



Figure 1 Red House Museum, Photo by John Kirby

RED HOUSE MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES ANALYSIS REPORT.

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"I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED
THAT IT IS THE ARTIST WHO
CREATES A WORK, BUT A
SOCIETY THAT TURNS IT INTO
A WORK OF ART. - JOHANNES
CLADDERS"

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF
CURATING: BY HANS ULRICH
OBRIST**

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INTRODUCTIONS

Between October and November of 2018, I had the pleasure to work at The Red House Museum and Archives for 20 days. This arrangement was part of an academic placement with UWTSD Lampeter work experience conditions.

This essay will be discussing the museum in the introduction and my place within the institution, including jobs and influence upon my abilities and skills. Furthermore, analysing the running of the organisation and its various facilities.

To introduce, Red House is a small local museum on the South coast of England in Christchurch. Established as a parish workhouse in 1764, the property retains many of its original Georgian features (Hampshireculture.org.uk, 2019). After passing to the Christchurch Priory and the women's wing demolished in 1887, the workhouse later was retired and sold to Herbert Druitt and converted into a private museum. Then donated in 1951 and remains open as a charitable trust with links to Hampshire Arts and Museum Service and jointly funded by Hampshire CC, Dorset CC and Christchurch BC (Booton, 2013).

Currently, Red House is open five days a week, Tuesday to Saturday. Run primarily by volunteers in various subdivisions, such as front desk, gardens, archive, exhibition, maintenance and Friends of Red House Museum. With the recent loss of staff, there remain only two paid staff members overseeing the on-site museum, Laura Bullivant as Community Manager and Catherine Donne in finance and volunteer manager (Booton, 2013). However, the museum is part of a more extensive network of Hampshire heritage institutes, thus, a delegation from Hampshire Culture Trust.

To discuss Hampshire Cultural trust, their mission statement states "Our mission is to provide great arts, heritage, museums and creative programming, working closely with local and national partners, and placing communities, our collections and their stories at the heart of everything we do." (HCT Strategic plan 2015-2015., 2015) Consequently, these aims are also Red Houses.

As a direct result, Red House provides exhibitions to break down social stigmas and include all people. It is providing public space for the local community, such as dementia café and public events. Foremost, prioritising community and not financial gain outside of sustainability is what defines the mission statement for the trust and its various locations.

However, though provided with the same main goals, Red House also has its informal assertions. Such as they serve to conserve and protect local history and heritage. As well as to offer public space for people to socialise, learn and relax in.

For example, the museum carries out several different aims. Firstly, provide help to the public and the materials housed in the building for future generations. To name but a few of the services delivered, the institute is a public museum free of charge, allowing for unlimited opportunity to educate and access to local history. Likewise, presenting the history of Christchurch, therefore, conserving and protecting a thousand years of history for everyone to see, as well as the history of the workhouse.

Another provision is the regular temporary exhibitions space allowing for a range of local artists to exhibit because they might be restricted before due to financing, prejudice or lack of opportunity. Moreover, art exhibitions are regularly swapped with local historical displays, encouraging local awareness, and social interaction by attendees sharing experiences such as recent past exhibitions, e.g. the 1960s themed show. Alongside, presentations for social inclusion, e.g. blind display with touch, making the museum accessible to everyone.

Alternatively, the public archives give protection and conservation to original artworks, photos and documents. These pieces are evidence of local history used by the community and in exhibition creation. Overall, the museum is working as a larger organisation to give a safe space for social inclusion and trying to become a focal point for the community as a social space.

Before October 25th, I had decided upon several aims in what I wanted to enact during the work experience placement. These aims varied from what I wished to gain from the encounter and what I would like to contribute to the institute — starting from a basic completing the module into more specific aims, such as gaining experience from a variety of heritage areas to help narrow down a future career and gaining experience in these sectors to promote employability. However, the latter two are aims that could and will take years to accomplish sufficiently, consequently, reliant on me to initiate assignments as well as work in multiple tasks and areas at once in hopes to gain as much knowledge as possible. Unfortunately, though this was the case, due to prior and lifelong chronic illness, there were constraints on the number of duties done a day and more physically demanding jobs.

Besides, preceding the start of work experience. Practical skills and knowledge were limited to an academic understanding of heritage management and volunteering positions at St Barbes museum and The Red House Museum during the previous summer. Subsequently left with incomplete information to work in the museum field. However, the resulting experience did allow for a smooth transition into working with other volunteers and staff due to familiarity. Proverbially hitting the ground running from day one.

Next in preparation was the practical planning, which consisted of emailing and authorising placement with both the institution and overseeing faculty member of UWTSD, which included health and safety forms. Additionally, person preparation included buying a diary to write activities and thoughts, as well as medical preparation to establish daily capabilities and limitations and creating a plan if I become ill. As well as travel plans and student financial aid in the form of grants.

ARCHIVE

One of the most significant roles and experiences assumed during work experience was within the archives, housing the largest group of volunteering within the museum. To begin with, training with leading archive volunteer, who shall remain unnamed for confidentiality, where information on the archiving computer systems also disclosed such as basic knowledge on health and safety procedures. To start the role of cross-comparing between archive material and inventory list on word document and left for the first several days on this job. Each cabinet was organised by folders that are named by keywords in alphabetical order.

Similarly, an inventory list to coincide with the original, that record differences between what was in cabinets and online. Likewise, duplicate copies, what was missing and what had damage and needed immediate attention. Another task consisted of grammar and spell checking. If each folder was too disorganised, then highlighted so that future volunteers can go further and spend more time sorting them out.

I was left alone to do this, mostly because it was at the start of the experience and staff nor volunteers knew what jobs to give. Similarly, had yet to appraise my skill level, and this was just an easy cross comparison. Further responsibilities included adding new items to archive and incorporating them onto the inventory.

Though this was a time-consuming job, it was tedious. I soon sought more jobs to work around the archive. Within the first week, IT provided a login username and password for the archive system and my domains to add any documents for future projects.

One of these jobs supervised by leading archive volunteer was helping sort through donated books to check if any are Christchurch related and if not or are in poor condition then placed in piles to sell or discard.

Likewise, a tour of the art collection and storage facilities was offered towards the end of the first week. Alongside, information on sorting methods and conservation protocols. During this tour, facts like every five years there was a regular volunteer turnover resulted in a new organisation strategy but not completed so all collections: art, books, artefacts and documents are disorganised. Subsequently, helped find art pieces for a visitor booking that evening, this was allowed due to was supervision, and they were not fragile works.

From the beginning of week two, the decision to document specific archive volunteer jobs and responsibilities (Figure 6). Primarily this was for the convenience of staff and volunteers who had expressed confusion of who was doing any one thing at a time, and if they needed help on a specific area, they had to go a long way around finding who they were. Thus, I interviewed as many volunteers who were available to find out times and days they worked, their speciality and jobs they were focussing. For example, volunteer A works Monday between 10 am and 1 pm in the art collection. They were currently working on finding pieces of work and would like to add unframed pieces of work into preservation boxes shortly.

During this process, it came to attention that all the volunteers had ideas on what they wanted to see done in the near, and long-term future of the museum/archive but couldn't do it alone. Likewise, it was inefficient practice for each volunteer to work on their own, and that it could be counterintuitive, thus, slow down others. Subsequently, I brought up a proposal for hosting a large group meeting between volunteers and staff to overcome several problems. Firstly, the communication barrier between staff and volunteers on projects, jobs and issues faced. Partly due to the museum manager has only recently taken her job after the previous two staff members left.

Consequently, she has little experience running a heritage institution and had yet to familiarise herself thoroughly with the various responsibilities. Nor has had the time to appoint a meeting time to acquaint herself. Thus, was more than happy to let me go around asking if a group meeting would be an acceptable route for volunteers. As a result of several days of finding individuals, the answer was an astounding yes.

Secondly, the next course of action was to make a meeting plan for Ms Bullivant the manager, with her amendments and approval sent to all known archive volunteers (Figure 2). Within this plan, multiple different subsections merged organising vital points. The first being an introduction to what the purpose of the meeting would be "This meeting is to hopefully record the roles of the volunteers and give an opportunity for a group discussion on what future jobs volunteers would like to see happen...transparency in people's roles and a clear written plan for the future of the archives." Next was an agenda in four different headings, 1, Future jobs 2, Problems 3, Individuals 4, Next steps. With a list of attendees and a poster with time, place and reason for the meeting posted in the staff room.

In turn, the meeting was a success, with full support from staff and volunteers. Alongside attendance of head archivist and collections officer for Hampshire Cultural Trust, who created ideas for how HCT can help. Future jobs and a list of what the volunteers would like, such as, more training and professional archive and art collection sorting. The meeting helped clear the air of responsibilities and for everyone to have their thoughts heard. I was allowed to run and organise the conference for multiple different factors as its unusual for a 20-year-old to take on such a role. Firstly, given some sort authorisation by my heritage degree, alongside, my willingness to put my time and effort into arranging it. Likely, understaffing also had a role as everyone wanted the meeting but no extra days to push for it. Likewise, the knowledge that all steps were watched and approved by staff, alongside familiarity from previous volunteering at the site, leaving more privileges.

Manager assistant

Between archive assistant, my second most significant role shadowing staff, most prominently the community manager and took on a temporary role as an aid. This job ranged between research in finding companies and entertainment for Christmas market fayre and phoning contestants. Onwards to more laborious tasks such as writing up reports, in this case, I suggested a community report. However, it was also prompted to write up additional finance and communication report.

Communication report

To summarise the report was to document the current communication methods and mediums utilised by the museum (Figure 5). Subdivisions include social media, leaflet, banners, press releases and word of mouth, within these sections examples of how the museum used these methods in the past. Accompanied by dates as well as pros and cons of each instance; finance and how many visitors brought up the technique in informal interviews.

To further help in promoting awareness of Red House, research on competing museums and heritage sites methods undertaken. Alongside, heritage information sites who aim to assist and guide other places to support future sustainability, in this case, South Western Museums providing, a basic spreadsheet on audiences and communication methods and which times to pass on information to them (SouthEastMusums, 2017).

To conclude, notes of own thoughts on how to proceed with communication and marketing plans were added at the end concerning marketing strategies.

Local Funding Report

Another report suggested by management originally asked to include only current examples of internal and external funding into the museum and art gallery (Figure 4).

External funding included Friends of Red House, who contributed money for exhibitions and purchase of items for maintenance. Further examples include funding from the council, Hampshire Council Trust and visitor and other charity organisation grants, donations and legacies.

Another section was titled current internal funding and opportunities to expand. Aptly named with examples of existing revenue sources, such as café, shop, gift aid and paid group activities, usually kids events. Further detail went into suggestions made by heritage organisations as well as own annotates, for example, more paid activities. However, they might not be popular and lose revenue. Another being the expansion of the self-catering café and souvenir shop (Brown, 2017). Those theses have complications due to lack of space to expand and limited money. Compromises include increased preparation with future exhibitions to purchase and sell related books at each event (Prescott, 2017). Likewise, to improve customer satisfaction and usability in the cafe, with printed instructions for the coffee machine, which was a frequent complaint. Similarly, to add a donation jar by the device or within the area for spare change left over from visitor coffee and piece of cake purchase.

However, not all suggestions were directly related to in-store revenue instead included social media and volunteers, both of whom indirectly bring about money for the museum. Social media to begin helps spread knowledge of the site to new clients. Likewise, a more extensive client base results in more recognition from prominent organisations and business who could provide large donations, grants or sponsorship for exhibitions and events, all of which can significantly assist the museum (Mendoza, 2017). Another example is with the availability of online donations making it much easier for potential gifts to come about.

In comparison, volunteers have a different role; they reduce the cost of paid staff in the archive, reception and the maintenance of the site, they are the backbone of any heritage site.

Next was a part of my initiative to help provide ideas on proposed funding opportunities, most coming from important heritage resource sites and research from competitive organisations. Examples include school visitations that were dropped previously due to expense, positive social impact thus giving a higher chance of newer clients and old ones returning. Diversifying audiences (AIM - Association of Independent Museums, 2017) would likewise appeal to more visitors, events to boost awareness and then onto working with council and authorities to promote partnership with tourism boards and to ask for increased funding grants by the council, though these have a downfall of any increase could result in the funder having control over ideas and exhibitions.

Community Report

'Increased participation can also have benefits for the individuals and populations involved: there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the range of benefits museums offer, including to people's health, education, and wellbeing.' – Mendoza review page 40

This report is to propose how the Red House Museum as a community orientated institute can broaden its influence and try to help the most vulnerable in Christchurch's society (Figure 3). In contrast to the other two reports which were suggested by management, this one was of my recommendations and thus, more of an interest to research and write up.

Within this paper, several different sections of community participation appeared, most notably focuses like mental health, homelessness and financial difficulty. Each with points of interest that have achievable suggestions, likewise, linked with resources and sites of which goes into more depth and detail on how to go about enacting them. Followed by a short paragraph bringing up resources that hold useful information but not directly involved with any one point. Such as the Museum Association as an organisation set up 'Museums change lives.' (Museumsassociation.org, 2017) Set up to educate museums on how they can make a difference to the community. This can be done through improved health and wellbeing, environmental and better communities and engagement as the main categories. Alongside, a list of MAs own suggestions.

Similarly. Values and Frames site set up by Common clause foundation developed by world leading associations on how charities and business can open their approaches to improving environmental and social problems (Valuesandframes.org, 2019).

Mental health in recent years has become a more recognised problem in society but severely lacks funds to cater or help everyone. Consequently, community institutions such as museums have proposed ways that heritage sites can help, or as much as they can. To be an institute/building for a professional to use to help young and elderly with mental health problems. Potentially to be in cooperation with local authorities to assist outside of the NHS. However, this would be a prevention strategy and alternative treatment where appropriate (Mendoza, 2017). Not to be mistaken for more severe treatments where available but to be used with minor problems or where the waiting list is long

Art therapy sessions, which has already started in art galleries, have been gaining popularity in recent years with long NHS waiting lists (Patmali, 2017). Similarly, art and craft events which have scientifically shown to decrease stress, which can offset minor illnesses and help prevent bigger ones such as dementia (Museumsassociation.org, 2019). On that note, Red House within the year gained funding to renovate an outbuilding to provide a dementia café that can give a quiet area for carers and patients to relax and join groups (Grassby, 2019). To increase the effects outreach 'history boxes' was suggested in the report to be sent to care homes and schools as a mental stimulant and memory jogger.

Differently, homeless and financially struggling ideas aim towards cooperation with an outside organisation (Museumsassociation.org, 2019). In this case, a Homeless shelter and a food bank, this way, Red House is used solely as a collection point, both in easy access to locals, promoting visitors of the exhibitions and boosting community awareness. The

external organisations can guide the museum in what is wanted and how to arrange for donations.

In conclusion, points made in the paper were of possible standard and received well by management. Notably, ones like dementia are easier to achieve, then from scratch due to the lottery fund for dementia café (Grassby, 2019). Likewise, these suggestions coincide with HCT aims for community involvement and as part of a more significant heritage movement. Though for various reasons such as limited staff and lack of funds, I hope to see Red House have a more extensive community influence and impact in the future. I believe I was allowed to write this paper due to discussing research on community impacts and due to limited time for staff to do it themselves.

CONCLUSION

Throughout my work experience, there were several issues with the Red House Museum. To start, with recent losses of staff, the new manager changed roles suddenly from community coordinator to manager without experience, so miscommunication and lack of communication with volunteers were prevalent. However, with time, training and more transparent correspondence, this issue should improve.

However, more significant problems reside in the archives as brought up in earlier pages. Most devastating was regular archive volunteer turn over. Consequently, resulting in a mismatch of multiple archive organisation systems in place. Similarly, archives keep getting added too without frequent updates to the inventory list or audits so often new unregistered pieces are present and missing documents. Though professional archivist could overcome, this brought in to re-categorise the archive and making it easier to maintain by volunteers.

Next is an issue faced by museums over the country, which is the ever-growing lack of storage space for artefacts. It is made worse by new influxes of objects every day by donors wanting to keep alive their or a relatives history by giving it to the museum, further at a disadvantage by legal limitations in place about the disposal of objects or transferring to other museums (Museumsassociation.org, 2017). Legally donors must be contacted before destruction or any living descendant. Reliance on old donation papers can cause more problems due to holding out of date information. Furthermore, the Red House is a listed building that cannot be expanded to keep all the collections. Also affecting HCT who hold all Hampshire's collection through the disposal of objects is slowly overcoming this, it is still a time-consuming task.

Additionally, volunteers are one of Red Houses key attributes, who have a significant say in what happens at the museum, from events to exhibitions, which is unlike other museums who use volunteers as unpaid maintenance staff to only do the bidding of management. However, rarely trained retired heritage or archive professionals thus are unable to care for artefacts or keep organisation as well as possible (GEM, 2018). Yet, this can be sorted simply by regular training, providing better conservation and maintenance for the museum. In continuation, discussed during the archive meeting mentioned earlier with HCT staff agreeing to provide proper training. As a result, keeping down costs and the chance of infestation.

To summarise points brought up during the introduction and to give concluding thoughts. Firstly, though my academic skills are of the same degree level, the experience learnt by report writing, and research has increased. Likewise, skills with public speaking have improved due to regular interaction and chances to take a leading role.

Likewise, though for the main part aims are as stated, there are fundamental differences such as the unspoken aim to make all the heritage institutions sustainable businesses (Mendoza, 2017). As well as, to run with limited resources, in both workforce and finances with an overpopulated system with new demands for community impact.

Overall my experience met and exceeded expectation. Hence, due to a preconceived expectation of being limited to uninfluential roles that would have occurred if at any other heritage site. However, I was treated as an equal, taught various positions in the museum and allowed to explore areas of interest and take on active roles that will hopefully have an impact in the museums' efficiency and capabilities.

After experiencing the museum from within, there are some points of context to the organisation that were recognised. Such as that there are substantial funding difficulties within Red House as well as all heritage institutes over the country (Mendoza, 2017). As a result, proposed schemes are unable to be implemented, and old projects shut down. New staff left unhired, and old let of thus facilities cannot be maintained. It is a national problem and many previously council-run museums are now private running on entry fees, therefore, limiting entry.

Further industrial truths are the political implications of museums, including, ethical questions taught in class. However, also the struggle between curators and funding bodies. In this case, councils that fund sites, resulting in museums no longer being neutral sites but somewhat biased to suit the benefactors; conservative councils' equal conservative pro exhibitions. Subsequently, this is no different at Red House even if they try to reduce political influences while curators try not to antagonise maintaining a thin line of free speech and funding.

An end notes to finish this report is due to confidentiality considerations for volunteers there will be lacking photos. Secondly, due to chronic illness over working during this placement resulted in hospitalisation from over exhaustion. (Figure 7)

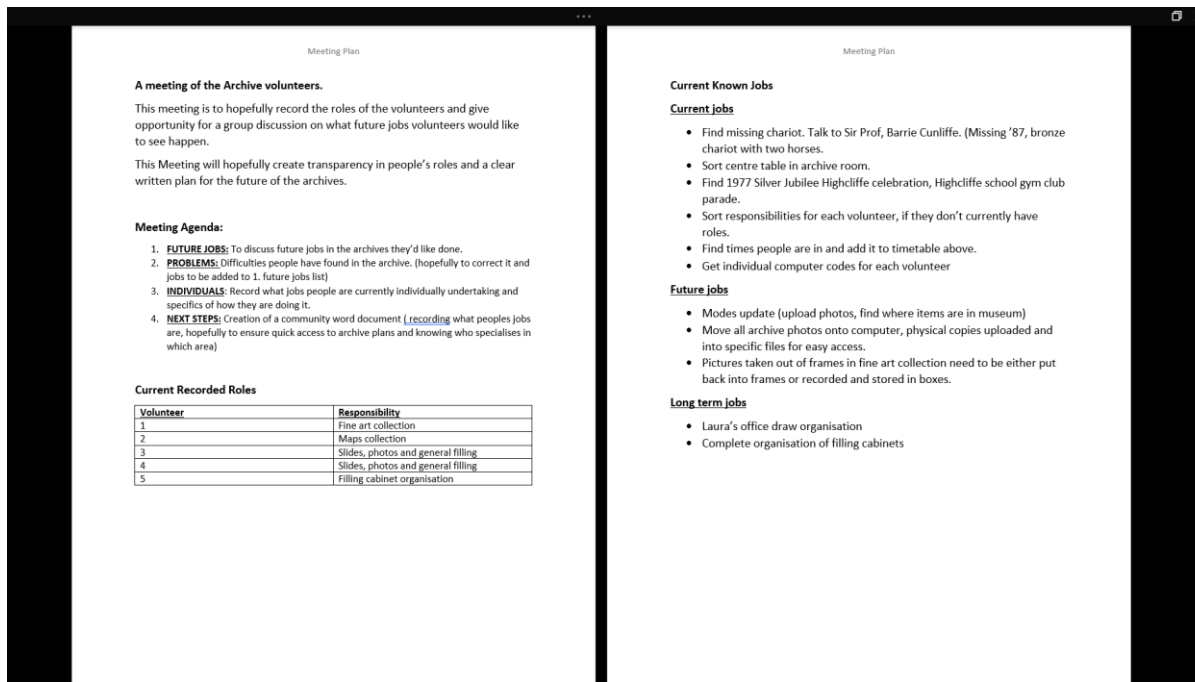


Figure 2, Photo of meeting agenda and current known jobs provided to volunteers and staff for archive group meeting. Written up by Amy Kirby, names of volunteers replaced by numbers to provide confidentiality.

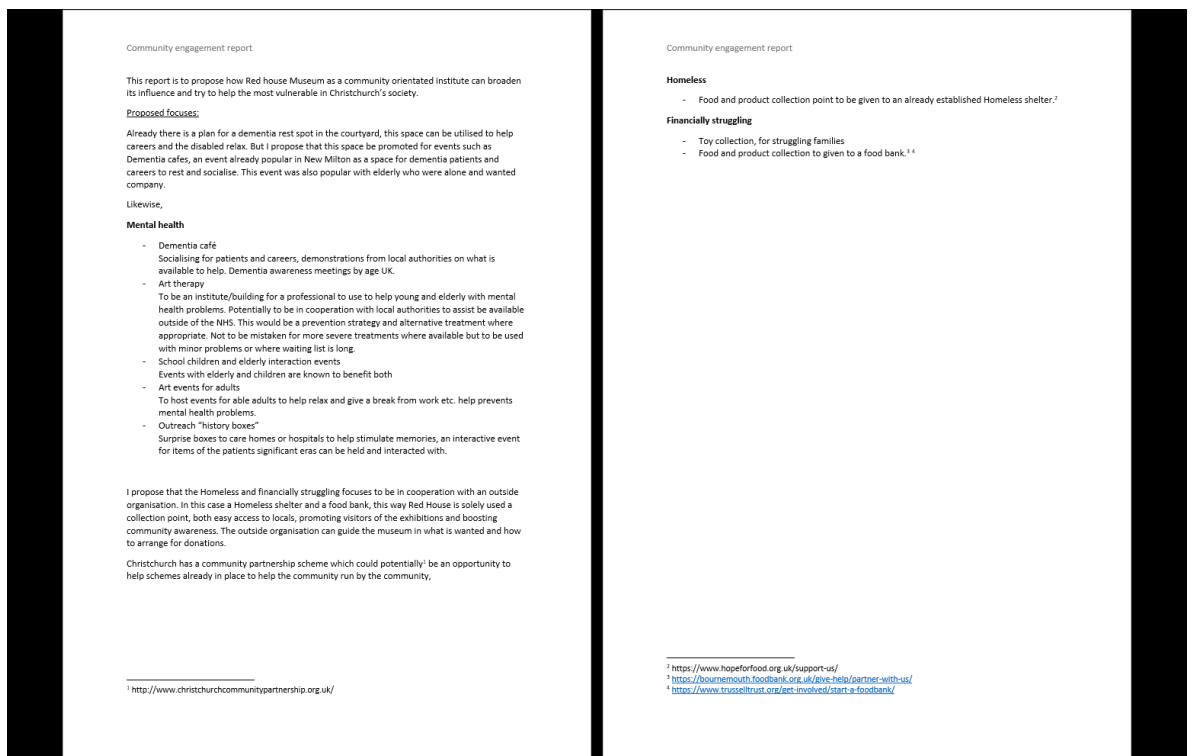


Figure 3, picture of community engagement report for Red House Museum created by Amy Kirby.

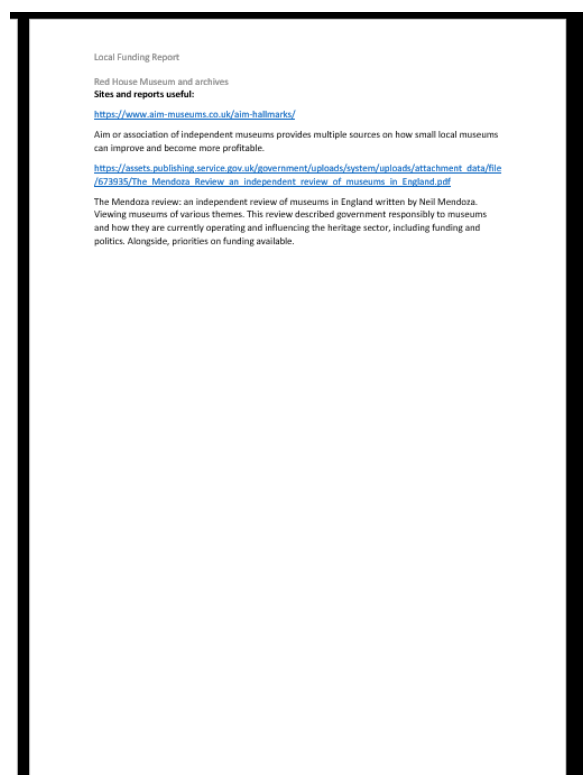
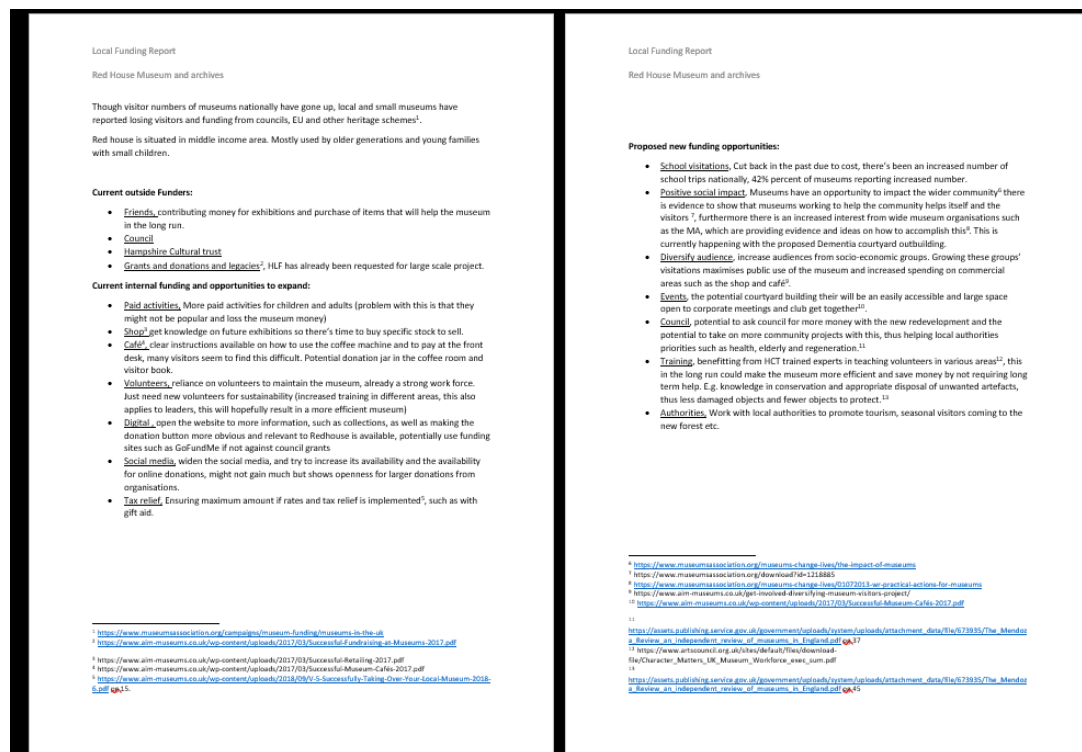


Figure 4, photo of local funding report for Red house Museum, Written by Amy Kirby.

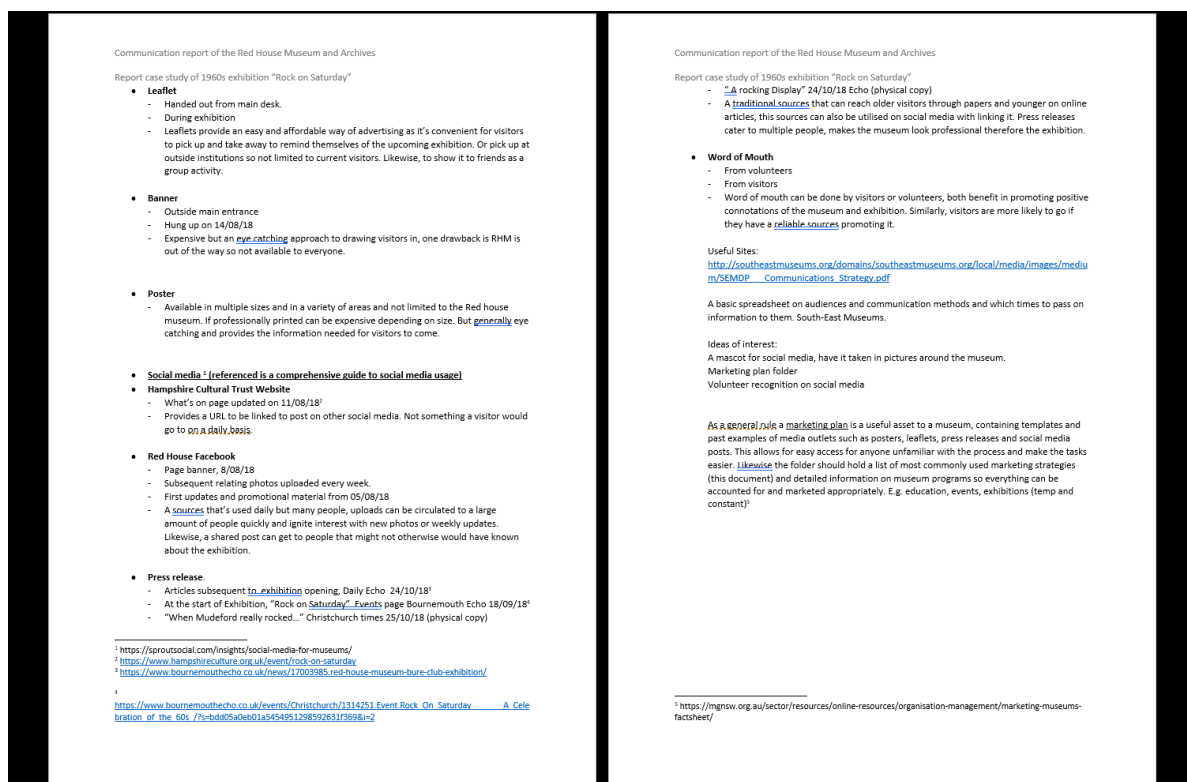


Figure 5, Photo of communications report for Red House Museum, report case study of 1960s exhibition. Created to document current media techniques in place and links to external resources.

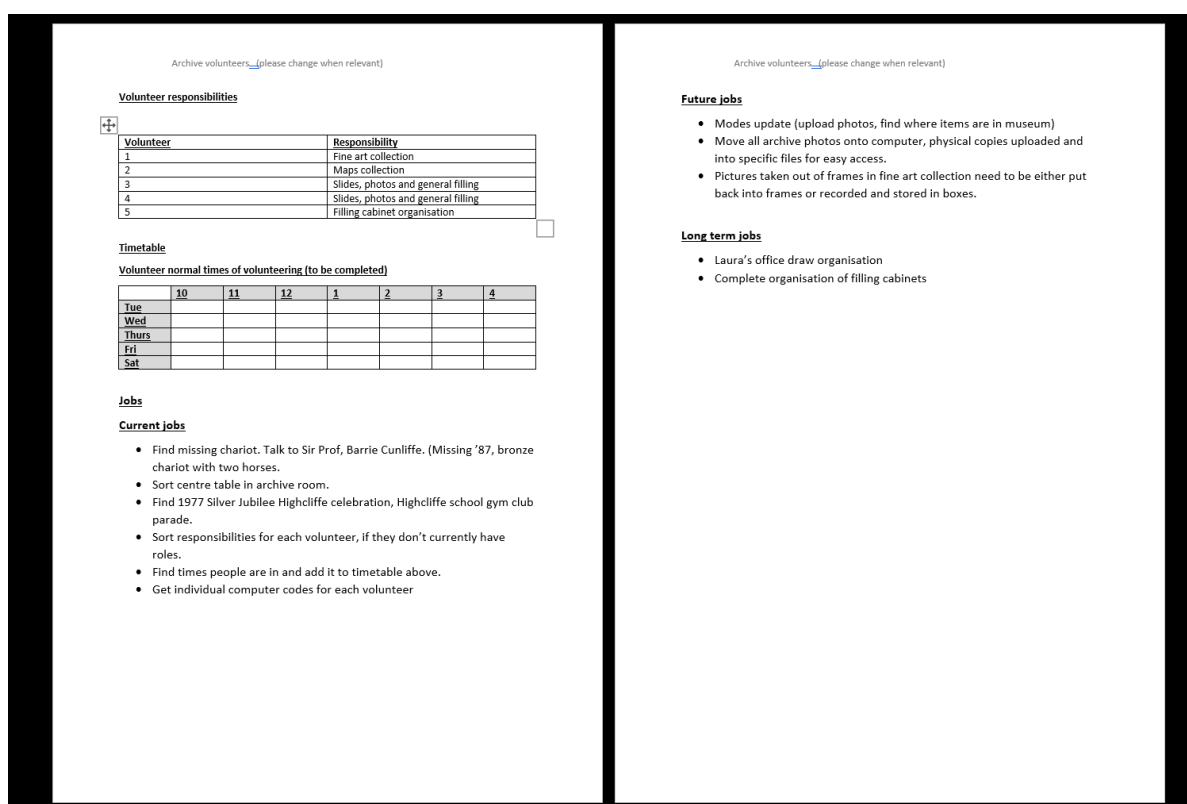


Figure 6, Photo of Archive volunteer responsibility and job spreadsheet. Accessible to staff and volunteers to update. This is older version unfilled as to protect confidentiality. Newer job list found on Figure 2 meeting plan. Written by Amy Kirby

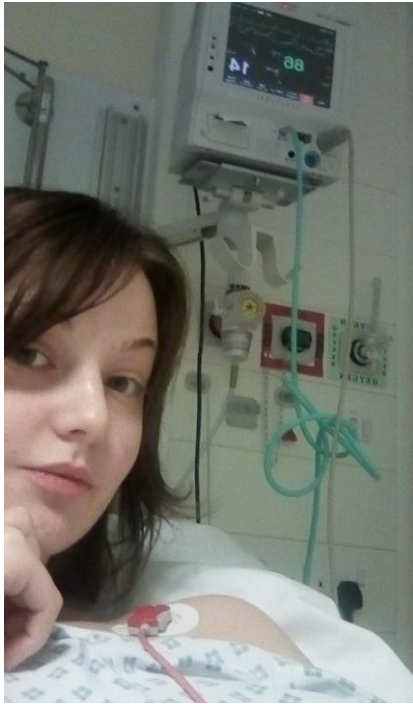


Figure 7, photo of myself (Amy Kirby) in hospital from over exhaustion of work experience.

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