

RUSSELL COTES ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

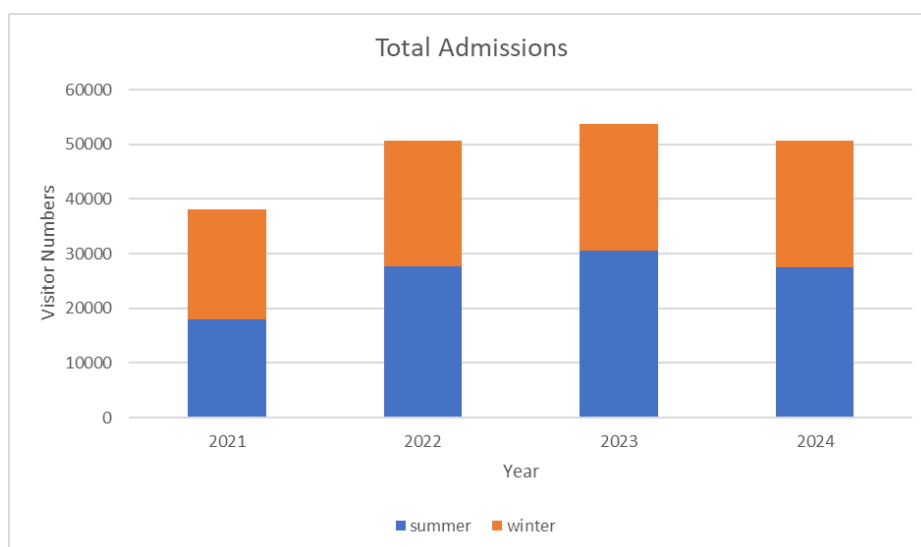


Report subject	Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum Update Report (1 October 2024 – 31 March 2025)
Meeting date	2 June 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>This winter 6-month period has seen the highest visitor numbers (23,283) since an admission charge was introduced in 2017, reflecting the popularity of the 'Artists in Purbeck' exhibition. It has generated increased income in admissions, Gift Aid, cafe and shop.</p> <p>The Museum submitted its latest Accreditation return to the Arts Council England. This sets standards for governance, collections care and user experience and is a requirement for important museum activity such as inter-museum loans and grants. The result will be heard in August.</p> <p>The Russell-Cotes has had considerable success with grant applications including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,500,817 for building repairs from ACE MEND Round 4 subject to BCP Council approval; • £30,000 from Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art for a research curator into the tempera revival at the Russell-Cotes; • £8,000 acquisition grant for prints from the Hallett Prize; • as a partner museum in the £5million 5 year 'Going Places' project funded by Art Fund, National Heritage Lottery Fund and Julia Rausing Trust.
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>The Management Committee accepts the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum Update report for the period 1 October 2024 – 31 March 2025</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):	Cllr Andy Martin, Portfolio Holder for Customer, Communities and Culture
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton, Chief Operations Officer
Report Authors	Sarah Newman, Museum Manager
Wards	Not applicable
Classification	For Update

Visitor Figures

1. This 6 month period has been the best equivalent period on record since charging began by a small margin, with 23,283 visitors between 1 October 2024 and 31 March 2025, which probably reflects the popularity of the 'Art in Purbeck' Exhibition which drew in a strong local audience by including a wide range of artists and styles with a local focus. The Museum was closed for 2 weeks in January for conservation cleaning.

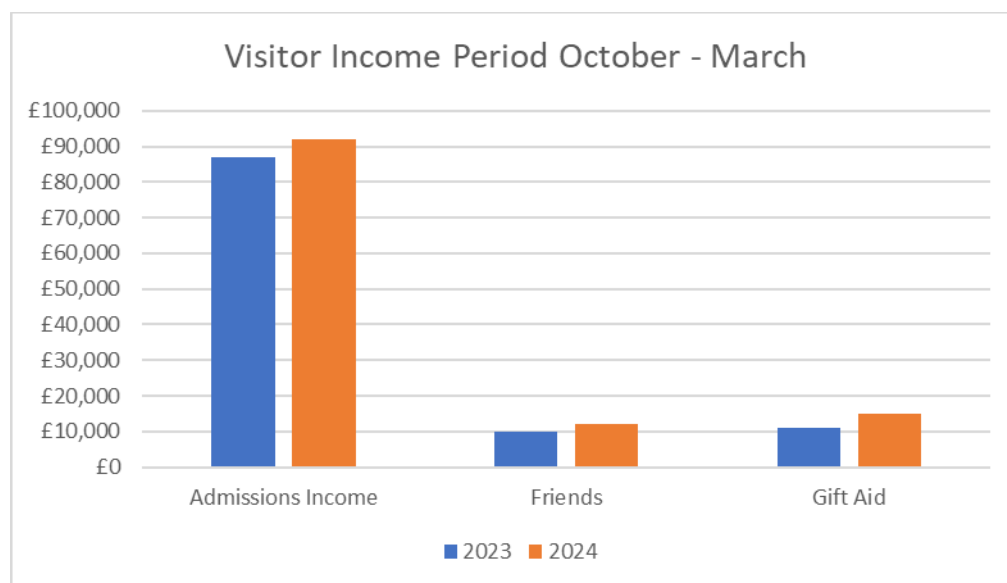


2. The final visitor figures for the 2024 – 2025 year are 50,738 (compared to 53,692 in the previous year), as the museum was not able to make up completely for the poor performance during last summer.

Financial Performance

3. Good visitor numbers and increased charges were reflected in increased income from admission, Gift Aid and Friends and Annual passes. The shop did exceptionally well and the café's performance increased too.
4. From January 2025, the Annual Ticket scheme was closed after a careful review. Previously the Museum had offered an Annual Ticket for £25 allowing free access for a year and a Friends Scheme for £36 with the additional benefit of an online

newsletter, discounts and event invitations. The Museum found that it was difficult to persuade Annual Ticket Holders to upgrade to a Friends membership because its additional benefits were so limited. Benchmarking revealed that no other museums were still offering two tier membership schemes in this way, so the scheme was closed. There have been surprisingly few formal complaints because the Friends scheme still represents very good value and income has not reduced so far.



Accreditation

5. The Museum was invited to make its accreditation return to Arts Council England by 1 May 2025, but submitted the application well ahead of the deadline at the end of January 2025. It is currently being reviewed by the Accreditation team at Arts Council England who may request further information. The outcome will be notified in August.
6. Accreditation sets standards for governance, collection care and user experience and is a requirement for much vital museum activity, such as inter-museum loans, and grant applications.

Building

7. There were only 23 building faults reported in the period (compared to 42 in the preceding half-year). Whilst some relate to water ingress complications, eg the flood in the vestibule in January, water ingress appears less of a problem probably reflecting a much drier winter than last year.
8. There was a break-in on 15th January 2025, when a casual intruder used scaffolding to gain access to the offices only, but nothing was taken from the scene. Police have notified the Museum that there is likely to be a prosecution because DNA evidence was found on site.
9. Ongoing building faults from previous reports are:
 - Bottom gate is collapsing and currently unusable but has now been raised for repair.

- mould in café store, but a survey has been undertaken detailing a method of managing the problem in situ.
 - damaged door frame at Study Centre has now been repaired.
10. There has been some success with front of house team undertaking minor repairs such as door hinges in the modern wing.
 11. Removing the bin from the garden, together with a baiting programme seems to have reduced the rat problem in the garden.
 12. The completion of the MEND Round 1 project is covered under a separate report.
 13. The proposals to recreate the children's pavilion in the garden, funded by the Bournemouth Civic Society, were submitted for pre-planning advice and although the officers were very supportive they conducted some detailed research and recommended changes to the design to make it more authentic. These are therefore being revised by Philip Hughes Associates so that updated quotes can be procured.

Collections and Conservation Care

14. The museum was closed for 2 weeks in January for its annual conservation cleaning work. All wooden floors in the historic house were polished and behind the scenes activities carried out.
15. The French 'Mystery Clock', which developed a fault last year has now been successfully repaired and is operating correctly and will go back on display in June.
16. A conservation grade acid free storage/transport box was made for the feathered headdress given to the author John Buchan when Governor General of Canada. This not only allowed for safe transportation to the Buchan Museum in Peebles, where it is on loan, but will also mean that this fragile object has a much better storage solution when it returns.
17. A custom-made plinth for the Burmese Buddha on display in the Yellow Room was made to lift it clear of the risk of being accidentally kicked by the public.
18. Funds generated from recent disposals are ringfenced, as per sector regulations, to be put back into collections care and development. Using this fund, 'Ave Maria Lane' by the Modernist artist Robert MacBryde (1913-1966) will be conserved and displayed in the 'Artist as Witness' exhibition. Interest in the artist is increasing and it is expected that this painting will be the subject of future loan requests.

Interpretation and Display

19. The redisplay of the Learning Gallery is underway by Lily Tutty as part of her Apprenticeship Degree and should be completed in June 2025.
20. The Room Books which provide information on each room and the paintings and objects displayed, have been comprehensively revised and professionally printed and represent a significant improvement on previous versions which dated back 25 years. They seem to be universally appreciated. Further information on all other objects on display (not included in the Books) is now also available to staff and volunteers so they can respond to enquiries from the public.

Programming

Artists in Purbeck: Spirit of Place (12 October 2024 – 16 March 2025)

21. This brand-new exhibition was curated by Dr. Gill Clarke MBE (co-author of 'Shorelines: Artists on the South Coast') and explored the profound impact that the Purbeck landscape had on artists, from the first half of the 20th century through to the present day. Showcasing a wide range of artistic styles and subjects, the exhibition featured some of the Russell-Cotes' finest 20th century works. It was also widely supported by over 20 private and public loans including key works from the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Courtauld Gallery, the British Council, the Government Art Collection and Pallant House Gallery.
22. The Russell-Cotes also worked closely with the Southwest Museum's Development Officer and regional museums in Purbeck including Corfe Castle Trust Museum, Langton Parish Museum and Swanage Museum. Using RCAGM's exhibition as a starting point, funding was secured for these museums to undertake conservation condition surveys and subsequent work, public programming activities and cross marketing opportunities. This ensured that the exhibition had a far-reaching benefit, with ongoing discussions to scope future plans, including a possible sequel and catalogue.
23. The exhibition was visited by 16,245 visitors. The local subject matter really resonated with local audiences, as reflected in the positive feedback. The Museum was delighted to see that during the exhibition's run, it had an 10% increase in visitors from the Purbeck region compared to the previous year.

Visitor comments included:

'It has inspired me to visit Swanage and Corfe Castle, and get over to the Purbecks more frequently

'Great range of contemporary as well as historic works'

'It was an absolutely enchanting exhibition, such a range of techniques and styles. Fabulous!'

'Very enjoyable and thorough. Thank you'.

24. An accompanying Purbeck related merchandise exhibition in the café gallery proved to be the most commercially successful venture to date (see below). However, unfortunately the team did not have the capacity to produce a catalogue for the exhibition, either with an external publisher or internally, and this was a missed opportunity as there was great demand.

Future Plans

May Morris: Art & Advocacy 5 April – 5 October 2025

25. Preparations have been underway for the development of an exhibition, on loan from The William Morris Society, to explore the wide-ranging talents and accomplishments of May Morris (1862-1938), the younger daughter of Arts & Craft designer, William Morris (1834-1896). The exhibition includes May's original designs for embroidery and wallpapers for Morris & Co., and showcases May's considerable achievements, including her tremendous efforts in establishing the Women's Guild of Arts. The exhibition shines a light on May's individual talent in both craft and design and her achievements in enabling female artists and crafts makers to fully engage in the artistic community, giving her the recognition she richly deserves.

26. It is anticipated that this exhibition will be more interactive, bring in a new audience who are focussed on textiles, embroidery and interior design and lends itself to many opportunities for selling William Morris merchandise.

Artist as Witness: The Impact of War (October 2025 – March 2026)

27. Dr Gill Clarke has been engaged to curate this exhibition on the impact of war, which focusses on the significant Russell-Cotes collection of War Art, commissioned by the War Art Advisory Committee and donated to the Museum in the 1946. It will also include private and public loans and a contemporary element, with a section of work by reportage artist George Butler from his work Ukraine.
28. The Museum has contracted to produce a catalogue for the exhibition with Sansoms & Company, which has been generously sponsored by Stuart Southall (a collector and lender to the exhibition).

Print Room

29. 'Picturesque Poole', a follow on from the previous exhibition of 'Beautiful Bournemouth' was displayed in the Print Room from 28 August 2024- 5 January 2025. Exploring recognisable Poole scenes through the years, the display featured works by notable Dorset artists and illustrators including Eustace Nash, Henry Lamb and Leslie Moffat Ward.
30. 'At the Heart of 'The Souls: The works of Violet Manners, Duchess of Rutland' is on display from January 2024 -July 2025. A display of the exquisite portraits drawn by Violet Manners (1856-1937) of her aristocratic social circle.

Future Plans

31. Self-Portrait Prize (22 July – 14 September) The Russell-Cotes is partnering with the Self Portrait Prize to host an exhibition of shortlisted works from the 2025 competition. Open to both emerging and established artists, the competition celebrates the power of self-representation and artistic identity, inviting participants to explore and redefine the genre of self-portraiture in contemporary art. Works will be shown in the Morning Room, Print Room and throughout the historic house.

Café Gallery

32. During the 'Artists in Purbeck' exhibition, Purbeck related prints and merchandise filled the café gallery with a large-scale vinyl of Corfe Castle and some larger works in the café area, inspired by the success of this approach for the Paul Kidby exhibition previously.

Future Plans

33. **Recovering by the Sea: Indian Soldiers in Bournemouth 1914 – 1915** The Museum is hosting a small exhibition recounting the experience of Indian soldiers convalescing at the Mount Dore Hospital (now the Civic Centre) which is being developed by the historian Nick Saunders.
34. **Waves of Change: Jewish Life in Bournemouth 1880 – 2020** (25 Nov 2025 – 15 March 2026) The Museum is hosting an exhibition on the Jewish community of Bournemouth which is part of a project funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund and researched by the Jewish Communities of Bournemouth to record their history for future generations.

Education

35. 11 primary school, 3 secondary school and 3 home -education sessions were held as well as two outreach sessions to local primary schools.
36. The AUB 2nd Year Fine Art course held their 2 week installation of artwork created in response to the Russell-Cotes collection in March. 13 university groups also visited with 278 students. Clock conservation students from West Dean College, near Chichester spent a day working on the Museum's clocks.
37. One A level student completed a one week work experience placement. A student from West Dean College also worked at the museum for 6 weeks, primarily working with the curator to improve cataloguing of Asian ceramics but also on the installation of the May Morris Exhibition.
38. Bournemouth & Poole College Art Department held an away day for their staff at the museum.
39. The Museum took stands at the Freshers Fairs for both universities and interacted with more than 500 students.

Engagement

40. Half term drop-in craft activities were held at October and February.
41. Christmas activities worked well this year, including Father Christmas, themed tours, evening events and a Victorian Christmas weekend. After last year's overwhelming numbers, numbers were limited to ensure a safe and pleasant experience and this had an inevitable impact on income. There is a clear demand, so the Museum continues to explore ideas to bring in audiences at Christmas in a cost-effective and sustainable way.
42. Two 'Sixpence Days' which give free entry were offered in November and March attracting 262 and 961 visitors respectively. The numbers vary considerably, but at the moment are still manageable. The loss of admissions income is partially offset by much higher spend in the café and the shop.

Events

43. The Museum has been running a very popular evening programme of monthly 'Lates', but it is very labour intensive so not sustainable for staff and volunteers without additional capacity. There has been a period of change to trial a new approach. Autumn saw the ticketed Hallowe'en Murder Mystery which was sold out as usual and a ticketed Christmas evening. The final two themed 'Lates' events were held: Victorian Gothic in October and Candlelit Christmas in December.
44. In contrast from January 2025, the Museum started offering only a few low-key, evening events connected to established seasonal themes, with limited or no programming to see if there is still interest in this more sustainable approach whilst maintaining Friends' income. It is early days but the Valentines evening went well with 91 tickets sold. Further events are planned in the summer which will involve only dance or music performances.
45. Monthly themed tours delivered by volunteers; Behind the Scenes tours by curatorial staff and exhibition tours have continued as well as general volunteer- led museum tours and spotlight talks.

Marketing

46. The Museum's social media continues to maintain an impressive level of followers and engagement, with almost 800,000 views on our Facebook page with over 10,000 interactions during the last 6 months. Posts about the exhibition, 'Artists in Purbeck: Spirit of Place', performed particularly well, as well as announcements of new exhibitions and funding successes. In an aim to welcome more visitors to the Sixpence Free Days, information was shared more widely and reached over 80k on facebook.
47. There has been good local press coverage, including Bournemouth Daily Echo, Sandbanks Life and Swanage News, as well as featuring in national coverage in the Daily Star and Sunday Mirror in pieces focusing on the south coast. The painting 'The Fruit Seller', which is on loan to the Bowes Museum in County Durham, was used to illustrate their exhibition review in The Guardian in February.
48. The Russell-Cotes continues to be the second most popular attraction on TripAdvisor behind Bournemouth Beach, and we are up to 2,163 reviews on Google, with an average rating of 4.7 out of 5. Google seems to be the preferred reviewing platform recently, more popular now than TripAdvisor.
49. The Russell-Cotes won Bronze for Visitor Attraction in the BCP Destination Management Awards; highly commended for Large Visitor Attraction in the Dorset Tourism Awards and three awards (Large Public Spaces - Gold (Overall winner) environmentally Friendly Spaces – Gold; and Horticultural Ambassador Award for our Volunteer Phil Broomfield) in the Bournemouth in Bloom Awards. The feedback from the Dorset Tourism Awards mystery shopper has highlighted the poor quality of our visitor facilities, compared to the main experience, and efforts are being made to address issues where possible.

Café

50. The Café has also achieved good income over this half-year, at £81,000 compared to £70,000 in 2023/24. October and February half-terms were particularly strong and Christmas income was up. However the reduction in events has impacted on bookings. Salary costs however, were higher than anticipated but the Café has made reductions to rotas to keep control of costs.

Shop

51. The shop figures show that for the period October to March, the Russell-Cotes shop performed very well, and the merchandise related to *The Artists on Purbeck* Exhibition was one of the strongest to date. It benefitted from strong images, which built on existing stock related to some of the most appealing paintings in the collection, giving confidence in choices and reducing the risk of leftover stock as it could be absorbed into existing lines or even sold back to lenders such as Swanage Museum.

52. Table showing comparison of shop sales for period 1 October – 31 March.

Period	Visitor Numbers	Net sales	Gross Profit	Spend per head	Average Transaction Value	Conversation rate (percentage of visitors who make a purchase)
Oct 23 – March 24	23,075	£39,012	£23,639	£1.96	£10.04	19%
Oct 24 – March 25	23,283	£53,237	£33,217	£2.69	£10.76	25%
Increase	208	£14,225	£9,578	£0.73	£0.72	7%

53. Top sellers reflect the Purbeck Exhibition influence, they were: postcards (44% of 6000 postcards sold in the period were Purbeck titles), exhibition calendar, museum guidebook, framed Purbeck Prints, 'Chalk Cliffs' and 'Spray' tea towels.
54. Greater emphasis was given to 'The Artists in Purbeck' than to Christmas merchandise but it is assumed many exhibition items were bought as Christmas gifts.
55. The shop spend for the year was higher than budgeted reflecting increased supplier prices, increased shop sales, and the higher than usual spend on stock for 'May Morris Art and Advocacy' Exhibition opening in April 2025 before the financial year end.
56. Overall, 2024-2025 has been a very successful year in the shop with management accounts showing highest ever income of £115,000 and net profit of £58,000.

Venue Hire

57. From October to March there were two small hires – a filmed piano performance and a promotional photoshoot for a singer. There was a larger booking for a wedding party which involved the partial closure of the museum for part of the day. As it was a quiet day it was a success, and worth considering again in the future because the venue hire and catering income was good. Altogether venue hire delivered £1785 net income with an additional £1575 for the catering operation during this period.

Staff, Volunteers and Training

58. Pete Harvey retired as Senior Museum Assistant after 31 years to a great send off. He has been replaced by Therron Welstead, who joins the team from Osborne House.
59. From October to the end of March, volunteers contributed around 2668 hours to the museum, across a range of roles. Recruitment was frozen for most volunteer roles,

to focus on priority areas: the garden and conservation cleaning. A full-day's training in conservation cleaning and object handling was provided on site for staff and volunteers by the conservator Morwenna Stephens to support the development of the conservation cleaning team.

60. The Museum Manager attended the Museums Association Conference in Leeds.

Fundraising and Partnerships

61. An application to Weston Loan with Art Fund for support for the 'Artist as Witness' exhibition was unsuccessful as was the application for the National Gallery Masterpiece Tour.
62. The Russell-Cotes was successful in its application to Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art for £30,000 to fund a research curator for a proposed exhibition on the Tempera Revival for 2027. After a recruitment exercise which attracted 12 applicants, Dr Ruth Brimacombe was appointed and has started work on the project.
63. The Russell-Cotes won the Hallett Acquisition Award which enabled the Manager to buy prints to the value of £8,000 at the London Original Print Fair at Somerset House in March. The prints were selected to fill gaps in the collection and with the intention of display in the 'Artist as Witness' exhibition and/or in a future exhibition programme and are itemised in the Acquisitions report.
64. The Russell-Cotes is part of the successful Going Places project which has attracted £5.36million funding from Art Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Julia Rausing Trust. This will fund 20 museums, in 6 networks to undertake two touring shows each between 2026 and 2030. The Russell-Cotes is in the 'Founding the Future' network with The Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle and The Watts Gallery near Guildford as all were founded by philanthropic couples. The network will focus on working with young people to co-curate the shows. The project will bring very significant funding for a staff member, conservation and exhibition costs.
65. Stuart Southall has made a significant donation to enable the production of a catalogue for the 'Artist as Witness' exhibition.
66. Phil Gibby, Area Director Arts Council South West visited the museum in January to meet the Chair and provide an update about ACE priorities at the time.

MEND 4

67. The Russell-Cotes was awarded £1,500,817 by Arts Council England MEND Round 4 for urgent maintenance and repair work which will form part of a £1,879,857 project with additional support from Community Infrastructure Levy and legacies. It would:
- Redecorate and overhaul sea-facing facades, roofs, joinery and guttering
 - Install new CCTV
 - Provide additional security measures
 - Construct new drainage
 - Enable independent disabled access
 - Install fire safety and protection measures
 - Restore water damaged murals

68. BCP Council is due to approve the acceptance of the grant at its meeting on 3 June 2025.
69. If approved, the lead designer will be appointed immediately and building work should commence in January 2026. The Museum should remain open throughout most of the work which should be complete by the end of 2026.

Options Appraisal

70. n/a

Summary of financial implications

71. n/a

Summary of legal implications

72. n/a

Summary of human resources implications

73. n/a

Summary of sustainability impact

74. n/a

Summary of public health implications

75. n/a

Summary of equality implications

76. n/a

Summary of risk assessment

77. n/a

Background papers

none

Appendices

There are no appendices to this report.