



Curatorial Consultant

Museum of Carpet: Celebrating 300 years of Industry and Craftsmanship

Consultancy Brief

Project Title: Curatorial Consultant (Heritage Lottery Fund Transition Funding project)
To be employed on a freelance/consultancy basis

Contract value: £10,000

Location: Museum of Carpet, Kidderminster, Stour Vale Mill, Green Street, Kidderminster, DY10 1AZ

Reporting to: Board of Trustees

Responsible for:

The development of the displays, overseeing the collections in store and taking the Museum to Accredited status, as part of the Museum development project

Introduction to organisation

Known as the *Woven Carpet Capital of the World*, Kidderminster has been centre of the carpet industry since the early 1700's. Its carpet industry can be seen as a microcosm of the Industrial Revolution - innovation, entrepreneurial spirit and manufacturing prowess drove its development, as British companies came to dominate the globe.

By the 1960s the town was weaving millions of square yards of carpet each year. With 25 companies in Kidderminster, over 15,000 people earned a living in the industry; at least 75% of the population were dependent upon the success of the carpet trade. Yet boom soon became bust; the 1970's saw competition in the form of cheaper imports; trends in interior design saw carpets being overtaken by wooden flooring. Today, the industry has shrunk - five mills remain and fewer than 500 people are still employed in the trade. Many of the town's landmark mills have been demolished; the industrial heritage of the town disappearing.

As the factories closed, machinery, artefacts and archive material was skipped, its historical value as a record of the carpet industry was ignored. To prevent this, the Carpet Museum Trust salvaged as much as possible and when the Museum opened in October 2012, supported by a HLF grant of £2.187m, Kidderminster was firmly placed on the map as a site of important, but for many, little known, industrial heritage.

The Museum holds an unusual and unique collection - it is the only Museum in the UK that is dedicated to telling the story of carpets and carpet making. From the moment a visitor enters, the Museum of Carpet gives a real feel for life in the carpet factory. A carpet timeline charts the industry's chronological development from its roots in the 18th century to modern times. Oral history recordings have captured recollections of lives spent working in the trade recognising the importance of people's own histories in telling of the story of the town. Elsewhere, the production processes are brought to life as retired weavers utilise their skills and dexterity carrying out demonstrations on the giant power looms. Handloom weaving demonstrates carpet's early craft skills roots producing simple goods sold in the Museum shop.

Its comprehensive archive containing over 26,500 objects and documents covering every aspect of carpet making – including point papers (the working papers taking designs from the artist into patterns for weaving), design samples and pattern books - is a record of the creative aspects of the industry. These together with the collection of around 3,000 carpet designs, many by significant designers such as Charles Voysey and Bernat



Klein, enables us to reconsider our relationship with carpet, offering, through its displays, collections and temporary exhibition programme, ways for people to reconnect with the finished product.

The Museum is a registered charity, soon to transfer to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, governed by a Board of Trustees, currently seven, who are all volunteers. There is one full time staff member, plus two part time members of staff, plus a team of volunteers in various roles.

With the ending of the Heritage Lottery Fund revenue support in December 2015, the Museum now has to generate its operating costs (approx. £75,000 per year) and the staff team plus a small team of consultants has been handed the challenge to finally establish the Museum as an independent and self-financing attraction.

Background to Post:

The Curatorial Consultant will be part of a project team responsible for creating a sustainable and economic Museum and tourist attraction which reinforces its position as a collection of National Importance.

The project will refurbish some of the Museum displays allowing for the re-interpretation of aspects of the collections in particular bringing forward the links to art and design and creativity and through the careful display of carpet samples currently stored offsite. The project aims to link the objects and artefacts on display to the collections and bring this out in all aspects of the delivery of the offer.

This will provide an environment in which visitors can learn about the town and its relationship to carpet, its social history exploring the magnates and its workers, as well as demonstrating the manufacturing processes which in turn gives rise to exploring the skills of designers and craftsmen. This project aims to: provide opportunities for involvement and lifelong learning; widen the Museum's appeal and its audience base and maximise the efficiency and delivery of the offer to visitors. It will also dovetail into ongoing work to widen its economic sustainability and its commercial operation.

The Curatorial Consultant will work closely with the Education and Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator, the Community Engagement Co-ordinator, Events, the Operations Manager and the Museum Assistant supported by the Income Generation and Business Development Consultant to secure the necessary changes to its displays programme as follows:

Overview of project outputs:

- The Museum successfully securing Accreditation and an ongoing plan to continue to make improvements is in place
- Review of gallery spaces, in particular the galleries dedicated to design process and carpet display, and production of a series of suggestions for improvements, changes and displays requirements
- Review of the future operation of the demonstration process leading to series of recommendations about how the training requirements for new weavers can be met; development of appropriate training programme to secure new weavers; development of skills development bid, in conjunction with Income Generation and Business Development Consultant to seek funds to implement
- Making links with potential national partners in the development of exhibition programme which is comprehensive and nationally relevant accompanied; development of an associated academic programme of activities, study and lectures; liaison with subject experts including identifying appropriate academic consultant, and key stakeholders on the content of the displays, collections and archives



- Development of archives including establishing a programme of work for volunteers to effectively catalogue, document and explore the materials contained including identifying gaps in collections
- Development in conjunction with the Education and Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator, the Community Engagement Co-ordinator, and the Operations Manager, a programme of learning, exhibitions, and events and activities that promote the Museum's collections as central to its offer.

Key responsibilities:

- Work in partnership with the Museum team to ensure the current and any refreshed exhibition displays have the best focus, clearest story and visual appeal effectively communicating the story of the carpet industry to its fullest
- Strategic selection of objects and other items for the displays
- Lead on developing a programme for volunteer research and the academic study including identification of appropriate academic consultant
- Support the volunteers to source detailed historical research and catalogue information to feed into the displays, and programme of events, activities and exhibition programme
- Provide guidance to professional standards for those volunteers working with collections and set their work priorities
- Specify specialist equipment required to adequately display collection of carpets, rugs and fabric samples and recommend suitable suppliers to make the best use of the project budget
- Recommend policy changes to ensure the development of the nationally important collection for future generations
- Recommend procedural changes to ensure the Museum is working to the highest professional standards
- Support the Museum Trustees to make changes to enable it to successfully gain Accreditation status
- Support the Museum team, partners and funders with ideas and information to put the collection at the heart of new projects and programmes of activity

The successful candidate will have:

- Specialist knowledge of the carpet industry and of the history of Kidderminster
- Considerable experience of working with museum collections, ideally with designated or other nationally significant collections
- Good communication skills
- Ability to work as a part of team with other professionals and consultants
- Relevant experience of working within a project team and leading on project elements, including experience of working on HLF funded projects



- Knowledge of professional museum standards and procedures, including experience of Accreditation standards and application process
- Knowledge of working in settings where volunteers form a central part of the delivery model through involvement in demonstrations
- Experience of working with funders and other stakeholders to develop projects

The successful candidate should carry their own public liability insurance to a level of £2,000,000.

For more details and an informal conversation regarding this post, contact Caroline Taylor. To apply for this post, please send a CV and letter (no more than 2 sides) outlining skills, experience, and suitability to:

Caroline Taylor - Interim Director
Museum of Carpet

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