communities alongside open programmes promoted through community partners, reaching families, older people, people experiencing health inequalities, disabled people, refugees and people seeking sanctuary, and communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

Newcastle

Work in Newcastle continued to have a strong creative health, recovery and older people's focus. Partnership activity with A Way Through supported people in addiction recovery through facilitated museum visits and outreach, including visits to Discovery and sessions using museum resources. This relationship is now developing into a longer-term creative programme. Work with Kirkwood Court reached around 25 participants in July and 20 in September through reminiscence loans boxes, while Museum Social sessions continued to provide accessible cultural opportunities for older people, including 23 participants in July. Engagement with recovery networks, dementia partners and men's groups has further extended NEM's reach into health and wellbeing provision.

Gateshead

Gateshead activity combined outreach to older people with targeted engagement with young women and people experiencing health inequalities. A major Q2 engagement was NEM's participation in the Recovery Festival, which reached around 400 people and strengthened links with recovery communities. Edberts House engaged around 16 participants through loans-box activity, while the Gateshead Young Women's Project took part in museum workshops in August. September activity included Age UK Gateshead and a Discovery Museum visit by Pathways to Blossom, maintaining engagement with older people and dementia-focused groups.

North Tyneside

Partnership working continued with North Tyneside Arts Studio, with sessions generally engaging around 9 to 12 participants, alongside work with carers and older people's organisations. North Tyneside Hospital used museum resources with around 50 participants in August, while activity with Age UK North Tyneside included facilitated reminiscence and art-based sessions. The NTAS partnership is also exploring opportunities for a longer-term environmentally themed programme.

South Tyneside

The partnership with Bright Futures remained a significant strand of Q2 activity. Young women who co-created the successful *Let's Play: Mini-me* exhibition at South Shields Museum and Art Gallery continued to meet and develop the next phase of the programme, with recorded sessions typically involving around 8 to 17 adults and

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children. The work has progressed beyond participation into genuine co-production, with the group's experiences shaping exhibition content and future programming.

The open Time Travellers programme, developed from the earlier ACTS partnership, continued to engage older people, while work with WHIST is developing heritage skills around oral history, podcasting, archives and exhibition-making. September activity also included a Museum Social at South Shields with 18 participants, demonstrating continued demand for socially focused heritage activity for older people.

Northumberland

Northumberland saw particularly extensive Q2 delivery, combining family engagement, creative health, work with disabled people and sanctuary activity. At Woodhorn, the summer HAF programme for lower-income families generated 140 engagements, alongside a well-attended Summer Storytime programme delivered with Ashington Family Hub. The Woodhorn Weeders also moved into intergenerational delivery through Wild Wednesdays, with individual recorded activities engaging adults and children together.

Creative health partnerships included the completion of the heritage programme with patients and staff on Beadnell Ward, part of Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust, as well as engagement with men's mental health groups and supported visits. Work around Hexham included sessions with adults and young people with learning disabilities, while the *Prisons & People* launch/open studio attracted around 68 engagements.

NEM also strengthened its sanctuary and ESOL work through Chat Time and Learn English Together, while the Community Pass Scheme added nine new organisations as members, helping community organisations provide supported routes into museums for people who might otherwise face barriers to visiting.

Overall

Q2 demonstrates both the scale and depth of NEM's community engagement, with 3,455 engagements across 178 activities complemented by increasingly sustained relationships with health services, recovery organisations, family hubs, older people's organisations and community-led groups. Particularly strong themes this quarter were creative health and wellbeing, co-production, family support, older people's engagement and work with people facing barriers to cultural participation. A significant strength is that a number of relationships are progressing from one-off activity towards regular or jointly designed programmes, increasing the potential for longer-term impact.

3 – Volunteering (Cross-venue partnership working)

Volunteers continue to provide significant capacity across Q2 contributing 7,264 hours between July and 21 September across visitor engagement, collections, learning, exhibitions, conservation and community activity.

North Tyneside recorded the highest level of activity, largely driven by 3,255 hours at Stephenson Steam Railway. City Guides Newcastle contributed 864 hours, Great North Museum: Hancock 856 hours, and central volunteering programme 674 hours

Young people, skills and inclusion remained a key focus.

Summer work experience engaged 28 young people, alongside MGH supported placements and bespoke opportunities across venues. Development of a new Digital Content Creator role will provide further opportunities for young people to build digital and employability skills. Supported volunteering also continued to widen access for people who may experience barriers to participation.

Volunteers made important contributions to collections and public programmes, including exhibition stewarding at Great North Museum: Hancock and Segedunum, conservation activity at Laing Art Gallery, and 182 hours of support to Tyne and Wear Archives. Partnership working also continued through Making Waves, South Tyneside Cultural Partnership and wider voluntary and community sector networks.

Key Metrics

- Total volunteer hours: 7,265
- Largest individual programme: Stephenson Steam Railway, 3,255 hours
- City Guides Newcastle: 864 hours
- Great North Museum: Hancock: 856 hours
- Central North East Museums programme: 674hours
- Summer work experience: 28 young people contributing 420 hours
- Laing Art Gallery: 419 hours
- Woodhorn Museum: 341 hours

Overall, Q2 demonstrates both the substantial operational contribution made by volunteers and the growing role of volunteering in supporting skills development, inclusion and routes into cultural participation.

Forward Look

Priorities for the next quarter are to:

- complete DBS checks and embed revised safeguarding processes;
- review recruitment arrangements in response to high demand for volunteering;
- recruit to new youth-focused opportunities, including Digital Content Creator;
- continue partnership development, particularly in South Tyneside; and
- onboard volunteers supporting collections research at Neville Hall.