


## University Museums Group Member Projects Case Study

<b>Case study title</b>	Lindow Man temporary exhibition
<b>Institution name</b>	The Manchester Museum
<b>Summary</b> [100-150 words. What is this case study about? What was the problem, issue or challenge and how did you tackle it?]	<p>The loan of the 2500-year-old Lindow Man, Britain's best-preserved bog body, by the British Museum resulted in an award-winning temporary exhibition at the Manchester Museum (April 2008- April 2009). Staff at the Manchester Museum had been working on the ethical treatment of human remains in museums. The exhibition <i>Lindow Man: a Bog Body Mystery</i> attempted to raise the issue for public debate. Following a public consultation staff decided to interpret the body from a number of perspectives, in order to show what the remains meant to different people. There was an outcry when the exhibition opened because some people didn't like the design or the multi-vocal approach to interpretation. The issue of the sensitivity of human remains that the Museum set out to tackle became a debate about interpretation, expertise and authority.</p>
<b>Keywords</b> [please choose up to 5 keywords to describe your project which will help members to find your project within the website database.]	<p>Exhibition Archaeology, Human Remains Ethics Museology</p>
<b>Background</b> [100 words. Give brief details of your Museum/Gallery and any relevant background to the project.]	<p>The Manchester Museum is part of the University of Manchester. It actively encourages students and lecturers to make use of the collections for teaching and research and attracts over 300,000 visitors a year. Some 4.25 million objects are held in the natural sciences and human cultures collections. These disciplines are reflected in the Museum's mission to promote global sustainability and understanding between different cultures.</p> <p>The Museum had a special interest in displaying Lindow Man: staff helped to recover the body in 1984 and two previous temporary exhibitions in 1986 and 1991 attracted record numbers of visitors.</p>
<b>Objectives</b> [100 words. Describe the objective(s) behind the project.]	<p>In displaying Lindow Man for a third time since the discovery in 1984. The Manchester Museum wanted to engage a new generation of people from Manchester and the North West with one of Britain's most famous archaeological discoveries, to stimulate public debate about how human remains are treated in museums and other public institutions, to display the body in a respectful and sensitive manner and to explore different interpretations of the body. The Museum wanted to reflect recent discussion</p>

	<p>about Lindow Man’s dating, the circumstances of his violent death and the interpretation of the evidence.</p>
<p><b>Project details</b> [400 words. What did you do? This might also include details of project partners, financial and staff implications etc.]</p>	<p>The public consultation in 2007 was the first important milestone in the project. Given the potentially contentious nature of the subject matter the Museum invited a selection of different people to discuss the project. The group included museum curators, archaeologists, pagans, members of local archaeological societies and a representative from Manchester City Council. Consultation established that people wanted the Museum to treat the body sensitively and respectfully and to present different interpretations of Lindow Man. The continuing archaeological debate about when and how Lindow Man had died meant that there was little about him that was not contested. It seemed that the most detailed forensic study of the body still had not resolved the big questions.</p> <p>The Museum, therefore, took a multi-vocal approach to interpretation and invited seven individuals, each of whom had expertise or experience regarding Lindow Man, to contribute to the exhibition. They included two peat workers who discovered the body, the forensic archaeologist who examined Lindow Man at the British Museum, a landscape archaeologist, a member of the Lindow community involved in the unsuccessful campaign to repatriate the body to the North West, two museum curators and a pagan, for whom the body held spiritual significance.</p> <p>Extracts from interviews held with the contributors and objects and personal mementos featured in the exhibition together with archaeological exhibits from both the Manchester Museum and the British Museum.</p> <p>The project also featured an innovative programme of education sessions and public events and activities. For example, in <i>The Verdict</i> secondary school students in a courtroom setting debated different interpretations of how Lindow Man had died. A number of teams presented different interpretations of the manner his death: accident, murder or ritual sacrifice. The team which presented the most convincing case on the day was the winner. There were also public debates, guided walks on Lindow Moss where the body was discovered, talks and seminars.</p> <p>Engagement with the public about the issue of how museums treat human remains was a crucial element for funding bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Wellcome Trust. Visitors to the exhibition filled in comments</p>

	<p>cards and posted them on a board for others to read and respond to. Through the comments boards, the Museum posed several questions during the life of the exhibition such as ‘How did Lindow Man die?’ ‘and ‘Should museums display human remains?’ These questions stimulated considerable debate. The public also contributed comments and questions to the Lindow Man Blog.</p>
<p><b>Project outcomes and impact</b> [200 words. How did this project make a difference to your museum? ]</p>	<p>This was the first time a high-profile project had been delivered by a team of curators and staff from different sections of the Museum, each contributing their own experience and expertise. A project team gave strategic direction whilst a content team developed the interpretative approach and the exhibits. This new way of working, different in style from traditional curator-led exhibitions, helped to develop team-working skills in the Museum.</p> <p>Secondly the project engaged large numbers of visitors and other participants. Some 190,000 people participated in the project in some way. The project developed a model of exhibition making that integrated displays with education, marketing and public programmes. Rather than simply using the exhibition as a vehicle for communicating knowledge, the Museum was able to explore with audiences different aspects of Lindow Man through a range of media as appropriate.</p> <p>The use of up-to-date media such as Blogs, YouTube and Flickr helped to promote discussion and disseminate coverage about the exhibition in a stimulating way that engaged a new computer-literate audience. This has now become embedded in the Museum’s practice.</p>
<p><b>What went well?</b> [200 words – what were the most successful outcomes or learning points of the project? ]</p>	<p>In quantitative terms the project was a success. Visitor figures were high. There were over 26,000 hits on the Lindow Man website. The project won two awards:- the Design Week 2009 Award for Best Temporary Exhibition and the British Archaeological Award for Best Innovation for its engagement of the general public about the issue of human remains. Over 12,500 visitor comments cards were filled-in. Sixty-seven percent said they wanted the Manchester Museum to display human remains. This will guide future displays of human remains.</p> <p>Qualitatively, the Museum received a great deal of thoughtful feedback from the public. Despite the clear wish to continue to see human remains on display at the Museum, many people stressed that this should be done in a respectful manner, by allowing visitors to choose whether they wanted to see the remains.</p>

	<p>Visitor Services Assistants stationed in the exhibition for security purposes also helped to interpret the body and answer questions from visitors.</p> <p>The ‘low tech’ comments cards boards worked remarkably well and encouraged visitors to respond to the deep questions posed by the exhibition. The shared experience of the exhibition was constantly changing.</p> <p>The exhibition received good reviews in the academic literature.</p>
<p><b>What could have been done better?</b> [200 words – barriers , failures and things that could have gone better provide some of the most valuable learning points for others.]</p>	<p>When the Lindow Man exhibition opened in April 2008 the Museum was criticised in strident terms on a number of Manchester websites. Critics claimed that the exhibition lacked content, that it pandered to ‘woolly pagan thinking’ about human remains and that it was ‘political correctness gone mad’. Some questioned why it did not include an Iron Age roundhouse, a chariot and a model of a hill-fort. The aggressive tone of the criticism was unprecedented.</p> <p>This criticism from more conservative quarters has prompted a debate about narrative authority and about whose voices should be heard in museum interpretation. This is a fascinating subject for further discussion in seminars and at conferences.</p> <p>The Museum could have framed its authorial responsibility more clearly. Despite its public consultation, critics said the Museum had left behind mainstream consumers of public archaeology. The Museum revised an introductory panel following the opening to make it easier for visitors who found the exhibition challenging.</p> <p>Some consultees were disappointed with the Museum’s display of Lindow Man’s body and felt that it was not sufficiently sensitive. The Museum’s inability to satisfy all the consultees’ expectations was an issue despite the exhibition team making it clear at the outset that it couldn’t implement everything asked of it.</p>
<p><b>Conclusions and recommendations for the future</b> [150 words. Briefly identify the most important points in the case study for others and where this project might lead in the future.]</p>	<p>The public consultation was a crucial stage in the project that helped create a degree of consensus about how the Museum should approach its Lindow Man exhibition and generated good will towards the project. Ideally consultation would be the foundation of all high profile projects but especially in the case of potentially contentious subjects such as human remains.</p> <p>Despite the vehement criticism that greeted the opening of the exhibition from some quarters , the Lindow Man project attracted record numbers of visitors</p>

	<p>and successfully engaged the public about how human remains are treated in museums. It is entirely appropriate for a university museum to mount an innovative and challenging exhibition of this kind. A local authority museum would likely have had its exhibition closed in the circumstances. It is important that university museums offer exhibitions of this kind to challenge the stereotypical interpretative approach recommended by some of the exhibition's critics.</p>
<p><b>Image</b> [please attach an image connected to the project.]</p>	
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<p><b>Date of submission</b></p>	<p>17<sup>th</sup> August 2010</p>