

CASE STUDY

Sharing the Creativity of Celtic Art through the George Bain Collection: Groam House Museum

This project developed from a desire to share the George Bain Collection of Celtic art with creative practitioners to broaden the collection's reach and to create new understandings of George Bain's work and its contemporary role.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

PROJECT DETAILS:

- This project cost £59,880
- It was funded through the Museums Galleries Scotland Museum Development Fund
- The project took place between July 2019 - April 2022

THE PROJECT:

To launch the project, local community and school groups took part in a series of creative workshops in animation and dance. This led to a collaboratively created performance at our local cathedral. Animations were projected onto the side of the building accompanied by contemporary music and dance - all inspired by the collection. It was a really successful and inspiring event.

We used this experience of linking creative practitioners with the collection, along with a wider survey of creative practitioners, to inform the subsequent development of an online database of a new collection website.

The new website shows work from the George Bain Collection alongside contemporary work by creative practitioners who have joined our online community. It is a work in progress with additional objects and interpretative text being added and new artists and makers joining the community.

As part of the project we ran a series of online events - two knit-alongs, talks, a creative artwork session and virtual workshop tours - to engage with creative practitioners and showcase the work.



“Our museum volunteers have made a huge contribution to this project and are gaining new skills in photographing and writing about museum objects. These skills are essential to the ongoing digitisation of the Bain collection.”

Doug Maclean, Chair of Groam House Museum

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES:

- COVID-19 was a challenge that forced many changes to the project. However, the limitations also made us think creatively. We embraced online events which led to larger audiences from various countries, not just the UK, than would have visited our physical site.
- The performance was great – it attracted a lot of local people and was a big hit on social media.
- A large part of the collection is now photographed and much more accessible.
- People joined the online community enthusiastically and online events were a hit.

THE IMPACT IT HAS MADE:

- It has connected practitioners from geographically far and wide with the collection.
- Volunteers have learned new skills in photography and writing.
- Online events provided social interaction at times when physical gatherings were limited due to COVID-19.
- It has built an international community of artists and makers all inspired by George Bain and the Celtic style.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Need to take account of seasonality in the planning and timing of future projects. Our volunteers have the most time available in the winter.
- Sharing challenges with colleagues working elsewhere, like Museums Heritage Highlands, really does help to broaden horizons and come up with solutions that serve everyone well. Small independent museums like us all too often work in silos, particularly when deep into a project, but being supported by Museums Heritage Highlands did make a difference and encouraged us to stretch the boundaries.
- Invest more in promoting projects both to general audiences and niche groups. Be mindful to build capacity for marketing into the project plan and consider costs for specialist marketing and PR support in the budget.

GUIDANCE:

- Practitioner consultation is really important, and can also be fun and build meaningful relationships.
- We kept the project volunteer writers' group active and engaged by scheduling regular virtual gatherings, and in-person when allowed. Initially, these gatherings were weekly, then fortnightly and then monthly. They were fun and enabled us to talk about what we were writing about, what we'd found out, and questions/challenges about the items. Writers did work from home but the coming together was a real positive.
- Be open to new ways of working, think creatively, adapt to changing circumstances to make the project work when challenges arise.

USEFUL RESOURCES:

For more information on this project contact Lynne Mackenzie: lynne.mackenzie@groamhouse.org

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