

Annual Review 2024-25

HISTORY
OF SCIENCE
MUSEUM



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD



From the Director

"We expect the unexpected, and because the unexpected has become our constant companion, we have made it our friend" is how a colleague recently described the History of Science Museum – and I cannot think of a better summary of the past twelve months!

Being forced to close to visitors the top gallery (and thus one third of our exhibition space) initially for a few weeks, then a few months, and at the time of writing a whole year, could have been a complete disaster.

But rather than losing heart and quietly weeping in a corner, we rolled up our sleeves and found a whole raft of completely unexpected opportunities in these (and a whole range of other) challenges: we explored new spaces for our exciting learning offers, launched an innovative public programme, commissioned and staged a play that embedded vaccine debates in historical contexts, managed to buck the national trend for visitor donations, did sector-wide sharing of learning from hazards identified in our collections, secured research grants, partnered in meaningful international collaborations – and did what so many said we would never manage: we received Listed Building Consent for the capital project element of *Vision 24*, our ambitious strategy for complete transformation. On the following pages we share some of those and many other highlights.

Working as a team, and trusting each other every bit of the way, has been at the heart of, arguably, one of the most successful years in our history to date during which we learnt so much – not least about ourselves.

It makes me enormously proud, and I feel so very humbled, to be working with such fantastically resilient colleagues, wonderful partners, and generous supporters –
THANK YOU!

Dr Silke Ackermann FSA
Director

From the Chair of the Board of Visitors

It has been both an honour and delight to Chair the Board of Visitors of the History of Science Museum over the past twelve months.

The History of Science Museum (HSM) is so much more than a repository of beautiful and fascinating scientific instruments. It is a dynamic place that aims to bring its many remarkable objects to life, placing them into the context of how science and society generate and use knowledge for the benefit of all.

The diversity of the objects, coming from all over the world, emphasises that science is not simply the product of any nation state, but is a truly international pursuit. Scientific knowledge is not 'owned' but rather shared by all societies. The HSM is very much the custodian of this philosophy and, in this regard, is unique amongst the other great museums of Oxford.

I have been deeply impressed with the way the HSM delivers effective communication. It consults broadly and extensively with the local and wider community to gain an understanding of the interests, thoughts and perhaps misconceptions, that surround the history of science. The HSM also collaborates with multiple national and international organisations to ensure that the knowledge being communicated is appropriate to the audience.

The desire to more fully embed these processes – consulting, understanding, collaborating, sharing – is the driving force behind the *Vision 24* project. *Vision 24* will make our Museum fully accessible and inclusive, allowing everyone to connect to our scientific past, present and future.

The task of generating the funds for *Vision 24* is not insignificant, but the Board of Visitors – a diverse group, with an exciting breadth of expertise, and an absolute commitment to help guide and expand the Museum's mission, see pages 30 to 33 – aims to use all its expertise and financial acumen to help deliver this immensely exciting future for one of the great crucibles of knowledge in Oxford.

Professor Russell Foster CBE, FRS
Chair, Board of Visitors



Vision 24

Explore Science – Discover Humanity

A decade ago, with the History of Science Museum's 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 of our history.

This process has included (and continues to include) every single member of our team. Who are we? Who do we want to be? What are our priorities and goals for the future? Whom do we want to partner with? Whom do we want to reach? Most importantly we were seeking to answer the question: how do we get there?

Vision 24 is the ambitious strategy for the future of our Museum and our goals are clear: we want to achieve full inclusion – physically, intellectually, and emotionally – under the strapline 'Explore Science – Discover Humanity'. Equally importantly: we want to attain financial and environmental sustainability.

Vision 24 has a myriad of elements, but one is right at the centre. Our stunning building with its almost unbroken history of housing museums since 1683 is now woefully inadequate for twenty-first-century expectations of access, and is also in dire need of tender loving care to safeguard its historic fabric for the future.

When we first started thinking about *Vision 24*, achieving Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission for our Grade I listed building appeared as unreachable as one of the outer planets.

But we did it! With generous financial support from our friends, the EPA Cephalosporin Fund, unperturbed by a flurry of setbacks, and never wavering in our determination to secure the Museum's future, we firmly kept our goal in sight and at the core of our short-term and long-term decisions.

And just before this *Review* went to press, we received the exciting news that following our formal submission to Oxford City Council in April and a period of public consultation over spring and early summer, we have been granted Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission. A major milestone for *Vision 24*!





The *Vision 24* Project Team, led by the Director Dr Silke Ackermann as the University's Senior Responsible Owner, includes colleagues from across the University of Oxford, as well as external consultants, led by Heritage Architects Purcell. As a Grade I listed building, the project also requires a specialist heritage consultant and ongoing consultation with key stakeholders (Historic England, Oxford City Council, Oxford Preservation Trust, Oxford Design Review Panel, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and Historic Buildings and Palaces), and our direct neighbours (Exeter College, the Bodleian Libraries, and the Sheldonian Theatre) as well as the collegiate University of Oxford.

In a press release, the Director shared her excitement: "Achieving Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission to secure the future of our unique building as a fully accessible public museum is literally a dream come true for me personally, and potentially a blueprint for other Grade I listed heritage sites. I am so very grateful to our project team and all the individuals and groups who have patiently supported and guided us as critical friends over these past five years. It is their belief in our plans, and their honest feedback at all stages that have enabled us to get to this point and I am immensely looking forward to developing the next stages of our project together."



Bringing representatives of our Local Planning Authority, statutory bodies, and advisory committees on board right from the start as critical friends, and listening to their advice at every stage of the process (even if it wasn't always easy to hear and we had to part with some of our favourite ideas) was at the core of this success. We have been working intensely over the past five years with our architects Purcell to develop plans that the Director has consistently referred to as 'Oxford's Louvre Pyramids' – namely a stunning addition to Oxford's architectural landscape in its own right that enhances and references our building and unique collections, creates new and cutting-edge spaces for visitors, staff, researchers and students, and enables us – together with our many partners – to give our objects centre stage for telling intriguing, beautiful, unexpected stories, bringing the many histories they embody to life.

Vision 24 is arguably the most exciting project in our Museum's history after its founding 101 years ago and it involves every member of our team – as well as our audiences and partners. We no longer want to think in terms of 'permanent displays' and 'special exhibitions', but rather envisage dynamic changes and interventions in modular cases and flexibly used spaces that reflect what life outside our walls is like: constantly changing. We want to future-proof our plans as much as we possibly can so that our successors feel that the world (or rather: our bijou building) is their oyster, and a canvas on which every new generation can draw afresh.

Throughout this whole period, we have engaged with our many supporters and donors to discuss how they may wish to get involved in *Vision 24*. If you would like to be part of this discussion, we would love to hear from you!

“
**PERMISSION TO SECURE
THE FUTURE OF OUR UNIQUE
BUILDING ... IS LITERALLY
A DREAM COME TRUE ...
AND POTENTIALLY A BLUEPRINT
FOR OTHER GRADE I LISTED SITES.**

To find out more about how you, or your organisation, can become involved in supporting the History of Science Museum and *Vision 24* please contact:

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Treasured Moments

Marconi Memories

In May 2025, the daughter and the grandson of Guglielmo Marconi – famed ‘Father of Radio’ – visited the *Making Waves* display in the HSM. Princess Elettra Marconi Giovanelli and Professor Guglielmo Giovanelli Marconi commented: “You can’t imagine the great joy we had visiting the wonderful exhibition. We were thrilled to see how you keep so extremely well the items of my grandfather.” A few weeks later, Dr Silke Ackermann welcomed to the Museum John Janowiak, President and CEO of the Marconi Society.



British Science Festival Presidency, London

MultakaOxford was invited to take over the presidency of the History of Science strand of the British Science Association’s Science Festival. This is Britain’s oldest science festival (dating back to 1831) and takes place in different cities each year. In autumn 2025, the HSM team used the theme of *Silk Roads* to offer visitors a global perspective on science.



Making Connections

MultakaOxford’s *Come and Connect* sessions are friendly gatherings where community members learn about the History of Science Museum. Each session focuses on a different theme to help volunteers connect with the Museum and its collection – and each other. The sessions are popular with one participant explaining: “Every session is an amazing opportunity for me to learn more and strengthen my interest.”



Culture Club

As part of the *Right Here Right Now* climate summit a group of 16–24 year olds from MultakaOxford’s Culture Club shared their take on climate justice. Over six weeks, photographer Michael Bicarregui led photography workshops at local green spaces, Ismael Rodriguez taught riverside painting and clay modelling, and Fred Mason introduced the group to pinhole photography, DIY darkroom processes, and crafts. Photography 4 Humanity’s *Climate Justice* Photo Exhibition at Fusion Arts in June 2025 displayed the impressive results.



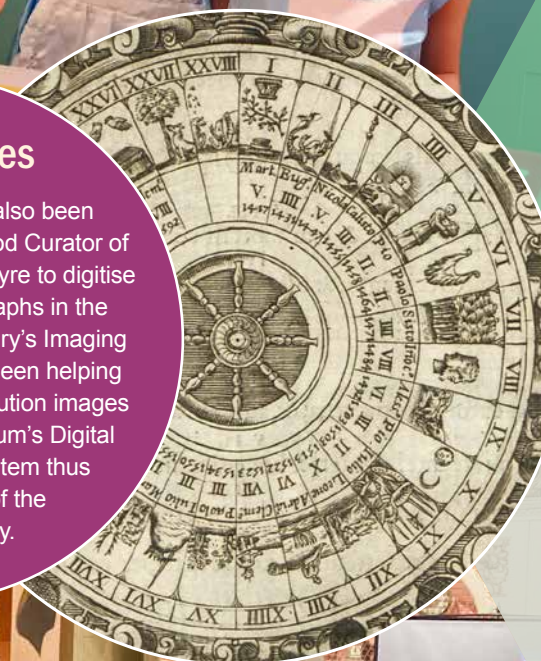
Book Keeping

From November 2024, Dr Lee Macdonald, HSM's librarian and archivist, has been working through more than 4,000 books printed before 1900 to classify, correct bibliographic details, and safely house each one in an individually constructed, archive-compliant box. Future library users will thank Lee for his work, which will preserve the books for generations and make light work of accessing this vital part of the collection.



Digital Riches

Dr Lee Macdonald has also been working with Sir Martin Wood Curator of Oxford Science Dr Tina Eyre to digitise over 700 historic photographs in the archive. The Bodleian Library's Imaging Services department has been helping and the resulting high-resolution images will be added to the Museum's Digital Asset Management System thus sharing the riches of the collection globally.



Alice's Day

On the afternoon of 4 July 1862, Christ Church mathematician Charles Dodgson took the Dean of Christ Church's daughters on a trip up the River Thames for a picnic. They begged him to tell a story and the rest is history, with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* being published three years later. Each year, on the first Saturday in July, Oxford celebrates Alice's Day. This year, as every year, the History of Science Museum joined in with activities for children of all ages.



Tsinghua Visit

In July, the Museum was visited by a delegation from Tsinghua University, led by Professor Guo Yong, Vice Chairman of the Tsinghua University Council. Tsinghua is the oldest public university in China and is globally respected for its science programmes and research. It is seeking to establish its own university museum and delegates were fascinated by the HSM's multi-disciplinary approach which explores the intersection of science, humanity and faith.



Medal Worthy

On 8 November 2024, the Scientific Instrument Society's annual *Gerard Turner Memorial 'Medal' Lecture* was given at the History of Science Museum by Curator Emeritus Dr Stephen Johnston. This is the first time the prestigious event has been held outside London, and the location was chosen to honour Dr Johnston whose lecture – *Back to the Future: New Approaches to the Astrolabe* – looked at how portable digital microscopes are bringing Gerald Turner's close examination of objects – 'eyeballing' – up to date, and how machine learning offers possible future efficiencies.

MultakaOxford

Cultural Meeting Points for Curious Minds

Global celebrations

On the morning of Saturday 5 April, had you been on Oxford's historic Broad Street in the beautiful spring sunshine, you might have noticed feverish preparations as the Museum readied itself for Multaka's first-ever Spring Celebration.

Staff and volunteers welcomed visitors with activities that explored and celebrated the ways different cultures – using different technologies and objects – mark the Spring Equinox across the world and through time.

Had you been there you would have been invited in to explore seasonal changes using an armillary sphere, to learn about the Ethiopian/Eritrean calendar and to find out how perpetual calendars work. Pausing on the Museum's elegant staircase, you would have heard readings of spring-themed poems from all around the world.

Participants commented on the "rich intercultural exchange" and said that "the explanations were very practical and easy to understand." They noted "the energy of the day" adding that "everyone was so enthusiastic". But perhaps this inaugural Spring Celebration is best summed up with the comment: "I loved it! It felt like we created a really special space together."

This is amazing

The African Astronomy Initiative grew from MultakaOxford's long-standing partnership with Oxford's Sudanese Supplementary School, a Saturday school which endeavours to improve the educational outcomes of children from the Sudanese community in Oxford and beyond while helping them to enjoy the richness of their heritage.



ENGAGING WITH THESE OBJECTS FOSTERS A SENSE OF IDENTITY, PRIDE AND BELONGING, ALLOWING YOUNG LEARNERS TO SEE THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THEIR FAITH AND CULTURE TO THE BROADER WORLD.

THIS WAS SUCH A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR THE STUDENTS ... THEY LOVED THE WORKSHOPS, LEARNED NEW SKILLS, AND YOU COULD SEE THEIR CONFIDENCE GROW WHEN THEIR ARTWORK WENT UP IN THE MUSEUM.

MultakaOxford's existing astronomy project wanted to work with the School to highlight the traditional and contemporary technologies that originate in the African continent, and particularly in Sudan and surrounding regions.

Over seven immersive sessions, students engaged with knowledge-sharing activities and creative arts, culminating in artwork inspired by Nabta Playa, the world's oldest astronomical site located in the Nubian Desert; by the important role played by the Summer Solstice in astronomy; by African-inspired Egyptian astrology; and by contemporary technological achievements from Sudan, including the Sudanese Satellite.

Adults working with the Sudanese School noted: "Children expressed visible pride in Sudan's role in early scientific development. The sessions left them feeling inspired and empowered."

But let's leave the last words with the children for whom this was a deeply meaningful experience. One student said: "I loved to learn more about African Astronomy and how important it is. Nabta Playa is the oldest astronomical site in the world, and this is amazing."



PROJECTS LIKE THIS HELP OUR KIDS SEE HOW MUCH ISLAMIC SCHOLARS CONTRIBUTED TO MATHS, PHYSICS, ASTRONOMY, HISTORY, AND PHILOSOPHY.

Inspired by the Stars

In another collaboration with the Sudanese Supplementary School, MultakaOxford worked with the Al-Sham Academy, based at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (OCIS), to enable students to explore and exhibition at OCIS called *Lines of Faith*. This exhibition was curated by Dr Stephen Johnston, Curator Emeritus of the HSM and featured astrolabes from the History of Science Museum.

MultakaOxford organised knowledge-sharing workshops about astrolabes for students of both supplementary schools, followed by an inspiring guided tour of OCIS and the exhibition. This collaboration resulted in student-created artwork titled *Inspired by the Stars*, and this was displayed at the History of Science Museum's entrance gallery for two weekends in November 2024 (see front cover).



IT IS VITAL TO INCORPORATE ISLAMIC OBJECTS. THESE ITEMS PROVIDE TANGIBLE CONNECTIONS TO THE CHILDREN'S FAITH, DEEPENING THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF THEIR HERITAGE.

IT HELPS FORM MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS TO THEIR SPIRITUAL AND HISTORICAL ROOTS, ENRICHING THEIR PERSONAL GROWTH AND WORLDVIEW.

Bringing to Life A Collector's Legacy

The Museum is delighted to celebrate a most generous gift from the Greenbaum family in honour of the late Mr Paul Greenbaum. This significant donation comprises a remarkable private collection of over 200 microscopes – which charts their change in use from being a curiosity for the wealthy to the mainstay and foundation of modern medicine – and significant financial support. The family gift, alongside a matched funding contribution from the EPA Cephalosporin Fund, will enable a new permanent curator for the History of Science Museum.

The combined gift will secure the delivery of a dynamic five-year public engagement programme to bring the stories of the microscopes to life.

The creation of an endowment to establish the PM Greenbaum–EP Abraham Curatorship of the Scientific Revolution and Industrial Age(s) marks a major milestone for the History of Science Museum, being the first role fully funded through philanthropy. Once appointed, the new curator will greatly enhance public engagement opportunities with the Paul M Greenbaum microscope collection and wider 1750–1900 collections which focus on a rich period of scientific innovation, resonating across many aspects of our world today.

This extraordinary donation brings together two strands that are central to the Museum's priorities: celebrating the role of independent scholars and collectors, and highlighting the technologies that have transformed the way we see and understand the world. The Paul M Greenbaum Collection will sit alongside the Museum's existing holdings of the Royal Microscopical Society, creating a significant centre for the study and appreciation of the history of microscopy.



TODAY WE TAKE MICROSCOPES FOR GRANTED, YET ALMOST EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES HAS BEEN SHAPED BY THEM; FROM THE DISCOVERY OF PENICILLIN, TO IVF, TO THE DIAGNOSIS OF ILLNESSES THAT SAVE MILLIONS OF LIVES. MICROSCOPY OPENED A WINDOW INTO THE UNSEEN, FOREVER CHANGING THE WAY HUMANS UNDERSTAND THE LIVING WORLD.

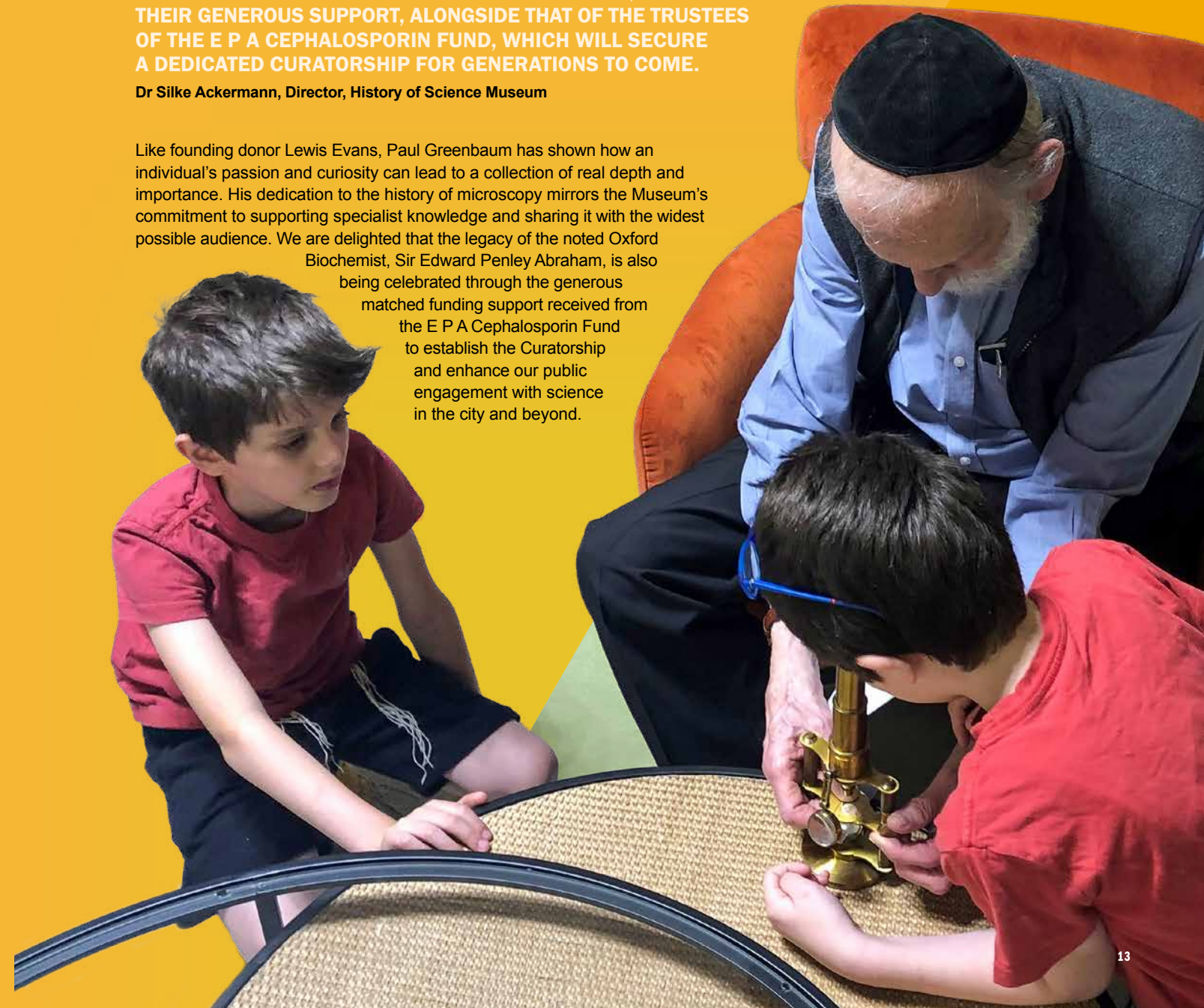
Dr JC Niala, Deputy Director and Head of Research, Teaching and Collections, History of Science Museum

“THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE MUSEUM IS DEEPLY THANKFUL TO THE GREENBAUM FAMILY FOR ENTRUSTING THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE MUSEUM WITH THE FUTURE CARE AND SHARING OF THE PAUL M GREENBAUM COLLECTION, AND FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT, ALONGSIDE THAT OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE E P A CEPHALOSPORIN FUND, WHICH WILL SECURE A DEDICATED CURATORSHIP FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

Dr Silke Ackermann, Director, History of Science Museum

Like founding donor Lewis Evans, Paul Greenbaum has shown how an individual's passion and curiosity can lead to a collection of real depth and importance. His dedication to the history of microscopy mirrors the Museum's commitment to supporting specialist knowledge and sharing it with the widest possible audience. We are delighted that the legacy of the noted Oxford Biochemist, Sir Edward Penley Abraham, is also being celebrated through the generous matched funding support received from the E P A Cephalosporin Fund to establish the Curatorship and enhance our public engagement with science in the city and beyond.

Paul Greenbaum with two of his grandsons.
(Photograph © the Greenbaum family.)



We Can Work It Out

Every public museum knows to expect the unexpected. But there's unexpected and ... unexpected!

In October 2024, we prepared to close our Top Gallery for a two-week survey of the roof. The initial view was that ten working days would be sufficient for both survey and associated maintenance.

How wrong we were.



The survey revealed that wood-boring beetles had chosen to make their home in the wooden beams of our historic roof. Restoration work would take about six months which meant we were looking at one third of our gallery space being closed until at least Easter 2025.

“ CREATIVITY PROMPTED BY SIMPLE NECESSITY

The entire Museum team swung into action to ensure all our audiences would continue to have enjoyable visits. The learning team took up the daunting challenge of redesigning, in just a few short weeks, their in-gallery teaching sessions. They had to think creatively about how to bring the same learning to life using objects and activities that were still accessible. Their many hours of careful planning paid off with one teacher commenting that the revised lesson, now taught in the Entrance Gallery, was even better than the original.

To support our relocated teaching sessions, we decided to create a temporary Islamic science shelf. Taking the opportunity to experiment with more modern interpretive approaches, we produced a shelf-wide display label designed with 8- to 10-year-old learners in mind. Colour images gave context about how the object was used and standard details were written as questions (“What was it made from?”) rather than statements.

Despite the many silver linings, it was with understandable enthusiasm that a cross-museum team met in early 2025 to start planning the reopening of the Top Gallery. However, two things soon became clear: the maintenance work would continue until late summer 2025, further delaying reopening; and our vibrant loans programme – while ensuring we continue to share our stories across the world – meant that many objects were temporarily off display, leaving significant gaps in Top Gallery cases.

Again, embracing the creativity prompted by simple necessity, we decided now was a good time to run a series of small, iterative display experiments to fill these gaps. These experiments would generate visitor insights to inform our *Vision 24* redevelopment plans.

A first step was to establish a baseline. Working with the Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) Data and Evaluation colleagues, we agreed an observation and evaluation programme to benchmark how visitors move around and respond to each of our three gallery spaces. Over spring and summer of 2025 we started surveys in the Entrance and Basement Galleries. The next step was to identify like-for-like object replacements or minor ‘shelf reshuffles’ to restore the Top Gallery to its pre-October 2024 state so we could carry out the baseline survey in this gallery on reopening.

Our on-going strategy is for a cross-museum team to continue working closely with evaluation colleagues, making small changes to both displays and wayfinding, considering evaluation results and iterating further updates. By resisting the temptation to invest in expensive, ‘one-and-done’ display makeovers, we can be responsive to our audiences and gather essential insights to prepare for the major gallery refurbishments ahead.

“ BY RESISTING THE TEMPTATION TO INVEST IN EXPENSIVE ‘ONE-AND-DONE’ DISPLAY MAKEOVERS, WE CAN BE RESPONSIVE TO OUR AUDIENCES.

This year, when the unexpected happened we made necessity the mother of invention. Our teams have creatively used limited space to generate engaging experiences; the visitor evaluation project is informing our future vision; and visitors and learners can, once again, enjoy our historic Top Gallery.

The Gourmet Beetle

Deathwatch beetles are connoisseurs. They like hardwood, especially oak, and preferably a century old or more.

Emerging in spring from holes up to four millimetres in diameter, adult females mate, lay eggs and die soon afterwards. Their larvae continue the tunnel-building of their parents and may chomp away for a decade before they pupate.

Adult deathwatch beetles make tapping sounds to attract mates. This tapping was often heard in the quiet of the night, perhaps as people sat with loved ones who were ill, or dying. The sound was interpreted as a countdown to death, hence the beetles’ popular name.

Thankfully, modern treatments are effective but it should also be acknowledged that in nature the beetle is an agent of good, breaking down fallen trees and creating space for new trees to thrive.



Building Safer, Smarter Museums

This year the Museum has taken an important step forward in the way it cares for its collections and the people who work with them.

Hazards in Collections is an initiative designed to make hidden risks visible, ensuring that the Museum can share its world-class collections more safely and more fully.

The Museum's rich holdings span centuries of scientific innovation but some of these objects – especially in areas like radio communications and early electronics – contain such hazardous materials as asbestos, mercury, and radium. These materials, once celebrated for their usefulness, now require careful handling.

In preparation for a major collections move, the Museum began a comprehensive survey to identify hidden hazards. Working with colleagues across the University, the survey brought to light new insights, revealing that risk is not a fixed property but is part of an evolving relationship between materials, the knowledge around them, and the contexts in which they are stored, studied, and displayed.

One of the most significant outcomes has been the redesign of the Museum's collections database. For the first time, there is now a clear, central record of where hazards exist. This makes it possible to manage risks so future users of the collection find a safe, well-documented resource.

Collaboration has been at the heart of the work. The Museum facilitated asbestos awareness training for colleagues across the Gardens, Libraries and Museums of the University of Oxford. These sessions have shared knowledge and built confidence, enabling staff in other institutions to identify, document and respond to hazards in their own collections.

But this project is about more than safety. Hazards are also part of the stories our collections tell. For example, the Marconi Collection – one of the Museum's most used and researched groups of objects – contains a wealth of early radio technology. Many of the objects carry a hidden legacy of asbestos, a material mined in dangerous conditions around the world. The project has prompted a new curatorial approach which looks at the wider histories of these materials – from the workers who mined them, to the health and environmental consequences that followed.

This change in focus has revealed that hazardous materials are not only a technical concern, but also a way to explore the ethics and human cost of scientific and industrial progress. A domestic wireless set or an early laboratory instrument can now be seen in a new light: it is a reminder of the lives affected by the materials from which it was made, as well as an innovation that shaped modern life.



Through this work the Museum has become part of a wider conversation – within Oxford and across the sector – about how to balance public engagement with safety, and how to tell more complex stories about science and technology.

Head of Collections, Research and Teaching, Dr JC Niala and Collections Management Systems Manager, Łukasz Kowalski, gave a talk at the 2025 *Scientific Instrument Conference* – held hybrid as part of the *International Union of the History of Philosophy and Science Conference* in Dunedin (NZ) – and explained how the History of Science Museum is leading sector-wide thinking about hazards in collections. The presentation shared the Museum's experience of developing collaborative training and demonstrated how cross-institutional knowledge-sharing is shaping best practice in the emerging field of hazards management.

Many institutions throughout the world are currently working hard to improve researcher and public access to collections, including the large parts of most collections that are not on display. Understanding hazards in those collections is a vital first step to opening them up.

Taking part in this conference, and the international discussion arising from it, has positioned the HSM as a sector thought leader. By showing the value of connecting collections care with ethical approaches to technology histories, not only has the Museum been able to build new professional networks but it has changed sector thinking.

The impact has been transformative, producing a safer working environment for staff, researchers, and the public as well as a more comprehensive collections database. It has also forged partnerships and new ways of interpreting objects that will enrich exhibitions and learning programmes.

Managing hazards is not simply about compliance: it is also an opportunity to deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and make the Museum's collections more meaningful for everyone.

The Alleviating Art

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Smallpox Inoculation

In March 2025 the Museum's Basement Gallery, which was once a chemistry laboratory, became once again a site of experimentation. This time, through theatre.

The Alleviating Art is a one-act, one-actor play about the medical pioneer, writer and poet Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762). Commissioned by the Museum from playwright, translator and scholar, Robert Myers, the play explores a moment in scientific history that continues to have vital relevance today.

Drawing material from Lady Mary's own letters, actor Catherine Cusack created an intimate and urgent portrayal of this pioneering and courageous woman. The play took the audience into the streets and harems of the Ottoman Empire and shared Lady Mary's encounters with the common practice of inoculation against smallpox – a practice that was unknown in England at the time.

The Alleviating Art shows how Lady Mary immediately understood the importance of a practice that could protect her children from the disease that had disfigured her and killed her brother.

At the heart of the play is Lady Mary's bold – and personally difficult – choice to inoculate her young daughter in the face of resistance from both the medical establishment and popular opinion. Her daughter, Mary, became the first recipient of smallpox inoculation on English soil.

The Alleviating Art explores the interplay of gender, motherhood, society and perceptions of health and science with sensitivity and style. As Director of both the Theatre Initiative and the Alwaleed Centre for American Studies and Research (CASAR) at the American University of Beirut, Robert Myers has created a piece of theatre that celebrates the way science advances through individual endeavour as well as through collaborative effort and communal risk.

Beautifully staged by Director Sahar Assaf, a Lebanese theatre-maker and Executive Artistic Director of Golden Thread Productions in San Francisco, a living piece of history emerged from letters written over 200 years ago.

The shimmering atmosphere of the performance evoked the wonder of international travel in a world just beginning to open up to a privileged few and was accompanied by Tarik Beshir's skilled oud playing, which transported the audience from the heart of Oxford in crisp early spring to the heat of the bathhouses of Sofia. A prominent figure in Oxford's music scene, Tarik is a songwriter and a student of late 19th- and early 20th-century Ottoman Egyptian musical traditions.

This international collaboration brought together a diversity of voices and perspectives, resulting in a work that was far richer than the sum of its parts. Just as Lady Mary's understanding of inoculation depended on the knowledge and practices she encountered on her travels, this project was shaped and enriched by the cross-cultural dialogue at its core.

The performance was followed by a debate chaired by Museum Director Dr Silke Ackermann.

The panel – comprising the playwright, Robert Myers; the actor, Catherine Cusack and Professor Sir Andrew Pollard, Director of the Oxford Vaccine Group and Chair of the UK's Joint Committee on Vaccine and Immunology – considered questions from a distinguished audience that included the recently elected Chancellor of Oxford University, the Right Honorable Lord Hague of Richmond.

From questions about the portrayal of historical figures to reflections on 'vaccine-denial', the panel and audience explored the ways Lady Mary's letters still resonate within the fields of science communication and immunology.

Lady Mary's mission speaks directly to challenges we still face today and resonates with renewed urgency in the wake of the COVID pandemic. It sits in dialogue with the History of Science Museum's ongoing *Collecting COVID* project and affirms the Museum's place within a global community of science, creativity, and shared human questions – past and present.

By following Lady Mary's journey through Europe and the Ottoman Empire to bring inoculation to Britain, the Museum staged a compelling example of how historical stories can be brought into conversation with contemporary life – underscoring the enduring importance of advocacy and courage in the face of societal and scientific challenges.

“
NO SANE MOTHER WOULD
EVER DO ANYTHING TO
HARM HER OWN CHILD,
BUT IN THIS CASE DOING
NOTHING COULD HARM
HER MORE.

Bright Sparks

Over the last academic year, supported by a Spark Award grant from the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), the Museum delivered for its second year running the award-winning project *My Place, My Science*.

Together with colleagues from Oxford Physics, the Kennedy and Botnar Institutes, the Biochemistry Department and the Wellcome University Centre for Integrative Neuroimaging (WIN; now the Oxford Centre for Integrative Neuroimaging, OXCIN), the Museum has worked with community organisation African Families in the UK (AFiUK) to support young people of African and black Caribbean heritage to enjoy science and build cultural connections by creating a space to learn together and build networks through events and workshops focussing on enjoying science and discovery.

The young people live in Blackbird Leys, an area of Oxford which is one of the most deprived wards in the country (in the bottom 20 per cent). Many are from first- or second-generation migrant families.

Supporting AFiUK's core mission, the programme aims to foster identity and belonging, to provide access to cultural opportunities, and to tackle barriers to learning such as racialisation and low-socio economic input – all by building on the young people's interest in science.

“IT WAS FUN AND EXCITING. I LOVED IT; I LIKE HOW I GOT TO MAKE PLANETS; IT WAS A GOOD EXPERIENCE THAT I ENJOYED VERY MUCH.

“ALL THE YOUNG PEOPLE WERE REALLY EAGER TO TELL ME ABOUT THE SCIENCE THEY'D LEARNT AND GAVE AMAZING EXPLANATIONS!

SUCH A JOYFUL EVENT AND SUCH CLEVER WAYS TO DEMONSTRATE SCIENCE.

This year the project delivered eleven events, three at the Museum, with an average attendance of 20 young people supported by adults from the community, and over 50 instances of engagement with scientists and researchers.

The project has enabled families to access the Museum and the University's science facilities as well as the Space Laboratories at Rutherford Appleton (RAL), a local pharmaceutical company, a virtual link-up with South Africa's MeekAT telescope, and even a trip to London to see *Moonwalkers* at The Lightroom followed by a meeting with the writer-director. All help to build networks, access novel cultural opportunities, and promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

Through collaborative partnerships, the project has been successful in enabling the young people to access 'real-world' science in safe but stimulating environments that encourage curiosity and enjoyment through a variety of engagement; making models of luxury sixteenth-century sundials and discovering astrolabes from north Africa at the Museum, cutting-edge lunar research at Oxford Astrophysics, meeting black scientists and engineers at RAL Space, and community events such as star-gazing at Oxford City College's Blackbird Leys campus.

The programme culminated in a co-created takeover event at the Museum during the May half-term. Twelve of the young people, supported by researchers, came together to host an event sharing their favourite experiments from the year's programme. It was heartening to witness the young people taking ownership of their experiences – whether demonstrating games testing coordination skills, explaining the use of infra-red cameras in space research, showing visitors how sundials work, or testing and trying on space suits. The Museum was alive with young people having fun supported by a host of friends and family from the community.

Celebrating the young people's achievements has been at the heart of the project and this year *My Place My Science* occupied a prominent position in AFiUK's tenth anniversary celebrations in May.

Over the next year, the Museum will be building on this work, diversifying the programme and supporting the young people from this community to access future opportunities in science and science heritage.

“I FOUND IT MOST INTERESTING THAT I CAN TALK TO PEOPLE WITH NO FEAR!

Islamic Art Biennale

‘And all that is in-between [heaven and earth]’

It is always exciting to contribute to exhibitions at home and abroad, through loans and through sharing ideas and learning. This is especially the case when those exhibitions enable us to show our objects in unexpected contexts, and even more so when such exhibitions inspire us to rethink what we do and how we do it.

The Second Islamic Art Biennale (IAB) – held in Jeddah under the patronage of the Diriyah Biennale Foundation from January to May 2025 – was just such an opportunity and one that we embraced wholeheartedly. The experience was enormously enriching and fed new ideas directly into our thinking about the opportunities offered by *Vision 24*.

After the phenomenal success of the First IAB in 2023, the History of Science Museum was delighted to be invited to collaborate once again. In addition to lending stunning objects for the exhibitions, HSM Director Dr Silke Ackermann contributed to the rich programme of events surrounding the Biennale.

But why would a (history of) science museum contribute to an arts biennale, one might ask?

The answer to this question lies at the heart of *Vision 24*, our ambitious strategy for complete transformation which looks at ‘science’ not only in the modern sense of the word but also as *scientia*, the Latin root word that would once have been universally understood as meaning simply ‘knowledge’.

The desire to explore the connections between people, ‘science’, art and belief underpins everything we do. The 2025 IAB is the perfect partner for the Museum in this respect with its title which includes a quotation from the Qur’an – ‘and all that is in-between’ – that expresses the human desire to understand and absorb everything around us and within us. This year’s IAB was a wonderful celebration of a whole world of craft and art, beauty and faith, ingenuity and understanding.

In response to the overarching theme, we lent some of our most evocative and stunning objects and the Director personally contributed to the public programme, including workshops, podcasts, IAB documentary, and the closing symposium.

The response from the public was overwhelming and utterly humbling. Over the course of its four-month run, the Islamic Art Biennale welcomed almost 650,000 visitors, including artists, scholars, students, pilgrims, and the general public from across Saudi Arabia and beyond, with 70 per cent of visitors being under 35 years old or younger, and male and female visitors roughly balanced. These audiences saw our objects in a new light, found them in different contexts, and experienced unexpected narratives. Responding to them, they asked thought-provoking questions, enabled us to rethink our approach, and encouraged us to contextualise our objects in a much more complex world than just the world of ‘science’.



Colonial Standards Using Scientific Instrument Collections in India and the UK to Investigate Mechanisms of Control



This year marks the start of an ambitious new international research collaboration for the Museum. Through this work, we will explore the global stories of science and empire that connect India and the United Kingdom, and develop new partnerships that cross borders, disciplines, and communities.

The project, entitled *Colonial Standards: Using Scientific Instrument Collections in India and the*

UK to Investigate Mechanisms of Control, has been awarded £400,000 by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the national body that funds and coordinates research and innovation across the United Kingdom. Only seven projects were selected from a very competitive field, and the HSM is proud that this is the only one led by a university museum. The successful bid was developed under the leadership of Dr JC Niala, Head of Research, Teaching and Collections, drawing on her long-standing experience of collaborative, cross-cultural research.

In February, Dr Niala travelled to Mumbai to represent the Museum at the Creative Industries and Cultural Heritage cohort workshop convened by UKRI-UK and UKRI-India. Over two intensive days, the seven project teams came together to explore the opportunities and challenges of India-UK research partnerships. The workshop highlighted the importance of equitable collaboration, the different cultural contexts of research, and the exciting potential for knowledge exchange.

This gathering, which brought academics, heritage professionals, and community partners into conversation, was a timely reminder of the critical role of research collaborations in strengthening cultural understanding. It was also a clear signal of the commitment to fostering strong UK-India research links, and it provided the team with invaluable insights as the project began to take shape.



Led by the History of Science Museum in partnership with the Institut Français de Pondichéry in India and the New Cartographers, a South Asian UK diasporic community research group, *Colonial Standards* will use the Museum's collections of weights, measures, and surveying instruments to investigate the ways in which measurement shaped – and was shaped by – local practices, colonial administration, and global knowledge systems. Through the New Cartographer's innovative participatory approach, the project will place community voices at the heart of the research.

The Mumbai workshop also brought home how important it will be for the project to create space for dialogue across disciplines, countries, and communities. Conversations ranged widely: from the complexities of building partnerships across different research environments to the need for shared understandings of heritage and creative practice.

From 1 September 2025, a new researcher will join the Museum to help drive this work forward. This role will include developing a digital resource that brings together collections from India and the UK, and working with communities in India and the UK to re-examine the histories of these objects and the stories they tell.

Although *Colonial Standards* is still in its early stages, the groundwork laid in Mumbai has already shaped the way this ambitious project will move forward. Dr Niala and the Museum are excited to develop research that not only deepens academic understanding but also builds long-term, sustainable relationships with partners in India.

Top photograph (from left to right): Audra Gill, Head of Creative Industries, Arts and Humanities Research Centre; Dr JC Niala, Head of Research, Teaching and Collections and Deputy Director, the History of Science Museum; and Basheera Shaik, UKRI, India.

Bottom photograph: Dr Jaideep Gupte, Director of Research, Strategy and Innovation at the Arts and Humanities Research Centre and Dr JC Niala.



Time Tellers and Time Keepers

Iffley Academy is a community specialist academy for students with complex special educational needs and disabilities based just outside the centre of Oxford in the quiet and ancient suburb of Iffley.

Since 2016 the Gardens, Libraries and Museums division (GLAM) has developed and sustained an in-depth partnership with the school.

In 2022, as part of its on-going goal of taking collections into the community rather than expecting communities to travel to the Museum, the long-term loan of a museum-standard display case to the Academy enabled a Co-curate programme to give students at the school the chance to work with learning, curatorial and collections teams to create unique exhibitions. These exhibitions allow students to explore curriculum-linked themes through the collections and to give expression to their own ideas and interpretations.

With learning to tell the time presenting challenging concepts to students with special educational needs, the *Time Tellers and Time Keepers* project aimed to support the Academy's Maths for Life programme by exploring the Museum's extraordinary collection of time-telling instruments such as sundials and clocks. Throughout the project, students had opportunities to tell the time in different ways practising, for example, the tricky conversion between analogue and digital.

Between October and January, a team from the Museum (Chris Parkin, Sumner Braund, and Miranda Millward) worked closely with one class. Over six weeks, students learnt about the history of how people have told the time, the use of traditional time tellers such as sundials, and the invention of time keepers such as different types of clock.

The programme opened with students making simple card models of a clock face and sundial and practising setting the same time on each, using pen torches to imitate the Sun. The students moved on to explore objects from the Museum's handling collection including a beautiful new centenary orrery – a mechanical model of the solar system – which reminded them that the earth rotates around the sun to create seasonal weather and varying lengths of day. Students had a go at building their own mechanical clocks from kits and encountered the story of Galileo and the invention of the pendulum escapement mechanism.

A visit to the Museum enabled students to find out about Lewis Evans and the HSM's founding collection and to meet Curator of Founding Collections, Dr Sumner Braund, who gave a wonderful introduction to the 'About Time' exhibition in the entrance gallery. The students found this fascinating and some showed an amazing recall of details. The students were also able to take a closer look at more unusual time related objects such as a nocturnal and astrolabes.



Back at school, inspired by Lewis Evans and their visit to the Museum, students made their own models of the beautiful ivory pocket dials they had seen, along with diptych and pillar dials.

The project culminated with the launch of their exhibition in January with a ceremonial ribbon-cutting by the Museum's director Silke Ackermann and class teacher Mrs Boddy. Two students gave confident, detailed and engaging talks at the case to invited guests, while back in the classroom students led activities including object handling, sundial making and demonstrations of the pendulum escapement mechanism inviting and sharing their learning with other students at the Academy. All the students involved gained their Arts Award Discover qualification and certificates were presented by Dr Ackermann.



It's Good To Talk

How do we talk about disease – and the stigma that often comes with it?

There is no single answer, but the first in a new series of events launched by the History of Science Museum this year set out to explore this question collaboratively.

Seeking a new way to explore ideas, the new *Let's Talk About* series departs from a traditional lecture to trial a structure intended to create exploratory conversations between speakers and audience. From the planning stages the Museum weaved curiosity and discussion into the fabric of the event, creating a participatory format for shared learning.

This collaborative spirit was evident from the start. Building on the success of a previous partnership – *Collecting COVID* – the Museum again worked with the Pandemic Sciences Institute (PSI) to co-design the event.

The PSI's aim to foster science-led innovation through partnerships between academia, industry and public health organisations made it a natural fit and *Let's Talk About: Stigma* drew on different perspectives to explore how illness and stigma influence our histories, experiences, and perceptions. It also celebrated the voices of early career researchers – individuals at an exciting point in their careers, actively gathering insights and forging new connections.

The evening began with small groups, each hosted by one of five experts, and each exploring one facet of the sort of stigma that comes with disease. Dr Tess Johnson, an ethicist at the Ethox Centre in Oxford Population Health, explored the moral complexities of antibiotic use and our collective responsibility to prevent the rise of superbugs. Joanne Gilchrist, Deputy Clinical Manager at the BSW ICB Vaccination Hub, showed how targeted vaccine outreach and community partnerships can help address health inequalities. Amy Paterson, a clinician-researcher at the Pandemic Sciences Institute, discussed how stigma can weaken public health responses during outbreaks and the need for stigma-sensitive interventions. Dr Hohee Cho, a historian at the Pandemic Sciences Institute, brought a vital historical lens to the discussion, examining how colonial health systems and quarantine regimes in the Pacific Islands shaped lasting associations between disease

and stigma. Finally, Dr Susanne Hodgson, an infectious diseases doctor and vaccinologist at the Jenner Institute, emphasised the importance of confronting STI-related stigma to ensure people feel safe seeking care and contributing to research.

Each speaker used an object – from a child's storybook to publicity poster to materials used in needle exchange programmes – to invite attendees to engage not only with ideas but with the lived experiences the objects represented.

As participants moved from speaker to speaker, connections formed among the groups as they shared their experiences and listened to each other. The evening ended with a whole-group panel discussion and this cumulative structure created an atmosphere of invested and thoughtful engagement with the subject and with each other.

Let's Talk About: Stigma demonstrated the power of conversation. It showed how we learn from each other and challenge assumptions together. The Museum's galleries were alive with questions and curiosity – a reminder that the most powerful learning happens when we listen, reflect and talk.



Board of Visitors 2024-25

The History of Science Museum's Board of Visitors ensures the Museum is properly managed and aligns with the University's goals. The Board works to keep the collection safe, oversees administrative and financial matters, and discusses policy and strategy.



Stephen Barber is founder and chair of Prix Pictet, an award which harnesses photography to draw attention to sustainability. Previously a managing trustee of the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, Stephen is currently a trustee of the Japan Society, the International Tree Foundation and the Ofenheim Trust. He sits on the advisory board of the Royal Fine Art Commission Trust.



Professor Chadreck Chirikure is Edward Hall Professor of Archaeological Science, Director of the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, British Academy Global Professor, and Fellow of Linacre College. He chairs the STEM Knowledge Network established by the UN. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.



Professor Nandini Das is Professor of Early Modern Literature and Culture at Oxford University and Fellow of Exeter College. She publishes on renaissance literature, travel, migration, and cross-cultural encounters. Her recent book, *Courting India: England, Mughal India and the Origins of Empire*, received the 2023 British Academy Book Prize for Global Cultural Understanding. She is a BBC New Generation Thinker, a founding member of UKRI Research England Council, and a member of the UK Committee on Research Integrity.



Professor Russell Foster (Chair) is head of Oxford's Nuffield Laboratory of Ophthalmology; founder and Director of the Sleep and Circadian Research Institute, and a Fellow of Brasenose College. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society, the Royal Society of Biology, the Academy of Medical Sciences and a Foreign Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy. He was appointed Commander of the British Empire in 2015. He has been a member of the Governing Council of the Royal Society and he established and led for six years their Public Engagement Committee. He has been chair of the Cheltenham Science Festival and a Trustee of the Science Museum. He is co-author of four popular science books and author of *Life Time: the New Science of the Body Clock and How it Can Revolutionize Your Sleep and Health*.



Ms Olivia Holder is a DPhil candidate and a Marshall Scholar at the University of Oxford. Her doctoral project is *Ceramics and Resistance: Artistic Assertions of Black Caribbean Identity from the Seventeenth Century to Now*. She has degrees from Oxford University, Peking University and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Her curatorial experience includes Counterpoint (Ashmolean). She is currently serving as the Research Consultant for a forthcoming new project at the Ashmolean.



Imam Monawar Hussain is Muslim tutor and Imam of Eton College, a Deputy Lieutenant for Oxfordshire, and Associate Director at Leadership Management International UK. He was High Sheriff of Oxfordshire from 2021-22. He founded the Oxford Foundation which promotes trust and understanding between diverse faiths and racial groups and inspires young Muslim people to contribute to British society. He is a founding member of the Oxford Council of Faiths and he founded the annual One World Festival held at the Ashmolean Museum. He is a trustee of the Oxford Trust, a former trustee and current Vice President of the Oxfordshire Community Foundation, and consultant to the Prison Phoenix Trust. He is Vice President of the Oxford Civic Society and co-chairs both the Oxfordshire and the Thames Valley Civic, Community and Faith Leaders Groups. At Eton College, he developed the first educational programme in the West tackling the radicalisation of young Muslims. He also leads a national initiative which works to tackle radicalisation. He is a founding member of the Armed Forces Muslim Forum, an Executive Committee Member of the World Congress of Faiths, an Honorary Research Fellow at the Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, and an alumnus of the Windsor Leadership Trust. In 2020 Monawar was awarded the Sternberg Interfaith Gold Medallion, previous winners of which include Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Basil Hume.



Dr Catherine M Jackson is Associate Professor of the History of Science in the Faculty of History, University of Oxford, acting for Professor Robert Iliffe, and Director of the Oxford Centre for the History of Science, Medicine, and Technology. Originally a chemist (PhD, Cambridge University, 1989), Jackson worked in industry, academia and education before retraining in the history of science (PhD, University of London, 2009).

She has published *Molecular World: Making Modern Chemistry* (MIT Press, 2023), and is working on *Molecular Puzzles: Re-thinking the Ring*, on the benzene ring.



Mr Henry Kim is Associate Vice Provost and Director of the Michael C Carlos Museum at Emory University, Atlanta. He was previously Director and CEO of the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto (2012 to 2020) where he was responsible for its construction and opening. From 1994 to 2012 he was curator of Greek coins and university lecturer at the University of Oxford and from 2004 to 2011 he was Project Director for the Ashmolean Redevelopment Project, a £70 million transformation of the museum. He created the University Engagement Programme to expand the use of museum collections in teaching.



Professor Chris Lintott is Professor of Astrophysics in the Department of Physics, University of Oxford and senior research fellow at New College. He is possibly best known as the co-presenter for the BBC's *Sky at Night* programme, and is currently the 39th Professor of Astronomy at Gresham College in the City of London, giving free lectures on Youtube. He writes for the *London Review of Books*, and *The Times*, and is the author of four books,

most recently *Our Accidental Universe* (2024, Transworld). His museum expertise includes time spent as an astronomer at the Adler Planetarium in Chicago and he has served as a trustee for Royal Museums Greenwich and on the Ashmolean Board of Visitors.



Conall Mac Niocaill is a Fellow in Earth Sciences at Exeter College, a Professor in the Department of Earth Sciences and a Junior Proctor of the University (2024–25). He obtained his PhD in Geology and Geophysics from the National University of Ireland, and studied and worked in France, Norway, and the United States before coming to Oxford as an EU Marie Curie Research fellow, and subsequently joining the faculty. He received a University teaching award in 2007 and the 2013 OUSU prize for 'Most Acclaimed Lecturer' in the Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division. He was part of the Opportunity Oxford team that received a Vice-Chancellor's award for Academic Excellence in 2022. Conall's research encompasses a variety of topics centring on the large-scale evolution of the Earth.



Richard Ovenden has been Bodley's Librarian (the senior executive of the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford) since 2014, and Head of Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) since 2022. He previously held positions at Durham University Library, the House of Lords Library, the National Library of Scotland, and the University of Edinburgh. He was educated at the University of Durham and University College London, and holds a Professorial Fellowship at Balliol College. He is President of the Digital Preservation Coalition, and holds Fellowships of the Royal Historical Society, the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He was made an Honorary Fellow of the British Academy in 2025 and has been elected to both the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was made an Honorary Doctor of Letters by Durham University in 2024 and an OBE in 2019.



Professor Sir Andrew Pollard is Director of the Oxford Vaccine Group in the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Oxford, Consultant Paediatrician at Oxford Children's Hospital and Fellow of St Cross College. He was Chair of the UK Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation from 2013 to 2025, and a member of WHO's SAGE between 2016 and 2022. Until the end of 2024, he was a member of Council of the Academy of Medical Sciences. In 2021 he received a knighthood for services to public health. He has pioneered the use of controlled human infection challenge models to investigate infections and to test vaccines. His research has included large epidemiological studies and vaccines trials in Europe, South Asia and Africa. He led testing of influenza vaccines for children in the 2009 pandemic, new vaccines for Ebola in the 2014–15 outbreak, and clinical development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID19 vaccine in 2020–21. He has supervised 50 PhD students, published extensively and received multiple awards.



Dr Venetia Porter is Honorary Research Fellow at the British Museum and the Courtauld Institute of Art. She was formerly Senior Curator for Islamic and Contemporary Middle East art at the British Museum. She studied Arabic and Persian and Islamic Art at the University of Oxford. Her PhD from the University of Durham is on the history and architecture of Medieval Yemen. She was the lead curator for the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World, which opened 2018. She is a Trustee of the Honor Frost Foundation and the Arab British Centre and was on the Advisory Board of the Islamic Arts Biennale, Jeddah, 2025.

Paper-free Progress

Working towards a more sustainable future is an existential concern for all of us. At the History of Science Museum a number of 'green' initiatives have been developed and embedded this year.

In autumn 2024, the Museum relaunched its Green Impact Group. Green Impact is a UN-recognised sustainability accreditation programme which helps organisations discover sustainable ways of working by raising awareness and breaking down the complexities of sustainability to provide practical starting points. At the HSM, the group is open to all staff and it meets six times a year.

This year the Green Impact Group spearheaded the Museum's participation in the University of Oxford's *Green Week* activities in February 2025. Green Week is a University-wide week of action to raise awareness of sustainability and to help staff explore more environmentally friendly ways to live and work.

The Museum's Green Impact Group set three objectives for the week.

The first objective was to raise awareness of sustainability among staff and visitors generally and this was done through social media activity and staff training. The week opened with a lunchtime carbon literacy training session open to all staff, which helped establish a common purpose while, throughout the week, the Museum's social media highlighted a 'sustainable object of the day'.

The second goal was to reduce the use of paper in the Museum by restricting the availability of printed guides. With maps, trails and leaflets removed from display, the Gallery Team staff seized the opportunity to engage in face-to-face interactions with visitors and the Learning Team laid on an

expanded programme of gallery tours as well as a programme of daily 'flash' talks about Museum objects. Paper-free alternatives were available to visitors of all ages: a scannable QR code gave online access to the Museum map and an online family trail. Extra family backpack sessions and the free loan of hands-on items such as picture dice and magnifying glasses helped the youngest visitors get the most out of our collection.

The third goal was to gather data on how visitors reacted to 'paperless trial' in order to explore ways of moving forwards in a more sustainable way.

The week was a great success with visitors reacting positively to both the sustainability drive and also the increased interaction with staff and volunteers.

Staff reported that they had enjoyed the closer connections with visitors as well as the enhanced collaboration between gallery and learning and engagement teams.

In measurable terms there was a substantial reduction in paper. During the week, the Museum handed out only half of the normal number of Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) maps, a quarter of the usual number of family trails, and a mere 15 per cent of the usual number of Museum maps. If these reductions were sustained over a full year, the savings in paper, printing ink and cost would be substantial.



“

INTERESTING AND INSIGHTFUL.
I FEEL I LEARNED MORE
FROM A PERSON-TO-PERSON
INTERACTION. I LIKE HEARING
WHAT OTHERS LIKED
...I COULD CONNECT
WITH THE PIECES
MORE.

Net Zero by 2035

The Museum's environmental sustainability work aligns with the University of Oxford's Environmental Sustainability Strategy. In March 2021, the University set itself the targets of achieving net zero carbon, and biodiversity net gain by 2035. The HSM has been following the University's Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) goal of developing a three-step, green strategy: first by auditing its current carbon footprint; second by setting measurable targets; finally by developing action plans. This work is being forward with the help of GLAM Environment Sustainability Manager, Jon Ray.

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 Audience
Engagement and Marketing

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

Digital Asset Management
System Manager (*shared
post with Pitt Rivers Museum*)

Dr Stephen Johnston

Curator Emeritus

Lukasz 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

Audience Engagement and Marketing Team

Ruth Holliday

Engagement and
Digital Producer

Chris Parkin

Learning Producer

Helen Pooley

Learning and
Engagement Manager

Multaka Oxford Team

Nicola Bird

Project Manager

Ash Hamoud

Community Connector

Luena Abigail Pimenta

Ricardo

Community Outreach
and Learning Facilitator

Hannah Underwood

Community Connector

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Gallery Assistant

Phoebe Clothier

Gallery Supervisor

Manfred Driver

Gallery Assistant

Peter Ellis

Gallery Assistant

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Gallery Supervisor

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Rana Ibrahim

Gallery Assistant

Megan Keates

Gallery Supervisor

Annabelle Page

Gallery Supervisor

Hannah Parsons

Gallery Supervisor

Silvia Pinna

Gallery Supervisor

Izzy Treyvaud

Gallery Supervisor

Jordan Wernyj

Operations Manager
(*until June 2025*)

Honorary Research Fellow

Dr Elizabeth Bruton

Students working closely with the History of Science Museum

Mathilde Daussey- 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: your contributions
are greatly appreciated.

Giving More

This year our astonishing Gallery
Team have managed something
that few others in the sector, locally or
nationally, have been able to do. Working
collaboratively and innovatively to achieve
a substantial increase in visitor donations,
their dedication and professionalism has
enabled the Museum to secure vital extra
income in the face of a national decline in visitor
donation levels which is reflected within Oxford
as well as throughout the country. In doing this, our
hardworking 'faces of the museum' have established
an area of excellence for the HSM within the Gardens,
Libraries and Museums division of the University of Oxford.

Welcoming Ruth

Last autumn, Ruth Holliday
joined the History of Science
Museum to take on the new
post of Engagement and Digital
Producer. Ruth is responsible
for designing in-gallery and
digital material, managing social
media channels, and planning
and delivering the adult events
programme. Previously she

was a library assistant at Christ Church library. She was
inspired to join the HSM by a desire to share the stories
of the amazing objects. When asked what she was
enjoying most in her new role, she said: "The variety
– I've met so many interesting people who are really
passionate about what they do. It's also been
wonderful to use our beautiful spaces to explore
the questions of science." Outside work, Ruth
is a keen crafter and can often be found
cutting, sticking and colouring (mostly)
inside the lines.



Thank You For Your Support

Thank you to everyone who has donated, volunteered, visited, and supported the History of Science Museum in 2024-25.

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

Philanthropic support from individuals and organisations will continue to be vital for the Museum in future, and will ensure the successful delivery of our ambitious *Vision24* transformation.

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

Arts Council England

Alwaleed Philanthropies

Stephen D Barber

E P A Cephalosporin Fund

**The Greenbaum family in honour
of the late Mr Paul Greenbaum**

**Higher Education Museums,
Galleries and Collections Fund**

Lady Wood OBE

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Research Council**

**UK Research
and Innovation:
Research England**

Be Part of the Future of the History of Science Museum

Philanthropy is vital for us

By supporting our Museum, you will help us preserve our extraordinary collection and our unique building. And you will help us share our stories, connect with our communities, and inspire new generations.

To find out how you can support our vision, please get in touch with:

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Or you can make a donation at
**[www.development.ox.ac.uk/
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