



SHARE Museums East  
**Family  
Learning  
Ideas**

**2011-2012**



**SHARE Museums East**  
a network of know how

Supporting excellence, resilience and  
cooperative working in museums  
in the East of England.



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## Family learning ideas

Have a look at these features and activities that museums across the region have developed to improve the quality of their family visits. Many of these ideas have come out of two recent SHARE Museums East initiatives: Museums as Learning Spaces and the Effective Museums: Family Learning programme.

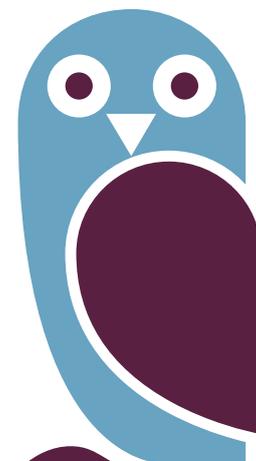


*Family fun at the Sedgwick Museum, University of Cambridge.*

All the ideas are simple to construct, low cost and easily adjusted for your own site. Most entries have an email that you can contact for further information.

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## Making your museum accessible

### Helping families to plan

The Fitzwilliam Museum has a section on their website that is geared for families, and can help them plan their visit. Headings include 'Family friendly activities' and 'Free things to do anytime'.

[www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/dept/education/family/](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/dept/education/family/)



### Family friendly displays

At Laxfield & District Museum, there is something at every physical level for visitors to see. Adults can focus on the photographs and objects at their level whilst a tactile geology display runs along the floor for children to explore.

[info@laxfieldmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@laxfieldmuseum.org.uk)

### Somewhere to sit

At Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery there is seating in each of the galleries. Benches have storage in the arm rests for story books. This table, with stools, has a fossil display set into the table top and storage for activities and games.



### A character or symbol can highlight family activities

Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery has also introduced a hare character called Peter Burrow. He is there to indicate family activities in galleries such as the 'stay, play and put away' activity boxes for under 5s.



### Turning your displays into a family adventure

To help families interact with their displays, Stevenage Museum has a story trail 'Sam and the Magic Mirror' integrated into their main exhibition. Each point in the trail is identified by a picture of the character of Sam, who invites families to listen to his story and find objects related to the story in the nearby display. The trail is situated at ground level so that all children can find it. [museum@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:museum@stevenage.gov.uk)



### Making shopping fun!

Cambridge & County Folk Museum has installed a 'pop-up' pocket money shop for families to visit. This shop is set up with old-fashioned scales, sweets and toys that children can bag up and weigh. It allows children to experience being an old-fashioned shop keeper while spending their pocket money on low priced items.

[info@folkmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@folkmuseum.org.uk)

### Developing useful partnerships

Developing partnerships with other local agencies that provide services for children and young people, e.g. Children's Centres, can help bring in new families to your museum. The Education Officer at Hertford Museum contacted the manager of her local Children's Centre and had a meeting where they discussed each other's work with families. She then ran a Stay and Play session at the Centre and brought Museum leaflets along. Families from these sessions have now come to activities at the Museum. [hertfordmuseum@btconnect.com](mailto:hertfordmuseum@btconnect.com)





## Inspired by museum collections



### Print your own newspaper!

To encourage families to explore one of their main exhibits: the Royston Crow printing press, Royston Museum has a simple printing activity stationed next to it. Using ink pads and letter stamps, families can create their own simple newspapers and pictures using templates supplied by the museum.

[curator@roystonmuseum.org.uk](mailto:curator@roystonmuseum.org.uk)

### Tactile treasure

The Museum of East Anglian Life has introduced Treasure Tubs which contain simple tactile objects to inspire connections with nearby displays and to make these displays more interactive for families. For example, next to their Garden display is a Treasure Tub containing flowers made of different materials, such as fabric and plastic, plus shells and pebbles. [enquiries@eastanglianlife.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@eastanglianlife.org.uk)



### What's in the box?

At the Mo Museum, Sheringham, visitors can put their hands into three feely boxes and try to guess what objects are hidden inside. All the objects are inspired by the museum's collections and have been fixed in such a way that they can easily be changed, making this a versatile resource.



### The Story Factory

To support their 'Fenland Stories' exhibition, St Neots Museum developed an activity called *The Story Factory*. Families followed simple steps (guided by objects) and pieced together a short story. They were given little fold-out books in which to write their story and illustrations, which they could take home.



### Bringing your photographs to life

Underneath a huge photograph of warreners (people who farm rabbits) at Brandon Heritage Centre, families can explore boxes containing objects relating to the photograph such as clothes, tools and even a toy rabbit!



### Making archaeology come alive

Next to a display about a Roman helmet that shows only a photograph of it, Tring Local History Museum has created a low level 'pretend' archaeology dig and also a replica Roman helmet of the same type as the original, for everyone to see and try on.

## Active exploration

### Museum detectives

Much Hadham Forge Museum has developed Detective bags. Items include a detective notepad with clues to solve by exploring the galleries, replica objects which need to be matched with objects on displays and magnifying glasses for close-up inspection.



### Dragon Hall detectives

At Dragon Hall in Norfolk, children can dress up as detectives and follow a trail around the site. The trail invites them to solve clues, try out various activities and use different explorer tools, such as a telescope, or their eyes and ears!

[info@dragonhall.org](mailto:info@dragonhall.org)



### Photograph trails

At the John Bunyan Museum, families follow a picture trail in which they look for objects on display that match incomplete images of these objects. On the back of these pictures are questions that encourage family discussions about the objects they have found.

[curator@bunyanmeeting.co.uk](mailto:curator@bunyanmeeting.co.uk)

### Roll the dice

As a change from a Spot the Object trail, families at Tring Local History Museum roll a big sponge dice and look for the object whose image has turned up on the top face of the dice. These dice are currently supplied at [www.craftpacks.co.uk](http://www.craftpacks.co.uk)



### Museum explorers

At the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway, families can use activity bags to explore the site in different ways without needing to write anything! Included in the bag are different exploration tools such as a torch, magnifying glasses and binoculars and investigative tools such as tape-measures. Families pick and choose items from the bag, according to what they feel like doing that day.

### Exploring your museum in a new way

Families can use a porthole and magnifying glasses to explore the Mo Museum, Sheringham and its maritime displays, giving them the opportunity to view exhibits from new and unexpected angles. They can also use an activity trail to give them ideas for objects to look at and questions to consider. This trail is laminated and comes with a dry wipe pen, so it can be wiped clean and re-used.





### Discovery trolley

The introduction of a simple 'Discovery Trolley' has proved popular at Ipswich Museum. The trolley contains a variety of resources for families to borrow to help them explore the museum. Things on the trolley include: animal costumes, magnifying glasses, binoculars, torches, story books, animal puppets, colouring pencils and paper and simple laminated eye spy trails. The torches and magnifying glasses and animal costumes have proved most popular. A small folder with plastic wallets with the paper and pencils allows visitors to leave their drawings for others to see.

[bookings.information@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:bookings.information@colchester.gov.uk)



### Encouraging families to explore more than one venue

Every summer holiday the University of Cambridge Museums run a joint activity to encourage families to visit more than one site. This could be as simple as a 'Draw what you Saw' competition in each museum with monthly prizes, or as sophisticated as families collecting 'Top Trump' cards showcasing each museum's collections. Working in partnership has enabled this annual project to develop, with the eight University museums having been joined by the University of Cambridge

Botanic Garden and three independent museums in Cambridge. Find out more about the Cambridge Collectors Cards: [http://issuu.com/camunivmuseums/docs/cambridge\\_collectors\\_cards\\_2009\\_report\\_300dpi/1?mode=a\\_p](http://issuu.com/camunivmuseums/docs/cambridge_collectors_cards_2009_report_300dpi/1?mode=a_p)

### Encouraging family interaction

#### Developing a space from child-only to family friendly

Museum of East Anglian Life has introduced a whiteboard in an area that already had children's activities. On the board, they regularly write questions for all the family to consider and write their answers, e.g. 'What was your favourite toy as a child?'. This has developed the space from being used purely by children to a space in which all the family can interact.

[enquiries@eastanglianlife.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@eastanglianlife.org.uk)





### “I would like to buy some humbugs, please”

Cambridge & County Folk Museum has used an old kitchen table to turn one of their rooms into an old fashioned grocer's shop. On this table are a range of traditional items for families to weigh, sort and package (using appropriate bags, string and paper). In addition to traditional money, scales and a till, children are encouraged to interact further, with opportunities for dressing up as a shopkeeper and preparing customer 'orders' using a real receipt and account book. What makes this activity particularly successful is the conversation it stimulates between families, particularly with grandparents who enjoy reminiscing with their grandchildren. [info@folkmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@folkmuseum.org.uk)



### Activity kits

At Fitzwilliam Museum, families can choose a free 'Fitz Kit box' from the reception to help them explore the museum. Each Fitz Kit focuses on a selection of different galleries and contains approximately five objects which make links with the collections on display. With each object, there is an activity or a question for the family to solve together by looking closely at the artefacts in the room.

[fitzmuseum-education@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:fitzmuseum-education@lists.cam.ac.uk)

### Revamping a children's area

Denny Abbey & Farmland Museum has re-vamped its education room to make it more family-friendly. Whereas before there were just colouring sheets left on the tables, these have now been joined by farmland jigsaws, a play farm, a 'cogs and gears' building kit, a lego farmland kit, a furnished book corner with books for all ages, a computer quiz, a toddler crawl space with appropriate toys, and a Victorian schoolroom exercise using slates, and high chairs. These are designed to provide interaction between family members as well as individual activity.

[education@farmlandmuseum.org.uk](mailto:education@farmlandmuseum.org.uk)





## Facilitating creative role play

### Kitchen Connections

In their newly refurbished Your History gallery at Epping Forest District Museum, there is a replica of the Victorian cast iron stove that is on display. This replica has wooden play food, kitchen equipment, a table and stools with it. Some families come in specially to play with it on a regular basis. For older children who come to family art and craft activities, this has proved invaluable as it keeps younger siblings occupied while they can spend longer on the crafts. [museum@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:museum@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)



### Becoming a Monk

At the entrance to Denny Abbey, there is a box full of cut-down monks' robes, which children and adults if they wish, can wear as they go round the abbey. There is also a folder full of cards, and they are invited to select one at random. On one side of the card there is the title of a monk/nun, e.g. almoner, precenter, infirmarer, etc. And on the other there is the job description. Being in role like this helps gives families a greater insight into what life in the abbey might have been like.

[education@farmlandmuseum.org.uk](mailto:education@farmlandmuseum.org.uk)

### Dressing up clothes for children and adults

At the Essex Police Museum, there is a dressing up area, with full length mirror, where children and adults can try on police uniform through the ages, including hats and handcuffs! There is a variety of male and female uniforms and hats in all sizes. Needless to say this is the favourite part of most people's visit!





### From jungle hide to a beehive...!

In the holidays, setting up a 'jungle hide' in the Natural History gallery at Ipswich Museum, has provided an exciting space for younger visitors, encouraging role play and stimulating their imagination. A simple 'drain pipe cube' frame from the supplier TTS, with material from charity shops, has been adapted to become both an Iron Age cave and a beehive. This is a brilliant resource – imagination is the only limit!

[bookings.information@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:bookings.information@colchester.gov.uk)

## Under fives audience

### Time for T

Lowestoft Museum has developed an imaginative picnic loans box, Time for T. This is inspired by their porcelain gallery and is lent out to childminders and nurseries to encourage not only creative role play but also to stimulate children's communication and language development. This project was part of the Let's Talk Museums initiative which involved six museums in Suffolk working more closely with Early Years practitioners and childcare providers.



### Toddler bags

"A visit lasts as long as the youngest person is happy."

Jo Graham, Learning Unlimited.

With this quote in mind, the North Herts Museum service has created Toddler bags, each based around a well known story such as Peepo (by Allan Ahlberg) and The Tiger who Came to Tea (by Judith Kerr) that makes links to their social history collections. For example, with their Peepo bag, children can play with objects related to the story such as a small sized wooden scrubbing board, iron and rubber duck. Reading the story gives parents a way into talking about the displays with their young children.

[museum.education@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:museum.education@north-herts.gov.uk)





### Story Starters

For younger visitors, Fitzwilliam Museum has a selection of picture books which are linked to objects and stories in the collection. Children and their carers are encouraged to enjoy the book together and then explore the galleries looking for creepy crawlies, naughty cockatoos, prowling bears and sleepy knights.

[fitzmuseum-education@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:fitzmuseum-education@lists.cam.ac.uk)



### Collecting feedback from families



### Children's comment cards

The Essex Police Museum has children's comments cards readily available so that children can fill them in whilst they are visiting. These cards are then displayed on a pin board for all visitors to see.

### Family feedback

To give families an opportunity to express what they would like to see in new displays and exhibitions, Hertford Museum leave out sheets with focussed questions for families to answers. This information is then used to shape all their exhibitions.

[hertfordmuseum@btconnect.com](mailto:hertfordmuseum@btconnect.com)





**Encouraging feedback**  
 On the back of their Detective trail, Dragon Hall has inserted a simple evaluation for children to fill in. If they return it to the museum reception, their family will be entered for a prize draw which gives them an extra incentive to return it.  
[info@dragonhall.org](mailto:info@dragonhall.org)

**Many thanks to all of the museums in the East of England who contributed to this Ideas Bank.**

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