



Museums  
of Cheshire

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## Conference Report

### 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016, Warrington

This report summarises the presentations and discussions at Museums of Cheshire's first full conference.



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**Museums of Cheshire Conference - 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016**  
**Venue: The Pyramid, Warrington**

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The Museums of Cheshire (MoC) welcomed a total of 891,000 visitors in 2014/5, and was supported by 664 volunteers and 229 full time equivalent staff across the 21 venues.

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### **Session One: Cheshire, The Big Picture**

#### **Peter Sandman, Local Enterprise Partnership for Liverpool City Region**

This presentation outlined what Liverpool's Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) does and how MoC members can potentially get involved. The LEP's primary aim is to develop domestic and international markets in Liverpool city region (LCR). It does this as a destination management organisation, through its partnership with Marketing Liverpool, through quality and evaluation services and by developing relationships with local boroughs and strategic partners.

The importance of the visitor economy to LCR was emphasised – in 2013 it was worth £3.64bn and supported 48,600 jobs. Liverpool welcomed 58m staying and day visitors, however 90% of them did not venture beyond the city. The aim is to create and then market an offer that will encourage visitors to visit both Liverpool and the rest of LCR. Liverpool itself is the lead brand for the group, having an international reputation and an existing infrastructure, and should be the starting point for discovering hidden gems further afield and bringing an additional £1.2bn into the local economy by 2025.

A number of current marketing, demographic and economic trends were outlined. The presentation then went on to discuss how MoC venues could capitalise on Liverpool's position and their proximity. Ideas included: creating visitor focused thematic and geographic packages/tours; entering marketing partnerships with Visit Liverpool, Manchester etc; increase familiarity and visibility through a strong marketing campaign; work on better transport connectivity and journey services; personalise the product; make the social and economic case for Cheshire through intelligence and advocacy work. The LEP investment strategy was also seen as a good opportunity for partnership working and resourcing.

## **Alison Duckworth, Marketing Cheshire – Tourism and Marketing**

Marketing Cheshire's aim is to raise the profile and awareness of Chester and Cheshire as a short break destination, and to increase the value of the visitor economy.

The presentation initially outlined what is known about tourism in the borough and how it compares with the rest of England, ie total spend, where people come from, when, how long they stay, what they come for etc. While digital and print marketing are still important, word of mouth continues to be the strongest driver for visitors to the county. There is a 93% satisfaction rating for those who visit which compares well with the rest of the country. General exploring and visitor attractions are proving more popular than events and specific interests, and it was noted that while heritage activities are often part of the trip they are not the main driver for visits by domestic visitors. The presentation broke down the main visitor segments, eg exploring families, considering what they came for, the type of accommodation they seek etc.

Marketing Cheshire's approach was then examined. Chester's brand position is to be further capitalised upon, along with the perceived lifestyle available in Cheshire. This will be promoted through the full mix of media channels including online, broadcast, print, PR, famous visits and collaborations. In each case the aim is to produce thematically, geographically and demographically targeted material that drives awareness of and engagement with Cheshire's tourism offer.

## **Rebecca Mason, Heritage Lottery Fund**

The presentation aimed to inform about the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) programmes and potential for funding MoC projects. The HLF priority topics and areas were outlined – geographically this does not currently include Cheshire but this may change in future. The issue of 'outcomes' was considered, ie the difference HLF wants to make to heritage, people and communities through its projects. The presentation considered what these outcomes could be, how they work and how to incorporate them in any application.

The application process was explained including the project enquiry/expression of interest service which is available in almost all funding programmes. It was noted that, excluding the places of worship stream, the main grant programmes have given £19,354,300 to Cheshire projects. This is a relatively low and could definitely be improved upon.

The presentation then presented examples of local projects that had successfully delivered HLF-funded projects. These included the British Deaf History Society's training for deaf volunteers programme, Nantwich Museum's The Impact of War on a Market Town project, and Grosvenor Museum's Cheshire's Great War Stories project. The variety in the projects was emphasised, as was Rebecca's willingness to talk about any potential applications.

## **Questions from the audience**

**Q.** What is happening in Liverpool with regard to cruises? It would be good to have tours from the terminal in Liverpool to venues.

**A.** Venues – or the MoC – need to contact Angie Redhead. Their offer will need to match the profile of the tourists and their interests. There's lots of potential here.

**Q.** The presentations emphasised Liverpool as the lead brand but not so much the rest of the region, including Halton. This is a plea to remember the boroughs.

**A.** It is true that Liverpool is the lead brand for the region but it is also important to create packages of products which include venues in the boroughs.

Placement and packaging are both really important and a dialogue between venues is needed. The trick is to make to it a unique offer and to remember that tour operators will want their own financial return so it needs to be something special.

**Q.** The message this morning has been that collaboration is key. Is there a formal structure in which to do this?

**A.** Suggest that this needs to happen through MoC – maybe its Facebook page. It's important not to over-engineer this – keep it simple.

Discover England's funding offer is good – you have to show collaboration so it becomes a catalyst for future work.

**Q.** Is there any advice on how to work with LEPs?

**A.** Not really. They all work differently. Some are very small while others – like Liverpool – are large and far reaching.

Liverpool's Investment Strategy is a quite novel way of looking at strategic funding opportunities – it could possibly be brought back to the MoC group. It's all about getting private sector traction.

**Q.** There's been a lot said about links with Cheshire and LCR but not about North Wales – Cheshire has strong historic and thematic links.

**A.** Agreed. This will be part of the Marketing Cheshire plan. It will also look towards Manchester, the Wirral etc, basically taking bits of boroughs! Visitors don't recognise geographic boundaries like we do, so we need to get better at grouping attractions.

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## **Session Two: People, Creativity & Wellbeing**

### **Mike Candler, Museums of Cheshire research consultant – Horizon scanning and research**

*Brief:* conduct baseline research on the social and economic impact of MoC and undertake stakeholder analysis for a better understanding of the local policy landscape.

*Method:* contacted 70+ local organisations asking “what’s your strategic priority?”

*Headline point:* “...overwhelmingly, the most exciting thing about the Museums of Cheshire is the diversity, range and quality of the collections and activity on offer throughout the year...”

The intention is that everybody in Cheshire has an understanding of the value and impact of museums and culture and the role of MoC in the social and economic development of Cheshire. By demonstrating value MoC can develop new approaches and resilience. This can be done by *building and developing relationships* with various sectors, including the public sector, the business community and education providers. The emphasis is on proving worth and fostering long term, mutually beneficial relationships.

Also, establish a *brand* through marketing to the tourism sector, profile raising and champion recruitment. It is important to *develop the product* through partnerships with destination management agencies, creation of a bespoke offer for cultural tourists, instigating an audience development strategy etc. Plan long term. Also, *develop the workforce* through skills audits and development, and remember *resourcing* - recruit a specialist fundraiser who can make applications, evaluate and report back. Also, market venues' spaces etc as a commercial enterprise.

### **Case Studies:**

#### **Pete Regan, De Profundis at Warrington Museum & Art Gallery**

Creative Remedies is a programme of arts activities that aims to improve the health and wellbeing of adults in Warrington. It was set up seven years ago to offer non-medication based treatment for people experiencing or recovering from mild to moderate mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression.

One of the projects Pete Regan presented was with a recovering alcoholic and explored that recovery through his music and a band of likeminded people. Another project was with Warrington Museums & Art Gallery where the Creative Remedies group was commissioned to produce short films about objects in the ‘Cabinet of Curiosities’ exhibition. The group had great fun and felt a real sense of pride and ownership. A third showcased Pete’s own photography and its role in his recovery from depression. The message of the presentation was that art is being used to profoundly change people’s health and wellbeing.

## **Laura Armitage, Learning and Visitor Services Manager at Tatton Park - Shakespeare Week**

Shakespeare Week aims to make people's first/early encounter with The Bard a positive one. Laura's team presented a week of Shakespeare-related events and activities at the park's Tudor Old Hall which included living history, archery and performances. It was considered a real success with 250 people attending, and really good reviews and feedback. The team also learnt a lot and Laura was asked to talk about the experience at the 2015 Museums Association conference.

There have been many benefits to taking part.

- Playing a part in a national event
- Working in partnership with likeminded people at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
- Being part of a fantastic learning initiative
- Attracting new audiences – most attendees hadn't visited before.
- Playing a role in challenging the stereotype that Shakespeare is far removed from everyday life or boring.

## **Tom Hughes, Selling Egypt**

West Park Museums took part in an ACE-funded project with five other northwest museums with Egyptian collections, all of which had been gathered by women who had pioneered Egyptian exploration and collecting. The project had several aims: to explore the collections; to connect non-specialist curators with Egyptologists; to develop products that could be sold in their shops, and to sell workshops. The project also worked to alter ideas about Egyptian collections being just about mummies. How did the objects get here? What are their stories? How do the collections complement each other? As well as the general public the target audience was schools, researchers and funders.

Working in a group had the benefit of joint procurement, allowing them to commission stock, animations, artworks etc that they could never manage individually. It also allowed them to develop partnerships with larger venues like the Petrie Museum, and to send the 'Beyond Beauty' exhibition of their collections to Two Temple Place, London. The initiative showed that success is possible if museums can find connections and work together.

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## **Session Three: Narrative study**

### **Catherine Mailhac, Unlocking the potential of our collections and stories**

*Brief:* Catherine was commissioned to produce a narrative study exploring the MoC collections and venues. It is intended to act as an advocacy tool as part of *Unlocking the Potential*, a project to create more resilient and sustainable organisations.

*Method:* primarily desk-based research looking at museum publications and policy documents, venue websites, visitor reviews (including forums) and through discussion with the MoC steering group and partners.

*Headline finding:* there is enormous scope and variety across the MoC venues. Objects tell the tales of human experiences across the millennia, and modern visitors can connect with those stories. By working collectively the MoC venues can offer more ways to engage.

The recommendations divide into three and provide a springboard for future development rather than being an exhaustive examination:

*Championing the diversity of MoC:* there is a range of themes and ways in which audiences can be engaged with the collections. They offer a potentially fresh look across the collections as well as a historic overview, eg bite size connections eg eight things that will make you smile at MoC.

*Championing Cheshire - events and destinations:* collections and venues used in celebration of the county's past and present, giving an authentic sense of place and a unique viewpoint, eg horses, flowers, shopping etc.

*Championing key themes:* as well as dipping in it is possible to develop strong themes that span the venues. They may appeal to cultural tourists who have an interest in specific areas, eg commerce, journeys, sanctuary and Cheshire at War.