Brief for Collections Review Consultant

1. Background

Lawrence House is a Grade II* Georgian townhouse built in 1753, located in Launceston's historic town centre. Owned by the National Trust and held on long lease by Launceston Town Council (LTC), the building served as the town museum for many years before closure in 2020 due to structural issues. Following emergency structural repairs funded through the 2024 Cornwall Devolution Deal, LTC and the museum's volunteer team now seek to return the Launceston Museum Collection to Lawrence House and reimagine it as a sustainable, inclusive cultural hub.

The Launceston Museum Collection comprises approximately 19,000 objects of significant local, regional and national heritage value. The collection includes late 17th-century and later costume, military and wartime clothing, Victorian-to-1970s toys and games, medieval and later coinage, military medals dating from the Boer War onwards, a locally minted penny of William I, Cornish trade tokens, a rare silver shilling issued by four Launceston traders in 1811, extensive photographic archives (including glass plate negatives from the mid-19th century onwards), paintings, prints, medieval priory tiles, Charles Causley's 1967 Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry, a rare Lambert typewriter, a detailed model of Norman Launceston, and a pioneering C19th Stirling gas engine from nearby Lewannick.

Since the museum's closure in 2020, the collection has been held in temporary off-site storage (intended only as a short-term solution) and supplemented by items remaining in Lawrence House basement areas and the Coach House. That temporary storage lacks proper temperature and humidity control, is cramped and has limited public accessibility. This situation is unsustainable long-term and poses significant risks to collection preservation, volunteer expertise and the museum's Accredited status. As an improved but again temporary solution a new storage unit has been leased with increased floor space and a transfer of the collection from the existing store together with collection and archive information from Lawrence House and the Coach House is being arranged.

An application for grant aid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund has been successfully made for a project planning phase which will explore the feasibility of returning the collection to Lawrence House. while developing a sustainable long-term collections management strategy. The Collections Review Consultant, whose post will be supported through a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Trust, will undertake a comprehensive assessment of the collection's scope, significance, condition and interpretive potential, identifying key themes, narrative opportunities and conservation priorities. This work will inform future displays, interpretation, collections care standards and a community-informed approach to collections sustainability.

2. Key Responsibilities

Collections Assessment and Documentation

- Undertake a comprehensive audit of the Launceston Museum Collection, working from existing Modes complete collections management records and supplemented by physical inspection where necessary
- Assess the scope, breadth and significance of the collection, identifying objects and themes of particular local, regional and national importance
- Evaluate the condition of significant artefacts, highlighting conservation priorities and any items requiring urgent intervention
- Document conservation needs and produce a prioritised conservation strategy that supports long-term collection care
- Identify any collection gaps or duplications that may inform future rationalisation or acquisition

Thematic and Interpretive Analysis

- Develop a thematic framework for the collection, identifying key narratives and storylines that connect objects and reflect Launceston's history
- Identify headline objects and key pieces that could anchor interpretation and engage diverse audiences
- Assess the interpretive potential of the collection in relation to audience interests, community needs and contemporary heritage themes (including wellbeing, creativity, social history and local identity) in collaboration with the Audience Development Consultant
- Explore how the collection can reflect diverse community experiences and support inclusive, accessible interpretation

Integration with Audience Development

- Work closely with the Audience Development Consultant to understand visitor needs, interests and barriers to engagement
- Assess how collections can be displayed, interpreted and accessed in ways that respond to identified audience research
- Develop recommendations for how interpretation and display priorities should be shaped by audience insights
- Identify opportunities for participatory or community-informed approaches to collections care and interpretation

Collections Rationalisation and Sustainability

- Assess the collection's size and scope in relation to the physical space available in Lawrence House and the museum's capacity for care and interpretation
- Develop recommendations for sustainable collections management, including guidance on future acquisition, disposal and rationalisation
- Identify objects that may be more appropriately cared for elsewhere (e.g., through partnerships with regional museums or specialist collections)
- Produce a collections care policy framework that supports professional standards while acknowledging the volunteer-led context

Storage and Environmental Requirements

- Assess environmental and storage requirements for different collection categories (textiles, photographs, ceramics, metals, organic materials, archives, etc.)
- Provide recommendations for the design and specification of the temporary storage facility currently being procured, including zoning, environmental controls, access and handling protocols
- Advise on best practice in storage solutions that balance conservation standards with practical volunteer management

Reporting and Evidence

- Provide interim progress reports at agreed milestones
- Deliver a comprehensive Final Report including collections assessment and thematic framework, conservation priorities and strategy, interpretive recommendations, collections rationalisation guidance, storage and environmental specifications, collections care policy framework, and implementation roadmap for future collections management
- Present findings to the Project Steering Group and key stakeholders

3. Duration and Timeline

Expected duration: 5–6 months (January 2027 – June 2027)
Key milestones:
Month 1: Transfer of collection to new temporary storage facility; initial audit and condition assessment
Month 2–3: Detailed collections review, thematic analysis and conservation prioritisation
Month 3–4: Integration with audience development findings; interpretation recommendations
Month 4–5: Draft collections care policy and rationalisation guidance; consultation with volunteers and stakeholders
Month 5–6: Final Report submitted and presented to Steering Group
Final reporting deadline: End of June 2027
A detailed work schedule will be agreed upon at project start, including specific dates for physical inspection of objects, meetings with volunteers and specialist conservators, and integration points with the Audience Development and Business Planning Consultants.

4. Skills and Experience

Essential

- Proven experience in collections assessment, documentation and care for heritage museums or cultural organisations
- Knowledge of conservation standards, environmental requirements and best practice in collections management
- Experience in developing thematic frameworks and interpretive strategies for museum collections
- Strong understanding of museum accreditation standards (UK Museum Accreditation scheme) and professional museum practice

- Excellent communication and facilitation skills, with ability to work effectively with volunteer teams and diverse stakeholders
- Knowledge of Modes collections management software

Desirable

- Experience with small or volunteer-led museums and understanding of practical constraints in heritage settings
- Specialist knowledge in any of the collection's key areas (costume and textiles, photographs and archives, decorative arts, natural history, local history)
- Experience in participatory or community-informed approaches to collections care
- Familiarity with Launceston, Cornwall or similar rural heritage contexts
- Knowledge of conservation specialists and networks that could support future collections care

5. Budget

Maximum budget: £25,000 (excluding VAT)
Inclusive of: All consultant fees, expenses, travel and materials
Payment structure: Staged payments linked to milestones (e.g., 25% on commencement; 25% on completion of collections audit; 25% on interim report; 25% on submission of final report)

6. Application Process

Interested consultants should submit:

- A proposal (maximum 2 pages) outlining your approach to collections assessment and interpretation, your methodology for thematic analysis, and your proposed timeline
- A CV (maximum 2 pages) detailing relevant experience, qualifications, specialist knowledge and references
- Two examples of collections reviews, thematic frameworks or interpretation strategies you have developed for heritage organisations
- A brief statement (maximum 250 words) explaining why you are interested in this project and what you understand to be the key challenges in collections assessment and interpretation for a volunteer-led museum

7. Assessment Criteria

Submissions will be assessed against the following criteria:

- **Quality of approach:** Clarity of methodology, realistic understanding of the project context, and evidence of structured thinking about collections assessment and interpretation
- **Relevant experience:** Demonstrated track record in collections assessment, conservation planning and interpretive development
- **Understanding of the brief:** Evidence that you understand the specific challenges facing a volunteer-led heritage organisation with a significant collection in temporary storage
- **Specialist knowledge:** Relevant expertise in collection areas or conservation that would add value to the project
- **Value for money:** Quality of proposal relative to cost

8. Contact Information

For more information or to submit your proposal, please contact

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