

# ENGAGING AUDIENCES IN AREAS OF LOW CULTURAL PROVISION: THE CONCEPT OF THE 'POP-UP' MUSEUM EXPERIENCE\*

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## Background

Since 2014, the Fitzwilliam Museum has been applying scientific analysis and advanced imaging techniques, such as Computed Tomography (CT) scanning, to the study of the manufacture and decoration of its ancient Egyptian coffins. Internal and external team members have included Egyptologists, conservators, a pigment specialist, an expert in historical painting techniques, a specialist in ancient Egyptian woodworking and a consultant radiologist, all working towards a better understanding of the industry involved in producing these objects.

This research has successfully reached various audiences via a major exhibition and associated publication *Death on the Nile: Uncovering the Afterlife of Ancient Egypt* (23 February – 22 May 2016). 91,782 people attended the exhibition over 13 weeks (one of the highest exhibition attendances on record for the Museum). Audience demographics, however, seemed to indicate a noticeable lack of social and economic diversity among visitors. Two audience surveys were conducted on 5-10 April and 3-8 May. Of those interviewed, 67% were educated to degree level or equivalent, and the majority lived in the local Cambridge area. More recently, an online resource was created to publish the results of our work ([egyptiancoffins.org](http://egyptiancoffins.org)) but this only has a reach among people with access to computer facilities and an Internet connection.

As part of an institution-wide effort to develop more socially diverse access the Fitzwilliam Egyptian coffins team developed a 'Pop-Up' Museum, inspired by an outreach project initiated at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Australia in 2012.<sup>1</sup>

## What is a 'Pop-Up' Museum?

A 'Pop-Up' Museum involves active researchers (including Egyptologists and conservators) taking genuine museum objects, craft replicas, hands-on activities and

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\* This article is derived from a paper delivered by proxy at the 2019 ICOM-CIPEG meeting in Kyoto, Japan.

<sup>1</sup> This complemented the award-winning exhibition Faith, fashion, fusion: Muslim women's style in Australia, which explored Australia's emerging modest fashion market and the work of a new generation of Muslim fashion designers, retailers and bloggers. To address the underrepresentation of Sydney's Muslim community at the museum, curators of the exhibition, Glynis Jones, and Melanie Pitkin, travelled into the heart of Sydney's Muslim community with objects from the collection, activities and giveaways in order to broaden the reach of their research, strengthen community relations and raise awareness of the Museum and its exhibition.

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digital experiences out into communities, to reach people who might not otherwise have access to this research (fig. 1). What makes the ‘Pop-Up’ unique is:

- 1) the opportunity for the public to interact first-hand with subject specialists rather than intermediaries (e.g. educational professionals);
- 2) the element of surprise – we ‘pop-up’ in places where people would not, typically, expect to have a cultural encounter: for example, a pub, supermarket and in public thoroughfares; and
- 3) the opportunity for us to interact with new and diverse audiences many of whom have little, if any, experience of visiting museums.



*Fig. 1: Members of the Fitzwilliam Egyptian coffins team (L-R), Melanie Pitkin, Charlotte Thompson-Mitchell (intern March-July 2019) and Helen Strudwick, ‘popping-up’ at The Wheatsheaf Inn (Wetherspoon’s Pub) in Wisbech, England. (Image © Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge.)*

With the support of funding bodies including the University of Cambridge’s Arts and Humanities Impact Fund, the Global Challenges Research Fund and ICOM UK – British Council, we developed and delivered 24 ‘Pop-Up’ Museum experiences between January and November 2019 in underprivileged parts of Cambridgeshire and in Egypt.

The Cambridgeshire project predominantly focused on Wisbech – a town with few transport links, about 1 hour 20 minutes’ drive from Cambridge. It is reported to be

one of the most deprived towns in the whole of the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> About one third of residents are non-native English speakers from Eastern Europe; there is a high rate of unemployment, and many others are on the basic minimum wage. According to the 2011 census, 35.1% have no qualifications and 19.1% are estimated to have literacy skills at entry level or below.<sup>3</sup> This is in stark contrast to its near neighbour – Cambridge.

The Egyptian component of the project, which is ongoing, is founded on a partnership with the Egyptian Museum Cairo (EMC). It aims to work with EMC curators and conservators, building their confidence and skills to develop and deliver their own ‘Pop-Ups’, which will incorporate their own collections’ research, while also training other colleagues across the country as part of a wider peer-to-peer training network. To date, this has been achieved in two locations, Cairo and Damietta, with further locations planned.<sup>4</sup>

### What can people expect to see and do at the ‘Pop-Up’ Museum?

In order to best engage diverse, and often non-academic, audiences with our research, the content of the ‘Pop-Up’ Museum aims to be accessible, relevant, multi-layered, tactile and visually stimulating. It is concentrated on three elements:

- 1) carpentry;
- 2) pigments and painting;
- 3) ancient Egyptian artefacts.

The content must also be flexible enough to allow those presenting to adapt it for people of different learning levels and interests.

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<sup>2</sup> National Conversation, <<http://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-report.National-Conversation.17.9.18.pdf>> (accessed 6 February 2020) and “Report singles out part of Wisbech as being particularly hit hard by child poverty” <<https://www.cambstimes.co.uk/news/more-than-70-000-people-in-poverty-in-cambridgeshire-1-6093858>> (accessed 6 February 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Cambridgeshire County Council 2016 <<https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Wisbech-2020-Baseline-Evidence-Profile-2016.pdf>> (accessed 6 February 2020).

<sup>4</sup> At the time of writing, the Fitzwilliam Egyptian coffins team was also working in collaboration with EMC staff and Ministry colleagues in the Faiyum (with the generous support of the Global Challenges Research Fund) to develop and implement a series of workshops and ‘Pop-Up’ Museums alongside contemporary craftsmen in the Faiyum focused on the production of Roman-period Faiyum mummy portraits.

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Fig. 2: Detail of the ‘Pop-Up’ Museum showing the painting activity informed by the work of Elsbeth Geldhof, a specialist in historical painting techniques. (Image © Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge.)

### Our ‘Pop-Up’ offers the following experiences:

- Two genuine artefacts – a face and a hand from ‘yellow’ coffins<sup>5</sup> – displayed in a secure, airtight showcase (only in Cambridgeshire);<sup>6</sup>
- A selection of craft replica tools, based on originals from ancient Egypt, many of which are similar to those used today, also displayed in a secure, airtight showcase;
- A 1:1 scale craft replica of a small rectangular coffin believed to have been made for a dog;<sup>7</sup>
- Craft replica joints for handling;<sup>8</sup>
- An opportunity to make a replica ancient Egyptian paint brush and paint with it (fig. 2);

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<sup>5</sup> Fitzwilliam Museum E.GA.507.1947 and E.GA.2861.1943 respectively, dated to about 1070–945 BC.

<sup>6</sup> As discussed below, we have not used real museum objects in our ‘Pop-Up’ Museum displays in Cairo and Damietta.

<sup>7</sup> Fitzwilliam Museum E.47.1902, from Beni Hasan; “Dog coffin”, <<https://egyptiancoffins.org/coffins/dog-coffin>> (accessed 5 February 2020).

<sup>8</sup> The tools, coffin and joints were all made for the project by specialist in ancient Egyptian woodworking, Dr Geoffrey Killen.

- iPads showing, amongst other things, a series of short films from [egyptiancoffins.org](http://egyptiancoffins.org), which demonstrate how the ancient tools were used and a 3D digital animation generated from CT scans of the Twenty First Dynasty coffin box of Nespawersheft (Fitzwilliam Museum E.1.1822);<sup>9</sup>
- A3 colour photographs. These facilitate our explanations of the role of CT scanning and X-radiography in coffin studies and provide contextual images of the Fitzwilliam Museum and pertinent sites in Egypt.

We also offer free giveaways, including the project's most recent publication<sup>10</sup> and, for children, bookmarks, and imitation scarabs.

### The 'Pop-Up' Museum in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire

We decided to pilot our 'Pop-Up' Museums in Wisbech, not only because of its disadvantaged status but also because of an existing relationship between the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) consortium<sup>11</sup> and the Wisbech & Fenlands Museum (WFM). We worked closely with WFM, the local council and local businesses, which were identified as possible venues for our project based on:

- 1) the recommendation of WFM staff;
- 2) the demography of those who frequent them; and
- 3) their unexpected nature as a venue. (Who would expect to come face-to-face with a 3000-year-old ancient Egyptian coffin fragment inside a pub?)

It took time to establish trust and rapport with members of the local community, beginning in the early months of our project, simultaneously with the development of the content of the 'Pop-Up' and the sourcing of materials and equipment for setting it up. Our Museum technicians created mounts and object labels, and repurposed secure airtight showcases (together with the equipment to monitor their internal environment) from previous Fitzwilliam displays. We purchased trestle tables which would continue to have a long use life outside the 'Pop-Up' project, designed promotional banners in-house (printed externally), purchased two iPads secured in existing protective cases, sourced materials for our painting activity from our Education Department and obtained pigments from field trips to Egypt, as well as from art materials suppliers. We searched marshy streambeds in Cambridge for reeds, the stems of which would make replica ancient Egyptian pens. We borrowed an all-weather gazebo for outdoor venues from Wisbech Town Council (fig. 3). The greatest expense for the project, however, was hire of a suitably large vehicle and fuel for the

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<sup>9</sup> "Animation of a CT scan of the box coffin of Nespawersheft", <<https://vimeo.com/356279697>> (accessed 5 February 2020). This 3D digital animation was produced in collaboration with creative industry partner ThinkSee3D Ltd with the support of an AHRC Fellowship awarded to Pitkin in 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Dawson 2018 (also available in Arabic).

<sup>11</sup> The Fitzwilliam Museum is a consortium member.

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3-hour return journey to and from Wisbech. Travel, object and public liability insurance was covered by the Museum’s insurance and public liability cover.



*Fig. 3: The ‘Pop-Up’ Museum appearing in the public thoroughfare outside the Wisbech & Fenlands Museum. (Image © Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge.)*

Between 14 March and 26 June 2019, 16 ‘Pop-Up’ Museum experiences (averaging 4 hours each) were delivered in eight venues around Wisbech. By surprising our audiences in these locations – not advertised until the day of the event – we could catch people off-guard as they were going about their day-to-day activities without any expectation of having a cultural encounter. It also helped us to manage crowds and minimise risk to the objects. The venues<sup>12</sup> we ‘appeared’ in, and the frequency at each location, were:

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<sup>12</sup> The Fitzwilliam Egyptian coffins project would like to thank Martin Baldwin, Manager of The Wheatsheaf Inn; Anita Grodkiewicz, Manager of the Rosmini Community Centre; Susanah Farmer, former Deputy Town Clerk at Wisbech Town Council; Kevin Smith, Manager of the Horsefair Shopping

- The Wheatsheaf Inn (Wetherspoon's Pub): 4 visits
- Rosmini Community Centre: 3 visits
- Wisbech Town Council Market Place: 3 visits
- Horsefair Shopping Centre: 2 visits
- Outside the Wisbech & Fenlands Museum: 1 visit
- Morrisons Supermarket: 1 visit
- Oasis Community Centre: 1 visit
- Wisbech Food Bank: 1 visit

We were surprised to find that, although several of these venues were within 200m of each other, our audience makeup was varied as shown by our qualitative and quantitative evaluation. At first, we invited participants to complete a short, written survey to try and capture audience demographics, what they liked or did not like about the 'Pop-Up' and what they would remember from their experience. However, we soon found that this evaluation was not appropriate to audiences with relatively low levels of literacy, visitors with learning difficulties and the high proportion of people with no English or English as a Second Language (ESL). This approach was simply inadequate for capturing the breadth of our audience, many of whom struggled to understand the questionnaire. Results from the first twenty surveys we were able to gather showed that more than half of respondents (eleven) were male from the local area and aged 55 or above. Education levels were wide ranging, with one man indicating he did not finish primary school, while several preferred not to reveal their educational level. Several individuals had a low or negligible literacy level, particularly at the Wetherspoon's pub. We also encountered migrant workers and homeless people, especially at the Rosmini Community Centre and the Foodbank.

Subsequently, we developed three questions supported by an emoji chart, designed to measure how our interactions affected people's sense of wellbeing. Interviews were verbal, with responses recorded by us, a process with which our participants were more comfortable. We also ran observation studies of approximately 30 individuals engaging with the 'Pop-Up' to measure the amount of time spent and what aspects of the 'Pop-Up' they engaged with and in what order. We also documented our conversations and interactions with visitors.

The results indicated that almost all participants reported feeling happier or inspired as a result of having interacted with our 'Pop-Up'. Audiences also claimed to have:

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Centre; Deborah Thulborn, Community Champion of Morrisons Supermarket; Martin Lawrence and Penny Walkinshaw, Board Members of the Wisbech & Fenlands Museum; Robert Bell, Curator of the Wisbech & Fenlands Museum; Chris Stevens of the Oasis Community Centre and The Reverend Kevin Newton of Wisbech Baptist Church for their support and facilitation of our 'Pop-Up' Museum at each of their respective workplaces.

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- Felt closer to their community;
- Appreciated the opportunity to interact with researchers from the Fitzwilliam and its collections;
- Learned something new about ancient Egypt;
- Were inspired to find out more about ancient Egypt, the Fitzwilliam Museum and/or their local museum;
- Understood research processes better; and
- Were more inspired to visit museums.

It became clear that there were very few interactions between participants and the WFM. As a way of bridging this gap, we curated a small display of the WFM’s own coffin fragments within a separate vitrine in their museum. This was accompanied by information linking the display to the ‘Pop-Up’ and [egyptiancoffins.org](http://egyptiancoffins.org). Through the Rosmini Community Centre and Age UK, we also organised two free bus trips from Wisbech to the Fitzwilliam Museum. These included a curator-led tour of the Egyptian galleries, morning tea and lunch and were enjoyed by 25 people.

### The ‘Pop-Up’ Museum in Cairo

A second phase for this activity was conceived as part of a project funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), working in partnership with colleagues at the EMC. This comprised:

- 1) A series of lectures (February – March 2019) and a 4-day coffins’ workshop (June 2019) for curators and conservators at the EMC, led by members of the Fitzwilliam Egyptian coffins team, with contributions from Professor Nesrin El Hadidi (Cairo University) and Dr Nour Badr (Grand Egyptian Museum Conservation Centre). In addition to supporting colleagues’ documentation and publication activities, the lectures and workshop provided the practical and theoretical background, which underpins the content of the ‘Pop-Up’ Museum (fig. 4). Subjects covered coffin identification, dating and typologies; the interpretation of X-radiography and CT-scanning images, and their use in coffin studies;<sup>13</sup> the identification and use of different species of timbers in ancient Egyptian woodwork; tools and joinery methods (and the opportunity to try these out); identifying and understanding ancient pigments and painting techniques; methods for recording texts and iconography on coffins; and different methods of research communication, including digital modes and community outreach.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Both techniques are available at the EMC.

<sup>14</sup> A version of this workshop was first delivered to an international audience of 23 conservators and Egyptologists in Cambridge in 2016.



- 2) A theoretical training session in the development and delivery of the ‘Pop-Up’ Museum (July 2019), followed by two practical, hands-on sessions with the public.



*Fig. 4: Curators and conservators at the Egyptian Museum Cairo participating in a session on ancient Egyptian woodworking and coffin construction with expert Dr Geoffrey Killen. (Image © Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge.)*

The first ‘Pop-Up’ venue was in the exit foyer of the EMC, adjacent to the Museum shop. EMC staff were keen from the outset, although it soon became apparent that public-facing engagement was something that few of them had experienced before:

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*“I was very quiet and reluctant at first and didn’t know what to say, but with time and watching other researchers at the ‘Pop-Up’, I became more confident”.*

- EMC conservator (July 2019)

*“It’s the first time [I’ve spoken with the public like this before]...at first I stayed back and waited for people to come to me, but [my colleague] told me to try and bring people over. He said to get the English-speaking people, but I wanted to do Arabic...I started giving out flyers to people, but they were worried I was selling something. After 30 minutes...I started to [identify] people who I thought would or wouldn’t be interested”.*

- EMC curator (July 2019)

From these comments it is clear that our live training sessions were essential in helping our Egyptian colleagues adapt their content and delivery styles to different audiences. It gave them confidence to approach people who seemed interested but unsure about the ‘Pop-Up’ display and to allow themselves to be guided by visitors’ individual interests.

It was not practical to take objects from the Fitzwilliam’s collections to Egypt for the ‘Pop-Ups’, nor possible to use items from the EMC collections, so we substituted a replica section of the inner coffin of Nespawersheft. For the remaining content of the ‘Pop-Up’, we provided a complete set of duplicates of the materials used in the Wisbech sessions, enabling our EMC colleagues to deliver ‘Pop-Ups’ independently. To ensure sustainability, we sourced as much of the equipment and content as we could in Egypt, thereby supporting local industry and economy. Cairene craftsmen used local materials to make the replica tools<sup>15</sup> and made rope and string for the creation of paintbrushes. Consumables for the activities were all sourced in Egypt. Promotional banners, flyers and labels were translated into Arabic and printed in Cairo. The Perspex showcases, mounts and a newly made craft replica of the dog coffin<sup>16</sup> were gifted from the Fitzwilliam Museum. We also hired a vehicle and driver as required.

The second ‘Pop-Up’ venue was the Pinocchio Furniture Store in Maadi.<sup>17</sup> Pinocchio produces high-end, ready-to-assemble furniture inspired by ancient

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<sup>15</sup> We would like to thank Professor Nesrin El Hadidi and Professor Mai Rifai of Cairo University for facilitating production of these replicas.

<sup>16</sup> Our grateful thanks go to Dr Geoffrey Killen for making this replica.

<sup>17</sup> Pinocchio Furniture, <<https://www.pinocchio-furniture.com>> (accessed 5 February 2020).

Egyptian designs and technologies. Its headquarters are in Damietta, but there are retail outlets in Maadi and Mohandaseen.

In contrast to the surprise nature of our ‘Pop-Ups’ in England, and our earlier trial at the EMC, the Pinocchio Store created a Facebook event and contacted their client database one week in advance. This meant we attracted a mixed audience, including those with a professional background in design/woodworking, university professors specialising in furniture history and design and also celebrity customers, including Egyptian novelist and critic Salwa Bakr (fig. 5).



*Fig. 5: Egyptian novelist and critic, Salwa Bakr (back left), in discussion with Melanie Pitkin at the ‘Pop-Up’ Museum at the Pinocchio Furniture Store, Cairo. (Image © Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge.)*

We were joined by curators, conservators and students from Cairo University who had attended the training session the previous day. It was clear that our colleagues had grown in confidence, both in setting up the activity and in engaging visitors. This included encouraging participants to extend the conversation. For example, one of the conservators shared his knowledge of ancient Maadi culture with a visitor who was completely unaware of it, despite having lived in the suburb for many years. Visitors really appreciated the interaction, which brought the content of the ‘Pop-Up’ to life, awakening new stories and ways of seeing. Some commented that it was important for young Egyptians to know more about their ancient past and the skills, time and handwork that went into producing their material culture.

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*“What is happening here goes beyond the museum. It encourages and raises questions...We are now living in an identity crisis and a phase of civilization downfall, hence we have to re-explore and search again for our roots, our origin, our ancient identity...That’s why I think this project responds to re-introducing the ancient Egyptian civilization with its fine details, techniques and development across time which is crucial to know, pass on to others and remind ourselves with.”*

- Salwa Bakr, Maadi (July 2019)

Afterwards we held a debriefing session with our Egyptian colleagues to discuss how to make the ‘Pop-Up’ Museum a sustainable and independent project for them in future. We also found out how their understanding of coffins had changed since we began working with them earlier in the year. The general consensus was that these museum professionals now see coffins differently: previously they had not thought very much about how they were made and decorated and the contribution this makes to Egyptology.

### The ‘Pop-Up’ Museum in Damietta

In November 2019, members of the Fitzwilliam Egyptian coffins team returned to Egypt to deliver a workshop in Alexandria<sup>18</sup> and a set of ‘Pop-Up’ experiences in Damietta, this time handing over greater responsibility for both to our Egyptian colleagues.<sup>19</sup> We also had copies of an Arabic translation of our publication ‘How to Make an Egyptian Coffin’<sup>20</sup> for distribution.

Damietta (Dumyat in Arabic) is a port city on the Mediterranean coast and the modern-day centre of furniture production in Egypt, an industry that has flourished there since the 19th century. Currently, there are about 35,000 registered local workshops, as well as numerous furniture factories. These include Pinocchio Furniture, with which we had collaborated in Maadi. Under the guidance of its owner, Amr Orensa, three venues in Damietta were selected: Pinocchio Furniture factory; Misr Public Library; and Olympia Sports and Leisure Club.

The session at the Pinocchio Factory provided a new experience not only for the workers there, but also for the Cambridge/Cairo team. The designers, production staff and skilled carpenters were invited to try out the replica tools and to compare their own practice with that of the ancient craftsmen (fig 6). They took up this offer with great enthusiasm and immediately engaged in detailed discussions of their tools and

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<sup>18</sup> The workshop was held at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria (17–18 November) for 38 local curators and conservators.

<sup>19</sup> Conservators Eid Rezk Mertah, Mohamed Ibrahim, Nour Mohamed Badr and curators Moustafa Saad Ahmed and Gehad Shawky Ali together with Museum consultant and our local ‘enabler’ Sara Hany Abed in Alexandria. Conservators Mohamed Ragab, Adel Mohamed, Nour Mohamed Badr, curators Moustafa Saad Ahmed and Rania Diaa, together with Sara Hany Abed in Damietta.

<sup>20</sup> Translated by Sara Hany Abed.

techniques with Dr Geoffrey Killen, specialist in ancient Egyptian woodworking and a key member of the Cambridge coffins' team, who had joined us in Damietta for this activity.



*Fig. 6: Dr Geoffrey Killen and Dr Nour Mohamed Badr demonstrating the bow drill with carpenters at the Pinocchio furniture factory in Damietta. (Image © Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge.)*

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The ‘Pop-Ups’ at the public library and the sports club followed a similar pattern to those held in Wisbech and Cairo. However, as with the event in Maadi, these had been advertised in advance on social media by our hosts and, as a result, we were slightly overwhelmed with visitors. Over the two afternoon/evening sessions more than 350 people dropped in, including families, academics, local archaeologists, workers involved in the furniture industry and many furniture design students.

The principal challenges we faced, therefore, were logistical both in terms of needing to adapt the set-up quickly to cope with the numbers and having sufficient time for detailed briefings with the team. However, these issues were more than counterbalanced by the excitement, energy and enthusiasm of both our collaborators and the public.

A distinctive feature of these ‘Pop-Ups’ was that we were taking our outreach model to a provincial setting with less cultural provision than is available in Cairo and less familiarity with ancient Egyptian artefacts. Damietta does not have its own history museum.

In addition to written questionnaires, we made 18 recorded interviews with ‘Pop-Up’ visitors across the venues. Much of the feedback relayed how astonished and delighted people were to see such an event in Damietta, how impressed they were by the passion and professionalism of the presenters and how much they derived from the practical activities. A young physics student summed up well the reaction to this intimate view into the everyday world of the ancient craftsman:

*“When we think about ancient Egyptians, we always think about how great and extraordinary they were, almost legendary, but today, seeing the phases of their work and breaking it down literally and metaphorically to explore its story made me see their human side....When we see the phases of manufacturing, we can see the logic behind it, which one can relate to.”<sup>21</sup>*

- Student, Damietta (November 2019)

## Impact and Future Direction<sup>22</sup>

In conventional museum practice, many direct engagements with audiences are undertaken primarily by learning and engagement professionals or trained volunteers. Our project has challenged this approach not only by putting audiences in direct contact and consultation with the research team but by doing this in some unlikely and unexpected settings in both Wisbech and Egypt.

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<sup>21</sup> Space does not permit us to give more detailed data on feedback here but interested readers can contact the authors herein to receive more information.

<sup>22</sup> For an extended account of the project’s impact and future directions, see: Dawson, J. 2019 “Fitzwilliam Museum Travels to Egypt with ICOM UK – British Council Travel Grant”, <<https://uk.icom.museum/resources/case-studies/fitzwilliam-museum-travels-to-egypt-with-icom-uk-british-council-travel-grant/>> (accessed 14 May 2020).

Our insights around construction, decoration and the stories of the coffins' owners, together with tactile engagement activities, have given visitors new routes into understanding Egyptian culture, helping them join together more familiar technologies with unfamiliar social and religious practices. The project has also helped us, and our Egyptian colleagues, refine the way we talk about our research and understand the benefit we gain from a two-way interaction with a more diverse range of participants than is usually encountered in the museum setting.

In Wisbech, across 16 visits, we had meaningful engagements (i.e. visits of 3 minutes or longer) with 448 people and estimate to have made an impression on a further 5,010 people who stopped by briefly (less than 3 minutes) or simply approached the tables to see what we were doing. We were surprised by the intensity of some engagements, which significantly exceeded 45 minutes on at least 12 occasions. The small display of coffin fragments from the WFM collection was on view in the Museum for 4.5 months and was seen by almost 3,000 people.

The combination of coffins' research workshops with training and practice in delivery of the 'Pop-Up' has helped our Egyptian colleagues develop their own study methods and expand their approach to outreach. They were not familiar with individual contact with members of the public and were initially hesitant. However, they gained confidence and technique quickly as they witnessed the engagement generated by the demonstrations and practical activities, realising that it is the knowledge and skills acquired from their own research that creates this level of excitement.

We have increased capacity by training 27 of the curators and conservators who attended the Cairo research workshop also to deliver the 'Pop-Up'. This has formed the foundation of a broader network of nationwide peer-to-peer training for coffins' research and 'Pop-Up' dissemination. These colleagues are now eager to embrace more opportunities to bring this out into a wider arena. Two of the co-presenters from the November events are working on delivery of a mini-workshop targeted at a small group of antiquities staff who operate in relative professional isolation in the Western Desert. Other colleagues are working on taking the 'Pop-Up' to schools in the Cairo area and to public libraries across the country.

For development and delivery of specialist training and public outreach to spread effectively and become truly sustainable, we now need more participants from the Cairo and Alexandria workshops to come forward. Our initial Cairo co-presentation team members have been using the social media groups that we set up to advocate and to encourage their colleagues. We need to provide additional support and resources remotely and specific training (e.g. specific wood-working skills with the replica tools) on the ground. We need to develop the 'hardware' of the 'Pop-Up' (e.g. table covers, banners, covers for the tools) to make it more durable and more easily transportable. We also need additional 'sets' of everything. A sustainable and affordable means of transporting all of these resources and people to deliver the 'Pop-

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Ups’ must also be found. Funding is essential but, as these activities become increasingly homegrown, the costs are low relative to the considerable professional and public reach and benefit within Egypt. We are actively seeking sponsorship.

There is now a major extension to the original project. We were asked by the EMC and the Museums Sector to develop a workshop and ‘Pop-Up’ on Roman-Egyptian mummy portraits. These will be delivered in Cairo and in the Faiyum (where most examples were made) using funding from the Global Challenges Research Fund (which also supported our initial project in Cairo in 2019) pending the current global COVID-19 pandemic.

In October 2019 our work was recognised by a University of Cambridge Vice Chancellor’s Research Impact and Engagement Award in the collaboration category.<sup>23</sup> There has also been considerable media coverage. This has included a radio interview and written article for BBC Cambridgeshire,<sup>24</sup> coverage in the Summer 2019 edition of the Wetherspoon News (which has a readership of 2 million),<sup>25</sup> the local Wisbech News,<sup>26</sup> a feature on the Alexandria workshop in the English language Daily News Egypt.<sup>27</sup> For the professional audience it was covered in The Museums Journal.<sup>28</sup>

Through talks and lectures also, we have focused on disseminating the project ideas to the public and to other museum professionals, who we hope will be inspired to adopt our model for their own collections and research.<sup>29</sup> A number of British cultural institutions, including the National Trust and V&A Museum of Childhood have already expressed interest in adapting our model.

The transferability of a ‘Pop-Up’ museum experience to any research subject matter and collecting area gives it great far-reaching potential. This type of outreach model could, in due course, become an integral part of working practice for museum

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<sup>23</sup> This award recognises outstanding achievement, innovation and creativity in devising and implementing ambitious engagement and impact plans which have the potential to create significant economic, social and cultural impact from and engagement with and for research.

<sup>23</sup> “Egyptian Coffin art in ‘pop-art’ shows around Wisbech”, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-47720757>> (accessed 10 February 2020).

<sup>24</sup> “Egyptian Coffin art in ‘pop-art’ shows around Wisbech”, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-47720757>> (accessed 10 February 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Fitzwilliam Egyptian Coffins website, “Pop-Up Museum in the Wetherspoon News”, <<https://egyptiancoffins.org/news/wetherspoonnews>> (accessed 10 February 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Thompson-Mitchell 2019: 8.

<sup>27</sup> “Delving into ancient Egyptians’ fascinating coffins world”, <<https://www.dailynewssegypt.com/2019/11/20/digging-into-ancient-egyptians-fascinating-coffins-world/>> (accessed 10 February 2020)

<sup>28</sup> Mulhearn 2020: 22–25.

<sup>29</sup> Pitkin, M & Strudwick, H. “The Pop-Up Museum”, <https://egyptiancoffins.org/news/icomkyoto> (Downloaded 12th May 2020); Pitkin, M. “I only came in for courgettes. The Pop-Up Museum – Ancient Egyptian Coffins Project” delivered at the *3D in Museums* conference, Judge Business School, 3 June 2019 & Pitkin, M & Wexler, J. “The objects formerly known as prints”, interactive discussion delivered at Mozilla Festival, London (30 October 2019).



research professionals in bridging and making relevant high-end academic research for audiences from socially and culturally deprived areas.

For Egyptology specifically, we hope that we have started to transform the way other Egyptologists, and museum and non-museum going audiences, think about ancient Egyptian coffins. No longer are they simply magical interments for the dead, but objects through which we can better understand ancient Egyptian craftsmanship, resources and the economies of their production, and beliefs in the afterlife.

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