



Tackling the 'digital divide' in Museums



ARCHAEOLOGY
DATA SERVICE

Boundary Objects Project Workshop

Virtual, 18 March, 2022

UNIVERSITY *of York*

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Towards a National Collection: Opening UK Heritage to the World COVID-19 Urgency Call

AHRC/Towards a National Collection welcome applications for research on digital capacity and digital engagement with cultural assets during the COVID-19 lockdown, during the period of emergence from lockdown, and on lessons to be learned from these for future patterns of cultural engagement.



 TOWARDS
A NATIONAL
COLLECTION

 Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

COVID-19 URGENCY PROJECTS

Digital footprints and search pathways:
*working with National Collections in Scotland during Covid-19
lockdown to design future online provision*

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE & UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
NATIONAL MUSEUMS SCOTLAND & NATIONAL GALLERIES OF SCOTLAND

Making it FAIR:
*understanding the lockdown 'digital divide' and the
implications for the development of UK digital infrastructures*

UNIVERSITY OF YORK
MUSEUM OF LONDON ARCHAEOLOGY, THE COLLECTIONS TRUST, CULTURE 24
THE AUDIENCE AGENCY & INTELLIGENT HERITAGE

Visitor Interaction and Machine Curation
in the Virtual Liverpool Biennial

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM & LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY
LIVERPOOL BIENNIAL

CREDIT: AUTOMATIC COMPUTING ENGINE (ACE) PILOT MODEL. BUILT BY NATIONAL PHYSICAL LABORATORY, TEDDINGTON, ENGLAND, 1949.
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Making it FAIR: understanding the lockdown 'digital divide' and the implications for the development of UK digital infrastructures

Was a response to challenges faced by smaller museums struggling to engage online with audiences during lockdown, and beyond. Problems include:

- Low levels of basic digital literacy
- Poor understanding of audiences (including those with specific access needs)
- Uncertainty over how to transfer real-world interpretive practice to the digital realm
- Lack of guidance about technical solutions
- Barriers to future-proofing digital assets in line with the FAIR Principles (digital resources should be Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) and shoestring budgets.

Making it FAIR Partners

- University of York (Archaeology and Sociology)
- The Collections Trust
- Culture24
- The Audience Agency
- Intelligent Heritage
- Knowledge Integration
- MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology)

Eight museums were chosen (out of 52 applications)

- Foxton Canal Museum, Market Harborough, Leicestershire
- Gawthorpe Textiles Collection, Burnley, Lancashire
- Museum of Military Medicine, Aldershot, Hampshire
- Museum of Scottish Railways, Bo'ness, West Lothian
- Somme Museum, Newtownards, County Down
- Spelthorne Museum, Staines, Surrey
- Tenby Museum, Tenby, Pembrokeshire
- Wiltshire Museum, Devizes, Wiltshire

Making it FAIR Implementation

- **Action Project:** Cohort received training, mentoring and technical support to develop digital collections-focussed content to stay connected with existing audiences, and reach new audiences using the *Let's Get Real* collaborative action research approach developed by Culture24
- **Research Project:** Study included a socio-technical challenge where the project team responded by prototyping simple tools that demonstrate how a fully developed infrastructure might support the smallest and least resourced museums (based on integration of existing tools). A Range of evaluation methods were also undertaken throughout, including cohort interviews, benchmarking and surveys

Making it FAIR case study: Wiltshire Museum

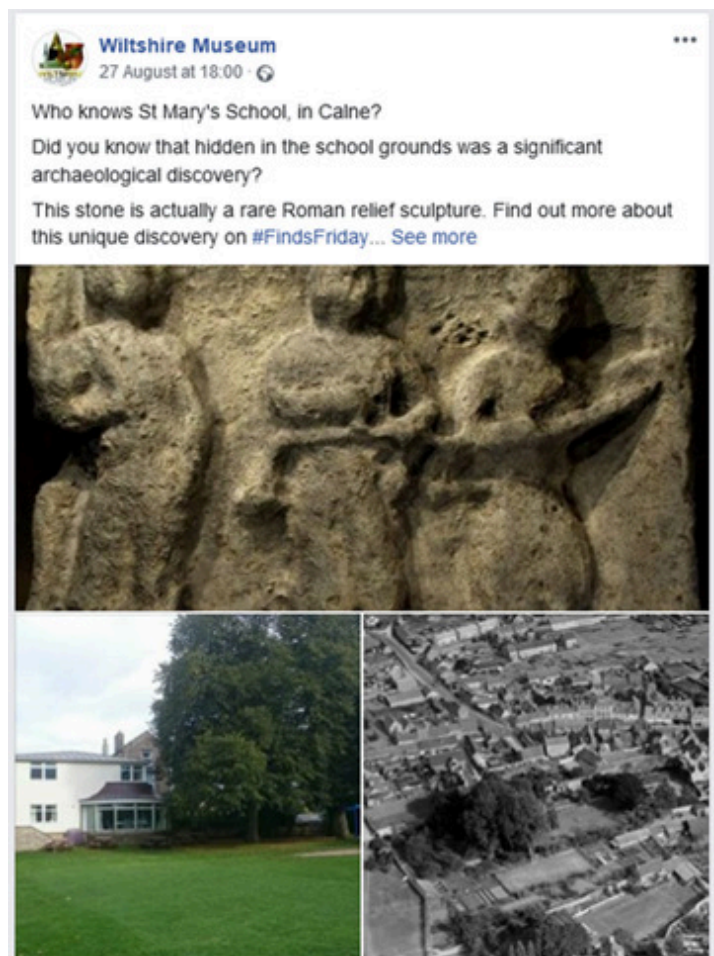
What did you want to find out?

- Whether our non-specialist audiences found our collections database approachable/engaging
- Whether we can improve this without compromising its usefulness to academic researchers
- How we can best encourage our local audiences to engage with our archaeological collections online
- Whether this would actually lead to more visits to the museum.

Making it FAIR case study: Wiltshire Museum

What did you do?

- We made two slightly different versions of the same webpage, sharing information on the recent discovery of The Melksham Hoard: one was typical, and the other a bit more ‘dynamic’ with slightly less specialist text. This was then sent out as part of our monthly newsletter for people’s opinions.
- We also made two different Facebook posts, both emphasising the local link and the narrative of its discovery, rather than the object itself.



Making it FAIR case study: Wiltshire Museum

What were the challenges?

- Pre-existing website architecture limits what we can do without it looking incongruous.
- Our collections management system doesn't link archaeological objects with potentially relevant archive photos, we need to rely on prior knowledge or search through the archive each time.

Making it FAIR case study: Wiltshire Museum

What did you learn?

- Our members were split down the middle in terms of which webpage design they preferred: 57% opted for the more basic design, although there were requests for more surrounding information
- 85% said that seeing an object online would make them more likely to search it out if visiting the museum physically
- The Facebook post emphasising local connections and the discovery itself, rather than the object performed far better in every respect.

Making it FAIR case study: Wiltshire Museum

What's next?

- We don't need to change the presentation of our online database, as it is what we build around it [via social media] that will drive wider engagement
- We need to ensure that our collections management database makes generating these kinds of posts quick and easy.

Observations

- Cohort changed their mind: content creation is far more daunting and time consuming than technology (technology previously used as a reason for non-engagement)
- Just as important to be capturing, preserving and disseminating curated digital content (social media, blogs, etc.) as digital collections
- Extensive use of proprietary social media platforms means there is a large potential role for TaNC to provide infrastructure for FAIR metadata creation, preservation and dissemination (meeting small museums where they are)

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