

THE MUSEUM TRUSTEE: EXPLORING THE THEORY, POLICY AND PRACTICE OF GOVERNANCE AT SMALL MUSEUMS

A DISSERTATION AND PORTFOLIO
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Professional Doctorate in Heritage

by
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, and that it is the result of my own independent work.

Geran Jane Fitzpatrick

April 2026

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For Cliff, Amelia and Alison

*If the average trustee sits on a board for three years and attends four two-hour meetings a year, they
will have 24 hours to make a difference (Wilson, 2024)*

When all think alike, no one thinks very much (Lippmann, 1915, p.51)

ABSTRACT

The governance of small museums within the UK heritage sector presents distinct challenges that impact their strategic management, sustainability, and effectiveness. This research explores the mechanisms used to govern small museums, analysing board composition, trustee recruitment practices, board dynamics, and governance effectiveness. While small museums play a significant role in preserving cultural heritage, they often struggle with issues such as board diversity, informal recruitment of trustees, governance stagnation, and a lack of structured training.

This study identifies the structural and operational challenges faced by small museum trustee boards. Findings indicate that many boards operate with outdated governance models, rely on informal networks for trustee appointments, and lack the strategic oversight required for long-term resilience. The study highlights the need for structured recruitment, diversity audits, term limits, formal training, and governance effectiveness assessments to enhance museum board performance.

The research contributes to the academic and professional discourse by emphasising that governance challenges in small museums differ in both scale and nature from those in larger institutions. It provides practical recommendations, such as the adoption of shadow boards, trustee sponsorship programs, and governance audits, to improve leadership, inclusivity, and accountability. Ultimately, the study argues that strengthening governance in small museums is critical to their sustainability and continued contribution to the heritage sector.

Practical contributions from this research are in the form of the Heritage Trustee Forum and the proposal for a digital tool for museum governance. These start to bridge the gap between governance best practice and the realities of governance in small museums.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AASLH:** American Association for State and Local History
- ACE:** Arts Council England
- ACEVO:** Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations
- AGM:** Annual general meeting
- AHRC:** Arts and Humanities Research Council
- AIM:** Association of Independent Museums
- ATRD:** Action for Trustee Racial Diversity
- AVLA:** Association of Leading Visitor Attractions
- BAME:** Black, Asian and minority ethnic
- BICF:** Board Intellectual Capital Framework
- BNIM:** Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method
- BMMT:** Buckinghamshire Military Museum Trust
- CHS:** Critical Heritage Studies
- CIO:** Charitable incorporated organisation
- CEO, CFO, CTO:** Chief Executive/Finance/Technology Officer respectively
- DCMS:** Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- DONH:** Department of National Heritage replaced by DCMS in 1997
- EDI:** Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- FTSE 100/250:** Financial Times Stock Exchange top 100/250 companies (UK listed)
- HLF:** Heritage Lottery Fund now National Lottery Heritage Fund (**NLHF**)
- HVG:** Heritage Volunteering Group
- ICAEW:** Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales
- ICOFOM:** International Committee for Museology
- ICOM:** International Council of Museums
- IOD:** The Institute of Directors
- KBAC:** Knowledge, Business, Audiences and Collections Framework
- LGBTQIA+:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, other gender identities

MA: Museums Association

MOLA: Museum of London Archaeology

MMP: Mapping Museums Project

MS: Microsoft

NCVO: The National Council for Voluntary Organisations

NPO: Non-profit organisation term is used interchangeably with not-for-profit organisations

PESTLE: Model which explores the political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors affecting an organisation.

S&P 500: Standard and Poor's top 500 companies on NY Stock Exchange

SID: Senior Independent Director

SWOT: Model which explores the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats affecting an organisation

WWII: World War 2

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH AND AN OVERVIEW OF ITS SCOPE

1.1 BACKGROUND AND AIMS

‘The UK possesses an extremely diverse, broad-based and skilful heritage infrastructure, which encompasses tangible, intangible and digital heritages, in organisations large and small, professional and volunteer and a range of global collections and collaborations’ (AHRC 2018).

The heritage industry is a major contributor to the UK and global economies. Statistics for England suggest the heritage industry contributed £44.9 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2022 and employed both directly and indirectly over half a million workers (Historic England, 2024). In terms of GVA, the sector is bigger than each of the sports sector, the aerospace industries, and IT services industry in England (Historic England, 2024).

Research has shown that many tourists visit the UK principally to visit particular heritage sites or that they include heritage activities in their visits (CEBR, 2024). In 2024 the UK had 31 World Heritage sites including places as diverse as Stonehenge, the Tower of London and Ironbridge Gorge. Within England, there are over 400 historic monuments managed by English Heritage; 500 sites managed by the National Trust; around 25 world-class museums such as the British Museum and the V&A, and over a thousand small museums reflecting the country’s rich heritage and culture with around 50 million visitors (HM Government, 2016). The number of museums in England alone is estimated to be around 2,600 (Mendoza, 2017).

According to Burton and Scott (2003) there has been a significant increase in the number of new museums in the developed world since the 1970s and a shift in the place that museums occupy in society.

The number of museums in the UK grew by 2.9% per year in the 1960s, 3.3% per year in the 1970s, 2.8% per year in the 1980s, 1.6% per year in the 1990s and 0.7% per year in the early 2000s (Candlin et al., 2023). Post 2011 there has been no growth with 2016 seeing the first contraction in the number of museums for over 50 years (Candlin et al., 2023). Growth was especially strong in the independent sector (Candlin et al., 2023). This increase in the number of museums can be aligned to a number of factors including the liberalisation of the history curriculum in schools and universities; the new taste for popular history; the rise in the number and membership of amenity societies and an increase in leisure time. This all led to a rise in the number of museums during the 1960s and 1970s (Samuel, 2012; Frank, 2017).

The heritage debates of the 1980s suggested that heritage also provided a new economic base for deindustrialised Britain with a new museum opening, for example, every two weeks in 1986 (Hewison, 1987; Frank, 2017). These new museums were mostly independent and represented the lives and experiences of ordinary people by protecting popular culture in danger of disappearing; they were museums of industry and everyday life primarily (at least theoretically) located in post-industrial northern England (Hewison, 1987).

Alongside the growth in museums there has been a shift in their focus increasingly towards tourist and leisure markets¹. Heritage has become a key resource in local economic development, and many visitor destinations have seen the addition of new heritage attractions and museums (Selwood, 2018; Babbidge, 2019). For example, the city of York saw the number of heritage attractions double from 9 to 18 between 1980 and 2015 reflecting a doubling in tourist visits during the same period (Babbidge, 2019).

¹ This is also reflected in the academic theorisations of heritage, for example, in the work of Urry and Urry and Larsen where heritage becomes a co-created tourism product for both producer and consumer (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

Whilst economic and social changes have led to growth in the heritage industry, funding has also been an important factor in the increase in the number of museums. Introduced in 1994, the National Lottery has been one of the most significant developments in the funding of the cultural sector since the formation of the Arts Council post WWII by providing both capital and operational funding (Creigh-Tyte & Selwood, 1998).

By the early 1990s clear distinctions could be seen between independent museums and those run by national and local government (Middleton, 1998). Independent museums were having to survive in an increasingly competitive market without access to regular funding. They charged for admission and began to adopt corporate practices such as business planning, and analysis (Fitzpatrick, 1998). Most independent museums were already limited companies complying with the legislative frameworks set by Companies House and the Charity Commission since they operated as charitable companies from inception (Fitzpatrick, 1998). National and local museums, in contrast, were very different; they generally allowed free admission, and their operations and governance were based on national and local government structures (Middleton, 1998).

However, government's ideas around how to run museums were beginning to change and independent museums were seen as pioneers of a new way of thinking (Middleton, 1998). There was a strategic decision for the national museums to become "exempt" charities regulated by the Secretary of State (Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport) under the responsibility of a board of trustees (DoNH, 1996 in Middleton, 1998; HM Government, 2016). The V&A, Science Museum and National Armouries, for instance, introduced boards of trustees in accordance with the National Heritage Act of 1983 (Mendoza, 2017).

This strategic change in the governance of museums continued at a local authority level too. Local government was no longer obliged to provide museum services and funding cuts meant that local authorities prioritised spending on other services (Rex & Campbell, 2021)². Many local authority museums moved to independent trust status

² Between 2009/10 and 2019/20 local authority spending in the UK on museums declined by 27% or £115m.

and became charities run by a trustee board (Rex & Campbell, 2021). The DCMS, for example, reported in 2017 that the number of charitable trusts operating former local museums increased to 64 (Brown, 2019; Mendoza, 2017). Many of these new independent museums still have legacy characteristics from local government and have struggled to make their museums work effectively.

More recently austerity and reductions in government funding have caused deep cuts in national and local government budgets. Services previously provided by the government sector are now provided by charities, and heritage organisations are not immune from this change. Funding is often sporadic and usually comes from specific government initiatives, such as the Know Your Neighbourhood programme launched in 2023, which utilised heritage organisations (amongst others) to deliver funded projects in economically and socially deprived areas (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2023). Other initiatives like the £95m High Streets Heritage Action Zones programme, for example, focussed on utilising heritage in community projects to support the government's levelling up agenda (Historic England, n.d.). Organisations like the Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth Textile Collections and the Historic Coventry Trust have been in receipt of these types of funds (Museum Development Midlands, 2025; Historic Coventry Trust, 2023). Both are registered charities, managed by a board of trustees.

My estimate is that there are in excess of 15,000 trustees working in the heritage sector in England and that the majority of museums operate as charities with a board of trustee directors. These trustees are the people who ensure that museums and heritage organisations work towards their purpose, that they are effectively and properly run and controlled and that they are accountable to the public. Museum trustees are responsible for how organisations conduct themselves both externally and internally. Although I will explore more formal definitions of governance, this is broadly what museum governance is all about: strategic leadership, accountability, compliance, ethical behaviour, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness. Critically, however, unlike non-executive directors in the private sector, museum trustees are unpaid volunteers often recruited through informal networks rather than for their expertise in running a heritage organisation (Groninger, 2016).

The objective of this doctoral thesis is to examine how small museums within the heritage sector are governed and how their trustees operate. I have been, and continue to be, a trustee within the museum sector, and have held trustee positions within the wider cultural sector since 1992. This doctoral thesis reflects on that experience and what small museum trusteeship is really like. The thesis identifies and discusses the mechanisms used to steer the activities of small museums, and the challenges and tensions in the governance process and maintaining an effective board. It also puts forward a number of practical solutions to governance problems such as changes in governance structures and a trustees' forum.

There has been limited research in the heritage sector into governance but most has been focused on major heritage organisations, see for example Tzeng (2009), Abdullah (2015) or about specific issues such as diversity (Shah, 2023) rather than on the smaller museums that form the majority of organisations within the sector. The Mendoza review, an industry piece of research, highlighted that governance is an issue for DCMS-sponsored museums (i.e. larger museums) and recommends that “museums should apply governance guidance more rigorously” (Mendoza, 2017). The issues that Mendoza stressed such as diversity, a lack of skills that would help improve resilience, and not working strategically are repeated more generally across the sector (Mendoza, 2017).

However, the academic literature with its emphasis on larger organisations tends to treat issues of museum governance as generic. As this thesis will show, this is an oversight since small museums face specific issues around board structure and how boards operate, the work that trustees do within small museums, their recruitment, knowledge and training. This thesis explores the distinctive characteristics of governance within the trustee bodies of small museums and suggests that the issues and problems around governance are different in both degree and kind to those experienced by their counterparts within larger institutions.

1.2 BEGINNINGS

My interest in the intersection of business and culture dates back to the early 1990s when, in my professional role as an accountant, I was asked to become involved with a newly formed dance company as a trustee. The company, Motionhouse, is now a very successful touring company both nationally and internationally with a staff of 21 in the office and on the road. It is a key National Portfolio Organisation³ for the Arts Council of England.



1: Motionhouse, Twisted 1999 (with kind permission of Motionhouse)

I spent over 26 years as a board member with a specific interest in finance, management and governance, including a period as the chair of the trustees. I watched the company grow and become well respected for its professionalism. I saw board membership change, and trustees come and go. No other board member served on

³ The Arts Council's National Portfolio includes all their regularly funded organisations. Funding lasts for 3 years and is granted on a competitive basis.

the board for as long a period, and I was often able to draw on the interconnections between current and historic events.

From the outset the company ensured that there was a range of skills and knowledge on its board. There was always at least one individual who had creative arts experience and an understanding of the cultural sector here in the UK: at times I was the only individual with commercial expertise whilst at others there were several of us with business skills. As the company grew so did my knowledge, and I became involved with other organisations as a trustee.

I was asked to join the board of Beaconsfield Gallery Vauxhall in 2015. Beaconsfield is an arts organisation based in Vauxhall, South London. It exists at what is seen as the cutting edge of gallery and incubator spaces ‘where open-minded artists and audiences come to challenge themselves and their understanding of what art can be’ (Beaconsfield Gallery Vauxhall, n.d.). In common with many small charities, Beaconsfield has challenges around its governance. As Lee, et al. (2017, p.44) point out in relation to small charities, many small charities lack ‘the resources available to promote more effective governance skills at the board and the awareness of suitably competent individuals as potential recruits to the board’. This is true of Beaconsfield.

Whilst I had been involved at the edges of this organisation for many years: helping with accounting and advising on grant applications and administration, I joined the board as another business associate stood down and quickly became acting chair. The whole experience was very frustrating since the organisation displayed many symptoms of so called “founder syndrome”. Freeman describes this as ‘a pattern of negative or undesirable behaviour on the part of the founder(s) of an organization’, which is usually marked by a lack of responsibility to the board of trustees (Freeman, 2006, p.1).



2: BAW, Thatched 1996 (with kind permission of Beaconsfield)

The organisation had lost National Portfolio Organisation funding just before I joined the board, and no amount of work to try and get a strategic change of direction would be entertained by the two founders. Eventually, exasperated, I decided that my efforts to try and change the modus operandi of the organisation would come to nothing and I resigned from the board. The organisation, at the time of writing, is still dominated by its founders and has no long-term funding, surviving instead on small Arts Council grants for specific projects.

In parallel to these trusteeships, I was a governor for a local secondary school during 2017 and 2018. My experience as a school governor was fascinating since there was an emphasis on training and the quality of governance to ensure that the best interests of pupils, their parents, staff, and local communities were being met.

The Chiltern Open Air Museum, of which I was a trustee for 13 ½ years, is a charity of much the same size, at least from an income perspective, as the dance company. Established in 1976, the museum aims to narrate the distinctive heritage of the Chilterns through its architecture, landscapes, and cultural offerings, by providing pleasure and education for both current and future generations.



3: Chiltern Open Air Museum, High Wycombe Toll House (with kind permission of the Chiltern Open Air Museum)

The board normally has a membership of around 8, and many board members had been trustees for a very long time enjoying a long history with the museum. Unlike the dance company, board membership mostly consists of individuals from outside of the museum sector and there have been times when there was no sector representation at all.

Again, I had had a long relationship with the museum albeit at the periphery. I had helped the education department in the late 1990s by setting up an invoicing system in Excel. It was in use for about 20 years! I had done an MA in Heritage and Tourism Management, and my dissertation looked at performance measurement of heritage organisations. The museum was included as one of several case studies. But I only really became actively involved once I became a trustee in 2009. Whilst I resigned in October 2022 to explore other opportunities, I remain a director of the museum's trading company, a member of the museum and trustee of the museum friend's organisation.

I became treasurer of the Heritage Volunteering Group (HVG) in July 2022. A much smaller organisation on paper than any of the other organisations I have been involved in (regular income at the time of writing is about £5k per annum). HVG was formed

in 2014 to support and promote volunteering across the heritage sector in the UK. It is a membership organisation with a mission is to help its members unlock the power of volunteering through collaboration and sharing of best practice. It works with a number of partners such as the DCMS, ACE, and AIM to ensure that heritage volunteering has a voice within the sector and beyond. Membership of the Executive Board of HVG has given me wider access to materials and a much greater understanding of volunteering within the heritage sector.

All these organisations and my experiences within them have informed and shaped my understanding of the realities of trusteeship. My initial interests were around the intersection between business and business practices and the cultural sector. I was particularly interested in how cultural organisations have been forced to employ business models and the resulting tensions within cultural organisations. In my MA dissertation I explored how heritage organisations were increasingly being asked to use management tools from industry to help them meet their strategic aims. I used a series of case studies to evaluate the suitability of a Balanced Business Scorecard as a model for inter-organisation measurement purposes. My MA work found there were limitations with this type of modelling and that many smaller organisations used informal methods and networks to measure their performance against other organisations. As my trustee experience broadened in the 2000s, I realised that trusteeship within the sector is little understood and that this was a gap worthy of study and research.

This thesis draws on this experience and new research to identify, analyse, and seek solutions around the governance of small museums.

1.3 THE ISSUES

When I joined the trustee board of the Chiltern Open Air Museum in 2009, I had already been a trustee of Motionhouse for 17 years. I was coming from a well-established board in the arts sector full of good practice. Whilst I had been recruited through informal networks to the Motionhouse board (this was in the board's early days just after the company had been incorporated), all board appointments by 2009 were advertised, and appointments were only made after a formal interview process and taking up of references. There was a good induction process. The board consisted of individuals with a good mix of business and cultural sector skills; although we were not terribly diverse we had a good mix of age, gender, disability, sexuality and we had a trustee under the age of 30; we were well trained (we even did Clore board training in early 2009); our focus was on strategic matters; and there was an informal but regular and healthy churn of trustees (I was the longest serving trustee). The board operated several sub-committees to discuss operational issues, so board meetings had a strategic focus.

Joining the Chiltern Open Air Museum exposed me to a very different type of board: I was one of only two trustees under the age 50, whilst most of my fellow trustees were in their late 60s and older; we were essentially recruited to a stereotype (older, middle class, white and well educated); only one of the board had any museum experience; recruitment was through personal networks (I had been recruited informally via a friend who was a staff member); there was no formal induction process or training and importantly we spent almost all our board meetings discussing operational matters. Most of the board were involved operationally as volunteers anyway and saw their operational roles as an essential part of their board participation. Additionally, board members saw no conflict between operational and strategic roles. There were no fixed terms for board members with one board member serving since the museum had been set up in 1985!

Although there were similarities in terms of size (staff numbers and income), the contrast between the two boards was strong and piqued my interest in how boards in

small cultural organisations run. My further experiences as a school governor and with Beaconsfield intensified this interest and informed this research.

My experiences highlight many of the problems small museum boards face (as identified, for example, in the work of Cornforth (2003a), Rochester (2003), Goforth (2012) and Lee et al. (2017) and others): skills and knowledge gaps; trustees overstaying their welcome versus valuable corporate memory; good and bad behaviour on trustee boards; trustees being too operational or indeed the reverse when they are too removed from the organisation; and more recent concerns such as diversity and inclusion. I was, and continue to be, interested in how small museums operate without specialist expertise on their boards and even in their operating teams (see, for example, comments by Sutherland, 2022 and Kendall Adams, 2019a). My experiences within the broader cultural sector suggest that this is unusual since both the dance and arts boards I was involved with had trustees with specialist sector knowledge, and my understanding is that this was the norm rather than the exception. In contrast, almost all of the trustees I spoke to for this research came from a broad spectrum of disciplines from outside of the museum sector such as commerce, education, engineering, IT, project management and journalism. They were mainly on the organisation's board because they knew another trustee or had a useful address book!

I continue to ask myself how important specialist knowledge is for museum trustees since they are the group setting the organisation's strategic direction (Kendall Adams, 2019a). Or does it really matter especially to the visiting public? Are visitors more interested in a good day out, including a delicious cup of tea and a freshly baked cake, than the deep insights provided by a highly educated curator? Is the enthusiasm and amateur expertise shown by trustees and volunteers for their museum and its contents enough? Or should the sector be demanding something more? If funding requires an authentic heritage experience can the amateurs in charge provide that?

Increasingly museums are being tasked, as respected and trusted local institutions to provide critical services for their local communities in programmes, for example, to provide pathways back to work or to alleviate loneliness (see discussions later in the

text). Again, this suggests that museums may need a wider range of skills in their trustee boards who hold ultimate responsibility for these programmes.

It is also clear from the press and sector insights that good governance is an issue for many museums. Controversies and debate around acceptable sponsorship of exhibitions and organisations (for example, the Sackler's sponsorship of a wing of the National Gallery or BP's sponsorship of the British Museum) have played out both in board rooms and in the public arena on social media and in the press. Board debates about the timely repatriation of looted art and artefacts demonstrate the complexity of managing major cultural institutions. The British Museum suffered major reputational damage with the discovery of the disappearance of some 2,000 objects from its collection in 2023, which resulted in apologies from the chairman of its board, George Osborne (Stephens, 2023). In smaller museums, board-level discussions also revolve around operational, strategic, and reputational issues. However, these challenges seldom attract media attention, although there are some notable exceptions. Problems with bullying, accusations of racist abuse toward senior staff and some disastrous financial mismanagement at Nottingham Castle, for example, did reach the press. The aforementioned issues led to the liquidation of the trust running the castle in 2022 less than a year after it reopened after a major refurbishment (Kendall Adams, 2023). Many of the problems were laid at the "feet" of trustees and a whole new organisation now runs the castle with a new board of trustees (Kendall Adams, 2023). Financial irregularities at Beamish led the museum's trustees to report the matter to the Charity Commission and police (Knott, 2020). The theft of coins at the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust by a volunteer trustee led to her prosecution and is discussed later in this dissertation and in Appendix 1.

This research aims to identify the mechanisms used to govern small museums; understand the experience of trustees of small museums and how that can be enhanced and improved; analyse the challenges and tensions in the governance processes in small museums; and propose practical solutions to improve board effectiveness, inclusivity, and accountability. It explores issues that I have identified and experienced alongside those of my fellow trustees and seeks to explain why those problems may exist. I

interrogate data from my fellow trustees to find evidence of the concerns I have had and to identify their unique experiences and issues as trustees within the sector.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

This research began as a proposal to ‘track the changes in the heritage discourse and strategic and management practice at small heritage sites using museums in Buckinghamshire as a case study’. As I started to explore this topic in more depth, I realised that more fundamental issues around governance existed, and these needed to be addressed first. I realised that my experiences reflected wider issues in the heritage sector and thus the issues and problems of small museum governance that emerged have informed how my research has changed and evolved. I explore what it is really like to be a trustee in a small museum and how contemporary issues such as diversity in museum boards can be addressed. I investigate who museum trustees are, museum board recruitment practices, and training. I look at museum board makeup, museum board focus and both inter- and intra- board dynamics. I investigate how to measure the effectiveness of museum boards, and I link museum board operations and effectiveness to organisational effectiveness. Furthermore, I suggest solutions to some of the issues that I see by proposing a trustee forum for museums and outlining a digital tool for museum governance. All this work extends the scope of my original proposal and ensures that the practice-based element of my research will have a wider influence than originally proposed.

Whilst museum trustee boards have always been the focus of my research, my objective with this research is to explain the realities of small museum board operations from a trustee’s perspective and highlight how that differs from both academic and industry literature and advice. Only by understanding this can we theorise how small museums can optimise both their board’s and organisation’s performance and effectiveness and put this into practice. My experience as a museum trustee, and as a trustee within the wider cultural sector, suggests that there is a significant gap in the current understanding regarding trustees’ experiences within small museum settings and the wider debates around how those museums can contribute locally to their communities and nationally to social and political programmes run by the funders of the sector. By

drawing on the wider literature, my research identifies some of the key issues that need to be addressed, particularly for smaller organisations. in museum governance programmes and initiatives.

The main question addressed by this research on “The museum trustee: exploring the theory, policy and practice of governance at small museums” is:

What is effective governance in small museums and how can governance best practice be applied within small organisations in the UK heritage sector?

As will be seen in the literature review small museums make up the majority of the museums in the UK heritage sector yet most of the research that has been carried out into governance within the sector only addresses governance in the major museums such as the British Museum, the V&A and other similar organisations. To truly understand the state of governance practice within the sector an exploration of governance within the several thousand small organisations within the heritage sector is needed. This study starts this process and lays the groundwork for future research.

However, to answer the main research question in depth a number of other ideas are explored and lay the groundwork for my study by mapping the field for the reader. The literature review therefore poses some further questions.

- How can we define small museums and how are small museums represented in the literature?

Due to the perceived insignificance of small museums and their trustees, it became apparent during the course of my research that these small museums are absent from much of the academic and industry literature. This is a major oversight since small museums are the largest sized category in the museum sector but are, in general, excluded from its discourse. As a result, the material presented in this thesis can be understood to provide an original contribution to an otherwise limited discussion.

- What is governance and how are small museums governed?

A general understanding of current research into governance especially in the museum sector is important and lays the groundwork for my research. Reflecting on my experience, some comparison is made with governance within the wider cultural sector to identify whether small museums governance is similar or different to other small cultural organisations. As with many of the terms used within this dissertation, the term “governance” has different uses. The focus of this dissertation is on “organisational governance” i.e. how museum boards operate, and their members behave, rather than systems of government, governance and delivery of public services.

- Who are trustees in general and museum trustees in particular, and what attitudes, behaviours and skills do these trustees have? How do boards run?

There have been a number of reports commissioned by bodies such as the Charity Commission in recent years around the size and shape of the charity sector and the individuals working within it. A particular focus has been volunteers and charity trustees. A major report in 2017, *Taken on Trust*, undertaken on behalf of the Charity Commission by CASS Business School⁴ has probably been most influential (Lee, S et al. 2017). This question looks at the work done by Lee et al. and others to explore general characteristics of trustees and their roles and behaviours on the board. Where possible cultural and museum sector literature on trustees is also interrogated, and my research focusses on the latter. The research on how trustees interact with each other and with other actors such as the CEO, board practices and board effectiveness are also examined under this question. Many of the challenges of governance can be understood by examining this area of research.

- How should museum boards be structured and run?

The fourth question answered by this research explores best practice as it relates to boards. How museum boards should be structured, how museum trustees are recruited and whether trustee boards should be more representative of their communities? The

⁴ Cass Business School, City University is now Bayes Business School, City St Georges, University of London

question also explores the skills museum trustees should have, and the training required to ensure that skills gaps do not exist.

- How effective are museum boards?

The final question explores the effectiveness of museum boards and how it can be measured. The effectiveness of the governance of museums is crucial to a museum's success. Therefore, measuring board effectiveness will allow trustees and other stakeholders to understand what actions must be taken by a board to improve its effectiveness and hence the overall effectiveness of the museum that they are overseeing.

These questions provide a framework for my critical analysis of the literature about governance in small museums in the penultimate section of Chapter 2. They help to guide the reader through the primary and secondary research and highlight how the reality of the trustee experience in small museums does not reflect the theoretical and operational guidelines made for trustees. They also guide the recommendations that I make based on that research such as the Heritage Trustee Forum and a digital tool for museum governance and highlight my unique contributions to the field.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research I take a pragmatic philosophical stance arguing that the nature of reality is rich, complex and dynamic and that the researcher should take a view which focuses on the practical outcomes or consequences of their research. I argue that my research needs to solve a practical real-world problem and that I am committed to generating practical knowledge which can be applied to improving the governance of small museums and the experiences of their trustees.

As already mentioned, the research has its roots in my own experiences as a trustee. My personal and academic experiences have put me in a unique position to gain insights into the research question. I have been a trustee for over 30 years, and I taught heritage studies at Buckingham University. The material that constitutes this thesis was collected and analysed whilst I was working part-time at the University. My position as an academic added to my credibility as a researcher and the robustness of my research whilst my position as an insider, a trustee, gave the participants in my research the opportunity to engage freely and voice their views without worrying about criticism. I acknowledge my positionality as a researcher by engaging reflexively with my methodology, data and results⁵.

Given the practical ontological and epistemological stance of my research I use mainly multi-method qualitative techniques to make sense of small museum governance and trusteeship. By drawing on theories of crystallisation in using multiple data sources and forms of analysis I reduce my reliance on a single source of data to build a rich account of what it is like to be a small museum trustee.

⁵ I am a white, middle-class woman in my sixties. I have a professional background as an accountant and a university lecturer, and I was educated privately (albeit that this was state funded since my father was in the Army).

1.6 THESIS STRUCTURE

Following this introductory chapter, the research question is addressed throughout the rest of this thesis as outlined below. Additionally, there are a series of appendices, which form the portfolio of the relevant material supporting this doctorate.

Chapter 2 is a comprehensive review of peer reviewed literature and research. It addresses the questions set out in section 1.4. The chapter defines and reviews the literature on small museums, governance (especially the governance of heritage organisations and trustees), the ideal museum board and the characteristics of its trustees. The discussion on board effectiveness serves as an introduction to the Board Intellectual Capital Framework which is utilised in my analysis of three museums included in my research. I complete the chapter with my reflections on the literature of governance and indicate for the reader some of the tensions and contradictions within the extant literature.

Chapter 3 outlines in some detail the methods I have used for my research purposes and the epistemological roots of those methods to clarify my research process. I discuss the main research paradigm, techniques and frameworks, and the tools used for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 reports the results from the interviews and other research undertaken. This involves a detailed analysis of the transcripts of the interviews undertaken to draw out common themes. The results are linked to my findings in Chapter 2 and inform my discussions, recommendations and conclusions in Chapters 5 to 7.

In Chapter 5 I discuss my results and tie this back to the literature from academia and industry to reflect on the reality of the lived experience of trustees within small museums. I critically examine how that lived experience differs from much of the literature and industry advice and lay the groundwork for my recommendations and conclusions.

Chapters 6 and 7 highlight the recommendations and conclusions from my research. I argue that strengthening governance in small museums is critical to their sustainability and continued contribution to the heritage sector. I make a number of recommendations such as the adoption of shadow boards, trustee sponsorship programs, and governance audits to enhance governance of small museum trustee boards. The practical aspects of my research, such as the specification of a new digital tool for museum governance and the formation of the Heritage Trustee Forum under the umbrella of the HVG, are also discussed within these chapters.

1.7 SUMMARY OF THE INTRODUCTION

The ARHC recognises the importance and dynamism of the heritage sector and the need to improve the connections ‘between research, policy and practice’ (AHRC, 2018). But as a professional working across both academia and in the heritage sector I would suggest that there is often a gap between the theory and practice which both sides find difficult to broach. Museum and heritage professionals repeatedly feel that academic theorisations lack the practical application that they require and are irrelevant to their work. Many academics have little experience outside of the very largest heritage organisations and national collections and do not understand the realities of small local museums.

With over 30 years of experience and a commitment to developing theory from reflective practice via a professional doctorate, I am well-equipped to enhance the understanding of small museums and their trustees. My experience as a trustee looking at trusteeship in small museums allows for a perspective that differs from other studies which are executed by individuals who are outsiders interrogating the governance environment and how trustees operate within the museum sector.

My research engages with literature on small museums, governance both generally and in the museum sector; trustees, trusteeship and how museum boards actually run; how museum boards should run and how effective they are. I use the literature to demonstrate in the thesis my unique perspective as a trustee and the thesis’ focus on a specific and differentiated slice of the museum sector makes visible the particular behaviours and micro-processes that I feel inform governance in small museums. I argue in this thesis that this perspective and the findings of the thesis shed new light on the experience of governance within small museums and challenge the prevailing view that governance across the sector is generic rather than stratified by size of the organisation.

In this chapter I have introduced the background to the research and my motivations for undertaking this investigation. The main research question and the five sub-questions that guide the reader through the literature review and research were

introduced, and a summary of the chapters was outlined. I have also mentioned for the reader some of the practical suggestions that I will discuss in much greater detail in later chapters to address governance challenges for small museums: the Heritage Trustee Forum, a digital tool for museum governance, and new governance structures.

The next chapter provides a general review of literature relating to museums, focussing on museum governance and trusteeship, and board effectiveness.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 THE LITERATURE REVIEW: INTRODUCTION AND REFLECTIONS

Candlin (2016, p.15) states in her research on small museums, or what she terms ‘micromuseums’, that many of the research findings which pertain to large museums are not relevant to small museums. Past and present surveys of the research literature show that research into the operations of museums is almost always considered in the context of large government funded institutions. The literature assumes that the operations, management and governance of museums are the same regardless of size of the organisation and their operating environment. So, whilst large museums are a subset of the museum population, probably representing less than 5% of all the museums in the UK, they dominate the research literature and advice given by industry bodies. This literature review highlights the research that has been done into the operations and governance of small and medium sized museums and recognises that there is a gap within that narrative.

My aim is that this literature review will provide the reader with a clear understanding of extant governance literature and its implications for the governance of small museums within the UK. As a practitioner, my key aim in this chapter is to highlight how the existing literature has focussed at a macro-level mainly on processes within larger museums, rather than presenting micro-level data about governance within small museums. The absence of this data I will argue is a significant gap in the literature and questions the common assumption that governance practices are uniform across the

sector. Instead, it suggests that governance may vary significantly depending on the size of the organisation, indicating a more stratified approach rather than a one-size-fits-all model.

My experience researching into small independent museums is very similar to Candlin's, whose work has provided a key point of reference during my research. The process of conducting a literature review presented a challenge; small museums are difficult to both define and to compare since many have a unique focus and characteristics. Additionally, the lack of sector literature relating to small museums meant that I had to source information for my research from sources outside of the sector and from sources which may be considered atypical for research in a traditional PhD⁶.

The sources for this literature review can be divided into three principal categories:

- Peer reviewed research
- Application in industry settings (particularly the charitable and heritage sectors)
- Legislation, codes of practice, standards, guidance and other formal documentation published by industry bodies and their regulators relating to governance

The literature was used to contextualise and position the research within the wider body of literature on boards, trustees and governance within the non-profit sector in the UK.

As stated already, the research objective is to provide a focused and in-depth understanding of the small museum practices and experience of governance. A number of subsidiary research questions direct the investigation to the information that needs to be gathered, in order to fulfil this objective.

⁶ For example, in my discussions of governance where I draw on material from the for-profit sector and the non-profit sector (medical and school governance materials) and for my discussions on governance and trustees much of the material comes from government reviews of the charity sector in the UK. Some materials come from industry too.

The first part of the literature review provides a framework to allow the reader to understand the field by responding to several questions.

- Question 1: How can we define small museums and how are small museums represented in the literature?
- Question 2: What is governance and how are small museums governed?
- Question 3: Who are trustees? What attitudes, behaviours and skills do museum trustees have? How do boards run?
- Question 4: How should museum boards be structured and run?
- Question 5: How effective are museum boards?

This chapter is split into six parts; the first covers question 1 and involves a brief discussion on definitions of museums from both a theoretical and a policy perspective. The section also defines small museums to help contextualise the research. The second part of the chapter focusses on question 2 and theories about governance. The question of what governance looks like in the museum sector is addressed, especially for smaller organisations. The next section looks at trustees and trusteeship in the charity sector before concentrating on the literature on museum trustees (question 3). Question 4 explores the literature which discusses what an ideal board for a small charitable organisation (and therefore an ideal small museum board) should look like. Question 5 addresses board effectiveness and explores how board effectiveness can be measured.

The final section in the literature review examines how established research reveals conflicting and contradictory perspectives on museum trusteeship and how these are critical to the research that follows. It returns to established examinations of governance from both the museum and the cultural sector, as I consider whether this reflects my experiences on the ground.

2.2 QUESTION 1: HOW CAN WE DEFINE SMALL MUSEUMS AND HOW ARE SMALL MUSEUMS REPRESENTED IN THE LITERATURE?

According to the Mapping Museums Project (MMP) there were 3,365 museums operating in the UK in 2019 (Candlin et al., 2023). The majority of museums are small or medium sized with visitor numbers below 50,000. This accounts for almost 83% of the sector. Independent museums, those that are not run by government or organisations like universities, make up at least 71.5% of the total UK sector. This suggests that nearly 60% of museums are both independent and small or medium sized. Furthermore, the majority of these museums are managed as charities governed by a board of trustees. However, as has already been mentioned, most museum research is focussed on the larger museums and there is an assumption that smaller museums will follow similar models of operation and governance (see for example discussions in Candlin, 2016, Candlin et al., 2022 on small museums and Bieber, 2003 on small museum boards). Later in this chapter I will explore this literature in more detail.

So how do we define these museums and what they do?

2.2.1 Museum definitions

Like much in the heritage world, a single, simple definition of a museum is hard to find. Definitions have changed over time and continue to be re-appraised as the remit of and practices within many museums continue to evolve.

Comparing definitions of museums from 1960, 1974 and 2022 shows clearly that there has been a number of changes in thinking about the role of a museum.

‘The museum is a permanent establishment, administered in the general interest, for the purpose of preserving, studying, enhancing by various means and, in particular, of exhibiting to the public for its delectation and instruction groups of objects and specimens of cultural value: artistic, historical, scientific and

2.2 | QUESTION 1: HOW CAN WE DEFINE SMALL MUSEUMS AND HOW ARE SMALL MUSEUMS REPRESENTED IN THE LITERATURE?

technological collections, botanical and zoological gardens and aquariums, etc.’
(Rivière, 1960, p. 12 from Brulon Soares, 2020b).

‘A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment’ (ICOM, 1974, p. 21 from Brulon Soares, 2020b).

‘A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing’ (ICOM, 2022).

International organisations such as ICOM (the International Council of Museums) incorporate a definition of what is a museum within their statutes. ICOM’s definitions of museums have been used as the basis of legislative definitions, cultural policies, codes of ethics and adopted by national bodies in member countries such as the UK. Early definitions such as the first two above were symbolic of Eurocentric ideas of museums and their practices. Later definitions such as the definition adopted by ICOM in 2022, have attempted to widen both the scope and inclusivity of museums and their practices.

The definition adopted in 2022 was not the definition that ICOM originally discussed and tried to adopt in Kyoto in 2019:

‘Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.

Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing’
(ICOM 2019, p. 23 quoted in Brulon Soares, 2020b).

This definition caused much alarm amongst many ICOM members who found it difficult to reach consensus around what some members described as ‘a fuzzy

collection of political correctness and trendy posturing that would have little legal value' (Noce, 2020). The debates around this definition were interesting because they showed how difficult it was to form a single unifying definition of a museum for an international audience. Davis (2020, p.92), a past president of ICOFOM – Canada, critiquing the discussions around the Kyoto definition, suggests a simpler definition as a compromise by 'identifying the fundamentals of museums, the how, the why and the who' without what she sees as irrelevant defining factors 'such as the what or where'. Her definition, which follows, allows for both more traditional organisations concentrating on collection and curation to co-exist with organisations that are more value-driven than object-driven and perform advocacy roles.

'By collecting, exhibiting and educating, the museum is a not-for-profit organization in which people preserve the past, probe the present and prepare the future' (Davis, 2020, p.89).

One criticism of this definition is that there is an assumption around the understanding of not-for-profit since many smaller museums around the world inhabit a grey area between the public and the private sector and must be funded privately or by generating income (Vella, 2024).

For Vella (2024) the term 'museum', which he suggests includes museums, galleries, historic houses and collection centres, encompasses 'different forms of collections accessible to the public, irrespective of theme, size, composition, content, collection, nature of exhibits, persons involved, venue, audiences targeted and included or implicitly and explicitly excluded'.

Here in the UK national bodies such as the Museums Association (MA) and the Association of Independent Museums (AIM) also have working definitions: the Museums Association (n.d.) states that 'Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society'. The problem with the MA's definition is that the term 'held in trust' assumes that the public is the owner of the collection, and that the organisation's legal structure reflects this (Candlin, 2016). This poses the question of whether private museum collections can

really be considered to be museums. AIM emphasises that ‘museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment’ and that AIM members (mostly independent museums) are ‘long standing, successful social enterprises, run in a business-like way...[which]... play a valuable role in their communities, contributing to a sense of place and making up an important part of the tourism economy’ (Association of Independent Museums Annual Report 2022, 2023). AIM’s inclusion of the term ‘social enterprise’ could also be thought to exclude private museums. Again, there is a suggestion here that organisations such as the London Mithraeum Bloomberg Space in Bloomberg’s European Headquarters despite their close relationship with MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) would not be considered a museum. The Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith, 2006) prevails even in museum definitions!⁷

Candlin et al., (2023) in contrast, did not use standard definitions in the MMP from either international bodies such as ICOM or UK bodies like the Museums Association: their project regarded these definitions as too limiting. Instead, the MMP included any organisation that had a permanent collection, with artefacts on display, in a defined space and regularly open to the public. Whilst this broadens the definition in many ways, the project excluded organisations such as zoos which are included in some official typologies of museums.

For this dissertation, I adopt the MMP’s definition of a museum as an organisation that identifies itself as such and maintains a publicly accessible collection in a designated space. However, all the museums represented by my interviewees were various types of charities since only these organisations have trustees. Furthermore, my interviewees perceived their museums as small, a characterisation to which I will now shift my focus.

⁷ Writing in 2006, Smith referred to the hegemonic vision of heritage, which is privileged by an elite group of experts, as the Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith, 2006). The Authorised Heritage Discourse recognises that nation states and their authorised representatives identify, recognise and protect heritage based on expert and authorised notions of heritage and history.

2.2.2 Small museums

Defining museum size is also complex as it depends on what specific characteristics are used. Candlin (2016) highlights that there is a lack of consensus across the sector on how to define small which leads to an unclear understanding of the members in this part of the museum sector. According to Candlin (2016), small museums often face challenges such as limited financial resources, a small workforce, and restricted physical space. These factors differentiate them from larger museums.

The industry bodies try to classify museums by size. AIM, for example, use visitor numbers to differentiate between small, medium and large in their Economic toolkit (Association of Independent Museums, 2024) with:

- Small = visitor numbers of up to 10,000
- Medium = visitor numbers of 10,001 to 50,000
- Large = visitor numbers of 50,001+

Definitions vary slightly for membership of AIM with a further category added for the largest museums with over 100,000 visitors and small being defined as visitor numbers of up to 20,000! AIM's (Association of Independent Museums, 2024) toolkit definitions of numbers are used by the Arts Council of England (ACE) although ACE find it much easier to define national museums than small museums (from accreditation documentation quoted in Sutherland, 2022). The MMP also looked at museum size and how one defines a small museum. They used visitor numbers and settled, after much discussion as outlined in their blog, on the following:

- Small = visitor numbers of up to 10,000
- Medium = visitor numbers of 10,001 to 50,000
- Large = visitor numbers of 50,001-1,000,000
- Huge = visitor numbers over 1,000,000

2.2 | QUESTION 1: HOW CAN WE DEFINE SMALL MUSEUMS AND HOW ARE SMALL MUSEUMS REPRESENTED IN THE LITERATURE?

(Candlin & Ballatore, 2018)

In contrast the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) Small Museums Committee (n.d.) state ‘our definition is simple, “If you think you’re small, you’re small”’. They surveyed members in 2007 and found that 41% of respondents indicated that budget size is the primary way to define a small museum. Other respondents (22%), not citing budget as the defining characteristic for a small museum, stated that staff numbers or square footage of the museum would define it as small. The AASLH have used these results to define a small museum typically having the following characteristics:

- Have an annual budget of less than \$250,000.
- Operate with a small staff with multiple responsibilities.
- Employ volunteers to perform key staff functions

Defining size based on square footage can also be problematic. Consider, for instance, the Chiltern Open Air Museum, one of the museums in this study which has a 45-acre site but only around 30,000 visitors and annual visitor income of £377,196 (Chiltern Open Air Museum Annual Report 2022, 2023). Is it large? Or medium sized? Or small?

In the UK, the definition of size may also be influenced by income, as it often correlates with the number of paying visitors. This metric can serve as a more reliable financial indicator than budget alone, given that many small museums operate at a loss or receive funding to cover their expenses, and nearly all charge for entry. However, some museums that might be classified as small by other standards do not impose entry fees, as they are part of broader museum services offered by public bodies such as local authorities. This indicates that using income as a measure of size presents its own challenges.

ICOM also looks at the size of a museum’s collection, and a collection of less than 5,000 objects is considered small. Möntmann (2021) suggests that many small museums do not even have a collection! Where museums do not catalogue their holdings or formally accession objects deciding what forms part of a collection in a

small volunteer run museum may be difficult. Returning to the Chiltern Open Air Museum, its collection is small under this definition since it is a museum of just 37 buildings with a further 15 buildings in store; the artefacts on site are not technically part of the collection and only serve to provide context to the buildings in which they are displayed. Vella (2024) recognises the issues with defining a museum by the number of artefacts in its collection and points out that the volume of objects in a museum's collection may be limited by the size of the objects collected or the space available for display. The former is certainly the case at the Chiltern Open Air Museum and shows how problematic these definitions can be.

Davis (2009) defines a small or local museum as museums serving a local community within a specific geographic region with small locally-based collections and Watson (2009, p.8) defines small museums as 'develop[ing] directly from the community they serve'. Additionally, Cordes (2018, p.45) observes that small museums are generally regarded as 'inconsequential members of the museum family with little to offer visitors except a possibly amusing way to spend an hour'.

A final definition recognises what differentiates small museums and comes from Clore fellow Bryony Robbins:

'Small museums' is a generic term for what others call community museums, or those museums based in rural locations; small towns and villages that receive no regular, core funding... These museums usually offer the only access to cultural activity within their locations. They focus on heritage but provide a richer cultural blend; learning sessions will include storytelling and drama, music, drawing and creative writing. If they have space they offer activities such as yoga, art classes and heritage talks. These museums potentially form people's first route into culture and play a vital role in establishing wider audiences for arts and heritage' (Robbins, 2019).

Whilst community museums do appear in the literature as evidenced, for example, by writing around museums and co-curation with communities, and museums seeking to be inclusive by ensuring that 'othered' communities are included in their audience development, studies of museums with this richer cultural blend rarely appear outside of industry journals. Initiatives such as the Connected Communities programme funded by the DCMS via AIM where museums and heritage organisations are running community-based programmes to tackle loneliness and encourage volunteering is a

good example of using varied activities within local and hyper local communities and their museums.

2.2.3 The literature on small museums

The literature on small museums is sparse: brief mentions of small museums are made in the academic literature, for example, by Black (2005), Hein (1998), Hooper-Greenhill (1994), Hudson (1998) and McClellan (2008) but their focus is on larger museums for their research and analysis. More major studies include the work done for their PhDs by Yates (2010), Cordes (2018) and Sutherland (2022) and their emphasis on volunteer run museums, craft focused single subject museums and curatorial practice particularly from a postcolonial perspective respectively.

Research by the MMP is the first major and substantive research done on small museums in recent years to come out of a UK university. A critical analysis of Candlin's 2016 monograph on micro museums, however, would emphasise that Candlin's small museums research is limited by her reliance on descriptive analysis and small museum stories based on her visits to museums around the UK (Candlin, 2016). Her 2022 work with Butler and Watts 'Stories from small museums' also takes a descriptive approach with oral histories and personal experiences forming its basis although the introduction to this work places the research and the data analysed within the wider context of the heritage debates (Candlin et al., 2022)⁸. Journal articles coming from the MMP place the research on a firmer more data driven basis (see, for example, the geographical analysis done by Ballatore & Candlin, 2022). Whilst governance is widely discussed in the MMP research it is used to define ownership rather than the overall strategic direction and policies of an organisation as overseen by its governing body.

What is clear from the research available is that small museums are generally very close to their communities (see, for example, the discussion within Vella 2024, and Weil 2002). Research from Australia measured the 'Impact of small museums in their local

⁸ Nevertheless, Candlin's presentation of her work as literary reflections fits into the wider heritage discourse described by Waterton and Watson (2015).

communities' and found that there is a mutually beneficial relationship between a local museum and its community (Kelly, 2006). The reasons for this are varied but reflect that many smaller museums have space to show the objects and tell the stories that larger museums may not (Kelly, 2006; Vella, 2024).

Outside of academia there is also limited material on small museums. Exceptions can be found in the resources of organisations that are dedicated to smaller museums such as the Associazione Nazionale Piccoli Musei in Italy (n.d.), the American Small Museum Association (n.d.) and the UK's Association of Independent Museums (n.d.). They provide operational materials, advice and training and convene conferences for their members.

None of the research mentioned above focused on governance in this context although a couple of studies will be mentioned in section 2.3 of this literature review and Sutherland (2022) does devote part of a section in one chapter to trustees. Material from AIM on governance will also be discussed in the next section.

2.3 QUESTION 2: WHAT IS GOVERNANCE AND HOW ARE SMALL MUSEUMS GOVERNED?

This next section looks at governance describing general concepts around governance before narrowing the focus to small museums. Whilst the term governance has many meanings and multiple interpretations, the focus here is on corporate governance and how it applies to the non-profit sector especially museums.

2.3.1 An introduction to Corporate Governance

Chronicles of business would suggest that corporate scandals involving fraudulent trading and poor governance have a long history. For example, in the eighteenth century a business set up to provide the poor with cheap loans, the Charitable Corporation, collapsed due to the mismanagement of the business by its board of directors and fraud by its officers (Taylor, 2013). The fraud was debated in Parliament in the 1730s and was the subject of several parliamentary acts to mitigate the scandal and offer relief to the victims of the fraud (Taylor, 2013).

More recently, governance was highlighted as an issue in the wake of large-scale corporate fraud and company collapses in the 1980/90s when the first corporate governance codes were developed, and it continues to remain in the news. In 2024, failures of the Post Office's accounting system and their board's treatment of sub postmasters caused national outrage and gave rise to queries about the scrutiny that the Post Office board gave to the actions taken by the organisation's senior management team during the last two decades. Questions have been raised as to whether the Post Office board was effective in its questioning of management over their aggressive defence of the faulty IT system and pursuit of sub postmasters. However, issues in governance are much more widespread than those at the Post Office and there is an ongoing requirement to support best governance practices within organisations.

So how is corporate governance defined and what are its core constituent parts? The Cadbury Report (1992, p.14), published in the UK in the wake of the collapse of high profile companies such as Robert Maxwell's Mirror empire and the bank BCCI, defined corporate governance as 'the system by which companies are directed and controlled' by a board of directors which is responsible for "setting the company's strategic aims, providing the leadership to put them into effect, supervising the management of the business and reporting to shareholders on their stewardship"⁹.

Cornforth (2014) referred to corporate governance as organisational governance to differentiate it from public and network governance which operates at a societal level and relates to systems of government, governance and delivery of public services.

For Tricker (2019, p.4) 'Corporate governance is about the way power is exercised over corporate entities' so corporate governance and ethics cannot be separated. Ethics concerns both behaviour in business and the behaviour of business so it is essential that both the board and the senior management team of an organisation display the standards that set the tone of what is acceptable within a business. Tricker (2019) suggested that whilst codes of practice and legislation can define how governance should be put into practice, business ethics will define what is acceptable in an organisation and dictate how it will be put into practice. The scandal surrounding Oxfam and its operations in Haiti, which were tainted by sexual misconduct and poor behaviour, is a good example of the gap that can exist between the theory and practice of corporate governance, a gap encouraged by a lack of standards at the highest level within the organisation (Khan, 2018). In the museum world ethical behaviour can also be missing as is evidenced by the scandal surrounding the collection of antiquities by the J. Paul Getty Museum particularly during the curatorship of Marion True (Brodie & Proulx, 2014).

Originally, corporate governance codes were focussed on listed companies. More recently the rules and regulations, and the ideas that had developed in the governance of listed companies have spread as good practice to unlisted private companies and

⁹ Actually, the report was specifically aimed at dealing with the financial aspects of corporate governance in the light of high-profile business failures

other organisations such as charities, government bodies and professional institutions. These organisations and their leaders have all recognised the importance of good governance. The Institute of Directors (IOD) in the UK, for example issued a code of good practice in 2010 for unlisted companies (Institute of Directors, 2016). This had 14 principles taking ‘into account the degree of openness, size, complexity and level of maturity of individual enterprises’ (Institute of Directors, 2016). The governance framework set out by the IOD is designed to ‘evolve over the life cycle of a business’ (Institute of Directors, 2016).

The Charity Commission here in the UK has also issued a code of governance good practice for charities. Originally published in 2005, the code was at the time of writing on its third revision. The code sets out 8 principles: an overarching ‘foundation principle’ where the charity’s trustees are assumed to understand their legal responsibilities and the organisation’s purpose, and seven further principles: ‘leadership; integrity; decision making, risk and control; board effectiveness; diversity; openness and accountability’ (Charity Governance Code Steering Group , n.d.). These are to be applied differently according to organisational size.

Before turning to understandings of small charity and museum governance in practice a brief explanation of governance theory is explored.

2.3.2 Academic understandings: theories of governance

As Tricker (2019) points out corporate governance theory is still in search of a single unifying paradigm. This next section explores the main theories and their application in both for-profit and not-for-profit organisations. The table at the end of the section summarises the various theories and their main characteristics.

Academic understandings of corporate governance are based on several theories, the main of which is Agency Theory. Agency Theory states that principals or shareholders contract with agents or directors to perform a number of duties on their behalf. In

exchange, the principals cede some power to the agents. Agency Theory assumes that the interests of the two contracting parties, agent and principal, are not aligned. Both parties in the relationship are seeking to maximise their own utility and that may not be beneficial to the other. There are a number of mechanisms to solve or, at least, mitigate conflicts between management and shareholders; Agency Theory suggests that the governance body, i.e. the board, provides an important monitoring function that attempts to moderate differences between the two. Other mechanisms include incentives such as salary and share ownership and disincentives such as the loss of jobs when there is poor performance. In practice, it can be very difficult to resolve the agency problem and there are many examples where company directors siphon off profits in remuneration rather than maximise shareholder returns (see discussions, for example, in Tricker, 2019; Renz and Andersson, 2014 in Cornforth and Brown, 2014; Coule, 2015).

There are contradictory views around non-profit governance. Pointer and Orlikoff (2002), writing about non-profit boards, for instance, argue that there is really very little difference between governance and board roles in for profit and non-profit firm, whilst Cornforth (2003a, pp.244,251) points out there has been ‘widespread academic criticism of the adoption of business-based models of governance in the public sector’, and that academic theories ignore the ‘multiple and ... conflicting roles that boards play and the way these may shift over time...’. Hough et al. (2005) concur and suggest that non-profit governance is complex and can only be adequately understood by employing a multi-theory and multi-disciplinary approach. Some academics such as Judith Miller suggested that for profit governance theories could be used as a starting point in researching governance for non-profit boards (Viader & Espina, 2014).

One component that differentiates for profit from non-profit governance is who is being served since non-profit organisations do not have shareholders. This is a key difference since non-profit organisations should serve the public interest without any individual benefiting financially. Certainly, whilst it may be the dominant theoretical model to understand the for-profit sector, the value of the agency model in non-profit firms such as charities is limited mainly because ownership of non-profits is not in the

hands of shareholders and the board contracts with senior management to perform duties on their and a number of other stakeholders behalf (Renz & Andersson, 2014).

Stewardship Theory, like Agency Theory, assumes a contracting relationship between agent and principal but it differs from Agency Theory because the interests of the two parties are aligned. Incentives or disincentives (i.e., the agency costs) are lower or non-existent since there is no need to use outside mechanisms to bring the two parties interests into alignment. Here the board has a mentoring role to the senior management team with shared decision-making and collaborative strategic management (Viader & Espina, 2014). This type of model may better describe the relationships between non-profit stakeholders, boards and senior management (Tricker, 2019; Renz & Andersson, 2014; Chambers et al., 2013; Coule, 2015). Applied to museum governance, Stewardship Theory would suggest that museum board members should have a degree of knowledge of the heritage sector which allows the board to mentor the organisation's senior management team and work towards common strategic objectives.

Stakeholder Theory also tries to provide a theoretical framework for understanding governance of organisations (Tricker, 2019; Renz & Andersson, 2014; Chambers et al., 2013; Coule, 2015). The board in this model acts to try to meet the interests of a wide and diverse group of interested parties or stakeholders. The difficulty with the stakeholder model is that stakeholder interests are often not aligned, and it is impossible to maximise the interests of all stakeholders at the same time (Tricker, 2019; Coule, 2015). Nevertheless 'enlightened' shareholder theory suggests that 'the satisfaction of stakeholder needs and interests is crucial to corporate success and the creation of long-term wealth' (Tricker, 2019, p.77). For non-profit organisations, Manchester Business School academics carrying out research for the NHS proposed that the 'inclusion of a range of different stakeholders drives an inclusive approach that represents a wide spectrum of societal opinions, balances competing priorities and avoids dominance by one group with particular interests' (Chambers et al., 2013, p.21). The Stakeholder Theory of governance aligns heritage organisations with a wide number of interest groups such as heritage bodies and the heritage profession, local

government and central government regulators, local schools, colleges and universities, visitors and the local community.

Often cited as the most suitable theoretical model to apply to non-profit governance, Resource Dependency Theory states that ‘the organisation is an amalgam of ... assets and capabilities [or valuable] strategic resources’ and that boards will act as the focal point between the management team and the external world in managing those resources and relationships (Tricker, 2019, p.73; Renz & Andersson, 2014; Chambers et al., 2013). Given this, ‘board members are selected for their background, contacts and skills in boundary-spanning’ or skills in ‘mediat[e]ing between it and important outside organizations’ (Aldrich & Herker, 1977, p.220; Chambers et al., 2013, p.20). This theory, if it is applied to museum governance, would suggest that museum board members should have the required skills to negotiate and leverage relationships not only with the usual external stakeholders such as local communities and government regulators but also with the heritage profession and heritage bodies.

Cornforth (2003b) discusses other models that may shape the governance of non-profit organisations: a Democratic Model and Managerial Hegemony Theory.

The Democratic Model states that there is organisational democracy where workers ‘participate in the processes of organizing and governance’ (Harrison & Freeman, 2004, p.49). For Cornforth (2003b) any member of the organisation (as in part of the non-profits membership) can put themselves forward for election to the board regardless of expertise. Their job on the board is to resolve the differences of separate interest groups and help set policy which represents the many stakeholders the organisation has (Cornforth, 2003b). For Cornforth (2003b) the Democratic Model needs representatives on the board who can champion various interest groups rather than just one and can report back to these groups regularly. In heritage organisations, many boards operate with some element of governance democracy by including in their membership representatives from interest groups such as the Friends of the organisation or local authorities or local environmental groups.

The Managerial Hegemony Model suggests that boards have no real power and end up just rubber-stamping decisions put to them by the senior management team (Cornforth, 2003b). There is a suggestion that boards of heritage organisations are often overridden when the subject of collections comes up at board meetings with museum directors exercising their expertise or managerial hegemony to shut down discussion (Bieber, 2003).

Chait, Ryan and Taylor bemoan the lack of ‘vibrant debate about what constitutes governance ‘in the non-profit sector seeing only ‘lifeless discussions about how to govern’ (Chait et al., 2005, p.xviii). They reframe the governance debate as one of leadership within three modes: a fiduciary mode, a strategic mode and a generative mode. They suggested that an effective board would work in all three modes, and in doing so achieve governance as leadership (Chait et al., 2005). Non-profit boards often do not operate across all three modes and a board operating across only one or two modes will be, according to Chait, Ryan and Taylor (2005), unable to achieve the governance needs of the non-profit organisation. Their governance model suggests that the trustees of non-profit heritage boards not only have to have technical skills to fulfil their fiduciary responsibilities, but they also have to be strategic thinkers and to have professional expertise to understand the organisation’s operating environment and stakeholders. This is an almost impossible expectation of small museum trustees.

Cornforth and Simpson (2002, p.456) also found that ‘a weakness of much of the prevailing nonprofit governance literature is that it treats issues of governance as generic and ignores differences that may stem from size or other organizational variables’. Rochester (2003, pp.116,127) put forward the ideas that there is a ‘liability of smallness’ and difficulties with ‘establishing and maintaining an effective board’ which means that smaller non-profit organisations will not conform to the usual models of governance. Evidence for this is also provided by Cornforth and Simpson (2002) who proposed that, because of the significant differences among the boards of organisations of varying sizes, scholars should focus more on building both theory and practice that take account of these differences.

In smaller non-profit organisations, an effective board will have to work with different approaches to decision-making and authority. Rochester (2003) proposed that an associational model rather than the more conventional bureaucratic model of the firm would help explain these organisations better.¹⁰ Associational models of firm behaviour assume a collaborative system between individual members and thus their governance bears a resemblance to stakeholder models by ensuring that the interests of various groups are met (Van Puyvelde et al., 2016).

All the theories of boards can be linked to models of board behaviour and the exercise of power amongst the board members. For example, in a stakeholder model board members will be most vocal when they are advocating for members of their particular stakeholder group (Greer et al., 2003). Developing a realistic framework to understand board theories in practice especially for organisations in the non-profit sector and the interactions between board members is daunting.

Nevertheless, much of the literature around governance in the non-profit sector only focuses on the roles of trustees or board members, and the chair and how they can ensure high quality and efficient service delivery (Abdullah, 2015). High performing boards in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors focus on shaping strategy, resource identification and use, and talent management (see for example, Ostrower and Stone, (2006) for a discussion on this in the non-profit sector more generally or Carty et al. (2017) for a discussion on this in an English cultural context). According to Chambers et al. (2013, p.30) ‘the emerging evidence concerning the behaviours of effective boards leans towards a comparatively ‘hands-on’ board with able and relatively engaged non-executive directors’. They advocate a mixed theory of governance model for non-profit boards that combines aspects of Agency, Stewardship and Resource Dependency Models (Chambers et al., 2013).

¹⁰ Classical Management theory assumes Max Weber’s bureaucratic model can be used to understand how organisations work. Bureaucracy theory assumes that organisations operate rationally with strict rules and regulations, hierarchies and division of labour.

2.3 | QUESTION 2: WHAT IS GOVERNANCE AND HOW ARE SMALL MUSEUMS GOVERNED?

Theory	Interests	Board members	Board role	Model	Practices	Dynamics
Agency Theory	Owners and managers have different interests	Owners' representatives	Compliance/conformance: safeguard owners' interests, oversee management, check compliance	Compliance model	Tendency to homogeneity, tendency to small boards	High challenge, critical style to achieve goals
Stewardship Theory	Owners and managers share interests	Experts	Improve performance: add value to top decisions, strategy partner, support management	Partnership model	Unitary, tendency to homogeneity, tendency to small boards	Appreciative style to achieve goals, collaborative, well-functioning board committees
Democratic Model	Members/the public contain different interests	Lay representatives	Political: represent constituents, members reconcile conflicts, make policy, control executive.	Democratic model	Balance between homogeneity, board size varies	Medium challenge, controlling, critical style to achieve goals, focus is external
Stakeholder Theory	Stakeholders have different interests	Stakeholder representative elected or appointed by stakeholder groups	Balancing stakeholder needs: balance stakeholder needs, make policy, strategy, control management	Stakeholder model	Tendency to heterogeneity, tendency to large boards	Predominantly external focus, tendency to be active in relation to sectional or political interests
Resource Dependency Theory	Stakeholders and organisation have different interests	Chosen for influence with key stakeholders	Boundary spanning: secure resources, maintain stakeholder relations, bring external perspective	Co-option model	Balance between homogeneity, board size varies	Predominantly external focus
Managerial Hegemony Theory	Boards of trustees appointed 'who are sympathetic to the senior manager' s agenda.	Members chosen by the museum director so that the manager can dominate	Largely symbolic: ratify decisions, give legitimacy, managers have real power.	Rubber-stamp model	Tendency to small board size with weak members	No challenge

1: Table showing a comparison of organisational governance theory and practices adapted from Cornforth (2003b) and Chambers et al. (2103, p 31)

2.3.3 Cultural Sector governance

Governance is a key priority for the cultural sector; the ACE Strategic 10-year plan “Let’s Create” first published in 2020 includes a section in the Equality Objectives which highlights an investment in governance practice as a key priority. However, there has been a growing body of research into cultural sector governance for a number of years which examines whether cultural sector governance expectations are being met in practice. This section highlights some of the research into cultural sector boards and governance mainly from the UK, USA, Canada and Australia.

Francie Ostrower, for example, has been working in this area for over 20 years and is known for her academic work on US non-profits and their governance plus her interests in arts and cultural participation. This work occasionally overlaps such as in her book “Trustees of Culture”, where she examines four major arts boards, their trustees and board culture (Ostrower, 2002). Her findings indicate that trustees for this type of organisation are drawn from a wealthy elite and that class is a ‘basic framework in which trustees’ values, priorities and motivations, are translated into practice’ (Ostrower, 2002). Other works by Ostrower include work on diversity (defined here as ethnic or racial diversity) on cultural boards finding that ‘boards of arts, culture and humanities organisations are quite homogeneous with respect to race and ethnicity’ (Ostrower, 2014).

Paulus and Lejeune (2012) highlight the lack of connection between actual practice and the governance prescriptions promoted by sector bodies that say that boards should be structured, formal and accountable. Their work looks at the boards of two small cultural organisations in Europe and how these actually work (Paulus & Lejeune, 2012). Surprisingly they find that soft governance prevails with friendship as a core characteristic that shapes board composition and functioning (Paulus & Lejeune, 2012). Additionally, they remark on how senior executives construct governance architectures to mitigate the risks in funder dominated fields of activity (Paulus & Lejeune, 2012). Although the scope of this research is limited to just two organisations it highlights how practice and governance models and codes diverge.

Nevertheless, codes and best practice manuals and advice dominate the sector literature. The Scottish Arts Council (2008), for example, used to publish a Handbook for Trustees although Creative Scotland (the Scottish Arts Council's replacement body) now directs organisations to The Scottish Governance Forum's Governance Code for the Third Sector and the Cultural Governance Alliance's Practical Guide to Governance (Creative Scotland, n.d.). These resources and documents all aim to explain the fundamental principles of governance and responsibilities essential for trustees to ensure effective daily management of third sector/arts organisations.

Arts governance has also been examined theoretically through traditional governance theories borrowed from mainstream governance (Rentscheler et al., 2025). Rentscheler et al. (2025) note a shift from a practitioner focus to an academic focus on 'boards, governments and the organisation's impact on society'. Their survey of arts governance literature suggests that the most commonly applied theory is Agency Theory despite the recognition that Agency Theory provides an inadequate explanation of non-profit governance (Rentscheler et al., 2025). Additionally, they find that many researchers have not acknowledged that arts governance may be different to other areas of non-profit governance (Rentscheler et al., 2025).

Rentscheler (2015) suggests that arts organisations need governance processes that are capable of meeting their specific needs as well as fulfilling the compliance requirements of the regulatory environment in which they operate. Her research is focussed on arts organisations of varying types and sizes in Australia although some non-Australian organisations also "make the cut". Of particular interest to my research are her findings around board members: Rentscheler (2015, p.168) states that 'there has been little examination of arts board members, their behaviour and how it intersects with performance... Board members spoke about the need for better recruitment practices, stronger training and development programmes and improved evaluations of how the board was performing'. She also highlights that it is too simplistic to rely on one model of governance theory and suggests that adopting a multi-theoretical approach to arts governance would be more appropriate (Rentschler, 2015). Her framework for understanding arts governance can be summarised as the three P's framework where

people (board members) achieve organisational and board performance through their passion for the art itself (Rentschler, 2015).

The need to improve governance was recognised by Carty et al. (2017) who reviewed governance across the cultural sector. They understood that many organisations were aware that governance was an issue that needed to be addressed and were making efforts to develop good practice. Their research found that cultural sector boards focused on the following agenda items: fundraising, long term strategic objectives and advocacy for the organisation rather than programming and cultural reach (Carty et al., 2017). The latter two are seen as the responsibility of staff members and so the intellectual input of trustees around culture is often limited. Their research covered 54 cultural organisations in England including 9 museums (Carty et al., 2017).

Glow, Parris and Pyman (2019) examined 20 small-medium sized arts organisations in Australia and the experiences of arts managers with their boards. Their findings indicate that there is a mismatch 'between what arts managers need for their organisations and what current governance arrangements provide' (Glow et al., 2019, p.411). Whilst their emphasis is on arts managers rather than trustees they make a number of insightful observations about the governance of small and medium sized cultural organisations: so for example they observed that business skills especially accounting are prevalent on boards; that boards have limited arts sector knowledge so prioritise regulatory matters over strategy development especially where this is arts related; that boards have limited fundraising skills although this is an area of priority for smaller arts organisations; that some board members are only using board membership to increase their status or as a stepping-stone to other more prestigious boards; and that there is often a mismatch in expectations and the urgency placed by board members on the work of the senior management team particularly in servicing the board (Glow et al., 2019).

O'Brien et al. (2023) focused on a geographical understanding of the interconnectedness of arts boards and the dominance of London based trustees even within the regions. An earlier work found that arts organisations in England had a large number of board members from financial organisations such as the accounting Big

Four: Deloitte, PwC, EY, and KPMG (O'Brien et al., 2022). These individuals form the new 'contemporary elite' responsible for setting the strategic direction (including artistic programming) and confirming senior positions within cultural organisations (O'Brien et al., 2022).

What is clear from this research is that cultural sector governance is a complex ecosystem of relationships, power dynamics, policies and processes. The next section explores whether this differs in one specific category of the cultural sector: museums.

2.3.4 Museum governance

One of the most hotly debated perennial issues concerning museums is the question of how they should be governed and what the role of trustees ... should be in respect of both their day-to-day operations and the longer term. (Griffin, 1991)

Interest by researchers into museum boards reflects the growth in the number of museums from the 1970s onwards. Griffin (1991), for example, writes about the newly formed boards of the major UK museums and highlights some of the issues that will be highlighted in this research such as the need for trustees to concentrate on strategic rather than operational issues and the attention needed when recruiting trustees.

Other early writing on museum governance includes work by Malaro (1994) on US boards, Beiber (2003) on UK museum boards and Oster and Goetzmann (2003) on US museum governance. Later research by other authors such as Carty et al. (2017) and O'Brien et al. (2023) focus on the wider cultural sector (see the discussion in section 2.3.3) which includes museums.

Malaro (1994) wrote about what constitutes good non-profit governance in a series of essays providing advice for museum trustees on a broad range of topics such as collecting, deaccessioning and restitution, donor gifts and computerisation. Her work, in common with much of the industry literature provides advice on good governance practices rather than research on existing trustee boards and their practices.

Bieber (2003) explored board dynamics and how these might allow him to frame a model of museum governance. He explored 5 factors to help understand 'how power within the governance of the[se] museums [in his research] was located' (Bieber, 2003, p.180). These are: board composition; the value of subject-matter knowledge (normally residing in the director); the role of the chair; the relationship between the chair and director; and mutual trust and respect between the board and the staff. His conclusions were that the museum director played a greater role in governance than might be expected in similar boards from outside the sector (Bieber, 2003). This related to sector and particularly curatorial knowledge. He also found that the chair had an enhanced role monitoring the director which Bieber (2003) speculates is because of the delegated authority given by the board to the museum director on museum operations. Less than 25% of boards in his research felt they made all the governance decisions (Bieber, 2003).

Oster and Goetzmann (2003) conducted a review to investigate how governance structures influence performance.¹¹ Their data, covering the finances and operational characteristics of US museums, revealed that the ownership structures of museums, specifically whether they are public, university-affiliated, or non-profit organisations, significantly affect various factors, including income and visitor statistics (Oster & Goetzmann, 2003).

Australian academic, Ruth Rentschler (2004) identified several studies of museum governance research. These results are tabulated at the end of this section where the table has been extended to include the more recent research of other authors mentioned in this section. Rentschler also developed a single model of museum governance based on four board attributes (determining the mission; initiating strategy; board-executive officer relations and community relations) and two board roles (performance and conformance) relevant to museum boards: the four by two theory of non-profit museum governance (Rentschler, 2004).

¹¹ Governance here does not refer to corporate governance but is used as a means to identify ownership structures.

Despite this, later research indicated that there is no one theory that explains museum board governance and that a combination of Stakeholder, Stewardship and Resource Dependency Theories are relevant to museums (Rentschler, 2004; Rentschler et al., 2021). Indeed, Rentschler et al. (2021) critiqued the use of just one single theory of museum board governance and suggested integrating the three models to understand how organisations react and strategise particularly when they are in crisis.

Tzeng (2009) compared governance at six national museums in the UK and Taiwan. He identified five factors that need to be considered in museum governance: ownership, governing body, directorship, control and benefit. He developed a model of museum governance containing elements of both Stakeholder and Resource Dependency Models (Tzeng, 2009).

Abdullah's (2015) research looked at accounting information in the form of KPIs as a measure of governance effectiveness at the major museums and galleries in the UK. Her conclusions were that the KPIs used by the DCMS were too generic to be of much use to the museums and galleries internally or help them improve services to their visitors and communities (Abdullah, 2015).

Most research into governance of museums has tended to concentrate on codes of practice. For example, Goforth (2012, p.97), writing in the Small Museum Toolkit, suggested that 'while there are many models of governance from which to choose, no single model will definitely fit all organisations. Often, a combination of various models works best for a given museum'. She recommended that museums use an extensive set of byelaws or policy documents that are reviewed regularly to dictate how the board operates (Goforth, 2012). Anderson (2012, p.119) highlighted in the same publication the close relationship between the director and the board, and provided a list of board tasks:

'determining and clarifying the museum's mission; selecting, supporting and evaluating the director; ensuring effective strategic management; ensuring and managing sufficient resources; developing the museum's standing and role within the community; guaranteeing legal and ethical integrity; recruiting, orienting and evaluating board members'.

Research into small and medium sized museums in British Columbia conveyed some of the governance challenges found in these institutions: a lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities between the board and management often leading to unreasonable expectations on senior managers; a lack of museum expertise; and a lack of diversity which created issues when looking at contemporary topics such as decolonising museum collections (Willard & Bell, 2021).



2: Figure showing governance challenges in British Columbia's small to medium non-profit museums from Willard and Bell (2021)

According to Ryder (2002) museum governance has been converging with commercial governance. Feber (2016) interviewed for Museums + Heritage recognised that the 'cultural sector operates in a more complicated social, legislative, financial and regulatory framework than it did 20 years ago'. He suggested that boards need to pay attention to their cultural balance sheet as well as their financial resilience; that they should balance their planning and reactions to changes in the operating environment; that there should be a focus on the relationship between the board and the senior management team (he highlighted that the CEO/Director and chair need a good quality relationship) and that boards should use traditional planning tools such as

SWOT and PESTLE to understand how the organisation should react to the external environment (Feber, 2016). This cultural balance has also been found in Genoways and Ireland (2003) who suggested that members of museum boards must have two foci: compliance and the museum's mission.

A report on the effectiveness of governance arrangements in the arts, culture and heritage sector in New Zealand (NZ Controller and Auditor General, 2015) evaluated governance based on five factors: strategic direction; leadership and culture; monitoring and review; risk management and internal controls. The findings of the report established the following: boards need to have a good mix of skills and experience which includes sector knowledge; boards need to beware of becoming too involved in operational matters since this limits their ability to question management's performance; and boards need to be strong advocates for their organisations and engage with key stakeholders although many did not fulfil this role well.

Here in the UK the Museums Association's 1998 definition of a museum suggests that governance (based on the implied premise of public trust) has been important for museums for a long period. Indeed, museum accreditation, launched in 1988, assumes that museums must have 'transparent and accountable governance' (Arts Council England, 2018). The revised Museum Accreditation scheme, dated November 2018, places greater emphasis on governance with the first standard requirement being 'appropriate governance and management' (Arts Council England, 2019).

The Association of Independent Museums provides a number of success guides for the independent museum sector including one which relates to museum governance. The emphasis is very much on the legislative framework within which museums and their trustees operate. Museum boards should include not only individuals with specialist knowledge but also people who care about the museum and its goals (Lesirge & Barnard, 2020).

More discussion about the particular characteristics of the trustees of both charitable and museum boards is found in section 2.4.

Author/Year	Dimensions	Analytical Approach	Major Findings
Abdullah 2015	KPIs for Board performance measurement	Case studies and survey	UK Government KPIs are not useful for measurement of Board and organisation effectiveness
Anderson 2012	Museum board and Director relationship	Conceptual	Close relationship; list of board tasks
Ames 1985	Museum trustees	Conceptual	The effect of composition, operation and value of trustees on museum performance; the difficulty of finding appropriate trustees
Baldwin and Ackerson 2006	Museum governance and leadership	Conceptual	21st century museums leadership and governance
Bieber 2003	Museum Board - Executive officer relationships, roles and power	Case studies and survey	There is tension between board members and decision making
Carty et al.	Cultural Sector Governance includes 9 museums	Structured interviews and questionnaires to wider demographic	Cultural sector boards focus on financial sustainability, long term objectives and advocacy
Dickenson 1991	Museum Boards and Management	Conceptual	Conflict between trustees and director is of critical concern
Feber 2016	Museum Boards in complex environment	Conceptual	Boards should pay attention to their cultural balance sheet
Genoways and Ireland 2003	Museum Board focus	Conceptual	Boards should have two foci: compliance and museum's mission
Goforth 2012	Museum governance	Conceptual	Many models of governance; recommends use of byelaws to dictate how board operates
Griffin 1987	Museum governance	Conceptual	Summary of different views about the establishment of organisational structure and practices within museums
Griffin 1991	Museum governance	Conceptual	The roles and relationships of and between governments, trustees and managers in the management of museums
Griffin 2002	Museum governance	Case studies and survey	Museum trustee-government tensions
Griffin and Abraham 1999	Museum governance	Case studies and survey	Successful organisational reform and issues pertaining to government-driven reform in museums
Griffin and Abraham 2000	Museum governance	Conceptual	Board and leadership in museums
Lindsay 1965	Director's perception of museum governance	Conceptual	Autobiographical account of time as director of National Gallery of Victoria
Missingham 1973	Director's perception of museum governance	Conceptual	Autobiographical account of time as director of Art Gallery of NSW
Malaro 1994	Museum governance	Conceptual	Legal and ethical charters for museum sustainability
O'Brien et al 2022	Cultural Sector Governance includes some museums	Data analysis	Cultural sector boards are dominated by new 'cultural elite' from big financial institutions.
O'Brien et al 2023	Cultural Sector Governance includes some museums	Data analysis	Geographical analysis of cultural sector boards
Oster and Goetzmann 2003	Museum governance and performance	Data analysis	Governance type impacted key variables such as income and visitor statistics

2.3 | QUESTION 2: WHAT IS GOVERNANCE AND HOW ARE SMALL MUSEUMS GOVERNED?

Pybus 2002	Museum governance	Conceptual	The difficulty of finding appropriate trustees
Rentschler 2002	Museum governance	Survey of museum directors in Australia and New Zealand	Director perception of trustees (among other indicators)
Rentschler 2004	Museum governance	Literature review	Four by two model of non-profit museum governance
Rentschler et al. 2021	Museum governance	Longitudinal case study	No single model for museum governance
Ryder 2002	Museum governance	Conceptual	Museum Governance converging with commercial governance
Shipley and Kovacs 2008	Heritage sector governance	Literature review of international charters	Model of good governance which is evaluated against reports from national heritage organisations.
Tzeng 2009	Museum governance	Case studies of six national museums in UK and Taiwan	Interactive model of museum governance with five factors: ownership, governing body, directorship, control and benefit
Ullberg 1984	Museum boards	Conceptual	Restructuring museum boards to make them work better
Willard and Bell 2021	Museum governance	Questionnaires and Interviews	Governance challenges for small and medium sized museums in British Columbia
Wood and Rentschler 2003	Museum governance	Survey	Need to broaden concept of governance to include ethics
Wood and Rentschler 2003	Arts governance	Conceptual	Need for trustees to fulfil mission, make decisions, lead and liaise with community

3: Table showing the main non-profit museum governance literature based on Rentschler (2004) and Tzeng (2009)

2.3.5 Comparisons with governance in similar non-profit sectors

Since there is very little literature which relates to the specific governance of museums it is useful to look to other parts of the non-profit sector in addition to the Cultural Sector (as discussed in Section 2.3.3) to assess whether there are any lessons to be learnt about governance and governance structures from there. Cornforth's edited books contain several examples from other sectors: in this section I examine key examples that relate to the recommendations provided in chapter 6.

In common with local authorities divesting themselves of their museums we have also seen the movement of local authority housing stock into housing trusts since the 1980s. Housing associations are independent bodies run by boards and accountable to

their regulator, the Housing Corporation (Robinson & Shaw, 2003). According to Mullins (2014) housing associations have seen an evolutionary change since the 1990s with consolidation in the sector leading to mergers between smaller associations to form single large organisations or the formation of group structures with parent and subsidiary organisations. Discussions with a housing association trustee indicate that this consolidation is as a result of increasing compliance and regulatory pressures which are difficult for smaller housing associations to meet (Hatfield, 2025). Two quite different governance structures have evolved. The former has been aligned with a growth in single unitary boards which are increasingly professional and have an emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness. There is no doubt that the boards of these larger associations are more remote from their communities and tend not to have local representation, but they are seen as the most efficient. The alternative governance structures found in housing associations are group boards with subsidiary boards answering to them. These have been seen as inefficient and costly; Mullins (2014) reports in one case that there was a saving of £500,000 in board member remuneration and the costs of running subsidiary boards when the association moved to a single board and the subsidiary boards disappeared. The experience of housing associations shows that it is possible to merge several organisations for governance purposes into a single association with a streamlined and more effective board. Nevertheless, the housing association governance experience has not been without its difficulties: for example, traditional social housing values and the increasing pressure to adopt more business-like practices are one area of governance tension (Brown, 2013).

The last decade has also seen considerable changes in library services here in the UK: library services are provided by non-profit trusts, various kinds of social enterprises, volunteers, partnerships and local authorities. A wide variety of governance models are, therefore, seen across library services in the UK. Key challenges include funding constraints, resource limitations, and the need to balance public service values with market-driven pressures. Both organisation structures and the challenges faced by the library sector are very similar to those found in the independent museum sector.

There is one governance model of interest here: a co-governance model. This involves both local councils and volunteers coming together to manage library services. Upper

Norwood Library Trust, an independent charity, was formed in 2012 by local residents (Upper Norwood Library Hub, n.d.; Charity Commission for England and Wales, n.d.). When the Upper Norwood Library faced closure due to council budget cuts a co-governance model was introduced, with the Upper Norwood Library Trust managing the library alongside Croydon and Lambeth councils (Upper Norwood Library Hub, n.d.). The councils still provide some funding although this is limited but the trust also finds external funding from numerous bodies including the National Lottery and various foundations (for example, the Walcot Foundation, the Charles Hayward Foundation, and the B&Q Foundation) (Upper Norwood Library Hub, n.d.; Charity Commission for England and Wales, n.d.). The Trust not only provides library services, but it also provides access to other art and cultural community projects and organisations (Upper Norwood Library Hub, n.d.). The Upper Norwood Library Trust is a good example of the effectiveness of co-governance models in the public library sector.

Streamlining boards across several organisations or creating co-governance models may be relevant to resolving some of the issues around museum governance which will be discussed both in my analysis of the results and my recommendations.

2.4 QUESTION 3: WHO ARE TRUSTEES? WHAT ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOURS AND SKILLS DO MUSEUM TRUSTEES HAVE? HOW DO BOARDS RUN?

2.4.1 Introduction: volunteering as a trustee

NCVO estimate that there are 580,000 trustees in total with almost 45% of these sitting on more than one board (NCVO, n.d.). According to Government research in 2016/17 this meant that there were over 950,000 trustee positions filled in registered charities in England and Wales (Green, 2016).

The NCVO numbers suggest the numbers of volunteers performing a trustee role are significant, but they are often overlooked both from an academic and a sector perspective. The reasons for this are unclear but perhaps it is because they do not carry out high profile front-line roles nor do they normally come under the control of the volunteer manager. Conceivably, Clifford's analysis (2021, p.327) 'that volunteering as a trustee is ... a "rare event" in the context of the total population' is a deciding factor in the lack of emphasis on the volunteer trustee in the literature. Discussions with Matt Hick of the Heritage Volunteering Group (HVG) in 2022, for example, acknowledge that trustees as a group are neglected within HVG's activities with museums and other heritage organisations in the UK (Hick, 2022). The influence of volunteer trustees, however, is substantial since they are the group that take responsibility to set the vision, mission and strategy for the organisation and make operational and financial decisions about the organisation's activities (NCVO, n.d.).

Recruitment of trustees onto charity boards is in crisis with 74% of charities in 2017 finding it difficult to recruit trustees (Getting on Board, 2017). Research by NCVO in 2024 found that 79% of charities had at least one vacant board position (NCVO, 2024). As many as 8% of charities had four vacancies on their board with over a third having at least one vacant trustee position for over a year (NCVO, 2024).

2.4 | QUESTION 3: WHO ARE TRUSTEES? WHAT ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOURS AND SKILLS DO MUSEUM TRUSTEES HAVE? HOW DO BOARDS RUN?

So why do people volunteer as a trustee and what might be done to encourage more people to become a trustee? Metcalf (2012) states there is ‘little research evidence on what motivates people to volunteer as charity trustees’. However, in August 2001 the Charity Commission, using the NOP market research group, commissioned a survey of trustee recruitment, selection and induction practices. The survey questionnaire included a question: What do people get from being a trustee? Responses included:

“Personal satisfaction that they have done something worthwhile”.

“The pleasure of being associated with a business-like and valuable charity”.

“There is some satisfaction in helping a charity and getting involved in the third world and donating time and perhaps money or resources to the charity” (Charity Commission, 2002, p.27).

Whilst I recognise this research is dated, similar responses are to be found in the research done by Yonder in 2021 for the Charity Commission where, for example, sharing skills and experience and giving something back were cited as reasons for being a trustee (Yonder, 2021). In other research from X/Twitter, under the hashtag #whyimatrustee, there were lots of diverse reasons for becoming a trustee, but many cited the opportunity to put their skills and experience to use and to make a difference (Isaac, 2015). Research by Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales (ICAEW) in 2019 found the following benefits to being a trustee: ‘96% say they’ve learnt new skills, 22% got a promotion as a direct result, and 84% said it made them happier’ (Wilson, 2019). There is little evidence that payment is a motivator to becoming a non-profit trustee and it is only recommended in exceptional circumstances (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2025). For a further discussion see Section 2.4.3.2.

2.4.2 Academic research into board volunteering and trusteeship

Analysis of McCurley’s bibliography of board literature in Widmer (1985) finds only nine items relating to the membership of boards of which only one article relates directly to what motivates board volunteers. Obviously, this bibliography is 40 years

old, but my research suggests that there is still a paucity of research into board volunteering.

According to Walton et al. (2017) there is a lack of evidence that programmatic volunteering as defined by Ellis and board volunteering draw upon the same motivational bases¹². Walton et al. (2017) additionally found that board volunteers are not any more likely to volunteer programmatically than non-board volunteers.

Many volunteers are service users, and this is also a characteristic of trustees. Lee, et al. (2017) found that just under 50% of trustees are also users of the services provided by their charities. This is consistent with the findings of Holmes (2003) and Orr (2006) where many museum and heritage volunteers were found to be involved in their organisations as a form of leisure activity.

Rochester (2003) found that smaller charitable organisations were often staffed by volunteers who also sat on the board. Other research has found that 80% of charities have trustees, who play both a governance and an executive role (Lee et al., 2017). They further suggest that a focus on governance alone does not address the reality of charity involvement for most trustees who spend as much if not more of their time on operational or management matters. Certainly, as Shirley Otto (2003) informed her readers, the central focus of the Cadbury report on a separation of duties between operational management and governance as good practice is difficult to put into practice in smaller organisations. This is especially true where the board is voluntary, has limited time and resources, and is expected to mentor paid senior staff as well as to audit and control them (Otto, 2003).

Miller-Stevens and Ward (2018) explored why individuals take on leadership roles in non-profit organisations. They maintain that, whilst board members may not be leaders in a traditional sense, board members share many commonalities with the motivation to take on traditional leadership roles within the sector: for example, service, control, self-recognition, and a strong commitment to the organisation's goals

¹² Programmatic volunteering refers to formal volunteering helping organisations or individuals rather than close relatives.

2.4 | QUESTION 3: WHO ARE TRUSTEES? WHAT ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOURS AND SKILLS DO MUSEUM TRUSTEES HAVE? HOW DO BOARDS RUN?

and success. Other reasons encouraging board membership include time, sharing expertise and professional skills, personal development, recognition, and socialness. Miller-Stevens and Ward (2018) found that reasons behind continuing service on a non-profit board moved away from individual self-interest towards commitment to the organisation and its mission.

In Metcalf's research there was a sense that some individuals became involved for 'the title of trustee or the status' or were 'motivated by personal agendas or to enhance their curriculum vitae' (Metcalf, 2012, p.128). Research by Sutherland (2022) also suggested that some trustees had become trustees to enhance their social prestige or improve their CV. One of her research participants stated that the trustees in her organisation were 'unqualified to be in their roles, stating that "they don't listen", are only "interested in status" and don't care about the impact on people' (Sutherland, 2022, p.159). For Miller (2018) not only does he see people serving on museum boards for reasons of status, but he also gives examples of individuals using their trustee position for personal gain. He cites an example of a few money managers who thought a museum trusteeship would give them access to potential clients (Miller, 2018)!

Lee, et al. (2017, p.7) observed that 'trustees are drawn from a narrow cross section of the communities that they serve'. The evidence found that the majority of trustees are white, male, over 60, mostly retired, with higher average household income than national averages and with higher education or professional qualifications (Lee et al., 2017). These findings are supported by the other surveys into trustees and trusteeship, see for example, Saxton (2016) and Langford and Anderson (2022). The perception is, even for the museum sector, that: "... trustees are older, wealthier people who are in a privileged position & able to afford more free time" (Powell, 2020).



General characteristics of trustees		
Gender	64% Male	36% Female
Ethnicity	92% white (male and female combined)	
Average age	60-62 years	
Employment	51% retired	44% Full-/Part-time
Education	30% Postgraduate	60% Professional qualification
Household income	75% are above the national median	
Average no. of trusteeships held	Each trustee is on 1.35 boards on average	

4: Summary of general characteristics of trustees (Lee et al., 2017)

To understand the actual functions of boards, it is essential to examine three of their key characteristics: the composition of the board, its areas of focus, and the dynamics within the board (Chambers et al., 2013). The following three sub-sections analyse the research done on each of these areas.

2.4.3 Board makeup: The structure and composition of a board

Whilst charity law says very little about the structure and composition of a board, there have been a number of guidance documents produced in recent years to encourage more representative and higher performing boards. Museum boards are sparsely represented in the literature here and, as is evidenced by my research, have been slow to adopt this advice (see section 2.5.1 for a discussion on EDI and boards, and the results in Chapter 4, section 4.4 for my findings).

2.4.3.1 Legal structures, Unitary Boards, and Two-tier boards

Charities here in the UK can adopt a number of legal structures: unincorporated association, charitable trust, charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) and company limited by guarantee. Each structure has a number of implications for how the trustees

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are organised and who they are responsible too. The table on the following page summarises this information.

In the private sector, unitary boards are the de facto standard here in the UK. This means there is one board comprising both executive directors (the CEO, the CFO, the CTO etc.) and non-executive directors (Tricker, 2019). Unitary boards monitor both operational performance and set strategic direction (Tricker, 2019). They operate, therefore under a principle of collective responsibility where all board members (executive and non-executive) are responsible for the running of the company. Within the unitary board model there is some question around the role of the non-executive director: the non-executive director has both a monitoring and a strategising role (Tricker, 2019). In many smaller companies, non-executive directors also fill skills/knowledge gaps and perform a mentoring role (Tricker, 2019).

Whilst there is pressure on large charities to move to a unitary board model, most charities in the UK adopt a two-tier structure where the trustee board manages the operational board. The latter may not be formalised in the smallest of organisations but consists of the senior management team. This separates those responsible for supervision from those responsible for operations.

For larger charities there is an argument that the unitary model may be more appropriate since it is the board not the senior management team who are responsible for the organisation's operational performance (Anthony, 2017). A unitary model would make some of the senior management team board members and hold them as well as other trustees responsible for monitoring the charity and producing its strategy. There are issues with this proposal: non-executive directors in the private sector are paid and it is proposed that trustees on larger charity boards, which have adopted the unitary model, could also be paid to at least partially compensate for the risks they carry as directors (Mason, 2017).

Structure	Governed by	Responsible to	Implications	Notes
Unincorporated association	Trustees	Members	Trustees are liable for any debts or obligations not the organisation	Unincorporated so organisation has no separate legal personality
Charitable Trust	Trustees	Charity Commission	Trustees are liable for any debts or obligations not the organisation	Unincorporated so organisation has no separate legal personality
Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)	Trustees	Members and Charity Commission	Debts or obligations are responsibility of the organisation. Trustees are not liable	Incorporated so the organisation has separate legal identity. Two types of model: Association are membership organisations and hold elections; Foundation CIOs are run by a small group of trustees.
Company limited by guarantee	Board members who are also trustees under Charity Law	Members, Charity Commission and Companies House	Debts or obligations are responsibility of the organisation. Trustees are not liable BUT in law directors of the company so have duties and legal obligations of a director.	Registered with Companies House as well as Charity Commission so dual reporting requirements apply. No shareholders so focus is on sustainability and compliance. Most common form of charity.

5: Table showing legal structures and the implications for trustees and directors adapted from the Charity Commission (2014)

2.4.3.2 Payment of Trustees

The issue of payment has received some coverage in the charity press. The general understanding is that charity trustees are volunteers and should not be paid for their services as a trustee. They may be reimbursed their expenses and for some services above and beyond normal trustee duties such as specialist building or administrative works (Charity Commission, n.d.). This can be varied and indeed some of the charities that feature in haysmacintyre/Charity Finance 100 Index do pay trustees having obtained permission from the Charity Commission to do so (Weakley, 2017).

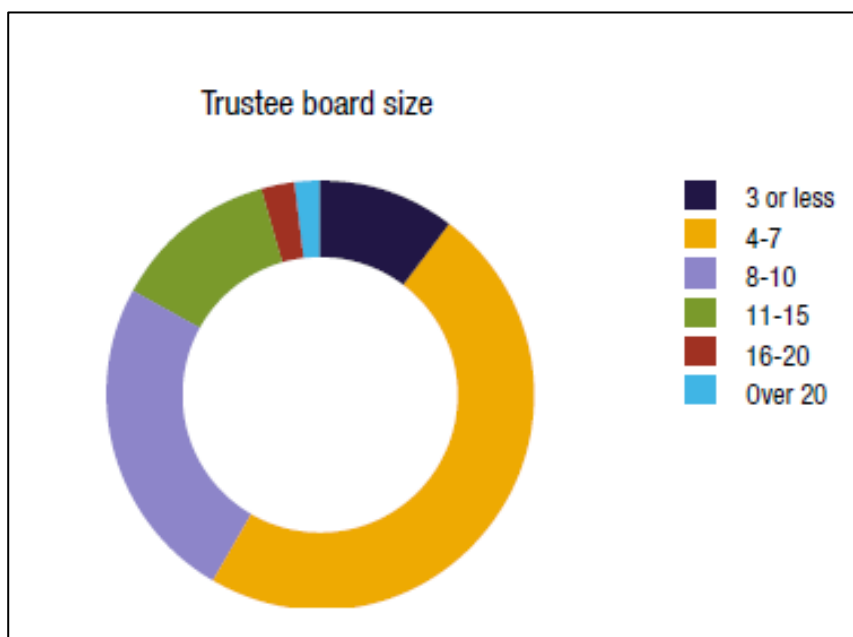
The Charity Commission have it within their power to authorise payments to trustees. Recent research conducted by Hudson and Ashworth (2012) revealed that charities that provide compensation to their board members see increased attendance at board meetings and enhanced overall governance performance.

The Hodgson review in 2012 recommended that larger charities with an income over £1m could pay their trustees providing this is clearly signposted in their accounts and annual returns to the Charity Commission. But Hodgson also recognised that this is ‘a hugely divisive issue in the charity sector’ and that many of the public believe that trustees should volunteer their services (Ramrayka, 2012). There have been suggestions that paying trustees could be a method to attract more trustees from diverse backgrounds, but the idea is controversial (Kay, 2019) and there is little evidence that paying trustees encourages board diversity, higher levels of engagement or specialist skills (Ramrayka, 2012). A survey in the late 1990s by Wise (2011) suggested that for many individuals, who are working, payment would be an incentive to becoming a trustee and for existing trustees would encourage greater levels of engagement. Additionally, he quotes research done into studying paid charity shop workers which shows that they increase shop takings and are more reliable (Wise, 2011). He argues that this suggests there may be a positive impact from paying trustees too despite continued advice from the Charity Commission that trusteeship should be voluntary wherever possible.

However, Hudson and Ashworth (2012) found that no arts organisations (which includes heritage organisations and museums) pay their board members. This is still true today.

2.4.3.3 Board size

According to Civic Society the ‘average size of a charitable trustee board in the UK was 5.9 trustees’ (Lee et al., 2017, p.20). In smaller charities board sizes are generally smaller with between 3 and 5 trustees whilst larger charities had boards of between 6 and 10 members (Lee et al., 2017, p.20).



6: *Trustee Board Size from Lee et al. (2017)*

I was surprised to learn that ‘there are some 1,700 charities with more than 20 trustees on their boards with 190 having over 50 trustees on their board’ (Lee et al., 2017, p.20). Gambling and Jones (1996) found one charity with 170 trustees on the board in their research! The Charity Governance Code recommends that ‘a board of at least five but no more than twelve trustees is typically considered good practice’ (Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d., p.19). NCVO recognises this advice but also states:

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‘The trustee board should be the right size to govern effectively... There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ size of board... A board should be large enough to ensure that there are enough people with the range of skills needed to carry out the board’s work. But also small enough to ensure that trustees can work together as a team with each fully participating in decision-making’ (NCVO, n.d.).

The Charity Commission recommend that a board is quorate with 1/3 of its trustees plus one (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2024). This would mean that small boards should have a minimum of 3 members.

Hudson and Ashworth (2012) found that average board size could be correlated to organisation type and that arts and culture organisations tended to have larger boards averaging seventeen members although their research concentrated on the largest charities in the UK.

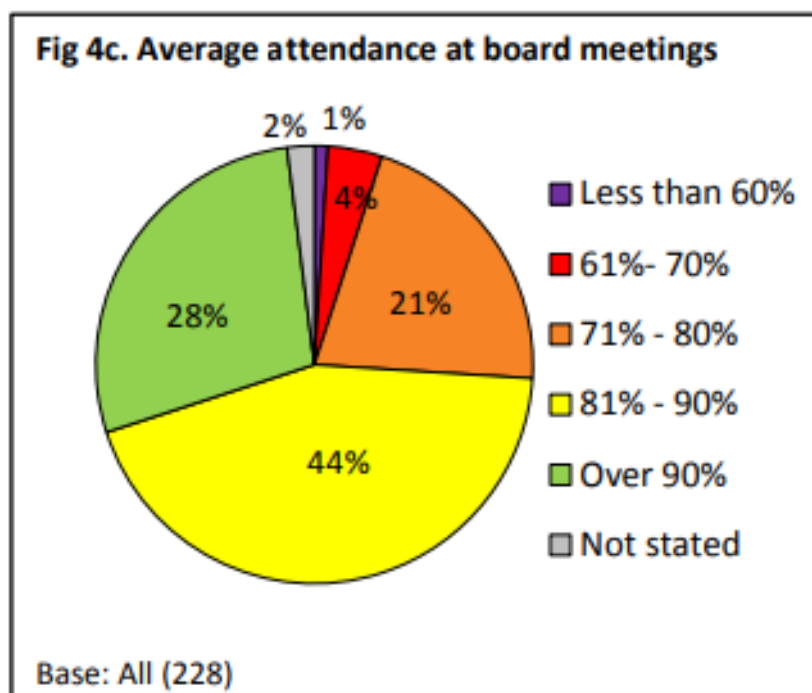
Academics such as Cornforth (2003a) have found that many larger boards wish to reduce their size possibly to ensure more effective governance and allow all board members to make more successful contributions to discussions.

2.4.3.4 Meeting frequency, length and attendance

Board meetings also vary in frequency. The Charity Commission recommend at a minimum one trustee meeting is held every six months (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2024). Guidelines from organisations like Charity Connect suggest that 3 to 4 meetings a year are optimal although the Charity Governance Code Steering Group recommends for both large and small charities that ‘the board meets as often as it needs to be effective’ (Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d.).

An analysis of the responses to a question asked on Charity Connect showed that the majority of meetings were quarterly (7 of 14 responses) with an average length of 2.8 hours (Masters, 2020).

Hudson and Ashworth (2012) found participants in their research achieved on average around 85% attendance at board meetings. Many charities now record and issue board attendance statistics in their annual statements.



7: Attendance at board meetings (Hudson & Ashworth, 2012)

Many charities also organise an away day each year to discuss more strategic matters. Indeed, AIM recommends that ‘every Board of Trustees should have one away day per year’ and provide practical guidance on holding successful away days for boards of museums and heritage organisations (McGowan, 2018, p.11). Pilotlight (2023), which helps charities to be more effective, promotes away days as one method to encourage board engagement.

2.4.3.5 Length of service and turnover of trustees

Whilst many charities (47%) do not encourage a fixed term of office, it is generally felt that good practice is to promote a fixed term of office for trustees. Three years is the most common term (46%) with 2 or 3 consecutive terms generally allowed, but some organisations only allow their trustees to sit for a single term and terms vary widely in length from one year to six (Lee et al., 2017). Research by nfpSynergy in 2016, for example, found that ‘50% of our sample had been a trustee for 3 years or less of the organisation where they are currently a trustee, while 11% had been a trustee for more than a decade’ (Saxton, 2016).

Hudson and Ashworth (2012) reported that a fifth of the charities they surveyed had unlimited terms of office. This is clearly an issue for diversity and recommendations (see for example, Hudson and Ashworth, 2012) are that boards regularly refresh their membership and retire individuals no longer adding value. Additionally, fixed terms provide a framework that allows unbiased and unemotional discussions about whether a trustee should continue or not. Many boards, therefore, encourage a turnover of trustees to strengthen membership of their boards (Hudson & Ashworth, 2012).

Controversially, Miller (2018) suggests that many of the best trustees are those who have served the longest. He gives no compelling reasoning for this but implies that those board members will have the most knowledge.

2.4.3.6 Time spent on trustee’s role

Lee, et al. (2018) observed that, on average, trustees dedicate approximately 4.88 hours per week on their trustee duties. They may also spend time on operational activities for their charity.

For some roles such as that of treasurer the line between operational and trustee duties is blurred. Indeed, the Honorary Treasurers Handbook states that many treasurers of

smaller charities act in a 'role akin to 'volunteer accountant' both preparing and presenting budgets, management accounts and financial statements (Sayer et al., 2017). Often their role is also operational: keeping accounting records and maintaining financial controls and monitoring financial systems. It is recognised by the Charity Commission that finance work in these charities is often taken on by 'one or more confident individuals' (Yonder, 2021).

2.4.4 Board focus: Trustee responsibilities¹³

In 2015 the UK government ran a campaign to get every single trustee to read their publication 'The Essential Trustee' (Green, 2016). This lays out the key roles and responsibilities for any charity trustee. About 20% of trustees (based on NCVO numbers) downloaded the publication in 2016.

Trustees are the people in control of the charity. Trustees are therefore legally responsible for the charity, its assets, its actions and decisions. Board members have both individual and collective accountability over the charity so trustees should take decisions together. Individual trustees should not take strategic decisions alone so that they operate responsibly and within the law.

Generally, there is supposed to be a line between governing and managing so except in the very smallest charities a trustee should not get involved with operational or day-to-day activities. If they do it is very important to differentiate between their operational roles and their trustee roles to ensure the separation of operational and governance functions.

The Essential Trustee lays out six main duties for any trustee (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2017). These are summarised in the Essential Trustee Jigsaw (see the following exhibit).

¹³ See Section 4.5 for results and a discussion on board focus based on my interviews.



8: The Essential Trustee Jigsaw (Green, 2016)

Trustees who are also directors have additional responsibilities under company law: the Companies Act (2006) lays out clearly the 7 main duties of a director (Evan, 2023).

These are that a director must:

- act within their powers under the company's constitution
- promote the success of the company
- exercise independent judgement
- exercise reasonable skill, care and diligence in their role
- Abide by three legal duties related to the need for directors to avoid or manage conflicts of interest which may affect their objectivity
 - Duty to avoid conflicts of interests
 - Duty not to accept benefits from third parties
 - Duty to declare any interest in a proposed or existing transaction

Miller (2018) highlights that many of the issues he had with trustees were when they strayed from their governance role into operational matters.

2.4.5 Board dynamics: Trustee working relationships¹⁴

Bieber (2003, p.168) points out that both literature from the charity sector and museum sector ‘emphasises the need for mutual respect’ in the chair/CEO relationship. Commonly studies on the chair/chief executive relationship are cross-sectional surveys which examine the chair/chief executive relationship at a fixed point in time. Iecovich and Bar-Mor (2007), for example, found that the best predictors of the dynamic between chair and chief executive was the time spent by the chair working in the organisation. Chairs that spent the most time with the organisation were dominant in the relationship.

Research on the chair/chief executive relationship by Cornforth and MacMillan (2016) highlights how a chair/chief executive relationship in a small charity can evolve over time. This challenges the more commonly held view that the chair/chief executive relationship is fixed and will be dominated by one of the two parties. Cornforth and Macmillan’s research found that for the chair/chief executive ‘the negotiation of the relationship is influenced by the relative differences in experience, skill, the extent to which each had established a position of authority in the organization, and the will, skill and time necessary to use these power sources’ (Cornforth & MacMillan, 2016, p.954). Tricker (2019, p.376) stipulates that the relationship is ‘one of the most crucial, most sensitive and most subtle relationships in the company’.

Board relationships are all about ‘the personalities and attitudes of the board members and their ways of interacting with each other’ (Kakabadse et al., 2006, p.152). Certainly, Cornforth and MacMillan (2016) observed that the atmosphere in the boardroom is critical for boardroom participation and enhanced board effectiveness. Kakabadse et al. (2006) report that much of this is down to having an effective chair who creates the right environment for all board members to have free discussions. A healthy board will allow for disagreement without discussions becoming abusive or disruptive.

¹⁴ See Section 4.6 for the results and Section 5.2.2 for a discussion on board dynamics based on my interviews.

Glaeser (2007) found that many boards gave too much authority to elite professional staff and allowed them to take control of processes such as strategic planning, policy development and board member recruitment. This is echoed by Bieber (2003) who stipulated that museum boards were often overruled by CEOs with professional curatorial expertise. In contrast Sutherland (2022) found that small museum boards often ignored curatorial recommendations and preferred decisions based on financial considerations instead.

In recent years the problem of bullying in charities has been recognised in research done by ACEVO (Fitzpatrick & Thorne, 2019). This research described instances of bullying of the chief executive by the chair or other trustees and vice versa. Appallingly, 17% of respondents to In Plain Sight said that trustees and chairs were seen as bullying. More generally ACEVO's research placed the responsibility for bullying with the board. Boards need to model the behaviours they expect within an organisation and by neglecting to deal with bullying within the boardroom can allow it to extend into the main workplace (Fitzpatrick & Thorne, 2019).

2.5 QUESTION 4: WHAT SHOULD MUSEUM BOARDS LOOK LIKE?

The focus thus far has been on how charity and museum boards are organised. This next section looks at how boards should be constituted and is, therefore, more prescriptive in orientation. In examining the literature around Question 3, it became clear that three topics around how boards should run needed to be addressed. This section therefore explores: equality, diversity and inclusion, trustee recruitment, retention and retirement, and trustee training and support. The corresponding results from my research can be found in Section 4.7 and the discussion in Section 5.2.2.

2.5.1 Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

The specialist charity Ecclesiastical carried out research in 2021 that found that 66% of charities were concerned about a lack of diversity on their boards (up from 35% in 2020 and 6% in 2019) (Getting on Board, 2021). Diversity is also a focus for HVG although this is for the volunteer population more generally; their research in 2019 found that only 5% of volunteers came from an ethnic minority background (compared with 13% of the population) and only 5% have a disability (compared with 17% of the population) (Heritage Volunteering Group, 2019). The charity ‘Getting on Board’ helped charities recruit more diverse boards especially from groups such as women, people of colour, young people, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities and young people. The charity undertook research that found that ‘59% of charities... [were] not representative of their community and service users’ and that ‘using existing networks to source new board members can be damaging as it means boards hire in their own image and it’s harder to challenge constructively when close associates, friends or even family members are fellow trustees’ (Getting on Board, 2017, p.2).

The Taken on Trust report noted that diversity was a big issue in the charitable sector with the majority of trustees being white British, older and with above average income

and education (Lee et al., 2017). The concern is that ‘given the demographic characteristics of charity trustees ... there is a danger that charity trustee boards might become myopic in their views and in their decision-making’ (Lee et al., 2017, p.5). A general recommendation of the report was that more work needs to be done by charity boards to promote greater diversity in their recruitment practices and for larger charities (with annual income in excess of £500k) to provide a report on board diversity within their accounts (Lee et al., 2017, p.7).

This is also evident from the Charity Commission and Yonder research in 2021.



9: Research from the Charity Commission and Yonder. Response to question: In the past, when you have been unsure about how to go about something in your role, how often have you used any of the following sources to seek help or guidance? (Yonder, 2021)

Across the whole sector including in museums there is consensus that ‘good governance... should be rooted in a diversity of people... more representative of our communities’ (Heal, 2021) .

There is a growing consensus that a fundamental shift is necessary to achieve diversity targets within the sector, with many believing that this transformation must start at the leadership level. Recent research indicates that employees in the Creative Industries are twice as likely to come from privileged backgrounds, and they tend to be predominantly male, able-bodied, and white (Wreyford et al., 2021). Surprisingly ‘if the UK’s Creative Industries were as socio economically diverse as the rest of the

economy, there would be 250,000 more working-class people employed in the sector’ (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2021).

Trustee boards of cultural organisations including museums reflect this lack of diversity and it is recognised that for EDI initiatives to be successful there must be diversity at board level too (Wreyford et al., 2021). There is a suggestion that targets such as those set by the FTSE 250 on gender equality enable cultural change and hold boards to account (Vinnicombe et al., 2020). Joanna Abeyie from Blue Moon, an organisation that helps businesses recruit a diverse workforce, agrees that EDI must work from the Board downwards:

‘But every board I’ve looked at. I’ve never seen someone wearing a hijab on a board, I very rarely see a south-east Asian woman, I never see a dark-skinned Black woman. So ... it’s important that we look at inequities within the [board] group’ (Wreyford et al., 2021, p.157).

There is a recognition that the key to diversity is good recruitment practices since many boards are still recruiting in their own likeness (for example, they recruit people of a similar age, gender, ethnicity, education level and experience) to the existing board (Cotterill, 2020a).

Aside from the moral case for diversity, there is arguably a business case too. Business research has focussed on whether diversity in the workplace (not charities but more generally) leads to better business performance i.e. more creativity, better performance both for work groups and the organisation in general, and competitive advantage. The results from academic research have been inconclusive although the business press is more unequivocal in the benefits especially at board level (van Dijk et al., 2012; Hewlett et al., 2013; Rudowski, 2018).



10: Figure showing that companies with more diverse leadership teams report higher innovation revenue (World Economic Forum, 2019)

Research also shows that, for charities, funders are increasingly interested in board makeup as well. Here in the UK, the House of Lords Select Committee Report on charities observed that, ‘trustee diversity is important, as boards with a range of skills, experiences, ages and backgrounds are likely to lead to better governance’ (Select Committee on Charities, 2017, p.28). This is reflected in the UK Corporate Governance Code 2018, which emphasises diversity too: ‘a company’s culture should promote integrity and openness, value diversity and be responsive to the views of shareholders and wider stakeholders’ and suggests that appointments to the board should ‘promote diversity of gender, social and ethnic backgrounds, cognitive and personal strengths’ (Financial Reporting Council, 2018, p.7). Boards should, under the code, evaluate on an annual basis their composition and diversity and include in their annual reports their policy on diversity and inclusion (Financial Reporting Council, 2018).

Blue Moon’s work suggests that diversity must work from the board downwards and that organisations need to reflect the communities they serve. Reach Volunteering (n.d.) also suggest ‘a lack of knowledge about good practice and behavioural and emotional barriers’ act as a barrier to good recruitment practices and diversity. With new generations of BAME and LGBTQIA+ staff entering heritage organisations their expectations are that boards will be reflective of both their staff and communities.

Only by auditing the board for diversity and targeting underrepresented groups can boards truly become more representative. In the end compelling organisations to recruit for diversity may have to be forced by funders and regulators and diversity recruitment itself may have to be funded somehow from outside of the organisation.

An interesting perspective was the subject of some discussion at the ‘Festival of Trusteeship’ in 2023. Here a panel discussing diversity highlighted not only the difficulties faced by boards who recruit in their own likeness but also how difficult it can be for prospective trustees who do not share common characteristics and experiences with those existing board members (Getting on Board, 2023). It was clear that the panel (which was focusing on LGBTQIA+ experiences on boards) felt that the common experiences which may help break down barriers between existing trustees and potential trustees were in many cases so alien to the panel that this was a real hurdle to them joining a board (Getting on Board, 2023). Positive recruitment targets and focused recruitment may help to eliminate these issues.

Research into women’s representation on boards suggests that female board members can enhance board effectiveness in a number of different ways: for example women are found to be more questioning and encouraging of open debate, collaboration and higher ethical standards (Campbell & Bohdanovich, 2015). Research has also found reduced levels of conflict on boards with women members (Nielsen and Huse 2010 cited in Campbell and Bohdanowicz, 2015). This is probably partially because women are seen to have different leadership and management styles.

There is, of course, an ethical case for female board representation but research has also shown that there is an economic case too since there is a significant and positive relationship between firm performance in the FTSE 100 and gender diverse boards (Brahma et al., 2021). Boards with three or more women are the most successful (Brahma et al., 2021). Other international research contradicts these findings and states that the relationship between female representation on boards is ‘not associated, positively or negatively, with firm performance’ (Pletzer et al., 2015).

Unfortunately, boards in the charitable sector are not very diverse and a 2023 report highlighted that only 13% of the UK's largest charity boards had gender parity (Inclusive Boards, 2023). BAME women are even less well represented with less than half of the largest boards having a single BAME woman on their board (Inclusive Boards, 2023).

The Parker Review, originally released in 2017, examined the FTSE 100 and found that of 1,050 director positions there were only 85 directors of colour filling 89 director roles (8% of the total compared with a representation in the general population of 14%). Of those only 6% held the most senior positions of chair or CEO (Parker, 2017). The report set targets for FTSE boards to increase their ethnic diversity: 'Each FTSE 100 Board should have at least one director of colour by 2021; and each FTSE 250 Board should have at least one director of colour by 2024' (Parker, 2017). By the end of 2022 96% of the FTSE 100 and 67% of the FTSE 250 had met the targets (Tyler, 2023).

For the largest 500 charities here in the UK just 6.6% or 418 individuals are people from an ethnic minority (John, 2023). This is unacceptable when many charities were setup to address issues such as racial inequality! Action for Trustee Racial Diversity (ATRD) suggests that one reason for this may be a lack of awareness about trustee roles in terms of both skills and vacancies (John, 2023). ATRD aim to help recruit an additional 10,000 Black and Asian trustees by 2026. ATRD and recruiter Nurole admit there are large hurdles to overcome before there is proper representation not least because demographically the BAME community is younger than its white counterpart (John, 2023).

There is a call for young people to be included on boards. Historically board membership was only afforded to older individuals with knowledge and expertise, but the fast-changing nature of the modern world has seen younger directors join the boards of commercial companies. For example, 17% of S&P 500 boards have members who are under the age of 50 (World Economic Forum, 2018). The Corporate Governance Institute and other governance organisations make a strong case for boards to include young people who bring energy, drive and a different way of thinking

to organisational governance. Young people often have a keen and up-to-date awareness about societal issues such as climate change that businesses need to address (Youth on Boards, n.d.).

Here in the UK ‘there are less than 2% of young people serving [on charity] boards [under 25 and less than 3% under 30]’ (The Social Change Agency, n.d.). The Young Trustees movement aims to change this by promoting board involvement by young people between the ages of 18-30. A number of cultural organisations, for example, the Roundhouse, Motionhouse and Spitalfields Music, operate youth boards or schemes to give young people the chance to join their boards.

2.5.2 Recruiting and retaining the right trustees

The key to improving board diversity is good recruitment so the next section explores how trustees are recruited and what good practice around recruitment and retention should be.

2.5.2.1 Recruitment: Routes into Trusteeship

Academic research by Daly et al. (2020) suggests there are three main routes or pathways into trusteeship. They explore the recruitment of trustees with reference not only to motivations but also with respect to resources (what they bring to the position) and triggers (prompt to engage). Of particular interest is the ‘triggers’ aspect of their findings since they found that many trustees become a board member because they were asked to join the board or had a personal connection with the organisation suggesting that informal recruitment remains an important route into trusteeship (Daly et al., 2020). Evidence from Lee et al. (2017, p.5) also found that recruitment of trustees is ‘overly reliant upon fellow trustees’ using their existing networks. A curator in Sutherland’s research (2022, p.159) commented that:

“a lot of small museums do not recruit their Board members through proper channels. So, instead of checking the skills required of the board, they will just say, 'Oh my friend could do this!', 'Oh I know this person who could be suitable', so they just recruit Board members quite randomly rather than thinking through the skills that's required to provide the leadership for the charity, or for museums.”

Research by Daly et al. (2020) suggests that volunteers in small organisations are often approached because they are known and thought likely to do a good job.

Nevertheless, most research suggests that many organisations within the non-profit or charity sector are trying to formalise their recruitment processes (Daly et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2017).

As mentioned before, Getting on Board's research (2017, p.5) found that many charities (74%) are struggling with recruitment and that 'charities put less effort into recruiting trustees than they do for even the most junior staff roles!' There are several codes of good practice addressing both recruitment and diversity such as the Code of Practice on Recruitment and Selection (2002) aimed at general employers; the Charity Governance Code based on the Equality Act (2010) aimed at charity recruitment; the Trustee Recruitment Cycle developed by Reach Volunteering in collaboration with the Association of Chairs, Small Charities Coalition and Getting on Board aimed at charity recruitment; and recruitment guides from museum related organisations like AIM (Personnel Today, 2002; Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d.; Reach Volunteering: Trustee Recruitment Cycle, n.d.).

All the codes suggest using a skills audit to identify the gaps in a trustee board. At least one organisation, the Trustee Recruitment Cycle, suggests that other gaps need to be identified and that a diversity audit will take account of characteristics beyond professional work-obtained skills (Reach Volunteering: Trustee Recruitment Cycle, n.d.).

The codes generally follow formal recruitment processes used outside of the charity sector i.e., processes to promptly fill job openings by identifying individuals with the right skills and qualifications for the available positions. The Trustee Recruitment Cycle gives some indication of what a good process would look like:



11: *The Trustee Recruitment Cycle from Reach Volunteering (Reach Volunteering: Trustee Recruitment Cycle, n.d.)*

It is clear that in a similar manner to normal recruitment, the recruiter (in this case the board) needs to reflect on the skill and attributes needed from a new trustee; plan the recruitment process by doing a skills and diversity audit; write a trustee role description and prepare a recruitment pack; decide where to advertise the role and place the advert; shortlist against an agreed set of criteria; interview perhaps using both internal and external interviewers (often for trustees this can be done remotely but this also needs to be thought out carefully); collect references and do any relevant checks; appoint the new trustee (but bear in mind that trustees may need to be co-opted onto a board and then formally appointed at the next AGM depending on the charity's rules); complete the administrative tasks that will notify the relevant regulator about the new trustee; induct ensuring that a new trustee understands the responsibilities of being a trustee and then evaluate the whole recruitment process. This all obviously cannot be done during a 20 minute chat at a cocktail party!

Admittedly recruitment processes can still go wrong, and it may be difficult to find the right trustees first time around. A good recruitment process will recognise this and not just recruit for the sake of recruiting. Good recruitment sometime means having to run through a recruitment process more than once.

On the other hand, research shows that recruitment of trustees in the charity sector especially for smaller charities 'appears to be highly informal and lacking rigorous recruitment procedures and policies' (Lee et al., 2018, p.5) and this was confirmed in 2023 where it was found that 'smaller charities rely on their links with members and supporters or trustees' personal relationships and little else in searching for new trustees' (Yonder, 2021, p.22). This is a longstanding issue for the sector with a report as far back as 2002 suggesting that too many charities relied on 'recruitment methods

that are narrower and more passive than they could and should be' (Charity Commission, 2002, p.1). Not only do most charities lack any kind of proper recruitment process without written applications, CVs or references but prospective trustees are rarely given an opportunity to ask questions to the board or senior management so cannot assess for themselves whether they are a good fit.

Charity recruitment practices that are more formal, inclusive and transparent should build both accountability and public confidence in charities. The Charity Commission found that 40% of their investigations in 2000/01 involved poor governance and suggest that more formal recruitment and training would help bring this number down (Charity Commission, 2002). Whilst the Charity Commission (2002) and the Centre for Charity Effectiveness (Lee et al., 2018) reported several methods for the recruitment of trustees, word of mouth and personal approaches appear to be the most common methods in both reports, even though there is almost 20 years between the two reports and there were numerous recommendations regarding recruitment in the earlier report.

Source of Recruitment	2002	2018
Word of mouth and other personal recommendations	68%	66%
Networking with other charities	6%	Data not available
Trustees elected from membership	6%	28%
Advertising	3%	4%
Other	16%	18%
Use of trustee brokerage Service	1%	Data not available

12: Sources of Trustee Recruitment 2002 (Charity Commission, 2002) compared with 2018 (Lee et al., 2018)

Even where professional networks are used, care must be taken that individuals are not just recycled from board to board since this limits recruitment to the existing pool of candidates (Carty et al., 2017, p.28). Metcalf does report some advantages of recruitment via personal contact in that people often find it difficult to refuse a personal approach (Metcalf, 2012). This may be an advantage for smaller organisations

especially where trustee recruitment is already difficult. This can also be true in reverse where recruiting a trustee helps fill a vital role in the volunteer roster.

Whilst most recruitment for charity trustees is informal, some charities do advertise their trustee vacancies. The hope is that more formal recruitment processes will attract new trustees with different perspectives and backgrounds. This may be via paid-for adverts in national newspapers or via an increasing number of free websites. For example, a small sample of charity websites which allow trustee advertising include Trustees Unlimited, Reach Volunteering, Third Sector, Charity Job, and more specifically for the heritage sector, AIM and the Leicester University Museum jobs desk.

Recruitment research has also shown that ‘many individuals who apply for trustee roles find the experience so dispiriting that they wish they hadn’t bothered’ (Getting on Board, 2017, p.2). Getting on Board (2017) recount numerous examples of poor recruitment practices by charities such as potential trustees not being contacted when they approached charities about trustee vacancies or recruitment processes which took huge amounts of time (up to a year) and involved multiple interviews.

2.5.2.2 Retention

Miller-Stevens et al. (2014) highlight a number of factors which ensure that boards retain trustees: appreciation of the trustee in their board role; effectiveness of the trustee in their board role; a good board experience with consistency in organisation behaviours such as keeping to meeting dates; fund-raising expectations on the trustee (although this may be less relevant to a UK perspective); a sense of purpose on the board; values, age and life-cycle of the trustee (this favours older individuals who have more time and can be more effective); the trustee is invested in the organisation and its mission; the trustee has a passion for the cause of the organisation and there is a deep value congruence between the organisation and the individual. Whilst it may not be possible to control all of these factors, organisations need to try to influence those they can.

It is perhaps surprising that, whilst many organisations have struggled to retain volunteers (especially older volunteers) post the COVID-19 pandemic and in a period of economic uncertainty, there is little evidence of this within existing trustee boards¹⁵. Online trustee meetings and catch-ups ensured that trustees continued to be able to volunteer during the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of the governing body making fast decisions in dealing with it, meant that trustees were much appreciated for delivering a vital service to their organisations.

2.5.2.3 Trustees leaving

It is important that some level of churn within the trustee body is expected and managed. Trustees need to feel they can step down as their life circumstances or their enthusiasm for a particular cause changes. In contrast, long tenures and the experience that trustees can bring may be advantageous to the organisation. Fixed terms of office and other opportunities allowing trustees to maintain engagement when they have exited their trustee role are a good way to retain expertise (Carty et al., 2017).

AIM suggest that ‘it should be a matter of routine to conduct exit interviews with all those Trustees who are retiring or resigning’. Exit interviews are helpful for board feedback by allowing a departing trustee to give suggestions, for example, on improvements to the board’s operation or the senior management team. The latter is a good reason for the exit interview to be carried out by the chair.

According to BoardSource (Droesch & Stepleton, 2018) the type of questions to be asked relate to: ensuring that the organisation made good use of skill, time spent by the board on strategy rather than operations, effectiveness of board meetings, improvements the departing trustee might make regarding inter-board relations and staff-board relations and whether the departing trustee would like to stay involved with the organisation.

¹⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic impacted health worldwide between 2020-2023. It caused a public health emergency leading to lockdowns, travel restrictions and business opening restrictions.

2.5.3 Training and support for trustees

‘Trustees are rarely asked about their own development needs, with only a few charities offering training or a buddying system’ (Getting on Board, 2017).

It is unsurprising that the academic researcher Metcalf (2013) found that trustees in all age groups lacked the confidence that they had ‘adequate level[s] of knowledge and understanding’ to do the role. One answer to this lack of confidence is training.

There is plenty of free training available across the charity sector, which is available to museum trustees, it is just a matter of knowing how and where to find it. For example, the Charity Excellence Framework highlights free resources with varied subject matter including governance available to charities. The Charity Commission produces The Essential Trustee as guidance for existing and new trustees, and some of the organisations my interviewees came from provided this as basic information to new trustees. The ICAEW runs a series of free online training modules for trustees which ‘provide an overview of charity trustees’ legal and financial responsibilities and their strategic and operational considerations’. ICAEW suggests the course can be used as part of the induction materials for new trustees or as part of annual or biannual training for trustees (ICAEW, n.d.).

In the museum sector the most comprehensive set of materials come from AIM; AIM has produced a series of training guides on governance, and the museums and heritage sector (for example, Successful Governance for Museums (Lesirge & Barnard, 2020)). AIM (n.d.) also provides training courses (but these come at a price) and points new trustees to external materials such as the Charity Commission’s The Essential Trustee. AIM run a programme for boards under their AIM Higher scheme. Whilst this has good governance at its core, the programme also helps boards with board development, organisational change and strategic planning. AIM (n.d.) recognise that trustee recruitment is an issue for many small museums and is now running a free programme for potential trustees across the regions. This is a practical introduction to museum governance and best practice and was trialled at the end of 2023 (Association of Independent Museums, n.d.).

More generally for the cultural sector there is a board development programme run by Clore Leadership which works with boards and senior management teams to improve working relationships between the board/senior team. The Cultural Governance Alliance offer a practical guide to governance which contains ‘essential information, bespoke resources and downloadable templates’ to help organisations with their governance (Cultural Governance Alliance, 2020).

Many membership organisations, such as NCVO, also provide learning materials although these are generally provided at some charge and can be quite expensive. This may be an issue for many smaller museums who see cost as a barrier to training.

A potential model for trustees in the heritage sector is that produced by the Pensions Regulator. Their Trustee toolkit is free and provides the essential training required by trustees of pensions and trusts. In contrast to trusteeship in the charity sector, more generally, all trustees of pensions and trusts must have a degree of knowledge that enables them to discharge their trustee responsibilities effectively (The Pensions Regulator, 2016). Pension trustees must have completed initial training within six months of joining a board. Regardless of the legal requirements for pensions trustees, what is interesting here is the Trustees toolkit. It comprises eleven self-study modules with assessments (The Pensions Regulator, 2016). Passed modules form part of a development record which the user can download and share. New trustees are encouraged to work through the models sequentially whilst experienced trustees are encouraged to use the assessments to identify gaps in their knowledge. The regulator also provides a ‘Plan your Learning’ template against which trustees can assess and then plan their training and use of the toolkit (The Pensions Regulator, 2016). Based on their assessment the ‘Plan your Learning’ template guides the learner to the relevant Trustee toolkit module and related learning (The Pensions Regulator, 2016).

Structured, formal training like this would be a huge benefit to trustees in the heritage sector and the wider population of charity trustees. Further discussion and some suggestions are made in Chapters 6 and 7 around focussed training for trustees, and I can see younger trustees, in particular, or trustees from a professional background using this as part of the CPD requirements that many firms now have.

2.6 QUESTION 5: HOW EFFECTIVE ARE MUSEUM BOARDS?

One question that arises from the literature is why does good governance matter and how can we measure whether boards are doing their job properly. The effectiveness of a board of directors extends beyond mere compliance; it encompasses the board's ability to drive strategy, safeguard key stakeholders, and uphold the board's culture. Studies, measuring how successful boards are, have examined the relationship between various board attributes and company performance (for example, see discussions around board effectiveness and board size and composition in De Andres, et al., 2005; board member motivation and board effectiveness in de Jong, et al., 2014; and board processes and board effectiveness in Forbes and Milliken, 1999) The literature suggests that board effectiveness relies on three main issues: board size, composition and internal structure (De Andres et al., 2005).

Whilst beyond the remit of this dissertation, academic research has shown that there is a correlation between governance and an organisation's performance albeit that the research concentrates on large for-profit firms. Research such as that by Affess and Jarboui (2023, p.392) showed that '... corporate governance plays a key role in improving the financial performance of English corporations'. This suggests that looking at a series of financial measures of outputs may indicate how effective the board is at governing.

As Forbes and Milliken (1999) highlight for-profit and non-profit boards are quite different: non-profit board members are drawn from outside the organisation; non-profit boards are larger; non-profit boards are more diverse (albeit not in my research and experience) and generally non-profit boards are more cohesive. They also indicate that the governance of small firms is quite different from large firms: with smaller boards, less formal processes, and less diverse members (Forbes & Milliken, 1999). Both non-profit and smaller organisation will, therefore, have board membership and processes that impact board effectiveness quite differently (Forbes & Milliken, 1999).

Cornforth (2002) identifies several key factors when studying board effectiveness in non-profit organisations (board members' skills, experience, time and a shared vision for the organisation). He also (alongside Simpson) recognises that organisational size impacts the board processes and structure and that this will impact board effectiveness too (Cornforth & Simpson, 2002). What is clear is that measuring non-profit board effectiveness is difficult especially since its measurement is based on the subjective evaluation of the assessor rather than a measurable output such as share price (Van Puyvelde et al., 2018).

2.6.1 Measuring board effectiveness

Agency and Stewardship Theories would suggest that monetary outcomes are most important and that it should be possible to map financial success by using a museum's financial data. For research purposes this is publicly available and easily obtained. Furthermore, the corporate governance code indicates that managing financial resources is an essential role for a trustee (see the Essential Trustee jigsaw page 722). Additionally, longitudinal studies using financial data could indicate changes in performance over time. Of course, Agency and Stewardship Theories, assume that the pursuit of profit is the reason for an organisation's existence, and this is not the case for non-profit organisations. Non-profit organisations like museums have multiple stakeholders: the visiting public, the wider community, funders, accreditation bodies, and staff to name a few. Stakeholder Theory acknowledges these different stakeholders and that they are not necessarily driven by financial success. Finding appropriate measures of success for the board that reflect this multiplicity of interests are more problematic. However, the financial accounts should provide some useful indicators of other measures of success: the awarding of grant funding; awards for visitor, educational or other community excellence; visitor numbers; completion of major projects etc. Luckily the latest UK accounting requirements (Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 102) require enhanced reporting from even the smallest charities so much of this information should be available from financial reports or, if not, from the organisation's website.

Boards operating to a Resource Dependency Model are more difficult to measure. Reynolds (2010) cites work from the Better Business Bureau in the US that suggests that non-profit organisations should spend at least 65% of their expenses on programme activities. It may be possible, again because of the reporting requirements of FRS 102, to ascertain this percentage although whether it is an appropriate measure of UK museum board effectiveness is questionable. The UK Civil Society Almanac suggests that 69% of total spending by small charities in the UK goes on charitable activities (NCVO, 2023). This percentage changes to 73% with the inclusion of micro charities (NCVO, 2023). There is no indication whether these are optimal percentages.

Neither Democratic Models nor Managerial Hegemony Models of boards suggest measures beyond an understanding of board makeup and behaviours so there are no additional measures that can be applied based on these theories.

There are a number of tools which have been developed to help boards assess themselves: for example, the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ) developed by Chait et al. (2005) and Governance Self-Assessment Checklist (GSAC) developed by Gill (Mannion et al., 2016; Gill et al., 2005). These allow boards to assess the experiences of its board members; what is working well and whether there are problem areas needing development. The Governance App (discussed in Appendix 1) was designed by the Directory of Social Change to allow a board to create a similar review of board members' perspectives of governance (The Governance App, n.d.). Both the questionnaires and the app allow board members to identify those areas of governance that they think need improvement.

Whilst industry bodies such as the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) recognise that measuring effectiveness of charity boards is important, there is no real consistency on how this should be done. Most measures use a number of key metrics as proxies for measures of overall effectiveness. The Charity Governance Code suggests 'that the board regularly discusses its effectiveness and its ability to work together as a team, including individuals' motivations and expectations about behaviours' (Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d.).

2.6 | QUESTION 5: HOW EFFECTIVE ARE MUSEUM BOARDS?

Lesirge and Barnard (2020) have produced a governance guide for AIM but there are no specific frameworks used to measure board performance. There are a range of qualitative and quantitative performance measures for museums and Davies (2023) gives some indication of the types of data that might be available for museums in the following table.

Type of data	Examples	Potential application in museums
Simple numbers	• Visitor numbers • Number of objects in the collection • Number of objects on display • Kilowatts used • Relative humidity and temperature • Followers on a social media platform	• Monitoring • Reporting • Benchmarking • Planning
Indices	• Economic benefits of the museum • Carbon footprint • Culture and heritage capital⁴	• Advocacy • Planning • Informing funding decisions
Qualitative feedback	• Visitor feedback forms • Focus group discussion data • Self-reported reflections	• Evaluation of outcomes and impact • Assessing subjective change • Testing opinions
Observed	• Visiting patterns in a gallery • How customers behave in the café	• Understanding existing audiences better • Improving future exhibitions and displays
Financial	• Budgets • Expenditure – invoices, etc. • Earned income – ticket sales, retail, trading, etc. • Grants and donations	• Improving sustainability and resilience • Finding efficiencies / savings • Identifying the events that generate the most income
Demographic	• Age • Gender • Ethnic background • Educational qualifications • Economic status • Health	• Understanding the workforce • Identifying non-visitors and under-represented audiences • Targeting marketing
Geographic	• Postcode data • Travel times • Number of overseas visitors	• Defining catchment areas • Targeting marketing
Time	• Visitors' dwell time • Average time needed to create new catalogue records	• Improving exhibitions • Planning resources
Digital – i.e., from website and social media	• Views • Click-through rate (CTR) • New visitor conversion rate • Bounce rate	• Understanding online engagement • Assessing if campaigns are working

13: Different categories of data with examples of how they can be used in museums (Davies, 2023)

Davies (2023) also suggests the use of the KBAC framework to review the balance of data used across the whole of the museum. KBAC stands for: knowledge – activities to create and share knowledge; business – the operation of the museum; audiences -

the consumers of museum activities; and collections – activities to expand and care for objects and heritage assets (Davies, 2023). In the KBAC matrix below Davies (2023) suggests a wider set of measures that may be available.

COLLECTIONS: Activities to expand and care for the objects / the heritage assets • Number of objects fully catalogued • Collection enquiries	AUDIENCES: The consumers and potential consumers of the museum activities • Numbers of onsite visitors • Participants at outreach events • Online users • Snapshot qualitative visitor feedback, e.g. an eight question survey collected twice a year
KNOWLEDGE: Activities to create and share knowledge. • Number of exhibitions • Publication of blogs • Online talks and outreach events	BUSINESS: The operation of the museum • Running costs broken down into, building, energy, staff and other • Income broken down into, earned (ticket sales and retail), grants, donations and other. • Number of volunteer hours / days

14: The KBAC Matrix with examples of data that might be suitable for an independent museum with two members of staff and c. 10,000 visitors per year (from Davies, 2023)

Whilst some of this data will not be available to the researcher who is working without access to internal documents, New Philanthropy Capital (Joy et al., 2013; Copps & Vernon, 2010) suggest that a quick review can be undertaken with external data such as the company accounts and other externally available information.

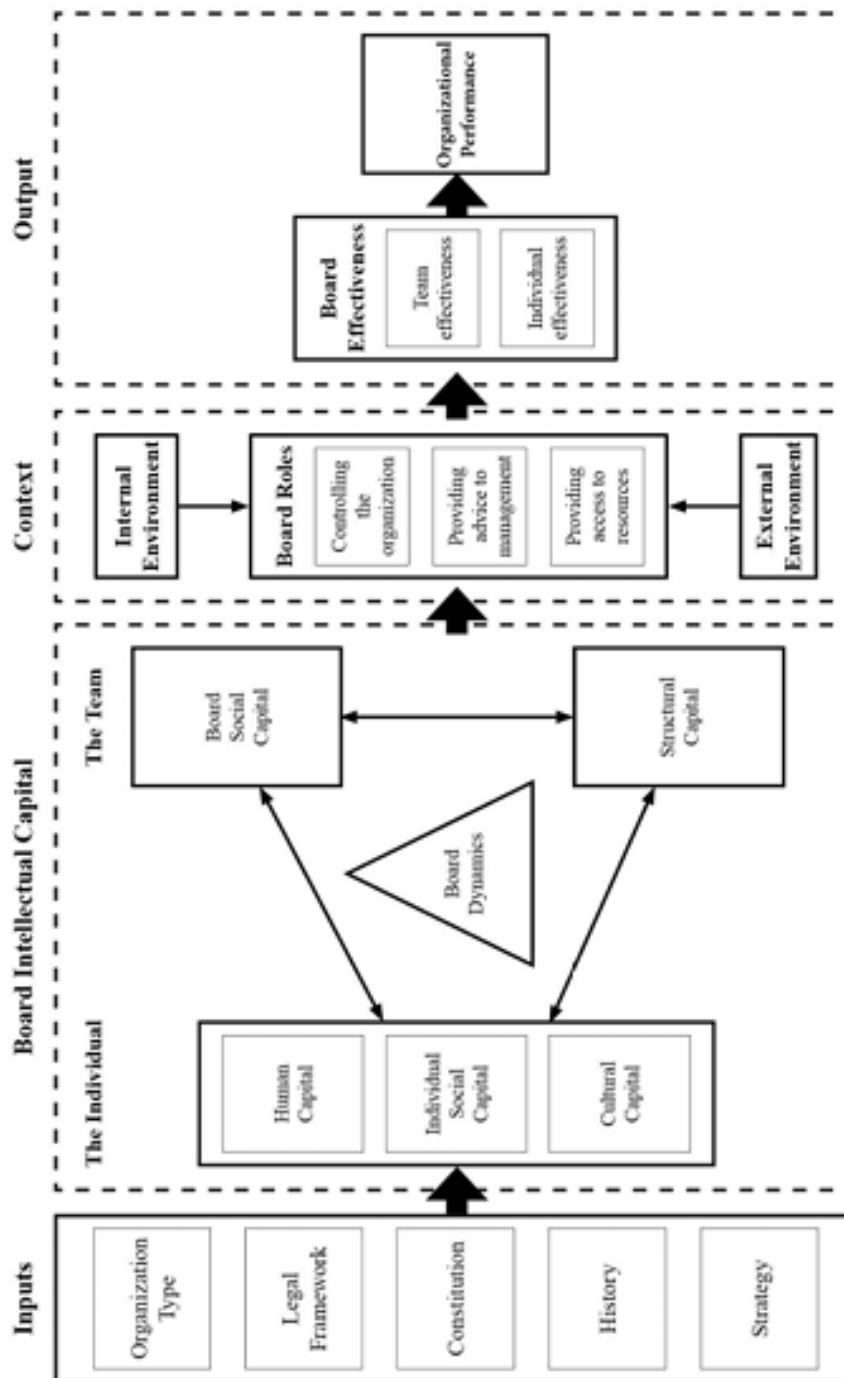
2.6.2 A framework for understanding board effectiveness

Several authors have tried to capture the complexity of corporate governance and suggested holistic frameworks to understand boards and their effectiveness notably Nicholson and Kiel (2004b), Hilb (2005, cited in Reynolds, 2010) and Young & Thyil (2008, cited in Reynolds, 2010). All these frameworks try to broaden the basis from which corporate governance should be viewed.

Nicholson and Kiel (2004b), for example, take a process view of corporate governance in their Board Intellectual Capital Framework (see exhibit 15). The framework is ‘a model that links board attributes to corporate performance via the roles that a board performs’ to understand the complexity of how boards work (Nicholson & Kiel, 2004a, p.6). Their framework “conceptualises the board as part of a governance system” which identifies a number of inputs, and a transformational process leading to a number of outputs (Nicholson & Kiel, 2004b, p.443). If one input or process changes other elements in the system will change. Furthermore, their model stipulates that the framework is an open system in which the board interacts with the organisation and business environment. Thus, factors both internal to the firm and external to the firm will impact how the board operates (Nicholson & Kiel, 2004b).

Reynolds (2010, p.145) tests this model with non-profit organisations and whilst he finds that ‘there is little evidence in the data to suggest that practitioners use theoretical models or frameworks to guide their actions’, he finds the Board Intellectual Capital Framework a useful model to view board operations. I agree with Reynolds (2010) that the model with an emphasis on inputs, outputs, the intellectual capital brought by board members and the internal and external environment provides a useful framework through which the potential effectiveness of the board may be understood. The model, which evaluates potential impacts of trustee characteristics and behaviours on board effectiveness, is used to analyse 3 museums and the detailed results are reported in Chapter 4 and Appendix 2.

The sections that follow offer the reader a brief overview of the workings of the model and thus how it could be applied as a tool to understand whether a board is operating effectively or not.



15: Board Intellectual Capital Framework from Nicolson and Kiel (Nicolson & Kiel, 2004b)

2.6.2.1 Board Intellectual Capital Framework: Inputs

Nicholson and Keil (2004b) propose that there are 5 principal inputs into their model: organisational type, legislative and societal framework, constitution, history and strategy. The inclusion of strategy as an input by Nicholson and Kiel (2004b) is by Reynold's (2010) reasoning 'curious' since the setting of an organisation's strategy is a board role. I do not agree and see this input (strategy) as an example of a feedback loop where outputs such as a strategic vision then become actionable through a strategic plan. We can see evidence of this in Chapter 4 and Appendix 2 in the analysis of all 3 museums.

Note that over time inputs will change, and with them how corporate governance is practised by the organisations' boards. For example, the new Charity Act passed in 2022 (an external input) will force a museum board to adopt new practices to reflect the new regulatory environment.

2.6.2.2 Board Intellectual Capital Framework: Individuals and the Team

Nicholson and Kiel (2004b) define four key components of board intellectual capital: human capital, social capital, structural capital and cultural capital. This literature review has already addressed trustee characteristics (human capital) and working relationships between individuals on trustee boards (social capital). Board culture, procedures and norms have also been discussed to a certain extent, and these are classified as structural capital within the model. Other aspects of structural capital such as the mechanical functions of governance (board agendas, board minutes and papers) and board policies have not been discussed. Cultural capital resides with individual trustees and measures their individual input, their motivations, and their ethics and behaviours.

Nicholson and Kiel (2004b, p.451) see the board's human capital capacity as a limiting factor in its behaviour so that a "board's potential performance is determined by the sum of the human capital" but even the best boards do not perform to their full human capital capacity

2.6.2.3 Board Intellectual Capital Framework: Context

Importantly, and something which emerges from my research, is that there are other external and internal factors that influence the board's behaviour and effectiveness. In the Board Intellectual Capital Framework these are labelled 'Context'. Conventional models such as Agency Theory ignore the multiple actors influencing governance beyond the organisation (traditional actors such as regulators and auditors and non-traditional such as funders, members, advisory or user groups). For museums, organisations such as the Arts Council of England, who run the museums accreditation scheme, will have a large impact into both general museum and board operations. Mapping significant events like the COVID-19 pandemic and museum specific events such as accreditation within the framework is important since a museum board will have to react to these and this should show in measures of board effectiveness.

2.6.2.4 Board Intellectual Capital Framework: Outputs

Outputs can also be mapped, although this is much more difficult. The Board Intellectual Capital Framework assumes that board effectiveness, which is made up of both individual and team effectiveness will impact organisational performance.

It is easy for the researcher to find data available in the public arena although some measures may be absent from the records: financial metrics such as visitor income, grant funding, spend on charitable activities and a few numerical metrics such as visitor numbers, staff numbers, volunteer numbers are normally available. Non-financial or

2.6 | QUESTION 5: HOW EFFECTIVE ARE MUSEUM BOARDS?

numerical metrics are much more difficult to locate although there may be hints within the trustee reports such as discussion on community or education programmes or activities to care for collections or heritage assets. Visitor comments from external sites such as Tripadvisor, and some awards for visitor or educational experiences may also be useful measures of success or otherwise.

2.7 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE LITERATURE ON THE GOVERNANCE OF SMALL MUSEUMS

This literature review is not exhaustive. A key contribution of this project is its interdisciplinary approach, drawing on museology, business studies, and governance research across multiple sectors. This breadth helps to illuminate the complex environment in which small museums and their trustees operate, though it inevitably comes at the expense of depth in some areas.

Academic literature on museum governance remains limited, and research specifically focused on small museums is particularly scarce. This section therefore highlights three important points before presenting the findings: the lack of existing research, the inherent complexity of governance, and the challenging, underexplored context in which small museum trustees work.

The research has shown that there is a scarcity of research papers that are dedicated to small museums and their operations. The MMP focuses on small museums and their contribution to new understandings of museology by describing a new subsection of museology, micromuseology. The project's work reveals unique models of interpretation, curation, visitor experience and community engagement in small independent museums, but the project has little to say about governance. Most importantly the MMP challenges the focus of mainstream museology on larger institutions and shows that small museums are not simply limited versions of larger museums but are fully formed, sophisticated, innovative institutions that can serve as models for any museum. Significantly small museums face unique challenges such as limited resources, space constraints, and minimal staff support that can provide larger museums with models, for example, in times of funding constraints. The MMP has opened the “doors” to new areas and instances of research into small museums (see for example, Bounia, 2025). My research concentrates on organisations that until now have mostly ‘fall[en] outside of the traditional academic compass’ (Candlin, 2016, p.12). The academic work by Candlin (2016), Gregory and Robinson (2018) and Bounia (2025) all highlight the strong relationship that these museums form with individuals

who become ‘donors or participants’ in these museums (Bounia, 2025). Whilst all the museums that I explore are somewhat bigger than those examined by Gregory and Robertson (2018) and Bounia (2025), I recognise the passion of the individuals in these mainly volunteer run and led spaces with very lean operational models. What is missing from the small museum/micromuseology literature is a specific discussion on how these museums are governed.

This literature review has also shown that there is a scarcity of research papers and publications dedicated more generally to museum governance and trusteeship with much of the existing literature instructing larger museum boards on operational practices (for example, Malaro, 1994; Babbidge, 2002; Ryder, 2002; Bieber, 2003; Babbidge et al., 2006; Babbidge, 2016; Carty et al., 2017; Lesirge and Barnard, 2020). Whilst this information is valuable it fails to offer a theoretical framework for understanding the environment in which museums especially small museums operate their governance. It is clear from the literature that most small museums have formal governance structures such as charitable status and a board (although this varies by country) but limited board expertise, inadequate policies and tension between volunteer trustees and professional and curatorial management (see, for example, Bieber, 2003; Willard & Bell, 2021; Sutherland, 2022). Micromuseums, at the very small end of the museum spectrum, may not even have formal governance structures in place (Candlin, 2016). Sector bodies like the Cultural Governance Alliance, ACE and AIM do promote good governance and governance improvement for all cultural organisations through practical guides, training programmes and peer networks focusing on strengthening financial oversight, diversity and strategic challenge on boards. These guides and sector initiatives such as Clore Board training assume boards can and should move closer to “good governance” ideals derived in the main from corporate and charity regulation. My experience is that the clear roles, strong financial stewardship, challenges to management and formal accountability advocated are in many instances ignored or overlooked by trustees in small museums. Moreover, my experiences suggest that small museum trustees tend not to engage with training and formal programmes through a lack of time and money. The question is why? My research explores why training bursaries and other sector initiatives are ignored by the

majority of small organisations and their trustees and seeks to address this very basic issue.

With respect to board literature more generally, it is clear that the models suggested for corporate governance do not reflect, in most cases, the realities of operating in the charity sector generally and for small museums specifically. Studies show that there is a limited applicability of models such as an Agency model and that it is wrong to treat issues of governance as generic. Understanding board models for small museums is, however, important since these have implications for both board behaviour and power relations within the board and with the senior management team (Chambers et al., 2013). Cornforth and McMillan (2016) in a longitudinal case study of a small charity suggest that the power dynamic can change over time (although this study looked at only one organisation and the relationship between the CEO and the Chair of the board). Another study suggests that museum boards could expect to see the CEO/museum director hold the upper hand in the power dynamic and that here the board merely rubberstamped suggestions put forward by senior staff (Bieber, 2003). My experience of power dynamics on the board suggests that the power relationship is as much about the innate characteristics of the individuals involved as it is about their knowledge. This is particularly true where the chair of the board is dominant because they are considerably older than the museum director and may have held senior positions in their career. I am used to consensus governance with robust board discussion and negotiation to get a majority agreement on a decision. I have had limited experience of a board rubber stamping decisions already made by the director.

Rochester (2003) found that size matters and other studies such as that by Cornforth and Simpson (2002) found that smaller organisations often struggle to recruit board members. My experiences reflect this and suggest that some roles are more difficult to fill than others (for example, roles requiring industry knowledge especially curatorial experience, fundraising and finance). Moreover, small organisations like the museums represented in this study are dependent on volunteers to carry out many of the functions required to run the organisation. Whilst the prevailing literature (see, for example, Otto, 2003; Lee et al., 2017; Miller, 2018; and ICAEW, n.d.) may recommend that operational and governance roles should be separated this is not my experience

and the reality on the ground is that the same people often fulfil both roles and that, in many cases that duality is difficult to manage.

Much of this literature review has focussed on who trustees are, what skills they bring to their organisations and what they do. This is, in my opinion an important set of questions to answer when we look at museum governance. It is worth indicating here that much of the data is quantitative since it is demographic in nature, based on, for example, survey data from research by Lee et al. (2017) and Bieber (2003) showing average ages, gender, occupations and the education of board members. The research is clear that museum boards need to be reflective in the broadest sense (age, gender, ethnicity, physical ability, neuro-diversity) of the communities they serve. Board makeup is an important focus of the literature, but my experience does not reflect the prevalence of the “male, pale and stale” trustee found in the literature. I do, however, resonate with findings in the literature regarding ethnicity, class and the education level of trustees (see, for example, Lee et al., 2017; Parker, 2017; John, 2023 and Tyler, 2023). I was interested to read in recent research that there is a better ethnicity mix in boards that are younger so perhaps this particular characteristic will change over time (Harmer & Ren, 2025).

Whilst size of organisation has already been remarked on, it also has an impact on trustee roles and behaviours (Rochester, 2003; Bieber, 2003; Sutherland, 2019). As I have already mentioned I have always had a concern that many trustees have a focus that is too operational and that this goes against the prevailing industry advice from most of the bodies regulating and supporting trustees from the Charity Commission through to AIM.

Size of board, frequency of meetings, virtual versus in-person meetings, length of service, time spent on the trustee role and payment of trustees are all topics covered by both the academic and industry research (for example Gambling and Jones, 1996; Hudson and Ashworth, 2012; Lee et al., 2017; Sayer et al., 2017; The Charity Governance Code, n.d.; Yonder, 2021; NCVO, 2022). My experience aligns with much of this fact-based research. With regards, for example, to payment of staff, I have seen takings go up in the museum shop and café when paid staff replace volunteers, for

example, but I am somewhat sceptical that payment (despite comments to the contrary by Hatfield, 2025, a Housing Association Trustee) would make a difference to attendance at board meetings or the quality of discussion. In my experience, many trustees (and other heritage volunteers) have a strong attachment to and are often active users of their organisation. This reflects research by Holmes (2003), Orr (2006), and Yates (2010). Of course, individuals become involved as trustees for other reasons, and I have personally encouraged students and young people to become involved in charity boards as a way to get some heritage industry and business (albeit non-profit) experience.

Recruitment and training of trustees are the subject of research such as that by Metcalf (2012), Lee et al. (2017) and Carty et al. (2017). My experience is that recruitment is informal and that inductions and training are limited despite all the good practice advice and that this is echoed in my results. It may be reflective of research by Robinson and Shaw (2003) that small charities find it difficult to recruit trustees and that a personal approach is more difficult to refuse (Metcalf, 2012).

Sutherland's research reported that curatorial staff did not feel supported by their boards and suggested that the skills base of the board needed to improve (Sutherland, 2022). I am shocked at how little sector-based experience is found on small museum boards especially since museums are becoming key service delivery vehicles and boards need to understand where this contradicts or compliments other museum activities. My perception is that the broader cultural sector has much more sector expertise on its boards even when the organisations are small. With the benefit of hindsight, however, this may just be a reflection of the origins of many of these organisations. Additionally, I recognise that my experience is limited to artist founded and led arts organisations whereas most of the museum represented by the trustees I interviewed for this study had been founded by enthusiasts of local history, a specific building (often under threat), a local individual of importance or a specific area of history. This reflects the findings of Candlin (2016) in her work on micromuseums and the wider MMP.

Thus far the emphasis in this summary of the literature review has been on theories of boards, governance practice and those who govern rather than on the effectiveness of the board. However, the primary question of my research asked “what is effective governance” in small museums and so I now turn to my reflections on board effectiveness. Greer et al. (2003), for example, state that effectiveness is a ‘fundamental requirement of boards’ but suggest that existing systems of performance measurement are lacking¹⁶. This gap is important since, for example, Oster and Goetzmann (2003) advise that board structure and performance are connected. Whilst board effectiveness measurement can be seen as subjective (Van Puyvelde et al., 2018), there have been some attempts to more rigorously measure board effectiveness (for example the BICF as described by Nicholson and Kiel, 2004b). As a trustee operating in the small museum environment, my concern is to understand how well a board (albeit that its make-up may be sub-optimal) is performing. Is this good enough over a period of time? Can we see how changes in board membership and composition impact a board’s performance? Like Reynolds (2010) I believe that non-profit boards need to improve their performance and that some sort of measurement framework could be useful to support boards in demonstrating how well they are governing across time.

In conclusion, the literature review underscores the significant gaps and challenges in understanding governance within small museums. While the existing research provides the reader with a basic understanding of governance in small museums, there remains a need for a better understanding of how small museum trustees and their boards operate which addresses the unique operational realities “on the ground”: limited resources and access to finance, training, and skills; a reliance on a small core team of staff and volunteers; an unpredictable patchwork of income sources which often do not cover operational costs; challenges in meeting professional standards of collection care (even when there are local significant artefacts in their care); strong community links and engagement; leveraging technology effectively; and difficulties with succession planning and building resilience into the team. My research into small museums recommends that a better understanding is needed in order to develop models of governance that enhance board effectiveness and sustainability. This will

¹⁶ This would be worth further research, but it was outside of the scope of this thesis.

help to ensure that these smaller organisations with their limited resources can continue to function, adapt and thrive.

2.8 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examined the environment in which museum trustees operate, focusing on small museums, their governance, and trustees. It provided readers with an understanding of the complexities of museum governance and the context in which museum trustees function. It also revealed that small museums in the UK are significantly underrepresented in academic research, despite representing in terms of numbers over 80% of the sector. They are often overlooked, with notable exceptions being the efforts of the team behind the MMP. Understanding the practices of small museum trustees is difficult because there is little research on governance in small non-profit organisations, especially small museums. The most insightful and informative materials on governance have emerged from organisations that support the sector, such as the Association of Independent Museums.

More importantly, as I have laid out in section 2.7, the literature outlines an idealised view of small museum governance that I do not always recognise from my own experience. In this thesis I argue that the lack of existing literature in this area highlights the need for more research and the significance of my results and their impact on future studies.

In my results and discussion chapters these tensions and contradictions are addressed by answering the following questions:

- Is there any evidence of board models from my data?
- What were the characteristics of the boards, their trustees and their behaviours as measured against the general museum and charitable sector populations?
- How do their characteristics and behaviours potentially impact on board effectiveness?

The research findings presented in Chapter 4 reveal the key characteristics of small museum boards and their trustees. The analysis indicates that many issues regarding

board composition and board room culture persist despite specific industry and Charity Commission advice. My interviews show that the majority of trustees in small museums continue to be mostly 'pale, male, and stale' and that many small museum trustees are drawn from a professional or semi-professional backgrounds and are recruited through informal networks. Additionally, my results support my supposition that few small museum trustees take advantage of the specialist training around trusteeships offered by the sector or more generally. I examine the three key characteristics of boards (as suggested by Chambers et al., 2013): board makeup, focus and dynamics and compare my results to industry advice on diversity. All these results are discussed further in my discussion chapter: Chapter 5.

Additional analyses are also presented in my results chapter. Firstly, I present the evidence for various board models across my data since an understanding of the prevalent board model should indicate what types of behaviour will be exhibited by the trustees being interviewed. I also present the work I have done on board effectiveness for three of the museums studied in this research. My aim is not to test the model itself but to use it as a framework around which to convey the data and results on effectiveness (Section 4.8 and Appendix 2). This feeds into a discussion in Chapter 5 on measuring board performance for small museums.

However, before all these analyses, the next chapter focusses on Research Methodology; in it, I outline the methodological approach and some of the issues surrounding my research.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In any research, the selection of an appropriate research philosophy and methodology is a critical decision that shapes the entire research process. This chapter explains and justifies the research methodology I adopted for my research into small museums. My aim is to highlight what is effective governance in small museums and how can governance best practice be applied within small organisations in the UK heritage sector. To do this I used multiple forms of analysis to provide a holistic view of small museum governance.

The chapter explores the application of pragmatism (my research philosophy) and the combination of abductive reasoning (my approach to theory development) and crystallisation (my approach to data collection and analysis), which together offer a framework for the research process. There is a step-by-step explanation of the methods employed, and the methodological dilemmas faced, and how they were resolved, as well as setting out my approach to data analysis. My discussion in the chapter also demonstrates how the data collection methods used in this thesis have a different focus from methods employed in the dominant critical positions as shown in

Table 3. Consequentially, my methods have the potential to surface new insights that contribute to the understanding of the trustee experience in small museums.

In relation to the research methods employed, there is a detailed presentation of the research design, including sampling, data collection methods, data analysis and ethical concerns. The thesis incorporates four distinct data collection sources, which include: a literature review, interviews, data from X/Twitter, and data from annual reports and publicly available data.

My position as a small museum trustee and a researcher into small museums boards is also discussed and I reflect on how my perspective and worldview has influenced the research process. In this chapter I outline how my positionality impacted the planning, engagement with and interpretation of my research process. I reflect on my potential biases and how I tried to overcome these throughout the research process. I have already stated that my professional experiences as a trustee provided a frame of reference with respect to my motivations into exploring governance within small museums in Chapter 1. My position as an “insider” i.e. a trustee in a small museum in Buckinghamshire eased my access to and the recruitment of trustees and directors for my research. At first, and based on wide reading of the literature, I naively thought I understood small museum trusteeship and that my findings would confirm my experiences and understandings. In reality, some of my findings revealed my inherent biases by catching me off-guard and highlighting different results to those I expected. These are documented in Section 7.2 Moments of Insight and in the results and discussions in Chapters 4 and 5.

However, before looking at my research philosophy and research methods, a brief discussion follows which explains the Professional Doctorate in Heritage and why I took this route for my research.

3.2 THE PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE

‘[The professional doctorate’s] focus is on generating practical action which also represents high-level professional scholarship... addressing complex professional, organisational and social issues’ (Lester, 2004, p.759)

The professional doctorate allows the researcher to engage with an area of research relating to their own experiences and professional practice (Fenge, 2009). As a practitioner with over 30 years of involvement in cultural sector trusteeship my experience is very broad, and I wished to tell my trustee story and to test the insights that I felt I had learnt against the body of academic heritage and business theory. For this reason, I chose the professional doctorate route over a traditional doctorate.

The professional doctorate route is not a common one in the world of heritage studies. Indeed, the DHeritage at the University of Hertfordshire is, at the time of writing, a unique offering. Its roots, however, are in a deeper tradition of professional practice-based research especially in education, medicine and business. Nowadays professional doctorates are widespread and have ‘crossed disciplinary boundaries’ since their introduction into the UK in 1992 (Anderson et al., 2015, p.208). There is a recognition that original knowledge can be produced in the workplace, although this has not always been the case. Fillery-Travis (2012, p.10) suggests that there is ‘a distinct difference between the questions academics ask and the problems and questions that practitioners face’, and that the inclusion of the views of the practitioner were traditionally seen as damaging to the research. Conversely, practitioners often perceive academic theorisations as neither relevant nor helpful to their work. Research produced by Waterton and Watson (2013) classifying heritage theory suggested that most of the writing about heritage is actually about the practice of heritage rather than true theory. This would suggest that there is an opportunity for heritage practitioners to add to academic debates around heritage theory through practice based doctoral programmes.

Operating at the interface of this rigor-relevance debate is difficult and open to misunderstanding from scholars at both ends of the spectrum. A practice-based model for a doctorate will be quite different to a theoretical model and often is thought of as less theoretically rigorous; for example, Schon (2001, p.7) suggests that professional

practitioners when ‘asked to describe their methods of inquiry ... speak of experience, trial and error, intuition or muddling through’. Nevertheless, whilst the ‘practice’ of practice-based research is not always clearly defined, Raelin (2007, p.506) suggests, a ‘practice epistemology will ... intermingle[s] practice with theory’.

Practice-based research tends to have one of three main foci: practitioners, praxis and practices (Whittington, 2011). Within the DHeritage cohorts at the University of Hertfordshire evidence of all these foci exist: this doctorate examines governance and the roles of trustees; another evaluates doing heritage practice in unique and challenging settings; and a third, now completed, looked at shifting locations of power and authority within heritage organisations.

The decision to do a practice-based doctorate has meant that I position my research firmly in practice and relate the findings of my research against my own experience and that of my fellow trustees. It has presented me with an opportunity to bridge the gap between academic theory and professional practice and address real-world problems for small museum trustees.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

‘Epistemological and ontological assumptions must be acknowledged and may be more important to some researchers than to others. Inescapably, this will impact on the study’s design, analysis and interpretation’ (Foster, 2024, p.8).

3.3.1 Research approach: Introduction

My initial reading of the existing literature was disappointing since there was little attention to small museum governance and my experiences do not tally with the idealised environment in which small museum trustees are presumed to operate. In my research I wanted to reflect my position as a researcher with broad experience and compare or otherwise my findings with my experience. For this reason, I chose a research approach that allowed me to forefront my experience and use this to better understand governance within small museums and its effectiveness. My approach draws on three research concepts which can be interconnected and allowed me, as a researcher to bridge the gap between theory, action and knowledge creation: these are pragmatism, abduction and crystallisation. Each of these is discussed in some more detail in the following sections.

3.3.2 Research philosophy: Pragmatism

Methodology is the cornerstone of any PhD project, and a professional doctorate is no different. However, my research approach has an applied rather than a wholly theoretical focus and a pragmatic viewpoint with its focus on the production of actionable knowledge fits my research philosophy. Early definitions of pragmatism such as the one that follows by Peirce support my pragmatic approach:

Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object (Peirce 1878, 135)

Here pragmatism aligns itself as a research paradigm that helps towards solving problems in the real world (see, for example discussions in Rorty, 1980; Leavy, 2017;

Simpson, 2018; Kelly and Cordiero, 2020; and with respect to heritage studies in McDavid, 2009).¹⁷

This study explores current practices within the museum sector using qualitative research methods focusing on the critical intersections between theory and practice in museum governance. Consequently, my work integrates theory and practice from both business management and museum studies. The choice of pragmatism as the guiding philosophical orientation was driven by a commitment to generate practical knowledge that is relevant and can be applied to the experiences of museum trustees and their organisations.

Pragmatism has been used in business and management research to build theory. For Simpson (2018, p.69), pragmatism shows ‘a genuine concern for how our worlds continuously unfold through our collective efforts to cope with the day-to-day exigencies of modern life’. She sees pragmatism as having potential for organisational theorising especially when related to ‘practice and process’ (Simpson, 2018, p.93). Farjoun, et al. (2015, pp.1788, 1798) argue that ‘pragmatism provides a richer and more realistic view than the ones used by rationalist and structuralist accounts’ and offers ‘multiple opportunities for revising organizational theories and envisioning new ones’. Pragmatism emphasises the value and meaning of research data through examination of its practical consequences (Morgan 2014b in Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020). Simpson (2018, p.93) states pragmatism is a ‘fresh methodological orientation that genuinely invites a theory/practice synthesis’. For Kelly and Cordiero (2020, p.3) a pragmatist stance brings an ‘understanding of the interlinkages between inquiry, experience, knowing and acting [that] addresses many of the weakness in existing organizational research’.

There are few examples of pragmatism as a methodological approach in heritage research. Examples can be found in the work of Khoo and Guan (2025) who took a pragmatic methodological approach in their review of women and heritage tourism

¹⁷ I have not reviewed for this dissertation the evolution and development of pragmatism as a philosophy. Pragmatism has a long history and its evolution as a research philosophy is marked by change, and some blurriness (Feilzer, 2009)!

and Carr and Cooke (2024) who took a pragmatic approach in their discussions on the safeguarding of Holocaust heritage sites such as Terezin and Staro Sajmiste (they argued the case for curated decay at Terezin and locally led adaptive reuse and safeguarding at Staro Sajmiste).¹⁸ McDavid (2009, p.220) in her work on the Levi Jordan Plantation Project reflected that a pragmatic philosophy allowed for ‘self-reflection and transparency’ enhancing the value of the practical outcomes of her community based work. Nevertheless, she realised its limitations and that her work in community-based archaeology needed a continual re-evaluation of her research approach in certain situations where a pragmatic approach did not appear to work (McDavid, 2009). I would argue that this adaptation fits exactly with the spirit of pragmatism; McDavid adapted her methods to optimise the practical outcomes of the projects she was involved with.

My research follows the three principles laid out by Kelly and Cordiero (2020) with ‘an emphasis on actionable knowledge; recognition of the interconnectedness between experience, knowing and acting and a view of inquiry as an experiential process’. Reflecting on each principle in turn with respect to my research, I make the following observations.

- Emphasis on actionable knowledge: Throughout my research I have wanted to find some ways of improving the experience of the small museum trustee. By keeping an emphasis on actionable knowledge, I developed my practical outcomes away from my original ideas around a series of information booklets to help small museums trustees to a more dynamic and useful Heritage Trustee Forum¹⁹.
- Recognition of interconnectedness between experience, knowing and acting: To a large extent the processes and issues which dictate how trustees operate are not documented or formalised within small museums. This means that I

¹⁸ DeSilvey (2017) makes an argument against the saving of certain heritage sites and suggests that some sites should be allowed to decay in a curated or planned manner. This philosophy, known as curated decay, has recently been adopted as policy by Historic Environment Scotland (Dick, 2022).

¹⁹ My concerns with producing booklets were that these would be overlooked in much the same way as information already available from the Charity Commission or bodies like AIM.

have had to rely on the knowledge and interpretations of trustees themselves. Pragmatism emphasises knowledge based on experience and observation of the actions of participants. The use of more than one data source (such as the X/Twitter data and the interviews with Museum directors) allowed me to answer the research question alongside questioning my own assumptions. This process, an extension of triangulation known as crystallisation, is a valuable way of illuminating a researcher's results by covering the same ground from a number of different perspectives (Ellingson, 2009).

- Inquiry as an experiential process: The research process necessitated I take a reflexive perspective throughout my research project and so I continually interrogated and evaluated my ideas and interpretations. This ensured that my research contributes to both the theory and practice of small museum governance.

	Ontology (nature of reality or being)	Epistemology (what constitutes acceptable knowledge)	Axiology (role of values)	Typical methods	Rhetoric (what is the language of the research)
Pragmatism	Complex, rich, external 'Reality' is the practical consequences of ideas Flux of processes, experiences and practices	Practical meaning of knowledge in specific contexts 'True' theories and knowledge are those that enable successful action Focus on problems, practices and relevance Problem solving and informed future practice as contribution	Value-driven research Research initiated and sustained by researcher's doubts and beliefs Researcher reflexive	Following research problem and research question Range of methods: mixed, multiple, qualitative, quantitative, action research Emphasis on practical solutions and outcomes	Informal, evolving decisions, personal voice, use of accepted qualitative words.

16: *Pragmatism research philosophies (adapted from Saunders et al., 2023, p146 and Collins, 2010 p55-57)*

3.3.3 Research strategy: Abduction

Methodological pragmatism states that ‘there are no intrinsically good or bad methods; in each circumstance, there will be methods that are more or less well suited to particular research questions’ (Foster, 2024, p.12). Foster, alongside others, aligns methodological pragmatism with abduction using the principle of abductive reasoning, which involves moving back and forth between theory and data, to identify the most plausible explanation for the observed phenomena (Foster, 2024).

Abduction is used in two different ways. The researcher can start with an incomplete set of observations and then proceed to the most probable explanation for the group of observations (Tomasella, 2022). Abduction can also be used for theory extension or generalisation by using creative inferences to generate new theory which can then be tested again (Anderson et al., 2015). Thus, an abductive approach requires the researcher to make creative leaps between theory and observation. In both examples, data needs to be sufficiently rich and detailed to explore observed phenomenon and identify patterns; theory is built iteratively through refinement and retesting (Anderson et al., 2015).

Quality assurance for abduction depends on four criteria: credibility (ethics and triangulation), transferability (choosing a sample population, thick description), dependability (research trail to allow replication) and confirmability (reflexive process) (Seale, 1999; Johnson et al., 2006).

In my research abduction is an appropriate method to build theory around research into small museums since it has helped me to link the evidence from my experience, my data collection and my desk research to theoretical frameworks and to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter I was researching.

3.3.4 Research Methods: Crystallisation

Whilst pragmatism and abduction provide the philosophical basis and reasoning behind my approach to theory building, crystallisation provides the framework around which, by both understanding my own position as a researcher and by drawing on multiple sources of data, I build the best answer to my research questions. In essence crystallisation is a complex multi-dimensional alternative to triangulation.

Crystallisation, a term first used by Richardson (2000), allows the researcher to draw on multiple sources of data (often from different genres)²⁰ to allow them to integrate multiple perspectives in illuminating a research question (see, for example, Richardson, 2000; Ellingson, 2009; and Tracey and Redden, 2015). Beyond this, crystallisation also allows for multiple ways of expressing the data (Ellingson, 2009). Importantly crystallisation highlights the researcher's positionality; the researcher is encouraged to reflect on 'what they believe in' and to question their own assumptions in building a better understanding of peoples' experiences and values (Shagoury, 2011).

Crystallisation begins in planning and emerges through the collection of data. Whilst typically researchers triangulate data from within a single methodology, crystallisation not only uses triangulation but uses multiple data sources from different genres whilst still performing a robust analysis.

In the course of this study, I crystallise my findings from my own knowledge of trusteeship with the practical life experiences of the trustees in this study, the reflections of museum directors and from the participants on #museumhour on X/Twitter. This data collection is extended by my analysis drawing on demographic data regarding trustees and analysis of financial data for three museums within this study. All these data sources provided the lenses through which complementary insights could be provided into the same phenomena: the operation of small museum governance and its effectiveness.

²⁰ Here genres are defined as, for example, narratives, poetry, personal essays, performances, and mixed-genre/ multimedia texts (Ellingson, 2009).

A key aspect of crystallisation is the use of researcher reflexivity to highlight the researcher's positionality. Throughout this research I have used Walsh's dimensions of the reflective process: personal, interpersonal, methodological and conceptual to guide this research (Walsh, 2003; Walsh, 2025; Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). The table below exhibit 17: Table showing Reflexivity adapted from Walsh (2004, 2025) and Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) summarises the types of questions I asked myself through the research process alongside a cross reference to the text where I write reflexively.

Paulus and Lester (2024) add one additional category: technological reflexivity. This is a critical examination of how digital tools impact the interactions with the research participants, the research data collection, analysis and findings. I have also included passages in this dissertation reflecting on my use of technology and its impact on the participants in this research.

Type of Reflexivity	Cross References
Personal Reflexivity Ask yourself: How are my unique perspectives influencing the research?	See Section 3.1 Introduction, Section 3.7.4 Personal Reflexivity, Section 7.2 Moments of Insight
Interpersonal Reflexivity: Power Ask yourself: What relationships exist and how are they influencing the research and the people involved? What power dynamics are at play?	See Section 3.7.1.5 Politics and Power
Methodological Reflexivity Ask yourself: How are we making methodological decisions and what are their implications?	See: Section 3.1 Introduction, Section 3.3.4 Research Methods: crystallisation.
Contextual Reflexivity Ask yourself: How are aspects of context influencing the research and people involved?	See Chapter 2 but especially Section 2.7
Technological Reflexivity Ask yourself: How are the digital tools used influencing the research and people involved?	See: Section 3.4.4/3.7.2 Use of X/Twitter Section 3.7.1.5 Politics and Power in use of Technology Section 4.4.1 Evidence of Technology use shifts in results

17: Table showing Reflexivity adapted from Walsh (2004, 2025) and Olmos-Vega et al. (2023)

3.3.5 Analytical approaches used in similar research in the past

For Waterton and Watson (2015, pp.24-25) heritage research has been approached from a ‘variety of theoretical and methodological standpoints’ to illuminate ‘its complex, mobile, messy, creative, affective, emotional, personal and performative nature’.

Exhibit 3 in Chapter 2 (see pages 54-55) highlighted key academic literature on non-profit museum governance and outlined the analytical approach used in each. What is clear from the table is that the vast majority of studies are conceptual rather than data driven, and that many date from the 1980s and 1990s. Only studies by Abdullah (2015), Bieber (2003), Griffin (2002), Griffin and Abraham (1999) and Tzeng (2009) involve case studies; Oster and Goetzmann (2002), Rentschler (2002) and Wood and Rentschler (2003) deployed surveys and data analysis to explore governance. Rentschler et al. (2021) used a longitudinal case study of a museum in Australia. Candlin et al. (2023) used a longitudinal approach to explore the UK museum boom and one aspect of their analysis included governance type (but as a defining characteristic of museum type rather than a structure of control). Whilst this analysis did not concentrate on differing views of museum governance per se it was useful to highlight the nature of the museums included in my analysis.

Rentschler writing in 2002 is closest in her research methodology to mine. Rentschler’s research (2002) reflected on how creativity is perceived by arts museum leadership in Australia and New Zealand by considering research in four main areas: interviews, case studies, cross sectional analysis and longitudinal studies. Interviews were conducted with board members as part of this research. Rentschler (2002) found that governance knowledge was sadly lacking and required further research.

Importantly, none of these studies are by practitioners so all the research represents an academic outsider’s perspective “looking into” the museum governance environment rather than an academic who is also an insider, namely a museum trustee, “looking out” trying to make sense of the environment in which they find themselves.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The central aim of the research was to reflect on trustee experiences and perceptions of their role within small museums. The research explored the reality of the trustee experience using a number of different data sources: narrative interviews; data from social media and in the public domain, notably X/Twitter in 2014, 2018 and 2021; data from annual reports and the Charity Commission website; conferences; blogs and secondary data.

In total, 22 interviews were carried out: 16 with trustees or ex trustees and 6 with museum directors or ex museum directors. The interviewees covered 28 organisations in total since some of the interviewees were trustees or had been trustees of more than one organisation. A detailed description of the process of recruiting and selecting the research participants is given later in this section. Each interviewee was then sent a follow-up questionnaire to confirm certain details, and these results are also presented.

These interviews were carried out over two years: the first eight covered trustees from just two organisations (the Chiltern Open Air Museum and the Old Gaol in Buckingham); the second expanded the interviewee base by interviewing trustees and museum directors from across Buckinghamshire. For the first set of interviews, I used existing contacts from my trustee work and from work at the University of Buckingham. For the second set of interviews, I used my network (initially trustees or museum directors I already knew) and then used snowballing as described in section 3.4.1.

On X/Twitter, data relating to the following X/Twitter hashtags #MuseumGovernance and #MuseumHour was collected where specific discussion around museum trustees were taking place. For example, #MuseumHour hosted a discussion on museum governance on 3rd September 2018 which asked a number of questions of museum staff and trustees. A further discussion again hosted by #MuseumHour held on 6th September 2021 centred on young trustees. The 2018 #MuseumHour discussion was interrogated in 2020 whilst the 2021 discussions were interrogated in 2021/22.

Secondary data sources such as the annual reports of museums, represented by the trustees and museum directors I interviewed, were also interrogated to provide general information on the museums. This was particularly useful in my analysis of effectiveness. Data is also available on Companies House and the Charity Commissions websites, and this was also examined for my research. Visitor experience data was uncovered from web-based review sites such as TripAdvisor.

Often small museums also provide access to useful data on their websites. Examples of this are the Forward Plan referenced on Amersham Museum's website (Amersham Museum, 2024). The problems at Buckinghamshire Railway Centre (covered in Appendix 1) were also available on the web and initiated a discussion with the trustee concerned over email (QRS, 2018). Unfortunately, he refused to be interviewed in case it prejudiced his lawsuit against the Quainton Railway Society.

3.4.1 Selection of participants: Trustees and Directors

By means of trustee interviews I sought to place trustees' experiences and my own perspectives at the heart of the study by critically examining the official depictions of the trustee's role and comparing this to the operational realities of the experiences of trustees within museums. In addition, interviews were conducted with museum CEOs to determine the views of trustees and their role from other related perspectives. Table 20 (pages 155-155) shows the museums from where the trustees or directors I interviewed came – indicated by a Y in the final column, and museums approached who did not provide anyone for interview – indicated by an A.

Participants were selected mainly using an exponential non-discriminative snowballing technique²¹. I contacted individuals I knew in the Buckinghamshire Museum

²¹ Statistical sampling in applied research may be of limited use when there is a population that is difficult to reach. Metcalf (2013), for example, sees trustees as a hard-to-reach group justifying use of this method. Selecting participants using the sampling of a known network of contacts is, therefore, an accepted technique to reach trustees.

“network”²², and they provided referrals according to a number of criteria: trustee or director of a Buckinghamshire museum, small museum based on one of the small museum criteria, and willingness to be interviewed.

I also cold emailed a number of organisations to try and widen my sample but with limited success. Some organisations just did not respond whilst others declined to take part. Additionally, I had discussions with several individuals over email, but they were unable to put aside the time within my ethics approval deadlines mainly because of timing and post the COVID-19 pandemic re-openings so did not make the final sample. Whilst most of the trustees were still in post, several research participants were ex trustees/directors who were willing to share their experiences and also reflect on the reasons that they had resigned their position. Six participants had been or were still trustees elsewhere, so the research covered 17 organisations in total including some organisations which were not in Buckinghamshire. Rather than exclude data about these organisations it was decided to keep it within the research.

The following museums from outside of the county are included in the data by virtue of the experiences of participants who are or have been trustees within them:

Museum Name	Location	Type
Dacorum Heritage Trust	Hemel Hempstead	Local Histories
The Charles Dickens Museum	London	Buildings, Personality
78 Derngate	Northampton	Buildings, Personality
Geffrye Museum	London	Arts
Thame Museum	Thame	Local Histories

18: Museums and heritage sites from outside of Buckinghamshire included in the Research

Whilst the sampling was based on positive requests to my approaches, it is surprising how balanced the samples were in terms of gender as is evidenced in the table on page 161. Unfortunately, no participant was from a BAME background, but this reflects my

²² As indicated before, these individuals were people I knew through my role as a museum trustee and through working at the University of Buckingham.

understanding of the profile of trustees within the Buckinghamshire museum trustee network.

3.4.2 Initial Interviews 2020

Eight interviews were carried out in 2020. These covered trustees of just two organisations and were used to explore the viability of the method being used. The interview method I proposed using was the biographic-narrative interpretative method (hereafter referred to as BNIM). This is a particular method of interviewing study subjects which is used to draw out the stories or narratives from interviewees' lives or lived experiences (Wengraf, 2001). The interview starts with an initial narrative question which encourages the interviewee to tell a story uninterrupted. After the initial story has been told, the interviewer explores, using information put forward by the interviewee, certain aspects of the narrative in further detail. A third set of questions may be asked to clarify certain narratives or supplement the narrative with information the interviewer had hoped would come from the original account. Participants would normally then be brought back to a plenary discussion but see my comments below (Wengraf, 2001).

For me, the attraction of the BNIM technique was its fluid and flexible structure, and the opportunity to extract richer content than a closed interview process would have done. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown had meant that training I had hoped to do in this method could not take place and so I relied on oral history training I had done in 2019 to trial it. I hoped that the richness I wanted would come through in the interviews since the oral history interviewing techniques I had been trained in are deliberately kept loose to allow respondents space to speak freely and explore their memories just like in a BNIM interview²³.

²³ Wengraf et al. (2002) acknowledge that the roots of BNIM is in oral history techniques and their use in social science research. The use of oral history to study individual's experience has also gained popularity in organisational studies (Ayume Hodge & de Sá Mello da Costa, 2021). For a more general discussion of oral history see Portelli (2017) and of oral history in organisational studies see Perks (2017). The longitudinal aspects of my research focused on the development of the professional and personal lives of my interviewees, as well as the organisational changes that occurred

Eventually I realised that I could not utilise the full BNIM technique because I did not wish to run the plenary sessions the BNIM technique requires (especially as I wanted my data sources to be anonymous) and that the COVID-19 pandemic could make this type of session difficult to run. However, using BNIM interview techniques did allow me to obtain richer content than straight interview questioning as is evidenced from this extract:

“I left only because I moved and can't really be doing a trustee in in the same way from 2 hours away ... It wouldn't work... not when they need trustees that are able to climb up onto a roof and get rid of the pigeons that are scratching the glass and things like that... It's not possible to do that from this distance...”(Interviewee 2020-03, 2020)

A great feature of the BNIM format is that it encourages very free flowing reflections on the part of the interviewee. Uniquely interviewees cannot diverge from the research topic since their reflections and story are the topic! The interview is not without its challenges though and one of the most challenging aspects of the interview was to not interrupt the interviewee; it also takes a lot of work to listen and not to interject with a question allowing the interviewee and their story to fill the space, only showing the interviewer's presence with the odd nod or smile. Occasionally, and probably due to the virtual nature of the interviews, the interviewee would need a verbal prompt to assure them I was still listening:

“Anymore Sarah, can you prod me a bit, please? ... Speak to me...” (Interviewee 2020-01, 2020)

At other times interviewees relished the opportunity to talk and in one interview it was about 40 minutes before I asked my first question!

Not all interviewees were happy without a series of questions to answer. This resulted in several short and somewhat less successful interviews where I had to prompt to get the information I needed.

over time. Using an oral history style approach was particularly suitable given the evolving understandings of governance within both the organisations my interviewees were involved with and the sector more generally.

3.4.3 Interviews 2021

Fourteen interviews were carried out in 2021. These involved both trustees and directors of various museums and extended the research both in terms of the scope and the depth of data sought. The same question was used for trustee interviews, but a discussion document was sent to museum directors prior to interview. This stated:

“I have already gathered data from social media and interviewed museum trustees from a couple of small museums in Buckinghamshire using a narrative form which explored their trustee experience through their stories. This qualitative research has gathered a set of recurring themes which I would like to explore with you today”.

The main themes addressed were governance, barriers to becoming a trustee, trustee responsibilities, trustee tenure, diversity, expertise, board development, training and professionalism.

3.4.4 Data Collection: X/Twitter

I chose to crystallise my results using different sources of data such as that I gathered from social media. Many museums and museum professionals are active users of social media (see, for example, Drotner and Schroder (2013) who discuss museum professionals’ use of digital technology to communicate with each other and exchange ideas). Whilst many museum professionals will be active across several social networks, I chose to use publicly available data on one platform only, Twitter or X as it became known as in 2023. This limited the social media data to be collected whilst allowing me to use specific keywords, hashtags and general searches to hunt for relevant content on the platform.

Data collected was focused on the #MuseumHour discussions held monthly (currently) on X/Twitter. #MuseumHour is an independent network and online community for museum workers and friends who discuss a broad set of topics around various themes (#MuseumHour, 2020). #MuseumHour hosted specific discussions on museum governance in 2018 and 2021.

3.4.5 Data Collection: Questionnaires

I used questionnaires in both 2020 and 2021 to confirm the data that I had collected from museum trustees via interviews in 2020 and 2021 but despite prompting their return was somewhat sporadic (I collected 9 questionnaires from 16 trustees). Questionnaires were anonymised so responses could not be tied back to individuals and results from questionnaires cannot be referenced back to interviewees.

3.4.6 Secondary data collection

3.4.6.1 Annual Reports

The museums' annual reports were an important source of secondary data. Museums, as charitable organisations, have to publish these on the Charity Commission's website and if they operate as companies limited by guarantee on the Companies House website. This means that the information is readily available and easy to access. Of course, the production of annual reports and their timely submission is also an indicator of good governance.

The annual reports were used to find data to evidence the performance of museum boards. This is discussed further in my results chapter.

3.4.6.2 Additional data

Additional data was sourced from each of the museums' websites and for the Chiltern Open Air Museum I hold some archival data on the museum²⁴. Where reports and documents were available on the museums' websites such as the Amersham Museum Forward Plan, these were also interrogated. Tripadvisor and Google were used to report the visitor experience in the analysis of trustee effectiveness. Details on awards

²⁴ This includes information provided to trustees from my time as a trustee and copies of a document on the formation of the museum written by one of the founders.

were obtained from the museums' website or from the websites for the awards e.g. Sanford award.

3.5 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

This section describes in more detail how I analysed and made sense of my data.

The process of sense making was iterative. I collected data in the early stages from the trustees of two museums and identified emerging themes. I looked for similar themes on social media (X/Twitter) and then returned to interviewing to collect more data; these interviews were done across a number of museums and involved both trustees and museum directors. Post interviews I developed coding frameworks to enable more systematic analysis. I explored further literature to make sense of the patterns and recoded the data. As my understanding of the patterns grew, I questioned whether further analytic measures were needed. I introduced new analyses to highlight the theoretical models emerging from my data and to triangulate my results. I then started to question why this information was important and whether the data on trustee characteristics and behaviour could be combined with other information and used to measure effectiveness. The realisation that trustee effectiveness and organisation performance should be connected gave rise to further data collection and analysis.

I followed a process which is closely aligned with the thematic framework produced by Braun and Clarke (2019). This is shown in exhibit 19.

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarisation with the data	Data transcription (if necessary). 'Active' reading and writing down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding data (posteriori) in a systematic fashion across the entire data set.
3. Searching for themes	Re-focusing the analysis at the broader level. Forming codes into potential themes.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking themes against the coded extracts and in relation with each other. Forming a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Further refinement of identified themes. Locating the overall story of the analysis.
6. Producing the report	Writing-up the analysis results with vivid extract examples and comprehensive commentary.

19: Thematic Analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2019) and Sang and Sitko in Gorman and MacIntosh (2015)

Post interview I used the MS Teams transcript which I copied and pasted into MS Word after extracting the text using the MS Stream transcript VTT file cleaner. I estimated that the transcript was about 85% accurate. Each interview transcript was corrected, and coded (as outlined in phase 1 and 2 of the framework). This initial coding was based on emerging themes and my experience. The analysis, using what is known as latent or researcher derived coding, aimed to highlight recurring issues of importance to trustees within small museums by using 'a code [that] is a word or brief phrase that captures the essence of why you think a particular bit of data may be useful' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.207)

Every interviewee was allocated a number relating to the year in which they were interviewed and a unique interview number i.e., 2020-01 to 2020-08 and 2021-01 to 2021-14. There is no relationship between places and the numbers given to make it more difficult to identify individuals. I also redacted names of both individuals spoken about in my interviews and any reference to the museum name to further anonymise my results.

I used the software (MAXQDA) introduced to me by the Researcher Development Programme (RDP) training at the University of Hertfordshire to help analyse my data.

MAXQDA is a tool to help the researcher to interpret qualitative texts such as interviews (MAXQDA, 2024).

I then refocussed my analysis in line with phase 3 of the framework. I used the themes discussed in the key texts from my literature review such as the report by Lee, et al. (2017) and created a new and more structured thematic coding analysis (known as semantic coding) (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Broad codes, which were pertinent to boards and their trustees and relationships with the senior management team, such as “induction” and “training” were used to assist in the management of the large and complex dataset. Objective and consistent application of this coding sought to address the introduction of any inadvertent bias into this analysis and MAXQDA allowed full traceability of selected interview quotes to the original interview recordings and transcriptions. Latent coding allowed me to pull out interesting quotes by labelling them separately. These were then tied to semantic themes to allow the data to be included in the relevant reporting of results and analysis. This analysis of the data allowed me to create a thematic map of the data (phase 4).

Revisiting the data using a more manual data analysis allowed me to extract new insights, findings and themes. In line with phase 5 of the Thematic Analysis framework, as I tried to make sense of the data and tie the data to different theories and ideas, I found myself going back to the original transcripts continually and re-reading them and making notes. This is similar to methods described by MacLure in her 2008 chapter on coding and her suggestion that the researcher immerses themselves in the details of the data (MacLure, 2008). This also ties in with the reflective introspective analysis process described by Shagoury (2011) in her description of crystallisation in practice in a classroom setting.

I analysed my data from X/Twitter by searching for keywords within the MS Word documents into which X/Twitter data was stored. These keywords were aligned to the semantic coding used in MAXQDA and then quotes and themes from the X/Twitter data were included in the reporting of results and subsequent analysis. Similarly to the interview data, X/Twitter data was revisited several times. X/Twitter data allowed me to triangulate my results.

Questionnaire data was analysed within MS Forms and tied into the coded themes. Where appropriate this data was also reported in the results and analysis.

For the analysis of trustee effectiveness, as discussed already, additional data was collected on the three museums studied from records held by the Charity Commission and Companies House. This was mainly financial data although trustee demographic data was also sourced from these two bodies. This data was analysed, and comparisons were done between the three museums using, for example, standard accounting measures. Longitudinal data was also available and for two of the three museums as much as 10 years of data was extracted from the accounts and presented. A change in accounting legislation meant that only more recent data was available for the third museum.

3.6 THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI

In 2019 I discussed a digital tool for museum governance with my supervisory team. In 2024, having completed my research, I was in a position to specify such a tool for this thesis. A digital product specialist advised me, in line with current industry practice, to use ChatGPT to specify a minimum viable product and first user journey for this digital tool based on the findings of my research (Durrant, 2024). The minimum viable product and first user journey produced using OpenAI ChatGPT are presented in the Appendices.

I also used ChatGPT to help generate a sample Code of Conduct and sample 'Trustee Welcome Pack'. These are also found in the Appendices.

3.7 ETHICS, PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS

3.7.1 Ethical considerations

The research was carried out according to the ethical protocols of the University of Hertfordshire. I undertook ethics training and details of the proposed methodology were submitted to the school's ethics committee before any participants were approached or interviewed. As stated before, a number of potential participants were not able to comply with my timeline and so they were not interviewed for this research. Research participants were provided with a copy of the ethics approval forms (see EC3 and EC6 in Appendix 5) detailing the nature of the research; their rights to withdraw; and collection and storage of data. This was signed prior to interview and returned to the researcher. A brief summary of the research and the interviewing method was emailed to the interviewees along with the research question:

As you know I am studying the experiences of people who are trustees of small museums here in the UK: how trustees became involved in their organisations; how their role has evolved over time; what their understanding of their role is; how much of that role is operational rather than one of governing. I'm collecting trustee stories for my research project, and I would like you to tell me about yours. Take your time. We've got as much time as you need for this and can start wherever you like. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt, and I will take some notes that I'll ask you questions about later. So, can you tell me your involvement at XYZ Museum and the history, the events and experiences that have been important to you as a trustee up till now.

Prior to interview each participant was offered the opportunity to ask further questions about the research and research method, and their permission was confirmed regarding the recording of the interview using the MS Teams recording facility. All the participants consented to this although at least one re-confirmed the anonymous nature of the interview midway through an interview! All participants were informed that the digital recordings would be transcribed and then the recordings would be

deleted. As far as it was possible, and as suggested by Kvale (2006) the ‘method of investigation’ was made transparent to the participants.

Wiles (2013) identifies three main areas for concern in examining research ethics in general: informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and risk and safety. More specifically, she recognises that narrative techniques such as those used in this research may cause the researcher further ethical issues:

‘Narrative approaches appear to raise some specific ethical challenges in relation to the management of relationships with study participants and sensitive handling of their stories’ (Wiles, 2013, p.84) .

Allmark, et al. (2009), in their comprehensive review of the literature on ethical issues in the use of in-depth interviews, suggest that there are five main areas that researchers need to be aware of when conducting in depth interviews: privacy and confidentiality; informed consent; harm; dual role and over-involvement, and politics and power .

Each of these areas is discussed very briefly below.

3.7.1.1 Privacy and confidentiality

The protection of an individual’s privacy can be a challenge in research. Privacy and confidentiality can be defined as:

Privacy relates to the research participant’s direct disclosure to the researcher; confidentiality relates to the extent to which the researcher protects the participant’s private information (Columbia University, n.d.) .

As stated in the preceding paragraphs I ensured that interviewees understood that their data (both personal and their interviews) would be anonymised prior to interview. Post interview, interviews were copied from the MS Teams platform onto my personal computer and all the data was ‘locked’ in a secure data vault that only I had access to. Data on the MS Teams platform was deleted. Participants have been anonymised in the writing up of the research to keep both their identities and data confidential. Post writing up the dissertation only the interview transcripts were kept in the data vault.

3.7.1.2 Informed consent

As well as privacy and confidentiality, informed consent can be an issue in research interviewing. Allmark et al. (2009) caution that participants may be inadvertently drawn into research based on incomplete information and then feel compelled to continue their participation. Recommendations found by Allmark et al. (2009) include the importance of providing interviewees with as much data on the purpose and scope of the research as possible and obtaining written consent. I followed both these recommendations in my research.

3.7.1.3 Harm

There is much discussion in the literature pertaining to interview-based research regarding the avoidance of harm to both participants and researchers (for example, see Wiles, 2013). For instance, researchers are advised to follow specific protocols to ensure their personal safety. In studies of vulnerable groups or where topics can be of a sensitive nature, interviews may need to be curtailed, or certain topics avoided. In my research all but one interview were carried out online and this face-to-face interview was carried out in a busy community centre during daytime hours. This ensured the physical safety of both the interviewer and the interviewee. Additionally, interviewees were telling their own stories without my intervention so could choose whether or not to reveal sensitive information.

3.7.1.4 Dual role and over-involvement

Reflexivity rejects the notion that the researcher is neutral in their research instead positioning them as an active participant throughout the entire research project. In contrast to bracketing or other techniques used to eliminate the confirmation bias, reflexivity ‘capitalises on the researcher’s subjectivity’ (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). So whilst researchers are advised to disclose their professional background to participants

so that researchers do not take on roles of both interviewer and counsellor, I was happy to be asked my professional advice on several occasions.

More generally I tried to wear my own experience lightly and examine my own biases and expectations of interviews by being reflective throughout the research process. Importantly, my own position as a trustee and a researcher is key to the understanding of the findings in this research.

3.7.1.5 Politics and Power

It has been suggested that ‘the power dynamics in research interviews, and potential oppressive use of interview-produced knowledge, tend to be left out in literature on qualitative research’ and that a ‘key issue...[is] who has the power and resources to act on and consume what the multiple interview voices tell the interviewing stranger’ (Kvale, 2006, p.497). Like many researchers pre-pandemic, I had expected to conduct my interviews face-to-face but the restrictions meant that I had to switch to using online interviewing. There is some debate as to whether the power dynamics are different in online interviewing (see, for example, discussions in Prior and Lachover, 2023 and Oliffe et al., 2021) but first it is necessary to consider the power dynamics in open-ended research interviews more generally.

As Hoffmann (2007, p.321) states ‘in the interview context, power is multifaceted and sometimes difficult to assess’. Rather like Hoffmann, in my research I used a form of open-ended interviewing that allowed the interviewee to determine what they wished to tell me rather than responding to a set of rigidly defined questions. Although I had established myself as an expert in trusteeship by explaining my background before each interview, the BNIM technique I used empowered my interviewees to choose what they wished to discuss. Unlike standard semi-structured interviews where the interviewer decides the questions to be asked and directs the data to be collected, beyond my initial crib sheet, the interviewees could (and did) take the discussion in multiple directions. The importance of this method of data collection cannot be

overemphasised, since I went beyond simply providing questions designed to answer my research questions or guide participants in a specific direction.

Where interviewees found the interview method difficult, the power temporarily shifted as I had to prompt the interviewee to talk about their trustee experience. Hence, whilst the power relationships in the interviews were dynamic, interviewees chose at all times what to talk about. In the one interview I did face-to-face, whilst the interviewee still chose what to talk about, he was patronising reflecting his age, gender, and City background²⁵.

Reflecting on my perceptions of the power dynamic I wonder whether the movement to online interviewing and the use of BNIM techniques mitigated against the power asymmetry suggested by Kvale (2006). Whilst my interviewees held power in choosing what to discuss with me, in the first interviews I conducted in 2020, I often held technological advantages over my interviewees with a stable internet connection, superior equipment and technological knowledge. I was also used to operating daily in the online environment unlike many of my interviewees, so I did not find the lack of rapport building using senses other than vision difficult. By the second year of interviewing (and the pandemic), participants had experienced online meetings and appeared comfortable in using the technology.

The online environment had some benefits too in addressing power asymmetry: it reduced the formality of the interview as both participants were at home with pets, family or delivery drivers interrupting the discussions; and individuals felt comfortable, safe and secure in their own homes²⁶. This is echoed in the findings of Oliffe et al. (2021).

In the data analysis and reporting stages of research power reverts to the researcher who can decide what to report and how to interpret the data. By reflecting on the data from my interviews alongside other data collected from sources such as X/Twitter and

²⁵ The range of factors influencing the power dynamic is discussed, for example, by Prior and Lachover (2023)

²⁶ Undoubtedly there were concessions too: I lost the opportunity to pick-up on subtle nuances such as body language and facial expressions; and there were occasional quality issues with the technology.

the museums' websites, I was able to create a repository of data which crystallised or debunked my views on small museum trusteeship. Richardson (2000) describes this process as 'reflecting' external views whilst 'refracting' internal views. Note that it is important to recognise, as with any researcher using crystallisation, there is always a challenge to maintain rigour and credibility.

3.7.2 Ethics and social media especially X/Twitter

Research using social media can be a minefield for researchers. Townsend and Wallace (2016) and the Association of Internet Researchers (2012), for instance, advise that it is difficult to provide a definitive set of guidelines because technology and its uses are constantly changing. Guidance from Townsend and Wallace (2016) gives an ethical framework for researchers to use in designing their research projects. Similarly, to the guidance given by Wiles (2013), the framework addresses issues under the following headings: legal, privacy and risk, re-use and publication.

Beurskens (2014) writes that whilst ethical requirements are probably more stringent than legal requirements, the legal rights over the use of social media data are probably a good place for the researcher to start when examining their ethical use of social media data for research purposes. Legal questions around ownership of information posted on social media sites have been dealt with in the courts where, for example, lawsuits have been brought surrounding the privacy of data held in the cloud and whether they afford the same protections to users as a physical home (see, for example, the discussion in Breslawski, 2014). Beurskens (2014, p.213) suggests that 'Twitter research is subject to legal uncertainty' guiding researchers to acquaint themselves with X/Twitter's governing documents.

Reviewing the X/Twitter Terms of Service (2021) suggests that whilst users retain rights to any content the user submits, the X/Twitter license allows for X/Twitter and others to make that content available including in publications subject to X/Twitter's terms and conditions for the content use. Users are advised that they should only provide content they are comfortable sharing. Furthermore, X/Twitter advises that

under their Fair use policy that ‘transformative’ use such as commentary upon a tweet or critiquing a tweet should be considered a fair use under copyright rules. Case studies from the Townsend and Wallace (2016) paper directs researchers that data posted on public sites like X/Twitter, using hashtags like #MuseumHour, has a public character and that the researcher can directly quote from such tweets without having to get informed consent.

For data collected from X/Twitter discussing museum trustees the research is structured following Townsend and Wallace’s (2016) framework; to conform to ethical guidelines, the only data I gathered from X/Twitter is publicly available and collected by using hashtags such as #MuseumGovernance and #MuseumHour. It has been assumed that the users who posted with these hashtags on a public forum, did so to engage in constructive discussions with both colleagues and strangers.

#MuseumHour, itself, provides guidance for its users:

‘You are welcome use your experience of and the discussion generated by #MuseumHour in presentations, reports, blog posts and publications. We ask that these are acknowledged to #MuseumHour and linked to our Twitter account @MuseumHour and page: <http://twitter.com/museumhour>’.

I have followed this guidance in this dissertation.

Where data was available in the public domain specifically with reference to two trustee disputes/fraudulent activity this was assumed to be freely available for discussion and no further permissions were sought.

3.7.3 The position of the researcher

Sparkes and Smith (2014, p.9)reflect:

‘...we conduct inquiry via a particular paradigm because it embodies assumptions about the world that we believe in and supports the values that we hold dear. And, because we hold these assumptions and values we conduct inquiry according to the precepts of that paradigm’.

Partway through my research journey after presenting my results at a research symposium, I was asked by one of the senior research staff what I was going to do about confirmation bias. I answered somewhat flustered that I was going to make my position clear by a process of bracketing myself out of the research to eliminate myself from the research process. Quite honestly this was a nonsense, and I needed a strategy which acknowledged my positionality and reflected on how my identity, experiences and background were influencing my research and findings.

Ironically, confirmation bias in the field of professional doctorates is barely discussed (I could not find any discussion in the professional doctorate literature I engaged with) although it certainly needs exploring. McSweeney (2021, p.1064) defines confirmation bias as ‘an inclination to retain, or a disinclination to abandon, a favoured explanation’ and Whittlestone (2017, p.7) as ‘a bias towards confirming one's existing beliefs’. For the professional doctorate researcher, where the research is based on their own practice and experience, building theory as confirmation without bias could be seen as a challenge. Confirmation bias suggests that the researcher may tend to look for explanations that confirm their beliefs and findings rather than test alternative hypotheses or explore alternative evidence. Whittlestone (2017, p.218) believes that ‘a ‘confirmation bias’ can arise at different stages of reasoning: in how we seek out new information, in how we decide what questions to ask, in how we interpret and evaluate information, and in how we actually update our beliefs’.

Bracketing is one method that can be used by researchers to overcome this bias. Fischer (2009, p.583) defines bracketing as the ‘investigator’s identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how he or she views the study’s data’. Methods of bracketing aim to ensure that the researcher is impartial throughout the research process. However, there is a lack of a uniform definition of bracketing across the literature which in itself can make it difficult to apply and elements of bracketing have variously been defined as ‘beliefs and values (Beech, 1999); thoughts and hypotheses (Starks and Trinidad, 2007); biases, (Creswell and Miller 2000); emotions (Drew 2004); preconceptions (Glaser 1992); presuppositions (Crotty 1998); and assumptions (Charmaz, 2006) about the phenomenon under study’ (Tufford & Newman, 2012, p.84). Rolls and Relf (2006,

p.286) suggest that ‘a major challenge for researchers using qualitative methods is to explore how their assumptions and experiences may be influencing the construction of knowledge’. Their starting premise is that the data needs to be collected, analysed and presented so as not to prejudice the subject matter.

Ahern (1999) notes that researchers cannot completely disregard their unconscious biases and preconceptions. In light of this, and recognising the impossibility of entirely denying prior knowledge, she advocates for the use of reflexive journals and diaries. These tools can assist researchers in their reflection and exploration processes (Ahern, 1999). Realistically, bracketing oneself out of a project is in itself a reflexive process since to exclude oneself requires a critical examination of one’s own assumptions, personal history and positionality. The question for me, and some other researchers, is whether their research should embrace personal experiences since these mediate how we understand the world anyway, and how to do that in a considered way.

Rationally, the juxtaposition of my personal experiences with the research I carried out cannot be ignored and I could not distance myself without reducing the value that my experiences and insights bring to this research. The experiences I have had both inside and outside of the heritage sector as a trustee provided me with a starting point for my research but also enriched the insights that I was able to give to the research as it progressed. The methods employed for this research sought to reveal what is ‘personal’ about the realities of the role of a heritage trustee. Part of this process involved an element of self-disclosure about the project. Why had I chosen to explore this topic? What was the relevance of my experience to the research I was undertaking? As part of this, and just as I have done for the reader in my introduction to this work, I gave my own professional background and experiences to the participants in this research as the key purpose was to facilitate rapport in order to generate rich and detailed descriptions of their experiences as trustees, and at times we even explored our understanding of the topic at hand together.

As both an academic researcher and a member of the small museum trustee community I have brought my own unique perspective to both data collection and interpretation and added a depth and richness to the data which would not be found

in traditional surveys. Nevertheless, research traditions continue to situate researcher bias as a significant threat to validity and so I have adopted Walsh's reflexivity matrix as outlined in the table in exhibit 17. The section that follows is a reflection on my personal position as an insider researcher and forms part of this.

By acknowledging and managing my positionality through strategies that include transparency, reflexivity and crystallisation, I have aimed to ensure that my research is both credible and authentic. Addressing ethical issues like the power dynamics, and the reflexivity outlined in the table in exhibit 17, has helped me to ensure that I embrace the power that my identity as a small museum trustee brings to the research.

3.7.4 Personal reflexivity

How are my unique perspectives influencing the research? I am, as a long-standing trustee in the museum sector, an insider researcher so many of the initial research ideas stemmed from my personal experiences and observations as a trustee. Based on this experience and discussions with colleagues and staff at the museum where I was a trustee and at other museums I was connected with, I have seen the complexities that arise from understanding how trustee boards work. I read the CAS report *Taken on Trust* and the Charity Governance Code before I embarked on this research, so I was disappointed by my perception of the lack of interest by my fellow trustees in the practice of trusteeship and their take up of the available training (Lee et al., 2017; Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d.). I was also disappointed that existing guidelines in the extant literature did very little to address the particular problems in small museums: lack of resources including time; duality of roles; templates for holding effective board meetings; etc. By using these personal insights, I shaped my study to focus on small museums and their trustees.

The first crucial step in my personal reflexivity involved thinking about how I perceive small museum boards operate and managing my assumptions around how other trustees think about and experience trusteeship. I decided to take a step back, and rather than ask a series of guided questions around how they had been recruited,

inducted, trained and operate, explore these issues through a free-flowing series of interviews where my interviewees presented their own trustee journeys and their reflections thereon. During my data collection and the analysis from my interviews and other data such as X/Twitter, I started to uncover many peculiarities involved in small museum governance which suggest that we may need to think about its efficacy. I have thought about new ways to govern small museums, often borrowing ideas from elsewhere, for example, Housing Associations, whilst recognizing the issues involved. As a result, I have put together a number of initiatives, including case studies, the Trustee Forum, and as of January 2026, I am involved in helping to develop an experiential training game teaching finance for non-finance managers in the charity sector. This should be tested on the HVG Executive Board in 2026.

3.8 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter set out the basis for this research: the research methodology and the research process. For the practitioner a professional doctorate encourages ‘reflective and critical thinking that goes beyond the immediate practice situation’ (Lester, 2004). Raelin (2007, p.495) argues that ‘by merging theory and practice we will end up with better theory, better practice, and better learning’.

For this research a pragmatic stance was taken alongside abductive theory construction and crystallisation (my approach to data collection and analysis). The abductive approach encourages full analysis of the data: 16 trustees and 6 museum directors were interviewed covering 22 organisations; X/Twitter analysis was undertaken and publicly available organisational data was also interrogated to arrive at the findings reported in the next chapter. The data was analysed and reanalysed to allow for iterative theory development and elaboration. This study is unique in taking an abductive approach with crystallisation to understand the experiences of small museum trustees. Other research into museum governance as well as being scarce used structured interviews, case studies or conceptual approaches to analyse museum governance more generally (rather than small museum governance specifically). My use of crystallisation to bring together data from several sources and my presence in the research process reflects my commitment to the small museum trustee community I have studied and provides valuable insights into the complexities of the experiences of my interviewees.

The next chapter lays out the results firstly by looking at the evidence for various board models as discussed in Section 2.3.2. Then I look at the data collected on the trustees themselves and finally I assess museum board effectiveness by using the Board Intellectual Capital Framework.

4 RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the main research findings emerging from my data. It is organised into three main sections which discuss the results showing how small museum boards can be modelled, who and what small museum trustees are and how they operate as trustees and how we might be able to measure how effective small museum boards are. These are the three main questions that I highlighted at the end of Chapter 2: is there evidence of the board models from my interviews; what were the characteristics of the trustees I interviewed against the general trustee population in charities and more specifically museums and how do their characteristics and behaviours potentially impact board effectiveness. It highlights a number of insights that informed my understanding of how small museum boards operate. These are summarised in the conclusions of the dissertation. The data presented should be read in conjunction with Appendix 4 which gives further quotations direct from my interviews and from X/Twitter.

The main models of board governance were discussed in Chapter 2. Evidence of board models was carried out via an analysis of each interview. Reference to the types of behaviour or particular trustee characteristics indicated where a particular model was being used (albeit unwittingly).

Detailed analysis of my findings highlights the main characteristics of boards and their trustees, suggesting that many of the problems around board makeup within the

museum and heritage sector remain unchanged despite countless discussions and industry research over the past twenty years. The majority of trustees can still be described as ‘pale, male, and stale.’ This research aims to shed light on the composition and dynamics of boards in small museums, particularly focusing on the demographic characteristics of trustees. In this chapter, I will explore the three key characteristics of boards, as identified by Chambers et al. (2013): board makeup, focus, and dynamics, with findings compared against industry standards and advice on promoting diversity within museum governance. I observe that a significant number of trustees in the small museums in my research come from professional or semi-professional backgrounds and are recruited through informal networks, raising concerns about diversity and inclusivity within the sector. Despite the availability of specialist training and advice on trusteeship, few small museum trustees seem to take advantage of these resources.

In this chapter I also look at how the board makeup and characteristics might be impacting board effectiveness. A process model of a board’s activities is used where inputs and board intellectual capital are assessed, and then outputs and effectiveness of the board are measured. There are many difficulties in measuring board effectiveness especially when only publicly available information is used. However, despite these difficulties there was enough information to provide an example of how such a model might be employed. The detailed workings for this analysis and the results from various outputs can be found in Appendix 2. I present a summary of the results here and a more detailed discussion in Chapter 5 on the usefulness of such analysis.

Firstly, I provide an introduction to Buckinghamshire and its museums since the focus of the study was museums in this county.

4.2 BACKGROUND TO BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND ITS MUSEUMS

The main location of the museums included in this research is the county of Buckinghamshire, just to the west of London. Most of Buckinghamshire has good transport links (rail and road) into London and the rest of the South East of England. The county has a ‘depth of cultural offering... includ[e]ing ... National Trust properties such as Waddesdon Manor, Discover Bucks Museum (our county museum), and internationally renowned facilities such as the film studios at Pinewood, as well as Chiltern Hills, country parks such as Langley Park, and the motor racing circuit at Silverstone’ (Buckinghamshire Culture, 2021). The county has a rich literary heritage with former residents including the writers John Milton, Roald Dahl, Enid Blyton and Terry Pratchett. Artists John and Paul Nash frequented Whiteleaf in the 1940s; John Piper and his wife lived in Fawley and architect George Gilbert Scott was born in Gawcott, near Buckingham. The Paralympic movement was founded in Stoke Mandeville in 1948 and there are other key sporting facilities such as Dorney Rowing lakes and Silverstone in the county. Thus, heritage is an important factor in Buckinghamshire’s cultural identity.

The county is long and thin: from the Chiltern Open Air Museum in the south of the county to the Cowper and Newton Museum in the north of the county is around 50 miles whilst the distance from Waddesdon Manor to Pitstone Green Museum is a mere 14 miles west to east. The county has 30 museums and heritage organisations. They represent a wide range of museums and heritage organisations from very small local museums such as the Old Gaol in Buckingham to one of the ‘jewels in the National Trust crown’, Waddesdon Manor, which had over 463,000 visitors in 2019 (by comparison there were 262,849 visitors in 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic) (AVLA, 2019, 2020).



4: *Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire*

All the Buckinghamshire museums and heritage organisations listed here fit into standard definitions of a museum as discussed in Chapter 2. Candlin and Larkin (2020), for example, advocate that ‘museums [should] have a permanent collection, ... have artefacts on display, ... be regularly opened to the public, and ... occupy a defined space’ (Candlin et al., 2020, p.9). Whilst one of the Buckinghamshire museums listed here has only a virtual space and some billboards (Chesham Museum) all have collections, artefacts on display, are accessible to the public and have a defined space even if it is only in the town library at the moment.

Table 19 shows the types and locations of the Buckinghamshire museums and heritage sites. This is based on a classification used by the MMP.

The largest numbers of museums within Buckinghamshire fall within the Buildings and Local Histories categories. Candlin et al. (2020) estimate that these categories nationally account for 17% (buildings) and 22.8% (local histories) of the sector respectively but in Buckinghamshire these percentages are higher with both at 30%. Buildings and Local Histories are also the most common categories for museums within the independent sector (Candlin et al., 2020). Rural Industries (12%) and Personality museums (9%) figure quite strongly in the data for Buckinghamshire in contrast to the national data which has only 3.5% and 5% in each category respectively (Candlin et al., 2020).

The museums and heritage sites in Buckinghamshire can also be classified by size: the simplest measure upon which to obtain comparative data is visitor numbers although income could also be used (Candlin & Ballatore, 2018). The National Trust properties of Clivedon (524,807) and Waddesdon Manor (463,328) are the largest by visitor numbers with around half a million visitors each in 2019 (AVLA, 2019). Stowe and Bletchley Park are also large with around 250,000 visitors in 2019 (AVLA, 2019). In contrast Milton's Cottage in Chalfont St Giles had 1,638 visits in 2019 and Pitstone Green Museum had similar numbers (Interviewee 2021-04, Interviewee 2021-11, 2021).

Type	Museum Name	Location	Further information	Interviewed
Arts	MK Gallery	Milton Keynes		
Buildings	Ascott House	Ascott	Historic House- NT	
Buildings	Boarstall Tower	Boarstall	Historic House- NT	
Buildings	Chenies Manor House	Chenies	Historic House	
Buildings	Claydon House	Middle Claydon	Historic House- NT	
Buildings	Clivedon	Taplow	NT – gardens only	
Buildings	Dorney Court	Dorney		
Buildings	Hughenden Manor	Hughenden	Historic House- NT	

Buildings	Stowe House and Gardens	Stowe	Stowe Preservation Trust (House) and NT (gardens)	Y
Buildings	Waddesdon Manor	Waddesdon	Historic House- NT	
Buildings	West Wycombe Park	West Wycombe	Historic House- NT	
Industry and Manufacture	High Wycombe Chair making museum	High Wycombe		
Leisure and Sport	National Paralympic Heritage Centre	Stoke Mandeville		
Local Histories	Amersham Museum	Amersham		Y
Local Histories	Buckingham Old Gaol Trust	Buckingham	Incorporates Royal Buckinghamshire Yeomanry collection	Y
Local Histories	Chesham Museum	Chesham	Currently only virtual	Y
Local Histories	Haddenham Museum	Haddenham		
Local Histories	Marlow Museum	Marlow		
Local Histories	Milton Keynes Museum	Milton Keynes		Y
Local Histories	MK Story Centre	Milton Keynes		Y
Local Histories	Wycombe Museum	High Wycombe		A
Local Histories, Personality	Cowper and Newton Museum	Olney		A
Mixed	Buckinghamshire County Museum (Discover Bucks Museum)	Aylesbury		Y
Personality	Milton's Cottage	Chalfont St Giles		Y
Personality	Road Dahl Museum and Story Centre	Great Missenden		A

Rural Industry	Lacey Green Windmill	Lacey Green		
Rural Industry	Pitstone Green Museum	Pitstone		Y
Rural Industry	Pitstone Windmill	Pitstone	NT	
Rural Industry, local histories	Chiltern Open Air Museum	Chalfont St Giles		Y
Science and Technology	National Museum of Computing	Bletchley (Milton Keynes)		
Transport	Buckinghamshire Railway Museum	Quainton		Y
War and Conflict	Bletchley Park	Bletchley (Milton Keynes)	Incorporates National Museum of Computing	Y
War and Conflict	Trenchard Museum	Halton		

20: Museums and Heritage Sites in Buckinghamshire

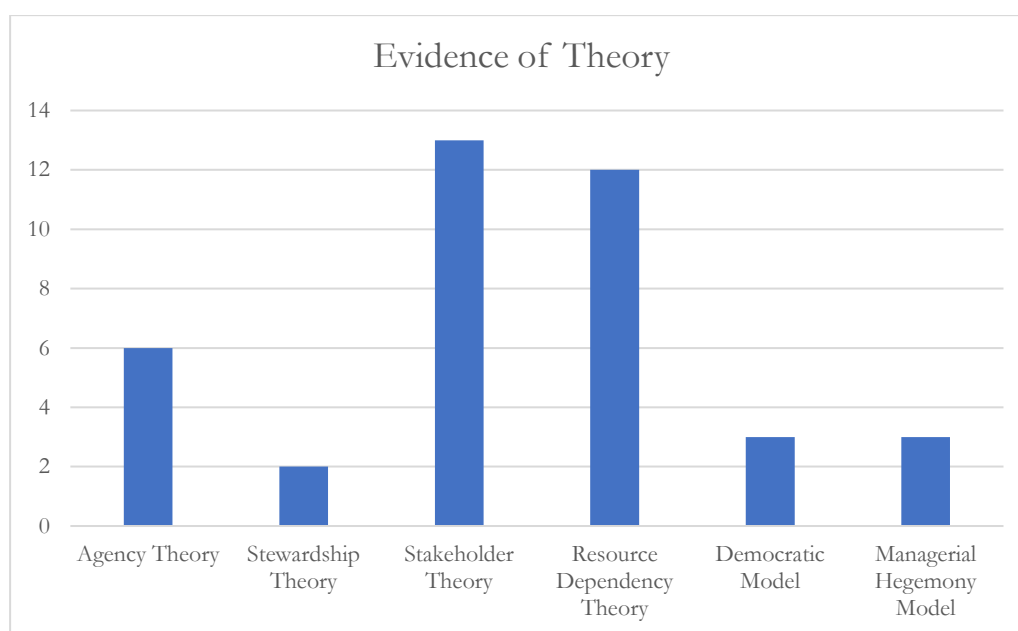
In terms of income Chesham Museum, which has been virtual since 2017 (other than some small displays in the town), had income of £5,529 and an annual surplus of £3,047. This makes it by far the smallest museum in Buckinghamshire.

Most of the museums and heritage sites in Buckinghamshire have at least one member of staff, although there are a number of volunteer-run museums: The Buckingham Old Gaol Trust, Chesham Museum, and Pitstone Green Museum are good examples of the latter.

For the researcher Buckinghamshire provides a good mix of types of heritage bodies in terms of organisational type, size and classification. This suggests that conducting research across Buckinghamshire heritage organisations will provide an insight into museum trusteeship more generally.

4.3 EVIDENCE OF BOARD MODELS

An analysis of the interviews was used to understand the governance models shaping small museums in Buckinghamshire. This is summarised below.



21: Graph outlining evidence from interviews of various board models

Unsurprisingly, there is quite strong evidence of both Stakeholder Theory and Resource Dependency Theory. Both theories suggest that board members are drawn from a wide range of groups with an interest in the strategic management of the organisation and have external links which should help the organisation meet those objectives. The only real difference seen between the two different models seems to be the reach that small museums have beyond their local communities to the heritage profession and national heritage bodies. This is often limited where most of the museum staff are actually volunteers.

There is also some evidence of boards moving from one model to another over time. For example, Interviewee 2021-03 (2021) describes a situation where the museum director²⁷ previously had a board that rubber stamped the chief executive's decisions.

²⁷ Note that many chief executives in museums are known as museum directors. In my interviews the interviewees used the terms interchangeably. I reflect the terms used in the interviews.

Once Interviewee 2021-03 joined the board, it moved into a monitoring and compliance role, and now there are a range of trustees who have the skills and relationships that they can leverage both locally and with national heritage bodies. Several other interviewees mentioned that their boards had changed over time too.

4.4 BOARD MAKEUP

4.4.1 General board and trustee characteristics

“I think I struggled for about five years before I got somebody under 30 onto the board. Average age, I would guesstimate... for charity board members, [is] between 55 and 70” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021).

“What’s the average age of the trustees on the board? On the board? At a guess, 76, 78. I’m 73, and I’m considered one of the younger ones” (Interviewee 2021-04, 2021)!

“...we’re mostly rich-ish, white, middle-class, old people”. (Interviewee 2021-04, 2021)

Museum boards in Buckinghamshire are made up of predominantly older individuals from a professional or semi-professional background. Many of the trustees I interviewed were in their seventies and one was in his eighties. Just one trustee I interviewed was below the age of 30. The youngest trustee on one of the organisations’ boards was 25 and the oldest was 89 at the time of writing (neither of these were interviewed). It is perhaps concerning given the considerable pressures within the sector especially with respect to EDI that so many trustees are well into their retirement and that the average age of trustees in my research is above 60.

Table 21 presents key information about the organisations associated with the trustees I interviewed. The table shows that there were 138 trustees (82 men and 56 women) with an average age of 61 across all the organisations in 2020/21: in 2024 there were 170 trustees (104 men to 66 women) across all the organisations with an average age of 60.

Organisation	Legal Structure	Board size 2020/21	Average length of service 2020/21	Average Age 2020/21	Male	Female	Board size 2024	Average length of service Oct 24	Average Age 2024	Male	Female
Amersham Museum	Limited by Guarantee	7	6	71	4	3	9	2	67	4	5
Bletchley Park Trust Ltd	Limited by Guarantee	9	5	56	6	3	13	4	57	7	6
Buckingham Old Goal Trust	Limited by Guarantee	7	9	61	4	3	10	4	61	4	6
Buckinghamshire Railway Centre (Quainton Railway Society)	Mutual	6	0	60	6	0	7	3	63	7	0
Chesham Museum	CIO	7	3		5	2	9	4		6	3
Chiltern Open Air Museum Ltd	Limited by Guarantee	10	14	64	4	6	10	5	60	4	6
Milton Keynes Museum Trust Ltd	Limited by Guarantee	11	9	63	7	4	10	7	63	7	3
Living Archive Project Milton Keynes	Limited by Guarantee	13	4	61	6	7	9	5	56	6	3
Milton's Cottage Trust (CIO)	CIO	10	6		9	1	10	6		7	3
Stowe House Preservation Trust	Limited by Guarantee	11	9	70	8	3	10	13	70	8	2
The Buckinghamshire County Museum Trust	Limited by Guarantee	8	4	59	4	4	9	5	55	6	3
The Pitstone & Invinghoe Museum Society	CIO						14	7		12	2
78 Derrogate Northampton Trust	Limited by Guarantee	6	12	73	5	1	6	13	73	4	2
Dacorum Heritage Trust	Limited by Guarantee	5	2	47	1	4	8	2	51	4	4
Geffrye Museum	Limited by Guarantee	12	3	59	6	6	10	3	49	5	5
Thame Museum Trust	CIO	8	4		4	4	13	4		8	5
The Charles Dickens Museum	Limited by Guarantee	8	3	52	3	5	13	2	54	5	8
Totals		138			82	56	170			104	66
Percentages					59%	41%				61%	39%
Averages		8.6	6	61	5	4	10.0	5	60	6	4

22: Table showing board trustee data at the time of interview and in October 2024

The data in both Table 21 and Table 22 also reflects a lack of diversity (see Table 22 for a breakdown by gender and age of my interviewees). The trustees I spoke to were white, older and mostly from a professional background. 62.5% were over the age of 60, with over half of those above the age of 70. The majority of museum directors were also older with just 2 below the age of 50.

Ethnicity was an issue identified in my research since all the trustees I interviewed were white which suggested that museum trustees were probably not representative of either the population in the county or, more broadly, the wider country. It is difficult to ascertain what the ethnicity mix was on boards within my research although based only on surnames there was just one trustee in 2020/21 and four trustees in 2024 whose families were of Asian descent. There were two trustees on one board of Black ethnicity (Interviewee 2021-07, 2021). With respect to the gender mix, although slightly better than the charity board gender imbalance found by Lee et al. (2017) of men to women, the number of men still outnumbered women as trustees on the museum boards within my research (with a ratio of 59 men to 41 women compared with the general trustee population where there are 64 men to every 36 women). My research reflects results stated in Candlin et al. (2022), that gender diversity differs by subject matter: this is true of board diversity and was most noticeable for the Quainton Railway Society where all the board members were male. Many of the other boards were much more balanced with several having more women than men.

The professional stance of trustees is noticeable across all the boards in my research: only one trustee had a blue-collar role as a telecoms technician. The most common professions were accountant or director although many board members listed that they were retired and so it was difficult to ascertain what their original roles had been. Whilst class was not a factor discussed in my interviews, given the nature of the professions of the trustees within my research, it would be safe to assume that many trustees would self identify as middle class (for example, see comments by Interviewee 2021-04, 2021).

Sex	Trustees	Directors
Male	8	3
Female	8	3
Age ²⁸	Trustees	Directors
Under 30	1	0
30-39	0	0
40-49	3	2
50-59	2	3
60 and over	10	1

23: Characteristics of research participants (Trustees and Directors)

Only one board in my data had the chief executive as a full voting member of the board (i.e. this was a unitary board); this compares with data for the arts and cultural sector from Hudson and Ashworth (2012) which had 25% of chief executives as full voting members on their boards.

My research found that museum trustees that I interviewed belonged to boards of between five and thirteen trustees in size: the average size was 8.6 trustees in 2020/21 and 10.0 trustees in October 2024 so significantly higher than the national average of 5.9 trustees but lower than the sector results for larger arts and cultural organisations from research by Hudson and Ashworth (2012).

Whilst none of my interviewees suggested an optimal size for a board; most agreed that a manageable size would be around 8/9 and that larger boards tended to be unwieldy.

“You know it was according to the Charity Commission, you have to have a contingent of eight or ten... but some boards have 20 people, you know, and the functionality of your board then gets restricted ... and smaller boards I've discovered seem to work a lot better, where with bigger boards... everybody thinks they have to say something or have to ask a question” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021).

Board size should be set in the Articles of Association. For example, the Chiltern Open Air Museum's new Articles of Association has a minimum number of five trustees and

²⁸ Research participants were not asked directly to disclose their age, but many revealed their age whilst being interviewed. Where they did not, their age has been calculated from records held at Companies House.

a maximum number of fifteen trustees. X/Twitter discussions on #MuseumHour also saw little discussion around board size although one participant suggested that to ensure diversity it would be a good idea to build larger boards. Another contributor highlighted that “... a larger board can lead to 'passengers' at meetings and/or voices being lost in the bigger mix” (Gardam, 2018).

Several of the museum trustees I interviewed had served on museum boards for a considerable period of time: one trustee had served since the museum was formed so he had been involved with that museum for 42 years and as a trustee for 37 years. Another had served for 26 years. The average time served for my interviewees was 9.4 years. Very long periods of service go against best practice advice by the Charity Commission and other bodies dealing with the charitable sector. One interviewee (Interviewee 2020-02, 2020) also commented that it was difficult to modernise organisations where trustees had been on the board for a long time.

I observed in my research that whilst several boards had moved to fixed terms with 2 or 3 periods of service as a maximum, others had trustees who had been around for considerably longer:

“I’ve been involved with the museum since 1976 since before it began ... But it was 1980 that I became a trustee... I have, I might say, I have offered to resign or retire over the years, but it's always been... turned down ... It's always been hard to get replacements...” (Interviewee 2020-06, 2020).

“I joined as a trustee so[me] 16 years ago now, something like that” (Interviewee 2021-05, 2021).

“The chairman at the time had been a trustee. He’d been a volunteer and then become a trustee and the chair, and he'd been chair for about 18 years” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021).

The following bar chart shows the average length of service for trustees at the time of interview and in October 2024 across all the organisations in my research:



24: Graph showing average length of trustee service for all the museums in my research

Even without a fixed term, some museums did not have trustees serving for very long periods:

“...there aren't fixed terms, and, as I say, in the time I've worked here every single one has retired bar one, our current chair... I don't think any, I might be wrong without checking, but any of the others have been trustees longer than four or five years” (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021).

Many of the trustees I interviewed had spent some time on more than one board simultaneously. While this was occasionally a transition as they moved from one board to another, this was not always the case. For example, one interviewee was sitting on three boards concurrently.

X/Twitter data suggested that “a lot of [museum] boards meet monthly - especially in smaller orgs” (McAward-White, 2018) and certainly this is my experience. Many of my interviewees reported attending monthly meetings even though most felt that this was too frequent unless there was a crisis. It should be noted that the movement to online

board meetings, for example, on Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic and the enhanced use of technology is seen as a good thing across the charitable sector as a whole. In contrast to the trends of general volunteering amongst older people during the COVID-19 pandemic, my finding that board activity moved swiftly online could be a reason that older trustees who were also shielding did not feel excluded from their volunteer roles and could continue to volunteer as a trustee. Informal research (and my experience) would suggest that online engagement is still a feature of board activity and probably will remain so.

The advantage of using tools such as Zoom is recognised by the Charity Commission in research done by Yonder (2021) which cited that meetings were cheaper to run since trustees did not have to travel to meetings. Additionally in times of crisis meetings could be held more frequently.

This correlates with a #MuseumHour proposal on X/Twitter pre-pandemic:

“It would be great to see boards make use of technology and consider virtual meetings sometimes” (Artsfundraising, 2018).

There was little discussion by my interviewees around frequency of attendance at board meetings although one organisation (Bletchley Park) reports board attendance in its annual accounts.

I did not specifically discuss in my interviews the time spent by trustees on their role, but it was clear that many trustees spend a considerable amount of time fulfilling trustee and operational duties.

“I worked out ... I was spending about five working weeks a year [on my trustee work], which is pretty high when you’re in practice and working” (Interviewee 2021-06, 2021).

Another interviewee mentions that often board reports are very lengthy taking a considerable time to read and digest but that the information therein was essential to their role as a trustee (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021).

This contrasts with some comments made by Penny Wilson (2024), formerly at Getting on Board, who quoted a colleague saying that trustees on a 3-year term of office only have 24 hours to make a difference! Of course, this comment cannot refer to much more than attendance at a two-hour quarterly board meeting over the course of a 3 year term so it does not reflect my findings that many trustees spend much more time working at their museums and on their board responsibilities.

In some cases, there was an expectation that trustees would also fulfil an operational role on a regular basis:

“But, one of the things that that led to, because we never had a venue manager or museum manager curator, was that we used to have to do caretaking for events. We’d only take on a booking if one of the trustees could physically be in the museum, unlock it, lock it up, tidy it up, etc. I did that quite a bit.” (Interviewee 2020-04, 2020)

Moreover, many of the trustees I interviewed reported that operational and management responsibilities dominated their time in board meetings. This is discussed in more detail in section 4.4.3.

None of the trustees I interviewed were paid for their services as a trustee. Out of pocket expenses and nominal payments for some operational activity was paid although many trustees did not seek recompense for expenses.

Remuneration was not a topic of conversation on X/Twitter although it was made very clear on X/Twitter that trustees should not be out of pocket for the work they carry out and receive expenses for their attendance at meetings (Moss 2020).

For young people in particular not being paid may be a barrier to becoming a trustee (Moss, 2020). Payment of trustees was something that was raised as an issue at the Festival of Trusteeship I attended in 2023.

4.4.2 Reasons for volunteering as a museum trustee

In my research my participants mentioned interest in the subject matter and altruistic motives as reasons for volunteering.

Reasons for volunteering	Numbers of trustees who mention or imply this
Museum's subject matter	15
Prestige (CV building seen as both positive and negative)	4
Learning opportunity	3
Community	5
Contribute to Museums success	8
Recognition coming from volunteering	1
No reason specified	1

25: Reasons for volunteering as indicated by my interviewees

The literature shows that volunteering can be classified into three main roles: governance, operational and support roles. Although my research concentrates on just one of these areas, these are volunteering roles that I recognise from my own experience and are reflected in my research. Indeed, many of my interviewees were involved with their organisation in more than one capacity and therefore fulfilled more than one role (i.e. operational or support roles) within the organisation.

My interviewees cited reasons such as an interest in local history or the local area or an interest in subject matter (enthusiasts) or more general altruistic reasons for becoming a trustee. Many had been users of the respective museums, and several had volunteered for the museum before becoming a trustee. Whilst many of the reasons cited for becoming a trustee were logical there was also a definite tendency for participants in my research, especially with enthusiastic volunteers in smaller

organisations, to develop a more irrational passion for the organisation and the work it does as they spent more time within the organisation and on the board²⁹. Many small museums seem to get ‘under the skin’ of their volunteers and trustees. Research into charities has found evidence of a very strong personal investment in their work by individuals working or volunteering for them (Fitzpatrick & Thorne, 2019). This is not always seen as a positive outcome.

“The chairman is a passionate museum-ey ...somebody who’s into old agricultural equipment or something like that... But, what happens is that people’s personal influence then sometimes blur their roles, or their personal passions can blur their role” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021).

Additionally, for younger trustees, there are opportunities to upskill, gain experience and to see how a whole charitable business operates (see for example research by the Roundhouse, 2018). This is echoed by one of my interviewees and by my research on X/Twitter.

“A youth trustee position is also an opportunity for a young person to gain confidence, learn new skills, and develop a deeper understanding of how arts organisations function, as well as providing access to a network of professionals” (Moss, 2021)

For organisations incorporating young trustees onto their boards there are benefits too. For example:

“I say, having a different age bracket represented on the trustees is very important, and she [our young trustee] brought a dimension to it that just wouldn’t have been there [otherwise].” (Interviewee 2020-08, 2020)

“she was 24 and, you know, had lots of fresh ideas... but those trustees have moved on, because they have other interests or they’re moving for jobs or their life moves on. But they do bring a freshness, that’s very valuable and they have a different perspective” (Interviewee 2021-01, 2021)

There is very little focus on the wrong reasons to become a trustee and “bad” trustees in the literature although it did come up in several of my interviews and in my analysis of X/Twitter discussions on trustees. It is worth noting that some of my interviewees were very clear that reasons for becoming a trustee such as building a CV may be less

²⁹ This is reflected in research elsewhere (Miller-Stevens & Ward, 2019).

acceptable than others (see for example, Interviewee 2020-05, 2020 and Interviewee 2021-01, 2021).

This was also recognised in conversations on X/Twitter:

“I think some people sign up to be trustees because they think it gives them social prestige, some because they have a particular agenda (not always to the benefit of the org)” (Cotterill, 2020b)

4.4.3 The impact of size of a charity on the role of trustees

The evidence from my research suggests that ‘size matters’ and that guidance for trustees in these organisations needs to be tailored to their needs and the resources of their organisation. Lee et al. (2017, p.16) echoed my finding around organisation size and found that “there were important differences between trustees drawn from charities of different sizes” and that “trustees play both a governance role and an executive role” in smaller charities.

Some of the organisations in my research have no staff at all, and trustees carry out both operational as well as governance roles:

“Each trustee has oversight for an area of the museums operations, which either because they have a professional background or because it's something they have over time taken a particular interest in and become involved in themselves... looking after the building... [doing] lots of local history work... oversight for our volunteers and all the rota-ing for all the volunteers” (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021).

These roles are very varied, and my research found trustees also operating as curators, educators, site managers, fundraisers, pest controllers and in more specialist roles such as finance. Many of the smaller charitable organisations within my research notably at The Buckingham Old Gaol, Chesham Museum and Pitstone Green Museum were staffed by volunteers who also sat on the board.

Whilst I had always been of the opinion that a duality of roles was undesirable, many of my interviewees did not see this as an issue and surprisingly some even suggested it

was a necessity especially where it gives trustees an oversight role (Dixon, 2019, Interviewee 2020-06, 2020, Interviewee 2021-11, 2021). Additionally, where trustees have both operational and governance responsibilities it gave “your Trustees opportunities to really get to know your organisation” (Collie, 2020).

Other interviewees felt it was a problem being both a trustee and a volunteer from a governance perspective or having too much of an operational focus at board meetings (for example, Interviewee 2021-14, 2021 and Interviewee 2021-10, 2021).

Others felt that trustee involvement in operational work could undermine staff members and operational management:

“...and to get boards to understand what the difference is between board trustee responsibilities and that of the operational side of the organisation and the limits of their involvement in the operational side is sometimes a very, very difficult thing to do...” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021)

Rochester (2003) also suggests that longstanding volunteers who are board members may form an elite group excluding less involved and newer board members. This is also reflected in my research where trustees often made decisions outside of board meetings (Interviewee 2020-07, 2020).

There was some discussion on X/Twitter around how trustees should be recognised as volunteers too: “Remember Trustees are 'volunteer' senior managers” (Museum Hour 2020). However, in my experience many volunteer trustee board members in larger heritage organisations understand very little about volunteering within their own organisations. Anecdotal evidence from my colleagues at HVG suggests that volunteer managers struggle to put volunteers and their needs high on their organisation’s agenda unless they have a board advocate. Staff in small museums, who by necessity are closer to their volunteers and therefore probably understand them better, could inform a wider understanding of volunteers and their needs within the sector as a whole.

4.5 BOARD FOCUS: MUSEUM TRUSTEE RESPONSIBILITIES, AND TRAINING NEEDS

Most of the trustees I interviewed were fairly confident about their responsibilities as a trustee; indeed, my impression was they were more confident than charity averages since Lee et al. (2017 p. 23- 24) reported concerns about whether trustees truly do have an understanding of their legal roles and responsibilities once recruited. Amongst my interviewees I would suggest there was a general understanding of what trustees do. For example, one interviewee was very clear that “in short it’s being responsible for the successful development of the museum and keeping finances under control and overseeing the directors and staff” (Interviewee 2020-06, 2020).

Interviewees gave the following responses to a series of six questions about understanding the role of a trustee (sent to post interview as part of the online questionnaire):



26: Interviewee responses to Can you grade your understanding of the following duties?

None of the respondents identified a poor understanding of their trustee duties or that they needed training in their trustee duties although whether this is indicative of real training needs is not clear. Perhaps these duties need to be emphasised more at regular intervals. Interestingly, one interviewee who had completed the questionnaire stated

that they had been to “Two ... trustee 'away days' which, although intended to concentrate on forward planning for the museum, did focus attention on our responsibilities as trustees” (Anonymised Questionnaire, 2020).

Some of my interviewees expressed concerns around whether they had the right skill set to be trustees. There were some lower levels of understanding around two areas: compliance with the governing document and ensuring that the charity is accountable. Only one respondent to the questionnaire had been given the governing document as part of their onboarding (but this was only when they asked) so the former result is understandable. Accountability is more difficult to measure: accountable how and to whom? Accountability means that trustees need to disclose, explain and justify what the organisation does and how they discharge their responsibilities. They are answerable to the law, other trustees and members of the organisation and the wider community. Therefore, the trustees need to ensure the heritage organisation is well-managed by the best people available; that the organisation is meeting its aims and needs; and it is achieving good practice whilst complying with the law. This is tested in section 4.8, but it is a very wide ask of any group of individuals especially those without specialist training.

The six main duties for any trustee as laid out in the Essential Trustee jigsaw (see exhibit 8, page 72) align with the questions asked of my interviewees in exhibit 26 on page 170. Whilst levels of confidence in these duties were generally ranked as good by my interviewees, it may be that trustees often find them more difficult to operationalise. Whether this is a matter of size as this interviewee suggests is debateable:

“It didn't make me feel uncomfortable, but I was very aware of the fact that we weren't running as a normal trustee board would run... I think because the whole thing was volunteer based, there lacked a serious element of professionalism that you would find in larger museums” (Interviewee 2020-03, 2020).

Based on the interview transcripts, training for museum trustees seems to be piecemeal. My interviewees indicated there is a lack of formal induction and that on-going training is minimal or not prioritised.

For example, this interviewee spoke about the lack of an induction although this was a common experience with most of my interviewees:

“When you join the trustees, there’s no...You’re not introduced to it. There’s no training. There’s no formal procedures you have to go through.” (Interviewee 2020-08, 2020)

One museum director was working hard to improve procedures in their museum and had introduced formal inductions for new board members. These included providing all the trustees basic Charity Commission information, additional training for trustees that needed it and Clore training for two trustees to improve recruitment (Interviewee 2021-11, 2021). This museum had a small budget for training but took advantage of free support where it was available.

Results from the questionnaire I sent to interviewees indicated that 77% had not had an induction and where it did take place there were instances where the new trustee was just pointed to guidance from the Charity Commission. Some interviewees sought out information on trustee responsibilities themselves; one interviewee for example was also involved with Citizen’s Advice and used their reference materials, and another used materials from the Association of Independent Museums. Others had had training elsewhere such as from the Association of Independent Museums. Only 33% responded that they had been made aware of their responsibilities by the chair or another board member. However new trustees were helped to understand the organisation by being given past minutes of board meetings, Annual Reports and accreditation paperwork and many had the opportunity to attend at least one board meeting before confirming that they would join the board.

The lack of training for trustees continues after induction and my interviewees reported that they had had little or no training after joining the board. The responses to a training question I asked my interviewees post interview indicated a distinct lack of training for two thirds of the trustees who responded.

So, what was considered to be training and development by my interviewees? One trustee stated that: “we have also occasionally been given government documents to read when trustee legislation has changed and become more formalised” (Anonymised

Questionnaire, 2020). Another interviewee suggests that for smaller museums “trying to find a way to keep them (the trustees) [and their skills and knowledge] up-to-date ... is quite a big ask, I think...” (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021).

Not all the interviewees were bothered about this lack of formal training for their trustee role: “I’ve had no official formal training... I’ve always taken the view that my professional background is ... certainly what I need to know” (Interviewee 2021-01, 2021).

One interviewee talked about mentoring as a low cost means to ensure that skills were being shared across the sector including with boards (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021). This interviewee had mentored another within my research sample.

Another interviewee seemed to be confident enough to criticise the chair of the board explaining that “it was quite clear there was a bunch of very committed people there but no board processes that I recognised” from both other boards and industry (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021). Where trustees had specialist skills such as finance or legal training or had worked at senior levels in industry, they seemed more confident that they did not need extensive training. Indeed Interviewee 2021-12 (2021) felt that limited training was required by experts in their own fields.

Finance was a barrier to training. Although there is more and more free training for the charity sector and its trustees, there is often little understanding of how that training can be accessed in particular by smaller organisations. Industry specific organisations such as AIM and the Museums Association do offer training, but it is not free and although there are training bursaries provided by AIM there is little incentive for smaller organisations to spend time completing applications for training purposes. In discussions with the chief executive of AIM it was recognised this was a problem (informal discussion at KYN conference 5/11/2024).

4.6 BOARD DYNAMICS: BOARD RELATIONSHIPS

My research suggests that the best boards work because they possess a strong chair; the trustees work well together; and the trustees also work well with the senior management team and the museum director. All these relationships are dependent on trust, from both sides.

The chair/chief executive relationship is an extremely important relationship for small museums with staff, but it is not one that always works well. One of my interviewees who was chair was very critical of his museum director stating that “frankly, some of the challenges revolve around the guy who’s the museum director. He’s been the museum director for probably nearly 30 years, really passionate about the museum but running it in his manner” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021). Here the chair saw the museum director as a block on progress and according to the interviewee the museum director saw the board as a hinderance to the organisation. The onus was on the chair to get the relationship on track, but it was not proving easy. Another interviewee, who was a museum director, felt that sometimes the chair was just badly behaved and “you as the ...museum director, telling a board member how they should behave is sometimes difficult...” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021).

Another interviewee, this time a museum director, had a much easier relationship with both his previous and current chairs:

“So, what we have done with my previous chair, who basically said, “No, you're the chief executive. You've got an executive team. Go on and do it...” We built our trust by delivering. And then, my current chair, who's been here two and a half years, has inherited something that was running well with an executive in charge of it, and he came in with good board skills and experience.” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021)

Interviewee 2012-03 reflected on the change over time in his relationship with the chief executive. He became more involved when he felt the need to roll his sleeves up either because he has more experience or because the operational team needed some help. Having said that, it is not the role he wanted to do since his emphasis was the strategic remit of the board (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021).

Occasionally it can prove difficult with a clash of personalities and again this was reflected in the relationship between interviewee 2021-03 and his chief executive: “I’ve had two real sort of table banging arguments with [him]...” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021).

Interviewee 2021-13 (2021) reported that although there were no problems between the museum director and chair at their museum: “I’ve known a few people that really struggle... with their chairperson trying to run the operation... when that is the job as the director” (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021).

Again Interviewee 2021-03 (2021) reflected that he had to spend a lot of time in the museum to ensure that he kept his museum director in check. I would suggest the continual balancing of the power relationship only swung in his favour if he did so.

My interviewees noted several occasions when intra board relationships were poor or dysfunctional. Several interviewees describe board meetings where there was a breakdown in behaviour (for example, Interviewee 2020-03, Interviewee 2020-04, Interviewee 2020-07, Interviewee 2020-8, Interviewee 2021-01). Occasionally this revolved around one member of the board, and at other times there were different factions on the board or individuals just did not get on.

This board director controlled the intra board relationships by recruiting likeminded people:

“I’ve certainly invited people to join the board who get on with me, and I get on [with] ... So, it’s a comfortable working relationship, but there [also] seems to be consensus that this is what we need to do” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021).

One interviewee (2021-21-13, 2021) reported “lots of lively discussion and debate” but that the board had not fallen out.

An effective mechanism to control inter board relationships is to have one board member who has a mediator role: this person can negotiate between board members or between the board and the senior management team (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021).

Board reviews as mentioned in section 4.8 can be an effective mechanism for airing any differences and helping to resolve them. There was only evidence that one board in my research had done board reviews and included these as part of their regular assessment of board effectiveness despite recommendations that this is good practice.

Many of the difficulties between charity boards and senior staff exist because there is sometimes a very thin line between what the board should do and what senior (and junior staff) should do. This is particularly difficult when board members are involved operationally: are they the boss or just another worker? Interviewee 2021-12 reflects on this power dynamic:

“Sometimes, they [the board] can actually step on the officer’s, not just the Chief Executive Officer but all the other officers’ toes or create a lot of difficulty for them...[because] if people are too involved, then, again, there’s this assumption that they can say or do things [that are not really their job]”.

A code of conduct for trustees sets expectations about how a board of trustees should behave but none of the interviewees I spoke to mentioned using a code of conduct. And there were definitely occasions when a code of conduct for trustees would have come in useful. One trustee, for example, reflecting on board meetings stated that:

“There was just a lot of head banging and not willing to compromise, which therefore meant, “Oh well, we’ll discuss this at next month’s meeting then”, now we’ve got nowhere, we’ve just had an argument” (Interviewee 2020-03, 2020)

In this museum there was a clear division within the board, with some trustees favouring progress and modernisation, while others, often longer-standing members, were resistant to change. This division created a challenging environment for decision-making, as it was difficult to get everyone to work together and reach a consensus. Trustee meetings were particularly difficult due to the lack of willingness by some board members to compromise, leading to arguments and the postponement of decisions to subsequent meetings or decisions being made by a small select group outside of board meetings. Board members need to support each other rather than work against one another. Ideally the chair of this board would set ground rules for board discussions that allow every board member to voice their opinions, and, if necessary, require the board to vote on decisions rather than to reach consensus via

discussion. Where a board member openly belittles others on the board there needs to be a code of conduct/board contract which allows board members to take quick action before this practice gets out of hand.

It is clear too that boards need a good and strong chair, one that effectively supports and manages the trustees. One interviewee spoke about a chair being bullied by board members and having to intervene to stop it (Interviewee 2020-04, 2020). This chair was ineffective in controlling the board and getting decisions made.

Two interviewees disclosed situations where a trustee had been bullied out of the organisation by another trustee (Interviewee 2020-04, 2020; Interviewee 2020-08, 2020).

4.7 WHAT SHOULD BOARDS LOOK LIKE?

4.7.1 Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Whilst there was a recognition, amongst museum directors and trustees I interviewed, that diversity was important there were few suggestions of solutions to the lack of EDI and no mention of EDI initiatives:

“I am keen to see a much more diverse board, and I do think our trustees are in principle, but they do get cold feet about what that means in terms of day-to-day help for the museum” (Interviewee 2021-11, 2021)

“I'm very aware that as trustees ... it's a difficult one because you want to attract younger people. It's not so easy. There's so many calls on their time” (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021).

One of my interviewees made some interesting observations about the differences between boards with female trustees and boards without. He maintained that women had soft skills which reduced competitiveness and conflict on the board making the board more effective and harmonious (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021). But it is important for boards to realise that diversity is not just an issue of gender.

The X/Twitter discussions were also reflective of general feelings about diversity on boards recognising that:

“Museum staff, trustees and volunteer teams should represent the diversity of their local communities” (Hill, 2018).

4.7.2 Recruitment, retention and rotation

The picture drawn in my research is that trustee boards are made up of older individuals from a professional or semi-professional background who had served on their boards for a long period of time. Many of the trustees I interviewed had been recruited via informal networks and using personal approaches. For a few board members the approach had been the other way round, and they had expressed an

interest in volunteering that had culminated in becoming a trustee. Only two boards in my research had used a formal recruitment process based on advertising in the national press although I have experienced recruitment of trustees using more formal methods during my time as a trustee.

The evidence from my research supports the findings of Lee et al. (2018) that most trustees are recruited via mainly informal processes.

“...historically, the trustees have often been recruited like friends of friends or friends that people know locally. Although, there has been some external recruitment ...I've tried to push for that more...[so] that we are recruiting for trustees based on their skills and experience”. (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021)

This can also be true in reverse where recruiting a trustee helps fill a vital role in the volunteer roster.

“...the chair invites people to become trustees because she sees it as a way of capturing people to run the museum.” (Interviewee 2020-02, 2020)

All my interviewees recognised that recruitment was key to creating a “good” board although it is questionable whether small museums followed good recruitment practices. Museum directors were focused on filling gaps in expertise, ensuring a diverse range of skills on the board, and aligning with the museum's strategic objectives; trustees were more concerned with diversity, skills, and the recruitment process itself.

There are many pathways into becoming a trustee. For the heritage sector, the focus on volunteers is normally their operational roles so there is little advice or understanding about why people become heritage trustees. By asking participants in my research to share their stories of how they became involved in their organisations as trustees a clear picture of trustee recruitment emerges.



27: Interviewees responses to How did you hear about the trustees role?

In my research, interviewees became trustees quite often because they were approached either at a social event or by the chair:

“... recruiting which was sort of somebody’s sidled up to somebody in a cocktail party and said, “Hey, would you like to be a trustee of [the museum]”?
(Interviewee 2021-12, 2021)

“I bumped into him one evening and we were chatting, and he asked the inevitable, “What are you doing? ... Oh, are you looking around?” And, he actually drew my attention to the fact that [the museum] was looking for more trustees”
(Interviewee 2021-03, 2021)

Interviewees 2020-01, 2020-04, 2020-05, 2020-08, 2021-03, 2021-05, 2021-06, 2021-08 and 2021-12 were all recruited in this way! This illustrates the informality with which trustees are recruited and how approaches like this restrict opportunities to diversify the board.

On the other hand, several had first volunteered for the museum and then been approached to become a trustee, but this is obviously still not ideal (for example, Interviewee 2020-01, 2020). In discussions more recently one museum chair suggested that good recruitment practice consisted of recruiting a board member as a volunteer for at least a year to ensure that they were a good fit for the organisation. Since the organisation is volunteer run and led, all the volunteer roles are taken by retirees, so

the board has an average age of over 70! One museum director expressed concern about this practice:

“I do worry that if it’s just a matter of “Oh, well, Fred’s been a volunteer for six years. It’s about time he was a trustee,” that is not a good selection process”.
(Interviewee 2021-10, 2021)

It should be noted that these informal approaches have been seen in other academic research (for example, Brodie et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2017) who found that people were more likely to become volunteers when they were asked by someone they knew or respected!

Several of the organisations in my research had done or were planning to do skills audits although not necessarily as an active tool to inform the trustee recruitment process and certainly not to improve board diversity. One organisation in my research had, for example, been involved in the AIM Prospering Boards programme and a skills audit was performed as part of that. Whilst the results were shared with both the museum director and the chair of the board, there was no active recruitment programme to improve the skills and diversity of the board. Rather as board members retired or moved on the audit was referred to but not updated before approaching existing networks! None of my interviewees had been involved in a diversity audit.

Another finding both in my research and others (for example, Metcalf, 2013) is that the person leading the recruitment process varies. In some organisations the activity is led by the chair in others it is led by the Chief Executive although guidance from the Charity Commission (2002) is quite clear that the board holds responsibility for this process (see also Metcalf, 2012). This was recognised by one of my interviewees (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021).

Some of my interviewees suggested that it could be difficult to attract trustees with specific skills such as finance, fundraising or legal expertise. This may be due to a lack of understanding of the role of trustees and the skills required, leading to misconceptions that trustees need to have specific experience or be of a certain age or stage in their career. Certainly, AIM states that ‘it is a common misunderstanding that a museum Board must have on it a lawyer, an accountant, and a building professional’

(Lesirge & Barnard, 2020, p.23). Interestingly, as I have stated before one of the most common professional occupations cited in the trustee data was accountant (15 trustees stated this was their occupation on data filed at Companies House). A further 4 indicated that they worked as a solicitor and there were 7 buildings specialists (surveyors, architects and structural engineers). Despite AIM's comment, I would argue that some roles such as the treasurer are essential and that finance skills are a requirement on a board. And when looking at trustee vacancies those for finance trustees often seem to linger on job boards suggesting that they are generally more difficult to recruit. A webinar discussion at the "Festival of Trusteeship" in 2023 highlighted the following as areas where it is difficult to recruit including those with professional skills (as discussed above), service users, women and young people (Getting on Board, n.d.).

None of my interviewees talked about specific museum-based skills such as curatorial experience although several recognised that it was valuable to have a museum specialist on the board. Across all the boards and time frames in my research there were only 9 museum specialists, mostly curators but also museum educators, and exhibitions and interpretation specialists. The lack of museum professionals on boards was found to be a problem in Sutherland's research (2022) since her small museum curators reported feeling unsupported and undervalued by their boards. Several felt that the board did not understand the basic skills needed to manage a collection and run an accredited museum (Sutherland, 2022). Since all the museum trustees that I spoke to represented accredited museums, this could be regarded as a recruitment issue. Accreditation requires that there is some understanding of the museum sector at the most senior levels of the organisation and the expectation is that there is at least one museum specialist on the board.

There are, as has already been alluded to, problems in recruitment of trustees generally and some specific skills in particular. However, Getting on Board (Getting on Board, n.d.) also found that the recruitment process was difficult for prospective trustees. Many reported that the recruitment process was unprofessional even when it is more formal than that found in my research, and that many potential trustees found the experience very disheartening. Whilst none of my interviewees spoke specifically about

this aspect of recruitment it was discussed at the Festival of Trusteeship, and my experiences have been similar. In the past I have approached some heritage charities about potential trustee positions without even an acknowledgement of my enquiry, and I have been through one protracted process to appointment.

One point to note is that advertising is expensive and often charities use their existing networks to do semi-formal advertising e.g., on their social media. Again, care should be taken where existing networks are used that the charity tries to recruit from a wider and more diverse pool of candidates with different social or cultural backgrounds rather than just recycling trustees from similar organisations or recruiting in their own likeness. Local volunteering centres can also be a low-cost recruitment conduit, but my experience is that there is little evidence that this route is an effective means to recruit trustees.

My research found that rotation of trustees was missing for many museum boards and that some of the trustees I interviewed during my research had had very long terms of office (see section 4.4.1). However, the regulation of charity boards and the requirements of funders may have precipitated change in this area in more recent years by requiring trustees to be appointed with closed rather than open term of office. One of the organisations involved in this research, the Chiltern Open Air Museum, for example, adopted new Articles of Association in December 2019, which state that “the term of office for directors [trustees] shall be three years and a director who has served for three consecutive terms may not be reappointed for a fourth consecutive term but may be reappointed after an interval of at least one year”. This is a standard recommendation now and in line with current best practice. The Charity Governance Code, for example, proposes that trustees serve a maximum of three terms of three years, or two terms of four years – a maximum of 9 years. No term of office was laid out for trustees of the Chiltern Open Air Museum in the original Articles of Association adopted in 1976. This was also the case for the Quainton Railway Society. Another museum has “... instituted two terms with a third term in extremis ... two four-year terms is maximum [to] keep people moving through” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021).

Many of my interviewees were in favour of fixed terms of office although some worried that rotation of trustees might mean that valuable knowledge about their museum is lost. It is inevitable that boards will revisit matters discussed in previous years as the tacit knowledge embedded in people, culture and processes is lost as board members leave. One interviewee remarked:

“I remember talking to a member of the board ... [who was] still on the board after 12 years, and he wanted to leave. But, they said, “No, you can't leave yet because actually we need somebody else to get to that sort of length of tenure before you go because we need you to guard against that ‘Oh, we’ve never seen this before.’ ‘Oh, yes, we have. Don’t reinvent the wheel...” (Interviewee 2021-10, 2021).

This triangulated with comments on X/Twitter where one commentator noted that “Longevity is sometimes just as useful as fresh blood, they can explain why some solutions don't work or have been tried before” (Morgan, 2018). Rotating board members off a board at different times can help but boards should also remember the value of staff and other volunteers as sources of intangible knowledge and board minutes and other documents in the organisation’s archives as records of tangible knowledge. The benefit of collaborative sharing outside of board meetings with a museum’s senior management team to transfer intangible knowledge into tangible knowledge at, for example, away days cannot be underestimated too. Again, the Chiltern Open Air Museum is an example of a resolution to this problem: as a membership organisation, trustees may retire but they can still remain a member of the museum association (since the Articles allow for more members than trustees) and thus both hold the board to account and prevent corporate amnesia. Some suggestion has also been made that ex-trustees can remain involved as advisors or patrons although care has to be taken that they cannot be regarded as de-facto trustees under the Charities Act 2011/2022 or Shadow Directors under the Companies Act 2006 (Cassidy, 2019).

A number of organisations are now starting to engage in succession planning. A couple of my interviewees mentioned this in their interview: “I'm 70 years old in October, so my game plan is to achieve succession planning” (Interviewee 2021-03) and “We have now got a succession strategy, and within that, we have tried to pull together a list of

existing skills and a list of the kind of skills that we would like to bring in in the future” (Interviewee 2021-11, 2021).

There is a danger in not doing succession planning as this quote shows:

“A lot of boards don't think about succession planning until it's too late. They should definitely look at term limits, skills audits etc. Recently worked with an org where all but one trustee had passed away” (Cotterill, 2020c)

I am aware that the Chiltern Open Air Museum is currently working on a succession plan for its chair. Elsewhere the Succession Planning Programme run by Museum Development East Midlands supported independent museums in the East Midlands to consider their future sustainability and to develop an inclusive approach to trustee recruitment.

Of the trustees I interviewed none mentioned any involvement in exit interviews.

4.8 MEASURING BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

The data thus far describes my findings about small board trustees and highlights the challenges that small museums have with their trustee boards. Trustees do not represent either the wider community nor many museums' target audiences; they are too old, too white and generally too male. But for optimal operation does this really matter? What is good performance as far as a museum board is concerned?

Only one board formally measured its effectiveness: this board had been through:

“two cycles of board review, first one with a reviewer externally who came in and asked questions and interviewed people. The second year, we've done just an internal questionnaire to follow up on that” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021).

It is anticipated that the cycle will be three years with an external consultant reviewing the board every 3 years. Unfortunately, there is no comment in the annual accounts about these board reviews and so I have no data beyond my interview to measure whether measurement of this type is meaningful.

As Copps and Vernon (2010) point out assessing board performance from the outside is very difficult but my interviews and data analysis provide evidence as to whether:

- The board members understand their roles and responsibilities.
- There is a strong chair who manages the board well (clear agendas, minutes, committees, content and timing of board papers)
- There is a diverse board with a range of required skills.
- There is good communications between the board and the rest of the organisation
- There are mechanisms for board evaluation and accountability
- The board is driven by results

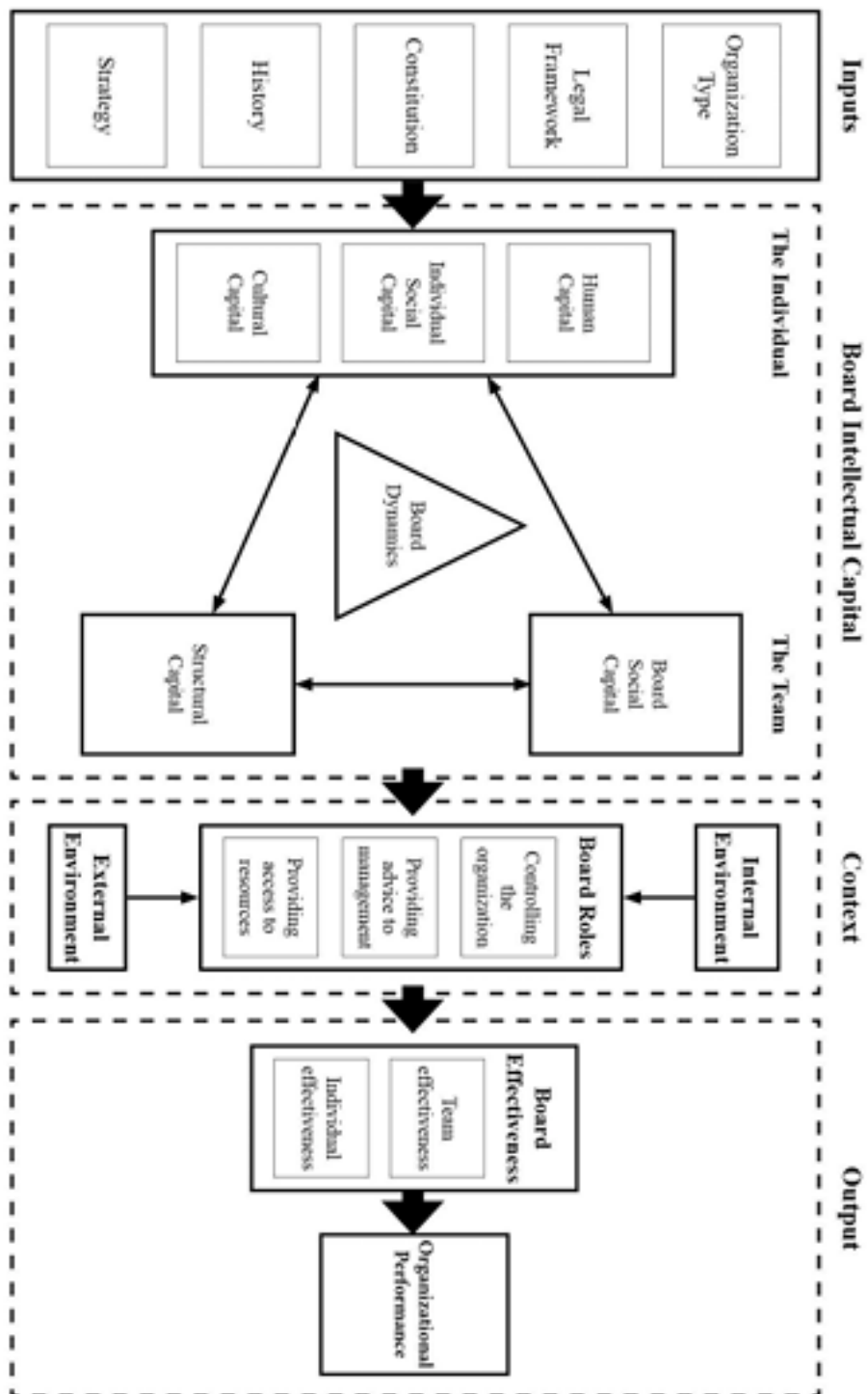
Crystallisation suggests that researchers can choose to gather and report data in different and unconventional ways. My research has shown that small museum boards do not measure board effectiveness. To see whether this can be done I applied a framework measuring effectiveness to the data I collected. The resultant analysis follows in the next section and is reviewed in the discussion in Chapter 5.

4.8.1 Using the Board Intellectual Capital Framework to measure effectiveness

A process model of the board is used as a framework to evaluate board effectiveness in this section of my results: the Board Intellectual Capital Framework from Nicolson and Kiel (2004b), as discussed in section 2.6.2, is used across three museums whose trustees were interviewed as part of my wider study. These are the Chiltern Open Air Museum, the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust and Amersham Museum; they were chosen since these are the museums from which I interviewed the most trustees and directors, and all have the same legal structure, a company limited by guarantee, so data is available on both the Charity Commission and Companies House websites. A short introduction to each museum and the results from the application of the BICF can be found in Appendix 2. Note that in this dissertation, the Board Intellectual Capital Framework is not considered a hypothesis to be either validated or invalidated, but rather it is being used as a framework around which to present data and results.

The Board Intellectual Capital Framework is a process model; the model is reproduced on page 188 for convenience. In a process model inputs are taken into a system, processed and a number of outputs are generated. These can be evaluated and in an effective system we see a feedback loop where the inputs are varied and optimised. Understanding and mapping inputs, outputs and the governance process may be one way of measuring board effectiveness.

A brief commentary on the results of the application of the BICF follows for each museum.



28: Board Intellectual Capital Framework from Nicolson and Kiel (Nicolson & Kiel, 2004b)

4.8.1.1 BICF Results for Amersham Museum

Amersham Museum is a small museum with just one member of staff, the Museum Director, employed at the time of my interviews. Thus, there should be very clear links between the operations of the board and any successful outcomes for the organisation.

Using the Board Intellectual Capital Framework, it is clear from the comments made by my interviewees that there were good working relationships between the trustees and the museum director at the time of interview. Board processes were good and there is a great deal of transparency around the museum's operations and plans (see, for example, the Forward Plan on the museum's website (Amersham Museum, 2024)). Nevertheless, there was an absence of inductions and specific training for trustees. Operational measures show consistent levels of income except when the redevelopment of the museum takes place in 2016/2017. Visitor numbers did increase after the museum redevelopment although post pandemic numbers are back to below 5,000 visitors. There are risks that the museum has too few visitors and that the board is not ambitious enough in targeting audiences from further afield than Amersham although audience development is addressed in the Forward Plan. There are also risks that the board is too reliant on investment income from the investment portfolio (formed mainly from a legacy left to the museum in 2004) and that they would do as well if not better to passively rather than actively manage their funds since there was no indication that there was any expertise in fund management on the board and the value of the investments has fluctuated widely over the last 10 years. Nevertheless, the investments and the related income act as a buffer which has allowed the museum to continue operating even when visitor income is low.

The board and the museum director have changed since my interviews in 2021, and it will be interesting to see whether this has an impact on the effectiveness of the board going forward.

4.8.1.2 BICF Results for the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust

Although the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust is a completely volunteer led and run organisation, it is difficult using the Board Intellectual Capital Framework to ascertain whether the board of the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust is acting well or poorly. There just is not enough data with only 4 years of financial results and detailed financial reports. However, despite this there were some interesting insights from interviewees from the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust. There was an absence of inductions and specific training for trustees. There were clearly some tensions between board members and a lack of process at board meetings. Additionally, as is discussed further in Appendix 1, the theft of some coins by a trustee/honorary curator in 2017 figured heavily in my interviews and eroded trust within the trustee body. The excess holdings of cash indicate a conservatism in the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust's operations although the failure to make a profit over the last 4 years will not help either.

The Buckingham Old Gaol Trust has seen a complete change of personnel on its board over the last couple of years and it will be interesting to follow the impact that has on the museum going forward.

4.8.1.3 BICF Results for the Chiltern Open Air Museum

The Chiltern Open Air Museum is much larger than the two other museums and the board is, therefore, much more removed from the day-to-day operations of the museum than at Amersham Museum or the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust. Indeed, this was a topic of discussion with several of my interviewees who either felt that they needed to be involved in the museum's operations to better understand the organisation or alternatively that trustees needed to be distanced from the operational activities of the museum.

In terms of the Board Intellectual Capital Framework the board can be seen to be cohesive and there are good relations between the director and the trustees. The staff know the trustees less well and there is often a poor understanding by staff of the trustees' role. The board is well run with papers provided in advance, agendas and a finance subcommittee. Interestingly this was the only board of the three museums with a trustee with specialist museum experience. The museum director at the time of interview (and the current director) come from outside of the heritage sector although both have charity experience. There was an absence of inductions and specific training for trustees (although this has changed more recently). Additionally at the time of interview several trustees had served for a very long time. This has now changed with six new trustees and a new treasurer.

Similarly to the other museums visitor numbers were badly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and these are still not up to pre-pandemic numbers. This is an issue for the museum which it will need to tackle particularly in the light of a drop in liquidity and growing expenses. The new board are well aware of these issues. In 2020 when my interviews took place with the Chiltern Open Air Museum the board had a very risk adverse attitude to surplus funds and held large cash balances (although the argument was that until the museum obtained its freehold this was a prudent position to take). Some structural changes to the museum's operations have taken place since the pandemic which has led to losses in 2023/24. Importantly the museum obtained the freehold to its site in 2023 and surplus cash balances are now being drawn upon. This is a risk since ongoing losses cannot be sustained and the museum has a new board of trustees with limited experience of running the museum.

The museum has won a number of awards over the last few years although care needs to be taken with the visitor experience (for example, less than positive reviews have been given of the museum's catering facilities on review websites like Tripadvisor).

4.8.2 Discussion on results of board effectiveness modelling

The use of the Board Intellectual Capital Framework to help in the measurement of board effectiveness provides some interesting results. For the researcher it is difficult to tie the outputs to actions taken by the board without access to a wealth of information much of which is internal to the organisation and therefore not normally available. Nevertheless, it was clear from the extensive data based on my trustee interviews and my further desk analysis from annual accounts, websites and other information sources that some measure of board effectiveness was possible.

Both hard and soft output measures indicate both the organisation's and therefore the board's success in setting the organisations strategic objectives and facilitating its daily operations. Hard measures based on, for example, financial results, and visitor numbers etc. are easy to find in company accounts and provide indicators of the organisation's financial health and success. Soft measures, such as awards and reviews, are merely indicators of success or otherwise.

My analysis shows that for any organisation wishing to measure board effectiveness the framework is a useful lens through which to view various measures. The comprehensive nature of the framework is attractive since it has a focus not only on measurement but also on board dynamics and board processes. Combined with a model like KBAC to ensure measurement is across the whole organisation rather than just one aspect (normally finances) it would be possible to construct a series of measures for a museum that not only measured board effectiveness in terms of business performance but also the museum's collection, its visitors and its research.

4.9 WHAT MY INTERVIEWEES CHOSE TO TALK ABOUT

It is also worth commenting on what my interviewees chose to talk about outside of the confines of my trustee analysis since the interviews of trustees were very freeform by design. The freeform nature of my interviews with museum trustees and directors (in common with oral history methods such as those described by Portelli, 2017 or by Perks, 2017) is important because it tells us about the meaning of various events or actions to the people concerned. Their observations beyond the narrow confines of questionnaire type questions around museum trusteeship tell us something about how it feels to be a trustee and what they think is important to their particular museum. It gives us a more nuanced view of the museum and its governance.

Almost all the trustees I interviewed from the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust, for example, spoke about the theft of some coins by a trustee/curator in 2017. This had had a big impact on the board since it eroded the trust they required to work together. The incident and its outcome are discussed more in Appendix 1 as one of the sample case studies.

It was clear from my interviews that many of my interviewees felt exposed to a regulatory environment they did not necessarily fully understand albeit that they did not always know how to clearly articulate this or to mitigate that exposure. One trustee, for instance, spoke extensively about their concerns around the responsibilities of being a trustee and the potential liabilities. For this interviewee taking on a trustee position had been risky and not something they would do again. This was echoed in one of the interviews I had with a museum director who commented on the legal responsibilities of trustees and how these made retaining trustees and finding new trustees more difficult. Whilst some of the museums where my interviewees sat on the board had officers' insurance many of the smaller museums did not since this was beyond their budgets or they did not know that such insurance existed.

Many of my interviewees took time to talk to me about their museum and the museum operations in some detail. Several wanted to talk to me about the Chiltern Open Air Museum and the museum's COVID-19 pandemic experiences especially around reopening the site (this was obviously very relevant in 2020 and 2021). For some of the interviewees there was some talk around how the museum sites themselves might develop. One museum chair asked for my advice on planning matters since I had experience of a museum of buildings! And several asked me if I was interested in becoming a trustee on their boards!

Other interviewees talked about the collections at their museums and how they should be interpreted, recorded and maintained. Sometimes this was quite specific: for example, one interviewee talked about a shawl crocheted by Queen Victoria and how they had been instrumental around its conservation and display at their museum. Some interviewees talked about other museums they had visited, often as a comparison to their site.

Other interviewees especially museum directors talked about their experiences more widely in the heritage sector. Interviewees, who were museum trustees, were more likely to justify their involvement as a museum trustee by giving me a potted history of their career and relevant experience.

All the trustees who were involved with more than one museum gave me comparative data which allowed me to extend my analysis across a wider number of organisations. Their observations of what worked and did not work on various boards helped me by highlighting what represents good governance practice.

I had made my background clear before I interviewed people, so finances, funding and fundraising were also a focus of discussion for some of my interviewees.

The richness of these interviews reminds us of the divergent interests and concerns of small museum trustees. For me, as a researcher, the wealth of information I gained confirms my choice to pursue long-form interviews over surveys or quantitative research.

4.10 SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

In this chapter I have analysed my results to answer three questions that arose from my literature review:

- Is there any evidence of board models from my data?
- What were the characteristics of the boards, their trustees and their behaviours as measured against the general museum and charitable sector populations?
- How do their characteristics and behaviours potentially impact on board effectiveness?

Firstly, I examined the various theoretical models and analysed the interviews to assess whether there was any evidence of which theoretical models the boards were following. I found that there was evidence of board models reflecting both Stakeholder Theory and Resource Dependency Theory. This challenges Bieber's (2003) research into small museum boards that suggests that professional expertise resides with the museum director/CEO and that the board would follow a managerial hegemony model by allowing the museum director to dictate decisions around the collections and the wider museum operations. My evidence suggests that many museum board members are drawn from the local community and specialist interest groups and demand an equal say in policy matters relating to their museum and collection. This is discussed further in Chapter 5 and may reflect that in many smaller museums the museum director may in reality have limited or no experience of collections and in the very smallest that the board is reliant on volunteers (and these may be board members anyway) to manage the museum and its collection. Furthermore, as discussed when looking at trustee characteristics in my study, there is a lack of sector expertise on museum boards which may have implications around the professionalism of smaller museum boards especially in volunteer-led museums and their sustainability in a highly competitive environment which requires new ways of engaging with more diverse audiences.

In Chapter 5 I will also consider whether size matters in terms of board membership and operations. My results indicate it does since the smaller organisations within my study found it difficult to recruit board members and indicated that certain roles were more difficult to fill than others. Evidence suggests that a personal request to join a board is more difficult to refuse and this may explain the persistence of informal recruitment practices across most of the organisations within this study.

In terms of board operations, small organisations often face unique challenges such as informal governance structures, founder-syndrome and personality clashes. Some of these issues are reflected in my results where, for example, decisions are made outside of board meetings by a subset of the board. Recruiting in one's own likeness can prevent constructive and necessary debate since it engenders a club-like atmosphere in the boardroom. My results explore the characteristics of trustees and their experiences. My findings suggest that board membership is still the preserve of middle-class, older, white people from a professional or semi-professional background recruited through informal networks. My findings also suggest that board members do not have access to specialist training around trusteeship. I was surprised by my findings on gender and the soft skills of female board members. I thought the gender balance across heritage boards would be more reflective of the gender balance of museum workers (see research by O'Brien et al., 2025 which showed that there have consistently been more women than men employed within the sector). Board relationships were also explored and the importance of strong chair, good intra board relationships and staff-board relationships were highlighted through my results.

My research also found that trustees are not generally thought of or managed in the same way as ordinary volunteers in museums. Whilst I discuss this in more detail in the following chapters, I found that trustees are an overlooked component of the volunteer workforce. Many of the trustees I interviewed also had active roles volunteering within their museum. This duality of roles is confusing for both trustees and the museum team so it is essential for museum trustees to understand that their focus at board meetings should be on strategically aligning the organisation with its intended purpose not micromanaging operations. Trustees in operational volunteering roles need to have clear guidance on those roles too.

The museum sector has seen an overall decline in volunteering. Whilst this was not reflected in my research, which took place over the COVID-19 pandemic years, this decline may eventually find its way into the trustee population as volunteering becomes less popular more generally. This is especially an issue for museums where trustees often engage with their museum as a volunteer before becoming a trustee or as reported in my results must have been a volunteer before they are taken on as a trustee!

My results explored issues such as the size of the board, frequency of meetings, virtual versus in-person meetings, length of service, time spent on the trustee role, recruitment (more often than not informal), and training. These factors are all important for a well-run and effective board. The results are reflective of my own experiences in small museums where board meetings become dominated by operational issues and the board is mainly concerned with compliance rather than strategic issues. The results reflect the reality of small museum board operations rather than the idealised world reflected in the literature and policy documents. Neither is it reflective of the large museum perspective which promotes a generic view of museum governance.

One of the questions I asked at the beginning of my research was “what is effective governance” in small museums. Based on interviews and longitudinal content analysis of three museums’ annual reports and other public documents I look at how to measure board effectiveness across these museums. There is no accepted model for measurements of this kind (indeed it is a bit of a Holy Grail across academia), so I chose to use the Board Intellectual Capital Framework model with its focus on inputs, the board’s intellectual capacity, and outputs to inform the measurement process. The difficulty with the model and measuring board effectiveness without being embedded within an organisation are acknowledged but this is definitely an area that warrants further research and development. The results of this analysis are discussed further in Chapter 5.

The next chapter considers these results and discusses whether or not they align with the idealised model of governance outlined in Chapter 2 and my experiences as a small museum trustee.

5

DISCUSSION: MY OBSERVATIONS ON THE RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

How boards set direction, exercise control and shape culture in their organisations is once more in the spotlight with the demise of organisations like the River and Rowing Museum in Henley in 2025, large scale redundancies in several major heritage organisations including English Heritage (Adams, 2025) and major losses in funding for small and medium sized heritage organisations (West & Neiva Ganga, 2025). My objective with this research has been to explain the realities of small museum board operations from a trustee's perspective and highlight how that differs from both academic and industry literature and advice. At the beginning of this dissertation, I asked the question:

What is effective governance in small museums and how can governance best practice be applied within small organisations in the UK heritage sector?

This chapter synthesises the literature from Chapter 2 and my results from Chapter 4 to understand how small museum boards really work and to ask the question “so what”?

The cultural sector as a whole operates in a much more complicated social, legislative, financial and regulatory framework than it did at the turn of the 21st century. The advent of the National Lottery, driving very significant building and refurbishment

programmes, the growth of commercial sponsorship, an increasing emphasis on earned income and the rapid decline of public funding for the sector, have all created complexity. Interest in how boards can control and influence heritage organisations dealing with this complexity has risen particularly in the light of an increased reliance on irregular funding in a complex and extremely competitive funding landscape and pressure on an already stretched workforce.

Research done by Sharples (2026) highlighted 663 vulnerable museums in England, all of which are small and independently governed. Of these 226 museums are in areas of high deprivation and in many cases these small local museums are the most accessible cultural institution for the communities around them. Heritage sites have increasingly in recent years been used for community work, as designated warm spaces and as organisations reaching vulnerable communities (often grant funding is reliant on factors like the latter). Museums in the UK, in particular smaller museums, have had to introduce efficiency measures and seek alternative funding as a result of reductions in central and local government funding since: ‘if funding had kept pace with inflation and demand, net service spending [on heritage] would have been 42% higher in 2022 to 2023 than it was in reality (Local Government Association, 2024 in West and Neiva Ganga, 2025). Nevertheless, heritage continues to be an important driver for investment in local economic growth, civic pride and tourism (West & Neiva Ganga, 2025).

In 1990 Middleton wrote that independent museums had a ‘management frailty’ with trustees and staff lacking basic skills in management especially in corporate strategy and planning, human resource management, customer care and marketing and research (Middleton, 1990). He also wrote about the problems in finding new trustees with appropriate experience and management skills and suggested that the lack of skills within the UK museums’ trustee body needed to be tackled urgently (Middleton, 1990). His call for building management skills in museums, although not specifically aimed at trustees, was reiterated in his work for AIM in 1998 (Middleton, 1998). AIM and other parties have subsequently tried to upskill museum managers and trustees, but I would argue that in my experience as a cultural and heritage sector trustee over the past thirty plus years I have seen little evidence that these initiatives have equipped people with

the skills needed to run these organisations. Basic management and governance skills are crucial for those running all small museums and especially so for those at risk (Sharples, 2026).

The UK Corporate Governance Code 2024 (FRC, 2024) is centred upon the principle of ‘effectiveness’ and whilst the Charity Governance Code does not emphasise effectiveness it does recommend that there is measurable evidence of good governance (Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d.). All boards (both for-profit and non-profit) are required to demonstrate the ways in which they are effective, to identify areas of improvement and to provide assurance around the competency of the board and its leadership and stewardship of the organisation. Whilst some of the boards I have sat on have worked hard to provide assurance around the competency of the board none have used KPIs or other measures to look at board effectiveness. Lesirge and Barnard (2020) offer guidance for independent museums to ensure they are effective but no ideas on how to measure and test effectiveness.

All these issues are examined in this chapter by drawing together the data from my research with the extant literature to formulate how my findings support or challenge previous work.

5.2 DISCUSSION

This research started by trying to define what constitutes a museum in the UK today. Museum professionals use standardised definitions of museums from organisations such as ICOM or the Museums Association in the UK whilst public understandings of museums are somewhat different since they are seen as places of entertainment, education and consumption (Candlin et al., 2020; McPherson, 2006). The definition of a museum used by the MMP is the one used for this research: I define a museum as an organisation that identifies itself as such and maintains a publicly accessible collection in a designated space.

All of my experience as a trustee has been in smaller cultural sector organisations. These organisations, all with incomes of less than £1million, can be categorised as small charities with two in the very small or micro classification (NCVO, 2023). In the literature review I looked at defining small museums using features beyond income: for example, by looking at square footage, the number of staff, and the size of the collection (see the discussions in section 2.2.2 and, for instance, the work by Candlin, 2016; Sutherland, 2022; and the AASLH, n.d.). I like the AASLH definition that ignores the defining characteristics set by other bodies and states that ‘If you think you’re small, you’re small’. Robbins (2019) defined small museums as community museums receiving no regular funding. Almost all the interviews I conducted related to small or micro museums as defined by these authors.

The research focus of many of the studies into UK museums has concentrated on large national museums so the literature relating to small museums is sparse. Research by the MMP, in contrast, covers the whole UK museum sector (Candlin et al., 2020). It compiled data on over 4,000 museums. The MMP found that about half the sector had never been surveyed before since previous studies had focused on accredited institutions (Candlin et al., 2020). As stated before in section 2.7, the MMP challenges mainstream museology’s emphasis on large institutions by demonstrating that small museums are fully developed, sophisticated, and innovative organisations in their own right. Small museums are valuable case studies for larger institutions since they

regularly contend with constraints on funding, space and staff. My research into small museums concentrates on organisations that until now have mostly ‘fall[en] outside of the traditional academic compass’ (Candlin, 2016, p.12).

Research into museum governance is also rare and concentrates in the main on larger organisations. Some of the work discussed in Chapter 2 focuses on UK’s national museums and their relationship with central government (for example, Griffin, 1991; and Abdullah, 2015). Other research tries to create new models of governance such as the work done by Rentscheler (2004) and Tzeng (2009). The governance of independent, local authority, mid-sized and small museums in the UK gets far less dedicated attention and much of the research includes museums as a subset of organisations in the wider cultural sector (see Bieber, 2003 for a study solely dedicated to UK museum boards, and Carty et al., 2017 and O’Brien et al., 2023 on the wider cultural sector with museums included in their samples). Governance codes, best practice manuals and advice dominate the museum sector literature (see for example, Lesirge & Barnard, 2020 and similar older success guides from AIM written by Adrian Babbidge such as *Charitable Status for Museums*, *The Effective Museum Trustee*, and *Charitable Status for Local Authority Museums*). Research from outside the UK is also sparse and covers topics such as board diversity (Baldwin & Ackerson, 2017), museum trustees as donors (Malaro, 1994 writes about this although there is more literature on board members as trustees and donors of art organisations such as in work by Ostrower, 2002), and boards as elite social institutions (Ostrower, 2002).

What is clear from my research is that small museums are vulnerable to financial and operational risks because their formal governance structures are lacking. Is this the case for all small non-profit organisations or is it specific to the museum or the cultural sector? My experience of small museum boards is that whilst all the organisations I have been involved with (and all the organisations in my research) have formal legal and governance structures, there is a lack of individual board expertise and formal policies representing good board practice. Only by discovering how small museum boards operate can we build understanding and theorise how small museums can optimise both their board’s and organisation’s performance and effectiveness and put this into practice.

My research broadly looked at three main areas: evidence of board models in small museums, characteristics and experiences of board members and effectiveness of the board. The discussion that follows looks at these three areas.

5.2.1 Understanding board models for small museums

There are a number of different features which distinguish boards in the charitable sector from boards of commercial for-profit organisation. Chambers et al. (2013) suggest that boards can pick a model to follow. My research shows that the board model in place in small museums at a particular time is a consequence of a number of factors: the board members, the chair, the organisation's history and culture, and boardroom procedures and recruitment practices. There is not a simple theory about how boards should operate. Nevertheless, each of the main board theories highlights particular and important aspects of the role of boards (Chambers et al., 2013): for example, Agency Theory focusses on the need to monitor and control managerial activities whilst other theories feature the importance of multiple external and internal stakeholders (Stakeholder Theory) and external influences and expertise (Resource Dependency Theory). This was summarised in Table 1. Whilst my research did not seek to establish the prevalence of one particular model, there was a strong thread running through my research interviews that suggested the existence of collaborative models such as Stakeholder Theory and Resource Dependency Theory. This indicates that board members are drawn from groups with an interest in the strategic direction and management of the organisation and that board members have external links to help the organisation meet its objectives.

My research presents a mixed picture of board power with different power relations evident from my interviews. In line with research by Cornforth (1999) I recognise his cautioning that my data is reliant on the word of just one source, the board members themselves, rather than independent verification of their accounts through observation and board minutes. Nevertheless, interviewee accounts correlated with each other, and bad behaviour and board fragmentation was especially evident for the trustees of one

organisation in my research³⁰. There was also evidence (again from several interviewees from the same organisation) of a powerless board with small subgroups of trustees taking decisions outside of board meetings (for a discussion on powerless boards see Murray et al. 1992). Interestingly funders are a key external stakeholder who can hold considerable power over a board although they may not be aware that they do so. Whilst funders and fundraising were an important topic in my interviews there was no recognition of the influence that funding providers had on board decisions. In my experience however, especially as treasurer in these organisations I have seen how potential or existing funding could skew a strategic decision.

My research also revealed that the quality of interpersonal relations within the boardroom, and the mechanisms available to manage them, varied considerably across the organisations in this study. At one museum, interviewees described board meetings characterised by entrenched disagreement, an unwillingness to compromise, and the repeated deferral of decisions to subsequent meetings. Two interviewees from different organisations disclosed situations in which a trustee had been bullied out of the organisation by another board member, and in one case a chair had been bullied by trustees and proved unable to control the board or drive decisions. These are not trivial governance failures: in small organisations with limited trustee pools, losing a single board member to interpersonal conflict can have disproportionate consequences for both governance capacity and institutional knowledge.

None of the organisations which my interviewees represented used a code of conduct for trustees. This is a document that sets out expectations about board behaviour and provides a framework for addressing breaches. The Charity Governance Code recommends that boards adopt such a code, and it would seem an obvious and low-cost tool for organisations where the informality of governance structures can leave boards without recourse when relationships break down. In small, volunteer-dependent museums, the absence of any formal behavioural framework means that dysfunction, once established, can prove remarkably difficult to address. The chair's role is crucial here, and my data confirms that the most effective boards were those

³⁰ Fragmentation is defined by Murray et al. (1992) and is characterised by stormy meeting and difficulties in decision-making at board meetings.

with a strong chair capable of managing both the agenda and the interpersonal dynamics of the group. The consequences were clearly visible where this leadership was absent.

In my interviews I saw very little evidence of boards being subjected to managerial hegemony and merely rubber-stamping management decisions (Bieber, 2003). Many board members were knowledgeable about the organisation because of their involvement as volunteers and could draw on this informal knowledge when making decisions. In several of the boards I looked at, interviewees reported an equal partnership between the board and management with boards confident enough to challenge management proposals. There was also evidence that board power changed over time. It was clear from one of my interviews that power had shifted several times in the relationship between the museum director and the chair of the trustees.

The research suggests that organisation size has a big impact on how a board operates (see Cornforth and Simpson, 2002; Rochester, 2003). In small organisations the focus is often on operational matters, and I found evidence of this in my research. This was frustrating for some of my interviewees whilst for others operational roles were key to their understanding of the museum. A core role for boards is in the development of strategy. My research suggests that there are worrying signs that the strategy space for small museum boards, either carved out for or by them, may not be very great. In my view, this is partially due to the continued emphasis on operational matters but also reflects a lack of time trustees can dedicate to their role (Wilson, 2024).

Size matters in other ways too. Rochester (2003) identifies organisational scale as a significant determinant of governance capacity, whilst Cornforth and Simpson (2002) observe that smaller organisations frequently encounter considerable difficulty in attracting and retaining suitable board members. My own experiences and research are broadly consistent with these findings, though I would suggest that the challenge of recruitment is not uniformly distributed across all trustee positions. Certain roles prove more difficult to fill than others, particularly those demanding specialist knowledge or professional expertise. Positions requiring curatorial experience, fundraising acumen, or financial competence, for instance, present persistent recruitment challenges, as the

pool of individuals possessing both the requisite skills and the willingness to serve in a voluntary governance capacity is often limited. Surprisingly, research by O'Brien et al. (2023) identified a number of individuals from large accounting firms who had taken up trusteeships in major cultural institutions so these recruitment issues may be confined to smaller organisations.

This recruitment difficulty is compounded by a structural characteristic common to smaller museums of the kind represented in this study: a pronounced dependence on volunteers to discharge many of the operational functions necessary for the organisation to function effectively. In the museum sector specifically, volunteers frequently undertake responsibilities that extend well beyond the boundaries of conventional governance, performing day-to-day operational tasks that would, in larger and better-resourced organisations, be carried out by salaried staff. This reliance on voluntary labour, whilst often born of financial necessity, gives rise to a significant governance tension.

The prevailing literature on organisational governance advocates, consistently, for a clear delineation between operational and governance roles (see, for example, Otto, 2003; Lee et al., 2017; Miller, 2018; ICAEW, n.d.). The rationale underpinning this recommendation is well established: the conflation of the two functions may compromise the objectivity and strategic oversight that effective governance requires. However, this position does not reflect my own experience, nor does it fully account for the operational realities facing small, volunteer-dependent organisations. In practice, the same individuals frequently occupy both governance and operational roles simultaneously, serving as trustees whilst also contributing directly to the delivery of services, the management of collections, or the administration of the organisation. This duality, far from being an occasional or incidental occurrence, is often an embedded structural feature of small organisations operating with constrained resources. It brings with it challenges in terms of role clarity, accountability, and the capacity of individuals to maintain the critical distance necessary for effective governance oversight.

A related topic concerns the status of trustees within the broader volunteering ecosystem. My research found that trustees are not generally thought of or managed

in the same way as other museum volunteers. Discussions with colleagues at the Heritage Volunteering Group confirmed that trustees as a group are neglected within HVG's activities with museums and other heritage organisations. This is paradoxical: trustees are, by definition, volunteers, yet they occupy a governance role that sets them apart from the operational volunteer workforce and often renders them invisible to both the volunteering literature and the support infrastructure that surrounds it. In small museums, where the same individuals frequently serve as both trustees and operational volunteers, this invisibility is particularly problematic. Recognising trustees explicitly as part of the volunteer workforce, and ensuring that the support, training and recognition available to operational volunteers is extended to those in governance roles, would be a straightforward step towards addressing the isolation that many small museum trustees described in my interviews.

5.2.2 The characteristics and experiences of trustees

As stated already there is evidence that board composition and practices can be mapped against the main board theories (see table 1). Museum boards are made up of unpaid volunteers who are charity trustees bound by charity law and in the case of all the charities I have been involved with, and the organisations in this research, bound by the requirements of the Charity Commission of England and Wales. Charity trustees are required to ensure that the organisation is carrying out its purpose for public benefit, is compliant with its constitution or governing document and the law, is accountable and manages its resources appropriately (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2017). Trustees are also required to act in the organisations best interests and operate with reasonable skill and care (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2017). The Charity Governance Code for Smaller Charities (Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d.) expects boards to focus on seven key principles of good governance. These are: organisational purpose; leadership; integrity; decision making, risk and control; board effectiveness; diversity and openness and accountability.

Exactly what trustees do is subject to contestation and ambiguity. On the one hand, there exists a long and comprehensive list of prescribed legal duties set out in *The Essential Trustee* (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2017) and supplemented by best practice frameworks such as the Charity Governance Code (n.d.) and guidance from bodies including the ICAEW and NCVO. These documents present trustee responsibilities as clearly defined obligations: ensuring the charity fulfils its purposes, managing finances prudently, safeguarding assets, reporting to regulators, and exercising independent judgement. The Charity Commission's own research with trustees in 2024 found high levels of stated confidence across most areas of trustee work, with 98% of respondents expressing confidence in decision-making and 99% in delivering their charity's purpose (Yonder, 2024). Yet these headline figures mask notable gaps: only 55% of trustees recognised that the board holds collective responsibility for ensuring the right information is sent to the Commission at the right time, and only 69% correctly identified the board as responsible for managing conflicts of interest (Yonder, 2024).

This points to a well-documented gap between prescribed guidance and actual governance practice. Moser and Nicholson (1996) observed that while most non-profit organisations provide guidelines for their governing bodies, implementation of these guidelines is often problematic, noting that the description of what boards should do 'is more straightforward than actual practice would suggest'. More recently, Langford and Anderson (2022) surveyed charity trustees in England and Wales and found significant variation in trustees' understanding of, and confidence with, their governance duties, as well as perceived barriers to enhanced governance and compliance. This echoes results from Wright and Millesen (2008) and Metcalf (2012) highlighting a lack of understanding by non-profit board members around their role. This ambiguity adversely affects board engagement.

The gap between guidance and practice is attributable, in part, to the limited time available to trustees. As unpaid volunteers, trustees must balance their governance responsibilities with professional careers, family commitments, and, in many cases, additional operational duties within the organisation itself. Nichols (2004) identified time pressures as a primary difficulty facing volunteers, noting the competing demands

of increased expectations for professionalism alongside greater choice and competition for time from other commitments. The challenge is compounded by the growing complexity of the trustee role: as regulatory requirements have expanded and governance expectations have increased, the time required to fulfil the role adequately has grown correspondingly whilst the voluntary nature of the position means that trustees' available time has not. In small organisations in particular, where trustees often carry both governance and operational responsibilities, the time constraints become especially acute.

Board composition constitutes a significant area of investigation within the governance literature, with much of the discussion centring on the demographic characteristics of trustees. A recurrent theme in this body of work is the prevalence of what has been termed the "male, pale and stale" trustee profile. This characterisation states that trustees are mostly male, white retirees (Lee et al., 2017). Whilst this depiction is well substantiated in the existing research, it does not accord fully with the observations drawn from my own professional experience or my research. I found a dominance of older white trustees, but the gender mix was more balanced than the general trustee or the museum trustee population. The boards with which I have been associated have not uniformly exhibited this degree of demographic homogeneity, which may indicate that the reality is somewhat more varied than the literature implies.

Nevertheless, my experience and results from my research align closely with findings pertaining to other dimensions of trustee diversity, particularly those concerning ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and educational attainment. Several studies have highlighted persistent imbalances in these areas: Lee et al. (2017) and Parker (2017) document the continued underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in board-level governance, whilst John (2023) and Tyler (2023) examine the extent to which class background and educational credentials continue to function as gatekeeping mechanisms in the appointment of trustees. These findings are broadly consistent with my own observations, where boards are dominated by individuals drawn from comparatively narrow professional and educational backgrounds, even in instances where progress has been achieved in other areas of diversity, such as gender representation.

A strong thread from my literature review was the need for greater diversity in trustee boards. Nevertheless, there is very little academic research specifically examining EDI initiatives in museum trusteeship. There are four main lines of argument in support of board diversity: the need to tap into the widest possible talent pool; the fact that diverse boards understand their stakeholders better; diversity prevents ‘groupthink’; and the increasing (recent) evidence that women on boards are associated with better organisational performance.

Most of the relevant literature for this thesis addresses either museum workforce diversity or charity board diversity more broadly, without bringing the two together in the heritage context. Sector reports and guidance from organisations like the Museum’s Association, AIM and Getting on Board plus my research highlight that trustees need to be representative of the communities they serve. Whilst more information needs to be collected specifically about class, sexual orientation and disability across cultural sector and museum boards, there is a suggestion that diversity in museum leadership including boards is stalling or going backwards (Godwin, 2025). Thomson et al. (2023) identify that volunteer populations can be diversified by reforming recruitment procedures, enhancing and enriching training, and offering mentoring³¹.

One particularly encouraging finding from more recent scholarship, however, provides some basis for cautious optimism. Harmer and Ren (2025) observe that boards characterised by a younger age demographic tend to demonstrate greater ethnic diversity in their composition. This finding is suggestive of a generational shift that may, over the longer term, serve to ameliorate some of the entrenched disparities in ethnic representation at the governance level. If this trend continues, and should organisations pursue deliberate strategies to recruit younger trustees, it is conceivable that board composition will progressively come to reflect more closely the demographic diversity of the communities and populations their organisations serve.

³¹ The Heritage Volunteering Group run an EDI forum each month and have a publicly available Trello Board showcasing EDI in initiatives. This is available at <https://trello.com/b/Y8o5YTBj/hvg-edi-board> Accessed 30/03/2026

One result that is worth mentioning from my research is the exposure that many trustees feel to the increasingly complex regulatory environment. In my results smaller museums often lacked officers' insurance because it was beyond their budgets or they did not know it existed or that it was required. The absence of officers' insurance may potentially deter candidates from applying for trustee roles and is therefore a potential barrier to trustee recruitment and retention.

A number of other topics have received attention in both the academic and practitioner literature: board size, frequency of meetings, the balance between virtual and in-person attendance, length of trustee service, time commitments, and the question of trustee remuneration (see, for example, Gambling and Jones, 1996; Hudson and Ashworth, 2012; Lee et al., 2017; Sayer et al., 2017; The Charity Governance Code, n.d.; Yonder, 2021; NCVO, 2022).

With regard to board size, my research found that the museums in this study had boards ranging from five to thirteen trustees. These figures are notably higher than the national average of 5.9 trustees but lower than the sector results for larger arts and cultural organisations reported by Hudson and Ashworth (2012). While none of my interviewees identified a definitive optimal size, most agreed that a board of around eight or nine members was manageable, and that larger boards tended to become unwieldy. In contrast a X/Twitter contributor suggested that larger boards might be desirable as a means of ensuring greater diversity.

Length of service emerged as a particularly striking finding. Several of the trustees I interviewed had served for remarkably long periods (several had been involved in a single organisation for over 20 years). Such extended tenures run counter to best practice guidance from the Charity Commission and other sector bodies, and, as one interviewee noted, can make it difficult to modernise organisations where trustees have been on the board for a long time. While some boards had moved to fixed terms with a maximum of two or three periods of service, others retained trustees who had been in post far longer, often because of the persistent difficulty of recruiting replacements. It is worth noting, however, that not all museums exhibited this pattern for example, at one organisation, no trustee apart from the current chair had served longer than

four or five years. My findings also revealed that many trustees served on more than one board simultaneously, with one interviewee sitting on three boards concurrently.

The combination of extended tenures and persistent recruitment difficulties makes succession planning a matter of some urgency for small museum boards, yet my research suggests it remains the exception rather than the rule. Only a handful of interviewees reported that their organisations had begun to address this: one chair, aged seventy, described succession planning as his personal "game plan," while another museum had developed a succession strategy incorporating a skills audit to identify both existing capabilities and gaps to be filled through future recruitment. More sobering was a contribution on X/Twitter recounting an organisation where the absence of succession planning had resulted in all but one trustee having passed away, leaving the organisation in an acutely vulnerable position. Programmes such as the Succession Planning Programme run by Museum Development East Midlands, which supported independent museums in developing sustainable approaches to trustee recruitment and retention, offer a model for the sector, but these initiatives have not yet reached the majority of small museums. None of my interviewees reported any involvement with exit interviews for departing trustees which further suggests that the transition of trustees in and out of small museum boards remains largely unmanaged.

The frequency of board meetings was another area where my findings aligned with wider observations. Many interviewees reported attending monthly meetings, though most felt this was too frequent in the absence of a crisis. A significant development in meeting practice has been the shift to virtual platforms. The move to online meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, using tools such as Zoom, is widely regarded as a positive change across the charitable sector. Research commissioned by the Charity Commission (Yonder, 2021) found that virtual meetings were cheaper to run and could be convened more frequently during periods of crisis. My own findings suggest an additional, less frequently noted benefit: the swift transition to online board activity during the pandemic may have enabled older trustees who were shielding to continue participating in governance activities, at a time when general volunteering among older people declined significantly. Informal observation and my own experience indicate that online engagement remains a feature of board activity and is likely to continue.

The time trustees devote to their role proved to be considerably greater than formal meeting attendance alone might suggest. Although I did not specifically ask interviewees about time commitments, it was evident that many spent substantial hours fulfilling both trustee and operational duties. These findings contrast sharply with a remark quoted by Wilson (2024) who reported that a colleague had suggested that trustees on a three-year term have only 24 hours to make a difference, a figure that can only refer to attendance at a two-hour quarterly board meeting and does not reflect the reality that many trustees of small museums invest far more time in their organisations.

On the question of trustee remuneration, none of the trustees I interviewed were paid for their governance role. Out-of-pocket expenses and nominal payments for some operational activities were provided, although many trustees did not seek payment seeing this as a form of informal donation to their organisations. I am sceptical that payment would materially improve attendance at board meetings or the quality of discussion. Small heritage organisations cannot afford to pay trustees, and research has shown that heritage volunteers, including trustees, are involved because they have a passion for the organisation and volunteering is a form of leisure activity (see, for example, research by Holmes, 2003 and Orr, 2006). Payment is not a key driver to being involved as a trustee in these organisations. However, my research suggested that, for younger people in particular, the absence of payment may represent a genuine barrier to board participation.

In my experience and evidenced in my research, many museum trustees are motivated by a strong personal attachment to their organisation rather than financial reward or CV enhancement and are often active users of its services, reflecting research findings by Holmes (2003), Orr (2006), and Yates (2010).

The recruitment and training of trustees are well-established areas of inquiry in the governance literature, with studies such as those by Metcalf (2012), Lee et al. (2017), and Carty et al. (2017) examining both the processes by which trustees are identified and appointed and the extent to which they are prepared for their roles. My experience is that recruitment in the small museum sector remains overwhelmingly informal and

that induction and training provision is limited, despite the considerable body of good practice guidance available. My research findings strongly echo this picture.

Although I have personally experienced more structured recruitment methods during my own time as a trustee, the dominant recruitment pathway that emerged from my interviews was one of personal approaches through informal networks. Nine of my interviewees were recruited in this way. The informality of these encounters was often striking with potential trustees approached at social events, through mutual acquaintances, or directly by the chair. Only two of the boards in my research had used a formal recruitment process based on advertising in the national press. These findings are consistent with those of Lee et al. (2018), who found that most trustees are recruited through informal channels, and with the observation by Robinson and Shaw (2003) that small charities find it particularly difficult to recruit trustees. As Metcalf (2012) notes, a personal approach is inherently more difficult to refuse, which may partly explain why this method persists. Recruitment using a personal approach carries significant implications for board diversity, since recruiting through existing networks inevitably tends to reproduce the demographic and professional profile of the current board.

Several of my interviewees had followed a slightly different but still informal pathway, having first volunteered for the museum in an operational capacity before being invited to join the board. While this route might seem to offer a more considered approach, allowing the individual and the organisation to assess mutual fit, it is not without its drawbacks. If the demographic of a small museum's volunteers is white retirees, then a board using this approach would also be recruiting white retirees!

All my interviewees recognised that recruitment was key to creating an effective board, yet it is questionable whether the small museums in this study consistently followed good recruitment practices. Several organisations had undertaken or were planning skills audits, though these were not always used as active tools to inform recruitment, and none had conducted a diversity audit. Particular difficulties were reported in recruiting trustees with specialist skills. Positions requiring finance, fundraising, or legal expertise proved consistently hard for small museums to fill. This finding resonates

with Sutherland's research (2022), which identified the lack of museum professionals on boards as a significant problem, with small museum curators reporting feeling unsupported and undervalued by boards that did not understand the basic skills needed to manage a collection and run an accredited museum. Since all the museums in my study held or had previously held accredited status, which requires some understanding of the museum sector at the most senior levels of the organisation, this shortage can reasonably be regarded as a recruitment concern.

Getting on Board (n.d.) found that the recruitment process itself was often difficult for prospective trustees, with many reporting that even formal processes were unprofessional and disheartening. While none of my interviewees spoke specifically about this, it was discussed at the Festival of Trusteeship in 2023, and my own experiences have been similar since I have approached heritage charities about potential trustee positions in the past without even receiving an acknowledgement.

A further dimension of the recruitment challenge for small museums relates to cost. Advertising is expensive, and therefore many charities rely on free-to-use networks and social media channels for recruitment. While this is understandable, care must be taken to ensure that recruitment from existing networks does not simply recycle trustees from similar organisations or reproduce boards in their own likeness.

Altogether, these findings paint a picture of a recruitment landscape that is overwhelmingly informal, reliant on personal connections, and often ill-equipped to deliver the diverse, skilled boards that good governance demands. The persistence of informal methods is understandable given the resource constraints facing small museums, but it comes at a cost by limiting the pool of potential trustees and perpetuating boards that may not fully reflect the communities they serve.

Additionally, these recruitment challenges may intensify in the years ahead. The museum sector has experienced an overall decline in volunteering, and while this was not directly reflected in my research the longer-term trajectory is concerning. Since many small museum trustees are drawn from the operational volunteer base, having first served the museum in a hands-on capacity before being invited onto the board, a

sustained decline in volunteering would narrow the already limited pool from which future trustees are recruited. The sector would benefit from monitoring this trend explicitly and developing trustee recruitment strategies that do not depend solely on the existing volunteer pipeline.

5.2.3 Board effectiveness

This research also asked the question are small museum boards effective? The literature on board effectiveness tends to be based largely on a picture of an ideal board so this aspect of my research was more exploratory.

Board effectiveness has long been recognised as a fundamental requirement of good governance, yet existing systems for measuring it remain underdeveloped. Greer et al. (2003) identified this tension directly, arguing that while effectiveness is essential, the tools available to assess it are inadequate. This gap matters because board structure and performance appear to be connected: research consistently finds associations between how boards are composed and configured and how well organisations perform (O'Regan and Oster, 2005; Brown, 2005).

Measuring board effectiveness is complicated by its inherently subjective character. Van Puyvelde et al. (2018) demonstrated that perceptions of effectiveness vary between board chairs and chief executives and depend heavily on boardroom interactions such as leadership style, meeting practices, and group dynamics rather than on structural features alone. Nevertheless, there have been serious attempts to develop more rigorous measurement instruments such as Chait et al. (2005) Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire and Nicholson and Kiel's (2004b) Board Intellectual Capital Framework (BICF). More recently, Harrison and Murray (2014) tested an online Board Check-Up tool internationally, finding that self-assessment can both identify governance weaknesses and prompt meaningful changes in board behaviour. Carman and Millesen (2023) extended this work and showed that self-assessment tools can yield valuable information to help improve non-profit board performance.

As a trustee operating in the small museum environment, my concern is less with whether a board's composition conforms to some theoretical ideal and more with understanding how well it is actually performing its governance role even where its make-up may be sub-optimal. These are the practical questions I am asking: Is the board's performance adequate over time? Can we detect the effects of changes in membership and composition on governance quality? Betzler's (2015) work on Swiss museums, reflecting the research done by Oster and Goetzmann (2003) and Ostrower (2002), demonstrates that board composition does indeed matter for specific outcomes such as fundraising success. Brown (2005) found close interpersonal relationships were a good indicator of positive organisational performance. These findings suggest that tracking both compositional changes and the quality of boardroom interaction over time could yield meaningful insights. However, my research showed that no-one was measuring board effectiveness.

Trust is also an important issue for small museum trustee boards and the theft of coins mentioned in my results is a concrete example of governance failure with direct consequences for board effectiveness. It usefully illustrates the risks of informal governance, the blurred lines between operational and governance roles, and the fragility of trust in small museum boards.

Like Reynolds (2010), I believe that non-profit boards need to improve their performance, and my research shows that some form of longitudinal measurement framework (such as the BICF used in this research) could support this. Such a framework need not aspire to false precision, given the multidimensional and context-dependent nature of effectiveness, but it could help boards demonstrate how well they are governing across time, identify areas for development, and build a case for the value of good governance to stakeholders. The growing body of validated self-assessment tools suggests that this aspiration is increasingly achievable, even for small organisations with limited resources.

My application of the BICF to three case study museums illustrates both the promise and the practical limitations of such an approach. What emerged from this exercise is that hard output measures such as financial results and visitor numbers are readily

available in annual accounts and provide useful indicators of organisational health, but they cannot easily be attributed to specific board actions without access to internal documents. Soft measures such as awards and visitor reviews offer only indirect signals. The BICF's strength lies not in delivering definitive verdicts on board performance but in providing a structured lens through which to track changes over time and to connect board composition and processes with organisational outcomes. Combined with a framework such as the KBAC matrix (Davies, 2023), which ensures measurement spans knowledge, business performance, audiences and collections rather than concentrating solely on finances, it would be possible to construct a more rounded set of indicators suited to the realities of independent museums. The difficulty of the exercise should not be understated, but even this limited application demonstrated that some degree of measurement is achievable with publicly available data.

5.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter has drawn together the findings from my primary research with the extant literature to examine how small museum boards actually operate and to assess what this means for governance practice in the sector. I have also reflected on my own experience as a small museum trustee to consider the results from my interviews, from X/Twitter and from other sources.

The picture that emerges is one of organisations navigating considerable complexity with limited resources. Small museums operate within an increasingly demanding financial, regulatory and social landscape where public funding has declined sharply, competition for grants has intensified, and expectations of accountability and community engagement have grown. The 663 vulnerable museums identified by Sharples (2026), all small and independently governed, are not marginal institutions: many serve as the most accessible cultural resource for communities in areas of high deprivation. Yet the governance structures supporting these organisations have not kept pace with the demands placed upon them. Despite decades of calls to strengthen management and governance capacity in the sector, from Middleton's early interventions in 1990 through to more recent initiatives by AIM and others, there is little evidence of the step change that is needed.

My research confirms that small museum boards do not operate according to a consciously chosen governance model. Instead, their practices align most closely with collaborative frameworks such as Stakeholder Theory and Resource Dependency Theory, with board members drawn from groups with a direct interest in the organisation and its external networks. Power relations within these boards are varied and often shifting: some boards work as genuine partners with management, while others show signs of fragmentation, with decisions taken outside formal meetings by small subgroups. A consistent finding is that small boards are pulled towards operational matters at the expense of strategic oversight. This is driven both by limited trustee time and by the structural reality that trustees frequently serve simultaneously as operational volunteers. The governance literature's prescription for a clear

separation between governance and operational roles, while sound in principle, does not reflect the realities of small, volunteer-dependent museums where such a separation is often neither practicable nor desirable.

The composition of small museum boards presents both familiar and more nuanced challenges. The expected dominance of older, white trustees was confirmed, though gender balance in my research was better than the national average. Persistent gaps in ethnic, socioeconomic and educational diversity remain, and informal recruitment practices (the dominant pathway into trusteeship for the organisations in this study) serve to perpetuate this homogeneity. Specialist skills in finance, fundraising, legal and curatorial expertise proved consistently difficult to recruit, a finding with direct implications for both governance quality and organisational resilience. Trustee service lengths were often remarkably long, sometimes exceeding twenty years, running counter to best practice guidance but persisting in the absence of viable replacements. The gap between what trustees are expected to do and what they actually understand and practise remains significant, compounded by the time pressures inherent in a voluntary role that has grown steadily more demanding.

Perhaps the most consequential finding concerns board effectiveness. While effectiveness is recognised as a fundamental requirement of good governance and is increasingly emphasised in both the UK Corporate Governance Code and the Charity Governance Code, none of the boards in my experience had adopted formal measures or key performance indicators to assess how well they were governing. Measurement tools do exist: instruments such as Chait et al.'s (2005) Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire and Nicholson and Kiel's (2004b) Board Intellectual Capital Framework offer structured approaches, and more recent work by Harrison and Murray (2014) and by Carman and Millesen (2023) demonstrates that self-assessment can identify governance weaknesses and prompt meaningful behavioural change. As of yet these tools have not penetrated the small museum sector in any systematic way.

My concern, as a trustee operating in this environment, is a practical one: not whether a board's composition conforms to a theoretical ideal, but whether its performance is adequate over time and whether the effects of changes in membership and

composition can be detected. The evidence from this research suggests that some form of longitudinal measurement framework (such as the BICF employed in this study) could help small museum boards track their governance quality, identify areas for development, and make a credible case for the value of good governance to funders, regulators and the communities they serve. Such a framework need not aspire to false precision; effectiveness is inherently multidimensional and context dependent. But even modest, consistent measurement would represent a significant advance on the current position, in which boards are expected to be effective but are given few tools with which to demonstrate or improve that effectiveness.

The central tension running through this chapter, and through this research as a whole, is between the prescriptive governance guidance developed largely with larger organisations in mind and the operational realities of small, resource-constrained, volunteer-dependent museums. Bridging that gap will require not only better tools and frameworks but also a willingness within the sector and among those who advise it to engage with governance as it is actually practised, rather than as it is ideally conceived.

The next chapter discusses the various recommendations I am making to overcome some of the issues highlighted and improve the trustee experience.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The outputs of a professional doctorate are crafted to connect theory with practice, ensuring that findings are not merely published but are actively used to drive change in the field. Whilst my experiences of small museum trusteeship and governance helped define and influence my research inputs (the literature review and research methodology), my results and the participants in this research have guided my recommendations and the impact that I hope to make to practice. It is important that my recommendations can be taken up by a broad range of organisations and that they help reduce the barriers to good governance. With this in mind, I have emphasised impact, accessibility, and application. Additionally, I have tested my ideas with museum professionals and trustees to confirm their viability.

Therefore, the recommendations laid out in this chapter are very practical and aim to be beneficial to museum professionals, heritage policymakers, and heritage organisations. They seek to make the role of a small museum trustee easier by decoding governance for small museums and highlighting the practical implications of my research.

The aim of this research was to determine what constitutes effective governance in small museums and how best practices in governance can be implemented within the UK heritage sector. In Chapter 4 I presented the results of my research on trustee experiences in Buckinghamshire, and in Chapter 5 these results were discussed in

further detail and tied back to the findings from the literature review and my experience as a heritage sector trustee. In this chapter, I summarise my findings and outline my recommendations to advance governance best practices within the sector. Additionally, I discuss the relevant practical aspects of my “research portfolio”.

My recommendations, in particular, reflect the following inputs from my interviewees:

- There is limited appetite to use reference materials or printed materials from the Charity Commission’s website or from AIM or the Museums Association (see results section 4.5)
- Training is limited but trustees are keen to have more access to high quality training. It should be noted however, that trustees are time and resource poor, and that there is little appetite to complete documentation for bursaries etc. Access to training should be free and, in my opinion, online (see results section 4.5).
- Training needs to be guided by experts and training pathways where trustees can build upon and update their knowledge would be helpful. Training should be in bite sized pieces, that are readily consumable and available in real-time (see results section 4.5 and section 5.2.2).
- Trustees indicated that a discussion forum would be beneficial and allow them to freely discuss current issues and topics of interest. Sessions could be guided by experts or case studies such as those in Appendix 1 (see results of the questionnaire question 2.13).
- There needs to be some measure of board effectiveness and boards need to tie their decisions with the performance of the organisation (see section 5.2.3).

6.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This research has found that the heritage sector has struggled to meet many of the recommendations around governance best practice as set out by the Charity Commission and the UK government or discussed by researchers such as Cornforth (2003), Bieber (2003), Feber (2016) and Goforth (2012), third sector industry bodies such as NVCO, ACEVO and museum sector bodies such as AIM and the Museums Association.

My research examined both the composition and governance practices of museum boards in Buckinghamshire with a focus on trustee demographics, board dynamics, and governance challenges. Key findings of the research are reiterated here:

Museum Board Models (sections 4.3 and 5.2.1): Small museums in Buckinghamshire show evidence of both Stakeholder Theory and Resource Dependency Theory models. This indicates that board members come from local groups with vested interests in the organisation's strategic management. My results support this since many trustees are also members of their museum's local community (see, for example, comments by Interviewees 2021-05, 2021 and 2021-13, 2021).

Museum Board Demographics (sections 4.4 and 5.2.2): Board members are predominantly older, white, and male, with limited ethnic diversity and few younger trustees. A gender imbalance persists, with more men than women serving as trustees. I was surprised by the latter result since there are more women employed in the sector (O'Brien et al., 2025).

Trustee Recruitment (sections 4.7 and 5.2.2) & Training (sections 4.7 and 5.2.2): Trustees are often recruited informally through personal networks (see comments on recruitment, for example, by Interviewees 2020-05, 2021-03 and 2021-05). There is little formal training or induction for trustees, and many trustees rely on personal experience (see comments on training and induction, for example, by Interviewees 2020-08, 2021-01 and 2021-03).

Museum Board Governance Challenges (sections 4.4 and 5.2.2): Boards are midsized with some trustees serving for several decades! There is a blurring of governance and operational roles with many trustees seeing their operational roles of equal importance (see comments by, for example, Interviewees 2020-05, 2020-06 and 2021-08). Long-serving trustees may resist change, creating governance stagnation.

Museum Board Dynamics (sections 4.6 and 5.2.2): Strong leadership is key to effective boards, but conflicts between trustees and museum directors are common. Some boards are dysfunctional because of dominant individuals or internal factions (see comments by, for example, Interviewee 2020-03 and 2020-04). Few boards have codes of conduct to regulate trustee behaviour. The use of mentors and mediators could both help facilitate better board relationships (see comments by Interviewee 2021-02)

Use of Technology & Museum Board Meetings (sections 4.4 and 5.2.2): The shift to online meetings using technology such as Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic improved accessibility and reduced costs. Some boards meet too frequently, making meetings inefficient and time-consuming (see comments by Interviewees 2021-05 on Zoom).

Remuneration & Barriers to Entry (sections 4.4 and 5.2.2): Trustees are unpaid, and expense reimbursement is inconsistent. A lack of payment may deter younger individuals or those from less privileged backgrounds from becoming trustees (see comments, for example, by Moss 2020 from X/Twitter).

Longitudinal perspectives (sections 4.4-4.7 and 5.2.2): The nature of the data allows a longitudinal interpretation of the results. This is important since it implies that despite the best efforts of the Charity Commission, leading charity sector bodies and museum sector organisations such as the MA and AIM, many of the problems associated with the recruitment, training and management of museum trustees still exist in grassroots organisations. To change these needs different interventions than those currently in place and despite an increasingly well trained and professional

museum workforce, professional development for trustees is still absent in many museums.

Trustees as volunteers (sections 4.4-4.7 and 5.2.2): Trustees are also volunteers but they are missing from most of the discourse around volunteers and volunteering (see comments, for example, by Hick, 2022).

Effectiveness of museum governance (sections 4.7 and 5.2.3): The final section of the results analysed museum board effectiveness using the Board Intellectual Capital Framework across three museums: The Chiltern Open Air Museum, Buckingham Old Gaol Trust, and Amersham Museum. Most museums measure their effectiveness using a series of measures such as visitor numbers, visitor income, and visitor reviews. However, few museums consider how the effectiveness of their board may impact these outcomes. The Board Intellectual Capital Framework model is a useful framework through which to view these measures and evaluate board effectiveness but requires a good understanding of board dynamics and internal processes for meaningful insights. Longitudinal data is also very useful in this context.

6.3 FOUNDATIONS FOR BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

In Chapters 4 and 5 I indicated that there were various improvements that could be made to enhance board effectiveness. These are my direct recommendations for museum boards - and charities, more broadly (some of which were already suggested in Chapters 4 and 5). Their implementation would create the foundations for board effectiveness.

Culture of the museum boardroom: My experience and research suggests this needs to improve. Board dynamics are important to improve the effectiveness of museum boards and involve not only the relationships between board members but also the relationships between the board and the senior management team. I suggest that the boardroom needs to be an environment where everybody feels comfortable and able to contribute. Training, clear definitions of board roles and responsibilities, and behavioural guidelines or codes of conduct (see policy documents in Appendix 1 for a sample Code of Conduct for a small museum in England and Wales) are, therefore, very important. I agree with one interviewee who recommended having a mediator on the board (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021). Additionally, the board needs to establish a clear distinction between oversight and management to avoid unnecessary friction with the management team and safeguard board independence. This may be extremely difficult in completely volunteer-run organisations so **job descriptions for both board and operational roles** should help to improve board dynamics, and the performance of the organisation as a whole. Alternatively **schemes of delegation or responsibility matrices** could do a similar job to help separate governance and operational roles (NCVO, n.d. provide sample documents to help trustees create these). All museum trustees should be given a **Welcome or Induction Pack** on joining which contains key documents such as job descriptions and a code of conduct (see policy documents in Appendix 1 for the contents of a sample Welcome or Induction Pack for a small museum in England and Wales). I recommend that boards conduct **exit interviews** especially when trustees leave midterm. An exit interview may highlight problems with board dynamics.

Greater diversity in museum boards: Museum boards need to recruit for diversity. Commentators such as Shah (2023) suggest that boards need to represent their target communities, and I agree. There are social, cultural and economic arguments for equitable access to trustee opportunities in museums, and in charities more generally, but diverse representation must not be tokenistic. The inclusion of diverse individuals on boards raises important questions regarding the motivations, understanding, and preparedness of the board to genuinely embrace and support individuals who have historically been marginalised in governance contexts. It should be recognised that the boardroom can be an intimidating environment for some individuals and that other adjustments (such as having a code of conduct for trustees and recognising the expertise brought to the table by all museum trustees not just the most vocal few) should be made to ensure that everyone can make a meaningful contribution and diversity is not tokenistic.

Skills and diversity audits for museum trustees: Principle 6 of the Charity Governance Code (Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d.) relates to EDI. I strongly recommend the use of skills and diversity audits by museum boards. These have been a general recommendation underpinning good training and board recruitment practices for many years. A skills audit highlights the board's current mix of skills and experience and allow for any skill gaps to be addressed through trustee training and recruitment. Diversity audits highlight how diverse a trustee board is and allow the trustees to identify those characteristics that are over and under-represented. Note, however, that care needs to be taken when analysing diversity in a board since many characteristics may be invisible and individuals may be reluctant to disclose some characteristics. Organisations such as Reach Volunteering (Reach Volunteering: Trustee Recruitment Cycle, n.d.) have skills and diversity templates for trustee boards to use.

It is important that boards do not just produce skills and diversity audits without actioning them. Action plans to improve board skills and diversity should be drawn up and reviewed regularly by the board to ensure that targets are being met when new board members are recruited.

Structured recruitment of museum trustees: Trustee recruitment has long been a challenge in the charity sector and trustee recruitment onto museum boards is not an exception. My experience and research shows that many trustees are recruited informally and that museum chairs believe that the pool of potential board members is limited. While interviewees agreed that recruitment is crucial for a strong board, many small museums do not follow best practice guidelines on trustee recruitment. I recommend that a best-practice recruitment process should include advertising the role, creating a job description, using application forms, shortlisting candidates objectively, conducting panel interviews, and documenting recruitment decisions. Unsuccessful candidates (even for trustee positions) should receive written rejections, and successful ones should receive formal offers. Potential trustees should have to provide references which should be followed up. Once potential trustees have been vetted and accept the position there should be a **structured induction process and training** to cover any gaps in governance and industry knowledge.

Job descriptions for both museum trustee and operational roles: This has already been mentioned as a mechanism to help improve the dynamics of the museum boardroom. I concur with good practice that recommends that all roles including those for a trustee should have a job description. I recommend that a general job description for a trustee should be in the museum trustees' Welcome Pack and specific job descriptions should be produced for charity officers such as the chair or treasurer. Sample job descriptions for trustees are available, for example, from Reach Volunteering (Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d.). Trustees who perform operational roles should also have a job description for those and a clear delineation between operational and trustee duties should be made.

Term limits for museum trustees: My experience and research found that many museum boards lack trustee rotation, with some trustees serving very long terms. However, regulatory changes and funding requirements encourage fixed-term appointments of trustees across the charitable sector, aligning with best practices put forward in the Charity Governance Code (Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d.). These vary in length although the Charity Commission (Charity Commission, 2002) recommends that a term of office should be between three and five years. The

Charity Governance Code recommends that trustees should not serve for longer than nine years without a rigorous re-appraisal of their membership of the board (Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d.). I agree with these recommendations. Whilst many interviewees supported fixed terms, concerns were raised about losing institutional knowledge. My recommendation is that museums mitigate this risk by using staggered departures of trustees, maintaining good formal minutes and archives of meetings, and involving former trustees as advisors (although care should be taken to ensure that advisors are not shadow trustees). **Succession planning** is also important, and some boards in my research were planning for the replacement of key trustee positions such as the chair. This is good practice because museum boards risk instability without proper planning to replace key positions.

Inductions for new museum board members: My research found that most of the museum trustees I interviewed had received no formal induction before attending their first board meeting. This reflects my own experiences in the museum sector. Informal inductions such as receiving some materials about the organisation, observing a board meeting, and having a brief run through of the Charity Commission documents (or at least being sent a link to the documents) were probably the best most of my interviewees could expect from their museums. I recommend that all new museum trustees should receive a basic induction which includes information about the organisation, the trustee role, policies around trustees and trustee meetings (i.e. how the board operates), and finances. I also think the Charity Commission's recommendation of a trustee Welcome Pack is very useful and I have included a sample Welcome and Induction Pack in Appendix 1. New trustees need to meet the team: other fellow trustees, employees, volunteers and other key stakeholders such as Friends. Where the new trustee also has an operational role, a clear distinction should be made between their trustee and operational roles (role descriptions could be included, for instance, in their Welcome Pack). The best inductions are linked with further professional development and, if a new trustee is inexperienced, training should be provided in the core skills needed to thrive at board level. A new trustee's contribution can be significantly enhanced by providing mentoring and support from a named trustee.

Training for museum trustees: Training is essential for all trustees. Competence levels in basic skills can be ascertained via a skills audit. Where skills are missing or knowledge is poor, training rather than recruitment may be necessary to fill the gap. More longstanding trustees also benefit from training since legislation, the funding environment, and sector best practice changes regularly. I would recommend that a trustee board does regular reviews of their trustees to highlight any training needs.

Measuring the effectiveness of museum boards: Museums commonly assess their effectiveness through metrics such as visitor numbers, revenue, and visitor feedback. However, few take into account how the performance of their board influences these outcomes. My experience as a trustee within the Cultural Sector for over 30 years reflects this. Several factors contribute to this oversight, including museum trustees' limited time due to their other responsibilities outside of the museum, a lack of awareness about the link between board effectiveness and museum success, and the absence of established frameworks for evaluating board performance. My research revealed that none of the museums I studied formally measured board effectiveness. At best, they only indirectly recognised its impact, for example when conflicts among board members led to dysfunctional meetings. Yet, assessing board effectiveness is crucial for identifying necessary improvements that can enhance both governance and the museum's overall success. To achieve this, boards require clear models or frameworks that allow for objective and straightforward assessment. Currently, few such models exist. This is an area for further research although models such as the Board Intellectual Capital Framework model could be a good way of incentivising museum boards to start to think about how the board impacts performance.

My recommendations are tailored to small museums so whilst some of these suggestions reiterate ideas that have been suggested for a long time to charities and large cultural organisations my focus is unique (see, for example, the research into recruitment and the suggested changes put forward by the Charity Commission, 2002). Disappointingly many small heritage organisations, as can be seen from my research, have been reluctant to engage with best practice and implement changes. The next section looks at a number of different solutions including alternative ways of organising governance for smaller organisations.

6.4 BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATIONS TO ACHIEVE GOVERNANCE EXCELLENCE

In this section, I propose several suggestions aimed at building on the foundations for board effectiveness set out in the previous section. These include shadow boards, sponsorship of trustees, the use of Senior Independent Directors, governance audits, participation in the Heritage Trustee Forum and the use of governance hubs.

6.4.1 Shadow Boards

Shadow Boards have been used for a number of years in the commercial sector. They mainly consist of younger employees who work with senior executives (often the board itself) on strategic initiatives. The primary purpose of shadow boards is to incorporate the perspectives of younger generation, given that the average age of a UK board member is just over 59, into the decision-making process. An effective shadow board should deliver insights, feedback, and innovative ideas to senior executives. Additionally, shadow boards can also serve as a pathway for board succession and enhance diversity planning.

A growing number of charities are using shadow boards as a means to help aspiring trustees understand the role and its responsibilities. For example, the NHS runs a shadow board programme (The Shadow Board Programme) which supports aspiring leaders across the NHS by giving them the opportunity to tackle current board agenda items and feed their discussions into the main NHS boards. The NHS Shadow Board Programme is seen as a developmental programme for aspiring NHS leaders and provides formal training for participants.

A smaller organisation that has developed a shadow board programme is Spitalfields Music (Gee, 2024). Their shadow board programme provides training, observer status at Spitalfields Music board meetings, a board buddy or mentor and regular meetings so that aspiring trustees understand the decisions made by trustees (Spitalfields Music, 2025). The shadow board programme is aimed at BAME groups, D/deaf, disabled and

neuro-diverse people and people aged under 35 (Spitalfields Music, 2025). The shadow board programme at Spitalfields Music runs for one year and several alumni have become board members at Spitalfields Music and other charities (Gee, 2024).

I have recently been asked for advice on shadow boards by a major heritage organisation. Their objective would be to use this programme to improve the diversity of their board. I propose to write this up as a case study once the organisation has started its scheme.

A similar suggestion could be used to keep the tacit knowledge of retiring trustees. Advisory boards could be used to support the main trustee board and ensure that the knowledge and skills of key trustees acquired through years of experience and observation are not lost to an organisation when they leave. This would be especially important for organisations with fixed terms of office and trustees retiring under rotation. Exit interviews would be a key factor in helping to decide who should join an advisory board.

6.4.2 Sponsorship of trustees especially for diversity

It is clear from my secondary research that many groups that are underrepresented find there are barriers to becoming a trustee. One suggestion is that funding could be provided to sponsor a trustee's appointment and training. Boardroom Apprentice (Board Apprentice, n.d.) has been running a board apprentice scheme since 2017. It is sponsored by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities and the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland. The scheme provides "apprentices" with structured training and a board shadowing opportunity for 12 months. Attendees are not paid for their participation, but all their expenses are paid. I propose that a similar scheme could be run by the heritage sector for smaller museums (perhaps funded by AIM or the MA) to increase the diversity of museum trustees.

6.4.3 Senior Independent Directors

The Higgs review in 2003 recommended that a Senior Independent Director (SID) could make an important contribution to corporate governance. Acting as a wise counsellor to the chair and ensuring that intra board conflicts are dealt with quickly and effectively, the SID should be able to de-risk a board by putting the organisations values into practice and acting as an intermediary between stakeholders of the organisation and its board. SIDs are now common in the corporate world but they are rarely seen in the charitable sector and indeed many boards members will have never heard of the SID's mediatory role.

Given some of the recent high-profile issues relating to governance in the charity sector in general and the museum sector in particular, it would be useful to explore whether a senior independent trustee could provide a mediator role for museums and would allow trustees, staff, and stakeholders an avenue through which they can air their concerns. This could be a role that is supported by the Museum Development agencies or the MA or AIM.

6.4.4 Governance audits e.g. The Governance App

Many larger organisations regularly review their governance frameworks, policies, and operations by performing a corporate governance audit. A comprehensive corporate governance audit for a for-profit organisation should assess various elements of governance including the composition of the board, adherence to regulations, ethical standards, accuracy in financial reporting, commitment to corporate citizenship, effectiveness in risk management, transparency in disclosures, as well as the rights and responsibilities of shareholders and the nature of stakeholder relationships. For non-profit organisations most of these elements remain; only shareholders rights and responsibilities disappear from the list.

In my experience governance audits are rare in the charity sector since the perception is that they are expensive and time consuming, but they do not have to be. The Governance App (n.d.), developed by the Directory of Social Change (DSC) and launched in 2022, is a digital tool designed to help charity boards assess and improve their governance. Using a structured questionnaire based on the Governance Code by the Good Governance Steering Group, the app allows board members to evaluate their governance practices through a series of questions. The results are compiled into reports that facilitate discussions on governance performance, strengths, and areas for improvement.

I review the Governance App and its usage with the HVG board in Appendix 1. My recommendation is that museum boards use the Governance App or a board self-assessment questionnaire (see for example, Allcock Tyler, 2020 p 69) to do a governance audit at least once per year. By doing a governance audit at regular time intervals it will become clear what areas are improving and what areas need work on.

6.4.5 The Digital Tool for Museum Governance

In Appendix 1 I have included the specification for a digital tool for governance for the museum sector. I envisage that this tool could be used by trustees to run governance health checks; issue compliance reminders; link to board meeting documents such as agendas, minutes and board papers; keep board diaries and provide real-time governance support such as online training in bite-sized governance lessons. It would be a complete trustee diary, data repository, manual and training hub in the trustee's pocket!

6.4.6 Heritage Trustee Forum

The Heritage Trustee Forum will be launched in 2026. Based on my research and experience as a trustee within the heritage sector I looked at a number of options for supporting small museum trustees. My first ideas were around a series of advice

booklets targeted at small museum trustees, but it became clear as my research progressed that a space for discussion would be much more useful. I first suggested a local trustees forum to the local museum development officer in 2020, who was very supportive of the idea. However, as the pandemic progressed, and work and meetings moved online it became clear that an online forum could have a wider reach. I spoke about my ideas with some of my interviewees and when I joined HVG in 2022 I saw this as an opportunity to integrate the trustee forum idea into HVG's wider strategic plans.

I have been working on the Heritage Trustee Forum for the last 24 months to get it approved as part of HVG. This has involved numerous discussions with the Chair and Executive Board, the preparation of board papers including the Terms of Reference found in Appendix 1, Section A and a budget. The demise of Getting on Board in October 2024 allowed the HVG Executive Board to agree that a trustee forum for the heritage sector would not be compromised by another organisation or indeed compromise it. The closure of Getting On Board reflects the difficulties faced by infrastructure charities and a crisis in their funding. Therefore, the Heritage Trustee Forum will sit as an addition within HVG's monthly events programme and operate at minimum cost. The aim of the forum is to provide a quarterly setting in which trustees can discuss matters of interest or concern. The forum will invite guest speakers to talk on current governance best practice, initiatives such as the Governance App, changes in legislation and run training exercises such as brainstorming case studies such as those found in Appendix 1, section D.

6.4.7 Adopting new models: Heritage Governance Hubs

The successful operation of museum consortia and cultural trusts such as the Hampshire Cultural Trust and Birmingham Museums Trust (as discussed in Appendix 3) demonstrate the benefits of shared governance and resource management for small museums. The two trusts serve as strong examples of how governance structures can

be optimised to attract skilled and experienced trustees while ensuring financial sustainability.

The Hampshire Cultural Trust, which manages a diverse portfolio of venues and collections, has demonstrated how an independent trust structure can support long-term strategic goals. Despite funding challenges, its governance model, with trustees from senior industry, finance, and the cultural sectors, provides valuable leadership and advocacy. Similarly, the Birmingham Museums Trust has leveraged its board's corporate and government connections to help navigate the financial pressures arising from the perilous state of its key stakeholder's finances whilst maintaining operational effectiveness.

Both Hampshire Cultural Trust and Birmingham Museums Trust demonstrate elements of consolidation of governance and a co-governance strategy as discussed in Appendix 3. By consolidating governance under a single, high-quality board, trusts could address key challenges such as trustee recruitment and financial sustainability. Smaller museums, which often struggle to attract diverse and skilled trustees, could benefit from a similar approach by joining together into consortia to facilitate their recruitment of trustees, and to manage their operations and strategy. While managing a large trust presents different challenges, the advantages of strategic oversight, professional leadership, and enhanced advocacy could make this a compelling model for the sector. Additionally, co-governance strategies could enhance sustainability, especially where local councils still have heritage funding influence.

I recommend that small museums and cultural institutions should explore the potential for collaboration through consortia or trust models to improve governance, attract skilled trustees, and ensure long-term viability.

Recruitment in this model could also benefit other organisations since unsuccessful recruits could be redirected to other similar museums close by. Girlguiding, for example, allow potential volunteers to be redirected to other areas so that they are not lost when they are not needed or are unsuccessful in applying to a local unit.

6.5 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter I have reiterated my results in summary form and made a number of recommendations to improve governance within museum boards. Whilst some of the suggestions I make align with long-standing best practices, such as structured recruitment, diversity audits, and trustee training, I have observed and confirmed through my research findings that there remains a significant gap in their widespread adoption particularly among smaller heritage organisations. Addressing these challenges requires a shift in mindset, with boards actively committing to governance improvements rather than viewing them as optional. The table that follows summarises the findings and solutions recommended.

I also suggest additional approaches to governance, such as shadow boards, trustee sponsorship programs, and governance audits, to help modernise board structures and ensure long-term sustainability. Whilst these are not new within the wider Charity sector, they are not common within the museum sector. Furthermore, collaborative models like Heritage Governance Hubs demonstrate how museum or cultural consortia can provide the opportunity to not only pool resources to ensure their long-term sustainability but also improve their governance by attracting skilled trustees and strengthening leadership.

A practical outcome of my findings is the Heritage Trustee Forum launched under the umbrella of HVG. This was introduced in section 6.4.6 and is further discussed in the next chapter and supported by documents in Appendix 1.

Ultimately, effective governance is not just about compliance; it directly impacts the success of museums and their ability to serve their communities. By implementing these recommendations, museum boards could build more inclusive, accountable, and strategically focused leadership, ensuring that their institutions remain resilient and relevant in an evolving sector.

Key Finding	Issue	Recommended Solution
Board lacks diversity	Limited age, gender, ethnic representation so do not represent community	Formal structured recruitment processes, diversity audits
Trustees recruited informally	Boards miss out on skills, expertise and lived experience	Clear job descriptions, application process
Trustees serve too long	Governance stagnation & resistance to change	Term limits
Trustees turnover too quickly	Loss of trustee knowledge so errors are repeated and there is no learning from history	Staggered departures
Trustees often operate as volunteers too	Blurring of governance and operational responsibilities	Clear job descriptions and explanation of the trustee's role
No formal training	Trustees lack governance knowledge so there is ineffective governance Training that exists does not seem to be working	Mandatory induction, ongoing training Training needs to be made more relevant and accessible
No/limited support for trustees	Trustees failing to learn from mistakes/successes of other trustees in similar organisations	Heritage Trustees Forum
Boardroom conflicts	Poor decision-making & inefficiency	Mediation, behaviour guidelines or codes of conduct
No board effectiveness assessment	Lack of accountability, sub-optimal board performance impacting museum effectiveness	Annual governance audits, self-assessment tools e.g. via new digital tool for museum governance

29: Table showing Governance Challenges and Solutions

The next chapter, the final of this dissertation, examines the conclusions from my research.

7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This research set out to explore the role of trustees within small museums and heritage organisations. Initially conceived as a result of my long experience as a trustee, it also sought to understand the wider experiences of other trustees within the museum sector. The research builds on and contributes to work in the field of both heritage/museum management and charity management. Although there are studies which have examined the governance of museums and the charity sector more broadly there has not been a focus on small museums, their trustees and governance. Much of the content and focus of the research, guidance and training materials for the sector are clearly written for charities with “large” enough incomes and budgets to provide adequate training and support for their trustees. This is not the case in the small museums that have been the focus of this research. As such this study provides unique insights into the realities of being a trustee in a small museum and offers tailored solutions and recommendations for small museum trustees.

Why does this matter? Most museums in the UK are small so it is vitally important that these museums are studied, and practical solutions identified that can be implemented to improve the effectiveness of their boards. Continued pressures on independent museums’ finances especially as local authority budgets are slashed means that many of the newer independents are under huge budgetary pressures. Energy costs have rocketed across the sector and remain extremely volatile, volunteering hours are decreasing, and the cost-of-living crisis means that visitors are spending less. How do

museums survive these onslaughts? Well, in part their trustees need to have a strategy which can flex and allow the museums to diversify their income and manage the financial and non-financial risks the museum faces. Museums need to be agile, enterprising and commercial in their outlook but for many museums, especially those who have moved to independent status from local authority ownership, this is difficult because both their trustees and senior management teams often do not have the skills to make the types of interventions needed. For smaller museums there also needs to be a better understanding of the trustee's role. If trustees are not even aware of their responsibilities and position, how can they make the strategic decisions necessary for survival?

Not only is the day-to-day governance of small museums challenging but all these museums also need to make themselves relevant for modern audiences. Diversity, decolonisation, and climate change are all issues that many visitors expect museums to be addressing. Several of the museums that my interviewees represented have programmes for older people, people with disabilities, and ethnically diverse local communities but others did not. One museum had run green initiatives in the past and another was so firmly rooted in the past that its operation showcased many of the green skills that others are so keen to promote!

Visitors need to not only have a good day out but also demand good facilities (a good café and a shop) and infrastructure such as the internet. Whilst these sorts of facilities may be standard in larger museums, in the small museums my interviewees represented they often are not. How do such museums compete with shopping centres such as the Centre in Milton Keynes which offers markets and free activities for children throughout the holidays or other attractions such as Odds Farm Park in the south of the county of Buckinghamshire?

Trustees are ultimately responsible for all the activities within museums. They need strategic and operational skills to run a business, curatorial knowledge, and fundraising skills in addition to ensuring that the organisation is meeting its charitable objectives, remains financially viable and complies with both corporate and charity law. Where museum organisations are completely volunteer led and run, the trustee body also

needs to provide proper systematic management of volunteers with adequate training, support and supervision. Trustees also need to invest in their own development and keep up to date with a changing regulatory environment and changing commercial demands.

This final chapter highlights the unique contribution of this research and suggests other areas for research studies into small museums in the future.

7.2 MOMENTS OF INSIGHT

Abduction plays a critical role in qualitative research by allowing unexpected observations to shape new theoretical insights. In this research, abductive reasoning was used to bridge gaps between existing theory and the realities observed in small museum boards. The research revealed that governance in small museums is not generic but is significantly influenced by factors such as board size, trustee demographics, and museum subject matter. These insights, drawn from a combination of literature review, data analysis and data discussions, underscore the need for a more nuanced approach to governance in small museums, one that acknowledges their unique structures and operational realities. By embracing abductive reasoning, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of museum governance and offers practical recommendations for improving board effectiveness.

The methodology chapter explains that abduction is a process of developing theories, characterised by key moments of insight. Below, I provide a detailed account of the observations that contributed to the insightful moments I observed.

- **Insights on Governance in Small Museums**

I found that governance in small museums operates differently from larger institutions, demonstrating that size significantly impacts governance structures. Unlike a generic governance model, small museum boards often reflect the unique characteristics of their institutions, offering valuable insights into museum governance as a whole. These findings are supported by the literature review (Lee et al., 2017; Rochester, 2003), data analysis (section 4.4) and my observations on the data (sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2).

- **Mismatch Between Theory and Reality**

I noted that academic theories on heritage governance do not always align with practical realities. A key example is the unexpected distribution of new museum establishments in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s, where more museums were founded in the South than in the historically industrial North. This finding challenges

assumptions about heritage development patterns and is drawn from the literature review (Candlin et al., 2023; Woodham, 2019).

- **Board Models in Small Museums**

My analysis showed that small museum boards exhibit characteristics of both Stakeholder Theory and Resource Dependency models. Given their strong community ties, this is unsurprising. However, it was expected that more boards would be influenced by a dominant chief executive, reflecting a Managerial Hegemony model. This discrepancy suggests that governance in small museums remains heavily community-driven rather than leadership-focused. These conclusions stem from the literature review (Bieber, 2003), the data analysis (section 4.3) and my observations on the data (section 5.2.1).

- **Impact of Subject Matter on Board Composition**

I found that the thematic focus of a museum significantly influences its board composition. Museums dedicated to industrial, engineering, or military history are more likely to have male-dominated boards, reflecting broader trends in gender representation in these fields. This observation is supported by the literature review (Candlin et al., 2022) and data analysis (section 4.4).

- **Gender Imbalance in Museum Boards**

I expected that there would be gender parity on museum boards since more women work in the museum sector than men. However, museum boards tend to have a higher proportion of male trustees. This imbalance raises questions about an awareness of EDI at board level and a willingness to address it through the recruitment processes. The findings are derived from the literature review (section 2.5.1), data analysis (sections 4.4 and 4.7.1) and my observations on the data (section 5.2.2).

- **The Role of Soft Skills in Governance**

I was surprised that women's presence on museum boards appears to positively impact board dynamics by reducing competitiveness and conflict. Their soft skills contribute to more collaborative governance, which can enhance decision-making effectiveness. This conclusion is drawn from the literature review (section 2.5.1) and interview findings (section 4.4).

- **Lack of Industry Expertise in Museum Boards**

Contrary to my expectations, museum boards do not prioritise industry-specific expertise when selecting trustees. This differs from governance practices in the broader cultural sector, where sector-specific knowledge is often deemed essential for effective leadership. These findings are based on both personal experience and data analysis (section 4.4) and my observations (section 5.2.2).

- **Museum Trustee Professions and Backgrounds**

My analysis of trustee backgrounds revealed unexpected professional trends. While many trustees identified as retired rather than specifying previous professions, accountants were the most represented profession. Furthermore, only one trustee came from a blue-collar background, highlighting a potential lack of socio-economic diversity within boards. This pattern was identified through data analysis (section 4.4) and later verified by new research highlighted in the literature review (section 2.4).

- **Blurring of Governance and Operational Roles in small museums**

I have always felt that an issue for small museum boards is the frequent overlap between governance and operational responsibilities for their trustees. My analysis suggested that this is not a universally held view and that there is no standardised approach to managing the challenge where trustees have dual roles. This issue is explored in the literature review (sections 2.5.6.5 and 2.5.7.1), data analysis (section 4.4) and my observations on the data (section 5.2.2).

7.3 FINDINGS SUPPORTING PREVIOUS RESEARCH

7.3.1 Governance in general

Many of my findings on small museum governance as summarised in Chapter 6 align with broader research on boards and governance in both the non-profit sector and corporate governance literature. I identified critical factors, for example, that influence board performance such as board diversity, recruitment practices, board member training, and governance effectiveness. These are governance challenges that are found across multiple sectors.

In the literature on boards of directors and corporate governance, board diversity (notably education, gender, age, ethnicity, and disability) as an example, has been shown to impact performance. Although some of the research is inconclusive there are examples of research showing that greater gender diversity (Campbell & Bohdanovich, 2015; Akimoto et al., 2021; Clatworthy & Peel, 2013), higher human capital (for which education and professional qualifications may be a proxy) (Jalbert et al., 2002), older board members (Platt & Platt, 2012; Clatworthy & Peel, 2013), and board members more reflective of the buyers, the community and service users (Akimoto et al., 2021) have a positive impact on an organisations' performance. Akimoto, et al. (2021, p.61) suggest, however, that more data on ethnic and other types of diversity needs to be collected to measure and assess the impact of board diversity in its broadest sense on board effectiveness.

I found that small museums focus on measures of operational performance such as visitor numbers and revenue without tying these back to the museum board and their performance. Many organisations only focus and measure operational success and fail to assess board effectiveness at all (see, for example, Herman & Renz, 2008). Using board effectiveness models that utilise financial and non-financial measures are useful across all types of organisations to assess whether their board is effective.

7.3.2 Charities and trustees

Much of my research confirmed a piece of work done by CASS Business School which was published in 2017 (Lee et al., 2017). This work analysed 3,200 responses to a questionnaire sent to trustees from the Charity Commissions databases on charities. This is a small subset of the overall number of trustees in the UK (it is estimated to be about 0.6%). I started with the intention of testing whether the results found by Lee et al. (2018) in their study were applicable to small heritage organisations. My analysis took a very small percentage of trustees of museums (estimated at 0.1% of the museum trustee population) and analysed the results for trustee and board characteristics, trustee recruitment, trustee retention and trustee training. Whilst the results were very similar, there were some differences which have already been discussed at some length. Furthermore, my work has extended the work done by CASS with a practical solution (the Heritage Trustee Forum I am setting up within the Heritage Volunteering Group).

Additionally, my work supported research work done previously about the charitable sector such as that by Cornforth (2002, 2014), Cornforth and Simpson (2002), Cornforth and Brown (2014), Cornforth and MacMillan (2016) and more specifically the museum sector by Bieber (2003).

7.3.3 Small museums

Despite the majority of museums being small, scholarship regarding small museums in the UK is limited (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.2 for a discussion on the measures which define museums as small). This suggests that both museum theory and guidelines regarding museum practice in small museums is detached from reality. It is at best disappointing and at worst troubling that much of museum theory ignores the largest group of museums in operation.

As a researcher looking at small museums, I question this omission. Is it that these organisations are just too difficult to identify or that their management and ownership does not fit into industry norms or that they lack the professional expertise for

recognition by the industry through accreditation or similar? My research and that of Candlin (2016, 2022), Cordes (2018) and Sutherland (2022) implies that small museums are an area that warrant further research and theory development.

7.4 FINDINGS UNIQUE TO MY RESEARCH AND CONTRIBUTION

Much of the work in this study originated from my interest in the intersection of business with the work of charities in the cultural sector and how business practice could be put to good use by smaller museums and heritage organisations. As a trustee of many years standing in small cultural organisations (a dance company, an art gallery, a small museum and a heritage volunteer support organisation) I have often been the only trustee with a business background and the professional skills needed by the board (accountancy in my case). My master's dissertation looked at KPIs for the cultural sector and reflected my interests in the performance of small cultural organisations. But my involvement as a trustee meant that I also wanted to examine and contribute to research on the trustee experience. The opportunities provided by a professional doctorate provided additional momentum because I wanted to explore whether it was possible to make a positive contribution to the practicalities of being a trustee of a smaller organisation within the sector. The Heritage Trustee Forum for the sector (albeit somewhat embryonic) is my main practical contribution.

My main contributions to theory are my observations on three themes coming out of my research: board models, trustee characteristics and experiences and board effectiveness. Throughout, my research emphasises the tension between prescriptive governance guidance (designed largely with larger organisations in mind) and the operational realities of small, resource-constrained, volunteer-dependent museums.

Board models My research found that small museum boards align most closely with collaborative board models such as Stakeholder Theory and Resource Dependency Theory. Board power relations were mixed: some boards operated as equal partners with management whilst others showed evidence of fragmentation or powerlessness, with subgroups making decisions outside formal meetings. A persistent finding was that small boards are drawn heavily into operational matters at the expense of strategic work. The structural reality of small museums is that trustees often double as operational volunteers. The literature's recommendation for a clean separation

between governance and operational roles does not reflect, and may not be achievable in, the reality of small, volunteer-dependent organisations.

Trustee characteristics and experiences. Through my research I took the opportunity to test out the accuracy of the results of the study done by Lee et al. (2018) within a specific sector of a particular industry (the heritage sector and specifically small museums) and to interrogate their results and assumptions, and their applicability to the heritage sector in general. I used a novel method in my research of trustees in the sector by employing narrative interviewing techniques which helped me explore the richness of the experience of my trustees. Data collection through questionnaires would have never identified the trustees who chased pigeons off the roof or the pig farmer in wellies or that a trustee was “up his arse”!

My results showed the expected dominance of older, white trustees, though the gender balance in my research was better than the national average. Nevertheless, I confirmed there are persistent gaps in ethnic, socioeconomic, and educational diversity. Recruitment was overwhelmingly informal and this continues to perpetuate demographic homogeneity. Specialist skills (finance, fundraising, legal, curatorial expertise) were consistently hard to recruit, echoing findings by Sutherland (2022) and others. Trustee service lengths were often remarkably long running counter to best practice guidance but persisting because of recruitment difficulties. Time commitments far exceeded formal meeting attendance, and the shift to virtual meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic was seen as a lasting positive change, particularly for older trustees. A significant gap between prescribed trustee duties and actual governance practice was confirmed, consistent with findings by Langford and Anderson (2022) and others showing that trustees' confidence in their roles often exceeds their actual understanding of specific obligations.

Board effectiveness. In chapter 5 I argue that measuring board effectiveness remains underdeveloped despite being a fundamental governance requirement. Existing measurement tools offer promising approaches, but none of the boards in my experience or research had used KPIs or formal measures of board effectiveness. My concern is not whether a board conforms to a theoretical ideal but whether its

performance is adequate over time and whether the effects of compositional changes can be tracked. Many museums overlook the potential influence of board effectiveness on the overall health, stability, and success of their institutions. This is an area which will reward further attention from researchers and, as confirmed with discussions with sector professionals, will be useful as a method of professional assessment of museum boards and to help boards understand how their decisions impact a museum's operations.

Importantly scholarship regarding trustees and small museums in the UK is limited. The museum trustees interviewed rarely appeared to engage with any available literature and guidance. This suggests that both museum theory and guidelines regarding museum practice are detached from reality.

Use of crystallisation in trustee research. I also demonstrate that crystallisation is an effective approach to researching trusteeship. This study draws on multiple sources of data, including my own knowledge of trusteeship, the lived experiences of trustees, reflections from museum directors, and contributions from participants on X/ Twitter. These qualitative perspectives are complemented by a quantitative analysis of demographic data on trustees, as well as financial data from three museums included in the study. Together, these diverse sources provide multiple lenses through which to develop a richer, more nuanced understanding of the same phenomenon: the operation and effectiveness of governance in small museums.

7.5 PRACTICE BASED SOLUTIONS

The practice-based outputs detailed here represent my primary contributions to museum governance in the “real” world. I have developed a collection of other customised research outputs to ensure a material impact in the heritage sector; these align with the research ethos of a professional doctorate and are presented in Appendix 1.

7.5.1 The Heritage Trustee Forum

I have proposed and will launch the Heritage Trustee Forum in 2026. The impact of the Heritage Trustee Forum could be significant in bridging the gap between governance theory and practice. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and peer support, the forum will help trustees navigate the complexities of governance and drive positive change within their organisations. Moving forward, its activities will continue to evolve, ensuring that museum trustees remain equipped to tackle emerging governance challenges in an ever-changing heritage sector.

The documents that support the establishment of the Heritage Trustee Forum (a Terms of Reference document) can be found in Appendix 1, section A.

7.5.2 Digital tools to enable governance effectiveness

I have included in Appendix 1 the specification for a digital tool for museum governance. This builds on the work that I did using and reviewing the Governance App. This work has been summarised below and is reported in more detail in the appendix. My suggestion, the digital tool for museum governance (hereafter referred to as the DTMG) would be a tool to run governance health checks (similarly to the Governance App), issue compliance reminders and provide real-time governance support such as online training in bite-sized governance lessons.

I propose that, for the heritage sector, the DTMG would serve as a more robust tool compared to alternatives such as the Governance App, and it would demonstrate significantly greater effectiveness. A blueprint for a minimum viable product for the DTMG, along with a suggested mock-up document for a first-time user journey, can be found in Appendix 1³².



30: Wireframe sample for the DTMG (OpenAI-ChatGPT, 2025).

³² This was produced with advice from a digital product designer and utilised ChatGPT to provide a basic MVP framework and first-time user journey (Durrant, 2024). The framework and user journey were then discussed with industry specialists such as Matt Hick of the Heritage Volunteering Group to refine them further (Hick, 2025).

7.6 APPLICABILITY OF FINDINGS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research has provided a better understanding of governance within the heritage sector. The findings will be applied through the Heritage Trustee Forum from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Additionally, the outline for the DTMG has been presented in the Appendix 1 and I am exploring whether funding could be obtained to develop this further.

It is evident that a project such as this DHeritage research has had to exclude or overlook certain other avenues of research investigation. These aspects are identified and discussed briefly in this section.

Comparative analysis with other sectors: whilst research from other sectors was identified and discussed in the literature review there would be value in comparing small museum governance in more detail with other sectors. The suggested research question would be “How do governance structures in small museums compare to those in other non-profit or cultural organisations, and what best practices can be adopted?”

Adopting new technology: my research touched on the use of digital tools to conduct board meetings remotely i.e. the use of tools such as Zoom. It would be useful to establish whether museum boards could adopt digital tools such as digital dashboards and governance applications to help track board performance and compliance. Only one board in my experience uses any tools like this, the Heritage Volunteering Group, who produce a digital engagement report in real time for use by the board. A research question which explores “How can museum boards leverage digital tools to enhance governance effectiveness and decision-making?” would be worth further exploration.

Financial Sustainability: my research discussed governance structures, but I do not link different governance models to financial sustainability. Research by Abdullah (2015) explores the use of accounting mechanisms and measures (such as enhanced

financial reporting and KPIs) to control the major government funded museums and galleries. This fails, however, to tie governance structure more generally with financial performance and sustainability. Two questions are worth asking here: the first relates to governance standards and funding since funding bodies often require specific governance standards before they will consider funding projects. So, asking whether small museums are adapting their governance to improve funding opportunities is worth further exploration³³. I also suggest the question “How do different governance models impact the financial resilience of small museums, and what role do trustees play in ensuring financial sustainability?” would be worth further research.

International best practices: there was some discussion in the literature review around museum governance in other countries but there is no discussion on whether lessons could be learnt around governance of small museums from other countries especially in situations where there is stronger state support. The question “What lessons can small museum boards in the UK learn from international governance models of similar organisations?” is worth further research.

Crisis management and governance: I have discussed in various sections of this dissertation governance related crises (for example financial, ethical and operational crises have been discussed) but I have not explored how prepared museum boards, and their trustees are to handle such risks. It would be worth exploring “How prepared are museum boards to handle financial, reputational, and operational crises, and what governance strategies enhance resilience?”.

³³ It is worth noting that one of my interviewees spoke about how the museum he was involved with had not become accredited since the requirements were too onerous (Interviewee 2021-04, 2021). He was confident that should the museum need to be accredited to secure funding, it was a process they would be happy to go through. He was also confident that gaining accreditation albeit time consuming would not be a problem.

7.7 LIMITATIONS

Every research study has limitations, and it is important to recognise and make the reader aware of them. This section covers those limitations.

7.7.1 Methods

This study was based on a sample of 16 trustees and 6 directors of small museums in Buckinghamshire. The study covered 17 organisations in total. One limitation of this study is the small sample size, which limits the generalisability of the findings, although discussions with museum professionals suggested that they saw my sample as a good illustration of organisations within the sector. Crystallisation using data from #MuseumHour on X/Twitter and other sources such as demographic data from the Charity Commission was used to mitigate these limitations and provide more generalisable results. Although the sample size is small, the findings provide valuable insights into this understudied research area and correlate with studies such as that done by Lee et al. (2017) across the wider charity sector. The study used a narrative technique and involved over 30 hours of interviews. I recognise that, although they would have produced data that was considerably less rich, questionnaires would have had a wider reach and allowed me to obtain data from more trustees. Future research could use questionnaires (based, for example, on my findings) to sample across a broader population of museum trustees. Nonetheless, the conversations I have had around the Heritage Trustee Forum suggest my results are reflective of organisations in the museum sector both small and large.

I am also a trustee myself, so I was very aware of my own biases. As I explain in Chapter 3, I struggled with my positionality initially. Nevertheless, I have made my positionality clear throughout this dissertation by adopting Walsh's reflexivity matrix as outlined in table 17 (which highlights where the reflexivity statements are in my work). This should help the reader understand not only any potential biases I bring to this study but also the richness afforded by my experiences of the realities of small museum trusteeship. I took great care to ensure that my own journey did not solely

define the experiences of my participants. In my data collection I purposely used narrative interviewing to allow my interviewees to drive the conversation. Nevertheless, some individuals were uncomfortable with this technique, and I needed to steer the interviews by prompting them to talk. A research study based on questionnaires rather than researcher interviews would be one methodological means to overcome potential researcher bias although as already indicated, Lee et al. (2017), as an example, produced similar results. However, I would also argue that a questionnaire in itself involves researcher bias since the questions asked would reflect the researcher's own assumptions, personal history and positionality!

My data analysis used data from other sources to crystallise my results. Crystallisation allows a researcher to build a richer account of reality by using data from multiple sources, and by viewing this data from multiple perspectives. My use of crystallisation was evident in both my data collection and my presentation of results (although the presentation of quantitative data in graphs and tables may be less familiar to practitioners of this type of research approach). The use of crystallisation in qualitative research into topics such as trusteeship and governance is not widespread and is a technique that warrants further attention in management research.

The analysis of the effectiveness of museum trustees was based on limited access to data. An analysis using more sensitive or confidential data such as transcripts of board meetings may have provided more insightful analysis of board effectiveness. Nevertheless, the analysis provided a framework around which to discuss board effectiveness and opens the door for further research.

7.7.2 Scope

This study focused specifically on the governance of small museums, exploring board operations and effectiveness of museum trustees. To understand the governance of small museums, interviews were conducted with individuals directly involved in the governance process, including trustees and senior managers. Additionally, data from secondary sources was used to enrich the findings. However, the study did not seek

input from other interested stakeholders, such as industry bodies like AIM, visitors, or the broader community. Further research could approach stakeholders to gather their opinions around small museum governance.

7.7.3 Context

This study is based on small museums based in Buckinghamshire, and whilst many of the results are not context specific and have been proved to be applicable more generally, care should be taken when generalising the findings to other countries or another context. It should also be recognised that some of my findings may reflect the unusual circumstances of the period in which I conducted my research (the COVID-19 pandemic). Further research, reflecting less exceptional times and the constraints museums operated under during the COVID-19 pandemic, would help confirm the generalisability of my results.

7.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In summary, embarking on a part-time professional doctorate whilst working has involved a substantial effort both in terms of time management and personal organisation so that I could address the research questions thoroughly. There have been times when I felt I was trying to hit a moving target but, in the end, I have realised that research is by its nature never really finished. It just stops for an individual once their research has advanced our understanding and knowledge of a topic and created foundations for other researchers to build upon. I would have relished the opportunity to talk to more museum trustees, but the scope and ambition of this project had to be managed since the time commitment to undertake all the activities required to carry out a significant amount of academic research with accuracy and attention to detail is substantial. Nevertheless, I am pleased that I will be able to achieve the founding of the Heritage Trustee Forum and contribute in a small way to the journey of trustees within the heritage sector (and I am also very grateful to my colleagues at the Heritage Volunteering Group for agreeing to host it). The Heritage Trustee Forum will play a vital role in fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and professional development among museum trustees. I am hoping to explore with the Association of Independent Museums and the Museum Development organisations funding to create the DTMG to improve the experience of museum trustees further.

It has also become clear to me from my research that many of my observations are not restricted to the heritage sector and that at least some of the recommendations could be of use within the cultural sector and beyond.

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9 PARTICIPANTS

9.1 INTERVIEWEES

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Interviewee 2020-02 (2020)

Interviewee 2020-03 (2020)

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Interviewee 2020-05 (2020)

Interviewee 2020-06 (2020)

Interviewee 2020-07 (2020)

Interviewee 2020-08 (2020)

Interviewee 2021-01 (2021)

Interviewee 2021-02 (2021)

Interviewee 2021-03 (2021)

Interviewee 2021-04 (2021)

Interviewee 2021-05 (2021)

Interviewee 2021-06 (2021)

Interviewee 2021-07 (2021)

Interviewee 2021-08 (2021)

Interviewee 2021-09 (2021)

Interviewee 2021-10 (2021)

Interviewee 2021-11 (2021)

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10 APPENDICES

10.1 APPENDIX 1: THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE PORTFOLIO

Along with the doctoral report which forms the bulk of this publication, I am also submitting a portfolio of wider evidence, the contents of which are outlined in the following pages. The materials presented here support the following:

- The statement of purpose and terms of reference required by the Executive Board of the Heritage Volunteering Group to agree to the formation of the Heritage Trustee Forum in 2026.
- A proposal for the development of a minimum viable product for a digital tool for museum governance including a first user journey mock-up (OpenAI-ChatGPT, 2025). These documents and the accompanying wireframes will be used to bid for funding to develop the tool.
- Conference papers and other presentations of my research whilst it was in progress.
- A sample of training materials in case study form developed for training purposes.
- A sample Code of Conduct for museum Trustees and the suggested contents of a Welcome or Induction Pack for trustees

Reference is also made to a policy paper I developed for the Council of the University of Buckingham.

10.1.1 Introduction

Not only are professional doctorates challenging the research approaches of traditional doctorates, but they are also challenging their outputs. Storey (2019, p.117) suggests that ‘the traditional thesis is often not the best way to describe or think about P[rofessional] D[octorates]’. She explores a number of alternatives including a portfolio model, where the portfolio is accompanied by a report that discusses the portfolio contents (Storey, 2019).

Portfolios as part of a Doctoral submission are relatively new outside of a few areas of academia such as education and healthcare. Fulton et al. (2013) link their use to the rise of NVQ in the 1990s and the requirement for candidates to build a portfolio of evidence for assessment alongside more conventional written work. That said, portfolios are commonplace in certain disciplines: for example, Art and Design courses from BA all the way through to PhD require students to produce a portfolio of work at the end of their degrees through which they explore an idea as fully as possible often in different media. Those explorations showcase a fusion of skills, knowledge, and creativity, and are often communicated in the final product alongside written reflections and a synthesising narrative of what worked and what did not. At doctoral level, this narrative would reflect the originality, contribution and consistency needed to claim doctoral level scholarship.

Professional doctorate portfolios in many ways reflect this exploration and serve as evidence of reflective and critical examination to further learning. Whilst it is not always clear what represents a doctoral portfolio, Fulton, et al. (2013, p.105) suggest that a portfolio will be ‘a mix of materials ranging from artefacts to published formal material in an academic sense’. Malfroy and Yates (2003) also found that many portfolios also contained a range of documents relating to ‘workplace practice’. Other examples of the types of documents included are strategic policy documents, published conference or journal papers, reflective diary extracts, reflections on professional practice, etc. A series of case studies in Fulton, et al. (2013) suggest a variety of designs for the portfolio.

The various sections below lay out my portfolio: my portfolio is a presentation of a forum, the outline of a digital tool for museum governance, papers, and educational resources.

10.1.2 Section A: The Heritage Trustee Forum

10.1.2.1 Heritage Trustee Forum: Statement of Purpose

The Heritage Trustee Forum will play a vital role in fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and professional development among heritage trustees. It has been established as a platform for trustees to discuss governance challenges, share best practices, and strengthen leadership within the heritage sector, and enhance governance effectiveness.

Key activities of the forum include:

- **Quarterly Meetings and Workshops:** Regular meetings will provide a space for trustees to engage with industry experts, governance specialists, and fellow trustees. It is proposed that topics covered will range from trustee recruitment and board diversity to financial oversight and digital governance. Workshops will be focused on practical governance skills, such as risk management, fundraising strategies, and trustee responsibilities.
- **Guest Speaker Sessions:** The forum will host prominent voices in heritage governance, offering insights on current challenges and innovative governance models. Speakers will include representatives from funding bodies, and legal experts in charity governance.

- **Case Study Discussions:** By analysing real-world governance successes and failures, trustees will be able to reflect on best practices and avoid common pitfalls. Discussions will include cases of museum closures due to governance failures, successful governance adaptations in times of crisis, and innovative board structures adopted by international institutions and other sectors of the charitable sector.
- **Online Resource Sharing and Networking:** It is proposed that a dedicated online platform will allow trustees to access governance toolkits, policy guidance, and training materials. A digital space will also facilitate ongoing discussions and peer support, ensuring that trustees can seek advice beyond scheduled meetings.
- **Governance Reviews and Policy Development:** The forum will actively contribute to sector-wide discussions on governance improvements, which will lead to the development of recommendations and toolkits for small museums.

The impact of the Heritage Trustee Forum will be significant in bridging the gap between governance theory and practice. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and peer support, the forum will help trustees navigate the complexities of governance and drive positive change within their organisations. Moving forward, its activities will continue to evolve, ensuring that museum trustees remain equipped to tackle emerging governance challenges in an ever-changing heritage sector.

10.1.2.2 Heritage Trustee Forum: Terms of Reference

1. Purpose

The Heritage Trustee Forum serves as a professional network for heritage trustees to discuss governance challenges, share best practices, and enhance leadership skills within the heritage sector. The forum provides a safe collaborative space for trustees

to exchange knowledge, access expert guidance, and develop strategies to strengthen museum governance.

2. Objectives

The Heritage Trustee Forum aims to:

- Facilitate peer-to-peer support and knowledge sharing among trustees.
- Provide guidance on governance best practices, compliance, and risk management.
- Support professional development through guest speakers, training sessions, and workshops.
- Offer a platform for discussion on sector-wide governance issues such as diversity, sustainability, and trustee recruitment.
- Advocate for stronger governance structures and policy improvements in the heritage sector (from 2026 onwards).

3. Membership

- Open to current and aspiring trustees of museums, heritage organisations, and cultural institutions. Members will need to sign up to the Heritage Volunteering Group on Better Impact to access membership events
- Membership may include representatives from museum boards, funding bodies, governance experts, and industry professionals.
- Participation is voluntary, with members expected to actively contribute to discussions and initiatives.

4. Governance and Structure

- The forum is overseen by a Steering Committee, composed of elected trustees from various institutions. This is constituted under the auspices of the Heritage Volunteering Group and will operate in accordance with the Heritage Volunteering Group Constitution.
- A Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson are appointed to coordinate meetings, set agendas, and represent the forum at the Executive Board of the Heritage Volunteering Group.

5. Meetings and Activities

- The forum meets quarterly, with additional ad-hoc meetings as needed.
- Meetings may include:
 - Presentations by governance experts and industry leaders.
 - Case study discussions on governance successes and challenges.
 - Workshops and training sessions on key governance issues.
 - Networking opportunities for trustees to connect and collaborate.
- A dedicated online platform will be available for ongoing discussions, resource sharing, and networking.

6. Code of Conduct

- Members must adhere to principles of confidentiality, professionalism, and mutual respect.
- The forum operates under Chatham House Rules, ensuring open and honest discussions without attribution.

- Any conflicts of interest should be declared, and trustees are expected to act in the best interests of the heritage sector and the Heritage Volunteering Group.

7. Outputs and Reporting

- A summary report will be published in the Heritage Volunteering Group annual report, highlighting key discussions, findings, and best practices.
- Feedback from members will be collected to assess the forum's impact and areas for improvement.

8. Review and Evaluation

- The Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually to ensure alignment with sector needs.
- Amendments may be proposed by the Steering Committee and approved by a majority vote of members.

10.1.3 Section B: Digital governance tools

10.1.3.1 Review of the Governance App from DSC

The Governance App (n.d.) is a website which intends to help a charity board to review its governance. It was designed by the Directory of Social Change (DSC) and went live in 2022. The website allows a board to create a review and prompts each board member to answer 70 questions on a Likert scale about their perspectives on how their board is managing governance. The administrator can produce a report for the board to review and share at a board meeting. This is viewed as a mechanism to start off

conversations about the charity board and how it operates. Reviews can be set at different times and governance performance can, therefore, be monitored over time. The DSC has ambitions to use the Governance App to 'revolutionise how funders, infrastructure and membership organisations support governance' (The Governance App, n.d.). There is no facility to interact with the app beyond the governance review, so users have to look externally for more specific answers relating to their governance issues.

The app uses the Governance Code produced by the Good Governance Steering Group as the basis for its governance review (Charity Governance Code Steering Group, n.d.). The app is very easy to use. It is straightforward to set-up a profile for the charity and the individual who does so is designated as administrator. There is an option to set-up another administrator, but this only occurs at initial set-up and there does not seem to be a facility to change this later. On registering an organisation there is a question on turnover; I assume this is used by the app to tailor the questions asked depending on whether the charity is small or large. There is no transparency as to where the cutoff point is. The questions are quick to answer, and the results are available in PDF, Excel and CSV formats. The PDF file provides some analysis. For example, it provides both the highest and the lowest scoring questions and asks the user then to reflect on what has driven that performance and how it could be maintained or improved.

I used the app to review HVG's governance. The users were the Executive Board and the Advisory Group. The reports produced by the app were used by the Executive Board to discuss governance and the users agreed that this was a good way to facilitate conversations on how well the charity was run and managed. The suggestion is that the Executive Board will use the app annually to both monitor governance and review whether performance against the measures improved or deteriorated.

I can see this app being used as part of a governance review as a good way into what is working and what is not. Additionally, it will provide the DSC with lots of information about charity governance more generally. For example, the DSC can see, for all the charities that have used the app, results that show of 'the 15 lowest scores,

eight of them relate to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion’ (Directory of Social Change, 2024). This will allow the DSC to provide targeted help and training. However, the app does not have the functionality that I had envisioned for a digital tool for governance in the heritage sector which would provide trustees with up-to-date information in real time to help them resolve problems or get advice.

10.1.3.2 Core features for a digital tool for museum governance (DTMG)

The digital tool for museum governance (outlined below) would be a tool to run governance health checks, issue compliance reminders and provide real-time governance support such as online training in bite-sized governance lessons. It would be a trustee manual and training in the trustee’s pocket! See Section 3.6 and footnote 32 on page 254 regarding the production of this MVP and first user journey (OpenAI-ChatGPT, 2025).

Core Features for a digital tool for museum governance (Minimum Viable Product - MVP)

To launch a digital tool for museum governance quickly and effectively, the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) focuses on essential features that provide immediate value whilst allowing for future expansion of the tool.

1. Trustee Self-Assessment Tool

- Governance Health Check – A short, structured questionnaire (Likert scale-based) to assess governance effectiveness.
- Customisable for museum size – Questions tailored based on small, medium, or large museums.
- Automated Report Generation – Provides instant feedback on governance strengths and weaknesses, with actionable recommendations.

2. Compliance and Best Practice Tracker

- Governance Checklist – A list of key governance responsibilities, mapped to UK charity laws and Museums Association/AIM guidelines.
- Legal and Regulatory Alerts – Updates on Charity Commission requirements, museum governance codes, and funding compliance.
- Role-Based Reminders – Automated reminders for key governance activities (AGM deadlines, policy renewals, funding reports).

3. Trustee Training Hub

- Microlearning Modules – Short 5-10 min lessons on topics such as:
 - Trustee responsibilities
 - Financial oversight and risk management
 - Diversity and inclusion in governance
- Webinar Integration – Live and recorded sessions with sector experts.
- A Trustee Induction Package – Step-by-step onboarding for new trustees.

4. Board Collaboration and Communication (Phase 2 feature)

- Document Repository – A secure space for governance policies, meeting minutes, and strategic plans.
- Board Task Manager – Assign and track action items from board meetings.
- Internal Messaging – A simple chat/forum feature for trustee discussions (optional integration with Slack/Teams).

5. Digital Governance Benchmarking

- Governance Scorecard – Compare museum governance effectiveness with sector-wide benchmarks.
- Trend Analysis – Track governance improvements over time through periodic self-assessments.
- Peer Comparison – See how similar museums approach governance (aggregated and anonymised).

6. Funding and Financial Oversight (Phase 3 feature)

- Funding Eligibility Checker – Matches museums with relevant grants and funding sources (Perhaps Phase 4).
- Basic Budgeting Tool – Helps trustees understand financial oversight responsibilities.
- Financial Health Indicator – Tracks financial governance best practices and risks.

7. Trustee Support and Advice Portal

- FAQ and Knowledge Base – Quick answers to common governance questions.
- AI-Powered Chatbot (Phase 3 Feature) – Provides instant guidance on governance queries.
- Legal and Ethical Advice Referral (Phase 3 Feature) – Links to specialist governance consultants.

10.1.3.3 DTMG minimum viable product development timeline (fast-track to market)

Phase 1 (3-6 Months) – Core MVP Features

- Trustee Self-Assessment Tool
- Governance Checklist and Reminders
- FAQ and Knowledge Base.
- Training Hub with Basic Courses

Phase 2 (6-12 Months) – Advanced Features

- Board Collaboration Tools (Document Sharing, Task Manager)
- Governance Benchmarking and Reports

Phase 3 (12+ Months) – Premium and AI Features

- Basic Funding and Financial Tools
- AI-driven Governance Chatbot
- Legal and Funding Advisory Services

10.1.3.4 User journey mock-up for the digital tool for museum governance (DTMG)

User: New Trustee (First-Time Experience)

Step 1: Onboarding and Profile Setup

- The trustee downloads the app (mobile/web version) and creates an account.
- Selects museum type (small, medium, or large) to personalise recommendations.
- Fills in basic profile details (role, years of experience, specific responsibilities).
- Completes an optional onboarding tutorial explaining how the app works.

Step 2: Governance Self-Assessment

- The trustee is prompted to take a quick governance review (Likert-scale questionnaire).
- Questions assess board effectiveness, compliance, and personal trustee confidence.
- Instant results: A visual scorecard shows governance strengths and weaknesses.
- Actionable insights: The app recommends relevant training and best practices based on the results.

Step 3: Training and Knowledge Hub

- Trustee accesses training modules, covering:
 - Trustee roles and responsibilities
 - Financial oversight and risk management
 - Ethics

- Equality, diversity, and inclusion
- Museum-specific governance challenges
- Completes short quizzes and earns badges for progress.

Step 4: Compliance and Reminders

- The trustee receives automated reminders about governance duties:
 - Board meeting deadlines
 - Charity Commission updates
 - Policy review cycles
- A checklist dashboard tracks progress on governance best practices.

Step 5: Collaboration and Board Tasks

- Trustee can view and contribute to board documents securely.
- Can assign tasks to fellow trustees (e.g., drafting reports, reviewing financials).
- Internal messaging allows quick discussions on governance issues.

Step 6: Benchmarking and Progress Tracking

- Trustee compares governance performance against similar museum boards.
- Tracks personal progress through completed training and board contributions.
- Receives quarterly governance insights based on app-wide data trends.

Step 7: Seeking Further Advice and Support

- Trustee can access an FAQ knowledge base for governance issues.
- If needed, trustee can connect with governance experts for legal or financial advice.
- AI-powered chatbot (Phase 2) offers instant responses to governance questions.

Future Enhancements

- AI-driven governance coaching with personalised action plans.
- Integration with museum CRM and financial software for enhanced oversight.
- Live trustee networking and discussion forums.

10.1.4 Section C: Published work and conference papers

Research findings have been disseminated through presentations at heritage industry conferences and practitioner workshops.

10.1.4.1 Paper presented at Association of Critical Heritage Studies 5th Biennial Conference ‘Futures’ in August 2020, “Liabilities of Smallness”

Abstract

Museum governance has risen up the agenda as public confidence in the charitable sector as a whole has been declining (see, for example, the Charity Commission’s report ‘Trust in Charities, 2018’). And the museum sector here in the UK places

emphasis on governance with the first standard requirement for Museum accreditation being ‘appropriate governance and management’ (Museums Accreditation Standard 2018).

There are contradictory views around non-profit or charity governance: some academics and practitioners argue there is very little difference between governance and board roles in for-profit and non-profit firms whilst others criticise the adoption of for-profit models of governance in the non-profit sector (see, for example Pointer and Orlikoff 2002, Cornforth 2002). However, both practitioners and academics recognise that there is a difference between the governance of large and small charities, with smaller charities facing challenges due to the “liabilities of smallness”.

To fully understand museum governance in small museums we need to understand the composition and competencies of their trustee boards. This paper presents the preliminary findings of a professional doctorate in Heritage at the University of Hertfordshire and reflects on interviews with trustees collected during initial research into small museum boards. The research aims to make a practical contribution to the future of governance by reflecting on the “liabilities of smallness” that small museums face. It will also address the reality of charity involvement for most trustees who spend as much if not most of their time on operational or management matters rather than governance.

A link to the recording of lecture can be made available on request

10.1.4.2 Paper presented to the HBS Research Seminar Series in May 2023 Museum Trustees: the forgotten volunteers of small museums

Trustees of small museums hold huge amounts of responsibility for the governance of their organisations but their presence within the sector is not well reported or

understood. My research is based on talking to trustees and directors of small museums and heritage organisations across Buckinghamshire (and my own experiences as a trustee of almost 30 years). I track the trustee journey from recruitment through to retirement and question whether recommendations and targets set by the charity sector as a whole are being met. My findings suggest they are not and that trustees within the heritage sector reflect the lack of training, diversity etc. that is seen in the charity sector more generally. My paper reflects these findings and questions whether there are lessons that can be learnt from the heritage volunteering groups across the UK to promote a heritage trustee community and that this community would help contribute to changing both the trustee profile and journey.

10.1.4.3 Paper presented at DHeritage Student Conference in May 2023 Museum Trustees: the forgotten volunteers of small museums

Abstract as above.

10.1.4.4 Other papers presented

Other papers were delivered as part of an Erasmus+ project I was involved in from 2019-2023. Whilst not related to this DHeritage research project I suggest these are evidence of more general development in domains B, C and D of the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (Vitae, n.d.). My presentations included a paper presented to the Association of Critical Heritage Studies 6th Biennial Conference ‘Interculturalities’ in December 2022, the European Parliament at the House of European History in February 2023, the Lynx Summer School “Dissonances. Re-interpreting and re-assessing difficult heritage” July 2023, and a local luncheon group in November 2023.

Papers delivered:

“Urban Spaces, heritage education and citizenship” at the ACHS 2022 Conference, held between December 4 and 7, 2022 in Santiago de Chile

Uk StadtRäume Scientific Board response to the European Committee of the Regions, Brussels in February 2023

The Lynx Summer School “Dissonances. Re-interpreting and re-assessing difficult heritage” July 2023 paper on “Urban Spaces: war memorials from the interwar period and citizenship” (delivered virtually)

Luncheon group: “Urban Spaces: war memorials from the interwar period and citizenship”

10.1.5 Section D: Training and educational resources

Two case studies are presented here as examples of the types of case study I propose producing.

The Bucks Railway Centre

Introduction and Background

The London Railway Preservation Society has collected historical railway equipment since 1962. The railway enthusiasts of the society commenced activities on a 25 acre site in Quainton in 1969. In 1971 the London Railway Preservation Society was incorporated into the Quainton Railway Society Ltd under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965. The Society is answerable to the Charity Commission, but it is not, currently, registered as a charity. It is registered as a mutual.³⁴

³⁴ I was surprised to learn that it was registered as a charity in its early days but became a mutual in 1982. A mutual whilst still a non-profit organisation is very much an organisation that exists to benefit its members, as opposed to the community at large.

Its objects (and therefore its purpose) are as follows:

To hold land and buildings for use as a museum for the advancement of education of the public and for the exhibition to the public and of the preservation of locomotives rolling stock and equipment of all kinds such as was used on the railways of the United Kingdom before the commencement of the modernisation of the railways during the late 1950's including any item of more recent or foreign origin if considered useful or desirable for the charitable purposes connected with railways and the study of history of standard gauge railways as the executive committee shall from time to time think fit.

The Quainton Railway Society Ltd. operates the Buckinghamshire Railway Centre (BRC) on the former Aylesbury and Buckingham Railway tracks. The museum is an accredited museum.

The museum comprises 3 demonstration lines, and a number of buildings containing engineering workshops, storage for rolling stock, a permanent exhibition of railway memorabilia, and a library. In 2002 a Grade 2 listed station building was moved from Rewley Road in Oxford and reconstructed at Quainton. This is now a visitor centre housing the administration office, a shop, café and meeting room.

The Board

The Board of Trustees is made up of nine individuals. Board members are required by the Society's constitution to be shareholders, and the minimum shareholding is set at four shares of £5.00 each in order to attain voting status at General Meetings and for a member to become eligible for election as a Trustee of the Society. Trustees are elected at the Annual General Meeting or co-opted between General Meetings.

Associate members of the Society are the equivalent of "friends". They may not vote at General Meetings or stand for election as a Trustee. Their membership buys them free access to the railway centre except during special events, discounts in the shop and café and a magazine.

The Problem

A number of issues arose between 2013 and 2018 which particularly impacted governance of the Society and its Board of Trustees. The railway centre had appointed an external consultant to review the organisation after they had been awarded provisional museum accreditation in July 2013. The consultant was tasked with helping the museum to put together an application for full accreditation in 2014. The museum put together and agreed a strategic plan for 2015-18 which was agreed in November 2014. However, there were a number of governance issues that were highlighted by the external consultant most critically that the museum board was spending too much time dealing with operational matters rather than taking a longer-term strategic view. Immediate measures were needed to change the way the museum operated and to communicate those changes to staff, members and volunteers. Additionally, there were issues for the site which would be impacted by the new East-West Rail line between Oxford and Cambridge and HS2. Museum accreditation was achieved in December 2015.

The proposed changes caused a lot of friction at the society particularly within the governing body. This resulted in several committee members resigning (4 in the course of 2016) with complaints about a lack of enthusiasm to support changes needed to become an accredited museum, complaints about procedure not being followed especially around the AGM and election of trustees, and complaints of bullying by the trustees. One ex shareholder (effectively a trustee) was banned from the QRS site and then expelled from the society. He took the Society to court regarding what he saw as a blatant disregard for procedure in expelling him and his wife from the Society without due process. He would not speak to me as he was concerned that this might prejudice his case although he directed me to documents in the public domain.

Additionally, the AGM in 2017 was not run in accordance with the rules of the society.

Discussion Questions for Training Purposes

Governance versus Operations – How can a museum board ensure it focuses on strategic oversight rather than day-to-day operations?

Handling Conflict – What steps should a trustee board take to prevent governance disputes from escalating?

Legal Compliance – How can museums ensure that their trustee appointment and removal procedures align with best practices?

Governance Reform Resistance – How can boards effectively implement necessary governance reforms without creating excessive internal friction?

Trustee Succession Planning – How can heritage organisations improve trustee recruitment and training to ensure long-term governance stability?

Lessons for others

The Buckinghamshire Railway Centre offers a number of lessons that may be helpful to those in similar positions:

- Trustees need to make sure that their charity complies with its governing document. A copy needs to be made available in particular to new trustees.
- Governing documents need to be updated regularly since many museums operate with rules that were put in place when they were formed.
- Trustees' appointments should be made in accordance with both the rules of the charity and the law. The Charity Commission states that 'if you are not properly appointed, the trustees' decisions or actions may be invalid, potentially creating disputes or putting charity assets at risk' (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2017).
- Trustees must comply with charity requirements and other applicable laws.

- Trustees should conduct “exit” interviews to ensure that they understand why a trustee is leaving and how they could better conduct their business.

The Buckingham Old Gaol Trust

Introduction and Background

The Buckingham Old Gaol Trust was established in 1985 to purchase, restore, and maintain the historic old jail building in Buckingham. Originally built as a prison in 1748 and later remodelled by George Gilbert Scott in the 1830s, the structure now serves as a museum and tourist information centre. The museum houses approximately 2,000 archaeological, historical, and social history artifacts, including items of significant historical value, such as coins from the Lenborough Hoard and a Richard III Half Angel.

In addition, the museum displays a proportion of the collection of the Buckinghamshire Military Museum Trust (BMMT). This arrangement and any loaned materials are covered by written agreements.

The Buckingham Old Gaol Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 25 September 1985 and registered as a charity on 25 October 1985.

The Board

The museum operates under a board of trustees, typically consisting of 8-12 members, including local councillors and, at times, representatives from the University of Buckingham. The governance of the trust relies on ethical stewardship, transparency, and adherence to regulatory compliance.

Trustees are elected at the Annual General Meeting or co-opted between General Meetings.

The Problem (Interviewee 2020-04, 2020)

In 2015, a trustee with expertise in coin collecting was appointed as the Honorary Curator, responsible for overseeing the museum's coin collection. By mid-2017, this individual had illegally sold several coins from the museum's collection to a dealer. The theft was discovered when another trustee, also a coin expert, was approached by the dealer with an offer to purchase additional coins, under the mistaken belief that the museum was deaccessioning part of its collection.

Upon discovery, the chair of the trust initially attempted to limit the number of people informed about the theft. However, other trustees insisted on transparency and formally reported the issue to the Charity Commission. The stolen coins were recovered, and the offending trustee was asked to step down and later prosecuted by the police. Following this incident, the museum implemented a new project to systematically record its collection using the Modes documentation system.

Points for Discussion

Governance and Oversight Failures - How could the trust have prevented unauthorised access to and sale of artifacts? What internal controls were lacking in the museum's governance structure?

Ethical and Legal Considerations - How should institutions respond to ethical breaches among leadership? Was the decision to involve the Charity Commission the correct one?

Transparency and Crisis Management - What are the risks of concealing or downplaying internal misconduct? How should organisations balance internal damage control with external accountability?

Collection Management and Security Measures - What policies could have been in place to prevent unauthorised deaccessioning of collection items? How does proper documentation and inventory management protect against fraud?

Lessons for Others

The Buckingham Old Gaol Trust offers a number of lessons that may be helpful to those in similar positions including:

- Strengthening Governance Policies
 - There is a need for clear policies on trustee responsibilities, conflicts of interest, and accountability.
 - Regular audits and inventory checks should be carried out to prevent similar breaches.
- Enforcing Transparency and Ethical Conduct
 - It is important to promptly report issues to appropriate authorities such as the Charity Commission.
 - It is important to establish a whistleblower policy to encourage ethical behaviour.
- Enhancing Security and Documentation
 - Museums should implement of robust collection management systems like Modes.
- Secure record-keeping and restricted access to valuable artifacts.
- Crisis Management and Communication
 - It is advisable to have a crisis response plan to handle governance breaches.

- Museums should engage their stakeholders transparently to maintain public trust.

This case study highlights the importance of strong governance, ethical leadership, and proactive risk management in heritage institutions. Strengthening these areas can help prevent and mitigate similar incidents in the future.

10.1.6 Section E: Policy Documents

10.1.6.1 University of Buckingham Policy Document

I wrote a policy document proposing a ‘Board of Scrutiny’ to ensure the accountability of both Senate and Council to both internal and external stakeholders for the University of Buckingham in 2020. Because of the nature of my proposals for governance changes within the university the document is not available for public consumption.

10.1.6.2 Sample trustees code of conduct

This is a sample version of a code of conduct for a small charitable museum, aligned with expectations from the Charity Commission for England and Wales:

Code of Conduct for Trustees (*Small Museum Charity – England & Wales*)

1. Purpose

This Code of Conduct outlines the standards expected of trustees to ensure effective governance, compliance with charity law, and the protection of the museum’s collections, reputation, and public benefit.

2. Legal Duties of Trustees

Trustees must comply with their legal duties as set out by the Charity Commission for England and Wales, including to:

- Act only in the charity's best interests
- Act with reasonable care and skill
- Ensure the charity carries out its purposes for the public benefit
- Manage resources responsibly
- Act in accordance with the charity's governing document and the law

3. Commitment to the Museum's Purpose

Trustees shall:

- Support the museum's charitable objectives, including education and preservation
- Safeguard the collections, heritage assets, and public access
- Ensure activities deliver clear public benefit

4. Integrity, Honesty, and Accountability

Trustees must:

- Act with integrity and avoid bringing the charity into disrepute
- Take collective responsibility for decisions of the board
- Be accountable for the charity's performance and compliance

- Declare any criminal convictions, disqualifications, or relevant issues as required by law

5. Conflicts of Interest and Loyalty

Trustees shall:

- Declare all relevant interests in a register of interests
- Declare conflicts at the start of meetings and withdraw where appropriate
- Not receive personal benefit unless explicitly authorised in line with charity law
- Avoid situations where loyalty to another organisation could influence decision-making

6. Financial Stewardship

Trustees must:

- Ensure funds are used only for the charity's purposes
- Oversee proper financial controls, budgeting, and reporting
- Approve annual accounts and ensure compliance with reporting requirements
- Protect the charity from fraud, mismanagement, or undue risk

7. Safeguarding and Duty of Care

Trustees shall:

- Promote a safe environment for visitors, volunteers, and staff

- Ensure appropriate safeguarding policies are in place (especially where children or vulnerable adults may be involved)
- Take health and safety responsibilities seriously

8. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Trustees must:

- Maintain confidentiality of sensitive information
- Comply with applicable data protection laws, including UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018
- Use information only for proper trustee purposes

9. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

Trustees shall:

- Promote equality of opportunity and inclusivity
- Ensure the museum is welcoming and accessible to diverse audiences
- Avoid discrimination in decision-making and conduct

10. Board Conduct and Decision-Making

Trustees are expected to:

- Attend meetings regularly and prepare in advance
- Engage constructively and respectfully in discussions
- Support collective decisions, even where there was prior disagreement

- Follow proper decision-making processes and maintain accurate records

11. Role Boundaries (Governance vs Management)

Trustees must:

- Focus on governance, strategy, and oversight
- Avoid involvement in day-to-day operations unless formally agreed
- Support and appropriately oversee any staff or volunteers in leadership roles

12. Public Trust and Reputation

Trustees shall:

- Act as ambassadors for the museum and charity
- Avoid public statements that could harm the charity's reputation
- Ensure communications are accurate and appropriate

13. Breach of the Code

Concerns about breaches should be raised with the Chair (or another trustee if appropriate)

Serious breaches may result in formal action, including removal in line with the governing document and charity law

14. Review and Acceptance

This Code will be reviewed annually. All trustees are required to confirm in writing that they have read and agree to abide by the code.

10.1.6.3 Sample trustees Welcome or Induction Pack

This is a sample Welcome or Induction pack for trustees of a small UK museum charity grounded in real governance responsibilities (especially those expected by the Charity Commission for England and Wales). It should give a new trustee everything they need to be confident from their first meeting and show them “how things actually work”, not just policies.

1. Welcome & Overview

- Welcome letter from the Chair
- Brief history of the museum
- Mission, vision, and values
- Summary of current priorities or challenges

2. About the Museum

- Overview of collections and significance
- Key audiences and community role
- Summary of exhibitions, programmes, and activities
- Any accreditations (e.g. Arts Council England Museum Accreditation if applicable)

3. Governance & Structure

- Governing document (constitution/CIO articles/trust deed)
- Organisational structure (board, committees, staff/volunteers)

- Roles and responsibilities of trustees
- Role descriptions (Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, etc.)

4. Trustee Responsibilities (UK Context)

- Summary of legal duties (aligned with the Charity Commission for England and Wales guidance CC3)
- Code of Conduct (the one you've just created)
- Conflicts of interest policy and register template
- Overview of liabilities and protections (e.g. trustee indemnity insurance)

5. Policies & Procedures

Key policies trustees should know:

- Safeguarding policy
- Health & Safety policy
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion policy
- Data protection policy (aligned with UK GDPR)
- Collections management or acquisition/disposal policy
- Financial controls and reserves policy

6. Financial Information

- Most recent annual report and accounts
- Current budget

- Funding sources (grants, donations, admissions, etc.)
- Financial procedures (approval levels, reporting cycle)

7. Strategy & Planning

- Current strategic plan
- Business or forward plan (if separate)
- Key risks and opportunities
- Any major projects (e.g. redevelopment, digitisation, community programmes)

8. Board Operations

- Schedule of board and committee meetings
- Terms of reference for committees
- Recent board minutes (last 2–3 meetings)
- Decision-making processes

9. Practical Information

- Key contacts (Chair, trustees, staff/volunteers)
- Communication channels (email, shared drives, etc.)
- Location details and access arrangements
- Claiming expenses policy

10. External Context

- Overview of relevant sector bodies and support:
 - Arts Council England
 - Association of Independent Museums
 - Museums Association
- Any partnerships or local authority relationships

11. Induction Activities (Optional but Valuable)

Include a checklist such as:

- Tour of the museum (including behind-the-scenes areas)
- Meeting staff and key volunteers
- Attending an event or school session
- One-to-one with the Chair or Treasurer

12. Trustee Declaration

- Signed agreement to:
 - Act in line with charity law
 - Follow the Code of Conduct
 - Declare conflicts of interest

10.2 APPENDIX 2: BOARD EFFECTIVENESS AT THE CHILTERN OPEN AIR MUSEUM, THE BUCKINGHAM OLD GAOL TRUST, AND AMERSHAM MUSEUM

10.2.1 Introduction to the Chiltern Open Air Museum

The Chiltern Open Air Museum was founded in 1980 as a museum of buildings from the Chilterns. Its origins lie in the Chiltern Society and a visit by one of its Executive Committee to the Weald and Downland Museum in 1973. He reported back that “the Society should consider starting an open-air museum similar to one in Sussex, of old buildings which would otherwise be demolished” (Minutes of the Chiltern Society Executive committee 11th June 1973 cited in *The early days of the Chiltern Open Air Museum. How it all Started.*, n.d.). The museum has a collection of 37 rescued buildings; artefacts within the buildings tell the story of the people who built and lived within them but do not form part of the collection.

The museum is a charity limited by guarantee and fully accredited.

10.2.2 Introduction to the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust

The Buckingham Old Gaol Trust was established in 1985 to purchase, restore, and maintain the historic jail in Buckingham. Originally built as a prison in 1748 and later remodelled by George Gilbert Scott in the 1830s, the structure now serves as a museum and tourist information centre. The museum houses approximately 2,000 archaeological, historical, and social history artifacts, including items of significant historical value, such as coins from the Lenborough Hoard and a Richard III Half Angel.

In addition, the museum displays a proportion of the collection of the Buckinghamshire Military Museum Trust (BMMT). This arrangement and any loaned materials are covered by written agreements.

The Buckingham Old Gaol Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 25 September 1985 and registered as a charity on 25 October 1985.

10.2.3 Introduction to Amersham Museum

Amersham Museum opened in 1991 and expanded into the adjacent Victorian building after a significant redevelopment in 2017. The museum showcases its medieval structure, which had been obscured from view along the High Street before the redevelopment. The museum features exhibits relating to people, places and events that tell the story of Amersham and its surroundings. Its collection reflects these stories.

The museum's charitable object is to 'To advance public education in relation to the history of Amersham and the surrounding area, principally by the operation of a museum.' The museum's vision is: 'Amersham Museum brings local history to life to inspire, surprise and engage people, helping them to explore the significance of the area's past, appreciate the present, and imagine the future.'

Amersham Museum is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The museum is fully accredited.

10.2.4 Measuring Board Effectiveness

The Board Intellectual Capital Framework is a process model i.e a model where inputs are taken into a system, processed and a number of outputs are generated. The model is reproduced in Chapters 2 and 4 and aims to link board attributes to corporate performance via the roles that a board performs.

10.2.4.1 Board Intellectual Capital Framework: Inputs

The BICF identifies a series of inputs (e.g. company history, company constitution, legal environment) and proposes that these lead to a particular mix of board intellectual capital. For this work I assumed that each museum was subject to a similar series of inputs: all the museums operate in under English law; they have similar constitutions and all operate in Buckinghamshire. Their histories, obviously differ. I would expect each of the organisations to have similar boards.

Note that over time these inputs will have changed, and with them how corporate governance is practised by the organisations' boards. For example, changes have occurred in external inputs such as the new Charity Act passed in 2022 and internal factors such as the adoption of a new constitution for the Chiltern Open Air Museum in 2023. Both internal and external changes are designed to reflect changes in legislation and the adoption of best practice.

Input	Definition	Amersham Museum
Organisation type	Underlying purpose of organisation	Museum exploring the life and history of the town of Amersham
Legislative and societal framework	The major laws and societal customs within which the board must act	Independent museum (legal structure is limited by guarantee) and registered charity . No funding from local or central government.
		Governed by the Companies Act 2006 and the Charities Act 2022.Charity Commission regulation dictates what a charity must and should do.
		Accredited museum so operates to UK industry standards for museums
Constitution	Governance agreements that govern the organisation that were agreed by the "corporate owners"	The museum's charitable object is 'To advance public education in relation to the history of Amersham and the surrounding area, principally by the operation of a museum'.
Vision	Museum's aspirations	The museum's vision is: 'Amersham Museum brings local history to life to inspire, surprise and engage people, helping them to explore the significance of the area's past, appreciate the present, and imagine the future'.
History	Patterns of past activity, behaviour and effectiveness of the organisation that may effect current board structure and functioning	See Appendix 2. Museum opened in 1991.
Strategy	The way in which the company uses its resources	New audiences, fill gaps in collection, guarantee long-term sustainability of museum and embrace the potential of digital developments. See Forward plan 2024-2027 available: https://amershammuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Forward-plan-2024-2027-FINAL.pdf . Accessed: 20/10/2024.

31: Table showing Board Intellectual Capital Framework inputs for Amersham Museum

10.2 | APPENDIX 2: BOARD EFFECTIVENESS AT THE CHILTERN OPEN AIR MUSEUM, THE BUCKINGHAM OLD GAOL TRUST, AND AMERSHAM MUSEUM

Input	Definition	Buckingham Old Gaol
Organisation type	Underlying purpose of organisation	Museum exploring the life and history of the town of Buckingham
Legislative and societal framework	The major laws and societal customs within which the board must act	Independent museum (legal structure is limited by guarantee) and registered charity . No funding from local or central government.
		Governed by the Companies Act 2006 and the Charities Act 2022. Charity Commission regulation dictates what a charity must and should do.
		Accredited museum so operates to UK industry standards for museums
Constitution	Governance agreements that govern the organisation that were agreed by the "corporate owners"	The museum's charitable object is 'To purchase, restore and maintain the building known as Buckingham Goal as a building of historical interest and develop the same as a heritage centre museum and gallery for the benefit of the people of Buckingham and Buckinghamshire'.
Vision	Museum's aspirations	The museum's vision is not stated in publicly available documents.
History	Patterns of past activity, behaviour and effectiveness of the organisation that may effect current board structure and functioning	See Appendix 2. Museum opened in 1993.
Strategy	The way in which the company uses its resources	Continue to maintain and preserve the building and collection; apply for re-accreditation; continue cleaning process ; continue careful management of the shop stock; improve training of volunteers and trustees; grow membership

32: Table showing Board Intellectual Capital Framework inputs for Buckingham Old Gaol

Input	Definition	Chiltern Open Air Museum
Organisation type	Underlying purpose of organisaion	Museum of buildings
Legislative and societal framework	The major laws and societal customs within which the board must act	Independent museum (legal structure is limited by guarantee) and registered charity. Limited funding from local or central government in the form of restricted grants for projects.
		Governed by the Companies Act 2006 and the Charities Act 2022. Charity Commission regulation dictates what a charity must and should do.
		Accredited museum so operates to UK industry standards for museums
Constitution	Governance agreements that govern the organisation that were agreed by the "corporate owners"	The museum's charitable objects are: 1. to establish and maintain museum(s) and/or archive(s) for the benefit of the public, and in pursuit of that object: a. collect and preserve artefacts and archives including historic buildings, structures and parts thereof that are of architectural and historic interest, relating to the Chilterns and surrounding area to a published policy; b. manage, document, conserve and safeguard the Museum collections and holdings to appropriate professional standards; c. exhibit, interpret and provide access to the Museum collections and holdings; d. research, promote and publish studies of the Chilterns and surrounding area, including its vernacular buildings and building techniques; e. research, manage and preserve the skills, crafts, traditions and social history of the Chilterns; 2. to advance education by providing engaging experiences and learning opportunities for the public, telling the history of the Chilterns through the historic buildings, Chilterns landscapes and the people of the area.
Vision	Museum's aspirations	The museum's vision is: 'To tell the story of the unique heritage of the Chilterns through buildings, landscapes and culture for the enjoyment, inspiration and learning of present and future communities'.
History	Patterns of past activity, behaviour and effectiveness of the organisation that may effect current board structure and functioning	See Appendix 2. Museum opened in to the public in 1981.
Strategy	The way in which the company uses its resources	To continue to invest in our facilities and in our Education, Events and Publicity departments in order to ensure the museum continues to attract high numbers of visitors; Implementation of 2023 Strategy Review under new CEO

33: Table showing Board Intellectual Capital Framework inputs for the Chiltern Open Air Museum

10.2.4.2 Board Intellectual Capital Framework: Individuals and the Team

Table 34 follows and contains data and limited comments from interviewees aligned to the measures of board effectiveness from Copps and Vernon (2010). This acts as a proxy for the four components of board intellectual capital (Social Capital, Structural Capital, Human Capital and Cultural Capital) and indicates how each board was operating at the time of interview.

The colour coding gives the reader a quick view on how each board was operating with red as a warning of poor indicators, yellow as a neutral/some good and some bad indicators and green as good indicators of board operations.

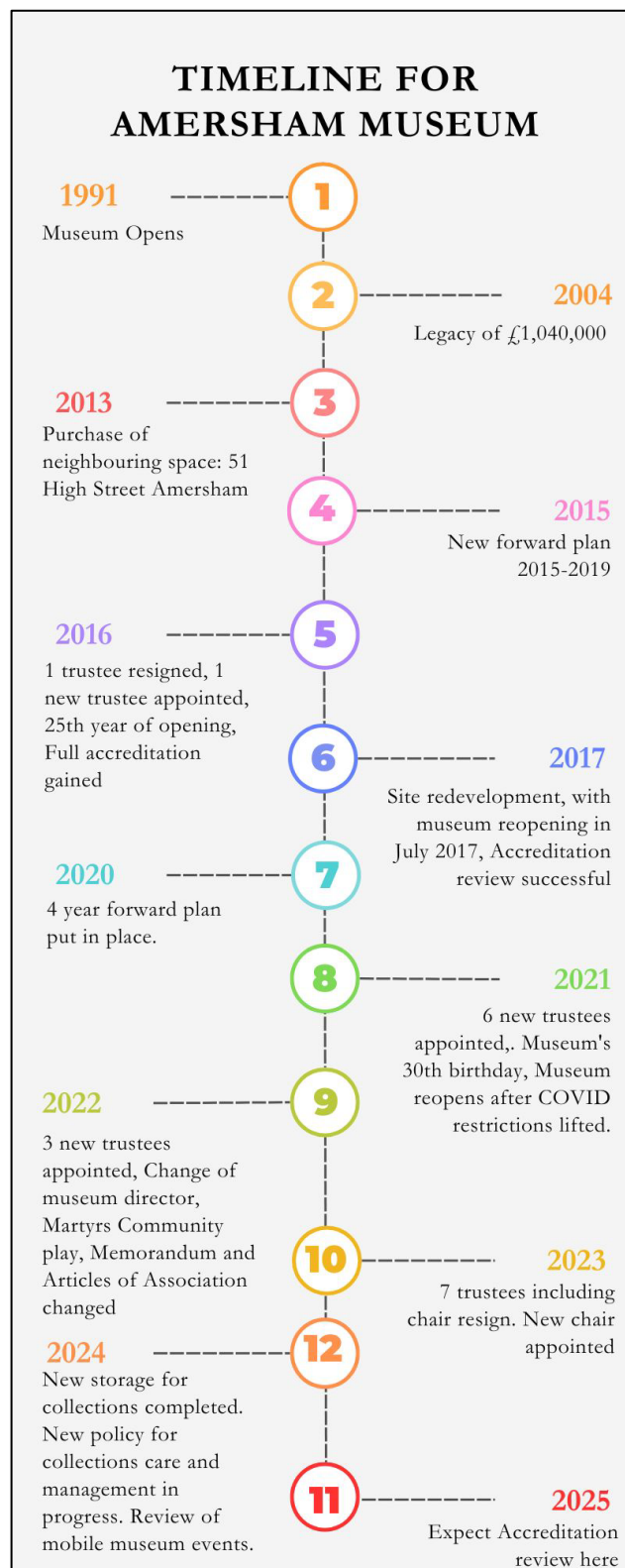
Measure of Board Effectiveness	Amersham Museum	Buckingham Old Gaol Trust	Chiltern Open Air Museum
The board members understand their roles and responsibilities (evidence of inductions, training etc.).	Evidence that board members understand their roles and responsibilities: "He definitely completed an application form and sent in a CV for them to look through. I didn't interview him, but I did do an induction with him". Training via Bucks Cultural leaders project and Buckinghamshire Culture	Limited evidence that board understand their roles and responsibilities. Seem to have learnt it elsewhere. Saw away day with consultant as a training opportunity.	Limited evidence that board understand their roles and responsibilities. Seem to have learnt what they know elsewhere or because of length of term. Although statement in accounts suggest this is changing and in future there will be inductions and training. Recruitment process is rigorous.
There is a strong chair who manages the board well (clear agendas, minutes, committees, content and timing of board papers)	Evidence of a strong chair with a good relationship with the museum director. Both had been in position for a long time and have subsequently left Amersham museum.	Evidence of a weak chair who allows board meetings to descend into chaos and takes strategic decisions out of meetings. Chair has now changed (in 2022) so hopefully Trust now run better.	Good chair but has at times allowed the board to be dominated by very assertive trustee. Good relationship with director now and in past. Director has changed recently.
There is a diverse board with a range of required skills.	Board had an average age of 71 at the time of interview; the board now has an average age of 67. All the board members are white both now and in 2021. At the time of interview the board had a good range of skills: "...the group of trustees we have now cover most areas in one way or another"	Only board to have had a Young Trustee. However, board also currently has oldest member aged 89! Average age was at the time of interview and now is just over 60. All board members are white. There has been a complete board change since interview, prior to this the average length of service was 8.9 years it is now 3.8 years.	Board had an average age of 64 at the time of interview; the board now has an average age of 59. All the board members are white both now and in 2021. At the time of interview the board had a good range of skills: this is only one of the three boards to have museum expertise on the board.
There is good communications between the board and the rest of the organisation	Evidence of a good relationship between the chair and the museum director (who was only employee when interviews took place). Both have subsequently left Amersham museum and 2 further staff have been employed parttime.	Board members are expected to take on volunteer roles. These are now better defined. Less so in past.	Generally relationship has been good although some board members more remote than others. In the past board members fulfilled key roles such as duty manager for the organisation. With new board impossible to ascertain how close this relationship is.
There are mechanisms for board evaluation and accountability	None mentioned	None mentioned	None mentioned
The board is driven by results	Board is very transparent (see for example their 4 year plan mentioned previously). Aim is to raise money to cover operating expenses and not have to draw down on surplus cash. Surplus cash acts as a cushion. Evidence that the board is good at managing this via a broad portfolio and good investment returns.	At time of interview little evidence that board was doing more than take operational decisions (and to a certain extent the shortage of cash for essential repairs means this is still the case). Decisions at the time of interview were often taken outside of meetings. This lack of focus led to some turnover of board members.	Board has comprehensive information at each board meeting including financial details and data like visitor numbers. Surplus of cash acts as a cushion against poor results. Board is aware that they are ultimately responsible for results.

34: Table showing a summary of board intellectual capital for all three museums

10.2.4.3 Board Intellectual Capital

Framework: Context

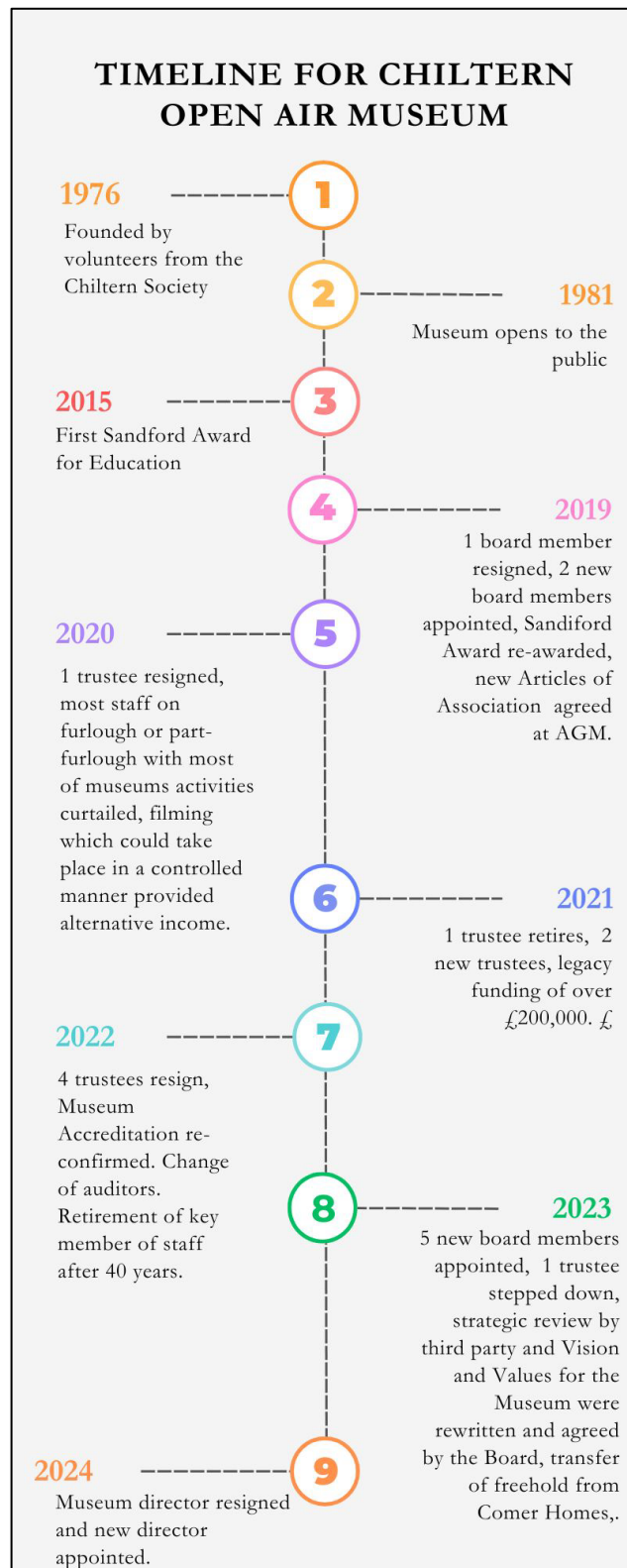
Exhibits 35-37 shows a time frame of major events and factors influencing each museum. These are taken as indicators of the internal and external environments facing each museum.



35: Timeline for major events at Amersham Museum



36: Timeline for major events at Buckingham old Gaol Trust



37: Timeline for major events at Chiltern Open Air Museum

10.2.4.4 Board Intellectual Capital Framework: Outputs

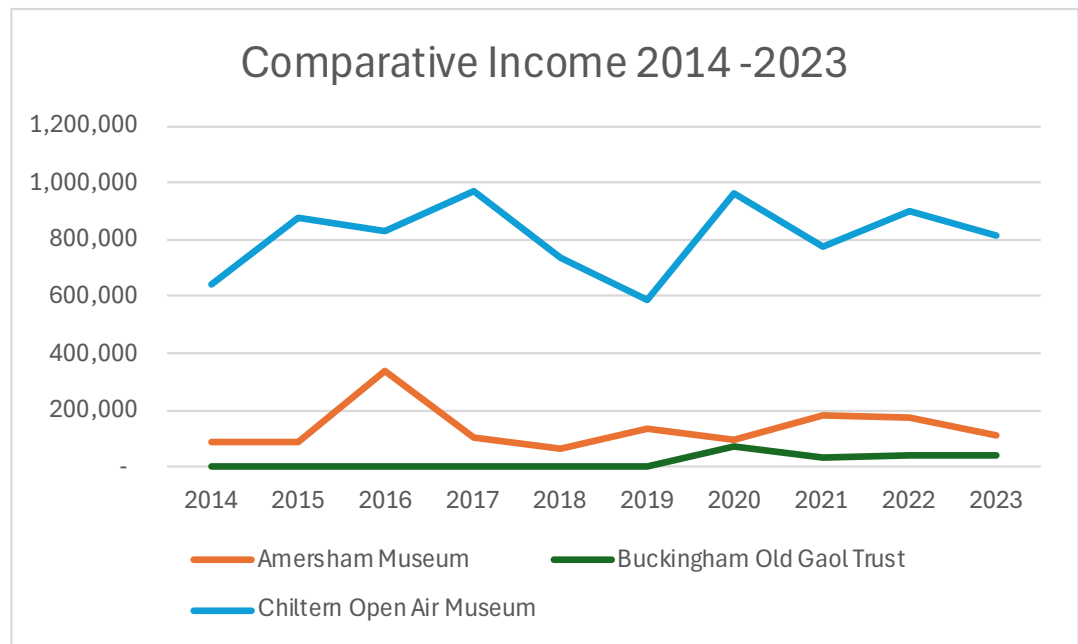
Outputs can also be mapped, although this is much more difficult. The Board Intellectual Capital Framework assumes that board effectiveness, which is made up of both individual and team effectiveness will impact organisational performance.

For the purposes of this section of my findings, I concentrate on data available in the public arena: financial metrics such as visitor income, grant funding, spend on charitable activities and a few numerical metrics such as visitor numbers, staff numbers, volunteer numbers although some measures may be absent from the records. Non-financial or numerical metrics are much more difficult to locate although there may be hints within the trustee reports such as discussion on community or education programmes or activities to care for collections or heritage assets. Some awards for visitor or educational experiences are also useful measures of success.

Output data is presented in the table on the next page. Comparisons can be made across the data between the museums and also year-on-year for each museum. A series of graphs have been drawn to show this comparative data. They follow on the following pages with an explanation.

	Y/E	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amersham Museum	Income	88,216	86,456	338,133	102,903	65,504	132,008	91,460	178,499	170,695	111,914
	Charitable Activities	57,528	79,147	146,758	391,080	161,652	122,826	96,823	114,510	148,390	144,545
	Total Expenditure	69,224	91,765	159,910	404,132	172,336	135,609	104,187	128,926	166,412	161,915
	Net income/(Expenditure)	18,992	- 5,309	178,223	- 301,229	- 106,832	- 3,601	- 12,727	49,573	4,283	- 50,001
	Charitable Activities/ Expenditure Ratio	83%	86%	92%	97%	94%	91%	93%	89%	89%	89%
	Grants	3,000	3,650	3,366	8,262	23,004	35,236	42,175	47,704	7,368	
	Current Assets	81,474	76,217	173,703	17,883	37,812	32,741	29,645	40,326	133,973	62,798
	Current Liabilities	11,276	31,171	20,995	1,200	1,700	2,166	2,202	2,352	4,631	5,143
	Liquidity Ratio	12	6	11	0	3	3	3	4	9	4
	Employee Numbers	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	3	3
Buckingham Old Gaol Trust	Visitor Numbers	nd	5,000	3,888	6,390	10,000	10,000	nd	nd	4,002	4,940
	Income							67,885	31,924	43,204	43,892
	Charitable Activities							74,306	36,640	47,595	47,017
	Total Expenditure							77,704	37,338	55,583	48,177
	Net income/(Expenditure)	-	-	-	-	-	-	- 9,819	- 5,414	- 12,379	- 4,285
	Charitable Activities/ Expenditure Ratio							96%	98%	86%	98%
	Grants							34046	17212		
	Current Assets							85,493	86,737	91,356	94,358
	Current Liabilities							696	696	696	696
	Liquidity Ratio							13	28	20	23
Chiltern Open Air Museum	Employee numbers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Visitor Numbers										
	Income	643,174	878,920	830,742	973,474	733,638	588,132	963,538	772,275	902,283	816,715
	Charitable Activities	553,332	621,143	645,903	640,901	727,718	750,667	672,386	637,368	986,283	1,040,027
	Total Expenditure	624,995	721,988	761,624	776,410	887,264	813,890	724,061	683,547	986,283	1,040,027
	Net income/(Expenditure)	18,179	156,932	69,118	197,064	- 153,626	- 225,758	239,477	88,728	- 84,000	- 223,312
	Charitable Activities/ Expenditure Ratio	89%	86%	85%	83%	82%	92%	93%	93%	100%	100%
	Grants	146,102	147,243	107,145	35,754	-	2,229	513,530	94,727	30,841	89,870
	Current Assets	496,936	792,761	824,959	1,031,114	873,172	646,190	853,956	947,501	740,349	517,413
	Current Liabilities	43,350	68,377	67,259	82,287	114,445	124,277	77,299	114,494	94,513	70,693
31/03 then 31/01	Liquidity Ratio	9	12	12	15	10	8	13	15	8	5
	Employee Numbers	19	16	14	17	19	21	19	24	37	37
	Visitor Numbers	40,000	-	50,000	-	53,833	56,000	14,864	25,291	32,688	33,711

38: Table showing Comparative data for Amersham Museum, the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust and the Chiltern Open Air Museum



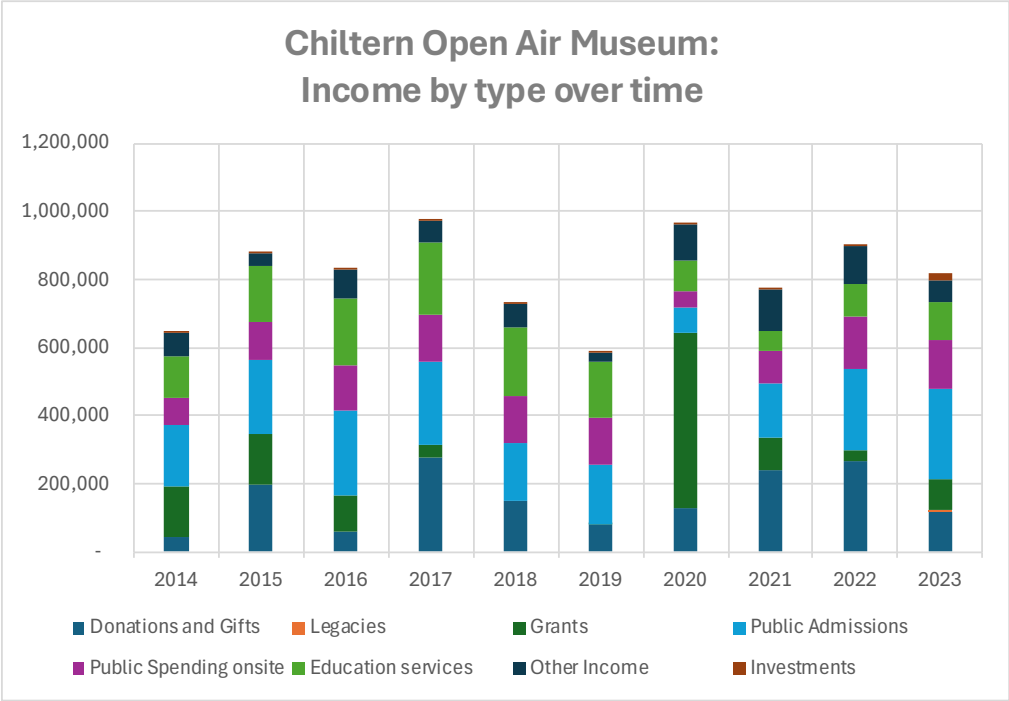
39: Graph showing Comparative Income for Amersham Museum, Buckingham Old Gaol Trust and Chiltern Open Air Museum

The comparative income data shows fairly consistent levels of income between 2014 and 2023 for Amersham Museum although there are two peaks: one in 2016 when the new museum wing was being redeveloped and the other in 2022 after the end of lockdown. Looking at the 2016 data in more detail shows that there was a fundraising drive and capital grant funding was released to finance the refurbishment of 51 High Street which accounted for just over £180,000 of the income.

For the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust only 4 years of data are available. In 2021 there was a peak in income of £67,885. This relates to a COVID-19 grant the Trust were able to access which increased the level of grant income substantially.

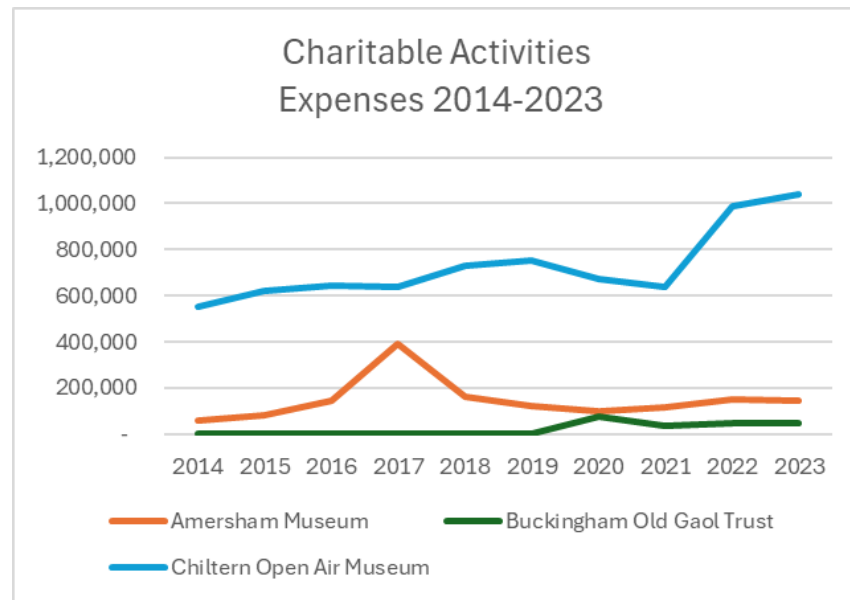
For the Chiltern Open Air Museum total income falls within the range £588,132 – £973,474 (see exhibit 39). Looking at the breakdown of income over time public admissions and public spending onsite remain fairly consistent except during 2020 and 2021 when both are squeezed. Visitor numbers are quite substantially down post-pandemic, so this suggests that the board and the management team have taken measures to hold income levels such as by increasing ticket prices or improving the catering and shop offers. Education income was increasing year on year pre-pandemic

and is still not up to pre-pandemic levels. Grants in contrast are up in 2020, and this relates specifically to emergency funding from HLF and ACE of £326,207.



40: Graph showing income breakdown for Chiltern Open Air Museum over time.

Two graphs are useful when looking at expenses. The first shows Charitable Activities Expenses over time (exhibit 41 below) and the second shows the Charitable Expenses to Total Expenses ratio over time (exhibit 42 on page 346).

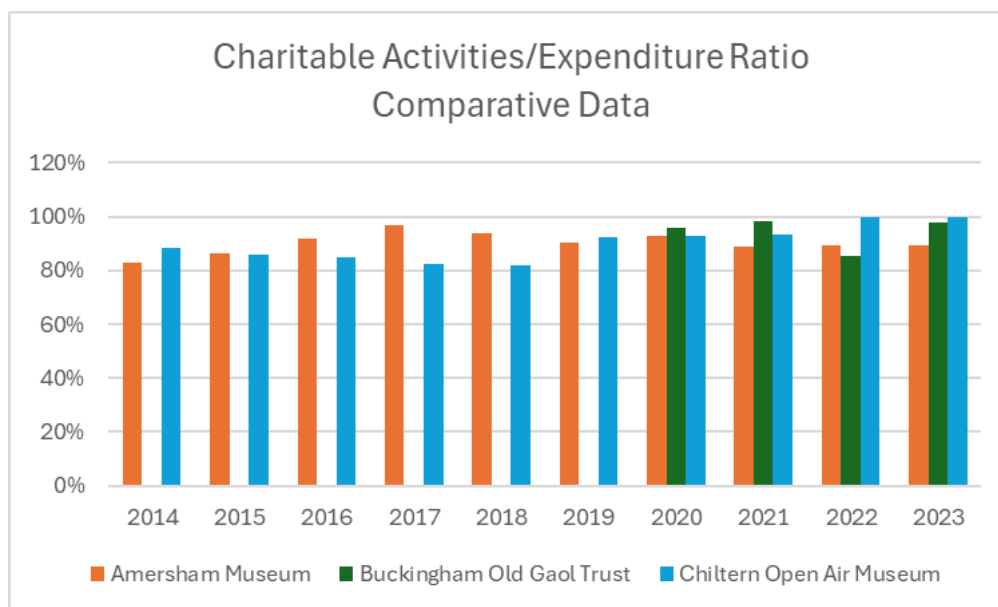


41: Graph showing comparative data - Charitable Activities Expenses 2014-2024

Looking at the Charitable Activities Expenses for each of the museums yields some interesting observations. For Amersham Museum the peak in expenses in 2017 ties in with the refurbishment of 51 High Street but otherwise expenses are fairly consistent; the Buckingham Old Gaol Trust has a low level of expenses, but insurance and repairs account for over half of the trust's expenditure.

More concerning is the large increase in expenses at the Chiltern Open Air Museum post-pandemic. These are now running at over £1 million and suggest some structural changes that may not be sustainable. It should be noted that the COAM board has substantially changed between 2019 and 2024 (one board member has died and four other board members left in 2022) and the museum director also left in 2023. Many of the board members have only been in place since 2023. Certainly, this may indicate a loss of corporate memory of museum operations and their impact on the museum's finances. It should be noted that there has been a similar turnover of board members at both of the other two museums and a change in museum director at Amersham

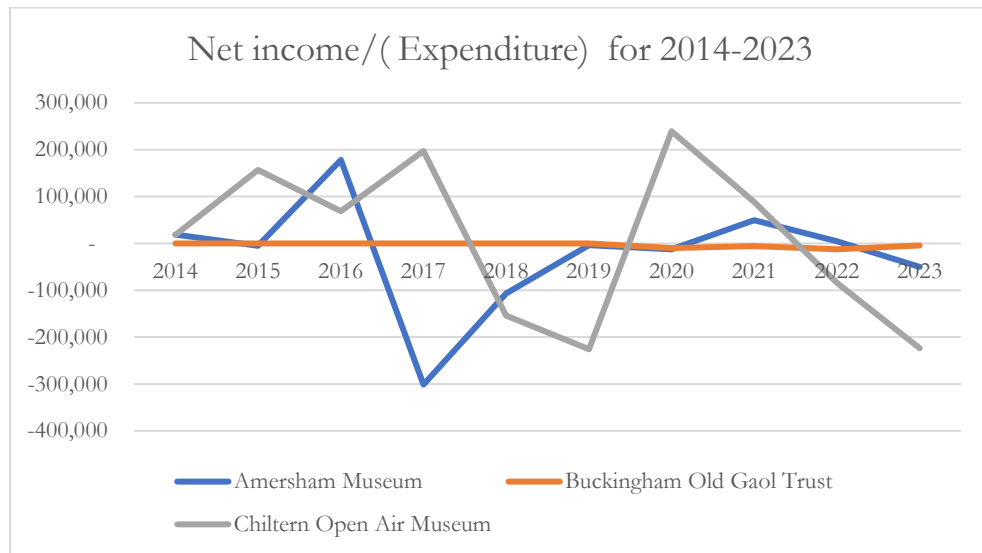
Museum so it will be significant to see how these museums fare over the next few years.



42: Graph showing comparative data - Charitable Activities/Expenditure Ratio over time

The graph above shows the ratio of charitable expenses to total expenditure. It should be noted that a change in accounting interpretation has meant that all expenses at the Chiltern Open Air Museum are now classified as Charitable Activities and the ratio is 100% in both 2022 and 2023. Nevertheless, the ratios are all above 82%, suggesting that all three museums and their boards are focused on their museums' activities.

Another useful measure is net incoming/(outgoing) resources which shows whether the organisation is operating in surplus or generating a loss. Over the last decade there are several years where all three museums have just broken even or operated at a loss.

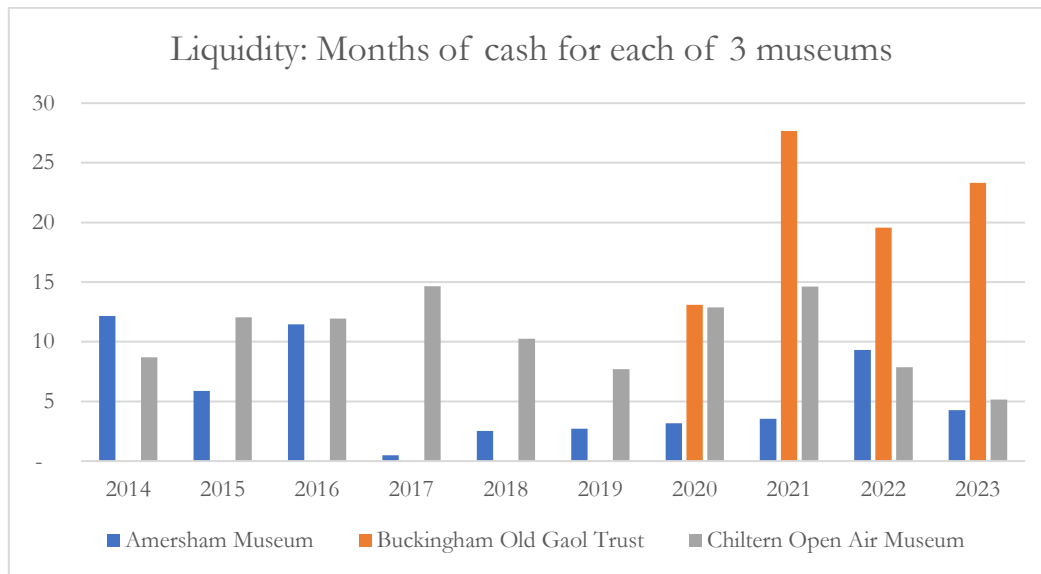


43: Graph showing comparative data - net income/ (expenditure) 2014-2023

One further ratio is calculated that looks at free cash reserves. Given that each museum has struggled at various times in the last 10 years to operate in surplus this is an essential ratio to evaluate the museums' financial health. It is generally seen as prudent to keep between 3 and 6 months of operating expenditure in reserve. Whilst the calculation is somewhat crude, the NPC (Joy et al., 2013) uses the following formula to calculate reserves, using numbers from the annual accounts:

$$\frac{(\text{current assets} + \text{realisable investments} - \text{current liabilities})}{\text{average monthly expenditure}}$$

The graph below shows the number of months of reserves held by each museum. The data used to calculate this is shown in the table on page 342 (exhibit 38).



44: Graph showing months of cash available for each of 3 museums

Each of the museum's is holding surplus cash as can be seen by the average months of cash held (exhibit 44). The NPC (Joy et al., 2013) advise that at the most one year's worth of reserves should be held on a charity's balance sheet. For Amersham Museum this ratio varies between 0-12 months since 2014. However, the ratio does not take account of the investments held by the museum (between £600k and £1m) since these investments are not available in the short term and would need to be liquidated should the museum's income streams be adversely impacted. The ratio in 2017 of zero months cash reflects the heavy spending on the new wing of the museum during that year. The Buckingham Old Gaol Trust has been holding between 13-28 months of surplus cash between the years 2020-2023. This is probably too much and possibly reflects a cautious position being taken by the board. The Chiltern Open Air Museum has held between 5-15 months of surplus cash between 2014-2023. The surplus cash held until 2021 reflects the policy of the board to hold in reserve cash reflecting the commercial purchase price of the museum's land until the transfer of the freehold. This transfer was enacted in April 2023 and cash reserves are falling as the organisation has released constraints on spending.

It should be noted that a heavy reserve position could indicate that the trustee board have a cautious position with respect to cash and so any analysis should take into

account the organisation's reserves policy as stated in the accounts. When charities hold too little cash, this is also of concern and generally less than 3 months of reserves would be cause for concern that the charity might be heading for administration.

Whilst visitor numbers are not a financial measure they have an obvious impact on income. Although there is no data for the Old Gaol and some data is missing for the other two museums the following graph shows visitor numbers over time (exhibit 45). It is very clear from the data that visitor numbers were steadily building at both museums pre-pandemic.



45: Graph showing comparative numbers of visitors by year

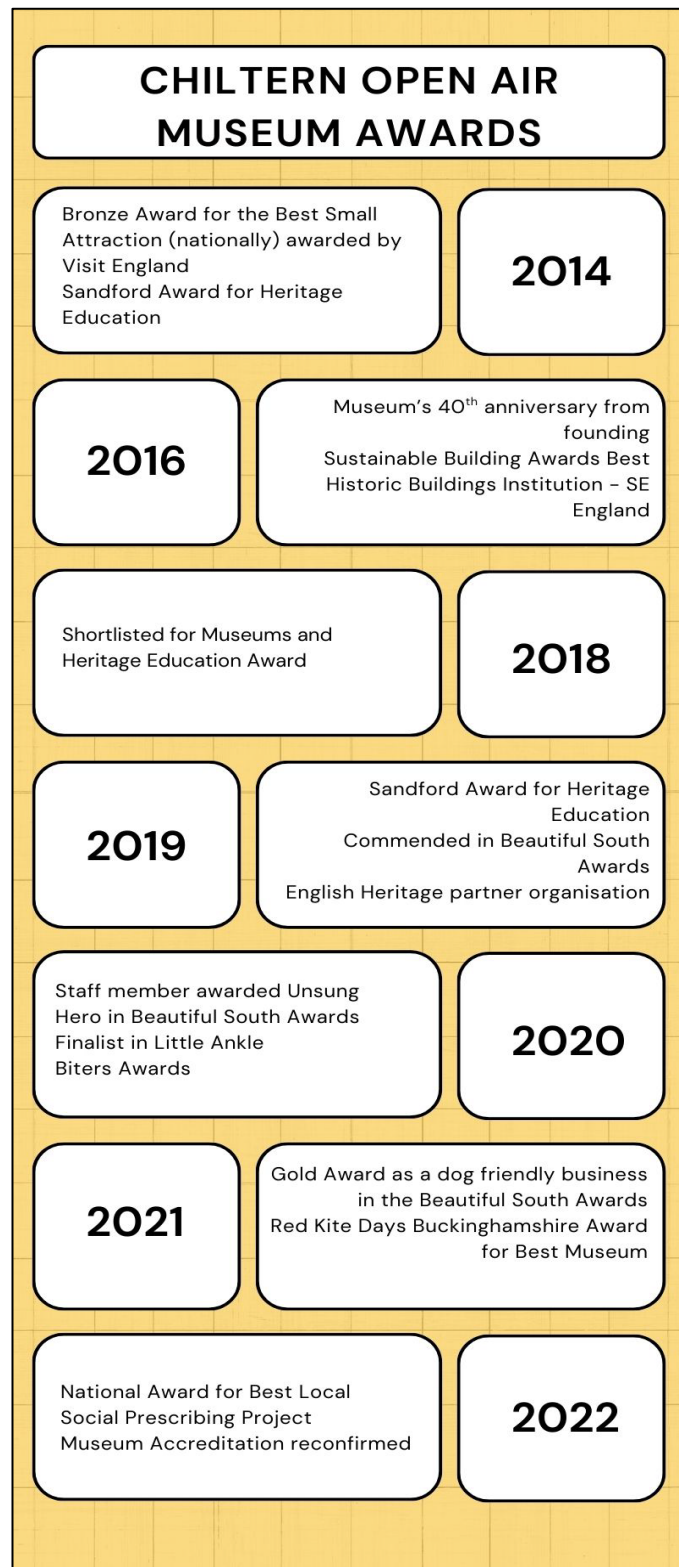
Amersham Museum in their current Forward Plan (Amersham Museum, 2024) look at demographic data of potential visitors. Drawing a modest radius around the museum of neighbouring villages and using census data, the potential visitor numbers are 25,076 with 20% over the age of 65 and 21% under the age of 16. Amersham Museum if it just draws on just the local population to visit is getting just under 20% of the local population to visit currently. Pre-pandemic this statistic was nearer 40%.

Comparative data has been estimated from the 2021 census for the Chiltern Open Air Museum (taking in the parishes of Gerrards Cross and Chalfont St Peter, Chalfont St

Giles, Little Chalfont, Stoke Poges, Fulmer and Denham) giving potential visitor numbers of 45,709. Adding in the Three Rivers Local Authority population (Chorleywood, Maple Cross, Rickmansworth and the Watford Rural District) brings the potential local visitor numbers to 139,832. Percentages for population age are broadly the same as for Amersham Museum with 20% under the age of 16 and 18% over the age of 65. Current visitor numbers at the Chiltern Open Air Museum are about 24% of the local population versus a pre-pandemic percentage of about 40%.

There are a number of soft measures that can be used to look at organisational success.

The timeline that follows (exhibit 46) shows one such set of measures for the Chiltern Open Air Museum.



The museum has won awards regularly since 2018 which is a testament to both the staff and the trustees. Whilst I note that awards must be applied for so awards can be seen as self-serving morale booster or just another form of marketing there are some awards which have real value. For example, the museum holds a Sandford Award for Heritage Education awarded in 2014 and again in 2019. This award is seen as the quality mark for heritage learning. The museum's accreditation was also reconfirmed in 2022.

Amersham Museum also won a Sandford Award in 2020. Neither it nor Buckingham Old Gaol Trust hold any other awards. Both Amersham Museum and Buckingham Old Gaol Trust are accredited museums³⁵.

Other soft measures such as the visitor experience are more difficult to measure although reviews on sites such as TripAdvisor and Google, and on the museums' own websites can give some indication of the visitor experience. A selection of visitor comments to indicate the quality of the visitor experience are collated in the table that follows:

³⁵ The Buckingham Old Gaol Trust has decided at the moment not to renew its accreditation.

10.2 | APPENDIX 2: BOARD EFFECTIVENESS AT THE CHILTERN OPEN AIR MUSEUM, THE BUCKINGHAM OLD GAOL TRUST, AND AMERSHAM MUSEUM

Museum	Rating	Comments - positive and negative
Amersham Museum	Tripadvisor 4.5/5 Facebook 4.1/5 Triphobo 4.8/5	“The museum is small, a restored former Tudor house, but it was very interesting. Lots of information and a little step back in time.” “Wonderful little museum with great local emphasis. Liz was incredibly helpful and a delight, as was the very knowledgeable Stephen.”
Buckingham Old Gaol Trust	Tripadvisor 4.0/5 Facebook 4.7/5	“Fascinating place full of the history of the area & the buildings role as a jail. The museum is quite a tardis & is packed with exhibits...” “This museum is such a cute little place. Seeing a “castle” centred in a town itself is lovely and this history is amazing.” “Made a special journey to visit this museum, it was ok but nothing really stood out to us...”
Chiltern Open Air Museum	Tripadvisor 4.5/5 Facebook 4.8/5 Yelp 4.7/5	“Honestly, I thoroughly enjoyed my day and would recommend” “Great slice of history suitable for all ages” “Catering is a joke” “...this 'museum' seems to have a very confused purpose...”

47: Table showing Visitor ratings and Reviews for all three museums

By looking at the results from using the framework it is possible to get an indication of how well each museum board is operating (see the results and discussion in sections 4.8 and 5.2.3 respectively).

10.3 APPENDIX 3: OPERATING MODELS WHICH MAY PROMOTE BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

This Appendix explores briefly several business structures that could be adopted in the museum sector to help promote board effectiveness.

There are some instances where several museums get together to operate collectively to meet a ‘business’ need. A good example of this is the consortia of museums and other attractions in South Buckinghamshire that worked together on marketing between 2022 and 2024. Other groups operate across different criteria such as procurement. The benefits of this for small museums is that they are able to consolidate resources and reduce individual expenditure. From a governance perspective a larger group or partnership working across a number of organisations could help attract more professional and diverse trustees.

The Hampshire Cultural Trust (n.d.) is a charitable organisation that holds the cultural assets formerly belonging to Hampshire County Council and Winchester Town Council. The trust was formed in 2014 as an independent charity (a company limited by guarantee and registered with the Charity Commission). It runs 23 venues across the county of which 13 are heritage related, although there will be a reduction in its scope since the trust has had to announce it will close museums due to local authority funding cuts (Hampshire Cultural Trust, n.d.). The trust is responsible for 2.5 million objects, including ceramics and a nationally important industrial heritage collection. Trustees are drawn from a pool of high quality and skilled trustees: trustees have held or currently hold senior positions within industry, the finance sector and the cultural sector (Hampshire Cultural Trust, n.d.). The board consists of 12 trustees. Hampshire Cultural Trust shows that sustainable models of organisation and governance can be created across a mixed portfolio. The trustees and senior management team have a commercial approach to managing their venues as an essential part of investing in their cultural offer (Hampshire Cultural Trust, n.d.).

Birmingham Museums Trust (n.d.) is responsible for 9 venues across Birmingham which were formerly under control of the city council. The venues are a mixture of museums and galleries. The trust has some challenges since Birmingham City Council the main stakeholder is effectively bankrupt. However, from a governance perspective the trust has been able to attract high quality, experienced and diverse trustees. These trustees have links into large corporates and government so can act as effective advocates for the Trust.

Other cultural organisations have adopted consolidated models too. For example, the Auckland Project manages 8 attractions across Bishops Auckland. Its trustee board consists of 9 trustees some of whom travel from as far as London to board meetings (Armstrong, 2025). The Science Museum Group (n.d.) has a board of fourteen trustees appointed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. It runs 6 venues across England.

10.4 APPENDIX 4: SELECTED QUOTATIONS FROM INTERVIEWS AND X/TWITTER

Trustee Characteristics
“the fact that they're elderly and male and white” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “I think I struggled for about five years before I got somebody under 30 onto the board. Average age, I would guestimate... for charity board members, [is] between 55 and 70” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “One of my older board members at one point said, “You can see he comes from London. He comes from London.” “Up his own arse,” he said. He used to pitch up in a three-piece suit as well, which locals...I had one board member pitched up in his wellies. He was a pig farmer...” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “...we're mostly rich-ish, white, middle-class, old people”. (Interviewee 2021-04, 2021) “What's the average age of the trustees on the board? On the board? At a guess, 76, 78. I'm 73, and I'm considered one of the younger ones” (Interviewee 2021-04, 2021) “He's younger. I mean, younger, you're talking about 60s, generally. X [name redacted], one of our trustees, is younger than that. All the rest are about over 60...” (Interviewee 2021-05, 2021) “ I'm very aware that as trustees, there are only six of us, and four of us are over 75...” (Interviewee 2021-08, 2021) “In a way, it very largely reflects the age of our visitors. Our local visitors are predominantly over 65. They're often particularly in their 70s and 80s. Some of our trustees are that. We are getting some, particularly from the council, younger trustees...Certainly, white and over 60 but not predominantly male. We've got several females...” (Interviewee 2021-09, 2021) “It is so true: white, male, stale, pale. I mean, horrible to say, but [as a] sixty year old...It's a similar challenge we are confronted with when we're trying to get volunteers who are not 60 plus” (Interviewee 2021-10, 2021) “Until about a year ago, I'd say all our trustees were over the age of 70, all male, all white. In the last couple of years, we've had a female appointee, so we have one female trustee and nine male trustees and two honorary male trustees. We now have a secretary who's under the age of 70, so he's a young sapling of somewhere in his 40s...” (Interviewee 2021-11, 2021) “The biggest single shift from my board nine years ago to where it is now is they were all pretty much bar one when I inherited them—and it was a 15 strong person board - retired

people, bar one, to what we've got now is ten people, all of whom, apart from the chair...are working.”(Interviewee 2021-12, 2021) “... trustees are older, wealthier people who are in a privileged position & able to afford more free time” (Powell, 2020)
Length of Service on a Board
“...it was very embedded with people who had been on the board for years and years and years since the 1980s, and that meant that there was a little bit of difficulty in kind of modernizing the organisation...” (Interviewee 2020-02, 2020) “I been involved with the museum since 1976 since before it began ... But it was 1980 that I became a trustee... I have, I might say, I have offered to resign or retire over the years, but it's always been... turned down ... It's always been hard to get replacements...” (Interviewee 2020-06, 2020) “I know that now that we are headed like most museums for much shorter term membership of the board, five years or eight years or however one works it with renewals and things. But then, you do lose things like that of course if you do that, so in a way, it would be quite useful to have people there” (Interviewee 2020-06, 2020) “So within the trustees of the [museum], there are some people who've been there for a long time; and some of them were involved in setting up the museum [in the 1980s]” (Interviewee 2020-07, 2020) “I had a few board members who've been long-serving board members who were on the Friends Committee, because we had a separate Friends Committee, and they were basically stuck in a period which had nothing to do with where the new organisation was wanting to move, the new goals and policies that we set ourselves” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “Having these old board members in can be a problem, but this board member was one of those who grew through the times but still had the historical perspective and therefore could assist us in dealing with the new times and making their inputs...” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “The chairman at the time had been a trustee. He'd been a volunteer and then become a trustee and the chair, and he'd been chair for about 18 years” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021) “I joined as a trustee so[me] 16 years ago now, something like that” (Interviewee 2021-05, 2021) “I think some of them have been there for 15 years...” (Interviewee 2021-06, 2021) “Yeah, we used to have a four year rule, and we've let it slip a little bit with people we want to keep. So, it sort of comes up, and we say, “Do you still want to be part of the board?” (Interviewee 2021-07, 2021)

“I would say half have been trustees for more than ten years, and all but two have been trustees for more than five years” (Interviewee 2021-11, 2021) “...there aren't fixed terms, and, as I say, in the time I've worked here every single one has retired bar one, our current chair... I don't think any, I might be wrong without checking, but any of the others have been trustees longer than four or five years” (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021)
Board Size
“You know it was according to the Charity Commission, you have to have a contingent of eight or ten... but some boards have 20 people, you know, and the functionality of your board then gets restricted ... and smaller boards I've discovered seem to work a lot better, where with bigger boards... everybody thinks they have to say something or have to ask a question” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “...so we've got ten trustees” (Interviewee 2021-07, 2021) “A new constitution was written which included sort of an upper limit of 11 trustees, a minimum number of three and maximum of 11.” (Interviewee 2021-11, 2021) “And, the size of the board has varied, but it's always been quite a small board. I think probably at most it's been eight or nine, and currently...Well, there was just a changeover, so currently, I think we're seven, but one is retiring, and a secretary. I think the secretary is not technically a trustee, so we have seven plus a secretary currently, but it will soon be six.” (interviewee 2021-13, 2021) “here's probably about three or four who are active and about 12 who aren't very active” (Interviewee 2021-09, 2021) “... a larger board can lead to 'passengers' at meetings and/or voices being lost in the bigger mix” (Gardam, 2018)
Frequency of meetings
“We meet four times a year and once a year for the annual general meeting” (Interviewee 2021-04, 2021) “ So, we actually meet on a regular basis maybe once every six weeks, really, and when things are happening, even more frequently where we just Zoom in together and chew through whatever problem we've got. They're minuted, so we can see what we said, but they're not formal board meetings. We have six, or we have had six formal board meetings [during COVID]... that may reduce back to the old board meeting frequency, which was once every quarter, so we had four in the old days...” (Interviewee 2021-05, 2021)

“ terms of the meetings, we were meeting for X [name redacted] three or four times a year, but we were always invited...When there were projects going on, we were always invited to site visit and to observe on-site; so it was very involved.” (Interviewee 2021-06, 2021)
Time spent on Board Role
“...there’s also getting people [the trustees] to understand that bit that the paperwork’s not sent to you to overload with you. It’s paperwork which you possibly need to read [as part of your role as a trustee]” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “I worked out ... I was spending about five working weeks a year [on my trustee work], which is pretty high when you’re in practice and working” (Interviewee 2021-06, 2021). “I remember talking to a member of the board ... [who was] still on the board after 12 years, and he wanted to leave. But, they said, “No, you can't leave yet because actually we need somebody else to get to that sort of length of tenure before you go because we need you to guard against that ‘Oh, we’ve never seen this before.’ ‘Oh, yes, we have. Don’t reinvent the wheel...” (Interviewee 2021-10, 2021) “...so there is now a fixed term limit of, I think, three years, but there’s nothing to stop people being reappointed kind of thing...” (Interviewee 2021-11, 2021) “Our current chair has probably been chair for about eight years or something like that, so no rotating chair. He would be...His three year limit anyway would mean that he would come up for reappointment every so often, but as things stand, he’s just, I guess, been reappointed each time he’s come up for re-election” (Interviewee 2021-11,2021) [The museum board]“... instituted two terms with a third term in extremis ... two four year terms is maximum [to] keep people moving through” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021)
Technology and Board Meetings
“Yes, let’s learn from this, I think. This last year, we’ve all become very skilled in Zoom-ing” (Interviewee 2021-05, 2021) “We have this funny situation at the moment where we’re on the cusp of everyone being familiar with technology, but we’re not yet there” (Interviewee 2021-08, 2021) “It would be great to see boards make use of technology and consider virtual meetings sometimes” (Artsfundraising, 2018).
Trustee Recruitment

“... and X asked if I'd like to join the board because of my stewarding. I'm always open to opportunities, so I agreed” (Interviewee 2020-01, 2020)

“It is hard to get museum professionals to go on the board, to join boards, because I think either if they're in my position, they've probably got kids and other things going on in their lives, but also museum careers are really demanding” (Interviewee 2020-02, 2020)

“...the chair invites people to become trustees because she sees it as a way of capturing people to run the museum.” (Interviewee 2020-02, 2020)

“After about five years as a volunteer, I was approached by ... the chairman, to join the board.” (Interviewee 2020-05, 2020)

“I decided I would look at some trustee positions [locally] because I had a little bit more time... So, I thought, well, maybe I'd give that a go. I gave them a call, and they were absolutely delighted because they were short of trustees” (Interviewee 2020-07, 2020)

“But then, shortly after that was the AGM, and I turned up at the meeting, and somebody said, “X [name redacted], would you like to be a trustee?” ... So, they basically signed me up on the spot on the night of the AGM, and I became a trustee that night” (Interviewee 2020-08, 2020)

“I bumped into him one evening and we were chatting, and he asked the inevitable, “What are you doing? ... Oh, are you looking around?” And, he actually drew my attention to the fact that [the museum] was looking for more trustees” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021)

“I've certainly invited people to join the board who get on with me, and I get on [with] ... So, it's a comfortable working relationship, but there [also] seems to be consensus that this is what we need to do” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021)

“I was idling myself one day, and the phone rang. It was X [name redacted]. He said, “Hey...” I was now living in the old town... We would like you to join the museum,” and I said nothing, did nothing, thought, “I don't know anything about the museum.” He rang back about six weeks later: “Have you thought about...?” He was very persuasive, and I did” (Interviewee 2021-05, 2021)

“I was working for a client...and he said, “Would you consider becoming a trustee?” And, I said, “Well, yes, I would,” because of interest in the building” (Interviewee 2021-06, 2021)

“And after about 18 months [of volunteering at the museum], the chairman of the trustees said would I be interested in coming on as a trustee, and I said, “That sounds very interesting. What would it involve?” He said, “Oh, no more than three or four meetings a year, that's pretty well it.” So rather thrown into the deep end and it is a lot more than three or four meetings a year...” (Interviewee 2021-08, 2021)

“I do worry that if it's just a matter of “Oh, well, Fred's been a volunteer for six years. It's about time he was a trustee,” that is not a good selection process” (Interviewee 2021-10, 2021)

“... recruiting which was sort of somebody’s sidled up to somebody in a cocktail party and said, “Hey, would you like to be a trustee of [the museum]”? (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021)

“...historically, the trustees have often been recruited like friends of friends or friends that people know locally. Although, there has been some external recruitment ...I’ve tried to push for that more...[so] that we are recruiting for trustees based on their skills and experience”. (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021)

“I’d quite like it if we recruited someone who was significantly younger, someone in their 20s, to link in really with...to provide a different perspective to get us all thinking differently or someone that reflects our target audiences” (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021)

“I believe I saw an advert through the Association of Independent Museums bulletin. They have a trustee opportunities page, and I’d not long moved into the area...and I thought, “Well, there’s something I can do with my spare time” ... So, I followed up... I think it was quite a while before I formally joined the board. I think it might have been a year, nine months to a year.” (Interviewee 2021-14, 2021)

“We hired our first @kidsinmuseums #YoungTrustees in 2018 to ensure we truly represent young people at every level of our organisation. We would encourage museums to do the same. @museumhour” (Kids in Museums, 2020)

EDI & Young Trustees

“diversity is quite a key thing, not just on the board, but with the audiences that we attract... I’m fighting a bit of a battle on diversity... We need to appeal to other audiences because A) It’s just the right thing to do; B) They’re not represented in our collections, and they should be; and C) We can get a lot of funding from that, which will help us as an organisation. It’s actually proving harder than I thought it would be... for them, diversity is the Black and Minority Ethnic and LGBT. And actually, I keep saying: Well, there’s a lot of people here with hidden disabilities, a lot of people. If you work somewhere like that, a very high proportion of people will have autism, high-functioning ... it’s also around economic accessibility to our collection...” (Interviewee 2020-02, 2020)

“X [name redacted] was fantastic, and I went to a few meetings where she was at, and you just feel the atmosphere lifting, and just enthusiasm and a young person’s eyes on all this stuff” (Interviewee 2020-04, 2020)

“...having a different age bracket [a young trustee] represented on the trustees is very important, and she brought a dimension to it that just wouldn’t have been there...” (Interviewee 2020-08, 2020)

“Getting younger people involved is very difficult because I had a young councillor and an officer from the council who... get sort of overshadowed by these big ghosts on your board, these people with a lot of kudos, standing, society and age. There’s always been a respect in the UK where people wouldn’t chat to somebody, message, because they’re older. People are very careful around that on boards and especially on boards and especially if they are new...” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021)

“We had a young lady solicitor, and I think she was only about 24. She’s probably the youngest. I would say 30ish would be the next...” (Interviewee 2021-07, 2021)

“Absolutely, so this instinctive reaction that “Oh, they’re not born and bred of us, and therefore, they cannot be of us,” is fateful. It’s a natural thing. It’s a very dangerous thing, which is why spreading the board and making it more diverse is always a challenge” (Interviewee 2021-10, 2021)

“... if we wanted to develop our connections into the different communities, whether it’s a community in parts of Slough or in parts of ... It’s going to be a damn sight harder for me to do that than it is if we engage somebody on the board who happens to be closer to that community” (Interviewee 2021-10, 2021)

“I am keen to see a much more diverse board, and I do think our trustees are [too] in principle, but they do get cold feet about what that means in terms of day-to-day help for the museum... for me personally, it’s a longer term objective to have younger board members, to obviously have more female board members, to have people from diverse cultural backgrounds and things like that” (Interviewee 2021-11, 2021)

“One of the areas we’re looking at the moment is diversity and inclusion and what we need to do for some of that, and that might need some training” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021)

“I’m very aware that as trustees ... it’s a difficult one because you want to attract younger people. It’s not so easy. There’s so many calls on their time” (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021)

“A lack of diversity... I have done quite a bit of work with military museums, so therefore, in some ways, you’d expect to see that. But then, when you probe a little bit more and you speak to the directors or the curators and you find out that within their collection, there are stories about women and that actually they want to attract families. And, they want to do things that bring young people. It’s like, “How are we going to do that?” when, at a strategic level, you don’t even have a woman giving you any input” (Interviewee 2021-14, 2021)

” Museum staff, trustees and volunteer teams should represent the diversity of their local communities” (Hill, 2018)

“Doesn’t this Q[uestion] say more about the outmoded structures of charitable trustee boards than just about age and background? Changing the faces will only go a limited way to address power imbalances, ‘feeding the beast’ syndrome #MuseumHour” (Goskar, 2020)

“Most boards are deeply under informed about “diversity”, they are simplistic in thinking about diversity and fill positions like they are checking things off a must have list” (Rao 2018)

Succession Planning

“I’m 70 years old in October, so my game plan is to achieve succession planning” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021) “We have now got a succession strategy, and within that, we have tried to pull together a list of existing skills and a list of the kind of skills that we would like to bring in in the future” (Interviewee 2021-11,2021)
Board Behaviours
“It didn't make me feel uncomfortable, but I was very aware of the fact that we weren’t running as a normal trustee board would run... I think because the whole thing was volunteer based, there lacked a serious element of professionalism that you would find in larger museums” (Interviewee 2020-03, 2020) “There was just a lot of head banging and not willing to compromise, which therefore meant, “Oh well, we'll discuss this at next month's meeting then”, now we've got nowhere, we’ve just had an argument” (Interviewee 2020-03, 2020) “And, they argued constantly. Every meeting, there was an argument about somebody, and somebody took offense at something.” (Interviewee 2020-04, 2020) “And, they bullied X [the chair – name redacted]. They bullied X [name redacted] a lot. That wasn’t acceptable either, and I stepped in when it got really bad” (Interviewee 2020-04, 2020) “But again, you just think, “Can I be bothered to fight at this anymore?”” (Interviewee 2020-04, 2020) “you as the ...museum director, telling a board member how they should behave is sometimes difficult...”(Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “...so compatibility within boards and getting people to understand why they need to be compatible and where their focus needs to lie in boards are something again that are missed a lot of the time because it’s a soft skill” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “the moment that you introduce a female or more females into a board mix, that component of conflict or male ego-ness or competitiveness sometimes disappears...” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “it was quite clear there was a bunch of very committed people there but no board processes that I recognised” from both other boards and industry (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021) “[The Museum Director said] “I’ve been doing this for 30 years. I had no help from the board. You people coming here, swanning around...”” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021) “I reflected on. Does the management want to have a matey relationship with the board? Or, it’s nice to have, but it’s not an essential prerequisite? It needs to be a professional and respectful one...” (Interviewee 2021-10, 2021)

“if there’s a few uncomfortable truths within the board, then fine, that’s for us to get sorted out” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021) “When it came to the X [name of organisation redacted], it was much more...I would say it was more micromanaged. It was more tricky to really get your opinion across because it really involved a few key people who might have been the people who sort of set up the trust in the first place. So, they had ownership of it, which obviously is in conflict with what a trustee should be...” (Interviewee 2021-06, 2021) “I do think a lot of people who take trustee jobs don’t understand that. I think if you're in a small museum or a new museum, then you can do things at your passion, and you can follow those, and you can get your sleeves rolled up to do that. But in a bigger, established museum, they are there to make sure we don’t go off the rails or spend all the money and all the rest of it; and most of that is boring dull stuff...” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021) “So, what we have done with my previous chair, who basically said, “No, you're the chief executive. You’ve got an executive team. Go on and do it...” We built our trust by delivering. And then, my current chair, who’s been here two and a half years, has inherited something that was running well with an executive in charge of it, and he came in with good board skills and experience.” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021) “I know where I'd like to be with the board. I'd like the board of trustees to have that arms’ length, governance-led, strategic relationship” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021). “I’ve had two real sort of table banging arguments with [the chief executive] ...” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021) “I’ve known a few people that really struggle... with their chairperson trying to run the operation rather than being the chair when that is the job as the director” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021) “Sometimes, they [the board] can actually step on the officer’s, not just the Chief Executive Officer but all the other officers’, toes or create a lot of difficulty for them” [because] “... if people are too involved, then, again, there’s this assumption that they can say or do things” [that are not really their job] (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021) “ it really seems to vary, the relationship between operational staff and then the trustees or the chair and the director or just the harmony of the way in which the board works.” (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021)
Trustee Responsibilities
“The role of the trustees is much more what I would consider a trustee board to be which is a critical friend helping... it’s still getting your hands dirty but in a more strategic way and in a way ... that allows them to use my skills” (Interviewee 2020-07, 2020) “...in short it’s being responsible for the successful development of the museum and keeping finances under control and overseeing the directors and staff” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021)

“I see the trustees as being there to support the curator, but equally, she is very good at giving us a vision to work towards and carry us along with what she sees as the future for the museum. I have to say I think we are governed very well” (Interviewee 2021-08, 2021)

“I see that as a role of the trustees that that is an important role, to make sure that the museum behaves and sits well within the community and gets on with the community”
(Interviewee 2021-08, 2021)

“we’re starting to look at ... having proper trustee role descriptions so that when we’re looking for new trustees, everybody has a clearer idea of what’s required: skills required, time commitment [etc]” (Interviewee 2021-11, 2021).

Induction and Training

“from my perspective, I learnt the most about boards from attending that AIM Enablers’ course that I did with X [name redacted]. That I found really, really useful and made me think about my position on a board differently to how I thought about it before”
(Interviewee 2020-02, 2020)

“When you join the trustees, there’s no...You’re not introduced to it. There’s no training. There’s no formal procedures you have to go through” (Interviewee 2020-08, 2020)

that “we have also occasionally been given government documents to read when trustee legislation has changed and become more formalised” (Interviewee 2020 anonymised)

“I’ve had no official formal training... I’ve always taken the view that my professional background is ... certainly what I need to know” (Interviewee 2021-01, 2021)

“It’s a small rather than capital ‘I’. I’m tending to look for people who’ve got senior management or board experience, so they know their way around. They know what’s expected of them. I always make sure that they are aware and read at least the guidance from the Charities Commission” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021)

“I had no idea about what a trustee was and is, but it didn’t bother me at all. I looked it up formally and discovered that it’s hugely responsible for everything, and in the worst cases, you can get thrown in jail for...Anyway, so it didn’t bother me in the slightest. I recognise this as a weakness in me, but I expect people to do the same” (Interviewee 2021-05, 2021)

“For X [name of museum redacted], it was a pretty scant introduction. There was no training. They didn’t really have the facilities. I don’t think they had the financials to do anything like” (Interviewee 2021-06, 2021)

“...we do an induction and we give them some of our books...It’s more like we just thought we would interview people a bit more...We’d invite them into the offices to have a look around the office. Yeah, just show them around a few of the projects we’re doing just to make sure that they’re really engaged with it, really, I suppose. We don’t want people who are just going to come and do four meetings a year and not really get involved, which had happened in the past...” (Interviewee 2021-07, 2021)

“We provide them in the basic Charity Commission’s guidance, and that applies to everyone retrospectively, so even those who were already trustees have been provided with that information. We do pay for training where it’s clearly supportive to the role. Trustees are more and more being encouraged to undertake training. Our treasurer and chair have been recently doing a course with the Clore Foundation about trustee recruitment specifically because we are planning to recruit new trustees in the next few months, really. It’s, obviously, for the most part, self-identified training opportunities, but I share links as do our chair and treasurer for things that come up that they think might be of interest to other trustees as well. We have a trustee who has a specific responsibility for the collection, and she’s undertaken training, risk training and things like that, with Harwell’s who provide us with emergency cover in terms of the collection. So, she’s done some additional training” (Interviewee 2021-11, 2021) “ the induction, again, we built up certainly through my time. They then both spent a day here, a large time, with me talking through what we do and current plans, then meeting all my team, going around, and then doing all the onboarding company secretary stuff, signing their life away and all that sort of stuff. As I said, ongoing, we’ve then put people where we’ve seen shortfalls in their experience on courses” (Interviewee 2021-12,2021) “[Museums] trying to find a way to keep them [the trustees and their skills and knowledge] up-to-date ... is quite a big ask, I think, for a small museum” (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021)
Reasons to Leave
“I left only because I moved and can’t be doing a trustee in the same way from 2 hours away” (Interviewee 2020-03, 2020) “Physically, I’m finding it very difficult with the volunteering, and I’ve been doing for some time. My body’s wearing out; and I felt because I haven’t got my finger on the pulse, I really wasn’t in a position to do a good job on the board” (Interviewee 2020-05, 2020) “I have offered to resign or retire over the years, but it’s always been turned down partially, as you well know, because it’s always been hard to get replacements. It’s no good retiring from something if there’s no one there to take your place.” (Interviewee 2020-06, 2020) “One of the three proceeded to harangue the person ... to such an extent that she was reduced to tears, telling her that she was full of herself and all the rest of it ... to the point where that person then left the trustees” (Interviewee 2020-08, 2020)
Operational and Governance Roles
“I’ve always continued to volunteer while being a trustee, engaging with fellow volunteers to show appreciation” (Interviewee 2020-01, 2020)

“I’m much more hands-on ... because I’m willing to go along and help out, so I can see how our decisions play out in real time” (Interviewee 2020-02, 2020)

“I’ve had to say, “Hold on a minute. It’s not really my position here to write the strategy and these documents and the accreditation policies and things because I’m on the board. Paid professional staff should be doing that.”” (Interviewee 2020-02, 2020)

“But one of the things that that led to, because we never had a venue manager or museum manager curator, was that we used to have to do caretaking for events. We’d only take on a booking if one of the trustees could physically be in the museum, unlock it, lock it up, tidy it up, etc. I did that quite a bit.” (Interviewee 2020-04, 2020)

“I think it should be all under the same umbrella because the operational matters obviously involve governance to my point-of-view, what they can and what they can't do and when it's in the best interest, etcetera.” (Interviewee 2020-05, 2020)

“I think one thing about that I would say is that to me it's always been extremely important to have on the ground involvement ... to understand what's going on day to day or week to week running at the museum. I know that some more professional trustees may not have time to be involved in this way... whereas I think, we as a small museum, it is something which I think is important for us all to partake in” (Interviewee 2020-06, 2020)

“... that if people are too involved... there's this assumption that they can say or do things. Sometimes, they can actually step on the officer's, not just the Chief Executive Officer but all the other officers', toes or create a lot of difficulty for them, and to get boards to understand what the difference is between board trustee responsibilities and that of the operational side of the organisation and the limits of their involvement in the operational side is sometimes a very, very difficult thing to do and a very difficult balance to strike” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021)

“I am encouraging the trustees, particularly in their areas of expertise, to work in working groups or even subcommittees, where they are a trustee and they can perhaps lead it” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021)

“There are organisations, museums, trustees, boards of trustees that don't have operational responsibilities. Everyone that's in X [name of museum redacted] does have operational responsibilities. None of us are carried in any sense” (Interviewee 2021-05, 2021)

“I want to be as involved as possible because I don't... I've never ever seen the role of a governor or trustee or anything like that as being simply people that go to the meetings and decide on policy” (Interviewee 2021-08, 2021)

“I suppose a lot more falls on the shoulders of small museum trustees, but equally, I think it's nicer because you are inevitably more involved. And, I don't think I'd want to be the trustee in a huge museum because I think the beauty of it is that, as I say, you do everything from sweeping up, mopping the floors, whatever” (Interviewee 2021-08, 2021)

“it's a mixture. Nominally, it's people who actually are involved in running it and doing operational things, so some of them also happen to be trustees. We have talked about separating it in the past, but I don't know. it's a difficult thing to aim at to have totally

different people as trustees as on the operations group, but I think we're not big enough"
(Interviewee 2021-09, 2021)

"I know that, historically, when I turned up at the museum, it was apparent that the meetings went on for hours and discussed whether it should be left-handed or right-handed threaded screws for the door... Those are the decisions that should not be bothering [the] board" (Interviewee 2021-10, 2021)

"...there was one of our four trustees. Delightful though he was, he was very passionate about his old machines in the farm. It took priority in his mind. You need to know what the business at the museum is about and how the governance worked, but actually, being too close to it can be a slight dilemma." (Interviewee 2021-10, 2021)

"So, I think there are potential issues around accountability if it's sort of trustees who are leading on day-to-day stuff ... because they already have that oversight role, perhaps no further oversight is required" (Interviewee 2021-11, 2021)

"Each trustee has oversight for an area of the museums operations, which either because they have a professional background or because it's something they have over time taken a particular interest in and become involved in themselves... looking after the building... [doing] lots of local history work... oversight for our volunteers and all the rota-ing for all the volunteers" (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021)

"It's really important when you then have members of staff or whatever, your director, however their roles, whether they're paid or unpaid, to be able to differentiate between their responsibilities as a trustee and their oversight versus them making any decision they like because they're a trustee when they're doing other volunteering" (Interviewee 2021-13, 2021)

"...there were often times when we were discussing operational matters... the one that sticks in my mind was the discussion about... the types of chairs and cups or glasses that will be used... And I remember sitting there thinking I can't do this. It is not what we should be doing. And it happened more than once..." (Interviewee 2021-14, 2021)

"I think it's perhaps sometimes a bit too close to the operations... In theory, there is a way to do that and then separate yourself out from the strategic point-of-view, but it's a very difficult thing to do, and I don't think there are many people who can really do it. It's a difficult one to balance..." (Interviewee 2021-14, 2021)

"Every single person who works in a museum - Board of Trustees included needs to do F[ront] O[f] H[ouse] at 2-3 times a year" (Dixon, 2019)

Decision making

"I find it quite frustrating that sort of ad hoc decisions being made by two or three people happening to meet in the museum in shop..." (Interviewee 2020-07, 2020)

“it’s basically three people. And, what they decide is going to happen is going to happen, and you don’t go against...You can talk against it if you want to, but it isn’t going to change what happens” (Interviewee 2020-08, 2020)
Reasons to be a trustee
“the trustees, they’re quite often very, very emotionally attached to the museum; and they can't see that bigger picture” (Interviewee 2020-02, 2020) I didn’t become a trustee because I wanted career development. But, what it has done for me...I've learnt a lot being a trustee of various organisations, and what it’s done is it’s taken the skillset that I had, which was quite specialist in truth, and it’s allowed me to actually look at small businesses and say...actually, I can apply all of these skills and make a difference.” (Interviewee 2020-02, 2020) “He looked on it as though it was a status symbol. It was something that he could add his CV. ... he spent no time at the museum at all. He wouldn't have known who was a volunteer, who was staff or who anybody was” (Interviewee 2020-05, 2020) “I say, having a different age bracket represented on the trustees is very important, and she [our young trustee] brought a dimension to it that just wouldn’t have been there [otherwise].” (Interviewee 2020-08, 2020) “she was 24 and, you know, had lots of fresh ideas... but those trustees have moved on, because they have other interests or they're moving for jobs or their life moves on. But they do bring a freshness, that's very valuable and they have a different perspective“ (Interviewee 2021-01, 2021) “And then when ... one of the trustees died, and he was replaced by somebody who clearly, in hindsight, clearly, only want to ... put it on his CV ...” (Interviewee 2021-01, 2021) “The chairman is a passionate museum-ey ...somebody who’s into old agricultural equipment or something like that... But, what happens is that people’s personal influence then sometimes blur their roles, or their personal passions can blur their role”. (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “ I think sometimes you’ve got to be careful because there are again people that will become a trustee but haven't really got an interest in what they're actually being a trustee for” (Interviewee 2021-08, 2021) “I do think a lot of people who take trustee jobs ... in a small museum or a new museum, then you can do things at your passion, and you can follow those, and you can get your sleeves rolled up to do that” (Interviewee 2021-12, 2021) “A youth trustee position is also an opportunity for a young person to gain confidence, learn new skills, and develop a deeper understanding of how arts organisations function, as well as providing access to a network of professionals” (Moss 2021)

“I think some people sign up to be trustees because they think it gives them social prestige, some because they have a particular agenda (not always to the benefit of the org)” (Cotterill, 2020)
Payment for Trustee role
“Trustees volunteer their services & usually don’t receive payment, apart from expenses” (Moss 2020) “I worry this excludes some people. In particular there’s been a good rise in youth trustees recently but those I have wanted to encourage wouldn’t be able to do this for free” (Moss 2020)
Away Days
“We’d had a group away day. We started to articulate what was our inevitable vision, mission and objectives” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021)
Board Professionalisation
“I would like to see us introduce an element of professionalism and people not feeling... that this is their personal museum” (Interviewee 2020-08, 2020) “I know where I'd like to be with the board, you know, I'd like the Board of Trustees to have that, you know, arms length, ... governance, lead strategic relationships, and you know... I do get that I really do, and in fact I think a lot of the trustees on the Board now... also, [have] ... the same position” (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021)
Comments on specific roles
“... the chairman, as I say, should be a champion but not be blurred by personal passions or personal choices as to what needs to be the key exhibits or the key role of an organisation. A really good chairperson is there to help steer not only the policy but also to champion the organisation in its key policies or roles...” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “a chairperson who...Well, to a certain extent, has a lot of power and kudos within a board can actually potentially undermine the functionality of both the board and the Chief Executive” (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021) “Having a mediator on the board is in my opinion a very essential thing, and I think a lot of us missed it. I accidentally ended up with having somebody like that. I didn’t recruit for

it. But if I have to now, I will recruit for a mediator in the future, definitely, a people skills person..." (Interviewee 2021-02, 2021)

"..for instance, the treasurer was a financial person in industry before he retired, and the vice treasurer also has a banking background" (Interviewee 2021-03, 2021)

"That was about ten years ago, and I became chairman. He said to me as we parted...I was talking about the role of Chairmen. He said, "Well, what you'll find is that if you become an odd-job man...So, the things that don't get done, you do. The things that crop up unexpectedly, you handle. And, it's true." Interviewee 2021-05, 2021)

"...it's useful to have some of that expertise {museum experience}, but it's not an essential prerequisite for being brought on the board. And, I will say it does run the risk of you get a little bit carried away by your own expertise... And this mindset, if that goes across to the board, is stultifying. It is very difficult to deal with" (Interviewee 2021-10, 2021)

10.5 APPENDIX 5: ETHICS APPROVALS AND FORMS

10.5.1 EC1A: Application for ethics approval

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

FORM EC1A: APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL OF A STUDY INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS (Individual or Group Applications)

Please complete this form if you wish to undertake a study involving human participants.

Applicants are advised to refer to the Ethics Approval StudyNet Site and read the Guidance Notes (GN) before completing this form.

<http://www.studynet2.herts.ac.uk/ptl/common/ethics.nsf/Homepage?ReadForm>

Applicants are also advised to read the FAQ General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) before completing this form.

<http://www.studynet2.herts.ac.uk/ptl/common/ethics.nsf/Frequently+Asked+Questions/4AD88CD88D0F3F2D8025829800300621>

Use of this form is mandatory [see UPR RE01, 'Studies Involving Human Participants', Sections 7.1-7.3]

Approval must be sought and granted before any investigation involving human participants begins [UPR RE01, S 4.4 (iii)]

If you require any further guidance, please contact either hsetecda@herts.ac.uk or ssaheoda@herts.ac.uk

Abbreviations: GN = Guidance Notes UPR = University Policies and Regulations

THE STUDY

Q1 Please give the title of the proposed study

The museum trustee: exploring theory, policy and practice in governance at small heritage sites

THE APPLICANT

Q2 Name of applicant/(principal) investigator (person undertaking this study)

Sarah Fitzpatrick

Student registration number/Staff number

17089455

Email address

Sf18aar@herts.ac.uk

Status:

☐ Undergraduate (Foundation)

☐ Undergraduate (BSc, BA)

☐ Postgraduate (taught)

☒ Postgraduate (research)

10.5.2 EC2: Application for modification and/or extension to an existing protocol approval 2020

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
(‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’)

FORM EC2: APPLICATION FOR MODIFICATION AND/OR EXTENSION TO AN EXISTING PROTOCOL APPROVAL

- 1 **Title of original application:**
The museum trustee: exploring theory, policy and practice in governance at small heritage sites
- Protocol Number:**
HUM/PGR/UH/04519
- Is this the first modification**/extension request for this study?**
- Yes ☐ No ☒
- If no, please include the most recent approval notification document with your application.**

-
- 2 **Protocol holder details**
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Applicant name: | Sarah Fitzpatrick |
| Student/Staff number : | 17069455 |
| Applicant e-mail address: | sf18aan@herts.ac.uk |
| Work address (if appropriate): | Click here to enter text. |
| Supervisor's name: | Dr Eureka Henrich |
| Supervisor's School & Department: | School of Humanities/History |
| Supervisor's e-mail address: | e.henrich@herts.ac.uk |
-

- 3 **Specify the nature of the modification/extension (please tick all that apply and complete Q4 & 5).**
- ☐ Revised title of study.
Please state amended title here
- ☒ Amend/extend dates
From: 01/11/2020 To: 31/01/2021
- ☐ Additional worker(s):
Names and student/staff numbers for any additional investigators involved in this study
[Click here to enter text.](#)

10.5.3 EC2: Application for modification and/or extension to an existing protocol approval 2021

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
(ETHICS COMMITTEE)

FORM EC2: APPLICATION FOR MODIFICATION AND/OR EXTENSION TO AN EXISTING PROTOCOL APPROVAL

- 1 **Title of original application:**
The museum trustee: exploring theory, policy and practice in governance at small heritage sites
- Protocol Number:**
HUM/PGR/UH/04519
- Is this the first modification**/extension request for this study?**
- Yes — No
- If no, please include the most recent approval notification document with your application.**
- aHUM/PGR/UH/04519(1)

- 2 **Protocol holder details**
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Applicant name: | Sarah Fitzpatrick |
| Student/Staff number : | 17069455 |
| Applicant e-mail address: | sf18aar@herts.ac.uk |
| Work address (if appropriate): | Click here to enter text. |
| Supervisor's name: | Dr Jana Filosof |
| Supervisor's School & Department: | Hertfordshire Business School |
| Supervisor's e-mail address: | j.1.filosof@herts.ac.uk |

- 3 **Specify the nature of the modification/extension (please tick all that apply and complete Q4 & 5).**
- ☐ Revised title of study.
Please state amended title here
- ☒ Amend/extend dates
From: 01/02/2021 To: 31/05/2021
- ☐ Additional worker(s):
Names and student/staff numbers for any additional investigators involved in this study

10.5.4 EC6: Participant information form

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
(‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’)

FORM EC6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1 Title of study

The museum trustee: exploring theory, policy and practice in governance at small heritage sites

2 Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a study. Before you decide whether to do so, it is important that you understand the study that is being undertaken and what your involvement will include. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask us anything that is not clear or for any further information you would like to help you make your decision. Please do take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. The University’s regulation, UPR RE01, ‘Studies Involving the Use of Human Participants’ can be accessed via this link:

<https://www.herts.ac.uk/about-us/governance/university-policies-and-regulations-uprs/uprs>
(after accessing this website, scroll down to Letter S where you will find the regulation)

Thank you for reading this.

3 What is the purpose of this study?

This research aims to address some of the gaps within the heritage literature relating to small museum boards and museum governance. The research aims to make a practical contribution to the future of governance by reflecting on the issues that many small museums and their trustee boards face. It will address the reality of charity involvement for most trustees who spend as much if not most of their time on operational or management matters rather than governance.

4 Do I have to take part?

It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Agreeing to join the study does not mean that you have to complete it. You are free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part at all, will not affect any treatment/care that you may receive (should this be relevant).

5 Are there any age or other restrictions that may prevent me from participating?

None as long you are a trustee of one of the target museums for research purposes

6 How long will my part in the study take?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be involved in it for a series of brief interviews lasting no more than 3 hours in total.

10.5.5 EC3: Participant consent form



**UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
(‘ETHICS COMMITTEE’)**

**FORM EC3
CONSENT FORM FOR STUDIES INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS**

I, the undersigned *[please give your name here, in BLOCK CAPITALS]*

of *[please give contact details here, sufficient to enable the investigator to get in touch with you, such as a postal or email address]*

hereby freely agree to take part in the study entitled

The museum trustee: exploring theory, policy and practice in governance at small heritage sites

(UH Protocol number)

1 I confirm that I have been given a Participant Information Sheet (a copy of which is attached to this form) giving particulars of the study, including its aim(s), methods and design, the names and contact details of key people and, as appropriate, the risks and potential benefits, how the information collected will be stored and for how long, and any plans for follow-up studies that might involve further approaches to participants. I have also been informed of how my personal information on this form will be stored and for how long. I have been given details of my involvement in the study. I have been told that in the event of any significant change to the aim(s) or design of the study I will be informed, and asked to renew my consent to participate in it.

2 I have been assured that I may withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage or having to give a reason.

3 In giving my consent to participate in this study, I understand that voice recording will take place and I have been informed of how/whether this recording will be transmitted/displayed.

4 I have been told how information relating to me (data obtained in the course of the study, and data provided by me about myself) will be handled: how it will be kept secure, who will have access to it, and how it will or may be used.

Signature of participant.....Date.....

Signature of (principal)

investigator.....*Sarah Jane Fitzpatrick*.....Date.....26/02/2020.....

Name of (principal) investigator *[in BLOCK CAPITALS please]*

.....**SARAH JANE FITZPATRICK**.....

Form EC3 – 1 August 2019