



(Ref: HG-18-01277)

Final evaluation report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

12 March 2024

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FOR



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



WEST MIDLANDS
HISTORY
PEOPLE OF IDEAS, INNOVATION AND ENTERPRISE

CREDITS

Researched and written by Jenni Waugh Consulting Ltd, Durnin Research and The Collett Consultancy

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NOTE

All URLs were accessible at the time of writing.

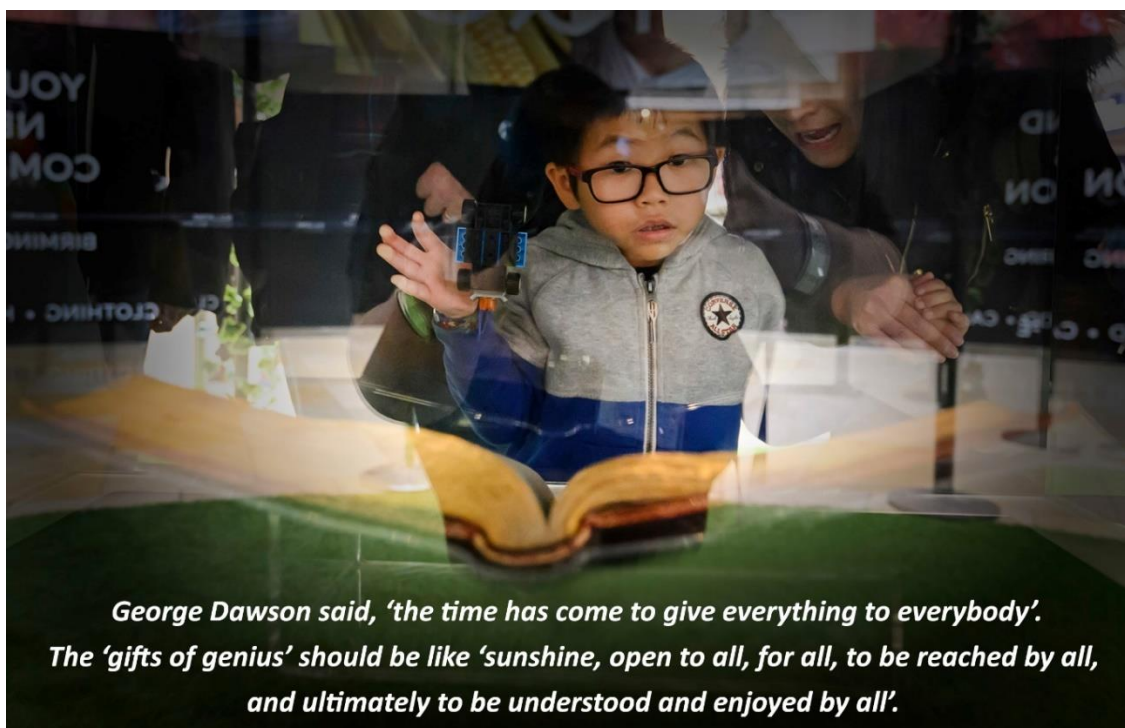


Figure 1 A boy views the First Folio, during its visit to the Bullring Shopping Centre, Birmingham.
Quotation from Ewan Fernie, 'George Dawson: Lost Prophet' (History West Midlands, 2018)

Everything to Everybody: project evaluation

Executive Summary

Project overview

Everything to Everybody (E2E) was an ambitious 4-year project led jointly by the University of Birmingham and Birmingham City Council's Library of Birmingham to restore the world's first, oldest and largest Shakespeare collection in any public library to every city resident.

IN TOTAL, 270,500+ people participated in E2E activity across the project lifetime.

It is estimated that visits to E2E events generated an additional economic benefit to the Birmingham economy of over £900,000 in that time.

As the most recent and by far the largest public engagement partnership between the University of Birmingham (UoB) and the Library of Birmingham (LoB)¹, E2E has provided a valuable testbed for UoB's new Culture Forward programme and comparable initiatives of cultural, civic and community partnership activity and has given staff at LoB new impetus to celebrate the magnificent collections it holds and share them with the City.

Working in close and effective collaboration, **this cross-sectoral partnership has achieved a national first**, taking the City's precious, 400-year-old First Folio of Shakespeare's plays out of the Library to 16 community venues including libraries, shopping centres, a family centre, a church and a prison.

¹ *Connecting Histories* (2005-2007), was a successful collections and community-focussed project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (predecessor to the Heritage Fund), delivered in partnership by Birmingham City Archives, the Universities of Birmingham and Warwick, and the Black Pasts, Birmingham Futures group.

The basics

Delivered between January 2020 and 31 December 2023, E2E was supported by a total grant of £791,400 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (Heritage Fund), as well as funding from History West Midlands, Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and private donors. The total value of the project was over £2 million.

The four aims of the project were to:

- **UNLOCK the Collections:** to deliver a comprehensive programme that will make Birmingham's Shakespeare Memorial Library (SML) and George Dawson Collection (GDC) more accessible to researchers to the people of the City
- **Safeguard the Collection's PHYSICAL FOCUS:** to position iconic artefacts within the collection as powerful points of interest and popular engagement.
- **Provide DIGITAL ACCESS to the Collection:** to create web-based resources and social media to facilitate presentation, interaction, collaboration
- **SHARE the Collections:** to deliver a varied range of co-produced engagement activities encouraging diverse audiences to use, enjoy, and take ownership of the SML and GDC.

The Approved Purposes

The Heritage Fund specified 30 obligatory approved purposes to be fulfilled by the partnership as a condition of the grant. These actions could only be adjusted with the Heritage Fund's agreement.

Thematically, the approved purposes related to:

- Fulfilment of Heritage Fund expectations regarding inclusion and promotion
- Recruitment of project team
- Volunteer recruitment and development
- Collections conservation and management, in particular improvement of the digital documentation and accessibility of the SML and GDC
- Research into the collections and heritage themes, and dissemination of the findings to local, national and international audiences
- Community engagement and the delivery of a complex programme of creative and heritage activities for a wide range of audiences
- Development of formal education resources, including Arts Award

Only one significant change was made in 2020 when, in the light of the Black Lives Matter protests in June 2020, the Heritage Fund gave the E2E team permission not to reinstall a statue of George Dawson in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and a portrait bust in LoB as part of his 200th birthday commemorations in 2021. Instead the team commissioned Soul City Arts to produce two legacy artworks in collaboration with pupils from Montgomery and Percy Shurmer schools.

The challenges

The project team overcame a succession of **external challenges** to ensure the project's successful delivery. These included 2 years of restrictive Covid-19 lockdowns, local and national bus and rail strikes, and the impact on community activity of the death of Queen Elizabeth II in late 2022.

To achieve the project's centrepiece activity, the tour of Birmingham's First Folio to 16 community venues including HMP Birmingham, the team also had to address the numerous **internal challenges** of taking such a priceless volume out of the Library and onto the road.

With the Heritage Fund's permission and £116,200 grant uplift, project delivery was extended by 12 months, enabling the team to engage with more partners and participants in neighbourhoods around the city. Initially intended to climax during the 2022 Commonwealth Games, the final delivery year coincided with the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's First Folio in 2023, granting the project an international profile.

Headline successes

Despite the challenges the project team experienced, each approved purpose was met, and many were exceeded.

IN TOTAL, 270,500+ people participated in E2E activity across the project lifetime.

It is estimated that visits to E2E events generated an additional economic benefit to the Birmingham economy of over £900,000 in that time.

The headline achievements of E2E are impressive and include:

- 45 volunteers recruited, who contributed over 1,290 days to the project
- 62+ community partners delivered E2E activities in over 40 venues across the city
- 11,793 people had a close-up view of the First Folio during the project, 3,342 of whom did so at community venues during the First Folio Tour
- 14,839 people participated in one of over 88 workshops, events, talks or other activities across the city or online
- 255,685 people visited one of 13 co-produced exhibitions in LoB
- 13 exhibitions took place in the Shakespeare Memorial Room (SMR) and LoB Level 3 Gallery, all documented on Flickr
- 8,262 online views of 46 films produced during the project
- 134 young people participated in E2E activities designed to increase their employability and creative skills
- at least 10 schools have taken part in project activities and co-curated exhibitions for the SMR
- LoB's Children's Library staff are now trained and have successfully delivered Arts Awards sessions to local children

Impact on heritage

As a result of the project, HERITAGE has been...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• identified and recorded• better interpreted and explained• better managed• in better condition
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E2E has made significant improvements to the management and condition of the Shakespeare Memorial Library (SML) and George Dawson Collection (GDC).

- The catalogue is now enhanced and digitised, available for all to see online, as is the First Folio itself and the poster collection.
- LoB staff are now more confident about introducing visitors to the SML and GDC.
- Project volunteers have founded the Friends of the Shakespeare Collection to continue work on the digitisation and promotion of the collections.

This work has increased public engagement with the collections and raised their profile.

- New research has increased understanding of the collections and the 13 co-curated exhibitions have increased the range of interpretive approaches, highlighting the relevance of Shakespeare's works and the Civic Gospel to contemporary city residents.
- New interpretation about the collections and the library's history have been installed on each floor of LoB, including audio posts in the roof gardens and improved displays in the SMR.

Thanks to a focussed approach to public relations and communications, E2E has enjoyed extensive international, national, regional and local media coverage since its launch, ensuring that news of the collection has travelled outside the city.

- Team members have published blogs, written articles and spoken at events about the project in a range of settings.
- Dissemination through Higher Education networks and History WM publications has increased national and international focus on the collections, attracting new researchers
- the project contributed significantly to the creative aspects of the B2022 Commonwealth Games opening ceremony and city-wide cultural festival

Impact on people

<p>As a result of the project, PEOPLE have experienced the following benefits...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more people and a wider range of people have engaged with heritage • learnt about heritage • developed skills • changed their attitudes and/or behaviour • had an enjoyable experience
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E2E has brought learning to a far wider audience than would have otherwise been achieved if the activity had been solely located in the library or university. This approach removed the stigma of Shakespeare as being ‘not for me’ that some audiences reported feeling prior to the events. It also presented the UoB in a less elitist light.

- 255,685 visitors attended at least one of 13 exhibitions in the SMR across the lifetime of the project
- 11,793 people had a close-up view of the First Folio during the project, 3,342 of whom did so at one of 16 community venues during the First Folio Tour
- 14,839 people participated in one of over 88 workshops, events, talks or other activities across the city or online

Participants have enjoyed the opportunities provided to learn something new, to connect with each other, particularly after the long Covid-19 lockdowns, and to try out the wide range of activities on offer.

- Survey respondents described how much they appreciated the fact that the Folio had been brought to them in their own ‘back garden’. This removed the barriers that a city-central location can impose on surrounding communities and fostered the sense of the Folio belonging to everybody.

From the outset, E2E was determined to be as accessible as possible, and made all reasonable efforts to support inclusion.

- Soul City Arts and Desiblitz worked with school children and adults living in Birmingham’s most diverse wards, exploring the impact of Shakespeare on South Asian culture and of the Civic Gospel on today’s community values
- Two Folio Tours were held in community centres which support people with complex disabilities (Sense Touchbase Pears and The Hive)
- Sense Touchbase Pears and BSL interpreters supported inclusive delivery of community events across the city
- BCAT, Bards Beyond Borders and Friction Arts worked with adults with mental health difficulties, with refugees and people in other vulnerable groups.

Impact on communities

As a result of the project the COMMUNITY benefits are...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the local economy has been boosted• the local area has become a better place to live, work or visit• people have volunteered time• the lead organisations are more resilient
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It is estimated that visits to E2E events generated an additional economic benefit to the Birmingham economy of over £900,000 during the project lifetime.

The E2E team achieved a national first by taking the City's precious First Folio on tour to 16 community venues around Birmingham and the West Midlands, including HMP Birmingham where it was viewed by 28 prisoners and 5 staff members.

- Project activity reached right across the city and into the neighbouring local authority areas of Dudley, Sandwell and Solihull
- Participants represented many of its superdiverse ethnic and national communities

Most participants felt a greater connection with their local community because of participating in E2E activities.

- Connections made between Shakespeare and other cultures and languages strengthened and renewed those within the respondent's own communities as commonalities of experiences and emotions provided new links between them.

45 volunteers were engaged throughout the project to fulfil a variety of roles, supported by a dedicated member of staff to ensure continuity, and comprehensive training.

- Volunteers contributed over 1290 days to the project
- Their roles included digitising, translating and cataloguing the collection, events support, exhibition curation and audience evaluation

Key lessons learned and recommendations for the future

Taking advantage of the enforced pause

The pause in the project in 2020 caused by the Covid lockdowns, and the extra year, allowed the E2E team time and space to come together, to develop clarity and consensus around the project's purpose. This paid dividends across the remainder of the project.

A risk-aware model for taking significant artefacts into communities

In touring the First Folio out of a formal, institutional setting to a range of 'non-traditional' community venues, E2E developed a risk-aware approach that assured conservation professionals such an activity was possible, and of great social value.

UoB and LoB now have a tested methodology and are more confident and positive about touring objects of a similar status and prestige from their collections or those of other.

Maintaining momentum through developing further community, higher education and cultural partnerships

UoB has begun developing Culture Forward, their new civic and cultural engagement partnership programming. The director is Ewan Fernie, who brings with him the extensive networks and experience that contributed to E2E's success.

LoB is considering how it can continue to contribute to such important cultural partnerships whilst operating without a large project budget. The team are now in conversation with other Higher Education institutions in the city to explore how the model might be applied in future. In the meantime, the skills and enthusiasm of the newly founded Friends of Shakespeare Collection mean that the SMC will continue to be championed.

Looking toward developing a regional Shakespeare offer

Looking to the future E2E has reasserted Birmingham's Shakespeare credentials and credibility, and there is now an opportunity to develop this as part of a coordinated regional approach through collaboration with key partners, notably the Royal Shakespeare Company, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Birmingham Rep and the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The scope of the report

Jenni Waugh Consulting Ltd, Durnin Research, The Collett Consultancy and James Macdonald Media Services were commissioned to evaluate the project in summer 2020.

The full report presents an independent evaluation of project delivery throughout its lifetime and has been prepared in accordance with the Heritage Fund Evaluation Guidelines for circulation amongst the Heritage Fund, the project partners and stakeholders.

The evaluation team produced a series of 11 impact case studies which have been uploaded to the E2E Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@everythingtoeverybody5379>