



## **Hidden Narratives 2025-2026: Programme Information**

The Hidden Narratives cohort programme will focus on uncovering and interpreting hidden or sensitive stories held within museum collections. It will support museums to bring these stories to light for the benefit of their local communities and visitors.

The programme will provide support and training to enable museums to explore objects or collections which have interesting or challenging stories.

Working alongside a cohort of museums, participants will attend workshops that explore current guidance and best practice and create a supportive peer network that allows for reflection on this and how it might apply to their collections. The programme will guide and support participants to explore how stories can be hidden or challenging to tell, and how they might uncover and share them in their work.

The programme will consist of an intensive support programme for up to 6 museums in the Midlands, including a programme of both in-person and online workshops delivered by sector specialists. Mentoring and peer support opportunities will be facilitated by Museum Development Midlands (MDM).

This activity sits within the MDM Inclusivity and Relevance programme and supports Arts Council England's [Let's Create](#) strategy.

The programme will be delivered from **September 2025 until March 2026**. As an outcome of participating in the programme museums will:

- Gain deeper insight into hidden stories within collections and develop effective ways to document and share them.
- Receive training to investigate objects with untold or sensitive narratives.
- Develop a practical plan to implement this work within their organisation.
- Identify and address internal challenges or barriers to adopting new approaches.
- Build networks and learn from best practices across the sector.
- Understand how to access further support and align plans with funder priorities.
- Build a peer network for ongoing advice, support, and collaboration.

## **Programme Delivery and Support**

The programme will be delivered by specialists from within the museum sector.

Details of the trainers and contributors will be confirmed in due course.

Participants will be supported throughout by Sally Hawley, Museum Development Collections Officer for Museum Development Midlands (MDM). Sally will facilitate a peer support network among the cohort museums, encouraging shared learning and collaboration. She will also provide one-to-one support tailored to the needs of each participating museum.

## **Programme Schedule**

### **June 2025 - August 2025**

Programme information release and expressions of interest accepted.

Cohort museums recruited and welcomed to the programme.

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### **Friday 12 September 2025 - Welcome and Programme launch Event**

#### **In-person- Newstead Abbey**

**10.30am - 4pm**

At this first event to launch the programme, we will provide full details of the sessions and welcome participants to the programme. It will be an opportunity for the cohort members to get to know one another, the MDM team and hear full details about the workshops throughout the programme.

As well as us discussing in detail the aims for the programme, there will be an opportunity for you to share, within a safe and non-judgemental space, any concerns or challenges you have identified with your objects and collections.

Simon Brown - Curator at Newstead Abbey, will give a presentation showcasing how he and the team there have been working in partnership with the public to develop interpretation to tell the story of Newstead, and create an inclusive welcome. They have achieved this through several projects and the creation of a permanent project lab space.

After lunch we will spend some time, guided by Simon, seeing the house and examples of interpretation created through international collaboration, and as discussed during the morning session.

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## **September – February 2025**

There will be 4 workshops during this period based on the following themes:

### **Workshop 1- An introduction to exploring hidden narratives in museum collections (online)**

- Current guidance and thinking around the complexities of the stories held within museum collections.
- Exploring your 'why' – defining aims and parameters.
- Who you represent in your spaces and what might be the best way to do this.
- Examples of hidden histories and narratives both within collections management and documentation and in interpretation and displays.
- The importance of undertaking this kind of work.
- Working to identify barriers to accessing these stories/museum collections.
- Ethics and challenges of this work.
- Understanding key principles and importance of equity, inclusion and autonomy.
- Identifying what collections to work with and who might need to be involved.
- Tools and resources and choosing and developing a toolkit tailored to the needs of your teams and organisation.

### **Workshop 2 – Exploring ways of working and creating a toolkit for your organisation (in-person)**

**Venue - TBC once we know where the cohort programmes are based within the region.**

- Co-production and co-curation as models to create inclusive content.
- Understanding the practicalities and sensitivities around this work.
- Evaluating and assessing what you already do.
- Planning and delivering ideation and information gathering sessions.
- Evaluation and when to do it.
- Building and maintaining trust amongst stakeholders and partners.
- Understanding principles of creating new relationships and maintaining them.
- Understanding the keys to good communication – both internally and externally and what this might look like.
- Exploring equitable and inclusive working relationships and practices.
- Monitoring and supporting the wellbeing of all those involved and looking at ways to do this (through resources and case studies).

### **Workshop 3 – Making it happen – exploring the outcomes and planning for the next steps (online).**

- Applying learning from previous workshops to your collections.
- Developing project and interpretation plans.
- Designing and creating physical outputs for new narratives.
- Storytelling.
- Writing, shaping and editing text.
- Designing inclusive exhibitions/ safe spaces in the museum.
- Exploring legacy.
- Considering how you are looking after yourselves and your teams, as well as your audiences, and preparing them to do this work.

#### **Workshop 4 - Collections Trust Bitesize Session Rethinking Cataloguing - January 2026**

- Understanding and applying the Spectrum *Cataloguing* procedure.
- Taking a critical approach to cataloguing, to make it a more open, ongoing process.
- Considering the ethical principles for cataloguing.
- How to think about internal and external users.
- The importance of transparency and recording past practice.
- Where to find more information and guidance.

During the programme, MDM will host an online peer sharing and networking session, which will provide space for and support museums to share knowledge, experience and good practice.

Each museum will be offered 1:1 online support session with Sally Hawley, Museum Development Collections Officer, to apply the learning to your own collections.

#### **Who is eligible?**

To be eligible for this programme you must be an Accredited museum or Working Towards Accreditation in the Midlands. Priority will be given to non-National Portfolio Organisations (NPO) and non-National museums. Please note: We encourage up to two individuals from each organisation to sign up to the programme.

#### **How to apply:**

**Read the Programme Information Sheet and Expression of Interest form.**

**Complete the form and submit to [enquiries@mdmidlands.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@mdmidlands.org.uk)**

Deadline for Expression of Interest submissions: **Friday 18 July 2025.**

We will confirm receipt of your application within two working days. If you do not hear



from us, please contact us again.

We will let all applicants know if they have been successful by **Friday July 25, 2025**.

If you would like to arrange an informal chat about the programme before applying, please contact Sally Hawley by emailing [sally.hawley@leics.gov.uk](mailto:sally.hawley@leics.gov.uk)

This is a competitive application process. MDM will shortlist applications based on evidence of need within your organisation.

### **Accessibility**

MDM will facilitate or book accessibility services or adjustments for delegates where requested. Please see [MDM Training Accessibility Statement](#).