

中國

China in Yorkshire

A Review 2008



China in Yorkshire – a Review



2008 saw museums in Yorkshire come together in a year long festival of Chinese culture and arts. **China in Yorkshire**, a major initiative for Yorkshire museums and galleries held an exciting exhibitions and events programme that explored Chinese history, culture, science, art and medicine and showcased the region's most stunning Chinese and Chinoiserie collections.

Led by Renaissance Yorkshire and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Arts Council (England), China in Yorkshire brought together 16 museum services to deliver this vibrant cultural programme across 20 venues in the region.

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The Exhibitions

16 temporary exhibitions have taken place across the region during 2008 along with 5 new contemporary responses to the historical collections held by the museums. These include:

China in Harewood
at Harewood House

The Last Days of Chinese Steam
at the National Railway Museum

The Return of the Ivories
at the Graves Gallery, Sheffield

Keighley's Summer Palace
at Cliffe Castle, Keighley

Chinese Printmaking Today
at Cartwright Hall, Bradford

A Taste for China at Fairfax House, York

Chinese Treasures at Lotherton Hall, Leeds

China, Local and Global
in Leeds Central Library

China, the Silk Empire: Science and Technology in Ancient China at North Lincolnshire Museum

China at Harewood at Harewood House, Leeds

Chinese Reflections at the Castle Museum, York

China and Wakefield at Wakefield Museum

Cantonese Drama at Doncaster Museum

Three Perspectives at ArtsMill Gallery, Hebden Bridge

China in Yorkshire Celebration at East Riding Treasure House, Beverley

Belonging, China at Weston Park Museum, Sheffield

Ceramics and Chinese Influences at Cannon Hall Museum, Barnsley

Significantly, funding enabled the Chinese collections at Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield and York to be researched in depth. This has fed into the interpretation process as well as identifying those items most in need of conservation.

Communities being Involved

One of the most significant aspects of China in Yorkshire has been the high level of community involvement feeding into the creation of some exhibitions. Members of the Chinese community loaned personal objects at several venues and helped with the selection and interpretation of objects.

6 Chinese community volunteers worked with us to create 30 oral histories from the Chinese communities in Leeds, Sheffield and York. Some of these were included within the York 'Chinese Reflections' exhibition whilst others have been made into digital stories on www.myyorkshire.org

177 community participants have been actively involved in various projects. Their ages ranged from five to 65 plus and the majority have been Chinese or British Born Chinese (82%) and drawn from the communities in Leeds, Sheffield and York. Approximately 16% were British born Asian resident in Keighley.

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Nature of participation

Through creative workshops, handling sessions, oral history interviews, filming and photography, members of the community were supported by artists, outreach workers and curators to make a direct input into the China in Yorkshire exhibitions. For example their photographs and family histories were exhibited on a timeline at the Castle Museum, York. In Leeds, at Lotherton Hall and the Central Library, young people's precious things, community photographs and loaned items were exhibited. In the Graves Gallery the Sheffield Chinese Community's Memory Book and eight original pieces of digital art produced by young people were exhibited alongside pieces from the Grice Ivories collection. Whilst at Cliffe Castle the Young Ambassadors are working with the museum to explore ways of enhancing the China in Yorkshire museum trail.

Each museum service has reached out to the community and included them in museum activity in a culturally sensitive way. Each service had a real commitment to working with the community and was keen to find ways in which people, new to museums, could make a contribution to shaping the exhibitions.



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Regional Partnership

A regional training and development programme brought together 168 museum professionals from across Yorkshire to attend:

- Two popular seminars on Chinese collections and working with Chinese communities.
- Three regional front-of-house and enabler training days aimed to inspire and inform staff about Chinese culture and art.

Three training days on Chinese culture and arts were also held for primary and secondary school teachers to feed into the delivery of the school curriculum.

Creating an identity

China in Yorkshire benefited greatly from a highly successful marketing and branding campaign. A specially designed logo gave a consistent brand throughout all the activities and exhibitions. Through a dedicated website, museums listed their China themed events and exhibitions taking place across our region throughout 2008. Thousands of flyers were distributed regionally to raise public awareness of the project and direct people to the site.

Using a PR agency, China in Yorkshire gained a profile in the national media, with significant coverage in the regional and national press, radio and TV including 'The Guardian' and 'The One Show'



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Increasing learning about Chinese culture

Older community members were keen that through this programme they were able to share their knowledge with their children and with the younger Chinese generation. Young people were surprised at what the older generation knew and were able to learn from them. Some community members felt that they had learned about their own culture through these projects.

People are more aware of Chinese histories ... Also kids learn about their own culture. It is rare for Chinese families to go to museums. To look at the Chinese and the other stuff there broadened their knowledge.
Community participant

Developing a legacy

There is a great deal of enthusiasm for continuing the work started on the project and the museums are planning to extend their work with these communities.

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Changing attitudes towards museums

For some of the community participants, the project has directly changed their perceptions of museums. They have been surprised by the interest shown in their culture and in their personal stories. They feel that their contribution has been valued and that they have had an opportunity to share their personal histories and cultural heritage with a broader audience. They also feel that exhibitions represent the whole of the Chinese community, not just one aspect.

I'm surprised that museums...would take such an interest in other cultures, that's why I wanted...this opportunity to become a part of it.
Community participant

It has encouraged members of the community to visit museums who would not have done so before and it has generated a desire to do more work with them.

I had never seen the traditional stuff. In Hong Kong people don't go to museums, like if you live in Leeds you never go to Leeds museum. I learned about my own culture and saw the modern Chinese alongside the very old. I was surprised that you can find this in England.

Community participant



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On the Web

The China in Yorkshire partnership dipped its toes into the world of gaming by creating an educational interactive game aimed at 10 -14 year olds. 'Yong's China Quest' takes children on a journey through Chinese history from the time of Confucius to modern day China and the Beijing Olympics. The game contains Chinese objects from some of the partner museums. During testing young people said it was "exciting, brilliant and cool" and "it is really good for learning about Chinese things". The game is available at www.mylearning.org/yong

Additionally, learning journeys have been created for MyLearning, a free web resource for teachers inspired by the museum, library and archive collections in Yorkshire.

Over 37,000 visitors have accessed our 2 websites (China in Yorkshire and MyLearning) to find out more about this inspirational programme visit www.mylearning.org/chinainyorkshire

As a regional programme China in Yorkshire has allowed Yorkshire museums to provide a strong cultural offer, giving visitors an opportunity to see different Chinese treasures and expand their knowledge of Chinese culture, arts and crafts. It has paved the way for museums in the region to work together and share their collective expertise in a way to benefit the public.

Promoting social inclusion

People enjoyed their involvement in the projects. They were actively engaged and their contributions were respected. The high production values for all the exhibitions underpinned this feeling and showed the value the museums placed on the community members' work.

From my observation the community members all have positive views about the project. It can really help to bridge the cultures, increase a sense of belonging and understanding.

Project artist



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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following for their contribution towards the success of China in Yorkshire:

Arts Council (England)
Barnsley Cultural Services
Beverly Museums
Bradford Museums, Galleries & Heritage
Jenny Cheng
Lisa Cheung, Artist
Chinese Youth Participation Project (Sheffield)
Eureka! The Museum for Children
Evergreen Agewell Luncheon Club (Sheffield)
Fairfax House, York Civic Trust
Harewood House Trust
Heritage Lottery Fund
Gayle Chong Kwan, Photographer

Lai Yin Association (Sheffield)
Leeds Chinese Community Association
Leeds Chinese Elders Group
Leeds Chinese Women's Group
Leeds Chinese Christian Church
Leeds Chinese Community School
Leeds Museums & Galleries
Leeds Yuk Min Cantonese Opera Group
Museums Sheffield
The National Railway Museum
North Lincolnshire Museum
Yan Preston, Photographer
Renaissance Yorkshire Museums Hub
Carl Rose, Photographer

The Royal Armouries Museum
Sheffield Chinese Community Children's Project
The Sheffield & District Chinese School
Tim Smith, Photographer
Stewart's Burnby Hall Gardens and Museum
Thackray Museum
Linda Foo Tomlinson
Wakefield Museum
Suna Xie, Artist
The Yorkshire Waterways Museum
York Chinese community members
York Museums Trust



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