

## Final report from Shropshire Museums to West Midlands Museums Development, 2022

Kindly shared by the Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery

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| <p><b>Original goals:</b></p> <p>Context:</p> <p>2020 saw unprecedented levels of global change. The riots and peaceful protests in May following the death of George Floyd have prompted widespread questioning, introspection, and debate. There were instant implications for the UK heritage sector including immediate protest, defacement, and removal of statues of figures who participated in the Atlantic slave trade and British colonialism.</p> <p>In Shrewsbury, national and local attention is focussed on the future of the statue of Clive of India. Shropshire born and Shrewsbury M.P., Lord Clive was renowned as a brave military leader but his actions on behalf of the East India Company inflicted mass famine, poverty, and other atrocities on the native Indian population in the mid-1700s.</p> <p>His statue, erected in 1860, stands in the town square, just metres from the entrance to Shrewsbury Museum &amp; Art Gallery.</p> <p>This created a unique and very pressing opportunity for the museum to connect with audiences in a new way as we worked towards re-opening during and after the pandemic. Funding from the Recovery Grant enabled SM&amp;AG to re-open, confident that customers could return feeling the museum is relevant, responsive and that they are welcome and represented.</p> <p>Original Outputs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Interpretation panels at re-interpreting Lord Clive better exploring his controversial actions and legacy</li><li>· A short film exploring the controversy surrounding the statue of Clive of India.</li><li>· Re-interpreting and labelling items in the permanent collection relating to our colonial past.</li></ul> <p>Original Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· SM&amp;AG connect with our community quickly and sincerely; responding promptly to emerging inequality issues and signalling our commitment to long-term exploration and change in how our country's colonial past is presented and how the Shropshire Museums presents colonial items</li></ul> |
| <p><b>Short description of what you done to date (500 words):</b></p> <p>The text, design and location of an upright interpretation panel has been agreed. City ID in Bristol, the design team behind the current wayfinding scheme in Shrewsbury were commissioned to design the panel and to source a suitable manufacturer. Covid and Brexit have caused severe delays to this process however a manufacturer has now been commissioned (Wood &amp; Wood) and the panel is currently under production. There</p>  |

is a three-month lead time for the production and delivery of the panel. We expect the panel to be installed during the Autumn of 2022. As agreed with WMMD, the full cost of the grant will be spent on the pane production, design, and installation.

We are in discussions with University of Chester staff and students about the development of a film and have completed the first phase of an ongoing project to relabel and contextualise Shropshire Museums colonial collections.

### **How have you spent the grant?**

The grant has been spent in line with the variations agreed in advance with WMMD in Jan, March and Oct 2021.

Jan 21 – Lockdown prevented person-to-camera filming so we pivoted and re-ordered the filming schedule. Closure of the museum prevented finalisation of new labels however we put draft ones in situ ready for re-opening. Directors raised a question about the nature of the interpretation - plaque on the plinth/stone inset/upright panel. We mitigated with briefings on the various cost and time implications of each.

March 21 – ‘Roadmap’ out of lockdown and introduction of tier system continued to delay filming. The National Trust advised that location filming permissions unlikely to be provided until the summer. A new review and re-design of street furniture and heritage interpretation across the town presented new opportunities as well as delays and increased stakeholder engagement. Awaiting Director/Councillor sign-off on final wording.

Variation agreed to spend the recovery grant on the interpretation element and fund other outputs of the original grant ourselves at a later date. Delays mitigated by erection of temporary interpretation panel at the entrance to SM&AG near to the statue.

Oct – Director and Councillor sign-off on final wording plus a decision on the type of interpretation secured in July. Immediately secured quotes from stonemason and met with the company appointed by the Council to deliver wayfinding/interpretation across the town. Negotiated to include the upright panel within the street scheme at a cost of £7,726.

Variation confirmed to spend the Recovery Grant on this element and SM&AG cover the shortfall and other elements of the project ourselves. This strengthened by the fact the expert in south east Asian history, who was due to be do all of the narration and person-to-camera work, stopped responding to our efforts to contact him.

### **Lessons learned:**

#### **Strengths:**

- SM&AG were extremely responsive in securing the funding to achieve this project – from a decision by Cabinet in June 2020 to securing funding by September.
- We feel our decision to engage relevant community and heritage stakeholders in drafting the interpretation panel text was a strength.
- We were very prompt in drafting a text for the interpretation panel and commencing consultation.

- We acted quickly to mitigate issues as they emerged – for example when delays were occurring around the placement of the permanent panel, we erected a temporary panel at the entrance to the museum and Visitor Information Centre – within 50 yards of the statue. Similarly, when the country went into lockdown in Jan 2021 and we could not proceed with person-to-camera filming we arranged for object filming in Shropshire Archives to proceed instead.
- The project has supported Shropshire Museums Services long term strategic outcomes – namely ‘Being inclusive and valuing partnership: We champion inclusion in the services we offer, how they are accessed and the people we work with. We give customers a real stake in current and future collections and in how our collections tell Shropshire’s stories’ and ‘Benefitting our community and welcoming families: We use a place-based approach to understand and respond to the needs of our community’
- The project has achieved outputs beyond those in the original project plan - due to delays in other areas of the project, our Curator was able to go through the online collection catalogue and has, to date, added a tag and new interpretation text to over 230 objects. This is additional to the original outputs of the bid and very much supports its objectives.
- The project has enabled us to work with new stakeholders, for example Shropshire Ethnic Minority Alliance
- We feel we have worked well with our funders – keeping WMMD up to date with issues and changes and agreeing variations in advance – we appreciate how responsive and supportive WMMD have been in this regard.
- The project has been a significant lesson in stakeholder management – both engaging with the very differing opinions on Lord Clive and trying to mitigate delays to the project because of new stakeholders seeking to engage throughout

Weaknesses:

- SM&AG perhaps underestimated the political contention of the project – after two separate petitions to both keep and remove the state prompted a Cabinet discussion the mandate the museums service received was to re-interpret the statue in line with DCMS ‘retain and explain’ legislation.
- We perhaps underestimated the desire of Directors and Councillors to input into the exact nature of the interpretation and the delays this would cause - plaque on the plinth/upright interpretation panel/a stone inset panel. We mitigated these by providing clear written briefs outlining the cost and time implications of each and chasing decisions.
- The interpretation element was more expensive than we anticipated, perhaps because of Covid and Brexit inflating material costs.

Opportunities:

- The upright interpretation panel finally approved removed the planning delay we were expecting, improves the visitor experience and lends gravitas to the panel by aligning it with other wayfinding and heritage interpretation across Shrewsbury.

- The review and re-design of street furniture and heritage interpretation also created a new opportunity for the museums service to join a select team leading on heritage interpretation across the town.
- The project has highlighted a need within the council for a corporate response and management of contentious subjects such as the Clive Statue. It has been very stressful and time consuming for the team to have to craft individual and urgent responses. We have challenged the expectation that such responses are sent from named officers.
- As a result of the project, we worked with Shropshire Minority Ethnic Alliance on activities for Black History Month and look forward to working with them in the long-term.

Threats:

- Covid caused delays – see variations
- The review and re-design of street furniture across the town centre and concurrent look at broader heritage interpretation added a time delay though has also presented some opportunities.
- Short film element had progressed well but the expert in southeast Asian history, who was due to lead the narration and person-to-camera work, stopped responding to our efforts to contact him.
- The ongoing national debate around historic figures in the public realm, and subsequent reports and ‘retain and explain’ legislation has brought additional and ongoing scrutiny to our project.
- An emerging review and redesign of street furniture and heritage interpretation across the town caused delays to the project.
- A cabinet session to which we had submitted a briefing note on the Lord Clive statue was cancelled and caused a delay.