



THE MUSEUM
OF ENGLISH
RURAL LIFE



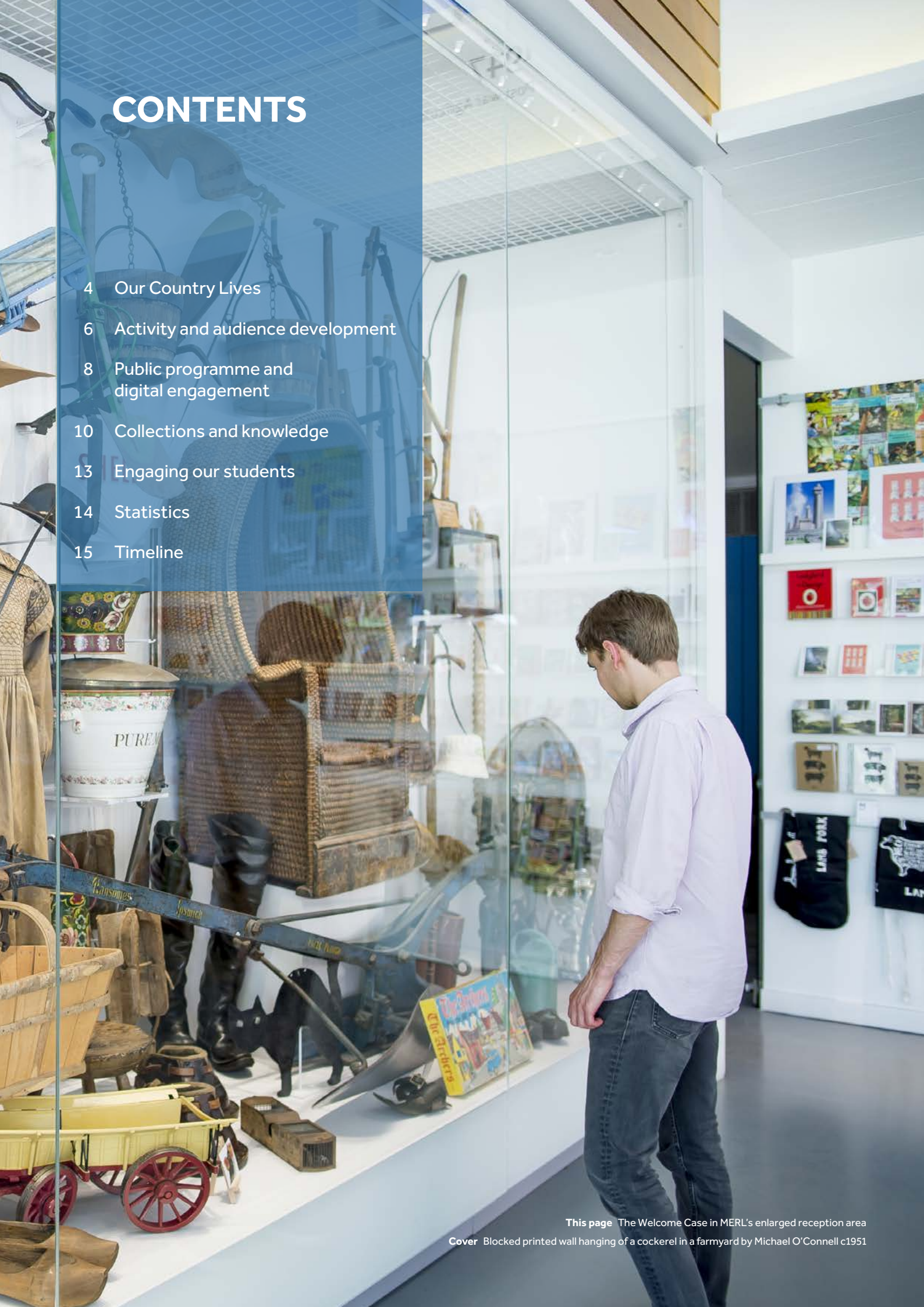
University of
Reading

THE MERL AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS REVIEW 2016–2017



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This page The Welcome Case in MERL's enlarged reception area

Cover Blocked printed wall hanging of a cockerel in a farmyard by Michael O'Connell c1951

INTRODUCTION

The first anniversary of the reopening of the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) marks a year of renewed activity and important new developments.

As we begin our final evaluation we are extremely proud of the positive response to the new galleries designed to introduce a new generation to the collections. The reviews and public reaction has been overwhelmingly positive: "What a fantastic resource for Reading and beyond, we should be very proud..." "Spacious, engaging and immersive displays tell the story of people, products and passions of English rural life." "A brilliant rejuvenation – great presentations – we will be back".

It has been equally inspiring to welcome visitors to new programming that aims to attract new audiences. We are delighted by the success of our extremely popular outdoor learning programme for the under 5s, Friday Fledglings, and our regular Lates, a new style of social event appealing to adults and young people that highlights research, collections and interactive opportunities to participate.

Our activity plan, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), has continued to build links with many local community groups drawn from Reading's diverse communities and local schools with projects that have explored food, well-being and creativity through the Museum's collections. At the same time, the MERL has been once more been awarded Full Accreditation status by the Arts Council England (ACE).

Project funding from ACE to develop our digital skills and engagement, in collaboration with Reading Museum, has been helping staff harness the potential to work digitally. Meanwhile, a Designation Development Fund project, Making, Using and Enjoying has allowed us to work with makers, creative practitioners and young people to explore the potential of intangible cultural heritage to improve research and understanding of collections.

During the past year we have led a successful submission to become a National Portfolio Organisation, as part of a consortium with Reading Borough Council. Our aim will be to develop a vibrant and inclusive programme of activity, including an integrated youth offer for Reading's children and young people and support partnership initiatives with the University's researchers that engage the public with excellent object-based research, teaching and learning.



Kate Arnold-Forster
Director of University Museums and Special Collections
Director, Museum of English Rural Life

OUR COUNTRY LIVES



The redeveloped MERL galleries, grant-aided by the HLF, Wellcome Trust, DCMS Wolfson and Headley Trust were opened at a VIP launch event by Tim Bentinck, aka David Archer from the longstanding radio serial, on 18 October 2017. This was followed by an opening MERL Festival for the general public on 22 October. The new displays have been well received by both local Reading people and visitors from further afield.

The Museum has hosted a number of specialist groups' AGMs including the Rural Museums Network and the Social History Curators Group whose members have been impressed with the interpretative approach. A review in the *Museums Journal* described the redevelopment as "outstanding". Press coverage across the national press, BBC and specialist publications has been equally positive.

The objective of the Our Country Lives redisplay was to create a people-centred approach to the object collection that draws on archive and library material and offers a relevant interpretation of the material on display, at the same time maintaining the distinctive quality of the collections. Early findings from the external evaluation of the project point to this having been successfully achieved.

The local Reading audience, both longstanding supporters and new visitors, encouraged through outreach and opportunities to participate, have come in large numbers. The opening hours of the museum have been extended to offer two full days at the weekend and regular evening opening hours during the week, as well as occasional extra days during public holidays at Easter and Christmas. The new café has proved both popular and financially successful and the expanded shop has also been attracting more business.

Over the last year MERL staff have been undertaking the usual snagging activity following the re-opening of the galleries. At the same time additions to the MERL garden, including new growing spaces and a shepherd's hut with themed play equipment, have also been developed. With generous funding from the Earley Charity, the MERL's learning studio has been refurbished and now has enhanced space and facilities including improved digital projection, more capacity for school parties and their belongings, a dedicated storage area for objects used for sessions as well as some new resources such as replica costume and magnifiers and lenses for use with object handling. The Our Country Lives project will be completed in March 2018 when the final grant aid will be drawn down from the HLF.

Top Timber Carriage from the MERL object collection in the new Shaping the Land Gallery

Opposite top left The Vice Chancellor helps Tim Bentinck cut the cake at the VIP launch event

Opposite top right MERL's Sensory Cow

Opposite top middle Visitor absorbed by the new displays

Opposite bottom The new A Year on the Farm gallery



AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

In January 2016 we entered the final year of the Our Country Lives' audience development programme: a programme of activity which has seen our audience development staff travelling the length and breadth of the country as well as undertaking a significant number of consultative and participatory projects with our local audiences. In 2016/2017, this activity saw us engaging with nearly 8000 individuals. Highlights of this extensive programme have included:

Community treasures

In July, our audience development work was celebrated with a summer event, Community Treasures, when we were joined by many of the groups and community organisations with whom we have been working. The event, which included a diverse programme of entertainment from clog dancers to traditional

Nepali dancing, was attended by 300 people with representation from 100 members of community organisations. One stallholder commented: "I was surprised to see how many different communities come together at MERL! It's wonderful to see how diverse Reading actually is".



Community platforms at MERL

Since reopening the Community Case, near the entrance and reception area of the Museum, has been one of the most publicly visible aspects of our audience development work. These co-curated exhibitions have included Sew Engaging (working with various partnership organisations), Journeys, Stories and Identities (working with the women of Elizabeth Fry Approved Premises for Women) and At Home (working with the clients of Alana House, a women's community project). The last of these exhibitions explored the MERL collections which relate to home and, using those as a platform, inspired conversations and creative work around what home means to the participants. Many of the women had not visited MERL before but, as a result of the project, said that the project had changed their opinion of the Museum, in one case stating: "It feels more accessible and relevant". Project participants mentioned that having their exhibition on display in the museum made them feel: "Privileged, a little nervous, shy", "honoured" and "proud".

MERL's growing communities

Our gardening projects have gone from strength to strength with the recent appointment of a specialist Assistant Volunteer Coordinator to support our gardening initiatives. These projects have seen us work with organisations such as the IRDC/Greater Reading Nepalese Community Association, Younger People with Dementia Berkshire and Reading Mencap. This year the charities Rise, Reading Hackspace, and MERL's pre-schoolers group, Friday Fledglings, also joined the growing scheme in our gardens. Our Growers are now an established part of our MERL community one commenting: "It's a small but very welcoming friendly community.... There's also things to be getting on with and it's so satisfying watching the garden change and knowing you've contributed to it".

Contemporary voices: our oral history projects

A significant part of our audience development work has been to re-engage with our rural communities and stakeholders. This has taken the form of consultation and an on-going programme of oral history interviews. The interviews are amassing a powerful contemporary viewpoint on themes and issues illustrated through our collections and are set to become the basis of an audio trail in the Museum. The interviews will also be celebrated in our Community Case over the coming months.

Opposite Nepalese dancing at the Community Treasures event (© Krishna Neupane, IRDC)

Top A selection of work from our community platforms

Middle The Beet Box bed

Bottom Contemporary Voices interviewer



PUBLIC PROGRAMME AND DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Friday Fledglings

A new and exciting change to the events programme for families has included the launch of Friday Fledglings, an outdoor session for pre-schoolers which takes advantage of the fantastic urban garden at The MERL, and promotes the benefits of outdoor learning. Sessions take their inspiration from the themes and collections of the Museum and focus on outdoor play and exploration of the natural environment. Friday Fledglings is planned and delivered by a local teacher and Level 3 Forest Leader. It also includes story-telling, craft activities and singing.

Sessions are very well attended and we receive between 30 and 55 participants a week along with their families. Each week, approximately one third of attendees are new visitors to both the session and the museum.

Lates

Since the relaunch we have trialled two highly successful MERL Lates, both receiving exceptional feedback and over 350 visitors. These are social events involving live music and dancing alongside opportunities to highlight research and collections and interactive opportunities to participate. Themes have included Dairy for British Science Week and Digital as part of the ACE funded #DigiRdg project. Forthcoming events on the themes of Making, Wool, Soil and a Digital Technology follow up are planned in late 2017 and early 2018.

The Lates are a new style of public engagement event appealing to adults and young people. While they offer a chance to showcase University research and involve key external stakeholders, they are also social events that have proved highly successful in offering opportunities to have a go, participate and learn first-hand from experts. Audience data collection has shown that a large proportion of attendees, including students, are new visitors to the museum and have since returned, often with friends and family. Students who become more familiar with the museum often return to gain experience through volunteering and work experience opportunities.

UMASCS is committed to increasing and diversifying its audiences over the next five years as part of its commitment to its main external funders, the HLF, ACE and Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) with a particular focus on target groups previously identified as part of the Our Country Lives redevelopment. This includes young people, with an emphasis on University of Reading students. The Late events have been specially designed to engage with this demographic. They aim to exploit the

Museum's potential for offering alternative learning experiences, opportunities for social interaction and innovation in how visitors engage with and participate in heritage.

Group visits

We have been delighted with the level of interest from organised groups to visit the museum. As the redevelopment has focused on a more accessible display and interpretation strategy, we were keen to gauge how successful this was without offering guided tours to the galleries as well.

We found, however, that most groups requested some sort of additional offer to make the visit to the MERL special for their members. We have worked with our volunteers to develop and deliver Welcome Hosting. This includes a volunteer greeting booked groups and providing an introduction and background to the collections, before accompanying them into the galleries and being on hand to answer questions or provide information on specific objects and themes, should that be required.

Requests are generally coming from local and regional U3A and WI groups, a variety of University Departments, youth groups including scouts and guides and special interest groups. We have also been a destination for a number of other museums offering excursions for their volunteers.

Another programming trial has been the introduction of extended hours Special Weeks in response to the number of evening groups asking to visit the museum as part of their regular meet-up. The most recent week received a lot of interest from adult groups, as well as cubs and scouts.

The Museum has continued to lead on or participate in many regular annual events including the Royal Berkshire County Show and the MERL Annual Lecture which this year was developed in association with the Campaign to Protect Rural England and addressed Visions of Rural England through a panel discussion.

Digital engagement

#digiRDG: Town and Country is an ACE-funded project running from November 2016 to May 2018, and is a collaboration between Reading Museum and the MERL. Its main purpose is to diversify and broaden both Museums' audiences by exploring and experimenting with new digital technologies. The project, led by Marketing Manager, Alison Hilton and Project Officer, Adam Koszary, also involved employing two Diversity Museum Trainees, Charlene Marriott and Nitisha Ramrekha-Heeramun.



Top Friday Fledglings: fun and outdoor learning in the MERL garden

Right Lates Silent Disco at the Digital Takeover event

Bottom right Trying out a Virtual Reality view of the MERL Galleries at the Royal Berkshire Show

Accompanying the project has been a process of culture change at both museums, based on the principle of agile management methodologies which value iterative, evaluative workflows. An ambitious programme of staff training has included monthly sessions focusing on different digital skills and a subscription for all staff to online skills courses. The team leading the project has also experimented with digital solutions to improve internal communications and collaboration.

#digiRDG has deepened the partnership between the two Museums, with colleagues working together on the hugely popular Digital Takeover Late event at the MERL, 3D schools workshops and public audio projects. The team has also created new partnerships and links with local groups and individuals working in technology, with plans to collaborate further in the future. Newer technologies have been explored including 3D scanning, 3D printing, Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality, as well as more established areas such as Wikimedia, blogging, social media and data analytics. The project has also enabled the purchase of equipment shared between the Museums which will allow Museum staff, community partners, students and volunteers to create high-quality content for use online. The conclusion of the project will see both Museums far better equipped to succeed in an increasingly digital world.



COLLECTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE

We have made significant progress in making The MERL and Special Collections holdings accessible. We embarked on a project to describe, conserve and digitise the John and Griselda Lewis Collection, which consists of 20,000 items that illustrate the history of printing and graphic design from the 15th to the 20th century.

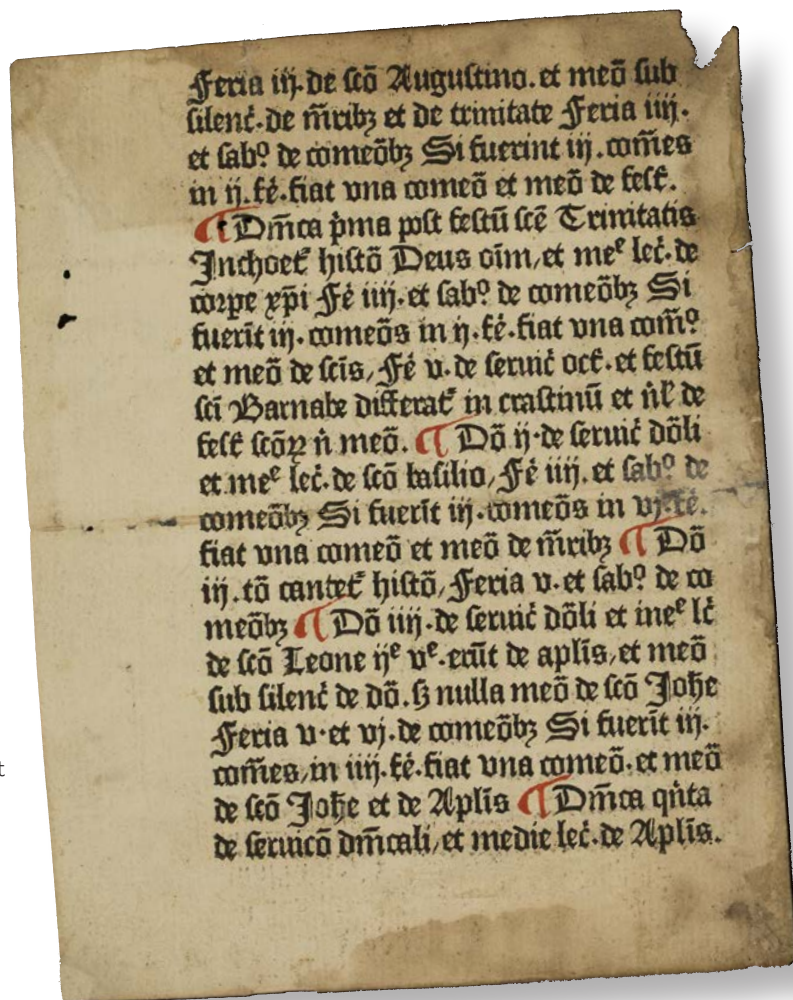


One of the most fascinating items in that collection, a loose printed leaf from the 15th century, hit national headlines in May when we discovered that it was a unique page from a book printed by William Caxton in 1477. The Caxton leaf subsequently went on display, attracting over 500 visitors.

Alongside the Caxton leaf display, the Staircase Hall has played host to several successful temporary exhibitions this year. Wintertide (December 2016 – February 2017) provided an opportunity to celebrate UMASCS collections in a collaborative display, rounding off the University's 90th anniversary year. Co-curated by The MERL Student Panel, Wintertide explored the season through five key themes: Celebration, The Winter Landscape, Adaptation, Winter in Literature and New Year New Beginnings. The New Year saw the launch of About & Out, the undergraduate Museum Studies final year exhibition (February – May 2017). Comprising of five displays around the Whiteknights campus as well as at The MERL and Special Collections, the project explored themes of identity, sexuality and social norms. Marking the centenary of the founding of Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press, the #HogarthPress100 exhibition featured new and original letterpress artwork alongside original artwork and archives of the Hogarth Press (June – August 2017).

Thanks to generous funding from the Poultry Club of Great Britain, staff were able to start cataloguing the David Scrivener Collection, which contains a wealth of material relating to poultry keeping, health and breeding.

The Landscape Institute has continued to support The MERL and has confirmed continued funding. The library collections have now been fully integrated into the open access MERL library, with targeted book buying also complete. Work on the archives of landscape architects continues. We have made significant progress in extending the profile of the collection among academic audiences



and we have undertaken survey work to ascertain nationwide holdings of landscape heritage collections.

Our MERL library is the most important collection in the country for the study of the history of British agriculture, rural society and the countryside, and we have reorganised the library and improved the layout to make it easier for our readers to find the items that they need. We have also been able to create more space for future additions.

One of the most significant purchases for Special Collections made this year was a collection of archival material including sketches and notebooks relating to the work of Albert Warren, who contributed to Owen Jones's design masterpiece, *The Grammar of Ornament*. As well as preparatory sketches for this work, the collection contains designs relating to the relocation of the Crystal Palace to South London, which complements our Great Exhibition and Landscape Architecture collections.



Inset opposite Librarian Erika Delbecque examines the Caxton Leaf

Opposite The Caxton leaf

Far left A Good Hardy Breed of Fowls and **(left)** Profitable Fowls from *The Profitable Farm and Garden*, 1900, David Scrivener Collection

Other significant acquisitions included:

- The Archive of Rosemary Pountney, researcher and performer known for her interpretation of Samuel Beckett's works and her scholarship
- Diaries and autobiographical writings of Sylvia Lynd, poet, novelist, and Irish nationalist; purchased thanks to the generous assistance of the ACE / V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of the National Libraries
- Artwork for the Ladybird Books Expert Series, the first new illustrations to be commissioned by the publisher for over 40 years
- Mark Mason's collection of material relating to the history of *The Archers*
- Records of the British Meat Processors Association, including minute books back to 1908
- The Archive of Lyndall Fownes Urwick, management consultant, was transferred from The Henley Business School, Greenlands.

Items from the Ladybird Collection were loaned to the Royal Academy in London for the exhibition *Second Nature: The Art of Charles Tunnicliffe RA (1901-1979)*.

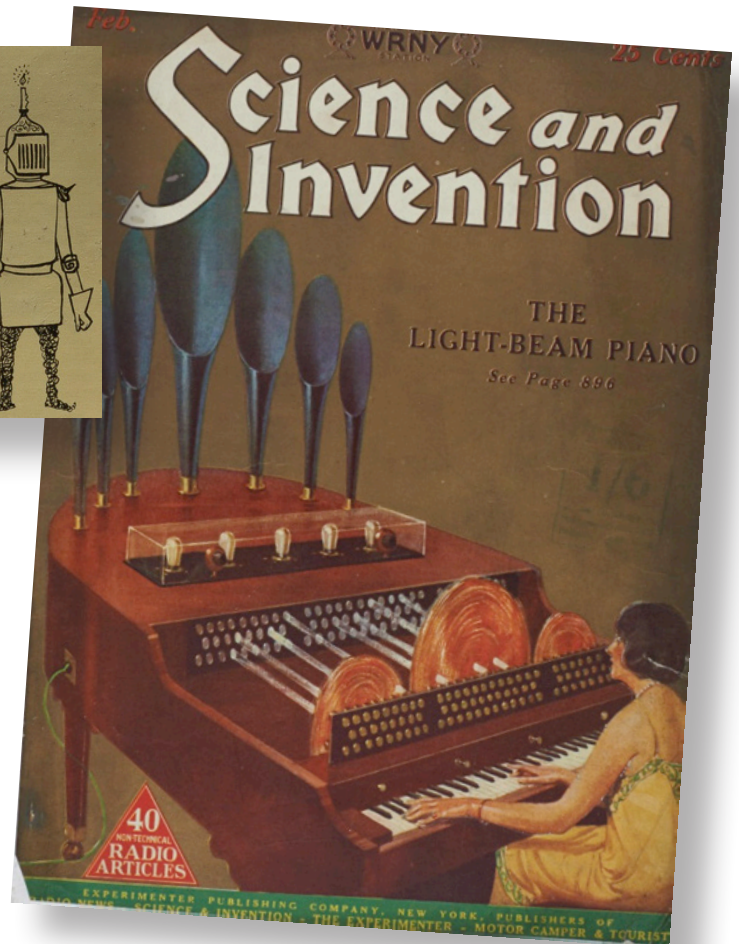
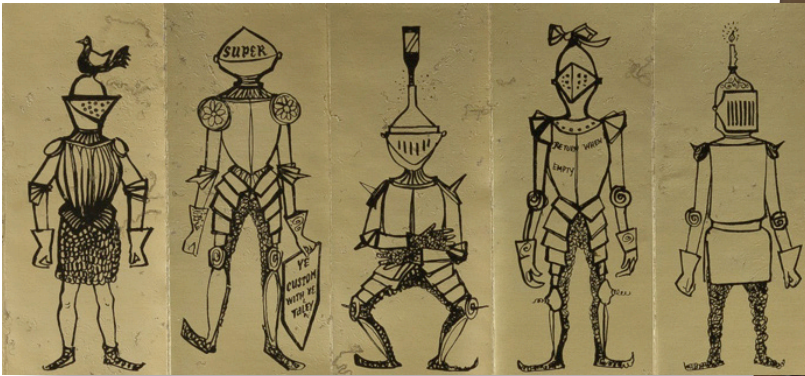
The University has maintained its investment in its art collections, with a new Curator of University Art Collections, Dr Naomi Lebens, starting in May 2017. The art collections team has continued a rolling programme of location audits across the University campuses and made significant progress in increasing accessibility of the collections, introducing their use in multiple exhibitions across the campuses along with a preliminary organisation of the Minnie Jane Hardman Collection and ongoing cataloguing of the Ladybird Books artwork.

The creation of a dedicated gallery for Ladybird within the MERL galleries has allowed the establishment of a case featuring a rotating display of artworks. This has dramatically increased access to the collection with three changing temporary exhibitions being mounted in this first year of reopening for the Museum.

The MERL object collections have continued to develop, with significant acquisitions including a work by the artist Michael O'Connell (funded by the Art Fund and the V&A Purchase Fund) that links stylistically to important Festival of Britain wall-hangings already held by the Museum, artefacts associated with the Poultry Club archival deposits that have come in through the year, and a diverse range of items connected to the estate of Mary Wondrausch (1923-2016), a prominent maker of English slipware pottery whose life and work features in a film, text, imagery, and artefacts on display in the current galleries. With the help of a new Collections Officer, Madeleine Ding, work has begun on assessment of objects from Bob Dawson's collection of material concerning the reception of Gypsy, Romany and Traveller communities, and a timely review of the Barnett Sewing Machine holdings is also underway, which will result in data-cleansing and other enhancements. Volunteer-supported retrospective cataloguing has commenced in connection with the Making, Using, Enjoying ACE Designation Development Fund project, which examines collections including that of ruralist writer, H. J. Massingham.

Making, using, enjoying

This ACE Designation Development Fund project is now well underway. Through a combination of collections reviews, artefact and archive rich workshops, and the commissioning of a series of responses and activities from creative practitioners, this project seeks to explore and examine the notion of the Museum of the Intangible. Taking as its starting point the idea that museums are too focused on tangible evidence, the project aims to deliver fresh thinking concerned with intangible cultural heritage. A series of events and programming connected with this project is also underway, including a successful Late entitled *Make It*, and a Seminar series, including contributions from architect and broadcaster Piers Taylor, former MERL staff member and endangered craft expert Greta Bertram, scythesman and bodger Mark Allery, and the MERL's first ever Poet-in-Residence Jack Thacker.



Nutrition, health and rural England

Activity on this Wellcome Trust-funded programme is now close to completion. Prior to her departure, Science Engagement Officer, Robyn Hopcroft was able to oversee completion of the first of several new films, this one featuring colleagues from the Hugh Sinclair Unit of Human Nutrition. Three collections-inspired animations are almost complete and set to provide new online content focused on science-related aspects of the Museum's displays. A small Community Case exhibition addressing mental health and the countryside has been developed with volunteer support, and content from this will find a future life online. Two livestock-related artist residencies have developed in parallel over the summer. In the first of these, film-maker Deirdre O'Mahoney has completed an extraordinary project that explores archival mentions of an old type of fodder called Sainfoin. By connecting these historical references to an active research project into legume fodder she weaves a narrative of relevance to beef and dairy farming and the wider environmental challenges of climate and ecological change and damage. In the second residency, Christine Mackey has collaborated with local maker group, the Silvers Workshop to design and build a hen house for the Museum. This is now home to three bantams and is proving popular with visitors and staff alike.

Research

Use of the MERL object collection for collections-based research has continued at a steady rate. University of Reading PhD student Hilary Matthews' investigations into livestock portraiture holdings are ongoing and have involved other specialists and private enthusiasts viewing the collection. MERL Fellow, Chris Green returned to complete some final object examinations; he is currently writing a monograph as a result of his research project. External researchers have been numerous and varied and include: several individuals visiting to see items connected with their families or with people they knew; PhD student Tom Rusbridge examining objects as part of his doctoral research into leather goods and materials in the eighteenth century; artist Dr Rebecca Jewell making use of bird-related holdings as part of a project concerning illegal bird trapping; Dr Luke Kelly of the Royal Holloway AHRC-funded research project *Pets and Family Life in England and Wales, 1837-1939* examining artefacts linked to rural pets. Notably, heavy horse owner Paul Brook-Nolan visited the new galleries and, after seeing the accessible stores, arranged to examine collections in

preparation for his making of hames for use with his own horses.

Dr Ollie Douglas continues to co-supervise two Kings College London AHRC-funded PhD students, Alex Bowmer and Felicity McWilliams. Both candidates have now completed their upgrade and their research projects are now well developed. Alex presented to a recent Veterinary History Group conference held at the MERL and has provided informal support to other aspects of the Museum's work. Felicity provides voluntary support to Conservator Fred van de Geer and has presented her research at several conferences and workshops, including most recently at the Society for the History of Technology meeting in Philadelphia.

The MERL and Special Collections continue to participate in the work of The Heritage & Creativity Institute which was established in August 2016 in order to catalyse inter-disciplinary research in the Arts and Humanities. As a result of the University Collections project that reported in Summer 2017, it has been asked to focus on collections 2017-2019 and has become the Heritage & Creativity Institute for Collections. Over the next two years the Heritage & Creativity Institute for Collections (HCIC), led by its Director, Dr Rhi Smith, will develop research frameworks for selected collections, support high quality research funding bids, and co-create a community of researchers/professionals to realise the research and impact potential of the University of Reading's collections.

Top left Example of an image used in the Special Collections twitter feed: Cartoon knights on a Twentieth Century greetings card (part of JGL 6/2/1)

Top right Science and Invention Magazine, February 1926 from the John and Griselda Lewis Collection (JGL 52/55/7)

ENGAGING OUR STUDENTS

We continue to work with students from across the University as part of our Museum Studies programme and through collaborations with partner departments.

In October 2016 a new member of staff, Dr Nicola Pickering joined as the Museum Studies Teaching Fellow and has received outstanding feedback from students. Dr Rhi Smith took on the new role of UMASCS Director of Academic Learning and Engagement and has been working on building a strategy for our future learning and engagement offer. This year our Museum Studies students staged their first final year exhibition *About and Out* which explored themes of gender, sexuality and the body across the University's collections. Our collections-based doctoral research programme also ran a series of engaging behind-the-scenes workshops throughout the year.

The volunteer and student explainer programmes continue to offer a range of exciting careers development opportunities for students. Our student panel co-created a social learning space called *The Nook* as part of the *Our Country Lives* redevelopment. Museum Studies students also established their own social group *MUSEO*, gaining funding from the Reading University Student's Union.

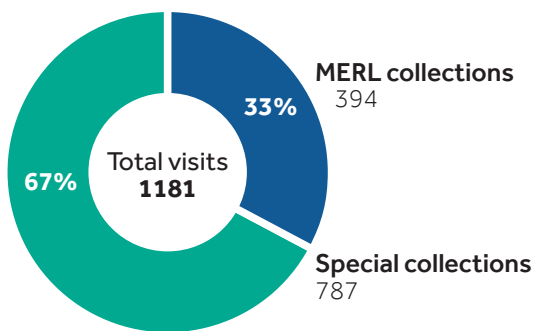


Above left and right Museum Studies Students with some of the exhibition materials from *About and Out*

STATISTICS

Research use of the collections

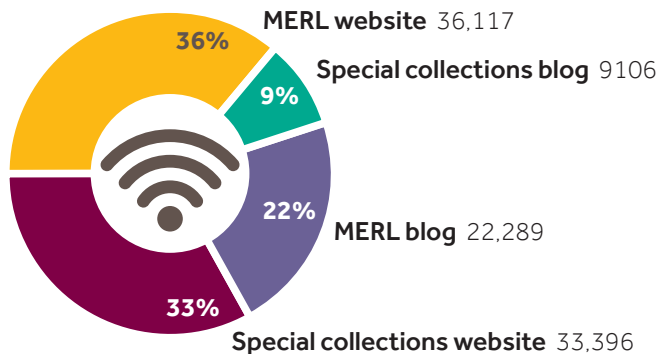
Number of visits, Aug 2016–July 2017



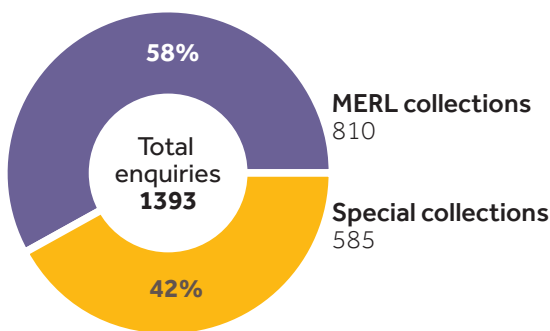
New research users **410**

Website and social media

Number of visits

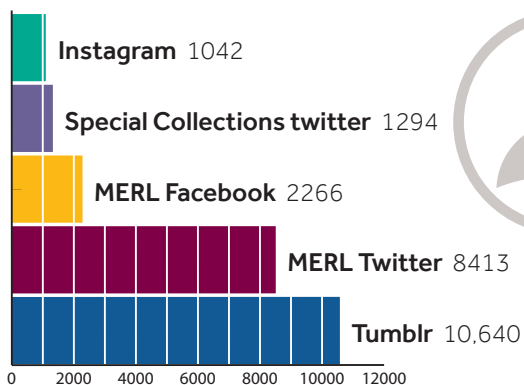


Enquiries



Followers

Number of followers Summer 2017



Student use of our collections

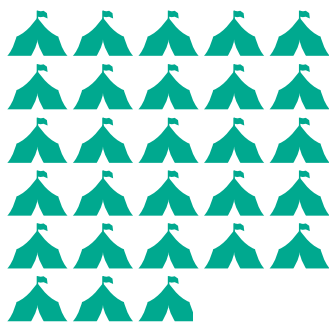
Student visits **641**

Number of HEI courses drawing on our collections **20**

Outreach

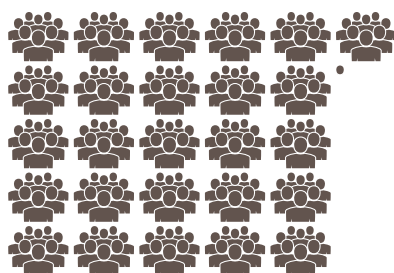
Our Country Lives Activity Plan, Oct 2016–Aug 2017

Number of events **271**



= 50 events

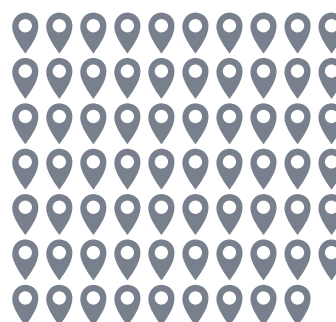
Number of people directly engaged **13,029**



= 500 people

Visits to MERL

Number of visits to the MERL **34,240**



= 500 onsite visits

TIMELINE

August 2016

- Landscape Institute academic and student engagement bursaries announced.
- First Food Artist Residency exhibition launches at Institute of Education.

September 2016

- The MERL contributes to the University of Reading stand at the Royal Berkshire Show, which wins Best Trade Exhibit and Best Large Trade Stand.
- Nicky Monroe (Graduate Trainee Library Assistant), Charlotte Dover (Graduate Trainee Archives) and Kathryn Marshall (Visitor Services Assistant) start work at MERL and Special Collections.

October 2016

- The MERL galleries reopen to the public, following a £3million redevelopment programme with £1.8 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).
- The new MERL website launches.
- Nicola Pickering (Teaching Fellow in Museum Studies) starts work at MERL and Special Collections.

November 2016

- Launch of *War Child* an online 'mixed-media book' which explores the MERL's Evacuee Archive.
- The MERL attended the Poultry Club of Great Britain National Show in Telford. The Poultry Club agreed to provide MERL with a project fund of £25,000.
- Launch of #digIRDG: Town and Country project.
- Friday Fledgings begins and continues every Friday in term time

December 2016

- Wintertide: cross collections exhibition launches in Staircase Hall.
- Visions of rural England: the MERL Annual Lecture in association with the Campaign to Protect Rural England.
- Work commences on cataloguing and digitising the John & Griselda Lewis collection of ephemera.

January 2017

- Charlene Marriott (Museum Diversity Trainee) starts work at MERL and Special Collections.
- Artwork for the Expert Series, the first new Ladybird artwork to be commissioned for over 40 years, is received from Ladybird Books Limited.

February 2017

- Community Exhibition with Elizabeth Fry House launches in Community Case.
- Launch of About & Out the BA Museum Studies final year exhibition in the Staircase Hall.
- Ladybird Extended Hours with talk and book signing by Jason Hazeley and Joel Morris, authors of the parody series.

March 2017

- Launch of the Woolworths archive.
- Special Collections acquire a collection of original artwork by designer Albert Warren, made for Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament*.
- MERL Late event: Milking it.
- Climate Change exhibition in Ladybird Gallery launches.

April 2017

- Landscape architecture and management education in the UK: past present and future: FOLAR (Friends of the Landscape Library and Archive at Reading) study day hosted at MERL.
- All University Art Collection artworks stored in Fine Art Department (TOB1) moved to MERL.
- Jess Freeland (Programmes Assistant) starts work at MERL and Special Collections.

May 2017

- Discovery of unique example of 15th century printed text by English printer William Caxton, hits the headlines.
- The Caxton leaf goes on display.
- MERL Late event: Digital takeover.
- Naomi Lebens (Curator of the University Art Collection) starts work at MERL and Special Collections.

- Isabel Hughes and Ollie Douglas attend the Congress of the International Association of Agricultural Museums in Estonia. The MERL is adopted as the venue for the next international congress in 2020.

June 2017

- Streamlined open access MERL and Special Collections library sequence reopens to the public.
- #HogarthPress100: Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press exhibition launched in the Staircase Hall.

July 2017

- Charles Tunnicliffe's Ladybird artwork from our collection goes on display at the Royal Academy in London.
- Community Treasures Celebration.
- Rachael Rogers starts work as Assistant Volunteer Co-ordinator at MERL and Special Collections.
- The MERL, in partnership with Reading Museum is awarded National Portfolio Organisation status by the Arts Council England.
- The MERL is awarded Full Accreditation status by the Arts Council England following the reopening of the Museum.

August 2017

- Successful holiday events at the MERL including a visit from Miller's Ark petting farm.
- Tim Jerrome starts as Archive Graduate Trainee.
- The MERL is awarded the Sandford Award, providing quality assurance for education programmes at the Museum.

September 2017

- The MERL hosts Welcome events for International students.
- Staff attend the Royal Berkshire Show contributing to the University stand that addresses the theme of Soil.
- The MERL begins planning for a Musician in Residence scheme for 2018 in partnership with the English Folk Dance and Song Society.



Wintertide: John Tarlton

THE MERL AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS REVIEW 2016–2017

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