

Audience Consultant

5 months Creative Consultation: Oct 22 – Feb 23 (approx. 36 days)

Discovering our Dioramas: Understanding our natural world at the Booth Museum of Natural History

Brighton & Hove Museums is looking to appoint a Freelance Audience Consultant as part of our Discovering our Dioramas project to develop and deliver a creative consultation period over 5 months with visitors and non-visitors, with a focus on the under 10s and their families.

This will enrich and transform the ways we will work:

- We will truly open ourselves up to listen to how we can use our collections and stories to best support people in their understanding of our natural world.
- We will explore how we can engender ways for people to make emotional connections to the past, themselves and the future.
- We will shape a new programme of on-site events and interpretation techniques to engage audiences with these internationally significant displays and to increase connections to the natural world.
- We will explore how a museum can help change people's behaviour around climate change and how much of an impact we could have.

This project needs to start with the things we don't know. We know our Booth collections, and want to discover what our audiences of under 10s and their families are interested in:

- Do we know what motivated them to get up on a Sunday morning and all come to visit?
- Did they come because it is free to visit?
- Did they come because we are a museum or did they come because we are a museum full of nature?
- Did they want to find out more about a specific creature or did they want to look at the creepy dead things?
- Do they visit the Booth Museum of Natural History? If not why not?
- How do their own lives interact with wildlife outside of the museum?
- Do they need a space to celebrate the natural world to alleviate the anxiety and depression caused by the climate crisis?
- Do local stories have more impact?

This consultation will allow us to explore how to create a contemporary diorama in a way that will help to connect it, us and our visitors to the historical Booth dioramas. We also investigate how to create that emotional connection that may lead to a sense of place and a sense of guardianship.

The consultant will

- be asked to explore ideas for audience consultation such as the list below and make recommendations on their feasibility or make alternative suggestions for innovative activities
- deliver those creative consultation events. There will be support from the Project Assistant - Discover our Dioramas and volunteers at Brighton & Hove Museums.
- develop an evaluation framework for the whole project
- make recommendations for a 12 month public engagement programme
- make recommendations for social media engagement
- make recommendations for the content of the diorama

Suggested Ideas for Creative Consultation Events:

- **Local Shopping Centre and Markets:** a way of connecting with visitor to this space to our natural history collections. A simple recreation of a Victorian parlour, with Edward Booth, would be ideal.
- **On a Bus:** a member of staff to ride a bus with a diorama/taxidermy case, talking to the public.
- **Pop Up Guerrilla activities:** at libraries, children centres, nurseries, play pits, coffee shops, cinemas, hairdressers, on the Pier etc. These could be facilitated by staff or have a questionnaire to complete.
- **Local Community:** would local businesses like to host an object? Can this be used to highlight how they are contributing to the local wildlife e.g. what their green policies are? What is the Booth's direct local community doing and how can they all support each other?
- **In the Museum:** observations of visitors, gathering data on where they normally see the most wildlife, observing the most popular exhibits, visitors rewriting labels, paper and iPad questionnaires, handling stations and facilitated conversations, non-user events, local community events, creative art events.
- **Online:** questionnaire, explore successful online events to link with, run a targeted online event as part of Brighton & Hove Museums' wider online program

Staff and stakeholders

The consultant should meet (in person or online) our core project team of engagement, curatorial, conservation, front of house, evaluation and marketing team members.

This project is being funded by the Esme Fairburn Trust.

Brighton & Hove Museums' role

We will introduce you to key team members. Provide any baseline data needed. Provide risk assessments and safeguarding documents. Induct you to the Booth Museum of Natural History. Support on public events.

The contract will be managed on a day to day basis by Su Hepburn, Schools Learning Manager and is sponsored by Ceryl Evans, Director of Engagement & Public Programmes.

Outline requirements

The consultant should develop an outline plan of approach in conjunction with and for agreement by the project manager and sponsor within two weeks of the contract start date of 10th Oct 22. Once this plan is agreed, the work should be completed by end Feb 2023. The consultant will meet with the Project Lead and the Project Team throughout the 5 month period to reflect and review on findings. A final written report will be expected.

The fee for this piece of work is £10,800 for 36 days work over a 5 month period inclusive of expenses and any VAT. A 60% invoice will be payable on appointment and 40% by pro forma invoice, the latter paid on satisfactory completion of the work.

To apply

Please send a cover letter and CV to su.hepburn@rpmt.org.uk by midnight 22nd September 2022.

Context:

The Booth Museum of Natural History, described by the Smithsonian Institute as the 'home of the diorama', houses the first examples of birds displayed in simulations of their natural habitats in Britain. The dioramas are included in the Grade II listing of the building, so we face the interesting challenge of making the old-fashioned cases relevant and engaging to modern audiences. The museum has a unique quirky charm that is particularly fascinating to young children, and consequently their extended families, with its focus on Victorian taxidermy.

We will demonstrate that the study of historical natural history collections can help our understanding of preserving natural history in the modern world and show that everyone can play their part in understanding the value of scientific museum collections.

We will use the collections to help contemporary audiences understand how much has changed for British bird species since the creation of the dioramas. They will show visitors how much the natural environment has changed over the last 150 years and discover the reasons why some species have declined or become locally extinct, whilst others have risen in number or have populations that have remained largely unaltered.

The project will also increase understanding of how pioneering Edward Booth was, why after his death Mrs Bessie Booth gave the museum and its collection to the people of Brighton, as well as why the museum is here and the history and context of the dioramas. We want to support visitors to develop an understanding of the dioramas themselves e.g. how they were constructed, and the birds and scenes created within them and their fascinating, but little-known links to local craftspeople and lost skills.

These dioramas were added to by successive curators in the early 20th century to try and complete the list of birds recognised as resident or migrant to the UK at that time. However, this process stopped in the 1930s and no new diorama's have been added to the main displays in the past 90 years.

For many Brighton children their first museum visit may be to the Booth natural history museum. Children are naturally very curious about the world around them, wanting to make sense of and understand their role in it. Museums can be very safe and welcoming spaces for families to spend time together.

Being able to explore, play and reflect in museum gives families ownership of their own experience and their own learning. This allows for creativity and critical thinking which will enable them to make connections between themselves and the wider world. The family can be equal learners and explorers in museums creating a shared understanding and intergenerational learning.

We know that we have an audience at the Booth of under 10s and their families. We also have a primary school audience coming for booked workshops. We aim to increase the audience engagement and audience figures for these audience through this project. We will be able to measure both through an inbuilt evaluation process.

Final project outcomes of the full Discover our Dioramas might be:

Creation of a contemporary diorama – this would be an opportunity to create a 'wow' moment. We will ask the public to participate in the creation of a contemporary diorama, considering what might be put in a modern Brighton diorama now, versus what would have been seen in one 150 years ago. Participants will know that they have helped to create a new diorama that will provide scientific information for future generations to use in a similar way to how we are using them now.

Creation of new interpretation for the Booth birds - increase awareness of the importance of this collection and change the image of the displays from being old-fashioned to being innovative by inspiring interest and creative thinking. Visitors will feel inspired to take an interest in the natural world around us, as well as the impact that humans are having on biodiversity.

Creation of creative engagement activities and opportunities in the museum – this might be creative diorama building workshops, eco clubs, etc. We want families leaving with:

- a richer understanding of themselves and their connections to the wildlife around them.
- An understanding the local and global impacts of climate change
- a sense of joy and wonder, and an ambition to celebrate and protect the natural world.