



Cultural Services Annual Report

2025-2026



Lancashire
County
Council





Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this year's Cultural Services Annual Report showcasing the fantastic work taking place across our Libraries, Archives, Museums and Heritage teams. We have activities that bring all generations of Lancastrians together, we focus on making our offer accessible and exciting to as many residents as possible, and we deliver opportunities to support individuals in their learning and opportunities, from the heart of communities across Lancashire.

It has been great to see families engaging with fun palaces taking place at more and more libraries, and there is a strong sense of the importance of engaging young people through our Culture Hacks and our Heritage Learning Team bringing to life the stories of Lancastrians of the past. This includes vital projects for children and young people with SEND and ensuring our offer is genuinely inclusive and engaging for everyone.



We have shown a clear ambition to continuously improve our Cultural offer from the opening of the Music Library in Burnley Central Library - a very attractive art deco space, to the Hidden Hoards exhibition with newly acquired and highly significant pieces of Lancashire's history, to the acquisition of the 1766 John France Press by Gillows now in the Judges' Lodgings, to the reopening of the library in the renovated Harris museum in Preston, and we are thankful to our partners and Arts Council England, Stocks Massey Bequest and the National Lottery Heritage Fund that have seen the value in working with us and investing in Lancashire.

I want to thank everyone across all our teams and volunteers for the contribution they make to Lancashire, and over the next year I look forward to seeing how we can build on these great foundations to enhance civic pride and enrich the lives of all residents of Lancashire.

County Councillor Matthew Salter
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills
Lancashire County Council

Our Cultural Services' teams



Lancashire Libraries

Across 64 library branches our library service is embedded at the heart of Lancashire communities providing access to books, online resources, trusted digital and health information, learning and culture. We are a universal service with an offer across our communities for people of all ages and backgrounds, from reading schemes for children to reading groups for adults. We provide a **Home Library Service**, delivering books and more to customers who can't get to the library, a **Mobile Library Service** providing a lifeline to the rural parts of the county, and a **Prison Library Service**. The **Lancashire School Library Service** provides direct library and reading support to early years' settings, primary, special, academy and independent schools.

Lancashire Museum Service

Our Museums enable people to explore the history of Lancashire. We operate in Judges' Lodgings in Lancaster, Queen Street Mill in Burnley, Helmshore Mills in Rossendale, Gawthorpe Hall in Padiham, Lancaster Castle and Clitheroe Castle Museum. Our **Conservation and Collection team** provide specialist curatorial, conservation, technical and design support for museums and the public.

We care for museum collections and heritage, training museum staff, heritage professionals and the public in collection care and preservation and are responsible for the Lancashire Conservation Studios and Ribchester Roman Bath House.

Heritage Learning Lancashire are an award-winning cultural learning and education team, providing learning programmes for the primary, secondary, further, and higher education sectors, family learning and teacher training/professional development.

Lancashire Archives and Local History

Lancashire Archives and Local History collects and preserves the County's unique archives, making 900 years of documentary collections available in person and online for exploring personal, family and community history. We are an Accredited Archive Service as designated by The National Archives, we deliver a schools, exhibitions and engagement programme, and are supported by an amazing team of volunteers and the Friends of Lancashire Archives.

Cultural Development

The team provide the strategic lead for Cultural Services in reading development, community engagement, health and wellbeing, cultural development and community funding including Crowdfund Lancashire.

Information Development

The team work with colleagues across Cultural Services to develop and deliver digital services to our customers, provide access to reliable information, and support the development of our workforce and work systems. The team also works with internal and external partners to support the development of multi-media resources and training materials.

Library Resources

The resources team contribute to the success of the library service through careful selection of stock to make sure we get value for money for every book we buy. We monitor our success through issue and stock turnover figures and by listening to operational colleagues. We advise and support staff across a range of areas including stock management, requests and Inter-Library loans.

Business Support

The team supports Cultural Services colleagues with all service projects and normal business delivery requirements including financial transactions for Cultural Services.



Highlights: Lifelong Learning

Lancashire Archives celebrated 85 years of the service and 50 years of the Bow Lane Records Office building, with a Heritage Open Days programme, study day with Lancashire Local History Federation and a special 1970s themed walking tour.

Crowdfund Lancashire is how Lancashire County Council administers the Lancashire Culture and Sport Fund. In 2025, Crowdfund Lancashire garnered support from over 3,300 backers, funding 68 projects with a total of £1.3m raised including over £425,000 pledged from Lancashire County Council.

Heritage Learning Lancashire ran the 2025 **Lancashire Schools' Storytelling Festival**. Involving five primary schools, the three-month project is designed to develop literacy, oracy, creativity, and confidence. Using storytelling to connect with Lancashire's intangible heritage and this year inspired by South Asian folklore. The programme strengthens communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and personal skills while boosting reading and writing development.

King Charles III, Duke of Lancaster, visited Lancaster Castle in September. During the visit he was introduced to some of our museum and tour guide staff. The visit was a huge success, with His Majesty clearly enjoying the castle and taking an interest in the ongoing Duchy of Lancaster funded refurbishment works, as well as current visitor numbers for the site.



Haslingden Library highlighted **Crime Reading Month** with author **Michael Knaggs** talking about his latest book, 'The Moorstone' which is set in Helmshore. Michael did some of his local research at the library and delivered the talk along the theme of a live investigation with the audience trying to delve into the case. 25 people attended and gave us positive feedback.

Libraries supported 6,543 interactions enabling residents to develop essential digital skills, with staff providing tailored, task-based assistance aligned to the Essential Digital Skills framework, addressing local barriers to access, confidence and affordability, and supporting greater independence in using online services.

Lancashire Libraries reading group service supported 222 registered groups who were able to choose from a selection of 434 titles. New books are added to the list each year with reading group members being invited to help in the selection. In addition to standard print, large print and audiobooks are also available on selected titles. This year nearly **28,000 individual books and over 2,500 sets were issued**.

Library visitor footfall

2,731,711



3,629,399

eBook/eNewspaper/
eMagazine downloads.



Issued

2,779,743

books in static libraries

Issued



57,253

books via mobile libraries



Hosted

275

Lancashire Adult
Learning courses in
libraries with

1,765

enrolments.



58,929

new library members



16,293

Children have participated in Reading
Schemes.





Highlights: Inclusive Cultural Offers

Hi-Vis Fortnight, saw **Skelmersdale Library Science Club** run a session with Braille Bricks. Children explored braille books and decoded messages in braille to open locked boxes.

Everyone enjoyed it;

“interesting to see how other people read” and “made me think about how other people live”.

Working with staff from Preston City Council the Resources team supported the **reopening of The Harris library** with the selection and purchase of 7,000 new books with many of these shelved in and around the galleries and exhibition spaces to complement the museum displays.

Morecambe library and the cultural development team were granted £1,000 to develop a project to raise awareness of the library with local secondary schools. The library worked with young adults with Special Educational Needs from “Unique Kidz” and a range of sensory equipment was procured.



Lancashire Museums, Archives and Libraries all partnered with the Weavers Uprising Bicentennial Committee in Pennine Lancashire to deliver a programme of activities marking the **1826 Weavers’ Uprising**, featuring a mobile touring exhibition in libraries, events at Helmshore Mill and new school resources.

To highlight **Autism Awareness Month**, Accrington Library delivered a Storytime using specialist sensory resources to ensure children with **SEND** were given equal opportunities to engage with stories, language and books in a way that adapted to their needs.

Lancashire Archives and the Conservation and Collections team supported interns on the Project Search programme, helping 18 - 24 year olds with learning disabilities and autism in Lancashire to move from education into paid work. Our interns worked on everything from archival research to digitisation of collections.



612

Home Library
Service customers
were supported
each month by

86

volunteers.
(monthly average)

58

Culture and sport
community projects
supported by Crowdfund
Lancashire.



20 

Fun Palaces in our
venues,

5,176

people visited them.



100

Different learning sessions
were offered within museums
or schools by Heritage
Learning Lancashire.



520

Average Mobile
Library stops per
month.

£330,000

contributed (to date)
by the LCSF to
community arts
and sports projects,
which has levered an
additional

£443,000

and counting in
funding from local
people, businesses
and local and national
funders.



37,932

Events delivered in libraries





Highlights: Healthier and Fulfilled Lives

Skelmersdale Library hosted a major new exhibition, **Alternative Futures**, a collaborative artist led public art project shaped by the lived experience, past and present, of the communities of Skelmersdale, and focused on New Town collections managed by Lancashire Museums and Archives.

The Heritage Fund supported, **Keeping East Lancashire in the Picture** project, celebrated the digitisation of thousands of historic Lancashire photographs by a team of over 50 volunteers, by winning the Archives and Records Association, Volunteering Project of the Year award.

Funded by the Lloyd's Register Foundation, **Lancashire Archives digitised a major collection of records linked to Fleetwood's coastal past** and worked with Fleetwood Library and Lancashire Museums to create a new interactive exhibition at the library.

Fun Palaces is a free national event where communities share skills in arts, crafts, science and digital activities. Cultural Services hosted 20 Fun Palaces attracting 5,176 visitors.

"Excellent Event with lots of activities. My son loved the music circles and table activities."

Cleveleys Library marked the 80th anniversary of **VE Day** with a 1940s-style street party featuring decorations, food, music, a quiz, raffle and memorabilia. 35 attendees received badges, and some shared personal wartime experiences, honouring the thriving local armed forces community and sharing stories together. **Rawtenstall Library** hosted a heritage tea party. Guests reminisced as they enjoyed a thematic quiz, explored a photographic exhibition and collection of WW2 memorabilia and were treated to an array of traditional sweets and cakes.

Around 80 attendees from **30 Friends Groups** came together **for the Friends Conference**. Highlights of the day: social media presentation, Bandura performance, a comic drawing workshop, interactive marketplace stalls and a children's author with a superhero theme. Barnoldswick Friends showcased their successful newsletter. Participants praised the chance to network and exchange good practice.



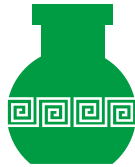
Archives
supported

164

volunteers
contributing

9,003

hours of
their time



Museums supported

177

(max per quarter) volunteers
who contributed 9,787 hours
of their time.



225

Memory Box loans to
support reminiscence events.



27,824

books loaned to library
Reading Groups.



3

new library
Friends' groups
were set up.



750

SIM cards provided as part of
NDBS to tackle digital poverty.



176,337

WiFi pages printed by customers
in libraries





Highlights: Inspiring Young People

We recruited 92 young people to join as 'Culture Hacks', who are our young volunteers in libraries and the Archives. They were involved in supporting events and helped create a new volunteer logbook. A 'Discover Creative Careers' event attended by Culture Hacks highlighted a range of creative pathways, including library apprenticeships, as part of this national initiative.

Our School Library Service Book Bus visited 180 schools across Lancashire bringing reading for pleasure books for children to add to their school library/classroom. The Book Bus experience empowers children to choose books in a library setting, giving them ownership of their school library and encouraging a love of reading.

The School Library Service Fantastic Book Awards celebrated its 21st year of inspiring and instilling a love of reading in children across Lancashire. Focussing on reading for pleasure, over 100 schools and nearly 3000 pupils took part in the Awards, reading books and voting for their group winner! Our celebration event was great fun, with winning authors answering questions and accepting their awards.

Reading Heroes - our summer reading offer combining superheroes and STEM, aimed at ages 4-11, returned for a third year – with a record 9750 registrations and 40 out of 69 libraries (including mobiles) beating their previous best for registrations or engagements.

Make Music Day at Burnley Library. A development day and discovery sessions working with Lancashire Music Service to introduce people to music and playing instruments. The BBC philharmonic also attended and offered 2 music shows for younger people.

Heritage Learning Lancashire welcomed Vancouver musician and speaker Luke Wallace into eight Lancashire schools in 2025/26. This innovative singer, songwriter, and public speaker uses his talent to champion environmental causes and encourage young people to think creatively about what they can do to improve their locality supporting a wide range of cross-curricular learning.



9,750

Children registered for our 'Reading Heroes' summer scheme.

20,549



Pupils attended Heritage Learning Lancashire creative learning sessions.



2,686

pupils attended events as part of 'Fantastic Book Awards'.

Children from

88

primary schools voted for their favourite 'Brilliant Book Award' read.



5

schools and **67** children took part in the Lancashire Storytelling Festival.

Heritage Learning Lancashire ran



70



training and development sessions with teachers



270,136



Books loaned to schools by Lancashire School Library Service

We supported **432** library volunteers with **40%** of these being Culture Hacks, young volunteers.





Highlights: Collections and Pride of Place



Archives launched a new online collections catalogue portal, bringing together archives and local history collections information, with improved search tools to widen public access to archives.

Burnley Library Music Room opened on 2 February 2026 after a 3-year refurbishment programme funded by Arts Council England, Stocks Massey Bequest and Lancashire County Council. Housing a unique sheet music collection which is available to loan, with additional use as a venue for activities and events with audiences up to 60 people.

Local charity, Global link, applied for funding to National Lottery Heritage to research and celebrate the history of **Carnforth library which celebrates its 90th anniversary in September 2026**. This will culminate in a celebration open day on 18 July.

The Northern Independent Reads project ran from the 8 August 2025 to the 31 January 2026 celebrating the creativity and innovation of independent published fiction in the North of England.

The project culminated in a festival on the 6 March attended by representatives from library authorities, publishers and suppliers from across the NW region.

The Hidden Hoards and Fascinating Finds exhibition curated by the Conservation and Collections Team was displayed at Clitheroe Castle Museum from July 2025 – March 2026. It featured some of the best archaeological finds from the county including the Silverdale Viking hoard and the newly acquired 4000-year-old gold armlet from Turton.

In January 2026, Lancashire County Museum Service acquired the **1766 John France press by Gillows** with £73,000 in grant funding from the Art Fund and Arts Council/V&A Purchase fund. This well documented early piece strengthens the nationally important Gillows' collection on display at **Judges' Lodgings**.

Judges' Lodgings celebrated 400 years with community events and exhibitions. Servant history was revealed through research, archaeology and oral history. New textile and ceramic artworks co-produced with local people are now on display alongside a digital installation. Watch this space in 2026!



161

new collections accepted
into Lancashire Archives and

18,315

new catalogue
descriptions created.

311

people trained in
heritage related
skills.



154,233

visitors to our museums and
heritage tours, including **12,277**
school visits led by our Heritage
Learning Team or site teams.




1,037

New objects recorded
as part of the Portable
Antiquities Scheme.

24,951

books were read by children
taking part in 'Reading
Heroes' with 44% completing
the reading element and 64%
reading at least 1 book.



601

issues of music and
drama collections.





How to find out more

Read a full version of the 2025-26 annual report via the QR code.



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