

Sheffield Museums

Submission to Sheffield Race Equality Commission

July 2021

1. About Sheffield Museums

Sheffield Museums Trust is the independent charity that operates six of the city's museums and heritage sites: Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet, Graves Gallery, Kelham Island Museum, Millennium Gallery, Shepherd Wheel and Weston Park Museum.

Established in 2021, the charity cares for the city's collections of human history and natural science, alongside the Guild of St George's John Ruskin collection and the Ken Hawley Collection Trust's Hawley Tool Collection.

In 2019-20 Sheffield's museums welcomed 1.1m visitors, 25,000 school visitors and more than 40,000 adults and young people who took part in learning activities from Toddler Takeovers, Halloween Trails and Life Drawing to national programmes such as the V&A's DesignLab Nation.

The museums tell stories of Sheffield and its people through their connections with city communities from adults exploring their personal and family history, people living with dementia and their families and artists with learning disabilities, to children, young people and families from across the city, and diverse communities of volunteers drawn from across the region.

2. Our destination vision:

An ambitious, resilient, and unified museums service that represents, celebrates, and inspires Sheffield.

Resilience, relevance, and representation underpins every aspect of the museums' work. The museums must be:

Resilient – with people who have the confidence, opportunity, and capacity to learn, adapt and recover from the challenges the museums will face.

Relevant – delivering collections and creative programmes that are relevant and useful to the communities we serve.

Representative – the museums will be more engaging places if our people, programmes and audiences represent the communities we serve and reflect our connected history.

3. Charitable Objectives

As a charitable Trust Sheffield Museums' objects are to advance education by the establishment and maintenance of museums and art galleries for the benefit of the public in particular in the fields of social and industrial history, science and engineering, design, technology, visual arts and crafts and natural sciences, in particular but not exclusively by:

a) the acquisition, ownership, preservation, protection, restoration, improvement, enhancement and maintenance of items and features of artistic, scientific, historical and industrial interest for the public benefit; and

b) the care, management, display and development of:

- i. the collections of the Sheffield City Council;
- ii. the art collection of the Mappin Trust;
- iii. the collection of the Guild of St George;
- iv. the collection of the Ken Hawley Collection Trust; and
- v. collections of any other person or body to an extent consistent with the objects of the Charity.

4. **SMT's ambition** is that the city's collections fire the imaginations of audiences and that the museums are inspiring and culturally inclusive,

Ambition for Place

Vibrant museums at the heart of our city and at the heart our communities

Ambition for People

Be a great place to work with a culture of collaboration, creativity, and high performance

Ambition for Creativity

Be recognised for dynamic museum experiences that inspire people to think, engage, be creative and connect with the city's past, present, and future

Ambition for Sustainability

To be operationally, financially, and environmentally resilient and sustainable

5. **How SMT is funded**

Sheffield City Council pay SMT an annual service charge of £1,762,200 until 2022 that supports basic 'open-the-doors' costs. This enables SMT to secure additional funding from Arts Council England and a range of trusts and foundations, as well as to generate earned income from commercial enterprises, individual giving and fundraising campaigns.

SMT is part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio and receives annual funding of £800,000 to support its work 2018-2022. Emergency support from ACE Cultural Recovery Fund and the job retention scheme has provided a lifeline over the past 18 months

SMT sites reopened in stages from mid-May (with the exception of Graves Gallery, which is closed for redisplay and is planned to reopen in September) and are operating with reduced capacity to maintain a Covid-secure environment. Visitor numbers since mid-May average 40% of 2019 numbers, although we are seeing a steady increase as visitor confidence grows.

Closure and low visitor numbers has affected our ability to generate income and in 2021-22, the museums are expected to generate a net deficit. In 2022-23 we anticipate further recovery that will enable the museums to achieve a balanced budget.

6. **Organisational profile**

Employees

SMT has a staff team of 100 who bring skills in visitor experience, curation, exhibitions, communications, fundraising, historic engineering, learning and participation, events, retail, finance and human resources.

SMT is female led and has a majority white team. 70% of colleagues work part-time. Just 5% of colleagues identify as being from an ethnic minority background compared

with 16% of the working-age population (ONS). 5% of the team identify as having a disability compared with 21% of the working-age population.

The staff team does not reflect the diversity of Sheffield's working-age population and SMT recognises that there needs to be significant action to tackle underrepresentation. It has revised recruitment processes and is working with sector colleagues (including the English Civic Museum Network, the Weston Jerwood Creative Bursary programme and the University of Sheffield's TAP project) to develop inclusive pathways to a career in museums. Low turnover, low pay, the paucity of jobs and negative perceptions of museums and galleries are all factors to consider. To find out more about work underway in the sector please go to:

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/guidance-and-resources/culture-change-toolkit#section-1>

<https://jerwoodarts.org/projects/weston-jerwood-creative-bursaries-2020-22/>

<https://www.museumdetox.org/>

Board of Trustees

SMT is governed by an engaged and active Board of Trustees.

Day to day running of the organisation is delegated to the Chief Executive. The CEO reports directly to the Board of Trustees, ACE and SCC and is supported by the Director of Finance and Resources and the Director of Programmes, and Heads of Service who bring expertise in specific functions.

Activity reports are shared with Trustees, SCC and ACE through quarterly board meetings and regular committee and stakeholder meetings.

SMT has 14 unpaid Trustees - 2 appointed by the Council, one by the V&A and 11 other members. Trustees bring skills and experience in a range of areas including finance, human resources, operations, management, strategic and operational planning, research, and governance.

The board is led by Neil MacDonald (Chair), a chartered accountant and currently Chair of St Luke's Hospice in Sheffield, a governor at Sheffield Hallam University and a Trustee at Sheffield Theatres. Neil is supported by Trustees from both legacy Trusts,

Richard Abdy
Patrick Abel
Darren Chouings
Cllr Tony Damms (SCC)
Maxine Greaves
Patrick Meleady
Richard McGloin
Cllr Josie Paszek (SCC)
Susan Ransom
James Robinson (V&A)
Arnie Singh

Recruitment is underway to appoint new Trustees and Associate Trustees who will join SMT from autumn 2021

<https://www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/about/working-with-us/join-our-board-of-trustees>

Volunteers

SMT has a team of 186 volunteers.

93 volunteers identify as White British, 2 as White Irish, 8 as Other White (Cypriot, 2 Greek 2 Italians, Spanish & 2 European), 1 Other (Arab; Yemeni), 6 Asian (Chinese), 2 Asian/British Asian (Hong Kong, Taiwanese), and 2 people of mixed heritage (1 Mestizo, 1 undisclosed). 72 people have not disclosed this data.

Of the 114 people providing data, 18.4% are non-White British. Black and Asian communities are under-represented within the volunteer team. Volunteer activity is gradually re-building as people begin to recover from the impact of the pandemic.

7. Audiences

Our goal is that the museums' audiences are representative of city's population, but there is work to be done to achieve this. We track the audience demographics for the four museums with the largest visitor numbers each year through regular visitor surveys and benchmark findings against census population data. In terms of the ethnicity of the people who visit, our most recent survey programme findings in 2019/20 were:

Ethnic group	Sheffield Population	Millennium Gallery	Graves Gallery	Weston Park Museum	Kelham Island Museum
White	84%	89.4%	90.1%	91.1%	96.1%
Mixed: Multiple ethnic background	2%	1.5%	2.5%	1.4%	0.8%
Black or Black British	4%	1.3%	1.3%	0.8%	2.1%
Asian or British Asian	8%	5.3%	3.3%	4.9%	0.6%
Other	2%	2.5%	2.8%	1.8%	0.4%

Understanding who, both demographically and geographically, is and isn't currently visiting is hugely important in enabling us to reflect on and develop our offer and inform our work to ensure the museums are relevant to and representative of the city's population as a whole.

8. Equality, diversity and inclusion

SMT's ambition is to become one of the most culturally inclusive museums in the UK. To achieve that ambition, SMT's EDI policy outlines action to build knowledge and understanding and embed mechanisms for change in all areas of work, from governance, recruitment and audience development to acquisitions, exhibitions and events.

Becoming an anti-racist organisation

SMT has a significant amount of work to do to dismantle the foundations of institutional racism on which museums are built. Only through action can we realise our commitment to being an anti-racist organisation.

The formation of SMT is an opportunity to embed anti-racism and race inclusion in the foundations of who we are and what we do. Trustees, Directors and colleagues have been building the knowledge, understanding and confidence to make meaningful change. This has included:

- Race and Governance training to support the recruitment of new Trustees and ensure that the Board better represents Sheffield's population and is able to lead change.
- Participation in anti-racist leadership training to support the development of race-inclusion policies and plans
- Working with external partners to complete a review of Weston Park Museum's Ancient Egyptian gallery and related school workshops to assess where activity perpetuates structural racism and inform changes to the existing displays over the coming months
- Undertaking an initial review of Sheffield's collections to better understand where histories have been erased or misrepresented
- Embedding a commitment to anti-racism, anti-discrimination and social justice in business planning
- Programming opportunities to showcase diverse creative talents and perspectives,
- Colleagues in collections, exhibitions and learning participating in online seminars focussing on developing anti-racist and race-inclusive practices, led by the Museums Association, [Inova](#) and more
- Engaging in the Weston Jerwood Creative Bursary programme and the University of Sheffield's TAP project to explore best practice in developing more inclusive pathways to a career in museums
- Working with city-wide colleagues to research the city's colonial connections and develop an anti-racist approach to our cultural heritage

While SMT has made some progress, there is much more to do. The next steps in realising our commitment to being an anti-racist organisation include:

- Current recruitment for an external consultant who will undertake a Race Inclusion Maturity Assessment. The Assessment will help SMT objectively understand where development is needed and underpin the intention to become a more diverse organisation with a culture of inclusion.
- Recruiting for external support to deliver a comprehensive programme of team training and development with anti-racism, inclusion and equity at its heart
- Revising the schools programme and wider learning activity to ensure that the museums do not normalise any form of racism
- Ensuring that diverse artistic talent and perspectives are woven through the creative programme and collection displays
- Advertising future creative opportunities through open calls
- Beginning to revisit the interpretation of the collections through collaborative practice

Museums can be spaces for discussion and debate and have an important role in challenging structural inequalities. As this work progresses, we will engage academic and community partners to review and challenge the breadth and depth of our activity and guide our development and support SCC's Race Equality Commission recommendations to embed change.

9. About the collections

Sheffield Museums Trust manages the City Council's Museum collections and are also custodians of the Guild of St George's Ruskin Collection and the Ken Hawley Collection,

together comprising over a million items of local, regional, national and international significance. These collections reflect the city and its relationship to the world.

The roots of the collections lie in the Literary and Philosophical Society, founded in 1822, established to promote knowledge and education and whose collections of Natural Science, Archaeology and World Cultures provided the foundations of Weston Park Museum when it opened in 1875. The Mappin Bequest provided the foundations for the city's art collection in 1887 and was later augmented by gifts from J G Graves between 1929 and 1943.

The museums have limited funds for acquisition and the majority of items have been acquired as gifts to the city. Since 2016, the collection has acquired 136 works of art, four of which are by artists of colour. Acquisition processes across the museum collections have not consistently recorded information on protected characteristics of donors, artists or makers and the team are currently changing processes to build a better understanding of representation within the city's collections.

Sheffield's museums, like many in the UK, are built on a history of colonialism; the imperial desire to explore, collect and ultimately to control the world is reflected in the Museum as an institution and through its collections. Britain's colonial history, racism and the legacy of slavery are woven throughout Sheffield's collections. SMT is committed to addressing these offensive ideologies and uncomfortable truths by working with academics and communities to understand and highlight them, acknowledge where the collections have come from and challenge the ethics of acquisition, interpretation and display.

10. Decolonising the collection

SMT will work within the framework of the Museums Association decolonisation guidelines and the Arts Council England repatriation guidance, both due to be published in 2021. For more information about this see,

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/decolonising-museums/decolonising-practice/>

Sheffield's collections number over one million items that are accompanied by varying degrees of contextual information. There are four interconnected strands to our approach to decolonising the collections:

Research and Review

A collections review will identify priority areas or themes for specific research. The provenance and stories of objects are key; founding collections (e.g. from the Literary & Philosophical Society), key collectors, identification of collections from British colonies, objects with inappropriate interpretations or incomplete histories, objects that illustrate the contribution of people and communities with international heritage. This also includes research into the representation of the city's diverse communities across the collections, with the priority for future collecting being that new acquisitions address this imbalance.

A review of the language used and the recording of information on the collections management database is also in progress to ensure appropriate language is used and to enable relevant information to be captured in order that it is easy to extract and share.

Reinterpretation

The identification of areas and objects where reinterpretation is required to tell a more complete story is also underway. This will be shared through exhibitions, displays, events and digital programmes, and, crucially, recorded for the future on the collections management database. It is vital that this work is undertaken in collaboration to ensure that authentic voices of diaspora communities are at the heart of this process.

Repatriation

Through the process of research and dialogue with communities of origin, we anticipate that there may be items identified in the city's collection which should be returned to their source communities. Over the past 25 years a number of items have been returned to their communities, including a Tattooed Maori head (Toi Moko) in 1996 and a Moriori Skull in 2016, both of which were returned to the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa).

We have also entered into discussions with the Egypt Ministry of Culture Supreme Council of Antiquities, who supported Sheffield's retention of Egyptian human remains, and with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in order to start a review of the Aboriginal material in Sheffield's collection. We welcome conversations regarding repatriation of collections, and we will undertake research in order to initiate dialogues with source communities regarding the collections we currently care for on their behalf.

Collaboration

We work with communities, colleagues, research hubs and partners on the research and decolonisation of the collections, including the Sheffield City Archives, University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University, Social History Curators Group, Natural Science Collections Association (NatSCA), Black Artists & Modernism project (BAM) and Subject Specialist Networks. We will grow this network and facilitate more opportunities to engage visitors and source communities in discussion about the collections.

11. Creative Programme

SMT delivers a diverse range of activity across the six venues, from co-produced exhibitions and displays to talks, workshops and events and from artists' projects to schools learning activity. We are committed to working collaboratively and to involving many voices in the presentation and interpretation of Sheffield's collections.

Exhibitions and Artist Commissions

Since 2018, one third of the artists we have commissioned are artists of colour. We have developed a strand of our exhibition programme that engages artists with the collections to broaden knowledge and share new perspective; this will continue and grow through open call opportunities for artists to work with us. All the exhibitions and the majority of displays staged in this period were curated collaboratively with artists, specialists or communities.

Learning and Engaging with Communities

A significant part of our work pre-Covid was working with schools across Sheffield. We have taken time during lockdown to review our most popular workshop, Ancient Egypt, in terms of addressing the perpetuation of racist ideas. Work with CIC True Talk Africa in 2021 has led to the revision of this workshop and will underpin how we approach our entire learning offer, supporting us as re-evaluate our impact and fulfil our commitment to becoming an anti-racist organisation. The museums have a history of working with communities and we will continue to develop mutually beneficial relationships with individuals and networks across the city. Working together is fundamental to our

approach and whilst we have more to do at a grassroots level, we will take an approach that is sustainable and useful to communities in Sheffield.

12. Looking ahead

While resource has been identified to undertake the work outlined above, like every charity, the museums are operating in a challenging and uncertain funding environment. The museums are committed to working with partners throughout the city and welcome meaningful discussion, debate and collaboration to ensure good use of resource and expertise, support social justice and ensure lasting change.

Kim Streets
Chief Executive
Sheffield Museums