

## THE RMG PLAN 2022-26

### *Building Reach, Reputation and Resilience*

#### **Introduction**

The Covid pandemic has shaken the world and reshaped our future. This is true for every country, every organisation and every individual.

At RMG we have learned much over this period: how to respond quickly to challenges; how to work more flexibly and provide innovative programming for our audiences using the opportunities offered by digital technology; how our visitors are ready to come back to our sites in great numbers when we offer them exciting opportunities; how to communicate more effectively with each other and the public; how to support and build resilience.

Plans for our future direction had already started prior to the pandemic but the events of 2020–21, the continuing instability due to conflict in Europe and the threat to our society from climate change mean that we must continue with an agile approach but ensure continuity and coherence in remaining constant to our fundamental values and content themes. These were articulated by the Content Strategy Group in pictorial form in *Charting our Course*. The Content Strategy Group continues to provide a workshop for the development of creative ideas. Its purpose is to develop, co-ordinate and deliver RMG's Content Strategy in relation to research, interpretation, content development, programming, exhibiting and dissemination, so that there is good collaboration and clear visibility of available assets and a knowledge of 'work in progress'.

The political, economic and social uncertainties we are witnessing will mean that a return to our large on-site visitor numbers of the past will take longer than first envisaged. Whilst this will mean that our financial position will be tight, we cannot stand still and we must, with prudence, invest in our programmes so that people continue to visit, tell their friends and come back time and again. We shall build relationships through active, quality engagement, and qualitative evaluation.

Over the course of the Museum's history, we have witnessed three main eras/areas of focus for museums: the traditional view of our founders that the collections and curatorial expertise were what made a museum; the more commercial view of museums that took hold from the 1990s; and the more recent vision for museums to be receptive to engage with communities and provide a multi perspective social history, to become places of memory and dialogue. To be successful in the future we must reconcile all three of these modes, recognising the importance of each. We have altered the way we work and our management structures to give more prominence to our publicly facing teams, as they are best placed to represent our audiences, it is vital that we understand that the work of all our colleagues contributes to RMG's success.

This plan sets out for our colleagues and our stakeholders our primary aims and values and specific objectives which will help us to rebuild and grow our audiences. It is not intended to be exhaustive as we cannot include here all the valuable work which goes on at RMG, but it is intended to provide an overview of the main areas of work. It will be reviewed and updated at least once a year.

Over the life of this four-year plan **our primary aims and values are to:**

**1. Deliver ROG "First Light" – marking the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of celestial observation**

- *Deliver an inspiring visitor experience at ROG with new and refurbished gallery spaces and outdoor experiences – a place of 'awe and wonder' which combines the concepts of 'Time and Space'*
- *Transform physical and intellectual access by integrating the historic buildings and collections with the modern astronomy offer and excellent visitor facilities, in a single unified site*

**2. Give people a reason to visit NOW**

- *Create a calendar of engaging, memorable and meaningful experiences that people want to share and that encourage repeat visitation*
- *Interrogate the past thoroughly, to revitalise and to better understand our present, encourage and host conversations around different perspectives and divided memories of history*

**3. Engage with the environmental challenges facing our future**

- *Raise the level of consciousness around climate change and sustainable living*
- *Increase the environmental sustainability of our sites and buildings*
- *Ensure our ways of working meet our values around sustainability, integrating our approach to reducing human impact on climate change through all our activities; Be an advocate for change in the museum sector*

**4. Increase the relevance of our expertise and collections for our audiences**

- *Fulfil our social purpose and responsibility as a national museum by responding to issues that are important to our visitors and stakeholders; be brave and bold, relevant, inclusive, ethical, informed, expert, for everyone to feel welcome*
- *Use the collections, sites and themes and pursue opportunities for research to meet the needs of audiences in supporting skills, knowledge and an understanding of the world around them*

**5. Maximise opportunities offered by digital technology**

- *Develop our approach to digital, ensuring projects consider digital opportunities at inception*
- *Use digital technology to build our reach and reputation, extending engagement with our collections both at home and internationally*
- *Ensure our digital systems are fit for purpose to enable greater staff efficiency and smoother customer experience*

**6. Run a high performing organisation**

- *Empower and develop our staff, through coaching and Continuous Performance Management, supporting a proactive and flexible approach to everything we do; share expertise across the museum, encouraging a respectful, collaborative and inclusive working culture*
- *Ensure financial sustainability with adequate resources to meet our needs*

**7. Care for our collections & buildings**

- *Fulfil our statutory obligations in caring for our collections and buildings, providing curatorial and conservation expertise*
- *Ensure our collections, stories and expertise are accessible to as wide an audience as possible, on site, in store, online*

## THE RMG PLAN 2022-26

### *Building Reach, Reputation and Resilience*

#### **1. Deliver ROG "First Light" – marking the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of celestial observation**

The 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of observing the wonders of the night sky at the ROG in 2026 offers us an opportunity to make it a place of 'awe and wonder' a 'must see' London attraction for the UK and international visitor; revitalising our displays, rethinking the stories we tell and improving the visitor journey. Our Visitors will see, hear and feel the wondrous, curious immensity of the universe and of our shared existence in it.

#### **The ROG project is key to our recovery.**

Activities:

2022

- Build a creative team to deliver the transformation: Architect, project manager, design team, exhibition designers and artist appointments in place, internal posts consolidated
- Agree main design components and develop designs for the 'build' project which best meet our aims: Complete Concept/Spatial Coordination (RIBA 2/3) designs for architectural works; allocate narrative display elements to each new space
- Unify *Time & Space* concepts by implementing the first 3 strands of the narrative vision: Complete Flamsteed House Concept Design (RIBA 2), commence Spatial Coordination (RIBA 3)
- Set out a vision for audience engagement for *First Light*: Complete Activity Plan draft
- Engage with key stakeholders: Launch Fundraising campaign, complete Royal Parks, Historic England, RBG, WHS consultation

2023

- Obtain statutory permissions for architectural works: planning application approved
- Develop architectural designs/cost/timetable to a detailed level ready for build tender: Technical Design complete (RIBA 4),
- Unify *Time & Space* concepts by implementing the remaining 2 strands (4–5) of the narrative vision: Complete new galleries/spaces Concept Design (RIBA 2) Commence Spatial Coordination (RIBA 3)
- Develop detailed narrative designs (strands 1-3): Complete Flamsteed House Technical designs (RIBA 4)

2024

- Build agreed architectural works: Commence Construction phase (RIBA 5)
- Complete historic spaces/FH apartments & galleries (strands 1–3) displays (RIBA 5)
- Develop detailed narrative designs for strands 4-5: Complete new galleries/spaces Technical Designs (RIBA 4)

2025

- Complete all building work to allow remaining display fit out to commence: (RIBA 5)
- Fit out of all commercial spaces complete (café, shop etc.)
- Commence fit out of historic spaces, exterior spaces, new spaces/displays (RIBA 5)

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2026

- Complete all planned works on site: all new spaces/displays (RIBA 5)

## **2. Give people a reason to visit NOW**

We will deliver and promote a dynamic year-round programme of 'must see' activities, festivals, events and displays designed to give people a compelling reason to visit; to enjoy social and cultural experiences and to foster longer term connections and relationships with us. We will adopt a diverse, layered approach to engage and grow our local and national communities in face-to-face conversations around our key themes, sites and collections. Taking the opportunity of national/international initiatives and anniversaries related to our collections enables us to maximize the promotion of our activities, extend an invitation to targeted audiences and broaden our ability to deliver through collaborations and partnerships.

We will underpin programmes with consultations to remain relevant and useful and to enable the audience to shape the activities. Partnerships will increase our expertise to interrogate shared histories and stories for us to continue to increase our appeal and our understanding of audience needs and interests. To retain and grow our audiences we must continue to understand the influencing needs and resulting choices made by our visitors, to align activities and activate meaningful relationship building. The purpose of activity is to bring people to our physical and digital sites, to gain knowledge and skills, for an enjoyable social experience and to support a better understanding of heritage, identity, and place. Analysis of cross museum visitor data and feedback will create a responsive and strategic approach to removing barriers, increasing repeat visits, improving our offer and making RMG a destination visit for local, national and international visitors.

Activities:

- RMG cross-site year-round programme of annual programmes, festivals and activities supporting audience access to the collections, themes and sites e.g., Diwali, World Oceans Day, Astronomy courses, Evening with the Stars
- Summer '22: Visitor research and recommendations completed and action plan developed
- Develop coherent cross-museum programme for supported access and wellbeing needs e.g. co-ordinated relaxed openings, SEND programmes and access provision
- Utilize smartify for inclusion of community voices in galleries
- 2022: Review of RMG approach to ticketing to optimize the invitation to visit

## **3. Engage with the environmental challenges facing our future**

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change identified human activity as the root cause for the rising trend in global temperatures. Humans need to reduce the activities causing climate change or find a way of doing them with less impact on the environment. As the damage is collateral to the pursuit of individual or corporate benefit, but the consequences are experienced by the globally shared common property of clean water, air and atmosphere, any action will inevitably require change socially, economically and

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culturally, as much as technologically. Those changes need framing in the cultural context of the past as it brought us to this point.

These are areas in which a museum has a major role at the centre of the nation's values and identity and can speak to how changes in human activity affect others both near and far. Our purpose is not to find solutions or offer advice but to reframe dialogue in a wider discussion to inspire changed conversations.

The Museum as an organisation also needs to address its own activities and their environmental impact and to look more widely at museum practice and certification.

Activities:

- The first step in this process is the appointment of a Sustainability Manager who starts in June 2022 and who will be tasked with producing a plan aiming to increase the environmental sustainability of our sites and buildings
- We shall also review our approach to the management of our collections, including the reduction in commercial storage, more efficient use of the remaining Kidbrooke site, collections rationalisation and increasing our storage estate sustainably
- We shall re-write our Collections Development Policy
- The Oceans content groups will work up ideas for displays on environmental topics for a rolling programme in our New Insights gallery, and we shall continue to develop the programme around World Oceans Day building our reputation in this area

#### ***4. Increase the relevance of our expertise and collections for our audiences***

##### **Content, Collections and Research**

Five new working groups feed into the main Content Strategy Group, with cross-museum teams tasked with developing content, ideas and stories, sharing existing relevant activity and supporting the development of projects that will fulfil RMG's strategic goals:

- Oceans (two groups) – one focussing on the ocean environment and sustainability, the other on human interactions with the ocean, sea lives and ships
- Creativity – art and architecture
- Society – power and identity
- Universe – time, place and space

In addition we will cultivate and champion a broad and inclusive community research culture beyond the Museum, bringing diverse voices and under-researched histories to the fore. We will leverage and enhance RMG's status as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO). Through cultivation of relevant networks, we aim to develop new collections-related partnerships with international, national and local museums, Higher Education Institutions and community partners, with a view to developing new research projects aligned with our strategic priorities.

RMG is a grant awarding body through our Caird Fellowships and research Internships; we will ensure that their work links to our values, aims, collections and content themes and that their research builds useful content for RMG.

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Activities:

- Spring 22 onwards: Content Strategy Development groups to review existing work and generate stories around the collection with a view to increasing audiences
- Late '22: Develop revised Research Strategy
- Summer/Autumn 2022: Undertake review of Fellowships
- 2022 onwards: Rebuild a programme of research seminars and conferences, working with a range of partners
- Ongoing: Work closely with the Publications team to maximise opportunities for staff, Fellowship and doctoral research outputs
- Ongoing: Develop innovative research grant proposals aligned with Charting our Course
- Deliver against agreed research projects

**NMM Galleries** *Our Ocean Our Planet: Ocean, People, Vessels*

The Galleries of the NMM will be tied together more effectively if we activate the space in Neptune Court and the Great Map to bring a memorable large scale, 'Ocean' moment to the visitor. If correctly presented, this will open the way to understanding vessels and life at sea as currently expressed in our galleries. This can only be done through collaboration as RMG has no 'Ocean' offer today in the teaching of Oceanography or Navigation. Collaborators will be offered broadcast and exhibition opportunities through accessing our sites and being visible to our audiences. We plan to replace Neptune Court roof, contingent on funding, and this will be an opportunity to re-imagine our Ocean moment.

On 'People' we will engage with diverse London communities to reflect our commitment to history broadened by multiple perspectives. We will use our collection to draw out how the Royal and Merchant Navies connected the world, globalised trade and so shaped a modern British society with huge cultural and ethnic diversity.

As we emerge from the pandemic, our focus over the life of this plan shall be less on large scale temporary exhibitions and more on high impact events, smaller projects and updating our permanent galleries. This does not mean that we won't have an exciting and changing programme.

Activities:

- June '22: BAS legacy space complete. The displays will explore the RRS Sir David Attenborough and cutting-edge polar research in a time of climate and ecological emergency.
- Ongoing: Develop a rolling programme in the New Insights Gallery around Our Oceans Our Planet topics
- October 2022: Content Strategy Group to develop a plan for refresh of visitor offer across all spaces e.g., *All Hands* and *Atlantic Worlds*
- 2024: Collaboration with RNLI for their 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- 2025: Pirates in collaboration with NMMC (NMM/SEG & New Insights)

**The Queen's House** *Art and Architecture*

We shall continue to deliver a dynamic, inspiring, changing programme of displays in the Queen's House. Within the next 4 years, we aim to grow, build and attract an arts loving audience through creative activities and innovative partnerships to raise awareness of the Queen's House. Commercial events will deliver financial support but in future the focus will be to carefully balance with continuous public access.

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Activities:

- 2023: Van de Velde 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary exhibition
- Improve the welcome to the House: Signage and wayfinding

### **Cutty Sark**

We want the *Cutty Sark* to develop as a skills and knowledge base, a landmark for local history and an anchor story for the great river port, London. It should become the access point to understanding how trade drove exploration and globalisation. Using new technology to experience seafaring in the days of sail is important to build engagement. To this end live events, character actors, virtual reality experiences and climbing the rigging are all being developed to deliver this deeper engagement to tell the stories about the ships history.

Activities:

- Access knowledgeable support through collaboration with our expertise in a new *Cutty Sark* Forum to begin meeting formally in 2022.
- Work with the National Historic Ships – UK team to make *Cutty Sark* a hub for shipkeeping skills
- April '22: Conservation Management Plan complete
- Continue to seek collaborative opportunities for the Michael Edwards Theatre space

## **5. Maximise opportunities offered by digital technology**

The pandemic forced a rapid acceleration of our digital competence and output, enabling home working and the delivery of online programming in short order. However, we recognise that we have much further to travel in developing our expertise in this area and we should start by acknowledging that 'digital' means different things to different people. It can be as simple as what we present on our website; how we engage with audiences through social media channels; the digital offer in our galleries; our IT infrastructure and our different organisational software systems.

Whilst we want to attract people back to our physical sites, we must also continue to develop our digital competency and in so doing increase our reach to those unable to visit. We want to involve our audiences in the co-curation of some of our largely inaccessible collections. We want to ensure the customer journey when booking events and programmes is as streamlined as possible and we want to maximise staff efficiency by providing reliable systems and infrastructure.

Activities:

- Summer 22 *One by One* (Leicester University) to provide an assessment of our digital competence and recommendations for next steps in our approach to digital
- Grow the reach and relevance of RMG by providing a rich, digital, interactive experience of our collections and content to audiences anywhere, on any device:  
Phase 1 (already underway): digitise 230,000 historic photographs  
Phase 2 (from May '22): develop the platform for the public co-curation approach
- Explore opportunities for digital engagement in the ROG 'First Light' project ensuring digital opportunities are considered and embedded at an early stage
- Maximise benefits from our Customer Relations Management system

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- Improve staff efficiency and organisational record keeping through training and clear guidance

## **6. Run a high performing organisation**

The Museum will be more effective if it has a real time overview of all work in progress so to deliver this increase in visibility and transparency we have implemented some key Management changes:

Activity Trackers: Significant and cross museum projects, and some strands of rolling activity, will have an Activity Tracker, available to all staff, providing an overview of major activities. Activity Trackers will increase the visibility of work in progress and so allow the Museum's committees and managers to ensure that projects and other major activities align with, and build on, past work whilst delivering an ambitious future. Projects and opportunities that are not in budget that can be activated and delivered as funding become identifiable - either from general funds or from funds raised specifically for the purpose. Work on the Activity Trackers commenced Autumn/Winter '21/22 and should be available by Summer 2022.

Visitor Experience: The 'Hub and Spoke' model puts the General Managers of our public sites at the centre with all departments feeding into and from this 'hub' as they represent our visitors in the design and management of our offer to the visiting public.

Management forums: Significant work has been undertaken to de-bottleneck some of our lines of management and control with the aim of reducing cost, shortening our lines of communication and encouraging an engaged, active and more collaborative approach. The Strategy Delivery Group and Operational Delivery Groups are now in place to gain oversight and authorise our activities.

Developing staff: We have introduced a Continuous Performance Management framework to ensure objectives remain relevant. We aim to create a coaching approach from the Senior Leadership team to increase trust and autonomy across the management teams.

Financial sustainability: We shall continue our work to generate funds for our public programming.

## **7. Care for our collections & buildings**

Alongside all of the priorities outlined above is of course our core responsibility set out in the National Maritime Acts, 1934 and 1989 to care for the national maritime collection and our historic buildings on behalf of the public. We shall continue our work in rationalising our collections and storage as set out above and, aside from the major plans to transform the ROG, our work to maintain our estate is forever ongoing. Having received confirmation in May 2022 of additional capital funding from DCMS, we are also planning a number of projects to enhance our estate, most notably we shall be working to replace the fabric of the Neptune Court roof and in so doing improve the environmental conditions of that area.