

Hastings and St Leonards Museum Association AGM, 14th December 2025

Museum 2025 report

On behalf of the museum team, I would like to thank the Association for their continued support, both as advocates in the wider community and as a valued sources of advice and information.

It has been a busy and exciting year so far for the museum, continuing the third year of Arts Council NPO funded projects, engaging with thousands of school children and welcoming visitors to a varied exhibition and events programme.

Visitor numbers to date: 24,901 (As of 24th November 2025)

Income to date £31,841 (April – October 2025)

Plus £150,000 NPO funding and £28258 other external grant funding

Exhibitions

2025 is the 200th anniversary of the naming of Iguanodon, a dinosaur important to Hastings, and **Stories from DEEP TIME** was a response by SoCo Artists to this and the museum's geological collection. Eighteen artists explored themes including an investigation into the collectors of fossils, the places where fossils are found and the fossils themselves.

In May 2025, **Agatha Christie – the Queen of Crime** opened at the museum. Another popular show displaying Gale Goddard's unique collection and explored the life and legacy of author Agatha Christie, spotlighting her iconic characters and works. Spanning 1920–1933, exhibits included detailed displays like Poirot's dinner setting on the Orient Express, Christie's 1926 disappearance, and Egyptian artefacts linking to Death on the Nile.

Since August, the Long Gallery has hosted **Plants Make Places** - This multidisciplinary exhibition features artworks by artist and environmentalist Laura Ribbons, as well as work created in partnership with local communities, exploring how art can be used to illuminate and negotiate the climate crisis. Laura's work celebrated the strength and Mythology of plants, constituting a continued dialogue around ideas of survival, hope and wellbeing. Discover how plants and green spaces can both shape our experience of place and belonging and inspire a recognition of our deep need for connection with other species.

Walkway and other exhibitions:

TRANSMISSIONS – or The Pscyhoshadowery of John Logie Baird 11 January, 2025 - 23 March, 2025

Another Sussex 10th May – 24th August

Local legends brought to life in an exhibition by Figment Arts.

How to Read a Book – Stephen Emmerson 1st Sept – 4th January

Hastings in Stitches: 28 August – 24th November

Coat of Hopes 6th - 18th September

The Coat of Hopes is a patchwork coat on an ongoing walking pilgrimage through the UK towards the end of the climate and ecological emergency.

Welcome – Axel Scheffler 17th October 2025 – January 2026

Working with the Hastings Storytelling Festival, a selection of original illustrations from Axel Scheffler's recent book *Welcome* is displayed at Hastings Museum & Art Gallery.

Family Secrets A Ceramics Gallery intervention by Kim L Pace & Jane Millar 14 October 2025 – 25 January 2026

Coming up in 2026

Long Gallery

Beside the Sea – JJ Waller

14th February 2026 – 5th April 2026

Besides the Sea features photographs by local Sussex artist JJ Waller. The show will present a selection of images taken in Hastings & St Leonards, as well as the towns of Blackpool, Brighton & Benidorm. JJ Waller's playful 'beyond the picture postcard' documentary photographs celebrate seaside tourism in a fun, vibrant, and engaging style. This exhibition explores quintessential British seaside scenes in conversation with global shots, delving into the complexities of coastal tourism and its unique quirks.

Lemons, Laws and Secret Doors: Hastings Queer Underground

25th April – 30th August 2026

This exhibition will illuminate hidden LGBTQIA+ histories, exploring what being LGBTQIA+ in Hastings has meant across time — from the town's development boom in the 1850s and the people it attracted, to pre-WW2 moments of queer visibility (such as drag and parties), through the AIDS crisis, and finally to the visible, vibrant community we see today. The exhibition will feature objects, artwork, oral histories, and archival research pertaining to Lesbian Lives (1850-1920), uncovering the lives of early queer women and suffragette networks; Hidden Loves (1850 – 1967), exploring local queer existence and relationships before partial decriminalization; Community Organizing (1968 – 2025), charting activism, peer support and local LGBTQIA+ groups; The Aids Crisis (1980 – 2000), documenting stories of loss, care, and resilience – and the backdrop of Thatcherism and Section 28; and Hastings Now (2000 – 2025), capturing contemporary queer life and culture.

Hastings Open

3rd October 2026 – 31st Jan 2027

The return of the Hastings Open exhibition – details to be released early 2026

Upper Walkway

Grace Lau Portraits In a Chinese Studio

10th January – 29th March 2026

In response to the Imperialist visions of the exotic Chinese made by Westerners during the turbulent years in China between the Opium Wars and the Boxer Rebellion, Grace Lau has reversed the roles in this photographic study, positioning herself as the Imperialist photographer documenting her exotic subjects in the Port of Hastings, Southeast England.

***This is all the Treasure We Can Have or Hold – Ruth Calland* 4th April – 28th June 2026**

Calland's work explores the intersections of gender, ecology, and popular culture. Drawing inspiration from the vibrant poster and magazine culture of the 1970s and 80s, their work

reimagines these forms to celebrate contemporary trans and non-binary creators on TikTok, capturing the gender-affirmative joyfulness found in their videos.

Outside the Lines 4th July – 4th October 2026 Art by Home Educated Creators

Tapestry of Black Britons 9th October – 8th November 2026 Touring tapestry featuring stories of black Britons in history

Fixing Our Broken Planet 21st November 2026 – 28th February 2027

Events this Year

Film Course for Ukrainian Refugees with Rebecca Marshall

Curious Agenda Lego

Lino Cutting Workshop

Creative Couching workshop

May Half Term trail

Jack in the Green: Spin Drum workshop

Red Set Girls & Jack in the Green

The Tokaido Lecture

Hugo Film Screening

The Wicker Man Screening

27th May Bee Hotel family workshop

29th May Make your own Automata workshop

May Half term Fossil Trail

7th and 8th June Hastings Regalia Reenactment

Lego Labs

5th July Market at the Museum

13th July Trans Pride

Summer Holiday Detective Trail

14th September – Garden Festival

25th September – Myth Monster

9th October – African Deeds

28th October Superworm Story and craft workshops

Half term Axel Scheffler themed trail and activities

29th November Creating Change: A panel discussion on community, green space, and looking forward with hope

13th December Refugee Buddy Project Community Christmas Market

Schools and Learning

The Museum's Schools and Learning offer has gone from strength to strength this year. 4121 school children have engaged with the museum learning offer between April and November 2025 and as well as delivering curriculum focussed workshops, the team have been collaborating with environmental artist Laura Ribbons, using the museum collection to explore the profound impact of plants on our sense of place, hope, and community in the face of the climate crisis, with a particular focus on Hastings.

As well as developing, planning and delivering workshops and materials for schools, the learning team have been leading on a partnership project Fixing Our Broken Planet – funded by the Natural History Museum. This project includes collections research, youth engagement, co-curation methods with young people and developing new interpretation for our mineral collections that will culminate in an exhibition display as well as a heritage trail around Hastings

Volunteers

Since April 2025, our volunteers have completed 841.5 hours of volunteering including auditing the displays in the Upper Durbar Hall, facilitating researchers and collections documentation and care. Thank you so much to our volunteers, who continue to be a great support to the museum and the staff.

Building

- Stonework repaired in stairwell, shop, and Brassey Lobby.
- Repair of main front door lock
- Remedial works to office lighting
- Remedials to electrics under Durbar stage including removal of asbestos-containing fuseboard
- Reconfiguration of gift shop furniture to accommodate fridge for cold drinks, and space for snack foods.
- Launch of 'Hang' space, which will utilise the hanging system in the coffee area for small, short-term exhibitions for local artists. /
- Development of stairwell space into display space (opening with a display of George Graham paintings from our collection in December)

NPO

One of the main NPO funded events this year was Market at the Museum which took place on 5 July. The event attracted an estimated 1,250 visitors to the museum throughout the course of the day. Despite the poor weather, there was a very positive atmosphere, and visitors seemed to have a great time. The free transportation was well used, which was an excellent result as it suggests that one of the primary aims of the event – bringing in new audiences from areas that typically do not utilise the museum or other venues and services available in the town centre – was achieved.

Four Trainees have been hosted by the museum this year, all receiving training in an introduction to collection care and conservation, marketing, interpretation and label-making, object handling, object research and documentation, curation, photography, and public programme development, alongside Collections research.. The initial two trainees focussed on the collection and exploring ways of engaging and identifying stories particularly relevant to the Ore area. The trainees have developed digitisation skills creating 3D models of archaeology excavated in Hastings which will be presented through an online map plotting these discoveries in the locations they were found. This resource will be hosted on the museum website as part of the Digital Museum.

The latest two trainees have conducted independent research to activate part of the Collection on permanent display in the Upper Durbar Hall. They have added interpretation panels in both English and Arabic for two objects on display (Italian Maiolica Dish with Hunting Scenes, Tin-glazed earthenware, Italy, 16th century and Ceremonial Shield – A Story of Power and Culture, Iran, early 19th century – in Mughal style, Brassey Collection), as well as the Upper Durbar Hall gallery and Grey Owl Gallery. They have also curated a temporary display of two objects in the Upper Durbar Hall to introduce audiences to the history of the objects and how they reflect their own personal stories.

Home Education groups are designing an intervention for the Natural History Gallery to focus on the impact of climate change and humans on natural environments.

Acquisitions

Painting 'Sketches of Gyp' by Leslie Badham

Marble clock gifted by Thomas Brassey to engineer who built the Sunbeam

7" vinyl record of 'Mr Crowley'

5 x etchings of Hastings and St Leonards

16 x Ephemera relating to Hastings Town Band and Bandmaster E. Stutely 1880 – 1910

1 x newspaper clipping 'Allies invade France' (6/6/1944)

1 x Rosses Guide to Hastings and St Leonards

2 works – Seen and Heard by Anne-Marie Watson who an Artist in Residency at the museum in 2023

Several works related to Sidney Little including photography, and a dissertation related to his development of Hastings seafront.

Loans

Creation of Flowers by George Graham was delivered to Chatsworth for their exhibition *The Gorgeous Nothings: Flowers at Chatsworth* Exhibition.