

North East Museums Quarterly Activity Report

Period: Quarter 1 (April 1 to 30 June)

1 - Venue Updates

Arbeia Roman Fort

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.

Tunes In June

The popular annual music festival returned in June, with the local bands playing each Saturday on a temporary stage erected against the stunning backdrop of the West Gate reconstruction. Unfortunately, poor weather led to the cancellation of the first concert (*The Gaslighters*, 6 June), but over the other dates the festival again attracted good numbers. Other bands featured were *The Black Corner Band* (13 June), *Rivolino* (20 June) and *Amateur Ornithologist* (27 June).

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.

Discovery Museum

Easter and May Half term Holiday Programming April and May

During Easter the team provided a Spring Museum Trail, Free and Charged for Science sessions and Discovery a Story storytelling a craft sessions. We also introduced the Time Travel Club drop in sessions as part of our partnership with The National Archives. Themes have included Spring & Easter, Animals & Insects and Building Bridges. We have delivered 15 sessions to around 400 adults and 780 children. The charged activities earned around £418

The Late Shows – Golf in the Museum and 7 Bridges - 9 May

Discovery Museum again supported the Late Shows, turning the ground and 1st floor into a Mini Golf course and welcoming an interactive Music and Art Installation to our 2nd floor, created by SALT. The installation celebrated the 7 bridges across the River Tyne. We welcomed over 700 visitors to the museum on the evening

New Temporary Exhibition Gallery

In preparation for the refurbishment of the old Working Lives gallery into a new temporary exhibition space, all museum items were removed by the curatorial and conservation team and carefully packaged and put into storage for future use. The new space, funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund and Wolfson Foundation, will open in late July.

Strike! - 2nd May to June 2027

This display marks 100 years since the General Strike. The General Strike of May 1926 rocked the country with King George V declaring a state of emergency. Around 1.5 to 2 million workers went on strike in support of 'locked-out' miners.

My father told me – 5th June – end date tbc

A small display as the result of an artist-in residency in Tyne & Wear Archives and the British Library. The artwork was inspired by masculinity and emotions evidenced through oral histories.

Swing Bridge 150 - 13th June to 30th December 2026

A small display charting 150 years of the Swing Bridge over the River Tyne drawing from archival material.

Discovery Nights; Unplugged – 26th June

Our digital detox evening for over 18s gives people time to read, draw, write, craft and listen with like-minded people. With a bar, chilled-out music and a host of non-digital activities on offer, the event encourages people to ditch their phone and make real connections.

STEMtastic 2026

The Learning team worked with Schools in the Westend Schools Trust to deliver a carousel of STEM activity over 4 days in April. We worked with 13 classes and 371 KS2 pupils.

Crane week – workshop rescheduling

The learning team successfully rescheduled or relocated workshops we couldn't run due to the Museum closure in May

Careers Fair – West Newcastle Academy

The learning team delivered a stall at West Newcastle Academy's Careers fair – working with around 120 pupils from KS2

Cultural Match Partnership workshops

North Gosforth Academy took part in an assembly and 2 Archive sessions in May linked as part of their Cultural match project we hope they return for the second half of the project in July. We are working with 120 year 7's

Science Works 26

We delivered a carousel of STEM activities to 3 school KS2 classes and 40 Home educated children exploring Renewable Energy, Building Bridges and Coding Robots – we expect to have engaged 115 school aged children by the end of June.

The Core Learning Programme will have expected to engage with around 3500 - 4000 children and earned around £7000 between April and June 2026

Great North Museum: Hancock

Treasure: Hidden, Lost, Found (28 March to 20 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? With thought-provoking displays and interactives, there is something to spark curiosity in visitors of all ages. The exhibition features significant loans from national and regional partner organisations including the British Museum, National Museum of Scotland, the Vindolanda Trust and the Auckland Project, as well private lenders.

Exhibition design was led by SeymourPowell who brought their experiential and digital design expertise to the museum for the first time. The exhibition has welcomed 10,000 visitors since opening and has received positive feedback. Family visits to the *Treasure* exhibition were supported with a range of gallery activities which can be given to groups visiting the exhibition, encouraging children to think about the roles of archaeologists and metal detectorists in finding Treasures, and to focus on objects on display.

Can you Dig it? A treasure gallery takeover (12 February to September 2026): An installation created by artist Theresa Poulton in collaboration with young people from across the region in celebration of the museum's upcoming exhibition, *Treasure: Hidden, Lost, Found*, opened on Saturday the 28th of March. From February 2026 a number of artworks have been in place across the Hadrian's Wall gallery that reflect the young people connection to themes around treasure.

Doorways (25 February to 25 April 2026): Following a very exciting and successful start to our work with Beacon Films, we were thrilled to be hosting an exhibition of some of the work created so far in our Spotlight space in early 2026. The work featured was 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 exhibition welcomed 7941 visitors.

Picture This: Someone Like Me (12 March 2026 to 17 January 2027): This artwork exhibition 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. Alongside the artworks, the exhibition will come alive through interactive events, family-friendly activities, and opportunities to meet the researchers themselves. Visitors are invited to explore research through creativity and conversation, discover the people behind the work,

and reflect on how diverse experiences and perspectives shape the way knowledge is created. 55,000 visitors have explored the exhibition since it opened on the 12th of March.

Celebrating WanBel: Commemorating Papua New Guinea's 50th Anniversary of Independence (23 May to September 2026). The museum has developed an exhibition featuring treasures from Papua New Guinea for September 2026 in collaboration with the Mariwai Project. More information can be found here: <https://wanbelglobal.com/>.

Unearthed Treasures (May to September 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.

Future exhibition projects in development:

Bayeux Tapestry (working title) (September 2026 to January 2027): In September 2026 the British Museum will be hosting the Bayeux Tapestry, the 70-metre-long tapestry, depicting events leading up to the Battle of Hastings and the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. To celebrate this historic exhibition, the GNM: Hancock is planning to display sections from the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne's historic copy of the tapestry. One of only 4 full scale reproductions and commissioned in the mid-nineteenth century this is the first time the copy will be on display to the public in many years.

Sunday Stones (working title) (January to April 2027): A Spotlight exhibition featuring objects from North-East Museums collections exploring 'Sunday Stones' and what they can tell us about human activity and impact on the world. A 'Sunday Stone' is a calcareous deposit that was formed inside pipes carrying waste-water from collieries.

Human Natures (February to September 2027): A major exhibition co-developed with Manchester Museum, Derby Museums, Horniman Museums and Gardens, Norfolk Museums Service and Great North Museum: Hancock. The exhibition explores The exhibition will tour to Newcastle in 2027, where it will draw on the GNM:H's collections and partnerships, aligning content with Newcastle University's research strengths. The Natural Sciences curatorial team has been heavily involved in this project including object selection and interpretation development for the Newcastle venue.

Our engagement activity continues to demonstrate the breadth, scale and civic impact of the University's museums connecting diverse audiences with collections, research and regional priorities through an ambitious and inclusive programme.

Public engagement across the period has been extensive, with a strong programme of exhibitions, events and participatory activity attracting large and varied audiences. Major exhibition launches for *Picture This: Someone Like Me* (70 attendees) and *Treasure: Hidden, Lost, Found* (c.200 attendees) brought together students, staff, partners and the public.

School holiday programming has been a particular strength, delivering sustained, high-volume engagement. Over the **Easter holidays**, a partnership with Moving Parts Arts enabled a vibrant, multi-layered programme combining community co-creation and professional performance. Highlights included *A Treasury of Tyneside Tales*, co-created by local young people and elders through 100 handcrafted “crankie” theatres, and *Wind Garden*, a large-scale outdoor installation involving 250 residents.

Performances such as *The Last Believer* animated the museum grounds, while in-gallery activity drew strong participation, including over 450 visitors engaging with hands-on “Nature’s Hoard” science activities. This was complemented by a comprehensive family-focused programme delivered by the museum team, including digital engagement through *Time Odyssey*, creative sessions such as *Sketches and Scribbles*, and early years provision through *Mouse Tales*. Participation ranged from small, bookable sessions to large-scale drop-in activity, demonstrating both reach and depth of engagement.

May half term continued this momentum, with fully booked making workshops (including 60 participants in a single day of chocolate-making sessions), strong attendance across family activities, and continued demand for interactive and facilitated experiences.

The GNM: H opened its doors for the **Late Shows 2026** an invited everyone to come along to view *Treasure: Hidden, Lost, Found*, take part in the specially designed *Quest for the Great North* treasure trail and have a go at making some wearable treasure to take away. 234 people came along to take part.

Other event highlights include:

- Flintknapping workshop with James Dilley (27th of March 2026): Experimental archaeologist Dr. James Dilley guided participants an introduction to flintknapping where the aim of the day was for attendees to go home with a variety of different stone tools, they had made, new flintknapping skills and a new appreciation for prehistoric technology. T
- Family fun day (28th of March 2026): To celebrate the opening of the *Treasure: Hidden, Lost, Found* exhibition, the museum hosted a family fun day including living history display and the launch of a new museum trail. Around 450 people enjoyed celebrating with us.
- Fully booked curator tours of *Treasure: Hidden, Lost, Found*

- Classics Fest: The Keeper of Archaeology delivered two object-based workshops on the Greek symposium for Classics Fest 2026 – Food and Feasting in Antiquity.

Learning

In addition to a full programme of regular schools engagement, self-led activities and facilitated workshops, we continue to deliver a targeted and impactful programme to engage children, young people and families, with a particular focus on those from areas of low cultural engagement and those facing additional barriers to participation. Our work with families has progressed strongly through the **Art Fund and Nesta-funded**

Mini Wonders programme, with the successful completion of a fifth cohort of seven families and the commencement of a sixth cohort of eight families. This work is developing a new model of museum-based family sessions grounded in parenting principles, supporting confidence, creativity and sustained cultural engagement among underrepresented audiences.

The **Time Odyssey programme**, funded by Art Explora, has expanded both in scale and reach. During the reporting period, we engaged **687 children from 19 schools**, alongside additional family participation during Easter and May half term. The programme has broadened its targeting criteria to include **isolated rural schools and special schools**, in addition to those with high levels of Free School Meals, ensuring a more inclusive approach to access. Its combination of digital interaction and collections-based learning continues to provide an innovative gateway into the museum's offer. We have also delivered high-profile, partnership-led events that connect young people with academic research and language learning.

Our **Newcastle Languages Festival event day** engaged **124 children**, bringing together contributions from across the University and sector partners, including the ENACT project, NU Language Ambassadors, Durham University's Classics for All, the National Archives and digital learning tools such as Vocabulous. The event also created opportunities for student engagement through Careers Development Module placements.

For **British Science Week**, we delivered an ambitious programme reaching **over 620 learners**, including mainstream pupils, SEND groups and home-educated children. The programme was structured across themed days and was particularly successful in attracting **Key Stage 3 audiences**, a group that can be more challenging to engage. Activity combined museum-led delivery (including LEGO *Build the Change*) with contributions from regional partners and University research

groups, enabling direct interaction between young people and current research in areas such as conservation, ecology and climate science.

Our work with **specialist and SEND audiences** remains a core priority. We delivered bespoke visits and workshops for **62 students from Northern Counties School (Percy Hedley Foundation)**, tailored to different levels of additional need and linked to curriculum themes around islands and climate change. This work demonstrates our commitment to deeply personalised learning experiences that support both educational outcomes and inclusive access.

Early years engagement continues to be a key strand. A **Toddler Takeover event** welcomed **89 children and their carers**, while our **Mouse Tales** enhanced storytelling sessions ran throughout the Easter holidays and May half term. These included relaxed sessions aligned with our wider accessibility offer, supporting younger visitors and their families to engage with the museum in a supportive and welcoming environment.

The team continue to work in partnership with local communities and organisations. Some new work in this region include:

- *The learning team have been working with Kids in Museums, the Podego group and the Newcastle Young Inspectors to pilot a visitor app aimed at teenage visitors.*
- *We have worked with the Occupational Therapy team from the Great North Children's Hospital to facilitate visits from their Sensational Thinking Project (Bobby's Big Day Out) team, encouraging visits from their neurodivergent patient groups. Bobby, their project mascot, has visited the museum and made Instagram reels making visitors with sensory processing issues aware of the museum, its sensory atmosphere and the support they can get for visiting. Bobby has also attended a relaxed Mouse Tales session.*

We are continuing our work with Beacon Films on the 'So What Heritage' project. They have developed a second film reel, which is currently being installed, supporting the Treasure exhibition. The first project intern was appointed and has begun his placement creating short form films about the museum galleries, alongside training and support in his development within the film making sector. His first film, exploring the Treasure exhibition, has just been completed. The third cohort of young people have begun their work creating films which will support next year's Human Natures exhibition.

Hatton Art Gallery

HAPPY! (14 February – 9 May 2026)

The *HAPPY!* exhibition has been well attended with over 6,016 visitors since opening on 14 February. The exhibition has been co-curated from the Jerwood Collection with the Hatton Gallery's young people's group, L-INK, who work with the Gallery to offer new perspectives through collaborative art-making and curatorial practice.

HAPPY! was conceived from initial conversations about the routes for progression in art, and the opportunities for making art through formal education. In homage to Victor Pasmore's 1957 Arts Education Exhibition, *HAPPY!* also presents the work of young artists at different stages of their arts progression.

The exhibition has been well-received. Visitors have commented:

- *"HAPPY! is one of the best exhibitions I have ever been to because it reminds me of the joy art and that the process of creating is available to us all."*
- *"Really interesting range of artwork all of which made me Happy in different ways!"*
- *"Thoroughly enjoyed the HAPPY! exhibition, really inspired by the uninhibited approach of youth!"*
- *"Of all we saw, the children's were so full of joy! Some great artists for the future!"*
- *"Just the does of Happy! I needed after some really difficult months."*
- *"Lovely gallery, mesmerising paintings."*

Curating Art 2026: Intimates (20 March – 16 April 2026). The second Curating Art MA exhibition placed the work of three contemporary artists in conversation, to explore notions of the body, touch and intimacy. *Intimates* placed intimacy within various cultural contexts, conveying the raw, visceral and at times confounding nature of closeness between bodies. A closing event for *Intimates* on 30 April was attended by more than 100 people.

BA Fine Art Degree Show (23 May - 6 June 2026)

The BA Fine Art Degree Show was displayed throughout the Hatton Gallery and Fine Art studios. The show was the culmination of the past four years' work for participating students. Works of fifty-seven emerging artists showed their work, with twelve exhibiting in the Hatton's galleries. Over 500 people attended an opening event on 22 May.

Lines of Action (20 June – 1 August 2026). Curated by staff members from Newcastle University's Fine Art Department, the exhibition explores how artists utilise the 'line' in its most expanded sense as a central part of their creative process. Rather than focusing solely on preparatory sketches, this exhibition examines the 'line' as an organising principle. It highlights how artists use the line to provide structure, create 'scores' for subsequent works, record actions, and open spaces for memory.

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

Curated and exhibited by staff from Newcastle University's Fine Art Department, this is the final exhibition in the *Fine Art 100* series. 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.

Events and holiday workshops. During both Easter and half term two art workshops a week were provided, one for 4–11-year-olds and the other for 12-18 years. The themes for the children were, Collage, Art and Nature, Spring Booklet and for the young people large scale work in mixed media.

The Late Shows. The Late Shows was successful, with 290 people attending. Professor Li from the Confucius Institute in Newcastle University provided a two-hour Tai Chi performance with opportunities to participate. There was also jewellery making and a postcard collage activity.

Learning. Primary schools from across the North East attended and participated in workshops. Primary schools visiting in this period included: Hesleden Primary School (near Hartlepool), Bernard Gilpin Primary School (Sunderland) and multi visits from Hotspur Primary School (Newcastle).

There was also engagement with secondary schools and FE colleges during this period. Working in partnership with the Special Collections team at the Robinson Library, North Gosforth Academy brought fifty pupils to study the part the University played in the First World War when it was a hospital. They created a postcard based on those sent by soldiers back to England. Other schools visiting included St Mary's Secondary school in Leeds and Emmanuel College in Gateshead. The Learning Officer is also planning to visit South Tyneside College to view a computer game that a student has created about Kurt Schwitters as a live project.

The Hatton's Home Educated art sessions run once a month and continue to prove popular, with an increase in numbers to fifteen children attending each session. Recent sessions have included: monoprinting, abstract painting, and drawing.

University Engagement

Museum Gallery and Heritage students curated an exhibition, *Intimates*, at the Gallery.

MA Creative Writing students were given a tour of the *HAPPY!* exhibition, which they will then use as a basis for writing.

Three practical art sessions were held in the Hatton for those people with offers to attend BA Fine Art in autumn 2026.

Ten Students from the Fine Art Degree course took part in a four-week in a collaborative project with the Hatton team and artist Mani Kambo, to create *Golden Hour*, an intervention inspired by the themes of the *HAPPY!* exhibition and was temporarily displayed in the exhibition. Forty people participated in a performative event led by the students to activate the intervention, inspired John Hoyland's 'list of

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things which fired his imagination' (Hoyland's prints and list are displayed in the same room).

BA Art fourth year student exhibitors have attended gallery briefings and worked with the Hatton team to realise their Degree Show exhibition which opened on 22 May.

Two Newcastle University MA Students from the Museums, Galleries and Heritage programme completed their placements at Hatton Gallery in May. They worked with the Exhibitions Officer to catalogue archive material and collection objects. They researched artists and curated a display in Hatton's Archive.

L-INK

L-INK (young people's group) gave a talk and tour to the Friends of the Hatton on 9 May, articulating their experience of co-curating the *HAPPY!* Exhibition. L-INK also designed a series of engagement activities for the exhibition which were delivered as part of the Late Shows on 9 May. The group assisted with the deinstall of the exhibition, working with Hatton teams to condition check artworks and wrap works for transit.

L-INK visited the *Terra Null* exhibition at Gallery North (Northumbria University) and engaged in a group discussion with artist Paul Dolan (whose work was exhibited in the exhibition), re-visiting an engagement with the artist with whom they worked in the past and who has actively supported their projects. Dolan's practice is of interest to the group who are keen to establish a connection which could offer possibilities for future projects connected to the Hatton programme.

The group are now working towards delivering a poster-making workshop as part of Baltic's Festival for Young People in the summer. The group researched the history of the Hatton's exhibitions, making use of the Archive and historical exhibition poster Collection. The posters they are preparing reference Victor Pasmore's designs from the 1950s and 60s as well as the story of the Hatton Pavilion by Toby Paterson, which toured Newcastle and Gateshead as part of the offsite programme during the Hatton's capital development in 2017. The panels from Paterson's Pavilion are due to be exhibited in a new context, as part of the 2027 exhibition programme, for which L-INK will also develop new collaborative work as part of their 2026-27 project.

Hexham Old Gaol and Moot Hall

Hexham Old Gaol Reimagined:

Tales from the Gaol our project to reimagine Hexham Old Gaol with artist Jonny Hannah continues to make good progress in Q1. An interpretation theme plan for each room in the gaol has now been devised to showcase fascinating stories of inmates and gaolers through the Gaol's 800-year history. Jonny Hannah held public community printing workshops at the Gaol on 26th April, and 3rd May as part of Hexham Literary Festival.

Easter at Hexham Old Gaol:

Family orientated craft activity 'Spring Wildlife Bonnet' took place over the Easter holidays, 71 participants (4 adults, 67 children) took part.

The annual Hare Trail for children also ran through the holidays with 72 participants (9 adults, 63 children).

May Half term at Hexham Old Gaol:

Facilitated craft activities were trialled at the Gaol over half term with 34 participants (16 adults, 18 children) taking part in historic bookbinding inspired notebook making.

Hexham People & Places:

Funded through Historic England Everyday Heritage project, regular targeted community outreach activities with two identified groups of young people & adults with learning disabilities in Hexham have taken place in Q1. All activities have been inspired by the history of Hexham and link to the longer term Hexham Old Gaol Reimagined Project. In Q1, inspired by the Hexham book festival – groups have researched local bookbinders and paper makers of the past (Pigots trade directory of 1834) and made their own miniature art books from khadi paper. The groups dressed up in period costume and printed messages using block letters and inks. Total engagements Q1 to 15th June: 35 people.

Laing Art Gallery

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*. Other artists on display include John Robert Cozens, Mary Elizabeth Bennett, Francis Towne, David Cox, John Martin, Edna Clarke Hall, Graham Sutherland, and Dennis Creffield.

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*** (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.

A variety of public programming events have been scheduled to accompany the exhibition, including a curator's talk and two artist-led workshops for ages 16-plus. Tickets for the two curator's tours held during The Late Shows were sold out.

The exhibition has received positive feedback, including the following:

- *'Two exhibitions of have just landed at the Laing Art Gallery, and together they do something quite rare: they make portraiture come alive, not polite...46 works that don't just sit there looking nice. These are portraits dealing with identity in the real world: culture, illness, grief, relationships...all of it. I love these exhibitions are about so much more than faces on walls. It's about who gets seen, how they're represented, and what that says about all of us.'* Culture Vulture
- *'...it was mesmerizing. I expected fantastic portraits. However, exploring the gallery's Exploring Identity show I also gained a new understanding of portraiture...These images become entire worlds to me'*
- *'really sensitively done and I think it's not an easy thing to pull off. You should be proud.'*
- *'I thought the salon-style hang of the exhibition's smaller work was absolutely wonderful!'*
- *'Portrait exhibition one of the best you've ever had.'*
- *'The portrait show was great. I thought I'd be bored as hell but it was great!'*

Portraits Exhibition – Cultural Match. The learning team have been using the *Portraits* exhibition as inspiration for the Cultural Match program workshops. All pupils from Wardley Primary School (totalling 256 pupils) visited the exhibition and took part in the workshops. The school were part of the Cultural Match programme and wanted their pupils to visit a cultural venue to learn about identity and other cultures through artwork. The team created a bespoke workshop for the groups in which they explored the exhibition and created a piece of artwork storytelling by looking for clues in paintings about a person's identity.

Hadrian Park Primary School Exhibition. Hadrian Park Primary School in Wallsend were also part of this year's Cultural Match program – they wanted to look at feelings and expressing emotions through art. They worked with the learning team at the Gallery to take part in a day of activities looking at the themes of emotions and how to use colour in art. The work they produced in the Gallery was part of an

exhibition on display in the Laing's Art Studio from Thursday 29th May – Monday 1st June, along with work created in school with a local artist they worked with as part of the project. The school invited families of the pupils involved to visit the Laing to show their work and build confidence in the pupils by having their work on display.

The Linking Project. In April the team started to deliver Linking Project 'neutral venue visits' at the Laing, in which schools attend the Gallery together and meet each other for the first time after 'linking' via video call or letters throughout the year. These have been a success so far with around 210 pupils attending for these visits. These sessions have had great feedback from the teachers involved on these visits who have loved seeing their pupil's confidence grow and watch them make new friends. More visits are scheduled throughout June.

Events and holiday activities. On 9 May the Late Shows at the Laing used the *Portraits* exhibition as inspiration for a drop-in crafting workshop. Participants were invited to make embellishments for 18th and 19th century clothing. The event also included exclusive curator-led tours of the exhibition. The event was attended by 289 people.

Throughout the Easter holidays and May half term there were a range of children's and family activities, including: Art Camp for 7-10 year olds, Make and Muse, and Little Artists Plus+.

Morpeth Chantry Bagpipe Museum

Morpeth Gathering at Morpeth Chantry Bagpipe Museum:

Over 10th-12th April, the Bagpipe museum provided a venue for 8 events of the Morpeth Gathering, with an estimate of 780 visitors over the 3 days.

Segedunum Roman Fort

***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 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.

Easter Holiday Family Fun

Families were invited to see what life might have been like in Roman occupied Britain, trying on armour, helmets and equipment of the Roman Legionary and the native British warrior. Other activities on offer included spear throwing, grain grinding and guessing the name and use of mystery archaeological objects. Children could also discover what it was like to be a child at the time; maybe one with rich Roman parents living in a town or a fort's Commanding Officer's house, or perhaps a tribal local, living in a roundhouse on the frontier of the Empire...

Segedunum Community Picnic

The Segedunum Community Picnic took place on 17 June, during Refugee Week, with 33 participants, including students from John Spence Community High School and St. Peter's C of E Primary, service users from Walking With in North Tyneside (a Wallsend based charity supporting people seeking asylum or refuge), and Northumbria Police. Craft activities around this year's theme for Refugee Week- courage, were provided by North Tyneside Art Studios. Rise North East supported play activities. The event was funded through Esmee Fairbairn Multaka Project.

The partner project with Rise, Step Outdoors and Play under 5s programme, has continued to be well attended, with 38 adults and 53 children under 5 engaging in weekly sessions throughout April and May. Following the success of the pilot, Rise have received funding to offer a further 8 sessions at Segedunum and will also deliver sessions for 8 weeks at SSR. The sessions have provided training for the N&ST learning team in active play- we will be using the project as a springboard for new under 5s offers at Segedunum and SSR. █

Following work with Brenkley School in the Cultural Match programme, the Segedunum team piloted a new sensory tour of the fort with a focus on emotional wellbeing with 84 CYP from Biddick Hall Primary and Carville Primary. This received positive feedback from teachers and pupils- we will be offering this session from Autumn Term.

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Brenkley School will be displaying their work produced during the 2026 Cultural Match project, following workshops with the Segedunum Learning team and artist Emma Sheridan, in Gallery 3 at Segedunum throughout June and July. A celebration event will be held for participating children and their families. |

Throughout April, May and June, the team has been further developing the offer for Home Educated groups at SSR, with new local history, Early Years and outdoor learning sessions. 47 children and 34 adults participated in the workshops. Feedback from families has been excellent, with requests for further sessions for KS3 children.

The team has engaged with the following careers and teacher CPD events: 23 April Future Careers SEND fair at The Parks in North Tyneside, attended by 350 young people and carers.

5 May Monkseaton Middle School Careers Zone workshop attended by 90 CYP

29 April Creatively Healthy Schools Conference for Northumberland Schools- the team hosted a stall promoting the use of our outdoor spaces at Seg and SSR, Sensory and SEND learning offers at this teacher CPD event.

Shipley Art Gallery

A Celebration of Dry Run (16-28 May). The final Dry Run exhibition celebrates the role that *Dry Run* has made in the development of second-year BA Artist Designer Maker students in Glass and Ceramics at the University of Sunderland over the past twenty-five years. This was an exhibition of glass and ceramic students, alumni and staff from University of Sunderland at various stages of their careers and highlighted the enduring role of *Dry Run* as both a platform and a point of departure. There was a celebratory preview event on 16 May and was attended by 97 people. Two of the students featured in the exhibition ran a successful workshop for the Recovery group on 22 May.

The Late Shows. The Late Shows took place on the 9 May. There was a variety of crafting activities led by Gateshead-based makers and organisations, including: Equal Arts, North East Modern Quilters, the National Trust, and the Shipley's drawing and painting group. There was also a performance by Side by Side Choir. The event was attended by 342.

Spring Craft Market. The Spring Craft Market took place in April. There were stalls by twenty local makers, a cafe by Urban Bakery, and watercolour painting activities led by the Shipley's resident painting group. A total of 262 people attended.

Drawn Together. Drawn Together, a collaborative family drawing event, took place in June, following the success of The Big Draw last year. This sees artists from NEATEN (NorthEast Artist Teachers and Educators Network) running a series of drop-in drawing activities in the gallery. These are designed for all ages and aim to offer surprising drawing opportunities such as using unusual materials and drawing on a large scale on paper on the floor.

Family Art Class. Family Art Class continues monthly and is well attended by families with children aged 7-12. Recently, attendees exhibited their wire portrait sculptures (inspired by Alexander Calder) at Shape Festival in Gateshead. Attendance is usually 12 children plus 12 adults.

Crafty Kids. Crafty Kids continues weekly and is well attended by families with pre-school aged children. The sessions are focused on exploring the galleries, learning about the artworks, and experiencing art materials in creative ways that support early childhood development. Attendance is usually twelve children plus twelve adults.

Holiday Activities. Three Holiday Art Classes and two Family Art Classes took place during the Easter holidays and May half term, which were aimed at ages 7-12. Approximately twelve children plus twelve adults attended for each class. Lego coding also took place during the Easter holidays, combining creativity and design with engineering and tech. There were around fifteen children and fifteen adults.

Adult Classes. The successful adult art and craft programme continues, and this during this period workshops included needle felting, acrylic pouring, watercolour, fused glass and embroidery. Approximately sixty learners attended over this series of classes.

All schools participating in the V&A DesignLab Nation project have now completed the project. There was another successful trip to London on 1st May where the Laing learning team accompanied Heworth Grange School to the V&A to take part in a day of activities led by their learning team. Using the ideas generated from this visit, the pupils then visited the Laing for a day of workshops. A member of Newcastle City Council's Urban Planning team spoke to the pupils about planning outdoor seating, which is their design brief. Having the pupils speak to a professional has been hugely beneficial to the pupils' final designs they then created at the Shipley. The pupils' work will be exhibited at a celebration event for all participating staff and students at the Shipley later in the year.

South Shields Museum and Art Gallery

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

(20 June – 8 August 2026)

Let's Play is a free family exhibition and play space developed in collaboration with local mothers from Bright Futures in South Shields. It's a welcoming, drop-in space where families can feel at home in the museum. It encourages creativity, exploration and learning through play. It also celebrates women's stories, experiences and achievements., and connects 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 has been 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.

***Stories From Shields* (23 April – 30 May 2026)**

The exhibition *Stories From Shields* brought together the voices of local businesses and residents through a series of short films, storytelling, a specially designed postcard collection, and the launch of a brand-new food and drink heritage trail. Initially planned to take place over three days, the run of the exhibition was significantly extended due to its popularity with the public.

Set inside the Victorian Street section of the museum, *Stories From Shields* let visitors explore what makes South Shields unique - from much-loved local dishes, to the personal stories and community spirit that shape the town today. Visitors also had the chance to share their food memories and stories.

The project was created by Local Heroes, a North East-based storytelling platform, and funded as part of the legacy of England's first Destination Development Partnership (DDP) Pilot, Destination North East England, a government- funded initiative for the North East of England, which was designed to boost the regional visitor economy and support sustainable growth.

***In the Presence of Nature* (26 March – 30 May 2026)**

In the Presence of Nature was an extension of the display that supported the highly successful exhibition of Claude Monet's *The Petit Bras of the Seine at Argenteuil*, that ran from 17 January until 25 March as part of the National Gallery Masterpiece Tour three-year partnership programme. This section brought together landscape

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artworks from the South Shields Museum & Art Gallery, Laing Art Gallery and Shipley Art Gallery collections, and invited visitors to slow-look at the scenes and explore them from a mindful, sensory perspective, as well as enjoying the artists' skills at depicting the natural environment.

Work is ongoing with EBSA young people and families at the ST venues. The team have begun attending EBSA Hub sessions at Mortimer College-this will initially be with 3 students and parents, as these young people find it particularly difficult to engage, but we will be hoping to engage with a wider group of CYP at Mortimer in coming weeks.

The team are working in partnership with Bright Futures, to engage a group of 6 girls experiencing EBSA , with year 2 of the NG Masterpiece Tour. They have participated in initial sessions at the museum, engaging with the idea of portraiture and developing enquiry, communication, social and artistic skills. They will be creating portraits to display as part of the Mignard exhibition.

The learning and engagement programme for Y2 of the NG Masterpiece Tour is currently under development. 30 Young people from New Writing North Young Writers participated in a live workshop with Christine Seidel, curator at the National Gallery and explored interpretation from the Monet exhibition with the SSMAG Learning Team. The young writers submitted entries to produce a sensory story for the exhibition which were judged by a panel including Darren Henley, CEO of the Arts Council, members of the National Gallery, staff from North East Museums and the Sensational Museum to choose a winning entry. The stories will be recorded and reproduced in a booklet which will sit alongside the exhibition. The winning narrative will be the focus of the sensory journey exhibition resource, which is currently being produced by artist Julia Collar. The team attended a NG Masterpiece Tour partnership day at the Grundy Art Gallery in Blackpool to share good practice and learning from Year 1 of the programme. We will be working with NG team and DWEL AI to pilot an AI tool within the Mignard Exhibition.

12 Students from Route2 Work College (SEN college for 16-24 year olds) based at the ECO Centre Hebburn, have been working with the Learning Team to develop sensory resources to support the new mining display at SSMAG. R2W learners will work alongside college and museum staff to create resources drawing on their own lived experience as SEN learners. The learners attended a talk by artist Bob Olley, whose work is displayed within the exhibit as part of their research. The project has been funded through the Barbour Foundation

The team has taken part in advocacy work, presenting 'Fostering hope, optimism and inspiration: South Shields Museum and Art Gallery ESBA programme' at the

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Access in Museums Conference at Leeds City Museum, sharing practice with 40 delegates from across the cultural sector. As a result of Leslie's article for Museum Association Journal, Leslie has been in contact with the curator of Gairloch Museum in Scotland to help support the development of sensory learning at their venue. Leslie also presented an online talk, 'Emotionally-Based School Avoidance - How the culture sector can help' for the North East Family Arts Network.

The Learning Team attended a facilitated Action Planning Meeting for STCEP at the Customs House, with teachers and ST cultural partners, to build a shared sense of how creative work with Children and Young People is contributing to the Making Waves LCEP aim, agree a shared sense of direction for the LCEP for 2026/27 and explore how the three headline priorities for the LCEP (Youth Voice, Teacher CPD and development, Careers) will guide work in 2026/27

The Learning Team is working with Rise to explore the possibility of delivering 8 Step Outdoors and Play sessions at Arbeia in September to promote active play and improve our offer for young families at the Fort.

Stephenson Railway Museum

Lion Running Weekend

The North Tyneside Railway Association (NTSRA) organised a special Gala weekend over 5-7 June featuring the guest locomotive *Lion*. Built in 1914 for the Royal Arsenal's extensive internal railway system in Woolwich, *Lion* is the sole surviving example of Peckett's 'E' class. In 1950, it was sold to the Wallsend Slipway and Engineering Company and worked on the quayside by the River Tyne until entering preservation at the Chasewater Railway in 1974. The locomotive is now owned and operated by the Lincolnshire Wolds Railway, which loaned it to the NTSRA for this special event.

Lion operated a busy timetable of passenger and demonstration freight trains across the weekend. It was joined by an impressive display of classic cars, guest speakers and local history stalls inside the museum. The Association also held a photographic evening on the 5 June and a sausage supper special train ride on the 6 June. 234 people attended the events.

Jackie Milburn Locomotive

Jackie Milburn, also known as Ashington No.5, has received a comprehensive bottom-end overhaul, which has involved repairing and replacing various bearings and wear plates. The tyres have been turned to bring them back into tolerance. The work has taken 6 years to complete. The locomotive was returned to traffic on the 25 July 2025 after undergoing a non-destructive testing (NDT) process and an annual examination. All the work was completed in-house by the North Tyneside Steam Railway / Stephenson Steam Railway volunteers.

During Elf Express 2025 the locomotive crew discovered an issue with both rear axle box bearings and journals. New axle box bearings had to be cast, and the wheel set had to be sent away to the East Lancashire Railway for the journals to be turned. Once the wheelset arrived back on site, the volunteers measured and machined the bearings to fit the newly-turned journals, before they carefully planned and put the locomotive back together in time for the *Lion* Running Weekend. Members of the thriving Stephenson Steam Railway Youth Group played a pivotal role in the workshop programme, working alongside the more experienced senior volunteers.

Ashington No.5 was also used for the first footplate experience guest of the year, on the 14 June (£30 experience - 1 round trip on the footplate of a steam loco).

Woodhorn Museum

The Northumberland Open Exhibition 2026:

The Northumberland Open Exhibition 2026 ran from February to May 2026. Featuring 281 artists and 590 artworks (50% more than 2025) was our most popular Open to date. Over 11,000 visitors saw the exhibition, 144 Artworks were sold generating £9,259.80 in commission, compared to 95 sold and £5868.90 taken in commission in 2025. Visitor comments include:

'This exhibition is beyond creative. It's inspiring and beautiful.'

'Great loads of talent in the North East really showed off for best results. Very enjoyable.'

'So many, so different, so clever, well done once again Woodhorn. Great exhibition.'

'Absolutely inspirational! So much talent! Thank you for staging this each year!'

'A wonderful exhibition showcasing a huge amount of talent in the North East.'

SUPERB!!!'

The Long Story of Woodhorn:

In Q1 we continued working with Roots and Wings (creative designers) and Justine Boussard (curator and storyteller) to introduce a co-developed and community-informed environmental narrative throughout the permanent Coal Town exhibition timeline at Woodhorn museum. An application submitted to NLHF on 1st May, and we are awaiting outcome as this will determine the size and scale of the project in 2026-27.

Easter at Woodhorn Museum:

- Facilitated informal learning activities in the Pop Up Ashington Group Hut opened for 17 days during Easter offering a Ceramic Heart Craft in celebration of the Heart of Woodhorn daffodil first bloom. 1174 participants (548 adults and 626 children)
- The annual visit from the Easter Bunny at Woodhorn took place from Fri 3rd to Mon 5th Apr - 1032 participants engaged.
- Bookable Chocolate Making Workshops for families engaged 102 participants. As a first trial of chargeable workshops feedback was good and tickets sold out.
- Easter Saturday saw the annual Easter Egg Motorbike Run organised by the Infidels Bike club from Blyth leave the museum enroute around Northumberland to collect Easter Eggs for children's hospitals and raise money for NE Blood Bikes. In total 824 bikers and spectators took part.

May half term at Woodhorn Museum:

- Facilitated informal learning activities took place in the Pop Up Ashington Group Hut for 10 days, 345 participants took part in the activities (163 adults, 182 children)
- Our bi-annual Birds of Prey display attracted 424 Visitors to site

Northumberland Miners' Picnic 2026:

- The 162nd annual Northumberland Miners' Picnic took place on 13th June, attracting 2035 visitors and performers, compared to 1493 in 2025. Over 140 people used the free shuttle bus service from Ashington Leisure Centre. Postcodes showed 63% of visitors were from the local SE Northumberland area, with a large percentage of those from hyper-local NE63.
- Performances included Newbiggin, Ashington, Bedlington and Ellington Brass bands, Northern Proud Voices, Northern Monkey Brass and Ladies of Midnight Blue.
- Also on display was The Northumbrian Miner sculpture by artist John O'Rourke and the story of the Cramlington Train Wreckers, a play by Ed Waugh commemorating the 100th anniversary of the General Strike.
- Family focussed activities included a band parade, circus skills and artist-led craft activities.

Ashington Male Voice Choir- The Woodhorn Mining Disaster Commemorative Concert:

Plans are underway to mark the 110th anniversary of the 1916 Woodhorn Mining Disaster on 13th August 2026. In remembrance of this tragic event, Ashington & District Male Voice choir have created a special programme of heritage music that pays tribute to the great sacrifice paid by the men who worked underground at Woodhorn Colliery.

A Community of Coal: Six Canny Tales from the Woodhorn Collection:

An outcome of workshops with Justine Boussard in 2025, the Museum Marras (Woodhorn Collections Volunteers) each selected an object from the Woodhorn collection and created a new piece of writing for it. The stories were illustrated and compiled into a booklet by local artist Lizzie Lovejoy, and the stories have also been recorded. The physical exhibition of the chosen objects launched in Coal Town on 13 June and will run until mid-September. Visitors can pick up a copy of the book for free and also listen to the stories via a QR code.

Big E and Ellington Colliery: End of an Era:

The famous Big E sign once on the side of Ellington Colliery was installed at Woodhorn in time for Miners' Picnic in response to a community request following a commemorative exhibition in 2025 on the 20th anniversary of the closure of Ellington Colliery. A Loan agreement for the sign is in place with Beamish Museum for 5 years. Content relating to the Ellington Colliery is also on temporary display in the museum, co-curated by the Museum Marras.

General Strike 1926 Centenary:

To mark the centenary of the General Strike stories relating to the impact of the strike on Northumberland mining communities researched and written by Museum Marra Ray Malecki have been recorded and shared online in a series of social media posts.

Banner Conservation Project:

Conservation work continues on Woodhorn's mining banner collection with conservator Laurie Endean-Olsen. members of the West Sleekburn community visited Woodhorn to see conservation of the West Sleekburn banner on 28 April. Preparation is underway for the annual banner display rotation on 29-30 June. An additional assessment of the Backworth Banner has taken place and discussions around community fundraising for its conservation are taking place.

Learning and engagement

Our learning team organised two CPD sessions for NEM-wide staff with Sam Castro Creations related to on camera presentation skills with a view to increase online learning content.

Woodhorn learning staff also took part in the Northumberland Creative Health for Schools Conference in April and continue to participate in the Northumberland LCEP.

Chat Time Woodhorn:

Monthly English conversational practice sessions for speakers of other languages are now taking place at Woodhorn on the 4th Friday of month, 1:30-3:30. Open to anyone who speaks English as an additional language and targeted specifically towards asylum seekers and refugees housed in SE Northumberland, attendance has grown in Q1 to 15th June with a total of 28 people participating.

Support included: Northumberland County of Sanctuary / Learn English Together Ashington volunteers, staff from the National Literacy Trust, and a volunteer graduate from Newcastle University.

Men's Pie Club, Ashington:

NEM has partnered with the Men's Pie Club CIC and Full Circle Food Project in Ashington to help develop a volunteer-led men's mental health peer support group, holding weekly sessions at Full Circle Food Project every Friday, 1-3pm, from Friday 1st May. The club has been publicly advertised programme and men can self-refer. NEM Community Connector has supported the group, providing heritage recipes, and monthly visits to Woodhorn. Total engagements Q1 to 15th June: ~50 people (estimate).

Northumberland College, Ashington Campus:

Initially externally funded, Woodhorn's intergenerational project is ongoing with young joinery / plumbing students and the Age-UK Woodhorn Weeders to co-produce outdoor furniture for Woodhorn. Facilitating trip(s) and visit(s) for students to Woodhorn and integrating heritage learning more broadly in their curriculum. Total outputs Q1 to 15th June: 6 new benches designed, produced and installed (3 backed and 3 double-sided without backs).

Community Object Loans Boxes:

New community loans boxes covering a variety of collection-related themes have been developed. Loans boxes are used by targeted groups, mostly care homes and older people's support organisations. Three boxes are currently in use at Woodhorn and one is in development for Hexham. Woodhorn Object Boxes themes: Woodhorn Colliery and Northumberland Coal, Mining Homelife, Shopping in c. 1970s Ashington.

Feedback: "I'd just like to say the mining homelife box was brilliant it held many items that different residents could resonate with particularly one of my residents who's father was a pitman painter it was very special for her to see photographs of his work"

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*and of him in one of the books I am now looking to purchase for her, the CDs and DVDs provided were great to be able to carry out 2 separate activities also.
Is it possible to pick up Shops or coal box in the next fortnight to be used on week commencing 22nd please?"*

Total engagements Q1 to 15th June: 64 people

Pitmen Poetry and Creative Writing:

Woodhorn hosted a local poetry recital in May which was attended by an audience of 40. Following the event success and popular demand from participants we have agreed to support a group of local poets to set up poetry and creative writing groups at the Museum in the Autumn.

Tyne & Wear Archives

Exhibitions, Events, Activities, Projects

The **Records at Risk** funded project funded The National Archives, to catalogue the collection of animator Shelia Graber started in mid-May. The first month has been spent box-listing the collection on site in South Shields and material has been boxed ready for transportation to Tyne and Wear Archives for cataloguing towards the end of June. The project is also being supported by a Northern Bridge University of Northumbria PhD placement.

To commemorate the the centenary of the end of the **General Strike** a free public lecture was held at Newcastle Library. Dr Joe Redmayne, a researcher at Newcastle University spoke about the events and impact of the strike and showcased archival material and photographs to shed light on the activities of those involved in organising tasks of picketing, publicity, issuing trade permits, selling foodstuffs, dispatch riding, soup kitchens, and much more. The event was well attended and received excellent feedback.

A small display entitled ***My father told me*** opened on the 5th June in Discovery Museums. This display showcases the work of Richard Bliss who was an artist-in-residency in Tyne & Wear Archives and the British Library. The artwork was inspired by masculinity and emotions evidenced through oral histories.

A small display charting 150 years of the **Swing Bridge** over the River Tyne drawing from archival material opened in the Discovery Museum atrium on 13th June.

Progress has also been made towards replacing our current Collections management System for which supplier support will end in 2027. This is expected to be a major focus of staff work in the autumn on 2026 . The new system will provide an improved service to researchers and support staff efficiency.

Learning & Engagement

The National Archives and North East Museums (NEM) Partnership is an educational partnership between The National Archives (TNA) and Tyne & Wear Archives, based at Newcastle's Discovery Museum, part of North East Museums. Between April and June 2026, the TNA/NEM partnership has enabled us to engage with over 1000 school students, aged between 11 and 18, from 13 local secondary schools. This has been achieved through archives-based workshops delivered onsite at Tyne & Wear Archives and in schools.

In these sessions, which link closely to the History National Curriculum and GCSE and A-level History specifications, students have been using documents from both Tyne & Wear Archives and The National Archives to answer enquiry-based questions on a variety of topics. Popular topics in this period have been Crime and Punishment, Public Health, and the Campaign for Female Suffrage. The partnership has also enabled us to engage with approximately 350 people through archives-inspired family sessions delivered during the Easter holidays and May half term.

Volunteering

Tyne and Wear Archives were sad to learn of the death of one of our long standing volunteers, Geoff Horseman. For over three decades he has worked with us to help secure objects and archives relating to the history of *C.A. Parsons and Company* into our museum and archive collections. In recent years Geoff was a weekly volunteer in our archives, scanning material from the collections and sharing his expertise about Parsons engineering and turbines.

The searchroom has regularly been supporting research visits from the interns and volunteers from the Ballast Hills Burial Ground Project at Newcastle University researching the history of the estimated 40,000 people buried on the site. For more information on the project see <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/ballast-hills/>

Visitor Performance

The searchroom team have had a busy few months with April regularly having 100% occupancy in the searchroom. Between 1 April and 22 June 2026 they have received and responded to 484 written enquiries.

Media Coverage

Members of the archive team have worked with the comms team to film content related to the Swing Bridge anniversary, our oldest document and for Discovery Lates. All these videos have performed well on Instagram and Facebook with one achieving over 400 likes.

Collaboration / Sector Partnerships

In mid-June, we accompanied the Great Charter of 1600 to the Royal Grammar School as part of a Royal Visit to celebrate their quinquenary. The charter was a focus of much excitement and interest by a range of visitors.

Planning for autumn teaching with Northumbria University is already underway with specialist sessions on legal history and music history in development. We will also

be hosting induction sessions for postgraduate researchers from Newcastle University.

2 - Communities

Key Metrics:

1,291 engagements (data to 19 June)

73 workshops and events

Strategic overview

In Q1, the Targeted Communities Programme focused on reducing barriers to museum access for communities experiencing social, health, and economic inequalities. Delivery combined open, targeted programmes with closed, community-specific activity, enabling both broad reach and deep engagement. A key strand of the work has been capacity building, supporting partners to independently use museum resources and sustain engagement beyond facilitated sessions.

Programme model

Open workshops: Public programmes with targeted promotion through trusted community partners, ensuring participation from priority communities.

Closed workshops: Tailored activity delivered with specific groups, often involving co-production, skills development, and longer-term partnerships.

Key areas of impact:

Health, wellbeing and care

Programmes with NHS Trusts, care homes, carers' organisations and dementia support groups used collections-based activity to support wellbeing, social connection and cognitive stimulation.

Health and Social Care training

NEM continued to invest in training health and social care staff to use Museum, Health & Social Care loan boxes independently. This capacity-building approach enables partners to embed heritage activity within routine care and support settings, extending reach, reducing barriers to access, and ensuring more sustainable delivery beyond facilitated sessions.

Migration, sanctuary and inclusion

Targeted work with asylum seekers and refugees included English language conversation sessions, arts projects, and co-produced exhibitions such as Destination Tyneside. These programmes supported social connection, confidence-building, and a sense of belonging, while positioning NEM venues as welcoming civic spaces.

Co-production and lived experience

In South Tyneside, a co-produced programme with young mums culminated in a major summer exhibition exploring working motherhood, inequalities in the workplace, and women's activism. This work demonstrates how targeted

engagement can progress into high-profile public outcomes and national partnerships.

Skills, learning and employability

Partnerships with colleges and community organisations supported intergenerational learning, practical skills development, and pathways into volunteering and further engagement with heritage.

Geographical reach - Activity took place across Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North Tyneside and South Tyneside, ensuring equitable distribution of targeted engagement across the region.

Community Forum

The Community Forum continued to play a key strategic role in Q1, with a facilitated meeting in May, providing a structured mechanism for dialogue, challenge and learning between NEM and representatives from priority communities and partner organisations. The Forum will inform programme design, helps identify emerging needs and barriers to access, and ensures that targeted community work is responsive rather than prescriptive. Insights from Forum discussions are directly shaping approaches to co-production, accessibility, and progression routes into wider museum activity.

Community Pass Scheme

The Community Pass Scheme enables community groups to access museums independently, reducing barriers and supporting sustained engagement in areas of highest need. This has been developed by the Northumberland team and is now being extended across North East Museums as a clear outcome of earlier Community Forum feedback.

Learning and next steps (Q2)

- Expand partner-led delivery through further training and use of loan boxes.
- Build clearer progression routes from closed workshops into open programmes and volunteering.
- Strengthen evaluation of longer-term outcomes, particularly in health and wellbeing contexts.
- Continue development of co-produced exhibitions as a visible outcome of targeted engagement.

3 - Volunteering

Key Metrics

- **Total volunteer hours:** 6,739
- **Registered volunteers:** 923
- **Applicants in process:** approximately 40

Summary

- Volunteers contributed **6,739 hours** across North East Museums, demonstrating strong and sustained community engagement
- Volunteering continues to support organisational priorities around inclusion, access, skills development, and audience growth
- Significant progress has been made in youth-focused pathways and partnerships, particularly through South Tyneside College
- Expansion into new programmes and sites, including Newcastle City Guides has strengthened regional reach and visibility
- A marked increase in applications reflects growing demand, but has led to a temporary pause in recruitment, highlighting capacity pressures

Insight:

Volunteering remains a significant organisational asset, supporting delivery across all sites. A large proportion of hours are contributed at Stephenson Steam Railway, highlighting both the strength of established programmes and an opportunity to further develop volunteering capacity across other venues.

Inclusion and Access:

- Volunteer input is directly informing improvements to accessibility, including sensory maps, uniform design, and visitor experience enhancements
- Programmes such as Chat Time and Creative Conversation support English language learners, social inclusion, and wellbeing
- Supported volunteering continues to enable meaningful participation for disabled volunteers and those with additional needs

Impact:

Volunteering is playing a key role in embedding inclusive practice and improving accessibility across the organisation.

Young People, Skills and Pathways:

- Partnership work with South Tyneside College is supporting students to engage with collections and apply learning in creative and digital contexts
- Development of a Digital Content Creator volunteer role will provide young people with transferable skills while supporting digital engagement
- Work experience and student showcases are strengthening pathways into cultural and creative careers

Impact:

These initiatives support workforce development, future talent pipelines, and diversification of audiences.

Partnerships and Community Engagement:

- Continued coordination of Making Waves partner meetings, enabling collaboration and shared development of volunteering opportunities
- Strong volunteer contribution to major events, including Late Shows, with excellent feedback from participants and visitors
- Ongoing engagement with community partners, including supported volunteering organisations

Impact:

Partnership working is extending reach, enhancing delivery, and strengthening relationships with communities across the region.

Programme and Geographic Growth:

- Successful integration of Newcastle City Guides into North East Museums
- Expansion of volunteering roles across exhibitions and sites, including Segedunum and Great North Museum
- Continued strength in established programmes, particularly at Stephenson Steam Railway

Impact:

Volunteering is enabling delivery across a wider geographic footprint and supporting organisational growth.