

Afternoon Tea @ the Lit

The Afternoon Tea @ the Lit project aimed to create community connections through social engagement, using the rich history of the Literary Institute and its origins as Assembly Rooms which brought the local community together. We sought to offer a relaxed and welcoming environment for vulnerable adults, particularly those at risk of isolation in order to benefit their mental health and wellbeing.

At the start of the project we contacted Manor Farm Day Centre and Merlewood and worked with them to establish a programme for the 5 Afternoon Teas. It became clear that many of the service users at Manor Farm and residents at Merlewood would be able to attend an event at the Literary Institute due to poor health or disability so we arranged two events on site at Manor Farm, one at Merlewood and two at the Literary Institute. This enabled us to adapt each session to meet the needs of the group.



Food prepared by volunteers for Afternoon Tea project

We built on existing relationships with Royal Holloway Community Action and liaised with their Student Leader on the Elderly Tea Parties project. They advertised the volunteering opportunity to the group, and we gained 8 new volunteers from their existing cohort. We were also able to provide them with some informal reminiscence training as part of the project. The students, many of whom are from overseas, enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about British culture as well as connect with the local area. The Grassroots Project which supports adults with learning disabilities also helped prepare food for the afternoon teas; helping them to learn essential skills and engage with new people.

“I think we all had a great time and I hope you can resume them at some point in the future.” Santiago

The sessions at Manor Farm Day Centre were supported by Debra Mooney and were attended by regular users of the Day Centre as well as residents of Grove Court. The attendees enjoyed reminiscing with each other around the chosen topic of food and shopping, prompted by items from the Museum collection. They also shared stories with the student volunteers who had prepared the afternoon tea. The group were more engaged and responsive as the session progressed, sharing more memories and enjoying each other’s company.



Participants at the Manor Farm Afternoon Tea

Photo taken by volunteer, Ting

At Merlewood, the session was more informal and student volunteers spent time with smaller groups talking about more items from the collection. It was an opportunity for the residents to interact with young people and tell them stories of their childhood. One resident who was living with

dementia was being visited by her daughter at the time of the session and they both enjoyed reminiscing together about the area they had lived in as a family. The Afternoon Tea @ the Lit project enabled them to make connections and share time together.

“Everyone had a really lovely afternoon” Debra

The public sessions were attended by a variety of people, including residents of Grove Lodge who had attended previous sessions and members of the local Women’s Institute. They were interested to be inside the Literary Institute Hall as many of them had attended dances, meetings or performances there in the past. Participants told stories of Egham in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, prompted by photos and items from the Museum collection. The group asked when we would be holding more Afternoon Teas or similar events and were keen that we repeat the experience with a different theme.



Various items from the Museum collection highlighted for use in reminiscence sessions

This project enabled us to refresh our handling collection and identify items from the existing collection which are useful and interesting in reminiscence sessions and it was a great way to engage local people in the museum collection and stories from the past.

Afternoon Tea @ the Lit enabled us to reach 108 new people in total, including 8 new student volunteers and 5 members of the Grassroots Project and we hope to be able to build on the experience in the future.