

Annual Review 2025-26

HISTORY OF SCIENCE MUSEUM

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



From the Director

What an amazing year we have had! New storylines and displays across all galleries; a range of innovative interdisciplinary events so popular we needed to find larger spaces to accommodate our audiences; thoughtful research collaborations linking us for the first time with South-East Asia; and learning for all ages that had everybody buzzing with excitement – these are just some of the topics you will find in the following pages.

Never before in the Museum's history have we been open from 10.00 am for six days a week, and as visitor numbers, donations and retail figures have convincingly shown, it was the right decision to take – with the added benefit of having a tangibly positive impact on staff satisfaction.

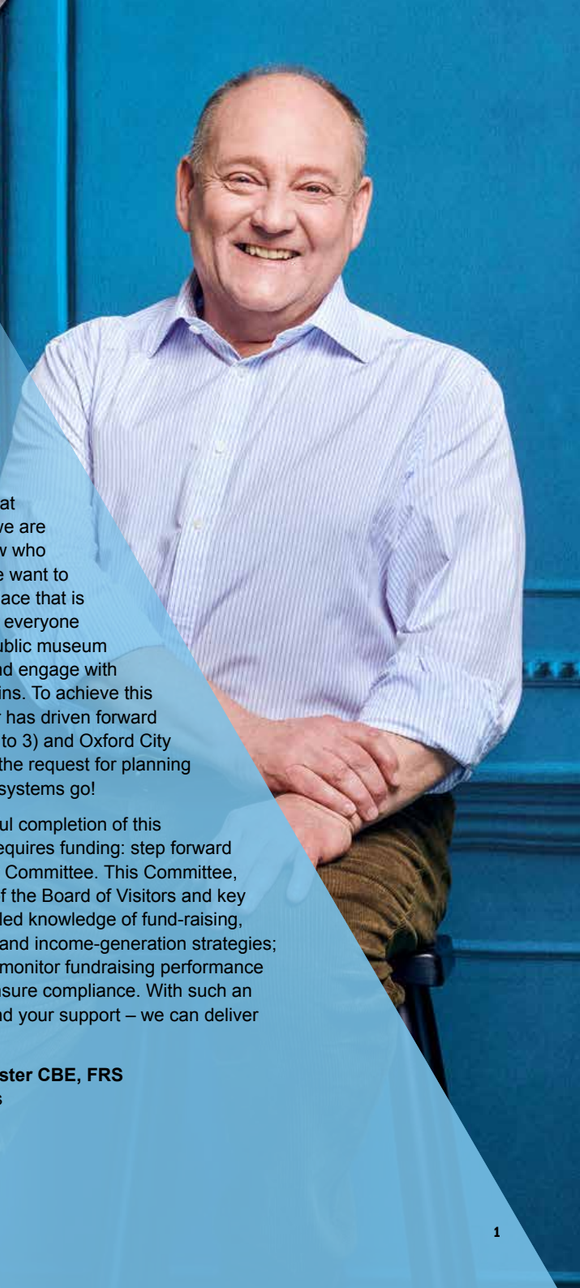
Equally exciting was the founding of our first ever dedicated Development Committee: individuals who are generously giving their time and expertise with the joint goal to make *Vision24* – our ambitious strategy for complete transformation – a reality, step by determined step.

You can read about these highlights, and about so much more, in the following pages – and you will see in full colour those at the heart of our success: my colleagues here at the Museum and across the University, our friends and collaborators far and wide, and our generous supporters who believe in us and share our vision.

We would love YOU to join us on this exciting journey – do get in touch with me and become part of *Vision24*!

Dr Silke Ackermann FSA
Director

From the Chair of the Board of Visitors



It seems extraordinary that twelve months have passed since I last provided some reflections from the Board of Visitors. A well-known phenomenon is that, if you experience a busy year, the brain's perception of time is speeded-up. Time certainly passes very quickly at the HSM as two important initiatives show.

The Museum was never happy that opening hours were restricted to noon to 17.00. After careful deliberation, we decided to extend our opening hours on a trial basis The experiment started on 20 March 2026 and I would like to thank to Cai Marshall, Head of Operations and Commercial, for overseeing the initiative and for the analysis that follows.

The new 10.00 am opening led to increases in visitor numbers (10.5 percent), retail income (33 percent), and donations (68 percent), compared to the same period the previous year. This led to a net increase in income of almost £30,000 over a period of four months, which is all the more impressive as several Oxford museums saw a decrease in visitor numbers over the same period. In addition, our Gallery Team are finding the longer shifts are more financially sustainable, leading to improved recruitment and retention. The 40 percent increase in opening hours has also improved the offer for the city and has allowed the HSM to stand on equal terms with other institutions in GLAM (Gardens, Libraries and Museums).

All agree that the trial has been a success, and we look forward to a continuation of this offer.

While we are a relatively small museum, we have a determined ambition to deliver world-class cultural and scientific engagement across all sectors of society. It is our firmly held belief that we cannot know who we are today if we do not know who we were yesterday. We want to make the Museum a place that is fully accessible so that everyone can enjoy the oldest public museum building in the world and engage with the knowledge it contains. To achieve this goal, the HSM Director has driven forward *Vision24* (see pages 2 to 3) and Oxford City Council has approved the request for planning permission. So, it's all systems go!

However, the successful completion of this transformative vision requires funding: step forward the HSM Development Committee. This Committee, comprising members of the Board of Visitors and key individuals with a detailed knowledge of fund-raising, will review fundraising and income-generation strategies; engage major donors; monitor fundraising performance against targets; and ensure compliance. With such an outstanding group – and your support – we can deliver *Vision24*.

Professor Russell Foster CBE, FRS
Chair, Board of Visitors

Vision24
‘Explore Science – Discover Humanity’

A decade ago, with our centenary in 2024 firmly in our sight, we started a period of reflection, of taking stock, of focussing on the future: the next 100 years in our history.

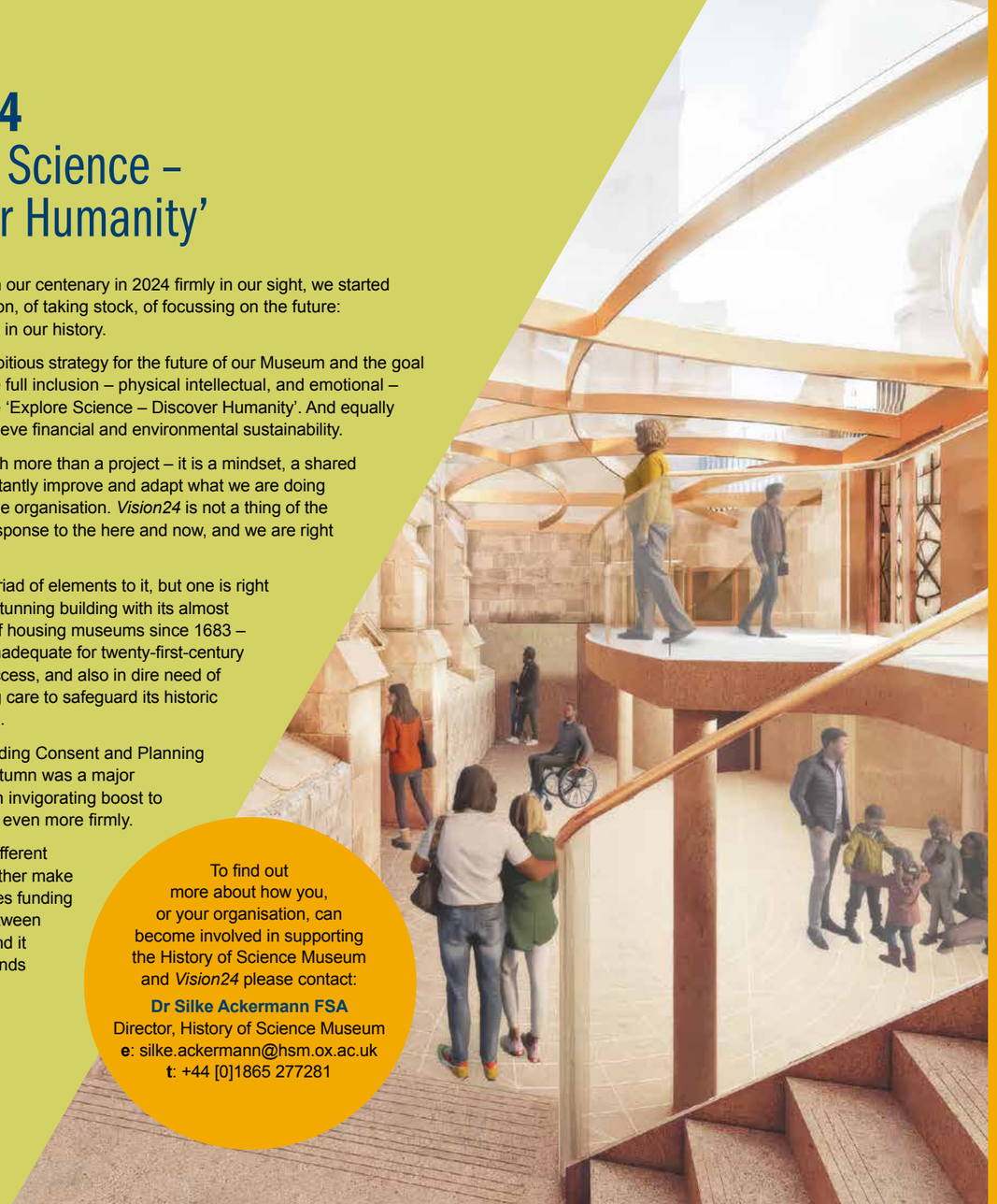
Vision24 is the ambitious strategy for the future of our Museum and the goal is clear: to achieve full inclusion – physical intellectual, and emotional – under the strapline ‘Explore Science – Discover Humanity’. And equally importantly: to achieve financial and environmental sustainability.

Vision24 is so much more than a project – it is a mindset, a shared endeavour to constantly improve and adapt what we are doing on every level of the organisation. *Vision24* is not a thing of the future – it is our response to the here and now, and we are right in the middle of it.

Vision24 has a myriad of elements to it, but one is right at the centre: our stunning building with its almost unbroken history of housing museums since 1683 – but now woefully inadequate for twenty-first-century expectations for access, and also in dire need of some tender loving care to safeguard its historic fabric for the future.

Getting Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission last autumn was a major milestone – and an invigorating boost to roll up our sleeves even more firmly.

Every one of the different elements that together make up *Vision24* requires funding – at every level between £1k and £10m – and it needs you, our friends and supporters!



To find out more about how you, or your organisation, can become involved in supporting the History of Science Museum and *Vision24* please contact:

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HSM in context
New scientific enterprise in Oxford in the second half of the 17th century



As Medical Tutor at Wadham College I have the extraordinary privilege of working in a room with an exceptional scientific pedigree, and I confess to being the least illustrious occupant of it.

It was here, during the wardenship of John Wilkins in the 1650s, that a remarkable group of thinkers gathered to discuss a radically new way of investigating the natural world. Among them were Christopher Wren, Robert Hooke, Robert Boyle, Thomas Willis, Seth Ward, Richard Lower and, a little later, John Mayow. At the time, there was widespread espousal of the Aristotelian view of the natural world, which sought to explain nature through reason and established philosophical principles rather than systematic experiment. The Wadham Philosophical Club were radicals who believed that nature should instead be interrogated empirically through observation and experiment.

Contemporary accounts describe the use of a mechanical ventilator (made from bellows by Hooke) on an open-chested dog, rendered insensible with opium and alcohol, as they sought to understand the mechanics of breathing. Although Harvey had already described the circulation of the blood, some physicians still regarded the movements of the lungs as providing the ‘motive force’ that sustained it. Hooke tested this experimentally by ventilating the dog with a continuous flow of air such that the lungs were motionless. The results were that the circulation continued and life was sustained, implying the *vital spirit* was some property of the air itself. Such work marked the emergence of an empirical approach to science that placed observation, measurement and experiment above received wisdom.

After the Restoration, many members of this Oxford circle moved to London, where their meetings evolved into the Royal Society, meeting at Gresham College on Bishopsgate in London.

Yet Oxford remained central to the new scientific enterprise and in 1683, only a generation after Wilkins’s gatherings at Wadham, the building now occupied by the History of Science Museum opened as the original Ashmolean Museum; the world’s first purpose-built university museum, and among the first museums anywhere to admit the public. It was conceived not simply as a repository of curiosities, but as a home for the new experimental philosophy, incorporating a chemical laboratory which would have resembled a scene not unlike that from Boyle’s laboratory, as reimagined by Rita Geer’s illustration on this page.

It was in the very same room in Wadham where Wilkins and his associates once met, in the early months of the 2020 COVID pandemic, that I and other members of the OxVent team set about designing a rapidly deployable mechanical ventilator, commissioned by the UK Government. The prototype device can be seen in the HSM.

The journey from my room in Wadham to the HSM is barely a hundred paces. That short walk traces one of the most important transitions in the history of knowledge: from informal conversations among a handful of curious scholars to the public practice, teaching and institutionalisation of experimental science. The HSM occupies not simply a historic building, but one of the places where modern scientific enterprise first acquired a public home – and where the public of all ages continue to enjoy their encounter with science to the current day.

Professor Andrew Farmery
HSM Visitors’ Board member; Fellow of Wadham College; Professor of Anaesthetics at the Nuffield Department of Clinical Neurosciences, Oxford

Astrolabes and diaspora

Provenance and collaboration

In January 2026 Dr Sumner Braund, Curator of Founding Collections, was generously awarded funding from the John Fell Oxford University Press Research Fund for her project *Astrolabes and Diaspora: A New Model for Collaborative Provenance Research*.

The project interrogates the layered nature of provenance history by considering how, as such instruments as astrolabes were passed from one generation and one society to another, the significance of the objects was transformed.

With Museum-based and community-based researchers working together, five astrolabes from the Islamic world in the Museum's collection were used to plot the transformation of meaning that took place as the objects moved from one owner to the next down the centuries.

The five astrolabes chosen for the study are diverse in their period and place of origin. Nevertheless, they all share a common moment in their history: in the early 1900s they were in the collections of two families who emigrated from the Ottoman Empire to France.

In Paris, the Akchoté and Fransès families were members of the vibrant Ottoman–Jewish diaspora and were taste-makers in Islamic Art for European and American collectors through their antique dealerships on the Rue de Rivoli and Faubourg St Honoré.

Dr Braund will investigate historical questions relating to these families' role in the trade of historic scientific instruments from the Islamic world, and the significance of the astrolabes to the Ottoman–Jewish diaspora at the turn of the twentieth century.

This research represents a new way of looking at the history of such instruments and the collaboration with community researchers is central to its methods. Historical investigation and community participation in research are intentionally interwoven in this project, and the aim is to develop a methodology for collaborative provenance research that can inform further work in this field, both at the Museum and in the sector more generally.

Dialogue, debate and discovery

As the *Colonial Standards* research project enters its final phase, the collaboration is demonstrating how scientific instrument collections can be reinterpreted through international partnership- and community-led research. Rather than treating museum collections in the UK as the primary source of authority, the project has brought collections, expertise, and perspectives from India and the UK into sustained dialogue, allowing research questions to be shaped collaboratively and informed by colleagues working across both countries.

A major milestone this year was the fieldwork undertaken in India by postdoctoral researcher Dr Shankar Nair. Through interviews with current and retired surveyors, he collected stories and first-hand accounts that have added an important new dimension to the Museum's research on the Great Trigonometrical Survey. While museum collections often focus on iconic instruments such as theodolites, surveyors consistently described relying on more everyday tools, particularly the Gunter's chain. Bringing these accounts together with the Museum's collections has given us a richer understanding of both, showing how important it is to interpret historic instruments alongside the knowledge of those who use, or have used, them in practice.

Principal Investigator Dr JC Niala and Naajia Ahmed from project partner New Cartographers also travelled to India. The visit included work with Mr Basavaraja's nationally recognised collection of more than 4,000 historical weights and measures, one of the most significant private collections of its kind in India, which the project is supporting through a programme of digitisation. Alongside this, the project's community action research programme has continued through workshops with South Asian community participants in the UK, creating opportunities for collections to be interpreted through multiple perspectives.
www.colonialstandards.org

The *Milking It* project, a collaboration between the History of Science Museum and University College London led by Dr Johanna Zetterström-Sharp, has continued to explore the cultural and political histories of dairy through innovative approaches to collaborative and public research. As Co-Investigator, Dr JC Niala has helped shape a project that brings together archaeology, history, heritage, and community engagement to examine how milk is understood, produced and consumed in Kenya and the UK.



A particular focus this year has been the launch of the project's public podcast, *Milk on the Move*. Rather than presenting research as a finished product, the series uses conversation to examine milk from multiple perspectives, bringing together leading researchers from around the world to discuss topics ranging from dairying's deep history and nutrition to industrial production, colonialism, and the politics of food. By bringing together diverse disciplinary expertise and perspectives, the podcast reflects the project's wider commitment to challenging seemingly familiar narratives about an everyday commodity and demonstrating how questions of science, heritage, and power intersect in daily life.

The project's innovative approach to public engagement has also attracted wider recognition. Following the success of the podcast, *Milking It* was selected by BBC Ideas for the development of a short film, due for release in autumn 2026. This collaboration represents an important opportunity to extend the project's reach beyond academic and museum audiences while retaining its commitment to research-led storytelling.
www.milkingit.org

Sector support
and advisory activities

Active participation across the museum sector, and the exchange of knowledge with colleagues in different institutions, are values the History of Science Museum holds dearly.

Alongside its own research and collections work, the Museum contributes to advisory activity and peer exchange that strengthens practice across institutions while creating opportunities to learn from different collections, communities and professional contexts.

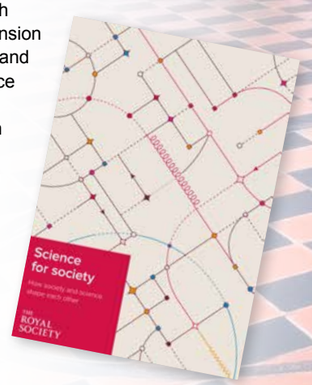


During the year, Dr JC Niala contributed to the expert panel convened by Surgeons' Hall Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh to support development of its *Human Remains in Collections Policy*. This work addressed the particular ethical responsibilities associated with human and ancestral remains, including dignity, consent, transparency, provenance, return, and sustained dialogue with descendant and connected communities.

Dr Niala also provided external advice to Royal Museums Greenwich in support of the Caird Research Fellowship programme. The fellowships enable researchers and creative practitioners to bring new questions, methods and lived experience to the Museum's collections, generating fresh scholarship and enriching public programmes and displays.

The Director, Dr Silke Ackermann, continued to serve on the Academic Advisory Board of the Deutsches Museum Munich (Germany) and the International Advisory Board of the Science History Institute Philadelphia (USA).

Dr Ackermann also provided advice on a chapter of a Royal Society (RS) report entitled *Science for Society*. This is a revision of the 1985 RS report *The Public Understanding of Science* by Sir Walter Bodmer which paved the way for an expansion of science communication and the popularisation of science in culture and the media. The chapter Dr Ackermann contributed to was on 'Informal Engagement with Science'; the report is now freely available on the Royal Society website. **https://royalsociety.org/news-resources/projects/science-for-society**



Hidden worlds

Children and adults alike are excited by the hidden worlds revealed by microscopes.

In 2026 the HSM introduced a series of weekly object handling sessions in the galleries, led by dedicated volunteer Harry Knight, and using the incredible collection of microscopes and other optical instruments generously donated by the Greenbaum family.

In the first two months of the sessions, more than 350 adults and 110 children were able to get ‘hands on’ with a range of objects from the collection, including microscopes from renowned makers Ross & Co, a range of Victorian slides, and other optical instruments such as spectroscopes and binoculars.

Visitors have been amazed at the craftsmanship of the objects, the development of scientific technology that they embody, and the stories of people associated with them.

Families enjoyed a series of microscope-themed drop-in sessions in the school holidays.

In the 2026 February half-term and Easter holidays a *Victorian Visual Wonders* session gave families the chance to discover the history of Victorian optical toys, watch a demonstration of a magic lantern from the Paul M Greenbaum collection, or make their own phenakistoscope (a rotating device which creates the appearance of a moving image.

In the 2026 May half-term holiday the ‘Zoom In’ family drop-in sessions gave visitors the chance to look at slides through a microscope from the Greenbaum collection, comparing these with modern electric and hand-held microscopes.

Children used their artistic and observational skills to draw the various different samples from nature recorded on the slides and, for many, the highlight was a close encounter with a bedbug or the eye of a beetle!

A partially sighted visitor was able to examine enlarged images and to view slides on a digital microscope using a screen. A touch-tour of a microscope made by Victorian makers, Dancer, included the chance to explore the instrument by opening drawers to reveal the exquisitely crafted accessories.

In the six months from February to July 2026, nearly 1000 visitors took part in gallery object handling drop-ins and family sessions at the History of Science Museum.



Tongue of fly and leg of bee



Rose Hill Primary School in Oxford is a school where almost half of the pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding (a government grant that supports disadvantaged pupils). A generous donation by the Greenbaum family in honour of the late Mr Paul Greenbaum has supported HSM’s engagement team to work with the school to develop students’ science capital – the combination of science-related knowledge, attitudes, experiences, and social connections that influence an individual’s engagement with science.

In June 2026, nine workshops were delivered to 75 pupils aged 9-11 both at the Museum and at the school.

The sessions began with a visit by HSM staff to the school with a boxed Victorian microscope from the Greenbaum collection. Students were invited to guess what was inside the mahogany box before having the opportunity to look at sugar crystals through a set of mini-microscopes.

Later in the week, the students visited the HSM to find out more about 19th-century microbiologist Louis Pasteur. Costumes and props helped them understand how Pasteur used microscopes to understand microorganisms and to help develop germ theory.

Next on the agenda was a treasure hunt around the museum to find different microscopes and to explore the stories of the people who owned them, including King George III and Oxford physician Henry Acland.

After a carousel of activities in the top gallery – involving using a beautiful microscope to examine the eye and tongue of a fly and a bee’s leg – it was on to a session with a freelance artist to create microscope-inspired art to take home.

During the visit, students found out how microscopes work, were introduced to modern electron microscopes, considered the similarities between artistic and scientific practice, and reflected on what they had learned over the course of the fortnight.

“I THOUGHT SCIENCE WAS BORING. I DIDN’T REALISE WE’D GET THE CHANCE TO LOOK THROUGH MICROSCOPES. THIS IS THE BEST MUSEUM EVER.

Year 5/6 Rose Hill pupil

I’VE NEVER SEEN [THIS CHILD] JOIN IN WITH THE REST OF HIS CLASS. I CAN’T BELIEVE HE’S SITTING DOWN TO LOOK THROUGH A MICROSCOPE. WE’RE GOING TO HAVE TO BUY HIM ONE FOR SCHOOL!

Year 5/6 Rose Hill teacher

Microscopes and materials

The Museum's secondary schools' programme has been active this year. The Museum's popular GCSE and A-level curriculum enrichment study days are delivered with the help of colleagues across GLAM and the University's science departments so students benefit from working with active researchers.

This year's study days included *Vaccine Concerns* in collaboration with the Bodleian Library and scientists from the Pandemic Sciences Institute; *Women in Astronomy* in collaboration with the Physics Department; and *Battle the Bugs*, a two-day event in collaboration with the Chemistry Department with workshops on penicillin, conversations with research groups, and laboratory sessions.

This year the generous donation of the remarkable Paul M Greenbaum Collection of microscopes enabled the Museum, with the Botanic Garden and the Department of Materials, to pilot a new study day aimed at 13- to 14-year-olds. *Microscopes and Materials* was fully booked with sixty students from five local secondary schools engaging in a carousel of workshops across the three venues. The workshops included an investigation of plants and biomimetic materials at the Garden; a study of metals and alloys using high spec teaching microscopes at the Department of Materials; and a session with six of the best nineteenth-century microscopes from the Greenbaum collection topped and tailed with historical context brought to life with such objects from the Museum's archive as Robert Hooke's famous book *Micrographia* (1660).



Quotes from students:

I LEARNT ABOUT STUFF THAT I NEVER WOULD HAVE EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT.

I REALLY ENJOYED THE WIDER VARIETY OF MICROSCOPE STUDY, AND IT WAS VERY INTERESTING TO LEARN THE PAST OF THESE MICROSCOPES.

Students were able to study a range of specimens from diatoms – an object of fascination to the amateur Victorian microscopist – to botanical samples, insects and even a sliver of mouse brain revealing a single neuron.

Having recorded their observations and marvelled at the fine engineering of the spectacular instruments, the workshop culminated in a discussion in which the students shared drawings and observations to explore how direct visual observations can be translated into scientific knowledge.

Quotes from teachers:

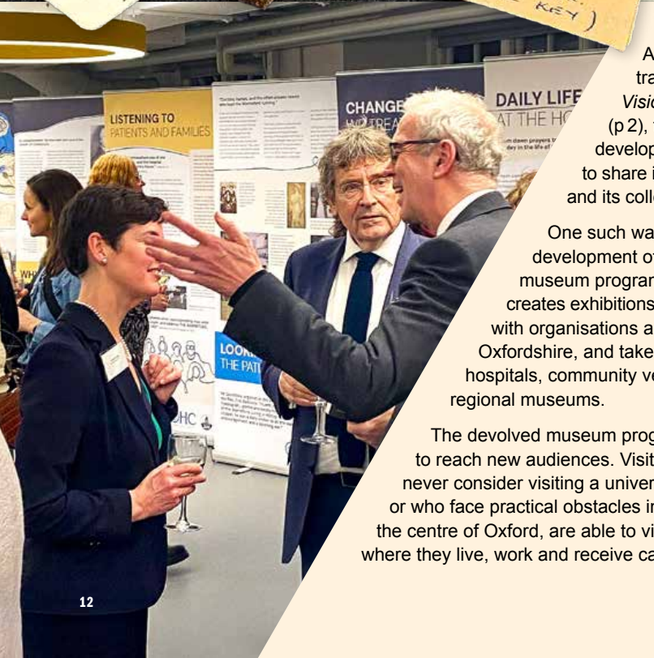
AT EVERY SESSION, I HEARD EXCLAMATIONS OF SURPRISE AND WONDER. IN PARTICULAR, I THINK THE STUDENTS ENJOYED HAVING THE SPACE AND TIME TO OBSERVE, CONSIDER AND DISCUSS IDEAS.

ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT, AND WOULD DEFINITELY BRING STUDENTS AGAIN.

Students and teachers were enthusiastic about the workshops, recognising the value of the curriculum enrichment they offer and the privilege of being able to freely handle such beautiful instruments. The Paul M Greenbaum Collection promises great new opportunities in engagement and an enriching strand of interpretation in the learning programme.

Beyond Broad Street





As part of our transformative *Vision24* project (p 2), the HSM is developing new ways to share its research and its collections.

One such way is the development of a devolved museum programme which creates exhibitions in partnership with organisations across Oxfordshire, and takes them into hospitals, community venues and regional museums.

The devolved museum programme aims to reach new audiences. Visitors who might never consider visiting a university museum, or who face practical obstacles in travelling into the centre of Oxford, are able to visit exhibitions where they live, work and receive care.

Presenting objects in local and familiar settings means the HSM can tell the stories of science in a way that feels relevant to people's lives. Venue partners benefit from high-quality exhibitions that enrich their own programmes, encourage repeat visits and, in healthcare settings, contribute to wellbeing.

Museum staff have been encouraged to think about displays in different ways by the act of taking exhibitions out of the HSM's Broad Street. They have enriched collaborative working skills, learnt to identify objects that can be displayed in a range of environments, and developed confidence in new display and interpretation approaches.

As work on *Vision24* progresses, the HSM is developing new models for sharing collections, engaging communities and ensuring that the Museum's stories remain accessible wherever its audiences are.

Two centuries of mental health care



Warneford 200 is a partnership project to mark the bicentenary of the Warneford Hospital which opened as the Oxford Lunatic Asylum in 1826.

In collaboration with the Oxford Health Charity, researchers, archivists, community organisations and people with lived experience of accessing mental health services, the Museum curated a touring exhibition which invites visitors to consider the history of mental health provision in Oxfordshire while providing a welcoming space for conversations about this important subject.

Audiences who might not visit a museum come across the display in museums, arts centres and community venues across the county. Community participation has extended beyond the exhibition as creative workshops – inspired by archival material and enriched with personal stories – have enabled local people to contribute their own responses. In this way, the exhibition has become a means of sharing historical research and a platform for dialogue and engagement.

https://warneford200.co.uk

Seeing what matters

A different approach has been taken through *Seeing What Matters*, an exhibition of microscopes from the Paul M Greenbaum Collection displayed in the main corridor of the John Radcliffe Hospital.

The exhibition connects historic microscopes with modern medicine, showing how developments in microscopy continue to shape diagnosis, treatment, and research.

Installed in one of Oxford's busiest public spaces, the display reaches the thousands of patients, visitors and NHS staff who pass through the hospital each day.

By displaying historic scientific instruments in a contemporary healthcare environment visitors are able to make connections between past and present scientific discoveries, and can reflect on the technologies that influence their lives.

Materia medica

The Oglander cabinet of *materia medica* – naturally occurring materials such as plants and minerals found to be useful for medical purposes – has a shadowy existence in the Museum's collection as it remains inaccessible in storage awaiting assessment for chemical hazards.

Photographic representations provide a glimpse into its eighteenth-century world, and something is known of the cabinet's provenance, but very little is known about the almost 1,000 specimens which make up its contents and which were amassed at a time of expanding trade and empire.

A desire to know more drove a group of volunteers from the Multaka programme to find out about the stories of places, people, and eighteenth-century medicine that the cabinet holds.

The dozen volunteers met regularly over a six-month period to satisfy a non-negotiable deadline – an invitation to participate in the Cheney School annual Sixth-Form conference in March 2026.

The diverse group of volunteers came from Europe, Lebanon, Afghanistan, China, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Africa and South America and, unsurprisingly, culturally specific stories and traditions began to emerge as they pursued their own research to reveal both historical information and healing practices that live on today.

The project began with a visit to the Oxford Botanic Garden where the group learned that around 70 percent of the world's population still relies on herbal or natural rather than pharmacological medicine and were introduced to, among other plants used in medicine, the magical mandrake.

During the months that followed, the volunteers identified and researched the contents of the Oglander cabinet, revealing the many stories that led to the creation of the *materia medica* collection – from plants and remedies, to the global routes that knowledge travelled and the complexities of colonialism.

The energy and excitement generated by the exchange of stories was palpable and almost every session began with tastings and sensory explorations of herbal infusions, Ethiopian coffee, quinine, frankincense, and many more.

The group started to imagine creating their own cabinet of *materia medica* and a chance encounter with an apprentice from the Rycotewood school of furniture led to a commission and a small cabinet, designed to echo the original, which arrived just in time for the conference at Cheney School. Eight of the volunteers took part in the conference and created a carousel of hands-on activities to which the students responded enthusiastically.

Shortly after the conference, an equally exciting prospect of engaging with an alternative audience arose with the annual community-centred Marmalade conference in Oxford. Twenty-five participants took part in a story-led workshop which encouraged critical consideration about where remedies come from, and whose stories are told.

The *Materia Medica* project was intended to make visible the hidden histories inside museum collections and to look at the ways natural medicines and knowledge are shaped by, for example, colonisation, trade routes, 'discoveries', and cultural assimilation. It also aimed to look at how museum collections reflect power, movement, and exchange. In two very different spaces, volunteers achieved both goals and, at the same time gained a sense of acknowledgement and empowerment through participation in welcoming, multicultural spaces.



From Cheney students:

IT WAS INTERESTING TO LEARN THAT MANY CULTURES WERE INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICINE.

LEARNING NEW THINGS ABOUT HISTORY, SCIENCE, MEDICINE AND CULTURE HAS REALLY FASCINATED ME AND TAUGHT ME TO BE MORE CURIOUS ABOUT THE WORLD.



Say cheese!

Since 2016, the Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) have maintained a close partnership with the Iffley Academy, a community specialist academy for students with complex special educational needs and disabilities based just outside Oxford.

Four years ago the HSM gave the school a museum display case on long-term loan and from this the Co-curate programme developed to give students the chance to work with museum staff to explore curriculum-linked themes and to create exhibitions.

This year's project – *Say Cheese: Photography Through the Ages* – was an exploration of photography led by GLAM Arts Engagement Officer, Miranda Millward with Multaka Community Outreach and Learning Facilitator, Luena Ricardo, supported by volunteers Valerii, Myla, Ilhaam and Marwa.



Students – who have grown up with digital cameras – were taken back to the people and inventions that preceded these.

Starting with Ibn al-Haytham's discovery that light travels in straight lines, students experimented with camera obscuras to observe how light creates inverted images of the outside world. Students made their own camera obscuras and connected al-Haytham's theories to such lens technologies as glasses and video cameras.

Moving on to the nineteenth century, students looked at the life and work of Anna Atkins, discovering how she developed the cyanotype process after learning it from Sir John Herschel.

They learned how women at this time were excluded from scientific careers but allowed to study botany.

Using lamps and light-sensitive paper, they gained a practical understanding of one of the earliest photographic processes and created their own cyanotype prints.





During a third session, students handled a variety of cameras to explore how photography became cheaper, easier and more accessible. They examined Kodak Brownie cameras, compared Victorian photograph albums with examples from the 1950s, and considered how photography evolved from formal studio portraits to more relaxed everyday images. They even had the chance to handle a Minox spy camera and its tiny accessories. This session concluded with an iPad photography workshop, during which students took photographs and experimented with editing techniques.

After the school-based sessions, the students visited the HSM to explore photographic equipment associated with T E Lawrence and Lewis Carroll and to use a Victorian half-plate camera and tripod.

To appreciate the challenges of early photography, they posed for a group photograph and attempted to remain still for 30 seconds. A Victorian-style photography booth allowed students to create their own formal portraits.

Outside on Broad Street, students compared the present-day streetscape with Sarah Acland's pioneering colour photograph.

In April, HSM Director Silke Ackermann and Head of School Paul Van Walwyk officially opened the students' exhibition of curated objects and carefully written exhibition labels. At the launch, students shared their knowledge with invited guests, led object-handling sessions, and gave demonstrations on Anna Atkins and the cyanotype process.

All the participating students successfully achieved their Arts Award Discover qualification while, in June, the Iffley Academy Partnership, through which this programme was delivered, won the Oxford University Vice Chancellor's Local Community Engagement Award.



Thinking in music



Einstein is reported to have once said that the greatest scientists are also artists.

This observation captures something important about the acquiring of knowledge, namely that seeing 'science' as something distinct from other areas of human activity is relatively recent. For most of history, a civilisation's transformative discoveries often follow contact between different curiosities, creativities, and ways of thinking.

As a university museum that is open to the public, we have a mission to share the stories that exemplify the power of collaboration and research. This academic year, two events in our programme explored the often-observed connections between science and music.

In October 2025 the Museum hosted an end-of-project celebration for a project called Thanks for the Memories. Oxford University's Professor Paul Klenerman and the Royal Northern College of Music's Dr Zakiya Leeming had combined their expertise to explore viruses, vaccines, immune memory, and music – with research outputs including an opera composed by Zakiya.

The evening event at the HSM included a panel discussion, sections of a video recording of Zakiya's opera which was staged in Manchester, and a subsequent reception where conversations continued.

The Museum had also been in conversation with Andrew Robinson. Robinson is the author of a number of books about Albert Einstein. His most recent book, *Einstein in Oxford* (Blackwell, 2025), takes the reader back to Einstein's 1931 visit to Oxford. And it was a series of lectures during this visit which led to the acquisition of one of the HSM's star objects: Einstein's blackboard.

Einstein is famous for saying: "I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music". And it was this that gave rise to the idea of designing an event that looked at Einstein's time in Oxford through his love of music in general and the violin in particular.

The Museum approached the Thanks for the Memories team. Would they be interested in working on another event about Einstein, science and music?



Zakiya responded enthusiastically, offering to collaborate with historians and scientists to compose original violin music for the event – *Einstein in Oxford: Thinking in Music*.

As the concept took shape, Oxford scientists were approached and we were delighted when astrophysicist Professor Roger Davies and experimental physicist Professor Brian Foster – who had himself recently finished *Einstein: A Life in Science and Music* (OUP, 2026) – agreed to join the project.

It felt as though the planets were aligning.

As Zakiya spent time in conversation with each contributor, three themes emerged for the violin miniatures:

Einstein v the Dinner Jacket: On Mass and Manners
Andrew's book highlighted the contrast between the restless, questioning energy of Einstein's busy mind and the exquisite clarity of Mozart.

Collider: On Mass and Energy
Brian's insights into particle physics revealed the rapid sequence of energy build-up, collision and decay that produces fleeting forms of matter.

Sauron: On Mass and Motion
Roger's discussion of the research project SAURON showed how the structure of galaxies is inferred through motion, with orbital patterns around a black hole shaping rich musical ideas.

To bring the compositions to life, Zakiya joined forces with the musician and violinist Linda Jankowska.

Finally, on a warm June evening, it all came together. With Museum Director Dr Silke Ackermann in the chair, the world premiere of each violin miniature was followed by lively conversations and thought-provoking audience questions.

Einstein was opposed to preserving his blackboard in the Museum. He protested at the time and we do not believe that he ever changed his mind. But we do hope he would have been happy to see so many people spending an evening together "thinking in music".

This event was made possible through the generous support of Fondazione VisMederi.



Millennia of meaning

Caring for a museum collection provides a daily reminder of how curiosity and discovery are inspired by our human instinct for beauty and storytelling.

Back in spring 2020, we received an Instagram message from a regular visitor: “I hope you’re looking after my astrolabes during lockdown 😉”.

The message was from Megan Kerr, Director of *The Writers’ Greenhouse* which runs practical writing courses and workshops for adults.

Before the pandemic, Megan liked to spend time in the Museum, inspired by its cathedral-like peace and beauty and its awe-inspiring astrolabes. Her connection with our beautiful building led her to contact us during lockdown.

Fast forward to 2025 when an astrolabe-handling workshop was co-hosted by the HSM and the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (OCIS).

Megan leapt at the chance to attend and, inspired by getting hands-on with ‘her’ astrolabes, she asked if we would host a writing workshop themed around our famous ‘star-takers’. Reader, we said ‘yes’, and Megan developed a bespoke two-hour workshop called *Writing in the Museum*.

The evening began in the Museum’s atmospheric basement gallery where Dr Sumner Braund, Curator of Founding Collections, brought the history of the astrolabe to life. To pick up an astrolabe, as the saying might sometimes go, is to hold the universe in your hand. Under Sumner’s careful supervision, each participant held an instrument, felt its weight, and imagined holding it up to the stars.

Next Megan coached participants in creating a single verse for an astrolabe-inspired poem using the highly appropriate Arabic *ghazal* poetic form, which uses couplets and speaks of love and loss.





Participants sought inspiration in the quiet of the galleries before writing, refining, and crafting their verses.

At the end of the evening, Megan placed her opening couplet onto the board and invited attendees to add their own lines. The evening ended with a reading of the complete poem.

That magical February evening connected us with the knowledge-seekers who made and used our astrolabes. *Writing in the Museum* showed how each astrolabe holds the story not just of its own time, place and people of origin – but of everyone who is inspired by it. We can all connect to and reflect the beauty of the universe we observe around us in the tools and the art we create to uncover its secrets.

This event was made possible through the generous support of Fondazione VisMederi.

Behind the glass, a bright
and brass display: the sky
in glinting discs. Millennia of
meaning overlay the sky.

Engraved embracing leaves
of brass and flaming stars,
horizon, tiny lines and spirals spray the sky.

Move the dials, line up the stars,
control the time, how can I pay the sky?

The astrolabe is heavy in my hand.
Tell me, how do you weigh the sky?

Dark trails of decay on the sky,
fingers lightly at play on the sky.

Circles in circles, tracing lines of azimuth
sealing sacred time flat, trapped stays the sky.

I stand, in awe, as the thousands before
who have worshipped her reign, the sky.

Gold and silver, wood, ivory and brass
their object though the same: to play the sky.

This seeking to capture essence of time, ray of prayer,
minutiae of elegance, sacred engravings, stay the sky.

The great cycle of the heavens
stains our souls and weighs the sky.

Fallen in flight. A net of leaves.
Frozen figures play in the sky.

Magic brass in Persian pocket:
a pocket watch of the universe, the day, the sky.

Rotating dance of celestial spheres
all perfectly measured asway the sky.

Admired, migrated, forgotten.
A star’s light, the sun’s ray, the sky.

Like a lake reflecting a ray of sunshine,
a golden disc reflects the day in the sky.

Hushed in awe of ancient holy
artistry, seeking to find meaning,
to capture time and stay
the sky.

Cyanotyping
and space racing



“WE LOVE HAVING MULTAKA VOLUNTEERS AT OUR SCHOOL. THEY ALWAYS BRING JOY AND GENUINE ENTHUSIASM AND DELIGHT TO EVERYTHING THEY DO.

Teacher at Larkrise Primary School

What do you remember about your school assemblies?

In October 2025, students at Larkrise Primary School in Oxford were treated to an assembly about photography pioneer Anna Atkins which was written and performed by MultakaOxford in collaboration with the HSM engagement team.

Atkins’ name may not be as familiar as that of male contemporary Henry Fox Talbot, but it is her name that appears on the title page of the very first printed book to use photographs as illustrations. Her cyanotype images of algae appeared in print in 1843 in *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*.

The school assembly was so well received that the team was invited to return a few months later, this time to introduce students to another science pioneer – NASA computer scientist, Katherine Johnson – and to share memories of their own school days in the Soviet Union, when cosmonaut ‘stars’ toured the country to spread the message of USSR ‘space race’ glories.

On this occasion the whole-school assembly was followed by workshops during which Year 5 pupils used historic calculating instruments and other objects related to space exploration from the HSM collection to explore the inspiring story of the female ‘computer’ who encountered racial and sexual discrimination but whose maths skills kept US astronauts safe and brought them home.

Both assemblies were part of a new Multaka programme called Cultural Diplomats which combines the skills and experiences of Multaka volunteers with the HSM’s staff and collections to explore science and to promote intercultural understanding.

The team plans to create digital animations showcasing lesser-known figures of science to be used by schools as an online resource.

Big brother...
or big data?



The COVID pandemic demonstrated – what researchers have known for centuries – that the best way to protect public health is to spot outbreaks of disease early and track patterns carefully. But securing that level of protection requires the gathering masses of private, electronic ‘Big Data’. And that raises questions of trust and transparency.

This spring, the HSM again joined forces with Oxford’s Pandemic Sciences Institute (PSI) to explore these very questions.

Following the successful 2025 launch of the series in 2024-25, *Let’s Talk About: Surveillance* again turned the traditional talk format on its head.

Five early-career researchers and practitioners brought objects from their work to stimulate discussion among small groups of guests who moved around the Museum in a carousel of curiosity. The evening ended with a round-table discussion, bringing everyone together for a thought-provoking conversation about what ‘surveillance’ means. For researchers and practitioners, it implied vigilance and keeping people safe but many audience members felt it held sinister ‘Big Brother’ undertones and implied an invasion of privacy.



Let’s Talk About provides a respectful space to listen and rigorously challenge what we think we know. The Museum and the PSI are both looking forward to seeing what new opportunities the *Let’s Talk About* collaboration opens up in 2027 and beyond.

Already the series has gone beyond the walls of the Museum.

In February 2026, the PSI took *Let’s Talk About: Surveillance* to Swindon’s *Festival of Tomorrow*. Soon after, in June 2026, the PSI’s Dr Sean Elias gave a presentation about the series at the University’s Public and Community Engagement with Research conference. The organisers are also planning to take the programme into local schools.

Open hearts and minds

The award-winning MultakaOxford project based at Oxford's History of Science and Pitt Rivers Museums brings communities together by sharing the rich knowledge and heritage of people from all over the world who have made their home in Oxfordshire.

Rooted in a practical exploration of the histories of the Museums' collections, participants are invited to share their science, art, stories, and culture.

***Multaka* means 'meeting point' in Arabic.**



Multaka celebrates its first decade

For its tenth anniversary, in December 2025, MultakaOxford and its sister group in Berlin organised a two-day conference in UNESCO world heritage site Museum Island, Berlin during which practitioners, artists and academics from around the world celebrated an impressive diversity of practice and projects from Florence, Turin and Zaragoza, as well as Oxford and Berlin.

HSM Director Dr Silke Ackermann and Professor Stefan Weber, Director of the Islamic Art Museum Berlin, opened the conference by highlighting the strength of the partnership between the Multaka initiatives in Berlin and Oxford.

Using a video recorded in 2015, a member of the Berlin team entered into a dialogue with herself, reflecting on a decade of activity.

From Oxford, Hannah Underwood (Community Engagement and Programme Manager) introduced The Culture Club – MultakaOxford's club which uses museums as spaces where young adults can develop confidence and enrich the heritage sector with their perspectives; Nicola Bird (Project Director) spoke about the strength of partnerships with the Berlin team; and Ash Hamoud (Community Connector) discussed creating spaces of dialogue, welcome and belonging.

African astronomy

The History of Science Museum continues its long-standing partnership with the Sudanese Supplementary School.

This year saw the delivery of a project which brought African astronomy into the galleries, helping young people connect with the museum by bringing in broader histories of science that celebrate our diverse histories.

Students looked at a range of African astronomical themes, including an exploration of Nabta Playa, one of oldest archaeological sites in the world and dating from around 7500 BCE. Indeed, Nabta Playa may be one of the world's earliest archao-astronomical devices.



Oxford–Berlin research workshops

The Oxford and Berlin Multaka initiatives won funding from GLAM (Oxford University's Gardens, Libraries and Museums Division) and SPK (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz; the body that oversees 27 cultural organisations in and around Berlin) to develop partnership projects. This was used to create two workshops – in Berlin in October 2025 and in Oxford in February 2026 – which brought together 60 practitioners, academics, community leaders, and artists to form a research community and create a legacy of approaches and projects. The workshops explored how museums and cultural institutions engage with issues of migration, inclusion, identity, care, and belonging and use lived experiences, co-production, and transformative practices to shape museum and heritage work.







"BY COLLABORATING WITH OPEN HEARTS AND MINDS, WE DISCOVER EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH, LEARNING, CREATIVITY, AND DEVELOPMENT.

Nicola Bird, MultakaOxford, Project Manager

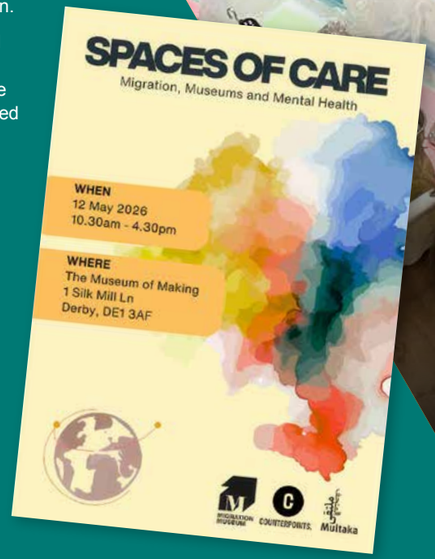
Spaces of care

On 12 May, a team of MultakaOxford volunteer trainers travelled to the Derby Museum of Making to co-deliver *Spaces of Care*, a training day organised in partnership with the Migration Museum and Counter Point Arts. Both partners and venue were chosen to broaden the reach of MultakaOxford's work and the day was attended by 35 people from across the Midlands and North East.

Over the previous four months the MultakaOxford team had worked hard to develop training workshops and the day gave them the chance to share their proven practice in the use of heritage, the arts and museums to promote good mental health, especially among people and communities who have experienced migration and forced migration.

During the training day, the MultakaOxford team went beyond presenting to help participants start to create their own space of care. The experienced volunteers enabled attendees to enter a space of safety and human connection, taking centre stage by effortlessly leading talking circles and sharing the activities they had developed at the History of Science Museum over the last 12 months.

The result was a day which recognised the complexities of our society and which showed how museums, heritage, culture and the arts can be spaces of safe dialogue, supporting those who have recently arrived in a new city and helping them find a sense of belonging.



"LOVED THE EVENT. WAS WORTH EVERY MINUTE OF MY TIME. FEEL EMPOWERED, INSPIRED AND ENTHUSED BY IT. THANKS FOR SHOWING US HOW TO CREATE A SPACE OF CARE IN THE WAY YOU DELIVERED IT.

A fresh lens

One of the History of Science Museum's greatest strengths is its collections. Yet collections are never static. As new research emerges and new voices contribute fresh perspectives, the stories that objects tell evolve.

This year the Museum has been exploring its photography collections in new ways, bringing together curatorial research, artistic practice and contemporary scholarship to better understand the people behind some of the world's earliest photographic images. This exciting project has revealed overlooked stories and challenged familiar narratives.

A key catalyst for this work has been a collaborative research project by artists Tom Pope and Matthew Benington entitled *Almost Nothing But Blue Ground*, which culminated in a 'performative lecture' hosted by the Museum.

The evening event presented the duo's research findings using dual-projection, live sketching, story-telling, archival object handling – and the donning of a cyanotype suit.

Beginning as an exploration of pioneering photographer and botanist Anna Atkins, the project developed into a wider investigation of the social, economic and colonial contexts that shaped her work.

Through archival research, the artists uncovered connections between Atkins' family wealth, plantation ownership in Jamaica and the networks of privilege that enabled her scientific and photographic practice. Rather than diminishing Atkins' remarkable achievements as one of photography's pioneers, this research places her within her historical context, acknowledging both her innovation and the cultural and social systems that made it possible.

Working with the artists prompted the Museum to revisit the information it holds on its collections. New research findings have been incorporated into object records ensuring that future audiences encounter a richer and more nuanced understanding of these important photographs.

The collaboration also encouraged the HSM to look beyond Anna Atkins to include other women represented in the Museum's collections, including Sarah Angelina Acland, Julia Margaret Cameron and Ellen Willmott. Although their contributions to the development of photography were highly significant, their stories have often remained at the margins of histories that have traditionally focused on male inventors and practitioners.

Photography occupied an unusual position during the nineteenth century, combining scientific experimentation with artistic creativity. At a time when most scientific careers were closed to women, photography was a suitably creative pursuit that offered some women a route into scientific observation, technical innovation and research. Supportive family networks and access to education and financial resources shaped these opportunities, while highlighting the inequalities that decided who could participate.

This research informed the development of *Now You See Me*, a new project for the Museum that explores women's contributions to the history of photography. Newly designed display banners showcase the work of Atkins, Acland, Cameron and Willmott, while future displays will look at how objects can better represent these stories within the Museum.









> **"THE COLLABORATION HAS NOT ONLY CHANGED WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT OUR COLLECTIONS, BUT HOW FUTURE GENERATIONS WILL ENCOUNTER THEM.**

Although focusing on photography, the significance of this work extends further. It demonstrates how museum collections can generate new questions, and how collaborations with artists, researchers and communities can deepen our understanding of familiar objects.

Most importantly, it reminds us that the histories preserved within our collections are never complete. By continuing to ask who is missing from the story – and why they are missing – we can create displays that better reflect the complexity, creativity and diversity of the history of science.

One step at a time

In January 2026 the HSM's top gallery reopened after 15 months of closure necessitated by an unfortunate combination of wood-boring beetles and loose plaster.

During the months of closure, a number of the gallery's objects had been sent out on loan and this presented staff with a good opportunity to rethink the gallery's installation, which had remained largely unchanged for over 25 years.

Tempting as it was to go for a 'Big Bang' complete redisplay, the team decided to try a more considered approach using simplified panels and clearer labelling to better showcase the objects.

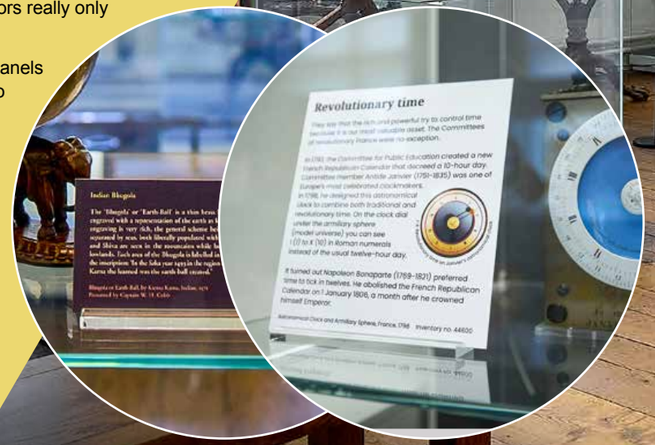
Dr Sumner Braund, Curator of Founding Collections, and Andrea Ruddock, Head of Public Engagement and Programming, worked together to identify the things they wanted to change.

They agreed that in most cases there were simply too many objects on display, making it difficult to tell compelling stories. The labels were hard to read – with very small text on a dark background. There was also a problem with what the labels said: did our visitors really only want to know a detailed history of the object?

Working through these issues, new information panels were created with a larger, clearer font; images to give historical context and reveal hidden details; and fresh stories frames and content presented in new, themed narrative strands.

Initial visitor feedback has been encouraging. Learning producers and tour guides are seeing the positive impact of these improvements while the gallery team has been delighted to see visitors leaning in to read the labels, look closely at the objects, and snap photos to share.

Museum staff are currently gathering observational and survey data to help us continue making make small, impactful changes that delight our visitors.



New labels (right) are easier to read and more engaging.





Choosing a new frame

As the top gallery reopened, the Museum celebrated the installation of *We Are* – an artistic collaboration four years in the making.

In spring 2022, Rawz – a local artist and musician – was visiting the Museum on a family outing. His elder son asked him about the portrait hanging at the top of the Museum's impressive central staircase. Looking up, Rawz saw in the background of the painting a young boy about the same age as his son, with a metal collar around his neck and a tear on his cheek. It was the only image of a Black person they had seen in the whole Museum

That moment was the start of a collaboration with the Museum. The portrait was returned to its original owner and Rawz worked with University researchers and with children from the local Sudanese School to create the poem and art installation *We Are* with its powerful message: you can choose how you want to be framed.

In April, the Museum was delighted to host a launch celebration to which Rawz invited family, friends and collaborators for a warm, personal evening that included a live poetry reading.

An activity table complete with a colour-in tablecloth was provided for the enjoyment of the younger guests and Rawz's family enjoyed it so much that they took it home to complete. When asked if they would send the Museum a photo of the finished version, they agreed – adding with a wry smile that it might take them four years to complete!

The installation is proving to be very popular with visitors, who are also able to enjoy a recording of Rawz performing his poem. The poem's words echo evocatively through the gallery every fifteen minutes, bringing an extra dimension to the striking display.

The last word goes to a visitor who shared in this in the display's comments book: "It's a very powerful message and it belongs here."

My place
my science





HSM's award-winning *My Place My Science* project has just entered a new phase with funding from a Nucleus award from the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC).

My Place My Science delivers a rich programme of activities and workshops that help young people from the Oxford-based community group African Families in the UK (AfiUK) to access science by giving them the chance to work with scientists and staff across seven University of Oxford institutions.

The new funding – which is managed and coordinated by the HSM – provides stability over a 30-month period to continue to develop the programme and to plan new ways to build on the interests of the young people.

This year there will be three new initiatives including a CREST-accredited (Creativity in Engineering, Science and Technology) award scheme that will support in-depth science investigation projects led by the Physics Department. AFiUK will support the young people in using journals to record and reflect upon their experiences. The HSM has lent a museum display case and will help students create an exhibition in the foyer of the Leys College, a tertiary college located in the heart of the student's community.

The eleven workshops and activities delivered this year included an early photography workshop at the Museum; an investigation of lenses, light and telescopes at the Physics Department; the annual star-gazing event at the Leys College in January; a visit to the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory to explore interferometry, meteorites and the ISIS neutron accelerator; a day of CREST award investigations focusing on the use of radio waves in astronomy; and a coding workshop to create an app for recording participants' own experience.

The year's programme culminated in the now well-established museum takeover event during the half-term school holiday in May 2026. Twelve young people became science ambassadors, sharing and explaining favourite activities to Museum visitors as well as friends and family.





"EVERY VISIT FEELS PERSONAL, RELEVANT AND CULTURALLY AFFIRMING. AS A RESULT THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD HAS BECOME A FAMILIAR AND WELCOMING SPACE FOR OUR FAMILIES – SOMETHING THAT IS PROFOUNDLY MEANINGFUL FOR COMMUNITIES WHO OFTEN FEEL EXCLUDED FROM ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENTS.

Jacqui Gitau MBE, Co-Founding Director, African Families in the UK

And yet there was appetite for more

In July, the Museum hosted a visit of the Boma parenting group from AFiUK with the aim of supporting intergenerational conversations and, after negotiating complimentary tickets and funding from the *Science Together* programme, AfiUK were able to hire a coach to take 57 young people, parents, parent advocates, and staff from the Department of Physics and the HSM for an extraordinary day visiting the Lovell telescope at Jodrell Bank, just south of Manchester.

The visit brought together many aspects of astronomy and astrophysics that the young people had explored during the year. This was an experience for all ages and dispositions, learning and sharing their enjoyment of science alongside each other.

This new phase of *My Place My Science* has welcomed new partners, supported by a cross-disciplinary advisory group that brings in experts from education, child development, museums, communities, and science engagement to act as critical friends and to advocate for the project. The project's continuing success has been celebrated at conferences organised by the Group for Education in Museums (GEM 2025) and the Institute of Physics (2026 engagement conference) and it now has a significant profile within the University, as young researchers welcome the chance to build experience in community engagement.

Most importantly *My Place My Science* continues to open doors for the community. It enables young people and their families to feel comfortable in places that previously felt inaccessible – the University, science departments, the Museum, and other external organisations. It enables those young people to envisage opportunities for themselves that previously might not have existed.

As we celebrate the achievements of the young people over the last twelve months, we look forward to the coming year as the new initiatives begin to bear fruit.

Communicating knowledge

Museum staff continue to share their research with a wide range of audiences nationally and internationally through talks, presentations, and publications.

Publications

Eyre, T (2026) book review of *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Colonial Shadows of Victorian Photography* by Jeff Rosen (Abingdon, Routledge; 2024) *Advances in Nineteenth-Century Research*, 1–2.

Eyre, T (2026) book review of *Understanding Use: Objects in Museums of Science and Technology* by Tim Boon, Elizabeth Haines, Arnaud Dubois, and Klaus Staubermann (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press; 2024) *Museums Journal*, July 2026, 54.

Johnston, S (2025) *Object lessons from the asylum: the portable museum of Thomas E. Dexter*, in Peter Heering and Roland Wittje (eds), *Objects of Understanding: Historical Perspectives on Material Artefacts and Practices in Science Education* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag), 91-108

Johnston, S (2026) *Back to the future: new approaches to the astrolabe*, *Bulletin of the Scientific Instrument Society*, 165 (2025), 2-15.

Johnston, S (2026) editor for publication of posthumous paper by Jim Bennett *Elizabethan Navigation* in *Journal of the Hakluyt Society* (https://www.hakluyt.com/journal-of-the-hakluyt-society/).

Macdonald, L T (2025) *The 20th Century* in Robin Wilson and Steven Balbus (eds), *Oxford's Savilian Professors of Astronomy: The first 400 years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

MacDonald, L T (2026) *The Royal Observatory, Greenwich, 1881-1939: Astronomy, astronomers and heritage in a changing world*. London: UCL Press.

Niala, JC, Utreras, J, Skinner, S, and Greenpeace (2025) *The Waiting List* (Oxford: Fig Studio)

Niala, JC (2026) *The New Eden: Wildlife in the City, and Discovering Our Shared Home*. London: Gaia.

Niala, JC (2026) *Return to Utopia* in *Future Rural: Imagining tomorrow's countryside* (ed Adrian Cooper). Bridport: Little Toller Books.

Niala, JC (2026) *Questioning Care for Things (and Their People)*, HAU: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 16, no 2, 386–401(https://doi.org/10.1086/741873).

Niala, JC (2026) *Urban Food Infrastructures and the Politics of Permeability* *The AnthroFood 2050 Manifesto: Anthropological Perspectives on the Future of Food*, edited by Michele F. Fontefrancesco and Sabine Parrish, 201–210. Vicolo del Pavone, in association with EASA FoodNet, 2026. Open-access volume· ISBN 978-88-7503-286-9

Acquisitions

The objects listed on this page were all accessioned in 2025-26. Most were generously donated and have already been used in teaching or research, or are on display. Here we highlight just one acquisition: a donation of seven eighteenth-century drawing instruments in a modern purpose-made cabinet. All are signed by or attributable to Thomas Heath, the pre-eminent London maker working in the first half of the eighteenth-century. The donor, Howard Dawes, generously offered these instruments to the Museum as a gift, for which we are extremely grateful.

18799 **Nuclear data logger** *Steve Walters*

18800 **Letter from William Reid to Professor fox, 20.1.2000, talks about lectures by Frank Sherwood Taylor**, *Professor Robert Fox*

18802 **Certificate for Data Sciences and AI category at the UN COP28 Stage & Holographic art visualising deep-learning predictions of the safety of a remote tailings storage facility through time**, *Maral Bayaraa*

18804 **Thermocouple potentiometer by Croydon Precision Instrument Company, used at UKAEA Harwell**, *David Humphrey*

18805 **Collection of architectural drawing instruments by Thomas Heath (images RS84963_49713 (2, 9, 15 and 16))**, *Howard Dawes*

18807 **Model of body scanner presented to John Woodgate, on his retirement as Chief Executive of Oxford Instruments**, *Louise Woodgate*

18808 **Stainsby Braille Writer, 1930s-1976,** *Stewart Longhurst*



DAMS (digital asset management system)

There has been a flurry of activity with the Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) this year.

DAMS is the source of images on our Online Collections Database – and thus often the first encounter people world-wide have with the objects and records we care for.

This year our system received a major update, making it sleeker, faster and easier to use.

Among several digitisation projects happening across DAMS, the most notable has been work to preserve slides from the so-called 'Millennium Project', the most significant refurbishment in the building's history to date.

Working with Eleanor, one of HSM's brilliant volunteers, DAMS manager Anna Grybenyuk-Pickett has been scanning almost 900 Millennium Project slides. Eleanor has been invaluable in this digitisation work, and we are hugely grateful for her support.

These slides are providing us with a fascinating glimpse into the building of the library annex and the interior Museum redecoration from the year 2000. The work is still ongoing – another 900 slides to go.

This is not the only archival material digitised this year. With expert help from Bodleian colleagues, we have managed to digitise ephemera relating to our Lewis Evans Collection and the recently acquired Greenbaum collection: a total of almost 6,000 images. We are confident that these digital images will facilitate future research by staff, researchers, and the public and we are truly grateful to the Bodleian team for their support.

A image of the 2001 Millennium build, with two of the Lewis Evans ephemera.

Trailblazing

Last year we wrote about how wood-boring beetle damage in the oak beams of the Museum led to the closure of the entire top floor of our beautiful building while repairs were being effected.

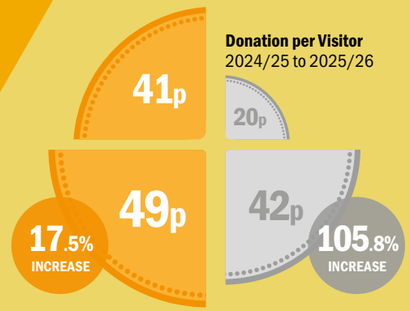
We used the time to look again at how our visitors encounter the collection, and to ask if our displays were working well for us. If not, what did we need to change? On pages 30-31 above we tell the story of our refreshed gallery space.

But object display was not the only thing we decided to do differently. Until 2026 the HSM had never regularly opened in the morning and, as our Director and our Chair of Visitors mention in their introductions, extended opening hours had been a long-standing ambition.

GREAT MUSEUM. WE WERE GREETED BY A VOLUNTEER WHO OFFERED TO GIVE US A PERSONAL TOUR. HE WAS EXCELLENT, FULL OF ENTHUSIASM AND LOVE FOR THE SUBJECT HE LIT UP THIS LITTLE MUSEUM.

Trip Advisor review





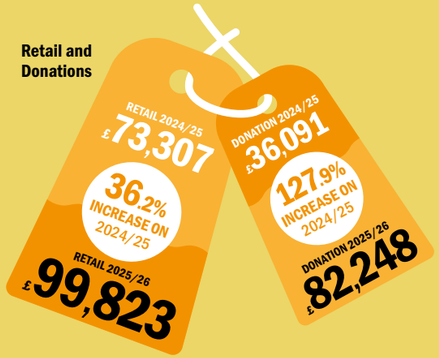
Donation per Visitor
2024/25 to 2025/26

Spend per Visitor
2024/25 to 2025/26

With the strong support of our Board of Visitors, we decided to open our doors at 10.00 am from 21 March 2026 for a trial period. In doing this we would be increasing the number of hours we were available to the public by a huge 40 percent, bringing us into line with other local civic amenities.

The longer opening hours have been hugely popular with tourists, residents, University colleagues and students alike, with the extended hours enabling the Museum to sustain double-digit growth in visitor numbers throughout a challenging period that has seen falling numbers in sister sites. In addition, Museum shop sales and donations from our visitors are also showing strong growth – bucking national, regional, local and University museum trends.

Retail and Donations





Our staff are the welcoming face of the Museum, whether you are coming for a quiet morning's contemplation of the beauty of our collections, a busy hands-on family activity, or one of our stimulating evening events. Our Gallery staff have always been loyally dedicated to the Museum and now, with longer opening hours, their work supports them properly – both financially and through proper welfare breaks during the working day.

In the last six months, gallery team contributions to the Museum's financial health and intellectual accessibility have been impressive and the six-month trial has been a resounding success – the 10.00 am opening is now firmly a part of HSM life.

Visitors Welcomed
2025/26

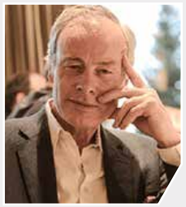






Board of visitors
2025-26

The History of Science Museum's Board of Visitors makes sure that the Museum is properly managed and aligns with the University's goals and vision. The Board works to keep the collection safe, to oversee administrative and financial matters, and to advise on policy and strategy.



Stephen Barber*
Founder and Chair of Prix Pictet



Professor Chadreck Chirikure
Edward Hall Professor of Archaeological Science at the University of Oxford; Director of the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art; British Academy Global Professor; Fellow at Linacre College



Professor Nandini Das
Professor of Early Modern Literature and Culture at Oxford University; Fellow at Exeter College



Professor Andrew Farmery *(from March 2026)**
Professor of Anaesthetics at the University of Oxford; Fellow at Wadham College; Senior Proctor at the University of Oxford (March 2026 to March 2027)



Professor Russell Foster *(Chair)**
Professor of Circadian Neuroscience and Head of the Department of Opthalmology at the University of Oxford; Founder and Director of the Sleep and Circadian Research Institute; Fellow at Brasenose College



Olivia Holder
DPhil Candidate and a Marshall Scholar at the University of Oxford; Lincoln College.



Imam Monawar Hussein
Muslim tutor and Imam of Eton College; Deputy Lieutenant for Oxfordshire; Associate Director at Leadership Management International, UK



Professor Rob Iliffe
Professor of the History of Science in the Department of History at the University of Oxford; General Editor of the Newton Project; Director of the Koch History Centre; Fellow at Linacre College



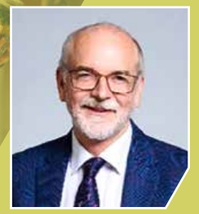
Professor Chris Lintott*
Professor of Astrophysics in the Department of Physics at the University of Oxford; Gresham Professor of Astronomy; Fellow at New College



Professor Nick Barber *(to March 2026)*
Professor of Constitutional Law and Theory in the Department of Law at the University of Oxford; Fellow at Trinity College; Senior Proctor at the University of Oxford (March 2025 to March 2026)



Richard Ovenden OBE
Head of Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM); Bodley's Librarian; Helen Hamlyn Director of the University Libraries at the University of Oxford; Fellow at Balliol College



Professor Sir Andrew Pollard*
Director of the Oxford Vaccine Group in the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Oxford; Consultant Paediatrician at Oxford Children's Hospital; Fellow of St Cross College



Dr Venetia Porter*
Honorary Research Fellow at the British Museum and the Courtauld Institute of Art



Professor Ian Ritchie CBE*
Leader Richie Studio (formerly Ian Ritchie Architects); Royal Academician; Honorary Fellow of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, American Institute of Architects, Royal Academy of Music, Royal Academy of Engineering and Royal Scottish Academy; Fellow of the Society of Façade Engineering, Royal Society of Arts, Society of Industrial Artists and Designers and SHARE; Member of the International Association for Bridge and Structural Engineering, Scientists for Global Responsibility, the UCL Natural Sciences Club.

*** Member of the HSM Development Group**

Museum staff



Senior Leadership Team

Dr Silke Ackermann FSA
Director

Helen Jezzard
Executive Assistant to the Director

Cai Marshall
Head of Operations and Commercial

Dr JC Niala
Deputy Director; Head of Research, Teaching and Collections

Andrea Ruddock
Head of Public Engagement and Programmes

Research, Teaching and Collections Team

Dr Sumner Braund
Curator of Founding Collections

Sarah Chard-Cooper
Collections and Research Access Manager

Dr Tina Eyre
Sir Martin Wood Curator of Oxford Science

Anna Grybenyuk-Pickett
Digital Asset Management System Manager *(shared post with Pitt Rivers Museum)*

Dr Stephen Johnston
Curator Emeritus

Łukasz Kowalski
Collections Management Systems Manager *(shared post with the Museum of Natural History)*

Lee Macdonald
Librarian and Archivist

Owen Shaw
Display Technician

Cheryl Wolfe
Conservator

Public Engagement and Programmes Team

Ruth Holiday
Engagement and Digital Producer *(until May 2026)*

Christopher Parkin
Learning Producer

Helen Pooley
Learning and Engagement Manager

Operations Team

Vienna Luk
Operations Manager

Phoebe Clothier
Front of House Supervisor

Megan Keates
Front of House Supervisor

Nicole DeRushie
Front of House Supervisor

Aadera Rammohan
Front of House Supervisor

Edward Smith
Front of House Supervisor

Zarifa Alikperova
Gallery Assistant

Oksana Borzykh
Gallery Assistant

Marie Chapman
Gallery Assistant

Manfred Driver
Gallery Assistant

Peter Ells
Gallery Assistant

Mira Ho
Gallery Assistant

Evie Holloway
Gallery Assistant

Hanna Vertiienko
Gallery Assistant

Project Researcher

Dr Shankar Nair
Colonial Standards

Associate Curator

Dr Veronica Poier

MultakaOxford Team

Nicola Bird
Project Manager

Ash Hamoud
Community Connector

Luena Abigail Pimenta Ricardo
Community Outreach and Learning Facilitator *(until June 2026)*

Interns

Emily Wilkinson
White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities Intern, University of York

Ed Shawe-Taylor
Samir Shamma Intern, Khalili Research Centre in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford

Students working closely with the HSM

Mathilde Daussy-Renaudin
Collaborative Doctoral Award Student

GLAM (Gardens, Libraries and Museums) Front of House Pool, Shared Services within GLAM, GLAM Divisional Office, GLAM Volunteer Services, and the Central University teams

We warmly thank all colleagues for their unstinting support throughout the year and for generously sharing their knowledge and expertise: their contributions are greatly appreciated.

Veronika Poier joins the HSM as Honorary Assistant Curator

This year we were delighted to welcome Dr Veronika Poier as new Associate Curator to the HSM. Veronika is Research Fellow in the History of Islamic Art and Material Culture at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, where she oversees exhibitions including, in spring 2026, the *Ultimate Journey*, which presented artwork inspired by the three holy sites of Islam; and *Courtly Splendours*, on Mughal and Timurid art and science and which opened in autumn 2026.

Veronika holds a PhD in the History of Art and Architecture from Harvard University and has previously taught Art History at Harvard, Political Humanities at Sciences Po, Islamic Art at Vienna University and material culture at Oxford University.

Veronika's research focuses on knowledge exchange among artistic and scientific communities, with a particular interest in the actors and social groups who preserve and spread artistic and scientific knowledge in times of political change.



The universe in a library

In July 2026 Edward Shawe-Taylor, a student of Arabic and Islamic art history at the Khalili Research Centre in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at Oxford University began a three-month placement at the History of Science Museum, as the first Samir Shamma Intern.

When the chance for the internship came up, Ed – who is about to complete his DPhil – jumped at the opportunity to work with the Museum's unique collection of scientific instruments from the Islamic World, which includes the globally most significant collection of astrolabes.

He notes that it has been a real privilege to closely engage with the Museum's peerless collection. His internship involves cataloguing and curating the objects as well as deciphering some of the inscriptions for the first time. He is currently curating a new display – *The Universe in a Library* – which explores the relationship between illustrated manuscripts and luxury scientific instruments in the royal courts of the Islamic world.

IT HAS BEEN A REAL PRIVILEGE TO CLOSELY ENGAGE WITH THE MUSEUM'S PEERLESS COLLECTION



Ed Shawe-Taylor disassembling the oldest dated astrolabe in the collection. Dated to 374/984–5 it was made by brothers Ahmad and Muhammad, members of a family of astrolabe makers from Isfahan.

Emily Whittingham with a Museum visitor examining a 19th-century microscope slide from the Paul M Greenbaum Collection.

The magic of microscopes

In July 2026, York University PhD student Emily Whittingham joined the HSM to spend two months working with the newly donated Paul M Greenbaum Microscope Collection.

Emily is researching the history of microscopy and the Paul M Greenbaum Collection offered her a unique opportunity to handle some incredible instruments.

She divided her time between behind-the-scenes cataloguing work and public outreach events. Both activities enabled her to explore the microscopes in detail and appreciate their craftsmanship. But it was the public events that gave her the opportunity to share her excitement and enthusiasm for these beautiful objects as she helped children and adults alike to enjoy the magic of looking at tiny objects such as fleas and seeds through the microscopes' lenses.

Emily commented that her time working with the collection had been transformative: it changed her understanding of the instruments on which her PhD is based by helping her to appreciate how the distinct material qualities of different microscopes shaped the experience of using them.

She observed how wonderful it was to see this precious collection being conserved and enjoyed.

The HSM is grateful to the Greenbaum family for the generous donation that makes possible both academic research and public outreach activities.

THIS HAS BEEN A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE FOR ME

Thank you
for your support

Thank you to everyone who has donated, volunteered, visited, and supported the History of Science Museum over the past year.

We are incredibly grateful for the generosity you have shown the HSM, which has helped us continue our mission to inform and inspire in-person and virtual visitors.

Philanthropic support from individuals and organisations will remain vital for the Museum in the future, and will ensure the successful delivery of our activities and help us on our journey to realising our ambitious *Vision24* transformation.

We would like to thank the following for their particularly generous support during this year:

Alwaleed Philanthropies

Anonymous

Arts Council England

Heinrich Böhm

Katharina Böhm

Robert Brooker

EPA Cephalosporin Fund

Fondazione VisMederi

The Greenbaum family in honour of the late Mr Paul Greenbaum

Higher Education Museums Galleries and Collections Fund

Maxson Network Limited

The Ofenheim Charitable Trust

The Society for the History of Medieval Technology and Science

Chris Turner

UK Research and Innovation: Arts and Humanities Research Council

UK Research and Innovation: Research England

The Ward Family in memory of John Ward, who volunteered at HSM

Lady Wood OBE



Be part of the future of the History of Science Museum

Philanthropy is vital for us

By supporting the Museum, you will help preserve our extraordinary collection and unique building. Your contribution will enable us share our objects' stories, connect with communities, and inspire new generations. To find out how you can support HSM's vision, please get in touch with:

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Or you can make a donation at **https://www.campaign.ox.ac.uk/history-of-science-museum**

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HISTORY OF SCIENCE MUSEUM

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ACCREDITED MUSEUM

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