



# #DYNAMIC COLLECTIONS:

Documenting Northern Lincolnshire's  
Local History

Final Evaluation Report

January 2026



**IPC**  
IRVING  
PATRICK  
CONSULTING



**Contents**

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1	Overview.....	4
<b>2</b>	<b>Project Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	Performance Indicators .....	4
2.2	Project Impact .....	6
2.3	Project Legacy.....	7
<b>3</b>	<b>Difference Made to Heritage .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1	Heritage is Better Identified .....	9
3.2	Heritage is Better Explained .....	9
3.3	Heritage is in Better Condition .....	9
3.4	Heritage is Better Managed .....	10
3.5	Heritage is More Accessible .....	10
<b>4</b>	<b>Difference Made for People .....</b>	<b>13</b>
4.1	Skills Development .....	13
4.2	Confidence and Wellbeing .....	15
4.3	Social Connection & Belonging.....	17
4.4	Empowerment & Co-Production.....	17
4.5	Inclusion: Adults with Additional Needs .....	18
4.6	Opportunities for Young People.....	20
4.7	Public-Facing Achievements.....	20
4.8	Co-curated Exhibitions .....	21
4.9	Widening Reach Through Social Media.....	30
<b>5</b>	<b>Difference Made to the Community .....</b>	<b>32</b>
5.1	Broadening Community Representation.....	32
5.2	Building Civic Pride & Shared Identity .....	32
5.3	Community Participation Through Co-Curation.....	32
5.4	New Community Partnerships.....	32
5.5	Access to Heritage Across the Region .....	34
5.6	Enhancing Community Wellbeing .....	34
5.7	Strengthening Collaboration .....	34
<b>6</b>	<b>Lessons Learnt .....</b>	<b>35</b>
6.1	Project Design & Timeframe .....	35
6.2	Documentation Workflows .....	35
6.3	Digitisation Preparation.....	35
6.4	Co-Production & Volunteer Management .....	36
6.5	Working with Adults with Additional Needs .....	36
6.6	Cross-Authority Collaboration.....	37
6.7	Digital Access & Systems Development .....	37
6.8	Community Engagement .....	37
6.9	Access, Inclusion & Recruitment .....	37
6.10	What Could Be Done Differently Next Time.....	37
<b>7</b>	<b>Project Legacy.....</b>	<b>39</b>
7.1	Strengthened Volunteer Infrastructure .....	39
7.2	Continuity for <i>Heritage Heroes</i> .....	39

7.3	Digital Legacy: Long-Term Public Access .....	39
7.4	Collections Legacy: Better Managed, Better Understood .....	40
7.5	Community Legacy .....	40
7.6	Organisational Legacy.....	40
7.7	Strategic Legacy .....	40
7.8	A Replicable Model for Community-Led Heritage.....	40
<b>8</b>	<b>Acknowledgement of Funding .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>43</b>
	Appendix 1: NELMs Volunteer Survey Results .....	44
	Appendix 2: Summary of Key Performance Indicators .....	46

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 OVERVIEW

*Dynamic Collections* is a National Lottery Heritage Fund initiative designed to support museums to make their collections more actively used, locally meaningful, inclusive of multiple perspectives and sustainably managed. The programme ran nationally between February 2022 and April 2023, and in June 2023 North Lincolnshire Museums (NLMs) and North East Lincolnshire Museums (NELMs) secured almost £250,000 to undertake a two-year programme of documentation, digitisation and community-driven interpretation.

The project set out to research and digitise approximately 90,000 items from Northern Lincolnshire's local history collections, while deepening community engagement through co-production, new volunteering opportunities, improved accessibility and the development of a new group for adults with additional needs at the Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre (GFHC). Public access would be further strengthened through the launch of online collections portals for both museums.

The project has been jointly delivered by:



**North Lincolnshire Museums (NLMs)** – North Lincolnshire Museum & Normanby Hall Country Park

**North East Lincolnshire Museums (NELMs)** – Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre

Both services are members of the Humber Museums Partnership and hold significant collections charting the social, cultural, economic and environmental history of the region.

The original project completion date was November 2025; this was extended to December 2025.

This evaluation report builds on the interim evaluation report issued in January 2025. The project evaluation was undertaken by Irving Patrick Consulting Ltd using data collected by North Lincolnshire Museums and North East Lincolnshire Museums. Observation sessions and

interviews with Project Volunteers and Project Officers were conducted by Irving Patrick Consulting Ltd.

The evaluation measures the extent to which the project has met its intended outcomes for heritage, people and communities, and the methods of working that contributed to, or affected that success. This report includes:

**A project summary**, including what the project delivered and the key differences that have been made, and the legacy of the project (Section 2).

**Analysis of how the project met its outcomes** for heritage, people, communities and for the organisations involved. These are presented in three sections:

- The difference made to heritage (Section 3)
- The difference made to people (Section 4, 5 & 6)
- The difference made to communities (Section 7)

**Review of the project** including management processes, models of working and lessons learnt (Section 8).

**Project Legacy**, detailing how the initiatives and information gathered during the project can support future heritage projects in northern Lincolnshire (Section 9).

## 2 PROJECT SUMMARY

*Dynamic Collections: Documenting Northern Lincolnshire's Local History* was designed as a transformative programme to address long-standing documentation backlogs, expand public engagement, and modernise collections practice across two local authority museum services. Funded by the *National Lottery Heritage Fund*, the project sought to strengthen the resilience, accessibility and inclusivity of heritage in Northern Lincolnshire by enabling local people to contribute directly to research, interpretation and collections care.

Delivered jointly by **North Lincolnshire Museums (NLMs)** and **North East Lincolnshire Museums (NELMs)**, the project supported activity at North Lincolnshire Museum, Normanby Hall Country Park and Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre. Two full-time Project Officers were appointed and worked closely with curatorial, learning and collections teams, volunteers and community partners.

At its core, Dynamic Collections aimed to:

- Improve the documentation and digitisation of local history collections at NLMs and NELMs.
- Build sustainable public-facing digital access through new online collections platforms.
- Recruit, train and support volunteers to undertake documentation, interpretation and creative engagement.
- Establish a new weekly programme for adults with additional needs at the GFHC (Heritage Heroes).
- Deliver co-curated exhibitions showcasing previously hidden collections.
- Embed inclusive, community-led practice across both museum services.

Across the two-year delivery period, the project exceeded expectations in nearly all areas.

*Museum Makers* (NLMs) and *Heritage Heroes* (NELMs) were established in direct response to identified gaps in participation, particularly among adults with additional needs. Interim evaluation findings highlighted that traditional museum volunteering and documentation tasks were not always accessible or engaging for these audiences.

In response, the project adopted flexible, creative and sensory-led approaches, allowing participants to engage with heritage in ways that reflected their interests, communication styles and strengths. These approaches were informed by early evaluation and audience analysis, which identified persistent under-representation of young people and adults with additional needs within museum engagement.

By the end of the project, volunteer recruitment significantly surpassed targets, documentation activity progressed at an unprecedented scale, and both museum services embedded co-production and community storytelling into core practice rather than treating it as a standalone initiative.

The project also surfaced substantial underlying collections challenges, including inconsistent numbering systems, undocumented ephemera, and unsuitable historic storage. Addressing these challenges collaboratively strengthened institutional knowledge and laid foundations for long-term improvements in collections care and access (discussed in detail in Section 3).

Two major co-curated exhibitions - *Stories from the Stores* (NLMs) and *Our Past on Paper* (NELMs) - demonstrated the power of volunteer-led interpretation. Volunteers researched objects, selected themes, wrote interpretation, produced creative and digital content, and

contributed directly to exhibition design and layout. Both exhibitions received strong visitor feedback and increased public understanding of local heritage.

*Dynamic Collections* also achieved a significant step-change in digital access. During 2024–2025, NLMs successfully launched its public *CollectionsOnline* portal, providing open access to hundreds of records under a Creative Commons licence. At NELM, a new MODES-backed public portal was developed to near-launch stage, supported by extensive data enhancement and digitisation preparation.

Equally importantly, the project delivered meaningful outcomes for people. Volunteers reported increased confidence, wellbeing, skills and social connection. Adults with additional needs described *Heritage Heroes* sessions as a weekly highlight, while young volunteers gained experience that supported progression into further study, training and employment. Creatively, participants contributed to exhibitions, films, sound collages, Discover articles, tactile displays, illustrated trails and digital storytelling outputs.

## 2.1 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Across both North Lincolnshire Museums and North East Lincolnshire Museums, the project met or exceeded the majority of its agreed targets, with particularly strong performance in volunteer engagement, public participation and digital reach.

Volunteer recruitment significantly surpassed expectations at both sites, with 32 volunteers recruited against an original target of six at each service. Correspondingly, volunteer hours far exceeded projections, particularly for Project Volunteers, reflecting both the scale of activity delivered and the depth of ongoing engagement achieved. This high level of participation underpinned progress across documentation, digitisation preparation, interpretation and public-facing outputs.

Public engagement targets were also strongly met. Both planned exhibitions were successfully delivered, with visitor numbers exceeding targets at North Lincolnshire Museum and achieving substantial reach at Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre. Social media activity significantly outperformed expectations, with output and reach far exceeding original targets and demonstrating the effectiveness of community-led storytelling in engaging wide audiences.

Several targets relating to collections documentation, digitisation and gallery updates were partially met, reflecting the scale and complexity of the collections involved. As delivery progressed, it became clear that significant preparatory work was required to address inconsistent numbering systems, undocumented material and unsuitable historic storage, particularly within the ephemera collections. Time and resource were therefore intentionally redirected towards improving data quality, collections care and system readiness, rather than maximising raw output figures.

At North East Lincolnshire Museums, activity with adults with additional needs substantially exceeded expectations. The number of *Heritage Heroes* sessions and total attendance both surpassed targets, demonstrating strong demand, sustained engagement and the success of the adapted delivery model developed through interim evaluation learning.

Overall, performance against targets demonstrates that the project was highly successful in its core aims, while remaining responsive and adaptive to emerging challenges. Where targets were not fully met, this reflects informed decision-making that prioritised long-term collections care, inclusive engagement and sustainable practice over short-term numerical outputs.

### 2.1.1 PARTICIPATION & PEOPLE

Across the project, 64 volunteers were recruited, with 40+ regularly participating across both museum services. Engagement was supported through recruitment events, taster sessions and short-term involvement opportunities, enabling participation from young people and students, adults with additional needs (Heritage Heroes and Museum Makers), community groups and local residents.

Weekly volunteer activity was sustained throughout the project lifespan, with volunteer time recorded consistently. In total, over 6,575.7 hours were logged by Project Volunteers and Museum Makers, representing an estimated £131,514 contribution, calculated using the National Lottery Heritage Fund's standard £20 per hour valuation. In addition, 87 Heritage Heroes sessions were delivered, attracting an average of 9.4 participants per session.

Volunteer engagement extended beyond participation, with several individuals progressing into postgraduate museum study, paid heritage or cultural roles, and public-facing opportunities including research, interpretation and public speaking.

### 2.1.2 COLLECTIONS & HERITAGE ACTIVITY

The project operated at significant scale across both museum services. 30,150 collection records were within the scope of the project, forming the basis for large-scale review, enhancement, digitisation preparation and future public access. Through volunteer-led documentation and staff oversight, over 16,488 catalogue records were created or significantly improved, increasing the accuracy, consistency and usability of collections data.

As a result of this work, over 500 records have been published online via the North Lincolnshire Museum *CollectionsOnline* platform, with further records prepared for release. Alongside documentation, thousands of ephemera items were surveyed, documented and rehoused, replacing historic non-archival storage with conservation-grade materials. At North East Lincolnshire Museums, ephemera collections were reorganised into SHIC (Social History and Industrial Classification) order, representing the most significant improvement to storage and structure at the site in decades.

### 2.1.3 DIGITISATION & DIGITAL ACCESS

Digitisation was closely integrated with documentation and collections care. More than 15,800 items were digitised at high resolution through external specialist services, supported by extensive preparation work undertaken by staff and volunteers. An additional 1,894 items were digitised in-house by volunteers. In addition, over 15,873 image records were migrated and improved through database integration, strengthening metadata quality and searchability.

A major milestone was the launch of *CollectionsOnline* at North Lincolnshire Museum, providing public access to digitised collections under a CC BY 4.0 open licence. At North East Lincolnshire Museums, the *MODES*-backed public collections portal was developed to near-launch stage, supported by comprehensive data cleaning and restructuring.

### 2.1.4 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & INTERPRETATION

Public engagement was strengthened through volunteer-led interpretation and co-curated outputs. The project delivered two major co-curated exhibitions:

- Stories from the Stores (North Lincolnshire Museum), attracting 9,709 in-person visits

- Our Past on Paper (Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre), attracting 4,636 in-person visits

The latter also represented the largest ephemera display at the site in decades. Volunteers contributed a wide range of public-facing outputs, including exhibition interpretation and trails, Discover articles and blogs, films and sound collages, and tactile and illustrated displays.

### 2.1.5 DIGITAL REACH

Digital platforms extended the reach of the project beyond on-site audiences. Project-related social media content reached over 100,000 views, with individual posts exceeding 34,000 views. Engagement levels were high, with significant sharing, commenting and community storytelling, particularly in response to content rooted in local memory and lived experience.

## 2.2 PROJECT IMPACT

*Dynamic Collections* delivered significant and lasting impact across heritage management, public access, community participation, organisational resilience and individual wellbeing. Evidence for these outcomes is drawn from quarterly reporting, volunteer feedback, visitor responses, staff reflections and independent evaluation.

The project transformed how local history collections are documented, cared for and shared. Volunteer-led research and documentation improved record quality, surfaced previously hidden stories and strengthened institutional knowledge, while improvements to storage, data structure and digitisation readiness have left collections better organised, more stable and more accessible for future use.

Public access to heritage was significantly expanded through the launch of *CollectionsOnline* at North Lincolnshire Museum and the development of a public portal at North East Lincolnshire Museums. Open-access licensing under Creative Commons further reinforced transparency and public ownership, enabling wider reuse of collections data and images.

Dynamic Collections also reshaped interpretation by embedding community knowledge, lived experience and creative practice into exhibitions, trails and digital outputs. Co-curated exhibitions demonstrated the value of this approach, combining historical research with personal and creative responses to reveal overlooked collections and connect audiences more deeply with local heritage.

The impact on people was consistently positive. Volunteers developed skills, confidence and a sense of purpose, with many reporting improved wellbeing and social connection. Adults with additional needs benefited from flexible, creative engagement that supported confidence, communication and familiarity with cultural spaces. For some participants, the project also supported progression into further study, training or paid work.

At an organisational level, the project strengthened workflows, improved staff confidence in co-production, and demonstrated effective approaches to managing large-scale documentation activity. Enhanced cross-authority collaboration and shared learning have increased resilience and readiness for future heritage projects.

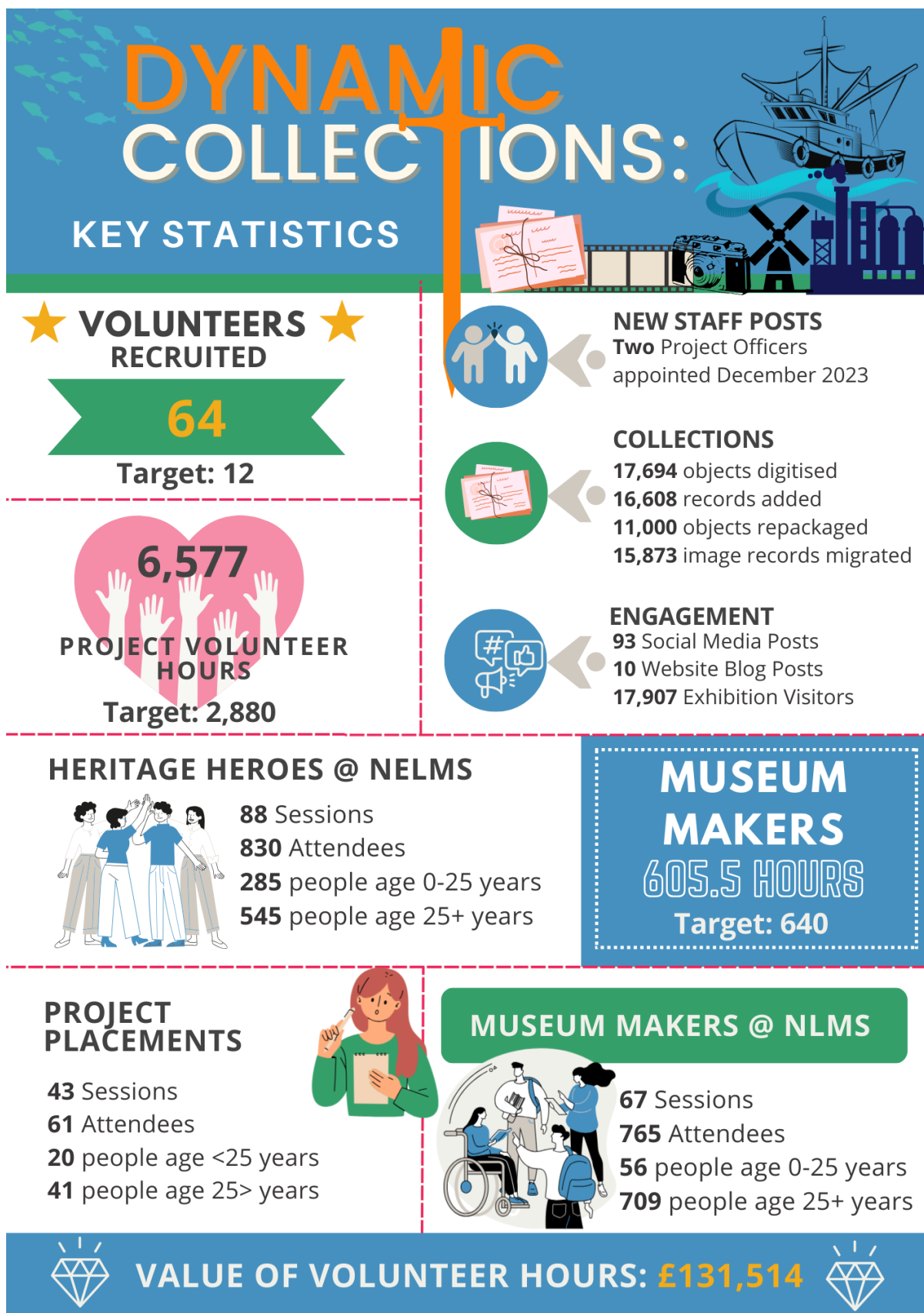
## 2.3 PROJECT LEGACY

*Dynamic Collections* has created a strong and sustainable legacy for both North Lincolnshire Museums and North East Lincolnshire Museums.

Key legacy outcomes include enhanced organisational capability in collections management, the continuation of inclusive volunteer programmes such as *Heritage Heroes* and *Museum Makers*, and deeper, more confident relationships with local communities developed through co-curation and shared storytelling. The launch of the *CollectionsOnline* platform at NLMs, alongside the near-completion of the NELMs public portal, ensures lasting public access to digitised collections.

The project also embedded open-access licensing, introduced more flexible and inclusive engagement approaches, and strengthened cross-authority collaboration. Volunteers leave the project with transferable skills, confidence and a sense of ownership that will support future heritage activity.

Overall, *Dynamic Collections* achieved its core aims and delivered benefits that will extend well beyond the funded period. The project has laid a strong foundation for long-term improvements in how heritage is documented, managed, shared and interpreted across Northern Lincolnshire, and provides a replicable model for community-led collections work within local authority museums.



### 3 DIFFERENCE MADE TO HERITAGE

The *Dynamic Collections* project significantly transformed the management, documentation, understanding and accessibility of local history collections across both North Lincolnshire Museums and North East Lincolnshire Museums. The project fulfilled, and in several areas exceeded, the National Lottery Heritage Fund outcomes relating to heritage being identified, explained and in better condition.

#### 3.1 HERITAGE IS BETTER IDENTIFIED

Prior to the project, much of the collection was effectively invisible, undocumented or inaccessible, limiting its research and interpretive potential. *Dynamic Collections* has fundamentally changed this baseline, creating a far more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the region's local history collections.

A major achievement of the project was improving knowledge and visibility of the collections. Volunteers and staff uncovered important material across boxes of ephemera, photographs, programmes and archival documents, surfacing stories connected to local culture, community identity and regional history. Examples included material relating to the Deyne School of Music, Zeppelin raids, S&G Stores, 1960s and 1970s popular culture, local shipbuilding and industry, Polish community life and the North Lincolnshire Sanctuary Group, Mabel Peacock's folkloric writings and playscripts, political cartoons at NELMs, and time-capsule material from People's Park. Through systematic documentation, thousands of items are now identifiable and traceable for future research and interpretation, including material that had not previously been reviewed by curatorial staff.

#### 3.2 HERITAGE IS BETTER EXPLAINED

Interpretation was substantially improved through the contributions of volunteers and community groups. Volunteers researched objects, drafted text for exhibitions, produced Discover articles, and created digital content. This enrichment made interpretation more reflective of community history, lived experience and local identity.

The two co-curated exhibitions, *Stories from the Stores* (NLM) and *Our Past on Paper* (NELM), provided platforms for presenting newly discovered stories. Through film, sound, artwork, tactile materials and written interpretation, volunteers explained the significance of objects in fresh and engaging ways.

Additionally, the *CollectionsOnline* platform now explains hundreds of item records to the public, supported by enhanced descriptions, metadata and contextual research.

The overall approach successfully shifted interpretation away from a solely curatorial voice, allowing lived experience, local knowledge and community memory to shape how heritage is explained and understood.

#### 3.3 HERITAGE IS IN BETTER CONDITION

The project delivered substantial improvements to the physical condition and long-term care of collections. Large quantities of ephemera were rehoused into conservation-grade materials, replacing vulnerable plastics and acidic historic storage. Items returned from digitisation were reintegrated into newly structured SHIC order, a nationally recognised system used by

museums to organise social history collections by function and use. Preventive conservation practices were embedded throughout delivery and shared with volunteers, strengthening day-to-day care standards. Digitisation also reduced the need for repeated handling, supporting longer-term preservation and reducing risk to fragile material.

For NELMs in particular, this work represents the most comprehensive improvement to ephemera storage and physical care undertaken in decades, transforming a previously inconsistent and vulnerable collection into one that is stable, findable and fit for long-term access and use.

### **3.4 HERITAGE IS BETTER MANAGED**

Beyond physical care, *Dynamic Collections* delivered a step-change in how collections are managed, structured and governed across both authorities. It improved record-keeping aligned with funder expectations, increased digital literacy among staff and volunteers, supported the adoption of open-access licensing and strengthened the identification of unaccessioned or non-local material for future rationalisation. At NLMs, more than 15,873 image records were improved through migration into *CollectionsIndex+* from the Image Archive using the IMPIX tool. At NELMs, the MODES system was significantly restructured to support the development of the public portal. Together, these changes improved long-term capacity for collections management and digital access.

### **3.5 HERITAGE IS MORE ACCESSIBLE**

For the first time, large portions of Northern Lincolnshire's local history collections can now be accessed remotely and freely by the public, researchers and creative practitioners.

Public access improved significantly through the launch of *CollectionsOnline* at NLMs, improved object-level metadata and the availability of digitised images under CC BY 4.0 licensing. Access was also enhanced through interpretive trails, gallery updates, volunteer-led digital resources, films, Discover articles, talks/lectures and co-curated exhibitions that encouraged deeper engagement. As a result, visitors and community members now have a more meaningful and accurate understanding of the region's heritage, and access has expanded to those who may be unable to visit in person.

Overall, *Dynamic Collections* made a substantial difference to the identification, explanation, organisation and accessibility of heritage across the region and establishing a robust foundation for future collections development.

## DAN NLM VOLUNTEER



“I’ve been involved with the volunteer project for around about a year now.

I’ve been doing a variety of things; digitisation of different objects, documentation and making sure everything is up to date, and also, I’ve been helping set up the exhibition we’ve got coming up which is about a variety of different pieces of history.

I think seeing the vast amount of different pieces of documents that we’ve got. Everything from diaries to letters and digital documentation. Think there was a World War One trench map that I was quite interested in with all the personal notes that were on it. Seeing these people’s lives through these documents is very interesting.

I think the collaboration of the project, getting to know these different people with different interests and backgrounds, being able to get their perspectives as well as finding ways to work together on the project has been very valuable”.



Photo: Irving Patrick Consulting

# MICHAEL

## NLM VOLUNTEER



“I’ve been involved with the project for just over a year now. The reason why I volunteered at the museum was because I work in an agricultural industry and it’s long and lonely hours and it gets me out and about sort of doing things that I want to do, to have my own bit of space really.

I’ve been documenting documents and items within the collection of North Lincolnshire Museum and also doing my own research which is the Normanby and Sheffield military hospital during the First World War. I’m particularly interested in that because I work on the Brocklesby Estate and have access to quite a lot of documents as well as having access to the Normanby documents held at the museum here.

One of the things that I’ve enjoyed working with is the list of soldiers that was hospitalised convalescent and sort of doing research into why they were there and how long they were there and whether they were from the local area or far away.

The project in general, I enjoy because everyone sort of contributes their own thing to it and we’re a mixed age group, everyone has different experiences of life and things they’re interested in, and we sort of share knowledge and help each other out really”.



Photo: Irving Patrick Consulting

## 4 DIFFERENCE MADE FOR PEOPLE

*Dynamic Collections* delivered significant and wide-reaching benefits for people, strengthening wellbeing, skills, confidence, employability and social connection across a wide demographic range. Evidence for these outcomes is reflected in staff observations, volunteer reflections and quarterly reporting.

### 4.1 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Volunteers developed a broad skill set that included documentation and cataloguing methods, digitisation preparation and metadata entry, handling and preventive conservation, digital literacy and collections management systems, archival listing and research techniques, and writing for exhibitions, trails and *Discover* articles. Many also gained experience in public speaking and creative interpretation, including film, printmaking and sound work. These skills were applied through real museum tasks, offering experience often associated with professional roles, and some volunteers used their learning to support job applications or progress into postgraduate study.

The project also built staff capability. Jenny Kirton, Project Officer at NLM, strengthened her experience of managing a large volunteer team, delivering co-production and interpretation activity, managing operational responsibilities and deepening practical knowledge of copyright and licensing.



#### RUTH - NLM VOLUNTEER

"I had recently completed an History and English degree and wanted to put the skills I had gained into use. I went to a jobs fair and was told about the museum and how my administrative skills would be beneficial. I had also worked with adults with additional needs.

What I'm doing is adding value to the community. It is such a diverse, broad community in Scunthorpe and it's so important to tell that story. We're very blessed here with the ethnic community and it's important to be mindful and respectful of their wishes.

I'm putting skills I'd forgotten or neglected into use and we are encouraged to develop new skills. I'm well supported, feel welcomed and valued, and I'm benefiting from being with others. It's wonderful.

I was anxious about retiring and I'm finding I'm blossoming again."

# JENNY

## DYMANIC COLLECTIONS PROJECT OFFICER NLM

---

"I'm Jenny and I'm the Dynamic Collections Project Officer at North Lincolnshire Museums. So, the Dynamic Collections Project, documenting North Lincolnshire history, is a National Lottery Heritage Funded project. I started my post in December 2023 and we recruited a team of volunteers that began volunteering sessions in February 2024. So, the project is all about connecting communities with the collections and shared history. It's a collaborative documentation project. Volunteers have been taking part in training on how to work with collections such as object handling, digitisation, learning about how to find object numbers, and they've done preventative conservation training. Such a lovely, dedicated team of volunteers. There's currently just over 30 volunteers involved in the project so we're a big, big team. Lots of project members have been coming in for weekly sessions and some come in for less regular sessions so we ask them to come in whatever time they can... that can fit around their lives.

The first part of the project, our priority, was really on the documentation side of the collection so working with the local history collections, the volunteers have been working to enhance the object records so collecting the dimensions, enhancing object descriptions, carrying out research on the objects and by digitising them as well, we are working to make them more accessible.

We've really enjoyed preparing for the exhibition. So, the volunteer team have been looking for stories during their documentation work and they have uncovered so many interesting stories that we couldn't include them all in the exhibition, so we found different ways to create a digital outputs for some of them.

What's been wonderful to see is the curiosity and moments of connection the volunteers have with objects when they discover something that resonates with them. I think it's helped create a sense of belonging and the bonds team members have formed between one another is just so wonderful to see. From our perspective as a museum team, we have learned so much about the objects in our collection. Our volunteers have brought their local knowledge and expertise from their own areas of interest, so it's been so wonderful and a privilege to work alongside them.

One of the key topics that has come up during exhibition preparation is about community spirit and the importance of community spirit so that's something we really wanted to get across in the stories we tell in our exhibition and also been asking questions about whose voices are represented in the collection. We really wanted to include a variety of perspectives in the stories that we document but also in the terms of the stories that we share too".



*Jenny Kirton with placement volunteer, Tyler Drury. Photo: Irving Patrick Consulting.*



*Alistair Eachus demonstrating how to create exhibition panels. Photo: Irving Patrick Consulting.*

Alistair Eachus, Project Officer at NELC, progressed from volunteer to staff member leading a major documentation programme, developing his people management and project delivery skills, running *Heritage Heroes* and designing and delivering his first major exhibition.

Both teams reflected that staff were often learning new skills just ahead of volunteers and teaching them immediately, requiring strong relationships, honesty and shared ownership.

## 4.2 CONFIDENCE AND WELLBEING

The 2025 *Museums Change Lives Award* nomination was celebrated as a significant milestone for the project, with volunteers at the heart of the occasion. A small group of staff and volunteers attended the awards ceremony in person, while others gathered at North Lincolnshire Museum to watch the event together on a large screen. Museum staff made the occasion feel special and celebratory, creating a party atmosphere with refreshments and a shared sense of anticipation. It was clear to see how excited the volunteers were and how much the nomination meant to them. Although the museum did not win and there were understandable feelings of disappointment, volunteers spoke with pride about being shortlisted, recognising the nomination itself as a huge achievement and a meaningful acknowledgment of their work.



*Project volunteers watching the Museums Change Lives award ceremony. Photo: Irving Patrick Consulting*

It should also be noted that in February 2025, North Lincolnshire Museum received significant external recognition, winning both *Small Visitor Attraction of the Year* and the *Accessible and Inclusive Tourism* awards at the Destination Lincolnshire Tourism Excellence Awards. In the same month the museum was also awarded the Autism Accreditation Award by the National Autistic Society, further demonstrating its commitment to accessibility, inclusion and high-quality visitor experiences.



*Volunteers Sharon, Adam, Dan and staff Kat, Madi and Rose at the awards ceremony in Cardiff. Photo: NLM website*

Throughout the project positive wellbeing outcomes were consistently reported, including reduced loneliness and anxiety, increased confidence in cultural spaces, improved mood, resilience, and a stronger sense of purpose and routine. Volunteers frequently described feelings of empowerment through opportunities to share their own stories in a safe and supportive environment; for example, one volunteer recently chose to bring in personal belongings and letters belonging to a relative she was grieving, using the sessions as a space where she felt able to be vulnerable and supported by the group.

Many participants expressed pride in contributing to a public institution and enjoyment and relaxation through creative engagement, with some adults with additional needs describing *Heritage Heroes* and *Museum Makers* as the highlight of their week and reporting that they felt safe, valued and part of something important. Staff also observed notable progress over time, particularly among individuals who initially struggled with communication but became increasingly comfortable, expressive and socially engaged. This exemplary work was recognised locally when the #DYC Project was selected as a case study by the North Lincolnshire Council Community Enablement Team for the recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection of North Lincolnshire Adult Social Care.

### 4.3 SOCIAL CONNECTION & BELONGING

*Dynamic Collections* helped create strong social networks among participants. Volunteers supported one another during tasks, collaborated on research, and engaged in shared creative projects. Many formed friendships outside museum sessions, organising their own meetups and continuing their connections beyond the project.

---

*"The Thursday group has become a community. There is a friendship group outside this project." Alistair Eachus - NELMs Project Officer*

---

For both young adults and older volunteers, the museum environment offered a rare intergenerational social space, creating opportunities for mentorship, peer learning and shared community identity.

### 4.4 EMPOWERMENT & CO-PRODUCTION

A core difference made for participants was the shift from traditional volunteering toward co-production and shared decision-making. Volunteers were not simply assisting staff; they were actively shaping interpretation and outputs. They selected objects, chose themes, drafted interpretation, produced creative content and contributed to decisions about layout and visitor experience. This level of involvement increased ownership and personal investment, and many volunteers described the exhibitions as "ours," reflecting a strong sense of agency and contribution.

---

*"I think the collaboration of the project, getting to know these different people with different interests and backgrounds, being able to get their perspectives as well as finding ways to work together on the project has been very valuable." Dan - NLMs Volunteer*

---

## 4.5 INCLUSION: ADULTS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

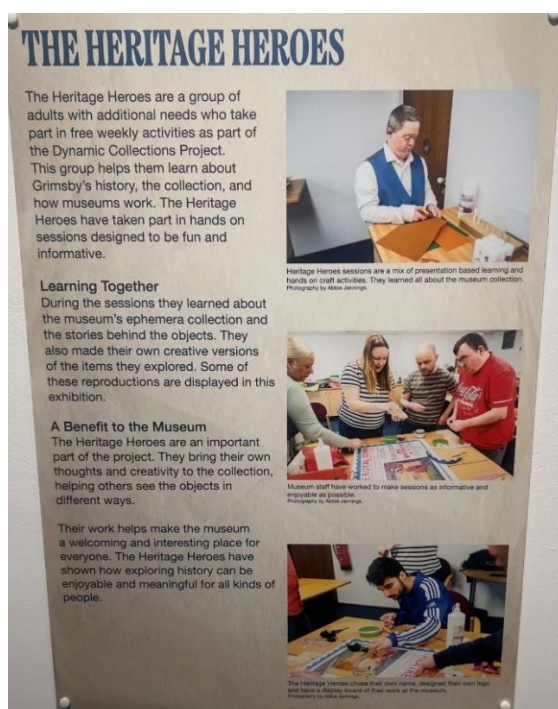
*Heritage Heroes* delivered some of the most impactful outcomes for people. Interim evaluation findings confirmed that creative, interpretive and sensory engagement was more effective than traditional documentation tasks for this group, shaping the final delivery model used across the project. Participants engaged in weekly creative and interpretive sessions that included object handling, tactile poster making, collaborative research, filming and performance, and guided gallery exploration.

Their work on *Grimsby Red*, a silent film premiered at the Parkway Cinema, created a landmark moment of visibility and celebration. Families and carers expressed pride in seeing participants' achievements recognised publicly. The film and related behind-the-scenes content are available via the Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre's YouTube channel. Also available on the same channel is '*Heritage Heroes Behind the Scenes*', a film about the *Heritage Heroes* and the making of '*Grimsby Red*'.

---

*"Our Heritage Heroes are just the most amazing group of people that we love working with. My colleague, Alistair, has worked really, really hard to make this happen and I'm just so excited to see it!" Louise Bowen – Senior Curator*

---



*Interpretation board on the Heritage Heroes in the Our Past on Paper exhibition. Photo: GFHC*



*Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre Facebook (above); Video by Heritage Heroes on YouTube (below)*



## 'GRIMSBY RED' FILM BY THE NELM HERITAGE HEROES



"I'm learning more things, like different things, like acting, pulling faces. It's one of the best things to remember. I feel like I'm feeling confident. It was really brilliant. Really, really fun. It was amazing".

Nathan



"I'm feeling so good that we're watching it today".

Aaron

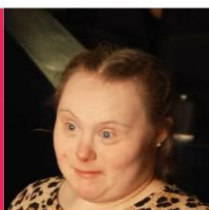


"It's good, the film's good and it's also good for the characters".

Tom

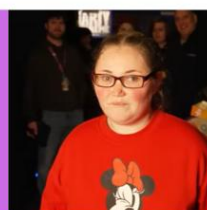
"It's amazing".

Sophie



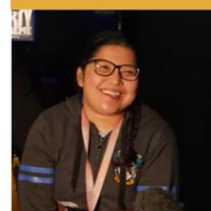
"It's exciting".

Neila



"I'm good. I'm nervous. I'm excited".

Marieanna



"Really good. Amazing. And I loved it as a whole, really".

Adam



"I'm feeling happy".

Clifford

Photos: Taken from 'Behind the Scenes of Grimsby Red', Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre



## 4.6 OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The project exceeded its target for youth engagement, with young volunteers contributing meaningfully to documentation, research and public-facing interpretation activity. Participation supported increased confidence, clearer career direction and a deeper understanding of heritage work, and in several cases directly influenced progression into further study, employment or ongoing volunteering.

At North Lincolnshire Museums, two placement volunteers, Tyla Drury and Abygayle Janik, returned to volunteer sessions, both expressing a desire to be more regularly involved with the project. Tyla Drury had recently completed a master's degree and used her continued volunteering to develop key skills, strengthen her CV and build on her practical experience. Abygayle Janik, who undertook her placement in April 2024 while considering a career in forensic archaeology, reported that her experience on the project inspired a change in career direction. She was subsequently accepted onto the Museums MA at the University of York, using her placement experience and a Discover article she wrote as part of her application, and re-joined volunteer sessions from April 2025 with the ambition of pursuing a career in museums, particularly within social history collections.

## 4.7 PUBLIC-FACING ACHIEVEMENTS

Volunteers contributed directly to public talks, guided tours, exhibition interpretation, *Discover* articles, digital storytelling and creative outputs displayed in galleries. Museum Maker volunteers delivered a talk to members of the North Lincolnshire Heritage Network on 23 June 2025, where they discussed documentation and interpretation activity linked to agriculture-related materials, including a gallery trail developed with a local illustrator and an exhibit created for Stories from the Stores.



Photo: NLM website



Volunteer Dan Zetterstrom (left, photo NLM website) delivered a Second World War-themed artefact handling session in the People's War Gallery. The session explored the experiences of evacuees during the Second World War and drew on his research into Second World War-related ephemera.

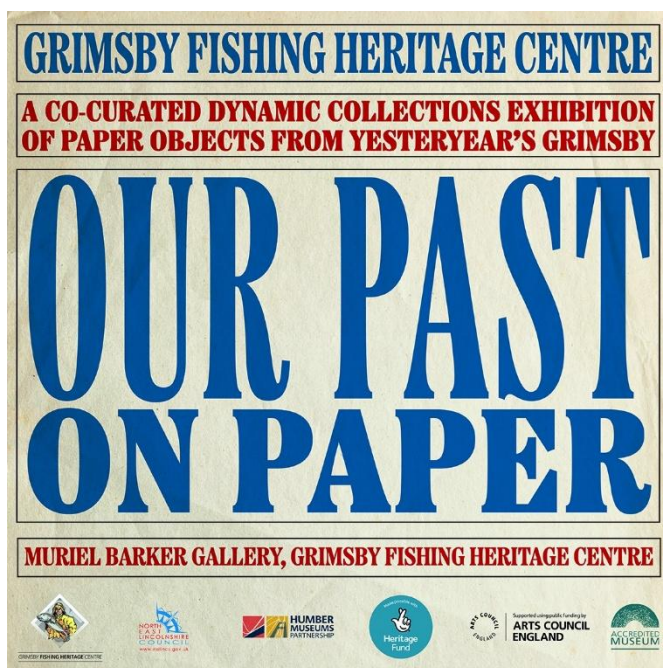
The work of volunteers increased public engagement and strengthened community pride in local heritage. Some of the volunteers from NLMs attended the Museums Association Conference for the Museums Change Lives awards, which was a significant motivational highlight and recognition of their contribution.

Overall, *Dynamic Collections* made a profound difference for people by creating inclusive pathways into heritage, building confidence and skills, fostering wellbeing, and empowering participants to contribute their creativity and lived experience to the museums of Northern Lincolnshire.

## 4.8 CO-CURATED EXHIBITIONS

### Our Past on Paper

*Our Past on Paper* was a co-curated temporary exhibition held at Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre in May 2025 until November 2025. The exhibition showcased the museum service's ephemera collections including materials that are rarely displayed despite their richness and relevance to everyday local life.



The exhibition was researched, selected and interpreted by Project Volunteers, working closely with staff, and was further enriched by creative contributions from the Heritage Heroes group (adults with additional needs). Together, they explored how printed materials such as posters, programmes, tickets, letters, cartoons and advertisements capture the social, cultural and political history of North East Lincolnshire.

Themes focused on community life, local events, work, leisure, activism and personal memory, revealing how seemingly ordinary paper objects can tell powerful stories about people and place. Many of the items displayed had not

been publicly accessible before, making this the largest ephemera display at the site in decades.

Volunteer research uncovered previously hidden stories within the collections, while personal knowledge and lived experience added depth and authenticity to the interpretation. Creative responses from Heritage Heroes helped broaden the exhibition's appeal, ensuring it was inclusive, accessible and emotionally engaging for visitors.

Visitor feedback was very positive, with audiences responding strongly to the sense of local ownership, the freshness of the stories, and the opportunity to see familiar places and experiences reflected in the collections. *Our Past on Paper* successfully demonstrated the value of collaborative documentation and co-production, transforming overlooked archival material into a compelling public exhibition and strengthening connections between the museum and its community.

The exhibition attracted 5,362 in person visits and achieved excellent engagement of a wider audience through social media (see Section 4.9 below), demonstrating sustained public interest in the Centre's collections and stories. These figures indicate that project-related content resonated well with digital audiences and successfully extended the reach of heritage activity beyond on-site visitors.

Platform	Total Views	Total Interactions	Reach
Facebook	23,692	277	16,234
Instagram	2,458	100	1,641
Combined Total	26,150	377	17,875

*"Our Past on Paper", Social Media Performance Summary between Dec-24 and Nov-25*



Photos: Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre



Photos: Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre

## Stories from the Stores

*Stories from the Stores* was a co-curated temporary exhibition held at North Lincolnshire Museum from May to November 2025. The exhibition brought rarely seen objects out of the museum stores and into the public gallery, using them to tell stories shaped and interpreted by volunteers.



The exhibition was created collaboratively with Project Volunteers and Museum Makers, who researched objects, selected themes, wrote interpretation, and contributed creative responses. Rather than focusing on traditional curatorial narratives, *Stories from the Stores* centred on community spirit, belonging and everyday lived experience, highlighting how museum collections connect to personal memories and shared local histories.

NLMs Project Volunteers selected three key themes to include in the project exhibition:

**The *Dynamic Collections* project**, with community members coming together and 'Documenting' - in various ways - a shared history.

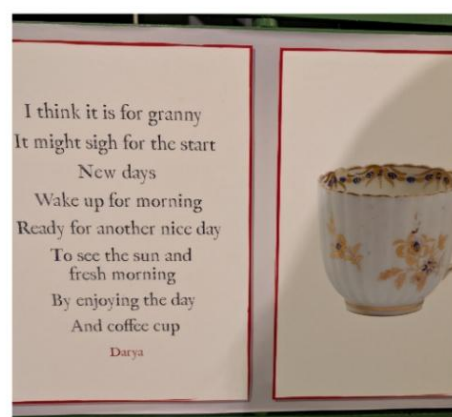
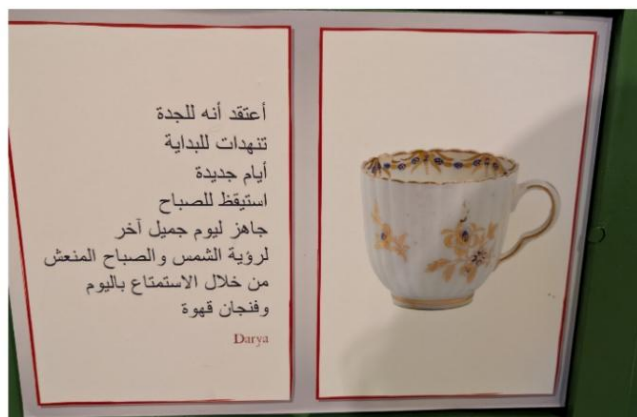
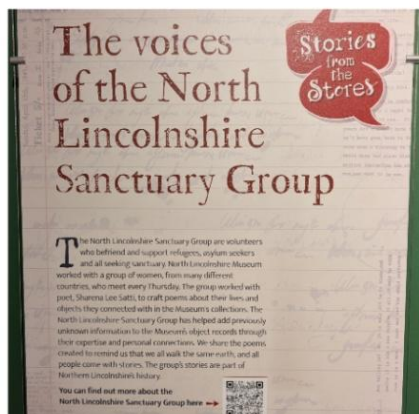
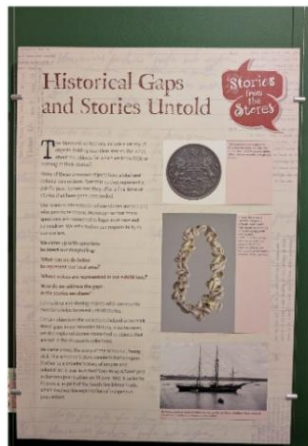
**Creatives who have shaped understanding of the region's past**, also considering the stakes of historical loss: William Fowler's etchings of Roman Mosaics, Mabel Peacock's recording of folktales, Karl Wood's sketches of North Lincolnshire windmills.

**Highlighting a regional history shaped by a strong tradition of community-level organising** – Scunthorpe Memorial Hospital Annual Carnival, Scunthorpe Pride, Cycle Song (a 2012 community opera involving 1200 participants).

Objects on display ranged across social history, domestic life, entertainment and work, many of which had been undocumented, under-interpreted or unseen by the public. Volunteers reframed these objects through contemporary perspectives, often drawing connections between past and present. Interpretation took multiple forms, including exhibition panels, labels, Discover articles, films, soundscapes and creative artwork, allowing for diverse voices and ways of engaging with heritage.

A key strength of the exhibition was the confidence and ownership shown by volunteers. Participants such as *Museum Maker* Tyler contributed reflective interpretation that linked objects to their own experiences, demonstrating how heritage can be reimagined through personal storytelling. Creative responses, including artwork inspired by historic diaries, added emotional depth and accessibility to the displays.

Over the six month run, the exhibition attracted 13,320 in-person visits. Visitor feedback highlighted the warmth, authenticity and relevance of the exhibition, with audiences responding positively to the community-led approach and the opportunity to encounter hidden collections in new ways. *Stories from the Stores* demonstrated the power of co-production, showing how collaborative documentation and interpretation can enrich understanding of collections, strengthen community relationships, and create meaningful, inclusive museum experiences.



# SALLY & SUE

## NLM VOLUNTEERS

"We started volunteering as I was interested in looking at the museum and contacted them and they said we are starting a new project in the year, so I came along to the open day, applied and was fortunate to be accepted. We've found with volunteering that it's not just about giving back, its about gaining something too, a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose even though it might be a small thing, it's a big thing to us. We have really enjoyed working with like minded people on the Thursday with a lot of laughter, a lot of fun and we've got to say something about Dan who helps us all the time when we get stuck. We also appreciate the coffee, biscuits and cake we get at lunchtime too. We've been learning new skills based on research and boxes we've been given to look through with different materials in them so that they can be digitised which we spent a lot of time doing to go onto a database that meant that anyone can access it to find out what's available in the museum.

We chose two projects to work on, one was Cycle Song which was an open-air opera performed in Scunthorpe in July 2012 in the central park. We were working through the boxes in the stores, and we came across a Cycle Song and we decided that that was the one that we wanted cause we both actually have been involved in it. Sally was a member of adult choir, and I had taken over a group of small children who had been part of the choir, so we have our contacts which helped as well. We also chose S&G stores because again we had contacts, we taught some of the Grandchildren or Mr Szenher and Mr Gorne who were the owners of S & G Stores, this linked with Dan who was doing some work on the Polish community during, and after, the Second World War. S&G stores was known by anyone of a certain age in Scunthorpe and the area because they sold good quality furniture at a very reasonable price. It's been really interesting doing this exhibition together realising there's an awful lot of work involved in producing an exhibition that we think everyone would really enjoy looking at with different aspects that we would have covered during this time. It's been really fascinating to learn new skills and look at the work we've been doing. What we've learn from the exhibition is that we are actually playing a small part in celebrating the past but hopefully inspiring the future too".



Photo: Irving Patrick Consulting

# OLIVER

## NLM VOLUNTEER

---

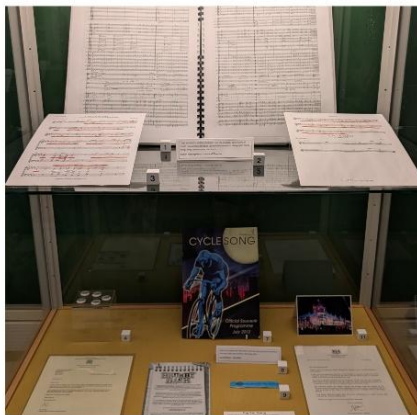
"I've been involved with the project since January, I've been investigating hauntings and tales of legends at locations near Mabel Peacock's family house, Temple Bath, St Peter's Church and St John's Well.

I've been involved in digitising the documents in a folder, making sure they're all there, measuring, seeing what condition they are and making sure everything is in order. The items I liked most were the stage programmes from the Plowright Theatre.

The thing I enjoyed the most was seeing how much stuff is in the archives, talking to everyone, listening to podcasts to help me get through the day and everyone just being so nice...just enjoy being here".



Photo: Irving Patrick Consulting



Photos: Irving Patrick Consulting

## 4.9 WIDENING REACH THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media engagement levels were consistently strong throughout the Dynamic Collections project, demonstrating significant public interest in the collections, stories and community narratives uncovered through the programme. Several posts achieved exceptionally high levels of engagement, far exceeding typical reach for local museum content.

One notable example was a post highlighting S & G Stores, a well-remembered Scunthorpe retailer founded in 1952 by Napoleon Szenher and Michael Gorne, two Polish ex-servicemen who settled in the town after the Second World War. This post, developed using research and interpretation generated through the exhibition, was viewed over 34,000 times, representing a substantial increase on average engagement levels.

The post generated significant interaction through shares, comments and reactions, with many local residents contributing personal memories of shopping at S & G Stores and reflecting on the role the business played in Scunthorpe's social history.



Platform	Total Views	Total Interactions	Total Link Clicks
Facebook	91,896	800 +	116
Instagram	14,286	356	N/A
Combined Total	106,182	1,156+	116

*"Stories from the Stores", Social Media Performance Summary between Apr-24 and Nov-25*

This example illustrates several key outcomes of the Dynamic Collections project:

Firstly, it demonstrates how community-led research and interpretation can dramatically increase public engagement. The story of S & G Stores emerged through volunteer documentation work, highlighting the value of collaborative approaches to uncovering and sharing local heritage.

Secondly, the post shows how the project successfully broadened representation within local heritage narratives. By highlighting the contribution of Polish ex-servicemen to Scunthorpe's economic and social life, the project brought visibility to migration stories that had previously been under-represented within the collections.

Thirdly, the scale of engagement confirms the effectiveness of digital platforms as tools for access and participation. Social media enabled heritage stories uncovered through the project to reach tens of thousands of people, including audiences who may not regularly visit museums or engage with traditional exhibitions.

Finally, this level of engagement evidences a strong sense of community connection and pride. The volume of views and interactions demonstrates that when local heritage is presented in a relatable, people-centred way, it resonates deeply with audiences and encourages active participation in sharing collective memory.

## 5 DIFFERENCE MADE TO THE COMMUNITY

*Dynamic Collections* strengthened the relationship between museums and the communities they serve, making heritage more visible, more accessible, and more meaningful for people across Northern Lincolnshire. The project not only increased engagement, but also fostered pride, representation, and collaborative ownership of local history.

### 5.1 BROADENING COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION

The project reached people and groups who have historically been underrepresented in museum practice, including adults with additional needs through *Heritage Heroes* and *Museum Makers*, young people through outreach work, and community groups such as the North Lincolnshire Sanctuary Support Group and Polish community members. Representation also increased through personal stories and co-curated outputs. This broader participation enriched the heritage narrative of the region and helped ensure collections and interpretation better reflected the communities who live there.

---

*"I like that the Museum's local history collections call attention to the many cultures and customs that exist within our local communities." Archie Wood - Project Volunteer*

---

### 5.2 BUILDING CIVIC PRIDE & SHARED IDENTITY

Volunteers and community groups expressed a strong sense of pride in contributing to the region's heritage. Exhibitions such as *Stories from the Stores* and *Our Past on Paper* showcased stories that resonated with local audiences, highlighting cultural memory, industrial history, creative expression, and the lived experiences of residents.

Visitors responded positively to the personal nature of interpretation. Many commented that seeing everyday people involved in museum decision-making made the institutions feel more approachable and relevant.

### 5.3 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION THROUGH CO-CURATION

Co-curation created opportunities for people to research and interpret objects connected to their own backgrounds and experiences, transforming collections into active community resources. Volunteers frequently described the significance of seeing their words on gallery walls, watching films screened publicly, hearing visitor feedback on objects they had researched and contributing to online public access. This level of involvement helped create deep community commitment and shared ownership.

### 5.4 NEW COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

*Dynamic Collections* strengthened and developed partnerships with schools and colleges, adult learning providers, the Sanctuary Group, artists and creative practitioners, community wellbeing services and disability support networks. The partnership with Linkage Community Trust created a steady flow of Heritage Hero participants while remaining manageable for staff and enabling successful activities to be repeated and adapted. These partnerships created new pathways for long-term engagement beyond the funded period.



Photos: Irving Patrick Consulting

## 5.5 ACCESS TO HERITAGE ACROSS THE REGION

Digital development significantly increased access for people unable to visit in person. The launch of *CollectionsOnline* at NLMs, and the planned release of the NELMs portal, made hundreds of digitised records accessible under open licensing. Public reach was extended further through Discover articles, digital storytelling, volunteer-led video content, social media and creative community responses, broadening access to heritage across the region.

## 5.6 ENHANCING COMMUNITY WELLBEING

The project made a substantial contribution to community wellbeing. Volunteers and participants reported reduced isolation, increased confidence, improved communication, relaxation through creative activity and a sense of fulfilment from contributing to local history. The project also created shared social spaces and accessible group activity, and publicly celebrated community achievements, reinforcing connection and pride.

## 5.7 STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION

*Dynamic Collections* enhanced collaboration between NLMs and NELMs and modelled a unified regional approach. Shared processes, aligned documentation standards and cross-team problem-solving created stronger foundations for future joint work. This collaboration supported consistent improvements in collections management, joint approaches to digital access, aligned engagement strategies and increased capacity to deliver future regional projects. Overall, the project strengthened the cultural fabric of Northern Lincolnshire and reinforced the role of heritage within community life.

## 6. LESSONS LEARNT

*The Dynamic Collections* project generated extensive learning across collections management, digitisation, community engagement, volunteer coordination and cross-authority collaboration. The reflections presented in this section draw on feedback from project staff and volunteers, quarterly reporting, and formal evaluation discussions. Collectively, they demonstrate both the complexity of delivering a large-scale documentation and engagement project and the value of reflective practice in shaping future work across Northern Lincolnshire.

### 6.1 PROJECT DESIGN & TIMEFRAME

The original two-year project timeframe underestimated the scale and complexity of the collections involved, particularly the NELM ephemera, which required significant work to sort, identify, number and repackage. In practice, both partner organisations agreed that the project operated as a three-year programme delivered within a two-year funding period. Key pressures included reconciling multiple object numbering systems, resolving cataloguing anomalies and preparing material to an appropriate standard for digitisation.

Staff reflected that an additional year would have allowed for smoother preparation, more confident decision-making and a reduction in time pressure. Future projects would benefit from more generous lead-in periods for database migration, volunteer recruitment and digitisation logistics, alongside clearer early forecasting and risk planning for unknown elements within collections.

### 6.2 DOCUMENTATION WORKFLOWS

Over the course of the project, teams developed a clearer understanding of effective documentation workflows. Early stages of delivery were characterised by cautious and sometimes repetitive processes, including repeated unpacking, separating accessioned and non-accessioned material, and re-sorting collections. With hindsight, staff recognised that some of these steps could have been condensed.

A key learning point was the importance of establishing clarity around numbering systems at an early stage to prevent later bottlenecks. The project also demonstrated that volunteers are capable of undertaking complex documentation tasks when provided with appropriate guidance and support. While some volunteers felt that additional early training might have been beneficial, staff reflected that many challenges only became visible through hands-on engagement and that learning through doing proved an effective approach when combined with responsive staff input.

### 6.3 DIGITISATION PREPARATION

The project reinforced that the time required to prepare collections for digitisation is frequently underestimated. Staff encountered challenges including identifying incomplete, duplicated or erroneous object numbers, matching physical objects to inconsistent or partial metadata, determining copyright status, and packaging material in a digitisation-ready format. Considerable time was also required to reach a point of confidence in handing over material for external digitisation. Staff concluded that digitisation preparation should be treated as a distinct and phased activity, with clear milestones and significantly earlier preparatory work embedded within future project plans.

## 6.4 CO-PRODUCTION & VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Working with large and diverse volunteer groups generated significant learning around co-production and volunteer management. Volunteers responded positively when given autonomy, ownership and opportunities to contribute meaningfully to decision-making. However, effective co-production required open communication, flexibility and consistent staff contact. Staff noted that large volunteer teams require clear task structures to avoid duplication and maintain momentum, and that volunteer retention improves when social connection and wellbeing are prioritised. Some volunteers experienced frustration due to delays affecting progress, particularly around IT access, laptop setup and the availability of acid-free storage materials. There was also occasional uncertainty around the role of external agencies, such as scanning services and aspects of the project's scope or aims. These experiences highlighted the importance of clear and consistent communication throughout project delivery. Staff reported that the project significantly strengthened their people-management skills, particularly in balancing volunteer enthusiasm with realistic project constraints.

Volunteer responses demonstrate consistently positive experiences, with participants highlighting enjoyment, interest, social connection and a strong sense of contributing to northern Lincolnshire's heritage. Volunteers particularly value supportive staff relationships and meaningful, hands-on work with the collections. Feedback also provided constructive insight into operational challenges, including the timing of conservation training, delays in accessing equipment and storage materials, and practical issues such as parking. This feedback closely aligns with staff reflections and has informed learning around induction, workflow planning and resources readiness.

## 6.5 WORKING WITH ADULTS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

The *Heritage Heroes* programme provided significant learning within the project. While there was initial staff apprehension about delivering the programme, this quickly gave way to increased confidence, enjoyment and a clear recognition of its positive impact. Staff reflections highlighted that accessible, creative activities were key to enabling deep and sustained engagement, and that partnerships with support organisations such as Linkage played an important role in providing continuity and reassurance for participants. The six- to eight-week group rotation structure was also found to work well, helping to maintain energy, diversity and engagement across the programme.

Developing effective ways for the *Heritage Heroes* to contribute meaningfully to documentation work formed an important part of this learning. Earlier attempts to introduce formal documentation practices, including object numbers, classification systems and condition reporting, were met with limited engagement. This prompted reflection on both the content and delivery of these activities and led to the trialling of alternative approaches that embedded documentation principles more subtly within object-based engagement.

Project Officer Alistair Eachus tested the use of pre-selected, object-focused questions during a session centred on a series of vintage postcards (see Appendix). Engagement during this activity was noticeably stronger. This may reflect the inherent appeal of the postcards themselves, but it also suggests that providing clear, structured prompts helped reduce the uncertainty and disengagement previously associated with open-ended group discussions.

Overall, this approach successfully supported active engagement with the collection while also generating meaningful interpretive insights. Reflecting on these outcomes, it is clear that

adapting documentation activities to suit the interests and working preferences of the group is essential. Combined with the programme's flexible structure and strong partnership working, this method now contributes to a tested and increasingly replicable model for inclusive museum engagement. They will continue to refine and build on this approach as the programme develops.

## **6.6 CROSS-AUTHORITY COLLABORATION**

The partnership between NLMs and NELMs demonstrated the value of cross-authority collaboration. Regular communication, shared problem-solving and aligned workflows strengthened project delivery and improved outcomes for communities. Challenges included differing legacy systems, variable levels of existing cataloguing and the need to coordinate across distinct organisational structures. Despite these challenges, staff agreed that collaboration significantly enhanced the regional heritage offer and delivered stronger, more resilient outcomes than would have been possible through isolated working.

## **6.7 DIGITAL ACCESS & SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT**

The development of *CollectionsOnline* for NLMs and the NELMs digital portal highlighted the complexity of digital systems development. Staff observed that systems migration consistently took longer than anticipated and required substantial testing and staff time. The project reinforced the importance of aligning digital access development with documentation workflows, particularly where open licensing and copyright considerations were involved. User interface testing was identified as an area that should be built more explicitly into future project timelines. Early technical planning and clearer resource allocation were recognised as essential for the success of future digital projects.

## **6.8 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The project demonstrated that meaningful community engagement is built on trust, sustained contact and a genuine valuing of lived experience. Participants responded most positively when their contributions were visibly represented through exhibitions, trails, film screenings and digital content. Providing space for creativity and personal expression proved central to building confidence, ownership and long-term engagement, and reinforced the importance of co-produced approaches to interpretation and storytelling.

## **6.9 ACCESS, INCLUSION & RECRUITMENT**

While recruitment events and open days attracted a wide demographic, including many young people, volunteer retention over time tended to skew towards more traditional museum audiences. Staff identified several barriers to broader participation, including the physical location of the collections store, limited public transport links and reliance on car access. These factors particularly affected younger volunteers and people with additional needs. Limited success in recruiting volunteers from global majority communities was also identified as a key challenge and a priority area for future recruitment strategies.

## **6.10 WHAT COULD BE DONE DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME**

Reflecting on the project as a whole, staff identified several areas for future improvement. These included allocating more time for digitisation preparation, beginning complex

documentation tasks earlier, delivering early workshops on numbering systems and cataloguing histories, introducing clearer volunteer progression routes, establishing cross-authority governance from the outset, and planning digital access platforms concurrently with documentation activity. Together, these reflections underline the complexity and richness of collaborative work with collections and communities and provide a strong foundation for shaping future projects across Northern Lincolnshire.

## 7 PROJECT LEGACY

The legacy of *Dynamic Collections* extends far beyond its two-year funded period. The project has transformed internal practice, enhanced public access, expanded opportunities for participation and established stronger regional heritage collaboration. This section summarises the enduring outcomes that will continue shaping Northern Lincolnshire's heritage landscape.

### 7.1 STRENGTHENED VOLUNTEER INFRASTRUCTURE

One of the most substantial legacies is the establishment of a stronger and more sustainable volunteer programme. Volunteers developed meaningful museum skills and built strong connections to the collections they helped document, with many expressing motivation to continue. Ongoing activity is expected to include weekly volunteer sessions at NELMs and twice monthly volunteer sessions plus a monthly *Museum Makers Volunteers* session at NLMs, as well as continued involvement in interpretation, digitisation preparation and public engagement by volunteers, Museum Makers and Heritage Heroes. The social bonds formed during the project, particularly among long-term volunteers, will support continued commitment, and volunteers now have sufficient confidence in cataloguing systems, research methods and preventive conservation to contribute with increasing independence.

### 7.2 CONTINUITY FOR HERITAGE HEROES

*Heritage Heroes* represents a significant and lasting legacy of the project, establishing a sustainable and inclusive model for engaging adults with additional needs in heritage work. The programme is underpinned by a strong partnership with Linkage Community Trust and other support organisations, which has enabled continued delivery beyond the project period. While early recruitment approaches proved challenging, the rotational model developed with Linkage, bringing groups of around twelve participants on a six- to eight-week cycle, has created an effective, manageable and replicable structure. This model has ensured ongoing diversity and reach while reducing the need for continual recruitment and allowing activities to be refined over time. *Heritage Heroes* has embedded a meaningful weekly wellbeing offer that supports creativity, confidence-building and social connection, while enabling participants to return to the programme and maintain a sense of continuity. The success of this approach has transformed initial uncertainty into confidence and enthusiasm among staff and participants alike. Public-facing outcomes, including the silent film premiered at the Parkway Cinema, stand as enduring evidence of the programme's impact and demonstrate how co-production with supported groups can create lasting cultural and social value.

### 7.3 DIGITAL LEGACY: LONG-TERM PUBLIC ACCESS

*Dynamic Collections* significantly improved digital heritage access. At NLMs, *CollectionsOnline* launched successfully and provides public access to hundreds of enhanced records, while staff digital literacy increased and a long-term mechanism for adding new content is now in place. At NELMs, MODES infrastructure was completed and the public portal progressed to near-final stage, supported by extensive metadata improvement and digitisation groundwork. The adoption of open licensing under CC BY 4.0 ensures digitised collections can be freely reused, extending reach and enabling creative engagement.

## 7.4 COLLECTIONS LEGACY: BETTER MANAGED, BETTER UNDERSTOOD

The project delivered major improvements in collections management. Records are now more accurate and complete, numbering systems have been addressed more consistently and thousands of items benefit from improved storage and preservation. The project also clarified the scale of undocumented material and laid groundwork for future rationalisation. The reorganisation of NELMs ephemera into SHIC order represents the most significant reform in decades, while NLMs migration and improvement of 15,873 image records into *CollectionsIndex+* has strengthened future cataloguing capacity.

## 7.5 COMMUNITY LEGACY

*Dynamic Collections* built deeper and more equitable relationships with communities. These relationships will continue through co-curated gallery projects, volunteer-led Discover articles and ongoing partnerships with groups including the Sanctuary Group and Polish communities, as well as creative collaborations with artists and educators. Participants who had not previously engaged with museums now see themselves reflected within local cultural spaces, and stories uncovered during the project will continue to inform exhibitions, programming and engagement activity.

## 7.6 ORGANISATIONAL LEGACY

The project embedded co-production as a working practice, demonstrated the meaningful role volunteers can play within documentation and strengthened cross-authority planning. It also increased staff confidence in delivering large-scale documentation projects and developed skills in volunteer coordination, digital workflows and inclusive practice. This organisational learning will strengthen future bids, strategic planning and cross-team working.

## 7.7 STRATEGIC LEGACY

The evidence base generated through *Dynamic Collections* provides strong support for future documentation and digitisation bids, the expansion of *Heritage Heroes*, and proposals for further social history documentation at NELMs. It also supports the development of new interpretation and research projects and future funding applications for region-wide heritage collaboration. The model of community-led documentation developed through the project is now a proven template for future work.

## 7.8 A REPLICABLE MODEL FOR COMMUNITY-LED HERITAGE

*Dynamic Collections* demonstrates how volunteers can co-produce interpretation, how digitisation can be integrated with community research and how ephemera can be catalogued at scale with public involvement. It also shows how people from diverse backgrounds can meaningfully shape collections and heritage narratives. This model is now embedded across both authorities and provides a clear blueprint for future inclusive heritage practice.

Overall, the legacy of *Dynamic Collections* is profound and enduring. It has strengthened the cultural infrastructure of Northern Lincolnshire, expanded access to heritage, and empowered communities to take an active role in preserving, interpreting and celebrating their collective history.

## 8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FUNDING

The National Lottery Heritage Fund logo was used extensively throughout the project to acknowledge the vital support that made the work possible, appearing across promotional materials, displays and project outputs. In addition, *National Lottery Thank You* events were held in both 2024 and 2025, providing opportunities to celebrate the impact of the funding, recognise participants and volunteers, and publicly thank National Lottery players for their contribution. These events helped to raise awareness of the project, strengthen community engagement and highlight the positive outcomes achieved through Heritage Lottery support.

**Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre**  
9 January 2025 · 🌐

FREE POSTCARDS!!

As a special thanks to players of the National Lottery, the Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre is giving away a free postcard to each lottery player who comes to the museum. All you have to do is come to the front desk and show your lottery ticket or proof of purchase on your National Lottery app.

Volunteers from the Heritage Centre's Dynamic Collections Project have specially selected an array of wonderful photographs from our collection. Five of these photographs were then chosen by the Heritage Heroes to be turned into fantastic postcards as thanks to all players of the National Lottery.

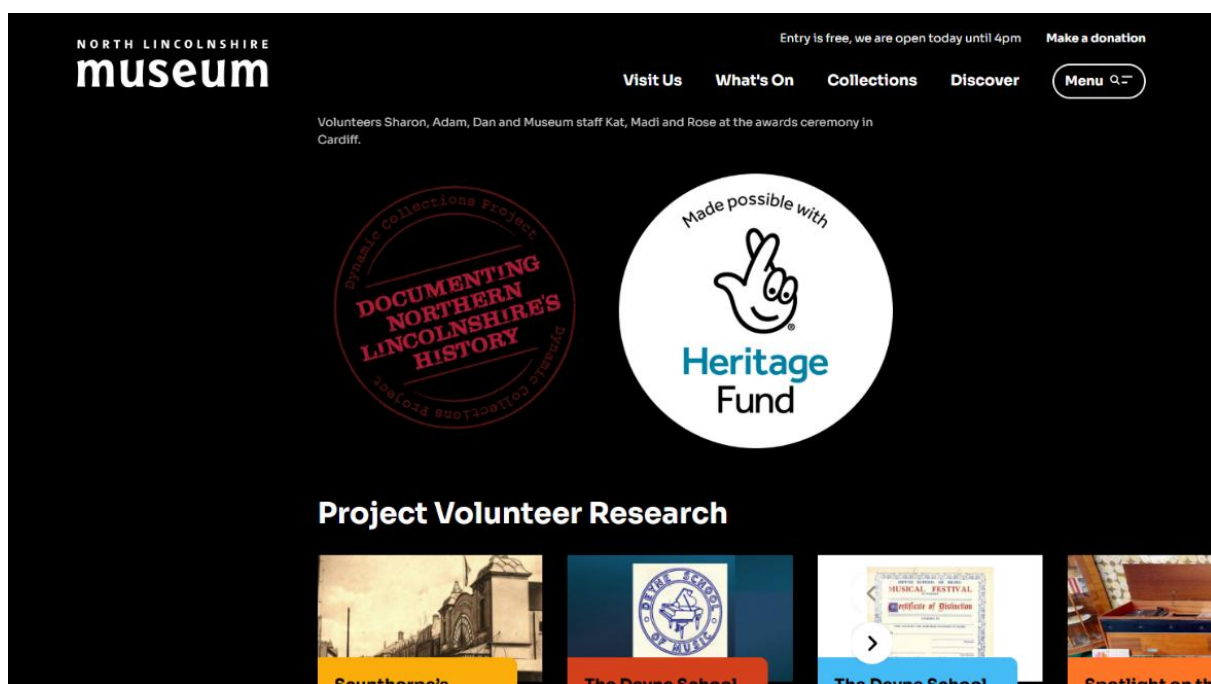
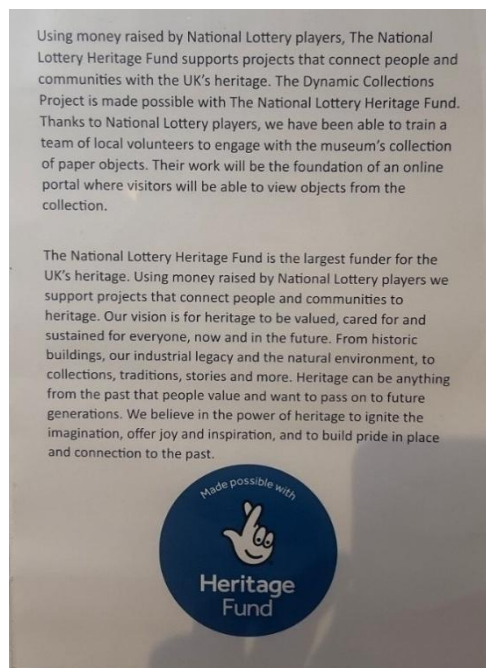
The Dynamic Collections Project is made possible by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. To read more about the Dynamic Collections Project, Volunteering at the Heritage Centre or the Heritage Heroes, head over to our blog page or contact our Dynamic Collections Officer at [alistair.eachus@nelincs.gov.uk](mailto:alistair.eachus@nelincs.gov.uk).

[#grimsby](#) [#grimsbyfishingheritagecentre](#) [#gfhc](#) [#NationalLottery30](#) [#heritagefunduk](#) [#NELC](#)

Thanks to  
National Lottery  
players







Examples of funding acknowledgement on social media, printed material and the website

## 9 CONCLUSION

*#Dynamic Collections: Documenting Northern Lincolnshire's Local History* has been a transformative project for the region, for both museum services, and for the many volunteers and community members who took part. Across its two-year delivery period, the project exceeded expectations, creating new pathways for participation, improving the condition and documentation of collections, and embedding a culture of shared ownership within heritage practice.

The project successfully addressed longstanding challenges in collections management, particularly the complex ephemera collections held by NELMs and the historic image holdings at NLMs. Through intensive volunteer involvement, thousands of items are now better understood, better housed, and better connected to community stories. This improved documentation has already begun shaping future exhibitions, digital access and interpretation.

People were at the heart of *Dynamic Collections*. Volunteers gained skills, confidence and a sense of belonging through meaningful heritage work. Adults with additional needs, supported through *Heritage Heroes* and *Museum Makers*, developed powerful creative outputs, including a silent film, and built trusted relationships with museum staff. Young volunteers grew in confidence and some used the experience to support their education and career progression. The project created a socially rich, supportive environment where people from all backgrounds felt valued.

The wider Northern Lincolnshire community also benefited from exhibitions, events, digital content and storytelling that foregrounded local voices. Co-curated displays and *Discover* articles made visible the lived experience, creativity and memories of residents. Community participants, including Sanctuary Group members and Polish community contributors, felt seen, represented and empowered.

The project's legacy is both practical and strategic. Digital access has been transformed through *CollectionsOnline* and the development of the NELMs portal. Documentation systems have improved significantly. Staff have increased confidence in working with volunteers, running complex cataloguing projects and facilitating creative, inclusive engagement. Partnerships have strengthened, laying the groundwork for future collaborative projects.

*Dynamic Collections* has delivered a resilient, forward-looking foundation for continuing documentation, digitisation and engagement work. It has shown how heritage institutions can become more open, more collaborative and more representative. The museums of Northern Lincolnshire are now better positioned than ever to share their collections and stories with local people and the world.

The project stands as a testament to the power of community involvement and the lasting value of investing in heritage. The achievements documented in this report demonstrate that when people are invited to contribute their curiosity, their creativity and their lived experience, heritage truly becomes dynamic.

## APPENDIX 1: NELMS VOLUNTEER SURVEY RESULTS

<b>How are you feeling about your volunteering?</b>	<b>Thoroughly enjoying the role, very interesting and great people to work with.</b>
<b>What's not so good? What could we do better?</b>	Sometimes I struggle with the terms and descriptions of the project.
<b>Do you feel you need any additional support/training for your role? If so, what could help?</b>	Nothing comes to mind.
<b>Anything you would like to feed back to staff/Trustees?</b>	Feeling of doing something useful and rewarding with like-minded people.

<b>How are you feeling about your volunteering?</b>	<b>Feel good putting things together so it can hopefully be enjoyed by the people of Grimsby.</b>
<b>What's not so good? What could we do better?</b>	I personally sometimes feel undervalued.
<b>Do you feel you need any additional support/training for your role? If so, what could help?</b>	
<b>Anything you would like to feed back to staff/Trustees?</b>	

<b>How are you feeling about your volunteering?</b>	<b>I have really enjoyed the experience. Finding the work interesting and, in some cases, thought provoking. Have enjoyed meeting new people.</b>
<b>What's not so good? What could we do better?</b>	There seems to have been some uncertainty around outside agencies (scanning etc).
<b>Do you feel you need any additional support/training for your role? If so, what could help?</b>	The conservator training would have been more useful towards the beginning of the project. On the whole the group have been well supported by Alistair.
<b>Anything you would like to feed back to staff/Trustees?</b>	I have enjoyed the experience and working with like-minded people. Creating the exhibition was interesting.

<b>How are you feeling about your volunteering?</b>	<b>Volunteering makes me feel useful, and helps me to socialise whilst also feeling useful in a small way.</b>
---	--

<b>What's not so good? What could we do better?</b>	
<b>Do you feel you need any additional support/training for your role? If so, what could help?</b>	We had extensive training which was in person and online and was very thorough and useful.
<b>Anything you would like to feed back to staff/Trustees?</b>	

<b>How are you feeling about your volunteering?</b>	<b>I've enjoyed learning more about the local area and history. It's also satisfying to have been of assistance in collating the collection.</b>
<b>What's not so good? What could we do better?</b>	
<b>Do you feel you need any additional support/training for your role? If so, what could help?</b>	No. Training has been provided where necessary.
<b>Anything you would like to feed back to staff/Trustees?</b>	

<b>How are you feeling about your volunteering?</b>	<b>It's been thoroughly enjoyable and I've met some great people, including Alistair. I've learned a lot about the Grimsby area. I've loved it! Thank you, Alistair.</b>
<b>What's not so good? What could we do better?</b>	I felt sometimes the project was hampered by delays in getting things we needed to progress. The laptop situation was dreadful! Also waiting for acid free folders, boxes.
<b>Do you feel you need any additional support/training for your role? If so, what could help?</b>	More training on care of objects whilst collecting data so we were more aware of the need for care when outing them in the folders, straightening creases, removing staples, pins etc. that were damaging the paper. Training we had should have been earlier.
<b>Anything you would like to feed back to staff/Trustees?</b>	Induction should include proper conservation preparation so we know how to care and minimise further damage to the objects/artefacts.

<b>How are you feeling about your volunteering?</b>	<b>Enjoying the work, discovering our local heritage and meeting new people.</b>
<b>What's not so good? What could we do better?</b>	Parking is sometimes difficult at the store.

<b>Do you feel you need any additional support/training for your role? If so, what could help?</b>	No
<b>Anything you would like to feed back to staff/Trustees?</b>	Just like to thank Alistair for his support and guidance.

## APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

<b>North Lincolnshire Museums</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual</b>
Project Officer recruited	1	1
Number of Project Volunteers recruited	6	32
Project Volunteers hours	1,440	3,752.5
Museum Makers volunteer hours	640	605.5
Collectionsindex+ records added or enhanced by Museum Makers	150	114
Collectionsindex+ records added or enhanced by Project Volunteers & Staff	15,000	5,374
Number of objects digitised	15,000	6,694
Discover articles	10	14
Lunchtime Lectures	7	2
Lunchtime Lectures attendance	140	77
Social Media Posts	24	68
Gallery Trails	2	2
Exhibition at NLM: May - Nov-2026	1	1
Visitors to exhibition at NLM	10,000	12,545
Local History Galleries cases updated	3	2
Local History Galleries panels updated	6	2

<b>North East Lincolnshire Museums</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual</b>
Project Officer recruited	1	1
Number of Volunteers recruited	6	32
Project Volunteers hours	1,440	2,154.7
Heritage Heroes volunteer hours	640	64
MODES records added or enhanced by Project Volunteers & Staff	15,000	11,000
Objects repackaged	14,000	11,000
Records added or enhanced by group for adults with additional needs	150	120
Number of objects digitised	15,000	11,000
GFHC website blogs	10	10
Talks	6	6
Talk programme attendance	90	62
Social Media Posts	24	25
Group for adults with additional needs, sessions	60	84

Group for adults with additional needs, attendance	600	<b>818</b>
Gallery Trails	2	<b>2</b>
Exhibition at GFHC: May - Nov-2026	1	<b>1</b>
Visitors to exhibition at GFHC	10,000	<b>5,362</b>
GFHC cases updated	2	<b>0</b>
GFHC panels updated	4	<b>0</b>