

RUSSELL COTES ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Report subject	Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum Update Report
Meeting date	4 May 2022
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>This report provides an update on the activities of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum from October 2021 – March 2022 including the ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>The Museum has been open for the entire period, with the exception of a 3 week closure in January for the planned installation of a new fire panel. Although, visitor confidence has been impacted by the new Omicron variants since December and there have been challenges maintaining all services, generally the return to the new normal has been very successful.</p> <p>Visitor numbers are 92% of pre-Covid levels, exhibitions, events and family activities have returned with considerable success (compared to 77% for year as a whole). The shop and café are similarly doing well. Investment has been made in the conservation of the historic interiors and some collections items to enhance the visitor experience.</p> <p>2022 is the Museum's Centenary year and a programme of activities for the year have begun well.</p> <p>The Museum has been successful in its application for funding from the Arts Council MEND fund which will secure the conservatory, replace plant including the air handling units and improve drainage.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>The Management Committee accept the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum review report for the period 1 October 2021 – 31 March 2022 and agree the actions suggested in the report</p>
Reason for recommendations	To demonstrate the fulfilment of the Committee's responsibility to provide strategic oversight of the Russell-Cotes as the delegated governance body for the Charity.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Beverley Dunlop, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Vibrant Places
Corporate Director	Jess Gibbons, Chief Operations Officer
Report Authors	Chris Saunders, Service Director, Destination and Culture Michael Spender, Head of Culture Sarah Newman, Museum Manager
Wards	Not applicable
Classification	For Update or Information

Impact of Covid

1. On 19 July 2021, Covid restrictions were lifted on the Museum, however requirements and recommendations for face coverings have been implemented over the period and visitor confidence has been impacted particularly by the prevalence of Omicron at Christmas and the re-introduction of guidance nationally on face-coverings and working from home and more recently the highly transmissible BA2 variant.
2. We have had some increase in staff absences related to Covid, however, fortunately while it has impacted on staff, we have enough capacity especially with staff working more flexibly that it has had very minimal impact on the service offered. The only direct impact was the early closure of the café on one occasion.

Financial Impact

3. This period has been cushioned by an increased Covid budget from BCP Council and additional funding through the ACE Cultural Recovery Fund which has mitigated against the loss of income from visitors which usually contributes £500,000 to core budgets.
4. The final financial statement for the FY 2021/22 is still under review.

5. Visitor Figures and performance

Year	2019/20			2020/21			2021/22		
Month	museum	café	total	museum	café	total	museum	café	total
April	3277	613	3890	0	0	0	0	382	382
May	3353	640	3993	0	0	0	1181	388	1569
June	3488	590	4078	0	0	0	2692	195	2887
July	3718	593	4311	873	12	885	3241	257	3498
Aug	4161	813	4974	1856	124	1980	3657	575	4232
Sep	3771	725	4496	2823	208	3031	3594	685	4279
Oct	3976	676	4652	2066	204	2270	3923	612	4535
Nov	2847	690	3537	187	22	209	2513	511	3024
Dec	1818	358	2176	1215	77	1292	2216	353	2569
Jan	2824	614	3438	0	0	0	815	224	1039
Feb	3599	606	4205	0	0	0	3052	432	3484
Mar	1853	324	2177	0	0	0	3502	497	3999
Total	38685	7242	45927	9020	647	9667	30386	5111	35497
summer	21768	3974	25742	5552	344	5896	14365	2482	16847
winter	16917	3268	20185	3468	303	3771	16021	2629	18650

- Since October 2022, visitor figures have been extremely strong and on the whole show visitor numbers are roughly 90% of pre-Covid levels, though direct comparisons are difficult. Oct 2019 – March 2020 saw total visitors of 16,917 (although this includes the impact of March 2020 partial closure), whilst the equivalent period of 2021/22 was 16,021 visitors, (although this includes a 3 week closure period in January for building works).
- Over the whole year, the museum was closed for 9 weeks (a 17% reduction in opening hours), but still welcomed 35,497 visitors (a 22% reduction in visitors). We have been helped by the strong visitor offer, investment through Arts Council Cultural Recovery Fund into digital ticketing, outside catering and improved marketing and by the numbers of people staycationing in Bourenmouth, either with family and friends or in serviced accommodation.

Building

- The installation of the new fire panel, which had been commissioned for November 2021, as reported at the last meeting, was cancelled at very short notice, because of a lack of critical parts. Although the museum had advertised a three week closure, we managed to reopen and secure enough staff to fill the rotas for the café and Front of house.
- The fire system with an addressable panel was finally installed during a three week closure in January 2022 and the museum reopened according to schedule on 25 January 2022. Unfortunately, the level of work and supervision required was of sufficient intensity and impacted on the whole building, that we were not able to utilise the closure to change the Main Hall lightbulbs and carry out

sacrificial polishing on the floor, as had been hoped. These will have to be scheduled for January 2023 if not before.

10. Increasing problems with the Conservatory where the insurance funded work to replace panels lost in the storms of winter 2019 have still not been scheduled and water ingress into the AHU units, confirm that the MEND funding has not come a moment too soon.
11. A historic house fire audit by external specialist is in progress following concerns from Philip Hughes Associates regarding fire compartmentalisation. Initial findings are that systems and fire installations are good, and that where it can be sensitively done fire compartmentalisation would reduce risk e.g. in plant room.
12. A topographical survey to provide accurate as built plans and sections of building is also in hand.
13. Some additional building work is being tendered to address water ingress in a package of works that is viable given the complexity and costs of the necessary scaffolding work.

Collections and Conservation Care

14. In line with the Forward and Conservation Plan, display and conservation improvements have been focussed this year on Galleries 1 and 2 with the aim to refresh the décor, fittings and some of the paintings. Conservation work was also carried out to some of the minor but unsightly wear and tear to the wall surfaces and woodwork in the Galleries and Main Hall. 22 years on from the original HLF building restoration the damage to high traffic areas of the building had become noticeable and while not full conservation this minor treatment has yielded noticeable results greatly improving the visitor experience.
15. During the Christmas closure period Galleries 1 and 2 were rehung. Previously some of our most popular paintings were not displayed to their best advantage. Additionally, visitor feedback from exhibitions had indicated that there were some works not on display that perhaps should be. The hang is now more thematic with the 'high Victorian' works in Gallery 1 while the much lighter Gallery 2 contains our Pre-Raphaelite masterpieces as well as some of our finest 20th century works.
16. The 1990s gallery leather seating, commissioned from designer Rory Smyth, have been sympathetically recovered as the original upholstery had become very tatty and worn.
17. Complete conservation of 'The Submission of the Emperor Barbarossa' by Solomon Alexander Hart RA (circa 1867). It has been severely damaged at least 50 years ago with a large 'Z' shaped slash across the bottom left quarter of the painting. Although repaired at the time the repair was failing and degrading. Additionally, the varnish had become discoloured, there were a number of small losses to the paint surface and the frame was in great need of cleaning and resealing. Solomon Hart was the first Jewish Royal Academician and served for many years as the organisation's librarian. This work was partly carried out on site so that visitors could interact with the conservators and find out more about such 'behind the scenes' activity. This activity was very popular and will be repeated where possible.
18. In addition, an Anatolian carpet dated to circa 1910 has been sourced for the Dining Room floor. This, along with three druggets in the doorways leading in and

out of the room, will protect the wooden floor which was being worn away by our visitors. The carpet is an authentic approximation of the carpet that the Russell-Cotes' had in that room and will be used sacrificially. The original carpet is in the collection, but its conservation at this stage would be prohibitively expensive, time-consuming and the resulting carpet would be too fragile to use functionally.

19. Five giltwood Louis XVI period (1774-1794) chairs from Drawing Room fully conserved. They had become very damaged with losses to the gilding and sagging upholstery. The gilding was restored and the upholstery re-adjusted. These chairs were part of the original Russell-Cotes foundation collection and is part of a suite supposedly once owned by Queen Victoria.
20. Glazing and conservation treatment of 'Dorset Landscape' by Leslie Moffat Ward (1930). The artist had decided not to varnish the canvas which meant that the work was susceptible to paint losses with changes in temperature and humidity. The glazing will encapsulate the canvas and protect the painting which is hugely popular with our visitors. Ward was one of the finest artists working in Dorset during the 20th century.
21. Glazing and conservation treatment of 'A Tempting Bait' by Arthur John Elsley (1906). This painting had suffered a large scratch across its surface and the varnish layer had yellowed to the point where some of the colours were obscured. The painting was cleaned and the glazing will add a layer of protection. Elsley's iconic pictures of children and animals together were wildly popular in Edwardian times and his works appeared on many advertisements and were widely available as prints.
22. See separate Acquisitions Loans and Disposals report.

Programming

Bournemouth Arts Club exhibition

23. The much delayed exhibition was finally able to open the public from 1st October 2021- 6th March 2022 . Celebrating over 100 years of Bournemouth Arts Club the exhibition showcased some of our finest 20th century works as well as loans from Southampton City Art Gallery and Swindon Museum and private loans. Visited by over 15,500 visitors, the local subject matter by local artists really resonated with visitors, as reflected in the positive feedback.
 - *'I knew it would be good by what I saw on your website, but truly surpassed. Fantastic collection & mix of media & ageless. Would definitely come to see another exhibition you put on here.'*
 - *'Very interesting - nice to see an exhibition concentrating on specific times and places and put in social & artistic context (local interest too). Well done!'*
 - *'One of the best exhibitions I've seen here - excellent!'*
24. Covid restrictions during the run of the exhibition did hamper the public programming ambitions for the exhibition, but we were still able to run a restricted private view attended by past and present Bournemouth Art Club members, gallery tours and a zoom talk by the exhibition's curator Dr Gill Clarke, as well as

two artist workshops lead by members of Bournemouth Arts Club (for 18 people). In addition we published a mini-catalogue of the highlights of the Russell-Cotes 20th Century collection to accompany the exhibition. A successful evening symposium in partnership with Arts University Bournemouth, was held to discuss the continuing arts movement in Bournemouth and how to create a vibrant art scene in the town for the next century.

'Road to the Museum' Exhibition

25. As part of our centenary celebrations, we worked alongside one of our long-standing volunteers, Paul Whitaker (who has published an autobiography of Meron Russell-Cotes) to produce our latest exhibition in the Print Room. Road to the Museum follows in the footsteps of our founder's by retracing the key events that led to the creation of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum. Local artist, Ella Shephard, was also commissioned to produce a series of illustrations to accompany the exhibition.

'The Lost Words' Exhibition

26. The current temporary exhibition, The Lost Words, is open from 26th March until 18th September and features over 50 original watercolour illustrations and 20 acrostic poems from the bestselling book by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris. The book was created in response to the removal of the names of animals and plants from children's dictionary, and has become a cultural phenomenon. Over a quarter of a million copies have been sold and has been adapted into a film, folk songs, dance and even puppet theatre. We have been able to create a Gallery shop in the Café Gallery and have programmed a number of nature-themed activities throughout the exhibition's run. Jackie Morris will also be visiting the museum in June.

Russell-Cotes Centenary 1922 - 2022

27. The programme of Centenary activities kicked off as the Museum reopened on 25 January. A new Centenary logo is being used to badge up activities. A year-long facebook project to post on 100 objects is being organised by the Curator and volunteers.
28. On 10 March the anniversary of our opening, the Mayor of Bournemouth, Cllr David Kelsey visited the museum for a tour with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Management Committee and afternoon tea. In the evening we held a party for staff and volunteers past and present. About 50 people attended the evening and toasted Annie and Merton's contribution to the cultural life of Bournemouth.
29. 10 March was also the first of the Museum's Sixpence Days commemorating the opening of the museum when on Thursdays visitors would pay 6d to visit (other days being free). This attracted 434 visitors and many made significant donations. Many visitors had come specifically because it was free, however others were regulars who just wanted to be at the museum on this special day. Volunteers provided musical performances, talks and tours during the day. Further Sixpence days will be held on a quarterly basis.

Education, Engagement and Digital

30. Online activity continued with 6 talks on a variety of topics from Merton Russell-Cotes to the gallery rehang. In total 411 tickets were sold.

31. The Museum reintroduced some on site events. The Halloween interactive attracted 115 people and the Christmas Weekend 279. A 'Lates' Programme of a monthly evening opening with additional programming was started in February with House of Hearts, organised by 2nd year BA Events students at AUB attracting an additional 250 people to see performances and activities. Back to the Roaring 20s in March attracted 85 people, many of whom dressed up and danced to 'FB Pocket Orchestra'. These 'Lates' will continue on a monthly basis to attract younger and working visitors. Halloween Crafts sessions were held for 46 children
32. Two tactile tours were delivered for people with visual impairments.
33. As well as on-site conservation of the Solomon Hart by Brick House Conservation, a 'Clock Day' was held in partnership with West Dean College, Clock Conservation Department. These 'conservation in action' events were very popular with visitors.
34. The majority of school group bookings were cancelled due to Covid but 3 groups managed to go ahead with 88 pupils. Regular art sessions for Home Educated children continued.
35. The regular AUB installation project resumed this year. In December 2021, 18 2nd year fine art students held their exhibition in the house called 'Bifolds'.

Audiences

36. The Learning and Engagement Officer and Visitor Services Team Leader completed the Equity and Inclusion course offered by Museums Development. They have drafted an Equity and Inclusion Plan for the Museum to sit alongside the Audience Development Plan for the Museum.

Facilities and Income Generation

Café

37. The café has coped well, with a small café team, very tight budgets and recruitment issues. During this period the café welcomed 13,500 visitors and achieved an income of £60,227 making a c.£4,000 net contribution to the Russell-Cotes.
38. There is a growing and loyal repeat customer base and the addition of the café terrace provides further opportunities.
39. The café has worked well with the increase in events; the museum 'lates' have brought in extra availability and income for the afternoon teas, along with bringing a new audience to the café. The menu and current offer can be delivered successfully and consistently
40. Afternoon Teas have been a growing business area with 184 bookings over this period generating £7,025. A particular success has been the seasonally adapted Christmas Afternoon Tea which has made the normally quiet month of December exceptionally busy (78 bookings generating £3,137).

Shop

41. Comparison Annual Income

Year	Income (net)	Profit	Spend per head	
2019-2020	£124,620	£62,758	£2.71	Closed at end of March
2020-2021	£33,032	£17,046	£3.41	Closed March – July, November, Jan - March
2021 - 2022	£94,831	£50,536	£2.67	All categories are down but only marginally. The main impact is lost footfall and supplier issues that also contributed to the previous year's figures.

Supply and other issues

42. Supply issues have stabilised somewhat but there is now the new normal to contend with. Bespoke stock will continue to sell, but the generic stock is affected more by changes to the visitor demographic. Some of these questions on visitor changes are still unanswered. Overseas visitors are not back in the same way and local or UK visitors have different value price point perceptions. The encouraging Lost Words sales figures have benefited from the higher footfall of local and UK visitors rather than overseas.
43. The new normal includes new suppliers wanting to be paid in advance which doesn't suit Council ordering systems so it will take time for new suppliers to bed in.
44. The concern remains about prices continuing to rise and ensuring that our price point is reflective of costs but within visitor price point perception.
45. The Museum has commissioned an external shop consultant to advise on refreshing the shop stock to generate greater income. In the next few months an action plan will be devised to introduce the new lines and carry forward the recommendations
46. The Museum has developed a pop-up shop using an external consultant in the café gallery to fully exploit the opportunities for merchandising and sales of prints, books and cards offered by The Lost Words exhibition. In the first few weeks of the exhibition, sales are doing very well and will be closely monitored to ensure that stock is replenished and trends identified.
47. We are monitoring the impact of the terrace opening on the shop as during the summer months the terrace offer demonstrably changes visitor behaviour with less footfall through the shop overall and in particular visitors no longer leaving via the shop. It will be interesting to see if the pop up shop reverses this as it

catches visitors who exit directly onto the terrace and are thus not tempted by the shop on their way out.

Venue Hire and Weddings

48. One wedding was held in this period, for which the museum was closed for one day.

Staffing

49. A new Finance and Administration Officer was recruited in February 2022, however the museum has not been able to fill the post of Marketing Officer despite two recruitment rounds. The role is currently being filled on a temporary basis.
50. The Museum is currently recruiting for an 18-month Collections and Engagement Officer post to support the additional work for MEND, Centenary and NPO application.
51. A number of new staff have been recruited for casual positions in the café and front of house.
52. Training sessions have been run for staff and volunteers on such diverse topics as ladder and working at heights, storytelling, object handling and salvage.

Funding

MEND

53. The Russell-Cotes was successful in its application to the ACE MEND Fund for building maintenance support of £518,000. See separate paper.

National Portfolio Organisation

54. The Russell-Cotes is progressing an application for core funding from the Arts Council through the National Portfolio Organisation programme.

Background papers

None

Appendices

There are no appendices to this report.