

# From Baths to Books

## Enhancing Access to the Heritage Resources of the Royal Pump Rooms, Leamington Spa

*'A three year project to enhance access to the heritage resources of the Museum and Library in the Royal Pump Rooms, Leamington Spa, by appointing a Heritage Interpretation Officer to contribute to programmes of activities which increase opportunities for young people, ethnic minority groups, community groups, and families to understand and enjoy the unique heritage of the town and the district.'*

(Summary of project proposal in the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, 28 June, 2002)

A full report on the progress and outcome of From Baths to Books was provided to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in March 2007. This document summarises the principal outcomes of the project, which was led by Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum (Warwick District Library) in partnership with Leamington Library (Warwickshire County Council).

### Background: the Royal Pump Rooms



The Art Gallery & Museum and the Library both occupy the Royal Pump Rooms, Leamington Spa. This building was opened as a spa bath house and assembly rooms in 1814 and was redeveloped in 1997 – 99 to provide a home for the town's Art Gallery & Museum, Library, Tourist Information Centre, Tea Rooms and a Hospitality Suite. The building is now Grade II Listed.

### The Project

From Baths to Books was a three year project funded by the HLF to enhance public access to the heritage resources of the Art Gallery & Museum and the Library in the Royal Pump Rooms. The aims of the project were:

1. Appoint a Heritage Interpretation Officer (HIO) to work jointly with the Art Gallery & Museum and the Library in the Royal Pump Rooms.

2. Organise workshops, lectures, events and produce interpretive resources to increase access and understanding of the Museum and Library's collections.
3. Develop new audiences particularly among the target groups of young people, ethnic minorities, community groups and families
4. Improve the co-ordination of services and encourage cross over visits within the building through developing partnership working, the creation of new interpretive resources and provision of staff training
5. Demonstrate the potential of joint working between museums and libraries in providing better services for local residents, so provide good models of practice in partnership working for other services.

Following the appointment of Jenny Barnes as HIO in July 2003 until August 2004 and Ashleigh Jayes as HIO in January 2005 until March 2007 a series of events and activities have been carried out and/or supported by the Baths to Books project.

## **Outcomes**

### **Projects and Resources**

Baths to Books has arranged and supported over 70 events, activities and projects that have been visited by 25,491 people over the course of the project, along with a series of resources that have facilitated a greater understanding of the Royal Pump Rooms, the collections held by the Library and the Art Gallery & Museum, and of the immediate surrounding area. These resources include:

- Two Heritage Walking Trails for Leamington's Old Town, written in partnership with Warwick University, taking in the original spa sites and places of interest within the Old Town area of Leamington Spa.
- Two KS2 linked Discovery Boxes for general use in the Art Gallery & Museum and the Library containing replica objects and documents from their collections pertaining to the Victorian history of Leamington Spa.
- A series of cross curricular Education Packs for KS1 & 2 linked to the collections on display in the Art Gallery & Museum, including handling boxes, and topic boxes.
- Training sessions for staff of the Art Gallery & Museum and Library, learning how to work in a cross domain manner with external and non traditional partners.

- Training sessions for teachers, showing how to use collections in a global context and an introduction to new education resources.
- A varied programme of events and activities for adults, children, specialised groups and families.
- Contributing to two exhibitions, 'Park Life' and 'Playtime', at Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum.

## Developing new audiences



An important part of From Baths to Books was to improve the provision of Education resources within the Art Gallery & Museum. As there is no Education Officer on the staff it was essential that any resources developed should be teacher-led. Working with both the Education Business Partnership (EBP) and MLA West Midlands, the Art Gallery & Museum

were able to secure additional funding to pay for teachers to come in and work with curatorial staff to develop new resources. As a result the Art Gallery & Museum can now offer a range of education activities covering subjects from the Egyptians to the Art and the Maths curricula. This has contributed to a substantial rise in the number of organised school visits to the Art Gallery & Museum, with a threefold increase on attendance compared to 2000/1.

A further objective was the number of cross over visits between the Library and the Art Gallery & Museum. The project has encouraged visitors to move between the two partner organisations through a wide range of events and activities. While it is difficult to monitor exactly the number of cross over visits, especially during busy events, observation during events suggests that visitors are now making better use of all the heritage facilities available in the Royal Pump Rooms.

Engaging with local Black and Minority Ethnic groups was also an objective of From Baths to Books, but it was not possible to fully develop this aspect of the project because of changes in staffing at the Library. An oral history project to record the histories of the local Sikh community was not fully implemented and other projects aimed at engaging with this particular target group were sidelined. As a result the number of BME visits to the Art Gallery & Museum did not grow during the project although it did become evident that the demographic of BME groups was changing within the District, including a rise in the number of Portuguese people settling in the area. This was reflected in their contribution to the 'Playtime' exhibition (December 2006 – March 2007).



During the latter part of Baths to Books several school holiday events in the Art Gallery &

Museum were joint marketed through the Library. This had a positive impact on the numbers of people attending. More events are now taking place with both partners involved in the planning process through to implementation. The success of the World War II events showed how well the two partners can work together and the practice of offering access to the Education Room from the Library and from the Art Gallery & Museum has allowed a greater flow of visitors.

Evaluations taken at events from participants and workshop leaders (where appropriate) have shown that participants enjoyed all events, especially the opportunity to try new things and experiences. User feedback also allowed the Art Gallery & Museum to identify gaps in provision regarding materials, signposting and missed marketing opportunities.

### **Improving the co-ordination of services**

From Baths to Books has enabled Art Gallery & Museum and Library staff to become more familiar with the collections held by each service and to devise ways of working together which accommodate the different working patterns intrinsic to the two types of service. This method of increasingly close working is reflected in other services provided by the two authorities, for example the development of One Stop Shops, and in the commitment to Enhanced Two Tier working.

The achievement of more and deeper joint working between the Art Gallery & Museum and the Library required good will and support from a wide range of staff in both services. This was essential for the implementation of joint work programmes and for the HIO to feel that they are a valued member of both staff teams. It is felt that the project has been a great success for both partners at operational level and the benefits of joint working should be engendered at a strategic level.

Events and activities organised by the Library, Art Gallery & Museum have increased cross over visits by public and staff. Events held within the Education Room, which is sited in the Art Gallery & Museum but can be accessed directly from the Library, have encouraged the free flow of visitors between the two services. Other events, such as Amazing History, have ensured participants utilised resources in both areas. Movement between the two spaces is also encouraged by the location of the Discovery Boxes in both the Library and the Art Gallery & Museum.

Ashleigh Jayes organised three days of cross domain training for Art Gallery & Museum, Library and Early Years staff, looking at how to use storytelling techniques to engage Early Years groups and families. Two sessions of staff training during 2006 promoted cross over visits for staff, in an effort to help each other understand how each partner works. Staff from each partner talked about their roles and responsibilities and led conducted tours around their respective facilities. The HIO has encouraged the sharing of resources by implementing the placing of a museum display case in the Library and

suitable library books in the Art Gallery & Museum to enhance exhibitions.

## **Lessons Learnt**

A number of key lessons have been learnt during the successful implementation of From Baths to Books.

### **Managing From Baths to Books**

The Steering Group, consisting of representatives from the Art Gallery & Museum and Library, with the occasional attendance of an observer from HLF, gave continuity to the project and helped ensure that the change of HIO after the first year did not disrupt the work programme. It also helped ensure that there was a broader awareness of the project amongst staff of both services, including at management level.

A great benefit to the project was having the HIO's workspace sited within the Library office but also having free access to the Museum office. This allowed the HIO to develop a good understanding of Library working practices and relate it to her knowledge of Museum working practices. Through this way of working the HIO was able to identify issues regarding planning cycles and time frames for action with both partners and was able to foster a deeper level of understanding between the two partners. Because of the restrictions in timetabling within the Library and the long term planning cycles of the Museum, the HIO was responsible for assisting in negotiating timeframes for events and activities, a role that staff within each partner has felt is invaluable.

Measuring the number of cross over visits between the two partners has been an issue. Although some steps are taken to measure the number of cross over visitors, it is especially difficult to monitor on event days or if the event is held elsewhere within the Royal Pump Rooms. Although the figure for cross over visits has increased it is suspected that this figure is actually higher than reported.

### **Funding From Baths to Books**

Although core funded by HLF, From Baths to Books has benefited from external funding via organisations such as MLA West Midlands and Warwickshire County Council. The HIO post has enabled both partners to search for and apply to funding streams that would have otherwise been closed to them but made available through cross domain working. Having a dedicated member of staff in the form of the HIO to ensure resources, including staff, time and materials, are available has helped in the funding application process and it is a concern that the opportunities to apply for extra funding in the future may be missed due to the lack of personnel being available to organise the resources in preparation for applications.

### **Organising From Baths to Books**

The Project Work Programme outlined in the original application was expected to evolve and change over the course of the project, as experience in joint working accumulated. This proved to be the case, and the ability to adapt the work programme in the light of experience and to take into account changes in personnel (including the change of HIO after the first year), while retaining the focus on the overall project objectives, has been essential to the successful implementation of From Baths to Books.

The principal changes to the Project Work Programme concerned the Oral History and outreach proposals. It became evident that both elements required time and long term planning and the change in HIO after the first year inhibited this. After the appointment of the second HIO, a change in staffing at the Library meant that the point of contact for the Oral History programme was lost. To counter this it was felt that a new focus was required and through the Playtime exhibition the HIO was able to meet and record the experiences of children, older people and ESOL students.



The outreach programme focus was also shifted from rural communities to engaging with under 5's as it was felt that this target audience would benefit most from the expertise offered by the Library Children's Team and would offer access to a new audience for the Art Gallery & Museum. Although external funding was granted for the outreach programme and many

sessions and events were organised, it is likely that more could have been raised if more staff resources had been available.

## Conclusions

From Baths to Books and the HIO post have demonstrated the potential for partnership working between Museums and Libraries provided the staff, funds and other resources are in place to facilitate it. The project has explored some of the potential for cross domain working and the legacy at the Royal Pump Rooms will include new resources and an enhanced awareness of the benefits of joint working on some aspects of service delivery. Staff support has been invaluable to the success of the project and feedback from colleagues has shown that there has been an increase in knowledge and understanding of each partner's working practice. Joint working within the Royal Pump Rooms will continue when possible but there is a need for high level management involvement to ensure that cross domain working continues to develop and achieve its full potential.

Ashleigh Jayes  
Heritage Interpretation Officer (2005 – 2007)  
Royal Pump Rooms

Leamington Spa