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SEARCH for Science

SEARCH is situated as a separate unit at Gosport Museum, itself now faced with the prospect of becoming a Discovery Centre. SEARCH was started in 1994 as a part of the Museums Service Educational strategy to bring both social history and natural sciences closer to school parties. The idea has been most successful and despite some fairly recent media pooh-pooing about the non PC attitude towards taxidermy specimens, SEARCH has been able to prove substantially, that children, in particular are not appalled by the idea of 'touching a wild animal that was once alive' but are fascinated by being able to touch, for example, the sharpness of hedgehog spines or, by contrast, a Barn Owl and see for themselves how its ultra soft feathers enable silent flight.

Special occasions enable children to learn even more about natural sciences by becoming like the animals themselves, helping to dispel many misconceptions about animals in particular. Older children are normally careful enough not to damage specimens but those with special needs have to be watched both carefully and tactfully. The tactile approach inevitably means that some specimens become damaged and the bullfinch (and its partner) are regular casualties being so fragile. Many younger children have not yet learned about delicate touching but staff are careful to look out for a likely tail or wing pull or a head wrench and step in to inform about gentler handling before damage occurs.

Repairs

Repeated repairs cause a gradual breaking down of surrounding and supporting tissues. Japanese tissues, especially those in the 10-15 gsm range and made from *Gampi*, are ideal since they form a strong yet discreet bridge between adhesive and protein substrates. Although they have not been used for natural sciences conservation in the longer term, their thinness combined with strength and pH neutrality, combined with providing a reversible repair, augurs very well for the future.

Conclusion

The information that visitors and children can gather, therefore, far outweighs the problem of damage and provides me with plenty of work plus the challenge of increasingly difficult repairs that require much thought and even research. I hope that we can all benefit from the possibility of further refining our technical skills and knowledge.

Re-Source: The work of Renaissance and collaboration, within and beyond regional hubs

David Crowther, Project Director for Renaissance in the Regions,

Renaissance in the Regions is the national development strategy for regional museums across England. Led by MLA, but driven by the needs of audiences and the commitment of its many stakeholders, this national programme is beginning to transform England's regional museums, and peoples' expectations for what they can achieve - given the resources.

A new network of Regional Museum Hubs is bringing together key museums in common cause, creating centres of excellence through lasting partnerships that will make a difference for everyone. But Renaissance is about more than Hubs alone. They are a crucial part of a framework of mutual support that includes Regional Agencies, National Museums, Designated Collections, key university, specialist and other museums, bringing together assets, expertise, knowledge, talent and audiences as never before. By increasing museums' capacity to care for and release their wealth of knowledge, evidence and ideas in ways that engage and inspire, they and their audiences are opening up new opportunities for learning and discovery.

Why Renaissance?

Whilst it is early days for Renaissance, it's important to recall just why and how it is that a domain traditionally undervalued and under-resourced despite its latent potential has started to find its voice and be heard.

It is just over two and a half years ago - October 2001 - since *Renaissance in the Regions - A New Vision for England's Museums* was published. Following extensive research and consultation across the museums community, its arrival was widely acclaimed, not least for the lucid way it spelled out what could be done to unlock the enormous potential of museums across the country to inspire and engage people, and change

their lives for the better.

Decades of underfunding had left museums weak in infrastructure, capacity, and leadership, and piecemeal initiatives were not the answer. Regional museums could deliver results in key government policy areas like education, learning, community development, and economic regeneration. But they needed an integrated, holistic and long term solution to do so.

The Renaissance report made a compelling case for targeted government investment into key museums working in partnership as Regional Museum Hubs to create centres of excellence for the benefit of audiences and museums across the regions. Alongside them, Regional Agencies, National Museums, Designated Collections and others would each play their part in an integrated framework that would create a national asset, nationally supported. Great services of regional and national importance would no longer rely upon local or specialist funding alone. In return for new investment, they would work in new ways.

In October 2002 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) allocated £70m to start the process of building the Renaissance framework across England over the period up to March 2006. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) offered a further £2.2m. In the light of different regional needs and circumstances, over forty key museums services across England formed themselves into nine Regional Museum Hubs, supported by the emergent new Regional Agencies responsible for the strategic development of museums, libraries and archives in each of the nine English regions.

Renaissance today

Since April 2003 the nine Regional Hubs have progressed in one of two ways. Six have used seedcorn and limited developmental funding to consult, research, plan and pilot new services, building their capacity to fully implement and develop transformed services from April 2006, subject to the funding being available. For the other three Regional Hubs - the South West, the North East and the West Midlands - major Renaissance investment is already transforming how they work with schools, how they engage new audiences (particularly those from deprived or harder-to-reach communities) how they manage their collections, how they develop new talent, and how they forge new partnerships and funding opportunities. These three 'Phase One' regions are showing how Renaissance can deliver results, and are preparing the way for the other six regions to follow.

Regional Agencies have been working to ensure the wider needs and priorities of the region are reflected in the work of Hubs and others involved in Renaissance planning and delivery. They are providing vital advisory, funding, and other services to museums large and small, not least through their management of the Museum Development Fund, designed to ensure that smaller museums have access to the advice and information they need to develop and, in time, play their part in the delivery of a shared Renaissance vision for their region.

Renaissance today is all about capacity building for the future, and building the integrated, sustainable framework of museums and related organisations that will ensure excellence is ultimately achieved across eight priority areas:

- Developing a comprehensive service to schools
- Reaching a wider community
- Redisplay of permanent collections
- Enhancing the care, management and conservation of collections
- Improving access to knowledge and information
- Developing the workforce
- Reaching and exceeding existing standards
- Operating effectively and efficiently to deliver high quality services

Designated Collections are a key element of the Renaissance framework, representing as they do assets of national importance. The recent round of Designation Challenge Fund awards, worth £3.8m (taking the total DCF allocation 2002 - 06 to £10m) has focussed on initiatives for both collections care and enhanced access. Across the natural sciences, examples of projects supported include improved collections care and interpretation in Cambridge at the Sedgwick, in Tyne and Wear at the Hancock and Sunderland museums, as well as cross-disciplinary projects at the Manchester Museum, Norfolk Museums, and York Museums Trust. As this short list shows, a significant fraction of Designated Collections are housed in University

Museums where, through partnership and networking, the potential is there to contribute to scholarship, research and learning across the museums domain.

Early results

Whilst the Renaissance framework is far from complete, and only three Hubs out of nine are able to bring major transformational activity to bear, the early results are very encouraging as the following points show.

Schools are using museums more:

- The very first term of Renaissance funding (autumn term 2003) has seen a 28% increase in school children visiting museums in Phase One Hubs.
- There has already been a 52% increase in the number of children engaged in outreach activities run by the Hub museums.
- 45% of the teachers visiting those Phase One Hubs are doing so for the first time
- 73% of the teachers believe that their pupils are learning new subject specific facts thanks to their museum visit, and 94% of teachers attending a museum activity see it directly linking to the National Curriculum.
- Museums in the Phase One Hubs have been particularly effective in working with schools located in areas of high levels of deprivation. Nearly 30% of school visits were from schools located in wards which have been classified as being amongst the 10% most deprived wards in England, and 46% of the visits were made by schools located in wards which fell into the 20% most deprived wards in England.

Access to and care of collections has improved:

- Phase One Hubs have seen a 166% increase in the number of loan venues, showing wider distribution of collections through the regions' museums and more people getting access to them.
- New visitors are being drawn into Phase One Hub museums. The Discovery Centre, in Newcastle for example, saw a 70% rise in visitors over August last year as a result of Renaissance funding.
- Some £6,972,276 will be spent by Phase One Hubs on the display, care and management of collections during 2004/06.
- During 2004/06, 311 new fte posts will be established in Hubs, and of those some 118 are directly related to caring for and managing collections.

Museums are contributing to regeneration and renewal:

- In the West Midlands (a Phase One Hub) nearly 80 new jobs will be created by 2006, including outreach workers in communities, curators managing and interpreting collections, and education officers unlocking the potential for schools to use them.
- The South West Hub (also Phase One) has received a stage one Heritage Lottery Fund pass to develop a flagship city museum (£10m allocated) with a Development Grant of £853,000.

Museums are beginning to build their capacity:

- Positive Action Traineeships are getting people from ethnic minorities into museum jobs - 'broadening the minds of other colleagues' and allowing museums 'to take risks they wouldn't take normally' according to two participants.
- MLA has so far committed over £450,000 (£456,550) to this critical area of work This is paying for 10 minority-ethnic trainees to spend 2 years gaining a museum studies qualification and work place training in Hubs and for a further 6 minority-ethnic individuals to take a museum studies course with a short period of work experience in a Hub.
- Links are being strengthened between National Museums and regional museums, leading to a range of partnership projects supporting exhibitions, education and outreach work.

Renaissance: the future

Clearly, what is being achieved in three regions must be extended across all nine. This, of course, requires significant additional government funding, and we stand now at a crucial moment - through the government spending review, we are asking, through DCMS, for the Treasury to double their funding for Renaissance in the Regions - from £30m pa in 2005-06 to £60m pa by 2007-08, together with an additional £5m pa from other sources.

This will equalise investment levels across all nine hubs, building centres of excellence in each English region, strengthening development services for smaller museums, and enhancing the role of Designated

Collections as national assets worthy of national access alongside other elements of the framework - whether through partnerships with Hubs, National Museums and others, through the sharing and uniting of expertise via subject specialist networks, or the management of a growing bank of knowledge available through a national collections advisory service.

In return, we believe we can deliver substantial, measurable benefits based upon the kind of progress achieved so far. For people - those who visit, or work with museums - we believe this will mean, by 2008:

- 14000 community groups engaged (0.3m people) often from the most disadvantaged and hard-to-reach communities
- 25000 schools engaged (1.5m pupils)
- 1400 Registered Museums supported by Museum Development Officers benefiting 58m users
- 30000 volunteers involved
- 500 local community development programmes engaging 150,000
- 17000 -strong workforce with its eyes on a stimulating future

Through a properly resourced, integrated framework of institutions and interests working together we can see a genuine collaboration that does justice to the potential natural and cultural wealth of museums, for audiences across England, summarised in a nutshell as follows:

- Nine Regional Hubs – providing regional excellence
- Regional Agencies – leading regional strategy
- National Museums – bringing world class resources
- Designated Collections – developing national assets
- Subject Specialist Networks – uniting expertise
- National Collections Advisory Service –sharing knowledge
- Museum Development Officers – tailoring all the above to local need

As part of MLA's five-year vision for museums, libraries and archives - Investing In Knowledge - Renaissance will play a crucial role in collaboration across the sector, connecting people to knowledge, learning, inspiration and creativity, whatever the source. The collaborative spirit of Renaissance is infectious. Closer partnership between the whole museums domain - from the mightiest National museums to the humblest independent community museum - is also emerging with the publication in March of 'Manifesto for Museums' a campaign document to show how additional Renaissance funding must sit alongside new money for the National Museums - if they are to be able to fully work with Renaissance partners as they would wish. Collaboration is proving productive - museums are indeed finding their voice. The Renaissance is coming.

The future of Natural Science in the context of a large regional museum

Jayne Arthur, Head of Curatorial Services, Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery

BM&AG is the largest local authority museum service in England with an operating budget of £7.2million. There are 6 sites (Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Aston Hall, Blakesley Hall, Soho House, Museum of the Jewellery Quarter and Sarehole Mill), 1 scheduled ancient monument (Weoley Castle), the Museum Collections Centre (a £4.1m capital project to develop improved access to stored collections) and 2 offsite stores. BM&AG is the lead partner of the West Midlands Hub Partnership (with Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, the Potteries Museum Stoke on Trent, Wolverhampton Art Gallery and Museums and Coventry Museum Service). Through Renaissance in the Regions the WM Hub has received £10.25 million over 3 years to March 2006 to develop and improve our services.

Natural Sciences Collections at BM&AG

The development of a natural history collection bore fruit in 1910 after much lobbying of the City Council by individuals and interested groups. At this point the scheme for a natural history museum was officially adopted by the City Council. W H Edwards was appointed Assistant Keeper and was responsible for the displays of three galleries at the Museum & Art Gallery including the Chase bird collection and numerous specimens of zoology, entomology and herbaria. The collections were to be a stimulus to the visitor on the diversity of natural life on earth. In the 1930s proposals for the development of Centenary Square included