

## CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

03 December 2020

### Cllr Amal Ghusain – Update on Portfolio Holder Priorities

#### Overall Service Position

RAMM's Saturday 24 October reopening following the first lockdown, was preceded by two preview days, with invitations targeted at supporter groups and Membership Scheme. Smaller visitor numbers on these days allowed RAMM to implement and adapt the routines and practices that have been put in place to create a Covid-19 safe environment. This includes free pre-booked ticketing (based on 30 minute slots); the use of the Garden Entrance for arrivals and Queen Street for departures; a one-way route around the museum; new signage and cleaning protocols. These are set out in more detail in a Covid-19 Risk Assessment developed and signed off by ECC's Health & Safety Team. To prevent any over-crowding or group 'cross-overs, this places a tight cap on numbers in the building at any one time and therefore the overall total daily numbers that can be achieved.

This together with a visitor route 'bottleneck' on the one-way route through Gallery 20, will limit visitor numbers in this period of Covid-19 operations.

RAMM staff were monitoring visitor 'turn up' rates, bookings, 'walk-ups', behaviour and duration of visit, to set booking availability at appropriate levels, compliant with the Risk Assessment. This will be kept under review when RAMM's second re-opening is permitted. Visitor response to RAMM's reopening has been very positive, with supportive and appreciative feedback.

Details of visit numbers for the ten day period to 2 December are outlined at the end of the report.

Furloughed staff had been returning to work in phases, with the focus on the roles and required for the building's physical reopening. The final group of returning staff re-joined their colleagues on 1<sup>st</sup> November. Following the Prime Minister's announcement about a second lockdown; the extension furlough and the closure of RAMM, some members of the museum team have been furloughed or part furloughed. As before, a skeleton team remains alongside colleagues associated with Arts Council England funding; all largely working from home. Systems and processes remained in place, allowing for a smooth second re-opening, once permitted.

#### Collections and Content Work

RAMM re-opened with four temporary exhibitions:

Brian Rice: 60 Years of Paintings & Prints (24 Jan- 17Jan 21)  
John Paul Evans: A Different Story (11 Feb- 22 Nov 20)  
Anita Corbin: 100 First Women (- new exhibition 24 Oct- 21 Feb 21)  
By Royal Appointment; Devon lace-makers (8 Feb- 1 Nov 20)

The lockdown period has been very disruptive to planned exhibition programming and this will have long running impacts, requiring re-scheduling and renegotiation with touring partners and lenders. Other collaborative projects have been badly affected by the closure of museums and galleries across the UK.

Exhibition development and projects led by RAMM staff placed on furlough, have in the main been 'paused', which will cause delays in project delivery and postponements. Lack of access to museum collections and their documentation has impacted on the type and volume of work the remaining team has been able to carry out. We have however been able to progress some existing

priorities and respond to the new challenges presented by the pandemic lockdown. Work undertaken or completed in this period includes:

### **Contemporary Art Commissions & shows**

**Covid-19 art commission** - Amy Shelton's 'Biophilia: The Exeter Florilegium' be a unique lightbox artwork. The flowers contributed by staff and patients from the Royal Devon & Exeter hospital as well as specimens from the gardens and window boxes of people self-isolating have now been removed from the flower press.

**Seedscaapes art commission** - Léonie Hampton's photographic work, 'Language of Seeds', will explore her relationship with seeds and gardening during the coronavirus-induced isolation. In September Léonie made several virtual and in-person visits to explore and photograph RAMM's collection of seeds and plants from around the world with the Natural Sciences curator. Her work will be shown alongside specimens from the collection as part of the exhibition 'Seedscaapes: Future-proofing Nature' at RAMM from February 2021. Conservation work on her selected specimens has begun.

**Michelle Williams Gamaker** – Michelle is a critically-acclaimed moving image and performance artist. 'The Silver Wave' is inspired by objects from the Arctic region in RAMM's collection. It tells the story of Ada Blackjack, an Iñupiat woman from Nome, Alaska, who became the sole survivor of a doomed expedition to Russia's Wrangel Island, in the Arctic Ocean. This commission to celebrate RAMM's year of 'untold stories' is now displayed in the World Cultures gallery. Attendees at RAMM Lates (virtual event) on 12 Nov were able to watch this new piece and join RAMM's Contemporary Art Curator in conversation with the artist.

**In Plain Sight Commission** - Joy Gregory continues to work on her commission for next year's exhibition 'In Plain Sight: Transatlantic Slavery and Devon' supported by the curatorial team. New content for black history month is available on the RAMM website where she discusses Devon's local links to the slave trade, her research into the RAMM collections, and her creative practice.

**[Simon Pope and Wassailing](#)** – 'Here's to Thee' is a joint commission between University of Exeter Arts and Culture and RAMM and Simon Pope (an internationally renowned artist). It will explore the more-than-human ecology and cultures around cider-making. Cider-farms are rich and complex ecologies, where people, other species, and abiotic natural and synthetic things come into contact with each other. Work has begun on the programme of public events and displays, hosted by the University, RAMM and project partners, will allow audiences to discover more about the rich and fascinating world of microbiomes and better understand how we are all connected. The new project builds on an event with the artist in Jan 2020 where Pope worked in close-collaboration with folk singer-songwriter [Jim Causley](#), and ceramic artist [Abigail North](#) to produce a new folk song and experimental wassail bowl that will be displayed at RAMM in 2021.

### **New digital content on collections**

Remote working has meant that unfurloughed staff have been able to contribute to our own digital resources and respond to the many opportunities that have arisen.

Some of these are:

- Collections Explorer: adding new records, new images or new content to RAMM's Collections Explorer website - 130 records added to CE since July; 34,614 page views on CE from 5,961 unique users
- Untold Stories tweets: adding new tweets to the ongoing series of untold stories for 2020 based on the hidden stories in RAMM's collection (71 so far this year.)
- Twitter account has had an average of 97,600 impressions per month since July
- Google Arts & Culture: new story on the Monatgu's collection of shells (a recently Designated collection) set to launch 18 Nov 2020
- Three more research blogs published on CE since April including one to mark Black History Month. Responses demonstrate international readership.

#### Digital work in progress:

- Bedrock and Education versions of Minecraft maps being launched later this month; enables interaction with the collections through play
- Work in transferring the HMS Challenger website to a new provider ready for 2022 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary – platform more user friendly.
- Google Arts & Culture: two new stories in progress including translating 'By Royal Appointment' exhibition to online content.
- Developing and testing a better search system for Collections Explorer – the faceted search will let people filter results so online visitors can find what they want quickly and easily. That's being deployed to the live site this week

#### New Acquisitions

While collecting activity is reduced (the furlough of curatorial staff has reduced the capacity and expertise required for grant applications), RAMM has made several significant new acquisitions. The temporary easing of lockdown facilitated transport of the items to RAMM and external conservation specialists. Acquisitions include:

'The interior of Exeter Cathedral' by Thomas Girtin, 1797. This exceptional watercolour is by far the most informative view that survives showing the cathedral interior as it was before the major changes undertaken 1810-30. Purchased with support from the Art Fund, Kent Kingdon bequest and Friends of RAMM. Display date spring 2021. Online content available and featured on BBC Radio Devon.

'Breathe' by Michelle Sank. A series of eight works by internationally acclaimed and Exeter-based social documentary photographer taken in March and April 2020 whilst the artist was isolated from her partner and social group during lockdown. Supported by a grant from the Contemporary Art Society's Rapid Response Fund. Display date spring / summer 2021.

James Chadwick's lap desk. Chadwick (1771-1855) spent some 15 years in Exeter where he was editor of the *Exeter weekly news*. In 1837 he and his family moved to the USA (taking the desk with him). His son became the 'father of American baseball'. Considerable cost of shipping from the USA covered by the donor. Blog article pending.

Press releases are pending for two other significant artworks.

#### Audience Development Activity

##### Online engagement

Whilst the museum building has been closed, the focus has been on engaging with audiences online. Online events continue to be important, both when the museum is closed but also upon reopening as there is currently no space in the museum for physical events. This is due to the one-way system in the museum and the use of the Courtyard area for café seating. We are therefore having to be creative about online activity, with an aim that, covid situation permitting, we might be able to reinstate some limited physical events from April 2021.

##### Achates Philanthropy Prize 2020 National Showcase

RAMM was chosen as one of the eight arts organisations chosen for the Achates Philanthropy Prize National Showcase, taking top place in the South West. Normally, Achates awards a prize that celebrates cultural giving but this time they wanted to shine a light on the work the organisations such as RAMM are doing throughout the pandemic. RAMM was selected as the South West project by a 19-strong panel of judges representing some prestigious cultural and philanthropy organisations. The showcase celebrates the many ways in which art generates value – looking beyond economic value alone to encompass intrinsic value, with proven benefits to mental health, physical health and social wellbeing, community building, educational value and innovation.

## **Lockdown Legends**

RAMM's Lockdown Legends exhibition went live in September, showcasing the stories of local people who had shown particular kindness, courage, humanity or ingenuity during the Covid-19 crisis. We received a wide range of nominations from refuse collectors to face mask creators, fundraising heroes to taxi drivers-turned-delivery men, and many more. All of them were truly inspiring, showing how our communities have pulled together during the crisis. The nominations were reviewed by a panel which consisted of broadcaster and presenter Angela Rippon CBE, President of Exeter City Football Club, Julian Tagg, Exeter City Councillor Amal Ghusain, and RAMM Museum Manager Camilla Hampshire. The stories now feature in an online exhibition on [Showcase](#) and a physical exhibition hosted in several venues around Exeter and Devon including Exeter's Historic Guildhall, Princesshay; a number of libraries across the county, Barnstaple Museum and Powderham Castle. They will also be held for posterity in the Devon Heritage Centre. The project gained a considerable amount of positive press and social media coverage.

## **Roaming with RAMM**

Following our successful RAMM at Home project, we developed an activity aimed at encouraging and inspiring people to get out and about and enjoy some fresh air, after the long months of lockdown. Roaming with RAMM was an exciting historic treasure hunt. It took the form of a series of six weekly summer challenges aimed at encouraging families to explore the city on foot, discovering fascinating historic objects along the way. Each challenge started directly outside the museum, with six clues released weekly via our social media channels and RAMM's website. As well as providing an opportunity to get out and enjoy the beautiful city of Exeter, Roaming with RAMM was also an opportunity for people to re-connect with the museum whilst it was closed. The project allowed families to continue to be inspired by RAMM's collections, finding out more about how they are linked to the city of Exeter along the way.

## **Online events**

In August, storyteller Clive PiG brought the museum's objects to life through a series of dramatic and interactive tales, entwining music, song, rhythm and rhyme. We released these across our social media and website for people to enjoy from the comfort of home. Over a thousand people have viewed these stories to date. We have held a number of online Zoom events including an art history session on The Grand Tour, two musical composition workshops in collaboration with the Devon Philharmonic Orchestra for GCSE and A-level music students, a CEDA networking talk (see below) and a very successful artists Q&A event as part of our 'Out and About' project. We have also used the opportunity of national 'virtual events' to shine a light on RAMM's rich content resources. In July, we brought together a wealth of online content for the virtual Archaeology Week and in September celebrated the Heritage Open Days festival, showcasing Hidden Nature from the RAMM collections. This brought together videos, games, online articles and stories.

## **RAMM Lates Online**

We hosted our first RAMM Lates Event online, an evening of talks, tours, games and musical entertainment. The theme was Women and the event was a great success with 260 tickets booked, and a host of positive comments received online. The evening included live zoom talks and Q&As: Photographer Anita Corbin introduced her exhibition: 100 First Women Portraits. Beth French, ocean swimmer and one of Anita's First Women, talked inspiringly about how she has tackled seemingly impossible feats of endurance and adventure. Moving image and performance artist Michelle Williams Gamaker talked about her work The Silver Wave which was inspired by objects from the Arctic region in RAMM's collection.

Throughout the evening, people were encouraged to participate on social media, following a cocktail recipe from Oddfellows; listening to a specially-created Spotify soundtrack featuring female performers who are outstanding in the world of music; playing an online game of First Women Bingo and joining in discussions about who should be in the next 100 First Women exhibition. Videos shown on YouTube throughout the evening included a talk from RAMM's Fine Art curator highlighting some of the most impressive paintings we have in our collection painted by female

artists, a talk about Constance Sladen and why is she important to RAMM and a performance of Camden Reeves' composition 'Music for Glass Cabinets', a beautiful piece of music celebrating the museum as a whole.

Headline social media stats for the day (not including previous marketing of the event):

Instagram – 5,535 impressions in total across Lates content

Facebook – reach 4,492 in total across Lates content

Twitter – 34,000 impressions in total across Lates content

### **Volunteering**

We launched our new online volunteer management system, iVolunteer, powered by Better Impact. All volunteers have been set up on the system and training has been carried out. The new system makes it easier to manage volunteers, track their hours, see their availability, create rotas and allocate shifts. It also makes recruitment, online training and reporting much simpler. When the museum reopened, we enabled the return to work of a number of volunteer visitor guides, providing training and support.

### **Ganesh Chaturthi**

On 22 August, we opened up the museum briefly to welcome a small number of representatives from the Hindu Cultural Centre in to celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi with prayers. This was live streamed to the wider Hindu community. One person said on the day: "I cannot begin to express how much this means to us." Another said, "It was a striking reflection of how promoting diversity is at the centre of the RAMM management's direction, and very much welcome by Exeter Hindu Cultural Centre and the wider Devon community."

### **Disability and accessibility**

We continued our collaboration with our disability partner, CEDA, moving our monthly arts and culture networking meetings online. Our Audience Development Lead presented an interactive session on community engagement and 'the new normal' to gain feedback into what might work in the future, receiving some valuable feedback on potential improvements to the accessibility of the museum.

This feedback from a deaf and disabled audience was incorporated into our re-opening planning and we were able to introduce a number of accessibility improvements for visitors, including updated accessibility information on our website and digitisation of all our labels, enabling blind or visually-impaired people to access information via screen readers on their smartphones. We also produced a BSL welcome back video for visitors.

### **Reopening communications and signage**

A great deal of work went into the preparations for reopening. A communications campaign provided a drip feed of content about reopening, including providing information about what to expect and the need to book tickets online in advance. The website was extensively updated to reflect the changed circumstances in the museum.

We produced extensive new signage scheme for the museum. These ranged from exterior signage, wayfinding, instructional posters, floorplans, donation information, marketing posters and pieces signposting to further information online. We also took the opportunity to redesign our toilet signage to be gender neutral, following feedback from participants in our Queering the Museum project.

### **LGBTQ+**

We continued our work on the Out and About: Queering the Museum project despite the museum being closed. The four commissioned artists for the project have all produced videos to introduce themselves and their work to RAMM's audiences. We hosted a very successful public Artists' Platform online event at the end of the month for further sharing of their work. We have carried out training in collecting oral histories and our project partners will begin working with members of the LGBTQ+ community on collecting queer stories and reinterpretations of RAMM's collections later this autumn. We have recruited a team of five research volunteers who are exploring the collections

through a queer lens over the coming months. We have had initial meetings with YAY! (LGBTQ+ youth Cornwall) and X-Plore youth to introduce the project and begin planning workshop sessions.

### **Young people**

Over months when the museum has been closed, RAMM has been working with its youth panel to develop an engaging social media campaign. This campaign looked at the youth panel members' own personal collections. It told some fascinating stories about objects they collected but also, often quite unintentionally, revealed a poignant glimpse of the personality of the collectors themselves. The panel released a series of 12 weekly, one minute videos, which they each filmed and edited themselves during lockdown and the result was a fascinating assortment of collector's items ranging from bicycles to decorative masking tapes!

## **RAMM Operational Activity**

Key staff have remained on site to meet building security and maintenance needs, also to provide contractor access for the installation of the Queen Street lift which was completed in time for the museum's reopening on 24 October.

### **Key functions maintained**

Staff maintained building security and the 24/7 call-out rota as well as all H&S maintenance checks, weekly alarm testing, water flushing etc. and providing safe access for staff.

### **Site Covid safety**

Covid-safe working practices were constantly updated and implementation continued for all staff who required access to RAMM sites as lockdown began to be lifted.

### **Monitoring & Response**

Monitoring Environmental, Pest and Building Management systems continued, including responding to any problems found, including calling in contractors as needed. Environmental readings were provided to the Government Indemnity Scheme and lenders weekly.

### **Contractor and Staff Access**

The team provide continued attendance to enable ongoing contractor and consultant access for key building works (e.g. Queen Street accessible lift installation, Queen Street flooring replacement). They also undertook enabling works, so contractors can complete pre-booked works at Bradninch offices (installation of new fire alarm). They provided emergency access to staff on request to all sites.

### **Planning & Preparation for reopening**

Operational Plans were designed and implemented for reopening. Part-time unfurloughing of key staff enabled the team to design, develop, and deliver high quality signage and wayfinding strategy for the building; develop a system for offering a free timed ticketing system for safe entry on visitors' return; and refresh the shop at RAMM to maximise the potential of Christmas sales, including development of an online shopping offer

A full training package for returning Front of House staff was developed and delivered in the run-up to the first preview opening day on 21<sup>st</sup> October.

### **Practical works**

A wide range of work was undertaken in preparation for re- opening. This included a deep conservation clean of all collections on open display; general cleaning; Installation of signage, ongoing redecorations throughout front and back-of-house areas, changing use of back office areas to facilitate social distancing in staff areas.

## **24 October- 4 November in numbers**

A total of around 2,600 people visited across the ten days of public opening in the period 24 October to 4 November, with highest numbers across the weekend 31 October/1<sup>st</sup> November. Increased understanding of visitor patterns and ratio of 'turn up' rate to bookings, should allow the museum to grow these numbers after the second lockdown ends, but within the safe limits set out in the Covid 19 Risk Assessment.