

# RUSSELL COTES ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Report subject	<b>Russell-Cotes Art Gallery &amp; Museum Update Report</b>
Meeting date	3 June 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The Russell-Cotes has had a very strong 6 months in terms of visitor numbers (up 9%) and income from admissions and secondary spend (up 10%), despite 4 weeks of closure for MEND building works in January. This is due to popular exhibitions, a good Christmas offer, successful marketing and additional press coverage as well as poor spring weather. This represents the highest annual visitor figures (53,231) since charging was introduced and contrasts with national statistics which continue to show that most museums have still not recovered fully from Covid.</p> <p>The resilience of the building to weather damage, vandalism and theft is compromised by the poor state of repair. Failure to complete works fully or in a timely manner has reduced the capacity to manage this fragile building and puts it at ongoing risk. A new condition Survey outlines £3million of work required in the next 5 years, including £1.3million in the next 18 months. An application for this work has been made to ACE MEND Round 4.</p> <p>The Museum has had some success with funding from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Bournemouth Civic Society for garden investment, Arts Council England/V&amp;A Purchase Grant and Art Fund for the purchase of collections items, and Art Fund 'Going Places' for a major museum exhibition partnership for 2025 -2030.</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <p><b>The Management Committee accepts the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum Update report for the period 1 October – 31 March 2024</b></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 Andy Martin, Portfolio Holder for Customer, Communities and Culture

Corporate Director	Chief Operations Officer
Report Authors	Sarah Newman, Museum Manager
Wards	Not applicable
Classification	For Update

## Visitor Figures

- Extremely strong visitor figures have continued throughout the financial year, and despite being closed for 4 weeks in January 2024, visitor numbers reached 53,231 which is probably a record high since charging has been introduced all year. This is an annual increase of 12% on 2022/23 and compares favourably to a decrease of 11% in visitor numbers reported by ALVA and 27% by national museums. There was an extremely strong performance in December for the Christmas offer and in February and March, perhaps reflecting the poor spring weather.

Year	2021			2022			2023		
Month	museum	café	total	museum	café	total	museum	café	total
April	0	382	382	3652	608	4260	4108	644	4752
May	1185	388	1573	3261	565	3826	3056	514	3570
June	2724	195	2919	3601	757	4358	3422	820	4242
July	3441	257	3698	3732	598	4330	5013	512	5525
Aug	4141	575	4716	4575	538	5113	5615	398	6013
Sep	3662	685	4347	4004	573	4577	5479	575	6054
Oct	4083	612	4695	3659	417	4076	4043	573	4616
Nov	2573	511	3084	3011	506	3517	2813	457	3270
Dec	2392	353	2745	2957	317	3274	4181	433	4614
Jan	847	224	1071	1665	289	1954	348	53	401
Feb	3304	432	3736	3316	528	3844	4017	547	4564
Mar	3558	497	4055	3942	493	4435	5056	554	5610
<b>Total</b>	<b>31910</b>	<b>5111</b>	<b>37021</b>	<b>41375</b>	<b>6189</b>	<b>47564</b>	<b>47151</b>	<b>6080</b>	<b>53231</b>
summer	15153	2482	17635	22825	3639	26464	26693	3463	30156
winter	16757	2629	19386	18550	2550	21100	20458	2617	23075

## Financial Performance

- Overall there was an increase of £50,000 in income from visitor admissions and secondary spend (increase of 10%) compared to 2022/23.
- Admissions income, including Gift Aid did particularly well and Friends membership continued to increase, driven partly by the Lates programming, which is now subject to change.

4. On 1 April, the admission charge was increased to £9.50 Gift Aided, with all other ticket prices, Friends, Annual tickets etc increased proportionally. There is no evidence at the Front desk that this has had any impact on visitors on arrival. We do not yet know if it has had any impact on numbers generally or on perception of value for money.

## **Building**

5. After concerns were raised at the last meeting about the condition of the building some maintenance work has been carried out:
  - Lighting in the garden has been repaired.
  - Extra electric sockets added in the café to allow the safe deployment of temporary heaters.
  - Clifftop lighting has been resolved.
  - Balcony lights have been replaced using a more sustainable method involving the precision building of a scaffold tower in the main hall. The method was recorded for future use.
  - The heavy doubled leafed exit doors in Gallery 3 which failed and collapsed outwards have now been replaced, although redecoration is not complete and they still need some work as they allow water ingress in heavy rain.
6. However, the building continues to be very vulnerable to bad weather, with a number of outstanding repairs which increase its impact:
  - The delays to the conservatory repair through the winter have been very challenging, with temporary repairs blown out in bad weather.
  - Deterioration of walls and ceilings continue throughout the lower floors and staff room requiring electrical checks.
  - A light switch on the Learning Gallery was reported smoking due to water ingress in heavy rain from the Conservatory above. Now replaced with automatic lights.
  - The rotten Front Gate was kicked in by vandals in November. The repair is on order but not started.
  - In December there was a break in via basement offices. Staff and police were called and nothing was taken. As a consequence, further locks have been fitted. A DNA match was made and we understand police are pursuing a prosecution.
  - In January the mains water pipe burst in café kitchen causing flooding.
  - Lead theft from the roof of the Galleries, as Metals Alert CCTV was not functioning because invoices were not paid. We are still trying to reinstate. The thief was arrested thanks to prompt response from our neighbours and police. Repairs are completed.

7. Motion sensitive LED lights have replaced strip lights in the downstairs staff corridor and stairs to reduce energy use. Lamps have also been replaced in the café and shop area, so they are now properly lit.
8. We have recently had a number of complaints and comments from visitors and volunteers about the lack of security for cycle parking which is proving a deterrent to their visiting, particularly now that many people use more costly e-bikes. This follows many years of issues for cycling staff, many of whom have had bicycles stolen from the cliff path stands. Consequently, we have started consultations with Transport colleagues and planners about the provision of additional, more secure parking, that we can make, given the limitations of our site and budget.
9. See separate report on the progress of the MEND project on conservatory repairs, air handling, security and drainage. Also see below on the new Condition Survey and fundraising efforts.

### **Collections and Conservation Care**

10. Whilst the museum was closed for 4 weeks in January for the MEND project, staff polished all downstairs floors and moved the paintings in Gallery II to reduce light exposure for more vulnerable works (as recommended by the Risk Assessment).
11. The sculpture of Queen Victoria was successfully conserved and her nose reconstructed. Back on display, she featured in the Telegraph and Times.
12. The fountain in the Main Hall continues to deteriorate and the projected cost is £20,000.
13. Under the new draft Audit Policy the first formal audit took place, witnessed by RCAGM Manager Sarah Newman and RCAGM Volunteer Amanda Williams. The audit was carried out examining seven storage locations, totalling 127 objects, within the RCAGM Study Centre. Although the locations were randomly selected, effort was made to include sensitive material. All the items concerned were accounted for but there were some deficiencies with the data recorded in the collections management database (Modes) - particularly around measurements and images, so this was rectified. In addition, the financial auditors Hixons requested an audit of 30 objects from the collection across both sites. All items were accounted for.
14. See separate report on Acquisitions, Loans and Disposals (including Lucy Kemp-Welch purchases) and on the new Audit Policy.

### **Interpretation and Display**

15. The temporary Collections and Engagement Officer completed the project to update all the Room Books which provide interpretation for the house to include highlights, paintings, sculptures, fixtures and fittings, ceramics and world cultures of note, for the first time. A set will be produced professionally and form the permanent interpretation with temporary information sheets to cover loans and moves of objects. These Room Books are well used by our visitors.
16. The Museum has stopped its subscription to Smartify to provide digital interpretation as it was deemed not good value for the cost, functionality and uptake. The intention is to use the Bloomberg Philanthropies App, to provide digital information via visitors' own phones. However, although this is free, there is not the staff capacity to upload the data currently. Therefore it is on pause for the time being. In the meantime, the interpretation is being uploaded to the Collections pages on the website.

## **Programming**

### **Siam through the lens of John Thomson (1837 – 1921) 21 Oct 2023 – 14 April 2024**

17. The opening of the photographic exhibition of Siam by His Excellency Thani Thongphakdi, the Thai Ambassador, was well-attended by Councillors, museum supporters and members of the Thai community. Associated programming included a number of practical workshops on wet collodian photography, talks by Narisa Chakrabongse (a member of the Thai Royal family) and curator Betty Yao on site and talks on John Thomson and Julia Margaret Cameron via zoom.
18. Comments have been very positive eg:
  - ‘The temporary exhibition of photos of Siam by late photographer John Thomson was really interesting.’ (Tripadvisor)
  - ‘Wonderful gallery. Museum. Always enjoy my visits and the Siam photographic exhibition today was outstanding. .. Magical visit.’ (Visitor Survey)
  - ‘Lovely gem of a museum, what an asset for the town. Rediscovered it last year after quite a few years and now a regular visitor. Loved the Lucy Kemp-Welch exhibition and the current Siam exhibition is stunning. All staff and volunteers have been extremely friendly, knowledgeable and welcoming, Well done everyone involved, I shall be back soon.’ (Visitor Survey)

### **A Painter in Paris: Albert de Belleruche (1864 -1944) 3 May – 22 September 2024**

19. This first major retrospective of artworks by Albert de Belleruche has been created in partnership with art dealers, Liss Llewellyn. Born in Wales, but of French descent, Belleruche studied and lived in France. He was at the centre of La Belle-Époque in Paris, forming close friendships with Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Renoir and sharing a studio with John Singer Sargent. This rich exhibition is filled with the light and colours of Impressionism, and features over 60 of his oils, drawings, and lithographs, many of which have never been on public display.

## **Print Room**

20. The exhibition of ‘African Sculpture’ closed in January 2024 after a year. It was hoped to use the Print Room for further exhibitions with an element of community collaboration. However, this was contingent on funding success which would have enabled the retention of the Collections and Engagement Officer. Unfortunately applications were not successful, so a small, but lovely display of some of the most popular prints and watercolours of mid-century Bournemouth, ‘Beautiful Bournemouth’ has been installed until a sustainable programme can be established.

### **Café Gallery – Paul Kidby, 30 Years of Drawing Discworld: Prototypes, Prints & Paraphernalia**

21. An exhibition of works by Paul Kidby, who is best known for being the artist and illustrator for Terry Pratchett’s Discworld series since 1993 was installed in May. This mini-exhibition and shop features prints and artworks based on Discworld.

## **Events**

22. The monthly Lates evenings continued successfully, particularly Gothic and Christmas themed nights. However, their popularity makes them difficult to ticket, manage safely in the small spaces and limited staff means there is not the capacity to programme them so regularly. Therefore, the format has been modified.

23. Free entry to the Lates evenings has been a significant driver for the Friends and Annual Tickets, so their restructure has been phased in order to maintain members' support. In 2024, there will be fewer the Lates and they will be ticketed (£15) to give a safe limit on numbers, but still free for members. From 2025, a charge will be introduced for all. The first event (Women Artists) in April under this new system was sold out well in advance. The format will be adapted as needed to ensure the safety of the collection and compliance with tax laws on the benefits allowed to members paying Gift Aid.
24. The Christmas offer is still developing and broader marketing was increased to attract local visitors over the December period into the general Victorian Christmas offer without so much focus on programmed activities such as Father Christmas, events etc. There was a small increase of 300 visitors in the general figures for December, with an increase in 700 for the events programme (compared to 2022).

## **Education, Engagement and Digital**

### **School visits**

25. There were 17 school visits, with a total of 427 pupils (3 of which (for 58 pupils) were self led). 9 sessions were given for 53 home-educated children.
26. The Bournemouth University partnership event has resulted in some joint activities on archaeology collections, support for events and activities and some joint funding applications. A project with BU Digital Media, saw 90 students developing projection mapping techniques inspired by the collection. A project with BU History students will develop a tour for the museum on world travel.
27. 26 AUB Fine Art students began their fine art installation project in January, for display in May. A further project worked with 15 historical costume students. There were further general visits from different courses at AUB, BU and Bournemouth and Poole College
28. Family craft activities were held in October and February half-terms and with Father Christmas in December.

### **Audiences**

29. A new membership has been recruited to the Focus Groups on EDI, Visitor Experience and Access. These continue to be useful in driving incremental improvements and providing evidence of need.
30. The application to Art Fund 'Going Places' was successful. This will enable the development of a museum network with The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, County Durham and the Watts Gallery, Guilford, Surrey. Together the museums will formulate two community-curated touring exhibitions for the three venues for 2025 – 2030 which should be externally funded via The Art Fund and NLHF. The objective will be to work with our target audience – young people (18- 25) to develop an ambitious exhibition potentially involving a major contemporary commission.

### **Marketing**

31. The Museum has featured in national press coverage, including a photograph of the curator, Duncan Walker, and the recently conserved sculpture of Queen Victoria in 'The Daily Telegraph' and 'The Times'. Additionally, the Russell-Cotes was highlighted in the Best of British feature on Bournemouth in 'The Sun', both online and in print. Tickets to the Russell-Cotes were also offered as part of a prize in a 'Good Housekeeping' magazine competition which attracted 43,218 entries from

across the UK. The monthly column in 'Dorset Magazine' has been running for over a year.

32. The social media channels continue to be very successful maintaining an impressive level of followers and engagement. In March 2024, TV's choirmaster, Gareth Malone, shared a post on 'Beautiful Bournemouth' to his 27,700 followers. Our website again attracted over 60,000 users, and our focus towards digital advertising continues.
33. At the 2022/3 Dorset Tourism Awards, the Russell-Cotes was awarded the Silver Award for Small Visitor Attraction of the Year, and at the 2024 Bournemouth Business Awards, it won the Tourism Business Award. As per TripAdvisor user reviews, the Russell-Cotes continues to be the second most popular attraction in Bournemouth, following Bournemouth Beach.

### **Café**

34. The Café had a strong winter season, increasing turnover by 7.3% on the previous year and profit of £8,000. Generally the Café offer grew stronger thanks to having a more consistent staff team, and proactive response to visitor feedback, resulting in an increased turnover. November was unusual as it saw a reduction in income on the previous year, which is probably connected to a lower visitor count in 2023 than 2022.
35. Being closed for almost all of January also impacted turnover. A strong Christmas offer saw a significant increase in income during December, which is something to continue to grow. Increased footfall at events also had an impact, particularly around Halloween and Christmas.

### **Shop**

36. There was a 7.41% increase on net sales from 22/23 to 23/24 over this period and some recovery from the poor performance in the previous 6 months.

### **Siam Exhibition**

37. 'Siam' was not a particularly strong exhibition, for sales though it did better than the previous year's 'Narrative Art'. The 'Siam' exhibition catalogue was well priced and sold 50 copies. The theme of Victorian travel and photography was not a strong seller. However, the Thai elephant decorations etc were popular around Christmas. An effort was made to source traditional Thai goods with wall hangings making good profits. Wall hangings and cloth prints were displayed on the café gallery wall supported by marketing vinyls which worked well.

### **Christmas sales**

38. This is the first year that has invested in significant Christmas merchandise and it generated £2,508 of sales. The experience will support the development of a detailed merchandise plan for 2024 to maximise profits. Decorations, fun books, Christmas card packs, jewellery, stocking fillers and the use of Girl in a Red Hat for Christmas context will be repeated. Other more generic Christmas items e.g. Christmas crackers will be avoided.

### **Study Centre**

39. The proposed disposal of the Study Centre and removal of the collection to an identified alternative site has been paused as negotiations about externalisation

have continued. Under the financial agreement with BCP Council, the Study Centre will be transferred to the new Corporate Trustee and it will take responsibility to develop a sustainable solution in due course.

### **Staffing, Volunteering and Training**

40. The contract of the temporary Collections Officer came to an end in March. The Marketing Officer returned from maternity leave in January. A Senior Museum Assistant has moved into the café, and a replacement has been recruited particularly to pick up evening hours and to cover for a colleague who is undertaking a 2 year part-time Curator (Degree Apprenticeship) MA at Teesside University.
41. Volunteer numbers continue to grow. There are now 140 volunteers, so recruitment is paused for all but a few crucial roles – gardening and conservation cleaning. The museum is looking at seeking some funding locally to provide capacity to support volunteers better and to develop programmes for their own and visitor wellbeing and creativity.
42. The 'Going Places' project is providing a number of useful training and networking opportunities on line and in person for staff, particularly around environmental impact, community engagement and audience development.

### **Funding**

43. See separate report on ACE MEND Fund Round 1 (£518,000) and NLHF Securing the Future Sustainability of the Russell-Cotes (£98,500).
44. The Museum received £6,000 from Neighbourhood CIL for improvements to the garden and sculptures on the railings. This work is in progress. £36,303 was received from the Bournemouth Civic Society for the recreation of a children's pavilion in the garden for which design work has been commissioned. £84,317 has been received from a legacy from Julia Stallard to be restricted to the repair and maintenance of the building.
45. Grants have been received from Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant (£8,725) and Art Fund (£5,725) for the purchase of preparatory sketches by Lucy Kemp Welch for 'Gypsy Horse Drivers'.
46. An application has been made to Bloomberg Philanthropies for digital improvements. Applications to ACE and Esmée Fairbairn for curatorial and audience development projects were unsuccessful.
47. Officers from the National Heritage Lottery Fund visited the museum briefly in January 2024 and discussions have started on forming an application for much-needed capital support post-independence.

### **ACE MEND Round 4 Application**

48. The final round of MEND funding has been announced to support museums with a backlog of maintenance. The museum commissioned a new Building Condition Survey from Philip Hughes Associates which identified £3million of work to be done on the Museum over the next 5 years, of which £1.3million is required in the next 18 months.
49. An expression of interest has therefore been made to MEND Round 4 for £1,413,904, with a provisional contribution of £250,000 from CIL and the confirmed allocation of £109,317 from restricted legacies for a total project cost of £1,773,221.



50. If successful this would enable the museum to address the failing decorations on the external sea-facing façade; deal with security issues on the roof and around the perimeter, improve fire protection, replace end of life services (eg CCTV, intruder alarms), conserve original murals and restore independent disabled access. The bid has focussed on work to prevent catastrophic failures which have recently forced the museum's total or partial closure and prevent irretrievable loss of collections and original features.
51. The museum will hear at the end of May if it is invited to submit a full application by the end of August for work to begin in April 2025.

#### **Summary of financial implications**

52. n/a

#### **Summary of legal implications**

53. n/a

#### **Summary of human resources implications**

54. n/a

#### **Summary of sustainability impact**

55. n/a

#### **Summary of public health implications**

56. n/a

#### **Summary of equality implications**

57. n/a

#### **Summary of risk assessment**

58. n/a

#### **Background papers**

None

#### **Appendices**

There are no appendices to this report.