



National
Museums
Scotland

National Programme 2023/2024



National Programme Across Scotland

Introduction

The publication of National Museums Scotland's fifth National Strategy in October 2023 [Delivering Across Scotland: National Strategy 2023–2027](#) reaffirmed our commitment to working in partnership with museums across Scotland to achieve our shared ambitions. In the wake of the pandemic, the value of this collective approach is apparent more than ever as museums navigate many challenges, including long-term budget pressures, rising operating costs, and the impact of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Despite these adversities, the resilience and adaptability of the museum sector continue to inspire and drive positive and meaningful experiences for a wide range of audiences.

The Strategy sets out our priorities to share Scotland's National Collection with communities across the country, to help build capacity at local level, and to support museum staff and volunteers to strengthen their skills and expertise. Funded national projects, loans from the National Collection, inclusive community engagement initiatives, support from the National Fund for Acquisitions, and our free National Training Programme all contribute to our strategic priorities, which reflect feedback from our consultation with the sector.

In this report we share details of the national partnership activity and impact during 2023–24:

- Our National Training Programme delivered 234 learning experiences for staff and volunteers in 73 museums in Scotland.
 - A lively programme of activity for Maths Week Scotland 2023 included 85 events and engaged young people at schools in every local authority area in Scotland.
 - Additional support and inclusive programmes helped to broaden access to our collections, reaching wider and more diverse audiences.
 - *Reveal and Connect: African and Caribbean Collections in Scottish Museums*, a national consortium-led project with museum partners and communities across the country, developed our shared approach to understanding and interpreting collections with imperial and colonial histories and legacies.
- We look forward to continuing collaboration with our many partners to develop and participate in strategic and impactful programmes, extending the reach of the National Collection for the benefit of people, places, and communities across Scotland.
- Significant loans were made for new displays at Kilmartin Museum following major redevelopment, and to the new Perth Museum. Archaeological objects from the local area were loaned to exhibitions on the Isle of Lewis.
 - The National Fund for Acquisitions contributed to the purchase of objects worth over £530,000, supporting collections development at 29 Scottish museums.

National Programme in Numbers

In 2023–24, National Programme activity by teams across National Museums Scotland reached all 32 local authority areas in Scotland. The data below gives an indication of the range and strength of national work and demonstrates our commitment to knowledge exchange, programme development, sector support, funding delivery, collections sharing, audience development, and inclusive practices, which are necessary for the museums ecosystem across Scotland to thrive.

- 119 museums across Scotland supported through training, loans, acquisitions, Maths Week Scotland grants, and our national project *Reveal and Connect: African and Caribbean Collections in Scottish Museums*.
- 2,540 objects from the National Collection on loan to 50 museums in 23 local authorities across Scotland.
- 234 learning experiences delivered in 16 National Training Programme events to staff and volunteers from 73 museums in Scotland.
- 26,284 views of our online training and guidance resources for museums.
- 52 grants worth £209,330 from the National Fund for Acquisitions, supporting acquisitions worth £530,488 and helping to develop and enhance 29 museum collections across Scotland.
- 80,084 pupils from 345 schools in every local authority across Scotland involved in Maths Week Scotland 2023, and 13 projects supported with grants worth over £50,000.
- 34,111 pupils from schools in every local authority in Scotland participating in our Digital Schools Sessions.
- 16,259 people engaged through our additional support and inclusive programmes.

Sharing Scotland's Collections

Loans

Our active programme of loans brings objects from the National Collection to museums across Scotland where they can be experienced and enjoyed by local communities and visitors, diversifying audiences and sharing the collection more widely. In 2023–24, 2,540 objects were on loan to 50 museums in 23 local authorities across the country.

These loans enable aspects of our shared histories to be made available to new audiences across Scotland, enriching audience experiences, enhancing the offers made by organisations, and ensuring the many stories the National Collection can tell are more widely appreciated.

Kilmartin Museum

More than 60 Neolithic, Bronze Age and medieval objects went on long-term loan to Kilmartin Museum in Argyll, representing a third of the objects on display. The Museum, which reopened in September 2023 following extensive redevelopment, displays objects from Kilmartin Glen, one of Scotland's richest prehistoric landscapes. Staff at National Museums Scotland worked closely with the Museum on the development of new displays. The loan includes the Glebe Cairn vessel, displayed with a view towards the Bronze Age cairn where it was found. The Poltalloch jet necklace and bracelet, discovered at Kilmartin in 1928 and believed to be around 4,000 years old, were displayed from March to December 2023.

Commun Eachdraidh Nis and Kinloch Historical Society Museum

A Late Bronze Age hoard found at Adabrock in 1910, and a bronze sword found in 1891 at Aird Dell, were loaned for display as the centrepiece of *An Tilleadh (The Return)* at Commun Eachdraidh Nis on the Isle of Lewis, 19 April 2023–29 March 2024. The exhibition coincided with the Hebridean Year of Homecoming 2023 and, for the first time, gave local audiences the opportunity to see the objects in North Lewis, close to where they were found.

Over 40 archaeological objects were loaned to new exhibitions in Lewis in 2024. *Na Dorsan*, which opened on 24 April at Commun Eachdraidh Nis, commemorates the centenary of the re-settling of the cleared township of Galson in 1924, charting the history of the area from the first farmers some 6,000 years ago to the arrival of Vikings on the island. *Lochs Archaeology Homecoming* opened at Kinloch Historical Society Museum on 25 April, raising awareness of the area's rich archaeology and highlighting remarkable finds. They included a 2,500-year-old pot, found buried in peat near Achmore, and an intricately decorated bronze mount converted into a buckle during the Viking period.

Anna MacKenzie, Heritage Manager at Kinloch Historical Society, said:

"The partnership with National Museums Scotland is at the heart of sharing and learning about the history of our area. The advice, training and support we have been able to access through this partnership has been essential in bringing this exhibition to Kinloch Museum."

Perth Museum

Loans to the new Perth Museum, which opened on 30 March 2024, included eight archaeological objects from Perthshire for long-term display and three objects for the inaugural exhibition, *Unicorn*, until 22 September 2024. The exhibition explored the mythical creature's role as an emblem of Scottish royalty and icon of popular culture. Loans from the National Collection conveyed its significance during the Stuart dynasty, including a gold unicorn coin from the reign of James IV and a carved oak panel bearing the Royal Arms of James V. A ceiling boss from Linlithgow Palace, dating from the period following the Union of the Crowns, depicts a unicorn carrying the Saltire superimposed on the St George's Cross.

Abbotsford

Six objects were loaned to Abbotsford The Home of Sir Walter Scott for display from March 2024, helping to tell the story of Scott's life and interests. They included a baby's basket lined with white satin, used by Scott's mother, a helmet worn by Scott when he was a trooper in the Midlothian Volunteer Yeomanry, and his brass fishing reel. Two charms

associated with witchcraft, a perforated stone from Roxburghshire and a calf's heart stuck with pins from Dalkeith, reflect Scott's interest in sorcery and folklore. The calf's heart was briefly in his possession at Abbotsford before he passed it to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Collections Development

National Fund for Acquisitions

National Museums Scotland administers the National Fund for Acquisitions, an annual grant of £150,000 provided by Scottish Government to help museums throughout Scotland to acquire objects for their collections. We work with our colleagues at the National Galleries of Scotland and National Library of Scotland who also provide expert advice on applications. The Fund normally offers grants of up to 50%, while the Special Funding Scheme supports museums that are unable to raise match funding by providing grants of up to 100% of purchase price.

As well as the financial support administered, through this process we learn about the collecting policies of organisations across Scotland, supporting both collections development, and the ambition to meaningfully tell the stories of people and places through natural and cultural heritage.

In 2023–24 the Fund contributed 52 grants worth £209,330, helping to develop and enhance the collections of 29 organisations in 18 local authorities across Scotland. The total purchase value of the objects to which the Fund contributed was £530,488. By 31 March 2024, a further eight grants with a total value of £38,296 had been committed and were awaiting payment. Acquisitions supported include:

- £25,000 to Aberdeen Archives, Gallery and Museums to support the purchase of a ceramic pot, *Alan Measles and Claire Under an English Moon*, 2023, by Sir Grayson Perry. A significant addition to the collection by one of the UK's most popular and celebrated artists, it depicts a cast of characters including Perry's childhood teddy bear Alan Measles, alter ego Claire, King Charles III, Nicola Sturgeon, Elton John and J K

Rowling. In keeping with much of Perry's work which takes on some of the big issues of our time, the artwork explores themes of national identity and gender politics.

- £13,200 to Glasgow Women's Library to acquire, at auction, a medal awarded to Maud Joachim by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). It followed her imprisonment in Dundee for taking part in a suffragette protest at a meeting led by Winston Churchill in 1909. A bar awarded in 1912 confirms that Maud was forcibly fed during another period of imprisonment. Glasgow Women's Library holds a Recognised Collection of National Significance, including extensive material relating to the women's suffrage movement.
- £5,000 to Culture Perth and Kinross to secure at auction an important 18th-century wineglass. The glass is engraved with the words 'Gang Warily', the family motto of James Drummond, Duke of Perth, who was an important figure in the 1745–46 Jacobite Rising. On display in Perth Museum, the glass helps to tell the story of the region's significant role in the Jacobite Wars.
- £500 to Dundee Museum of Transport to support the purchase of a Nutshell compact folding caravan dating from the 1950s. Designed to be affordable and accessible, it was suitable for towing behind a small car. The caravans were made in Dundee by William R Stewart & Sons (Hacklemakers) Ltd as they sought to diversify their business during a downturn in the jute industry.

A 3,000-year-old logboat, found in the River Tay and acquired in 2007 with support from the National Fund for Acquisitions, is one of the highlights of displays in Perth Museum. The boat received specialist conservation treatment at the National Museums Collection Centre in Edinburgh to prepare it for display. Conservation and installation of the Carpow logboat was undertaken by National Museums Scotland and Graciela Ainsworth Sculpture Conservation, funded by donations from Whisky Auctioneer Ltd.

More information on the National Fund for Acquisitions, including our annual report, can be found on the NFA webpage: <https://www.nms.ac.uk/our-impact/national-work/national-fund-for-acquisitions>

[ac.uk/our-impact/national-work/national-fund-for-acquisitions](https://www.nms.ac.uk/our-impact/national-work/national-fund-for-acquisitions)

Engaging and Inspiring People

Maths Week Scotland

Maths Week Scotland, funded by the Scottish Government and coordinated by National Museums Scotland, fosters engagement with maths through a dedicated week of events and activities, complemented by ongoing initiatives throughout the year. The theme of Maths Week Scotland 2023, 25 September – 1 October, was *Maths in Motion*, revealing the connections between maths and movement, including sport, animation, space travel and more. Now in its seventh year, Maths Week Scotland experienced its most extensive lineup yet, featuring over 85 public events. The Maths Week grant fund allocated over £50,000 to projects, events, and resources nationwide. With the participation of more than fifty collaborators, including museums, science centres, local authorities, community groups and individuals, the event reached 80,084 pupils from 345 schools in every local authority in Scotland. A successful new Maths Week Scotland primary school workshop, *Museum on the Move*, was piloted at the National Museum of Scotland and will become a staple of future Maths Week Scotland programmes.

Schools

Digital Schools Sessions

Our free Digital Schools Sessions bring the National Collection to classrooms across Scotland. Designed to support delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence, topics include dinosaurs, ancient Egypt, the Romans, Second World War, Fantastic Flying Forces, and biodiversity. A new session for 2023–24, *Climate Change for Kids*, with Dr Sian Henley from the University of Edinburgh, explored the impacts of climate change on children across the world. Dr Ali Clark, Senior Curator Oceania, shared artists' responses to climate change in the context of the National Museum of Scotland exhibition *Rising Tide: Art and Environment in Oceania*. A nationwide

project from The Data for Children Collaborative with UNICEF, *Climate Change for Kids: Rising Heat, Raising Hope*, in partnership with the University of Edinburgh, gave young people a creative outlet in response to the climate emergency. Working with artist Laura Johnson, participants helped to create a quilt for display at the National Museum of Scotland. During the 2023-24 school year, over 34,000 pupils from schools in every local authority in Scotland participated in digital sessions.

Community Engagement

Additional support and inclusive programmes

Through our additional support and inclusive programmes, we seek to make a positive and lasting impact on people's lives, promoting equality, health and wellbeing and the sense of belonging that comes from sharing our common heritage. In 2023–24 a total of 16,259 participants engaged with our onsite and community outreach programmes.

Access programmes, events and activities

Our monthly Museum Socials, with activities, handling objects and curator-led talks, support people living with dementia and their carers. Themes included the ancient Egyptian Qurna burial, delivered during Black History Month 2023, *Music for Wellbeing* with the Scottish Ensemble, and new exhibitions including *Beyond the Little Black Dress*, *Rising Tide: Art and Environment in Oceania* and *Maps: Memories from the Second World War*. *Monster Myths and Legends* was a particular highlight, bringing participants face-to-face with specimens from our cryptozoology collection.

Friday Friends, supported sessions for D/deaf and visually impaired children, continued in partnership with Edinburgh Zoo and the Palace of Holyroodhouse, providing children with access to exciting topics and handling objects and extending our reach beyond Edinburgh to schools in the Lothians and Fife. We supported the launch of the Edinburgh Deaf Festival 2023 programme. Working closely with the Forth Valley Sensory Centre and

Macular Society Scotland, we offered outreach sessions for people who are blind or partially sighted and arranged group visits to the National Museum of Scotland. A range of accessible events and activities to accompany our exhibitions *Beyond the Little Black Dress* and *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* included relaxed views and sessions for neurodiverse audiences, with accompanying visual stories, quiet spaces and supportive resources, audio-described tours and D/deaf-led British Sign Language tours.

Youth engagement

In June 2023 we worked with young people from Pilton Youth and Children's Project and Granton Youth in North Edinburgh to engage with the art installation *Bottled Ocean 2123*, part of the exhibition *Rising Tide: Art and Environment in Oceania*. Māori artist George Nuku visited the young people's space to support them to make artwork for the installation. At the National Museum of Scotland George worked with participants from the migrant, refugee and asylum seeker support organisation, *The Welcoming*, who volunteered their time to create and install further pieces for the display. Community volunteers were invited to the launch event in September to support George to deliver a Māori *haka*. We worked with around 400 individuals to realise the installation, supporting their engagement and inclusion and enhancing confidence and wellbeing.

We continued to work with young people from LGBT Youth Scotland, connecting them with Scottish Contemporary History curator Mhairi Maxwell to explore new LGBTQIA+ content for the *Hidden Histories* trail. In partnership with SCORE Scotland, which promotes racial equality and social justice, we introduced a group of young people to the *Black Futures* section of the exhibition *Beyond the Little Black Dress*. Artist-led workshops and a tour led by the exhibition's guest curator, Dr Sequoia Barnes, helped participants to explore their own designs based on an imagined future of peace and equality. In May 2023, young people from family support organisation Multi-Cultural Family Base visited the National Museum Collection Centre to explore material recently collected during the Black Lives Matter protests.

Inclusive family activities

Relaxed sessions for our regular Curiosity Club family programmes were organised as part of the Edinburgh Science Festival in April 2023. In October 2023 we launched a new session in our regular Relaxed Mornings for children and families with additional support needs. Sensory Sundays explored museum themes through sensory play and creative activities. We continued to deliver outreach and onsite community magic carpet sessions for new and diverse family audiences. For LGBT+ History Month in February 2023 we welcomed LGBT Health and Wellbeing's Rainbow Families support network to the National Museum of Scotland for a takeover day of activities attended by over 70 participants. A new online project revealed a fresh perspective on our collections by asking members of the LGBTQIA+ community to explore an object that resonates with their identity. *Orientations* shares voices that have often been underrepresented in mainstream history and explores how our objects can reflect aspects of identity through a series of blogs: <https://blog.nms.ac.uk/tag/orientations/>

In January 2023 we launched a new outreach programme at the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People, supported by the Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity. Outreach sessions bring real and replica handling objects and activities to children on and off the wards to support their health and wellbeing. This included participation in the *Climate Change for Kids* quilt project, helping children and young people feel connected to the wider world beyond their ward.

Inclusive adult and multi-cultural activities

South Asian Stories, funded by the Nancie Massey Charitable Trust, was created in partnership with Networking Key Services (NKS), a health and wellbeing organisation supporting South Asian women and their families. From September 2022 to June 2023, over 200 members of Edinburgh's Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani communities worked with staff at the National Museum of Scotland to offer new and unique perspectives on objects in our collections. Based on their lived experiences, memories and personal research, community members created webpage content exploring 16 objects. A trail featuring 10 of these

stories was illustrated by South Asian artist Malini Chakrabarty and translated into Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu. The webpage and trail were launched in March 2024: [South Asian Stories trail \(nms.ac.uk\)](https://nms.ac.uk)

In October 2023, as part of a wider project funded by Wellcome in association with the University of Exeter, we showcased natural sciences research outputs through a series of natural world art and illustration workshops inspired by medieval bestiaries. Participants from The Welcoming, which supports asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in Edinburgh, and the Grassmarket Community Project, an inclusive community for individuals facing social exclusion, were invited to participate in these free creative workshops.

Strengthening Skills and Expertise

National Training Programme

Our popular National Training Programme offers free collections knowledge and skills training for staff and volunteers in museums across Scotland. In 2023–24 we delivered 16 events, providing 234 learning experiences to staff and volunteers in 73 museums across Scotland.

The Programme is developed and led through consultation with the sector, meeting expressed skills gaps, and addressing new thematic areas for training, such as sustainability. Training shares current best practice, and in-person events provide valuable knowledge exchange and networking opportunities. Provision of online training and guidance supports colleagues who may not be able to travel for geographic or resource reasons.

Additional, more specific collections advice and support is frequently sought. These needs are met on a case-by-case basis and supported by colleagues across National Museums Scotland. More information can be found in our Training and Guidance webpages which include our: [Guide to Collections Advice](#).

Online training and guidance

Our online [Training and guidance for museums](#) includes resources on collections care, photographing collections, and archaeological human remains. A new resource [Caring for entomology collections](#) shares good practice in curating and managing insect collections. The resources received 26,284 views during the period of this report.

In 2024 we consulted museums on the value of the resource and received a very positive response, including the following comments:

“The mix of written information, photographs and videos is a great way to convey information and to bolster confidence. It is especially useful for training volunteers and new staff.”

“They’re brilliant examples of best practice and I’m just always keen for more!”

“Your online offerings are absolutely vital for us here in the north!”

Collections Care

Our collections care workshops provide core skills training in caring for museum collections through practical advice and demonstrations and sharing best practice. Object handling, packing and labelling sessions took place on 29 August and 14 November 2023. Integrated Pest Management on 30 August and 13 November 2023 shared the principles of good pest management, a vital part of caring for and managing museum collections. Participants learned how to identify and monitor pests and strategies for preventing and dealing with infestation. On 5 March 2024 this workshop was delivered online for members of the North East Scotland Heritage Network. A workshop on couriers museum objects, delivered jointly with Historic Environment Scotland, took place at the Engine Shed, Stirling on 21 August 2023. The session provided practical advice and presented real case studies to develop participants’ knowledge and confidence in all aspects of safely transporting museum objects between venues for loan or research.

Classical Collections

On 29 September 2023 a *Classical Collections* symposium took place at the National Museum of Scotland in collaboration with the Classical Collections Network, Hellenic Society and Roman Society. The event brought together specialists in classical collections from the ancient Mediterranean, including Greek, Etruscan, Roman and Cypriot material. Presentations were followed by tours of highlight objects on display at the National Museum of Scotland.

Photographing Collections

Photographing museum collections is important for identification, research and condition monitoring as well as helping to make collections more accessible to audiences. A workshop on 5 October 2023 shared National Museums Scotland’s approach to digital photography with practical demonstrations in the photography studio at the National Museums Collection Centre. Participants learned how to plan a shoot and received guidance on using lighting and camera techniques, colour balancing images, and where to get advice on editing raw images.

Hazards and care considerations in African collections

This online workshop on 22 November 2023 was organised as part of the project *Reveal and Connect: African and Caribbean Collections in Scottish Museums*, funded by Museums Galleries Scotland. The workshop considered the hazards and care issues presented by world cultures collections, particularly objects from Africa. The session looked at some of the unique challenges these collections can present, including botanical toxins such as abrus seeds or uranium glass used for beads, and the importance of understanding how to manage risks appropriately.

Collecting Sustainable Technology

This hybrid symposium took place at the National Museum of Scotland on 5 December 2023. It discussed collecting, interpreting and preserving sustainable technologies developed in response to the climate emergency and biodiversity loss. Speakers from organisations across the UK included National Museums Scotland, the Science Museum Group, Glasgow Museums, Aberdeen Archives,

Gallery and Museums, Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums and the University of East Anglia. Discussion focused on the ethics, practicalities and challenges of collecting examples of sustainable technology as well as intangible heritage in relation to human experiences and responses to technology.

Tracking and Reducing Emissions of Exhibitions

By 2027 National Museums Scotland aims to be well advanced on the path to a carbon neutral footprint. An important part of this work is reducing the environmental impact of our exhibitions and displays. This online workshop on 6 February 2024 shared the tools and processes our Exhibitions and Displays team are developing to track and reduce our carbon emissions. They shared their experiences, challenges and lessons learned and showed participants how they could approach this work in their own museums.

Storytelling for the Planet: A place-based approach for museum audiences

This online event on 26 March 2024 was organised in partnership with the Natural History Museum and Museums Galleries Scotland. The event was part of *Our Broken Planet: Community of Practice* which shares learning on how museums can communicate the planetary emergency to audiences, especially young people. Inspired by Scotland's storytelling traditions and following on from *Scotland's Year of Stories*, participants shared best practice, experiences and learning through case studies, workshops and talks.

Collaboration and Capacity Building

Programmes designed to build capacity also help us to develop strong partnerships across the sector, and expand our shared understanding of collections. Collaborative work supports developing skills, sector guidance, best practice advice, and collections reviews.

Reveal and Connect: African and Caribbean Collections in Scottish Museums

Supported by a grant of £60,000 from Museums Galleries Scotland, this project is a partnership with Glasgow Life Museums; the Hunterian, University of Glasgow; and University of Aberdeen Collections. Working with museums across Scotland, we are producing a national review of African and Caribbean collections and establishing a collaborative network with museums in Africa and the Caribbean and descendant communities in Scotland. Representatives on the Steering Group include diaspora communities in Scotland and heritage organisations in Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Jamaica and Barbados.

Four Working Groups took place during June 2023 with representatives from heritage organisations in Africa and the Caribbean and community groups in Scotland. They included participants from Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, National Museum of Ethiopia, Botswana National Museum, National Museum of Jamaica, National Art Gallery of the Bahamas, National Trust of Guyana and heritage consultants from Belize and St Lucia. Diaspora community interests were represented by, among others, Glasgow City Council, African and Caribbean Elders in Scotland, African Women's Group Scotland, Glasgow University UNESCO Chair for Refugee Integration through Language and the Arts, and Migrants Organising for Rights and Empowerment (MORE). The discussion at each group was lively and wide ranging and notes of individual contributions will be used to plan the 'connect' element of the project as we look ahead to engaging audiences with African and Caribbean collections in Scottish museums.

More information can be found on the project webpage: <https://www.nms.ac.uk/collections-research/collections-departments/global-arts-cultures-and-design/projects/reveal-and-connect/>

Reveal and Connect: Caribbean Natural Sciences in Scottish Museums

The second phase of our Reveal and Connect project, *Reveal and Connect: Caribbean Natural Sciences in Scottish Museums*, is supported by a grant of £95,956 from John Ellerman Foundation. It will explore the links between colonial histories and Caribbean natural science collections in museums across Scotland. Our project curator will work closely with partner museums to publish a collections review and support provenance research and consultation with descendant communities. Cross-cultural collaboration with colleagues from the University of the West Indies and Barbados Museum and Historical Society, and with diaspora groups, is vital to the success of the project, providing unique expert insights, bringing to light new knowledge about the collections, and addressing perceived bias and misrepresentation.