



the happy  
museum

## Case Study – real practice, real impact

Ceredigion Museum –  
partnership and social  
enterprise

**Ceredigion Museum, Aberystwyth** is county council funded, has five full time staff and welcomes some 30,000 visitors per year.

# Ceredigion Museum – partnership and social enterprise

**This case study is about how a project developing craft wares with local young people led to a range of wider benefits – important partnerships for the future, a new source of revenue for the museum, exposure to new evaluations tools, as well as benefitting the young people involved.**

**This case study is relevant to:**

- Senior management team
- Learning and community engagement teams
- Curators and collections teams

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# Highlights

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*“The project was about expanding the idea of the museum, showing that it is not just a building in town, breaking down barriers so that it really is a museum without walls.”*

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Alice Briggs, assistant curator

- The project helped develop a strong relationship with the charity Tircoed
- The social impact focus of the project helped the museum win Heritage Lottery Funding
- This was the museum’s first outdoor project, which has opened up possibilities for future work
- The museum learned about and used appropriate impact evaluation tools



# Museum profile

Ceredigion Museum in Aberystwyth occupies a former theatre and cinema dating back to 1904. The museum has a collection of some 60,000 objects relating to local craft and industry, the majority were made or used in

the county between about 1850 and 1950. The museum is run by Ceredigion County Council and has faced significant cuts in recent years. The museum has five full time staff and has around 30,000 visitors per year.

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*"It showed that we are a community hub and the project gave us the opportunity to work outside our own space. We don't have an outdoor space – this got us working outdoors."*

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**Alice Briggs, assistant curator**

## Happy Museum funded activities

Called 'Harvest the Knowledge', Ceredigion's project was bi-lingual and was carried out in partnership with Tircoed, a woodland and rural communities charity. Tircoed and the museum trained five young people with craft and enterprise skills to make a range of kitchen crafts for sale in the museum shop that were inspired by and related to objects in the museum's collection. The participants also

used craft skills to mend tools from the handling collection. The project also invested in proper branding for the products with marketing support from an intern sourced through Aberystwyth University. The project created an enduring partnership with Tircoed and by working outdoors at the charity's woodland workshop showed the museum in a new light.



# What happened?

*“Our intention is to eventually display the objects with the tools, giving visitors a better understanding of the production process.”*

**Stuart Evans, designer and technician**



“The project was a chance to really show what Ceredigion Museum is about,” says Alice Briggs, assistant curator. “It showed that we are a community hub and the project gave us the opportunity to work outside our own space. We don’t have an outdoor space – this got us working outdoors.”

“The project was about expanding the idea of the museum, showing that it is not just a building in town, breaking down barriers so that it really is a museum without walls.” The museum has planned further activities beyond its own building to continue working with communities working with land management.

“Our partnership with Tircoed as a charity is on-going and the project facilitator Bob Shaw is continuing to work with us on identifying tools and objects inside the collection alongside an additional volunteer. We are looking to develop new partnerships that continue looking at land management use and the sustainability of our land within other areas of the collection over the next 24 months. With a particular focus on the sheep farming community to talk to them about their histories and use of the land.”

For Stuart Evans, designer and technician at the Museum, working with the interns to explore the museum’s objects “refreshed our view of the collection.” Stuart identifies a number of ways this happened:

“By getting people with specialist knowledge of old tools enabled us to identify and categories our in-store collection – and we were able to categories the tools and differentiate the collection. By focusing on specific items we were able to marry the tools with finished objects on display. Our intention is to eventually display the objects with the tools, giving visitors a better understanding of the production process.”

“Through this process, some of the tools were identified as being ‘A - for display only’, ‘B - good enough for handling’, ‘C - to be restored and used again by crafts people’, and ‘D – deaccessioned’. This work is still being undertaken and will continue, now that we have established a body of keen volunteers.”

Alice Briggs believes the project has had an enduring legacy.

“In some ways it has been transformative – here was an initiative that was not just about the past, but that also shows how we can live in the future.”

The kitchenware crafts the interns created not only provide revenue for the museum, but also helped develop their woodcraft careers. In commercialising the products, the museum has taken care to emphasise that they were made by local craftspeople using local materials sourced from properly managed woodlands. The stories of the makers, and the tools used to make them, were told and the link made between the products and the museum’s collections.

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*“It’s been great being able to share our experiences through a community of practice.”*

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**Alice Briggs, assistant curator**

The museum also benefited from the Happy Museum focus on appropriate evaluation. “We had done lots of fantastic projects in past, but we didn’t know what impact was,” says Alice. “The Happy Museum idea of measuring what matters has been really important for us.”

“We attended two of the Happy Museum community of practice evaluation days, which introduced us to the work of Daniel Fujiwara, and the Happy Museum’s evaluation tools. These have been fantastic in several ways; offering case studies and examples of evaluation, networking opportunities, and signposting to other resources about impact. The interest in social impact within the museum that has stemmed from our working with Happy Museum’s evaluation tools formed part of the remit for our recent Heritage Lottery capital project funding bid (for which we were successful), and we will be working on how to set up integrated evaluation into the community engagement plan that forms a large part of the implementation of that project.”

“We have come away from the Happy Museum activities with many simple, but effective evaluation tools that can be easily

integrated into projects – although embedding that new culture into staff and the organisation is another challenge. The partnership model that we used in working with Tircoed has increased the sustainability of our partner organisation. Tircoed won new funding and successfully bid for us to have a paid work placement for six months to continue working on the project. We were able to disseminate the learning from the project at a symposium on Harvesting the Knowledge held in June 2014.”

Being part of the Happy Museum community of practice has been important. “The museum has faced and is facing a lot of cuts. The project has helped with the challenges of organisational change. Within the staffing structure we have at the moment, many of the people find any kind of change really difficult. It’s been great being able to share our experiences through a community of practice.”

“Working within the Community of Practice has been invaluable as a supportive environment to network and develop contacts with other museums. We learnt to ‘steal ideas with pride’ where they worked at the conference, and our Curator successfully bid for funding to bring the Paper Apothecary (another Happy Museum Project commission), on a tour of Wales which will be beginning soon. It has also helped meeting museum staff from completely different backgrounds of organisation across the UK, big and small, and seeing what innovative projects everyone is working to achieve.”



# What's changed?

*“Working within the Community of Practice has been invaluable as a supportive environment to network and develop contacts with other museums.”*

Alice Briggs, assistant curator

**Being part of a community of practice:** The museum benefitted from the support of and input from other museums facing similar challenges.

**Successful funding bid:** The social impact work from the Harvest the Knowledge project helped the museum secure Heritage Lottery Funding for other activities.

**Commercial, environmental and social:** The sale of craft wares could provide a new source of revenue for the museum, with positive environmental and social benefits too.

**New directions:** The museum has shown it can operate beyond its walls and has plans for further outreach work that shows the museum in a new light and aims for new audiences. The museum has also discovered the benefits of more participatory work with its collections.

**Follow up project:** A second Happy Museum project, The Gospel Ship, has been developed in collaboration with artist, Janetka Platun, Happy Museum and People United. Through the project the community will co-create modern day responses inspired by the themes and subjects of an original 19th Century print (The Gospel Ship) in the museum's collection.

Talks, public events and performances will result from the material created in the workshops while further funding is currently being sought to create a full sized Gospel Ship in 2017. The gathered responses will be painted directly on to the sails of this traditional clipper which will sail along the Welsh coastline, stopping off at least six locations. The voyage will be enriched with commissioned events, artist commissions and a touring exhibition of the museum's rich collection of maritime paintings and artifacts.



# Happy Museum success factors

Since 2008, The Happy Museum project has been testing a set of working principles through commissioned projects. These 'action research' projects have helped us identify critical success factors of how, what and why museums might re-imagine

themselves in the light of these principles. The table below is a summary of our 'Story of Change' tool (More information here: [www.happymuseumproject.org](http://www.happymuseumproject.org)). This case study best demonstrates the aspects of practice highlighted in red.

Principles	How? Drivers	What? Delivery	Why? Difference we make
Measure what matters	Share a wellbeing vision Share a Story of Change	Use time, resources and scope creatively Measure what matters to people	To re-think what matters
Be an active citizen	Encourage active engagement Anticipate challenge and change	Work experimentally Use everyone's potential	To create happy, resilient people
Pursue mutual relationships	Share ownership Ensure mutual benefit	Work across hierarchies and teams	To create happy, resilient teams
All of which help re-imagine museums for better community LIFE*			
Create the conditions for wellbeing Learn for resilience	Consider playfulness, creativity, activity and aesthetics	Be a good host Broker relationships	Communities are: • Learning • Interacting • Feeling happy, satisfied and worthwhile • Environmentally aware
Value the environment and be a steward of the future as well as the past	Consider the social and financial benefits of being green	Use the museum's unique resources. Lead by example: care of people, place and planet	

\* The Happy Museum Project is conducting a national LIFE survey, where LIFE = Learning, Interactions with others, Feelings and emotions, and Environmental awareness. More: [www.happymuseumproject.org](http://www.happymuseumproject.org)



# Tools used



The Ceredigion team used the 'story of change' to define their vision for the project and to plan the route to achieve that vision. The purpose of this tool (which is similar to theory of change, or logic modelling) is to make sure we start by focusing on the difference we want to make rather than on the activities we may use to achieve those ends.

Using a story of change challenges 'business as usual' thinking by

More on using a Story of Change can be found here:  
[www.happymuseumproject.org](http://www.happymuseumproject.org)

starting with the overall purpose and working backwards. The process of 'measuring what matters' can then start at the planning stage – by defining the success factors for a project, a strategy or a change of direction. The tool is also valuable for helping to communicate a vision to staff, volunteers and all stakeholders, as well as the thinking that underpins it.



# Online resources

Museum website: [www.ceredigion.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=197](http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=197)

Partner website: [www.tircoed.org.uk/index.php/what-we-do/39-harvesting-the-knowledge-project-page](http://www.tircoed.org.uk/index.php/what-we-do/39-harvesting-the-knowledge-project-page)

Tumblr site: [www.hadaucrafts.tumblr.com](http://www.hadaucrafts.tumblr.com)

Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/hadaucrafts](http://www.facebook.com/hadaucrafts)

Article on the project: <http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/sense-of-place/harvesting-the-knowledge-in-ceredigion>