

**FIND OSWALD OTTER
SURREY MUSEUMS FAMILY TRAIL
Summer 2003
Evaluation Report**

**Kate Pontin
September 2003**

Summary

1 There has been overall a moderate success for this year's trail, particularly in terms of getting it handed out to pupils in disadvantaged areas. They may have not visited a museum in the summer, but the booklet will highlight opportunities for them for the future.

2 Museums in Surrey need to continue to offer activities for families and would benefit from further support from Surrey Consultative Committee in terms of funding and training. Individual museums also needed to be more committed to supporting these joint ventures if they decide to participate in them.

2 Some museums reported a number of new museum users entering their sites to do the trail. Others however felt that any new visitors or increase in numbers was due to factors other than the trail. It appears that publicity was not very effective and thus many visitors were not aware that it was happening. In future more publicity on television, local radio and in the local papers is essential. Local commitment from the individual museums is also important with relation to publicity and with the offering of family events.

3 A breakdown of visitors from each of the participating museums was generally not available, and where data was present it varied in categories from site to site, and thus made evaluating the impact across the County very difficult. Consideration of easy and appropriate ways of keeping such data is needed – it will become more common for this sort of data in the future – particularly for grant aid etc

4 The trail continues to be a good way of museums in Surrey co-ordinating their efforts and if in future it is not continued then other approaches should be considered.

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Letter sent at beginning of summer

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1.0 Introduction

Surrey Museums Consultative Committee funded a booklet, called “Find Oswald the Otter”, listing all the museum venues taking part in a trail, and encouraging family visits to museums in Surrey. The booklet indicated what was on offer to families over the summer of 2003 in each museum, including a variety of workshops (some funded by this scheme). It was distributed to participating venues, schools in targeted areas, and other venues such as libraries and tourist information centres. Each Museum was also responsible for publicising the trail locally. If a family visited three venues they were able to enter in a free prize draw.

For the evaluation of the trail the following aims were established in discussions between Sharon Bristow (Lifelong Learning Development Officer for Surrey Museums Consultative Committee) and Kate Pontin (Consultant Evaluator). These were as follows:

- To discover if all trail booklets were used/handed out in museums and schools
- To establish the increase in numbers of visitors attending workshops and holiday activities
- To establish the increase in numbers of visitors coming to the museum
- To establish the proportion of new visitors.

It was accepted that in some cases the figures would be difficult to establish and a preliminary letter was sent to all participating museums so that they were aware of the data to be collected during the summer period.

2.0 Methodology

A number of approaches were taken with the aim of providing both quantitative and qualitative data. The evaluation was dependent on participant museums sending in individual data.

The approaches taken were as follows:

- Statistical and accompanying information about individual museums gathered from museum staff by post/phone. A very short survey was sent out (see appendix) at the end of the summer holiday. An initial letter (see appendix) before the beginning of the holidays gave guidelines to staff on data to be collected.
- 60% of schools that received trails were contacted by phone to establish if all booklets had been given out to pupils.
- Several museums were visited to see workshops and one museum was visited with my own children. The numbers of workshops funded by the scheme itself were, this year, limited and correspondingly so were the visits.

3.0 Results

3.1 Were all booklets used or handed out?

All boxes of booklets sent to schools were handed out to individual pupils.

In museums, however, there were significant numbers of booklets left at the end of the summer. This seems to be chiefly because the second delivery of booklets was too near the end of the summer. In fact some museums had run out of booklets long before the new batch came. One museum felt there had been “little demand” for booklets.

These factors are likely to reflect a number of issues

- The need to publicise more – perhaps directly to all schools – so that children and families are aware of the trail, but also locally so that visitors are more aware of the trail and associated events. Holding holiday activities can help attract publicity.
- There is a need to actively hand out trails to families visiting the museum and encourage them to use and keep them. Upon arriving at one museum with my children we were asked if we were interested in a trail, with further details also being given when we had said yes. This more pro-active type of approach is to be encouraged.

In conclusion:

Trails should continue to be sent to schools

There is need to deliver more trails to more popular museums and second batches earlier in the summer.

There is a need for publicity to be improved both centrally and by the museums themselves

3.2 Was there an increase in children attending workshops and summer events and if so why?

Many museums did not run workshops or events and those that did, felt that there was minimal impact from the booklet in terms of new attendees. Any increase in users was for other reasons such as children returning with their families after visiting with their school.

**Museums should be encouraged to develop their programmes for families
Support should be available to help them with this**

Quotes

“47 families said they were new visitors”

There were more children doing the trail this year but it doesn't encourage children to look at the displays”

“there were a few with booklets from other museums – more than before”

3.3 Was there a general increase in visitors to the museum over the summer and was this influenced at all by trail?

Some museums had no increase in visitor numbers and felt that the weather may have had an impact on this whereas others had had an increase but largely put this down to the weather (!), particular exhibitions etc.

3.4 What proportion of these visitors were new to the museum and were as a result of the trail?

Most museums that had had an increase in new visitors felt that this was due to reasons other than the trail. There were however a small number of museums who said that there had been an impact.

- Several museums mentioned that one or two families had come from elsewhere with their booklet ready for stamping. Staff felt that this was only a small number but that it does reflect some impact. As these museums failed to keep thorough statistics on users over the summer these figures are therefore only from personal experience and only reflect observations of staff rather than full figures.
- One museum mentioned that 47 families had stated they were new to the museum but these may or may not have heard about the trail before arriving.
- Two museums kept useful statistics and one in particular provided detailed figures for relevant users over the summer (see case study below). These figures show that there were 20 additional children using the trail. The other museum provided clear evidence for new users with a significant number of these visitors having already been to other museums.

Case Study: Guildford House Gallery

Number of trail participants 21

New to museum 13

Of the 21 participants 18 had got their copy from other museums in the area.

Most of the children were between the ages of 6 and 11 and had usually come with their parents.

3.5 Summary of results

Were all booklets handed out?	All those schools that were spoken to had handed out all their booklets to the children Most museums had copies still available at the end of the summer. Although one museum said there had been little demand most felt that this was due to the second batch of leaflets being too late.
Were workshop attendances, in general, up from last year?	Almost all replies stated that they had not run workshops (only 12% had). In future funding through this type of scheme would be usefully spent organising and helping people run events for families. Both registered new users to these events although they put this down to reasons other than the trail. However this highlights the effectiveness of events and their publicity to attract.
Were visitor numbers, in general, up from last year?	40% of museums registered an increase in visitors although again this was largely due to other reasons eg new opening, new exhibitions etc
What were the numbers of new visitors to the museum?	Most museums had not kept numbers of specific types of visitors and highlights a need to keep much more sophisticated data on their users, particularly if they wish to apply for funding to support new ventures.

4.0 Discussion

This evaluation has highlighted a number of issues in relation to summer visiting and to the trail.

- The weather has an impact on visitor numbers!
- New exhibitions are important in attracting new visitors
- Appropriate publicity is important and in this case could have been more focused to attract more new users. Local publicity (using local family events) is also useful. Marking those that were handed out in schools instead of museums would have been helpful in finding out how effective this approach really was. Offering trails to pupils in more disadvantaged areas is a good idea and will at least have highlighted new opportunities to them.
- Most smaller museums do not run summer events. This is an area where more support, training and funding may be useful. However individual museums

need to find more time to be committed to projects they wish to be involved in. Funding was available for workshops from this project fund and were offered to all museums. However the take up was low.

4.1 Recommendations

- Trails should continue to be sent to schools
- There is a need to deliver more trails to more popular museums and to deliver second batches earlier in the summer.
- There is a need for publicity to be improved both centrally and by the museums themselves
- Most museums had not kept numbers of specific types of visitors and highlights a need to keep much more sophisticated data on their users, particularly if they wish to apply for funding to support new ventures.
- Funding and training needs to be continued to support the development of summer events for families.
- **The take up of workshops and support for writing trails was a disappointment. There was also a poor response to requests from the co-ordinator. Museums need to continue to be enthusiastic and make efforts to support the development of the trail according to the co-ordinator's requests. Those that participate need to be fully committed and respond to requests for information by the deadline and find time to support the venture. Perhaps a briefing session early on in the project would be useful. Communication also seems to be a problem between Surrey Museums Consultative Committee and the museums.**
- **Surrey County Council generously provided funding but requested it be spent by the end of July, which is very awkward for a summer scheme not ending until early September. In future this needs to be rectified and further funding be found to pay a co-ordinator so that some of the communication problems can be solved. An enormous amount of time is spent contacting people and co-ordinating programme development as well as sorting funding, deliveries etc.**

4.1 Discussion of evaluation process

There are a number of issues, which need to be raised to explain the limitations of this evaluation and its failure to provide statistical evidence for numbers of visitors and new visitors. These were

a) Julie Ellis was seconded in to run and co-ordinate this programme as Sharon Bristow (Lifelong Learning Development Officer for Surrey Museums Consultative Committee) was temporarily covering a different post. This meant that Julie had extra duties increasing her workload so that she did not always have time to commit to the

trail as and when necessary. This was not helped by the slowness of museums to respond to requests for information. There needs to be a commitment from all museums involved and a co-ordinator with time allocated to fulfil the needs of this central post. Ultimately this meant that some of the evaluation did not happen at the desired time.

b) The failure of most museums to keep appropriate statistics, despite receiving a letter clearly asking for certain data to be kept makes a thorough evaluation impossible. It is appreciated that many museums, particularly smaller ones have issues of staff/volunteers etc but I would recommend that museums consider how they can improve visitor data as they will find it useful in many ways. For example:

- Is it possible to record children/families etc on till entries
- Can people be asked to fill in brief details when signing the comments book
- Can shop or entry staff be asked to gather more details when people enter about whether they are new to the museum, for example.

As a result it has also been difficult to make any valid comparison with the last trail, Sammy Squirrel.

APPENDIX

July 14th 2003

Dear colleague

Re Surrey Museum Trail, 2003

I hope you have received copies of this year's Surrey Museums Family Trail, "Find Oswald Otter". There are certainly a lot of lovely events happening this year. Please make sure you distribute your brochure to as many people as possible. It is important that all copies go and that we manage to give some to new users and not just our regular visitors. This year it is my task to evaluate the success of the programme and I will be visiting a number of events through out the summer. I will also be phoning all of you at the end of the holidays to find out how it all went. It would be useful if you get a note of the information listed below, as I will need these figures for the final report to those funding the programme.

Data to collect:

- The numbers of leaflets given out and those left. Please try and make sure all have gone by the end of the summer!
- The numbers of children attending the workshops and other formal activities. Please also keep a note of those that are new to the museum/or are new attendees of the museums events. If you are familiar with your clientele an informal count will do otherwise it will be necessary to ask people whether they have been to the museum before. We are interested in finding out how many new visitors the trail attracts.
- General Museum attendance over the summer and whether this is higher than last year (and if you have the figures, the increase in visitors)

With much thanks for your help and I look forward to meeting some of you during the summer. If you have any questions or want to discuss the evaluation please do contact me using the above details.

Kate Pontin
Consultant evaluator

**“Find Oswald the Otter”
Surrey Museums Family Trail
Summer 2003**

Final Survey

It would help with the evaluation of this programme if you could please fill in the details below. If you do not have accurate figures please write down your feelings! Return in the stamped addressed envelope provided or email me . Thank you for your help.

Q1 Please fill in the figures below

Number of booklets received	
Number of booklets given out/taken to children and families	
Number of booklets left	

If you had some remaining was there any particular reason for this?

Q2 Did you run family or children workshops this summer? **YES/NO**

Were the numbers of those attending greater than in previous years? **YES/NO**

If so please provide details

Q2b What was the percentage (or approximate if no figures but please say it is an estimate) of new museum users at these events?

Q3 Did the museum itself have an increase in numbers this summer, compared with previous summers? **YES/NO**

Q3b What percentage of these (or approximate if no figures but please state this) were new visitors to the museum?

Any further comments about the trail

Kate Pontin