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The Missing Museums: Accreditation, Surveys, and an Alternative Account of the UK Museum Sector

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The Missing Museums: Accreditation, surveys, and an alternative account of the UK sector

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Surveys of the UK museum sector have all had subtly different remits and so represent the sector in a variety of ways. In the last three decades, surveys have almost invariably focused on accredited institutions, thereby omitting almost half of the museums in the UK. In this article we examine how data collection became tied to the accreditation scheme, and its effects on how the museum sector was and is represented as a professionalised sphere. Yet, while is important to understand the role of surveys in constructing the museum sector, this article goes beyond critique to show how the inclusion of unaccredited museums drastically changes the profile of the museum sector. We outline the inclusive approach that the Mapping Museums project team has taken with regards to data collection, and compare our findings with those that are produced when a survey is limited to accredited museums. In so doing, we sketch out an alternative, heterogeneous version of the UK museum sector and make recommendations based on that evidence

Key words: museums, professionalism, data collection, ethics, classification

In 2016, the Westminster government called for ‘a wide-ranging review’ that would examine ‘the opportunities for all of England’s museums’ (Mendoza, 2017, p. 5). Neil Mendoza was commissioned to chair the enquiry and the ensuing report was published a year later. In the Executive Summary, Mendoza noted that the review ‘considers the wider context of the UK sector’ but that its primary focus is on accredited museums, namely, those that have reached nationally recognised standards of collections care, management, visitor services, and information delivery (Mendoza, 2017, p. 9). This focus on accredited museums is not an isolated instance. Recent governmental reports on the museums sectors in Northern Ireland and Wales similarly concentrate on accredited museums, and the same parameters were applied in late twentieth-century studies of the UK sector as a whole. Scotland is unusual in that its governmental reports do include some unaccredited museums.

There is a substantial gap between the number of accredited and unaccredited museums in the UK. The Museums Association website states that there are around 2,500 museums in the UK and that 1700 are accredited, so by this reckoning around 800 museums are unaccredited (Museums Association, n.d.). These figures are regularly cited, but our research points to a greater gap between the two. Over the last three years, the Mapping Museums team, which is based at Birkbeck College in London, has documented and analysed the growth of the UK independent sector from 1960 until the present day.[1] In the first phase of the research we compiled a list of all museums (irrespective of governance), which showed that 3224 museums were open to the public in 2017. This is to say that over half of museums are unaccredited, and are not figured into official accounts of the sector.

This disparity is not just a question of numbers, because the process of creating standards and classifying accordingly has implications for which things, practices,

and people are rendered visible or invisible. Equally, surveys and lists do not simply reflect the museum sector, so much as create versions of it, and it is important to consider the elements that do not fit or are structured out. As Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star have observed, selection and prioritisation are not inherently bad things, but they do have ethical, financial, and cultural dimensions (Bowker & Leigh Star, 1999).

In this article, then, we consider the surveys and reviews that have been conducted by the government bodies responsible for museums in the UK, their parameters, and the mechanisms that underpin the inclusion or exclusion of particular venues. We pay particular attention to how data collection became tied to the museum accreditation scheme, and its effects on how the sector was and is represented.

While is important to understand the role of surveys in constructing or creating the museum sector, this article goes beyond critique. We outline the more inclusive approach that the Mapping Museums team has taken with regards to data collection, and compare our findings with those that are produced when a survey is limited to accredited museums. In doing so, we point to the inequities of data collection as it currently stands, to the limits of official versions of the sector, and we present an alternative, heterogeneous view of cultural practice that recognises the contributions of a diverse range of practitioners. We close by considering the implications of our findings for museum policy.

Independent museums and accreditation

In 1963, the Standing Commission for Museums and Galleries published *Survey of Provincial Museums and Galleries*. At the time 'provincial' was taken to be synonymous with 'non-national' and despite its title the survey covered museums in

the four capital cities of the UK. The authors also stressed that they considered 'museums run by every sort of authority' (SCMG, 1963, p. 2). They listed local authority museums, those run by the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works (later the Historic Buildings Commission and subsequently English Heritage), those run by the military, school, and university museums, and finally 'privately-run museums of which a few belong to commercial firms, some to local learned societies, and almost all the rest … are administered by trusts' (SCMG, 1963, p. 2). The authors of this museum survey took little notice of governance or the standard of the museum in question. The same was true of the Standing Committee reports conducted in the 1970s and 1980s (Drew, 1984; Morris, 1988; Wright, 1973), and of the massive Museums.UK Database project of 1987, which was funded by the Office of Arts and Libraries, the government body that had responsibility for museums at the time. In their introduction to the findings of the Museums.UK Database, David Prince and Bernadette Higgins-McLoughlin explicitly stated that they had set out to cast their net as widely as possible, and had included 'a number of institutions that might be considered to perform, at the very best, museum functions at only a marginal level' (Prince & Higgins-McLoughlin, 1987, p. 6).

By the 1990s, that open-handed, inclusive approach to surveying had largely disappeared. One of the key drivers in the change was the introduction of the accreditation scheme, which the Museums Association first proposed at their Annual General Meeting in 1971. Responding to the plan, Dr Kersley, a delegate at the event, observed that many small independent museums would find it difficult to meet the first essential requirement, namely, that they had sufficient income to carry out and develop the work of the museum to satisfactory professional standards (Anon, 1971).[2] Another issue was that the accreditation scheme incorporated a definition of

museums. Although the International Council of Museums (ICOM) had developed a series of definitions from 1946 onwards, they had never been formally used within the UK. The terms adopted in 1971 by the UK Museums Association stated that:

> We define a museum as an institution where objects relating to the arts, sciences or human history are collected, adequately recorded, displayed, stored and conserved, and are made available for research and for the instruction and interest of the public or, in the case of some specialised museums, of a restricted public (Museums Association, 1976, p. 4).

By referring to museums as 'institutions', the definition presupposed a level of permanence and implied that they occupy a solid building in a fixed location (and not say, a boat or a large garden shed). As some of the delegates at the 1971 meeting commented, most small independent museums were not institutions, and so could not meet the terms being set. Museums that were less financially secure or that occupied temporary or mobile premises would not be eligible for accreditation, partly because they could not meet the requisite standards and partly because they did not meet the terms set by the definition.

The motion to develop an accreditation scheme was passed and subsequently established by the Museums Association. Initially, it was voluntary, run in a relatively ad-hoc way, and was of little consequence for individual museums, but in 1985, following talks between the two organisations, the Museums and Galleries Commission piloted a registration scheme, which was formally launched in 1988 (Museums & Galleries Commission, 1986). The scheme superseded accreditation and continued to be voluntary, but importantly the Museums and Galleries Commission

stipulated that ‘an unregistered museum would not be eligible for funds or subsidised services’ (Museums & Galleries Commission, 1987, p. 33). Registration thereby became directly linked to public funding. (The name of the scheme was changed back to accreditation in 2004, so for the purposes of clarity we will refer to accreditation throughout).

The change in the scheme’s management also enabled a closer tie between accreditation and surveying. In 1994, the Museums and Galleries Commission launched the Digest of Museum Statistics (DOMUS), which was intended to provide a ‘Domesday book of the museums business’ (‘DOMUS, 1996). The list of accredited museums formed the basis for the DOMUS database and the DOMUS team gathered further information in tandem with the annual accreditation returns (Coles, Hurst, & Windsor, 1998, p.11).[3] Every year accredited museums were sent forms that they were required to complete in order to retain their status, and DOMUS piggy-backed on this process by sending out questionnaires in the same package. At one point the DOMUS team considered the possibility of including unaccredited museums in the Digest and thereby generating a more comprehensive view of the sector, but that plan did not go ahead (DOMUS, 1996).

Here, then, several things happen, each reinforcing the other and underpinning an increasingly unilateral, official notion of the museum. The Museums Association had introduced the accreditation scheme as a means of setting and improving standards, and the Museums and Galleries Commission further pressed museums to professionalise by tying accreditation to funding. Museums had to comply with the official definition of a museum and to meet the scheme’s standards, if they were to receive public financial support. In that it required museums to fit certain professional

models of best practice, the accreditation scheme actively sought to shape individual museums and the character of the sector as a whole.

The link between the accreditation scheme and surveys simultaneously worked to create a vision of a professionalised sector by means of omission. An estimated 700 museums were unaccredited during the period of the DOMUS survey, and because of its remit and its data gathering process, they did not appear in the official documentation (Coles et al., 1998, p. 10). This meant that museums that did not meet the requisite standards of collections management, that were not financially stable, or did not have permanent buildings, were all excluded from the survey, as were those museums that were run by individuals or groups who did not know about accreditation, did not have the resources to make the application, or were disinclined to do so. Thus, accreditation shaped the museum sector by pushing individual museums towards professionalised practice, while the use of accreditation data served to edit out non-professional museums from the surveys. In any event, the link to accreditation meant that DOMUS did not reflect the character of museum practice in the UK, so much as invent it as a professional entity.

This depiction of the UK museum sector was reinforced in 1998 when the Museums Association agreed a new definition. New Labour had come to power the previous year and their cultural policy was adamantly instrumental. Museums, galleries, theatres, and concert halls were expected to develop participation among diverse communities, build educational infrastructures, and generally establish a substantial social, educational, and economic role. The new Museums Association definition echoed those aspirations by emphasising public service and the social contract between the museum and its users, and it sought to reposition museums as being central to the national political agenda (Besterman, 2010). In doing so, it added

a legal stipulation: that museums had to keep their collections 'in trust for society' (Anon, 1998). Again, this concerned the contract between museums and the public, because establishing museums as trusts helps to ensure that collections are not sold or used for private gain, which is especially important when public funding is involved. Those privately owned museums run on an ad-hoc basis with little legal governance, museums owned by businesses, or those operated as commercial enterprises, could not be considered museums under this new definition. As a result, venues that had no formal constitution or ran on a commercial footing were unable to renew their accreditation, or were ineligible to apply, even if they did meet the requisite standards.[4] Thus, in its final iteration, DOMUS represented the UK museum sector as a professionalised and a charitable sphere.

The DOMUS project ended in 1999 as part of a wider re-organization of governmental affairs. In 1998 Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland took over aspects of their own government, including responsibility for the arts, while the remit of the UK-wide Museums and Galleries Commission was dissolved in these areas. The management of the accreditation scheme also changed in that each of the four governments administered the scheme in their areas with the new Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in England assuming oversight for the UK as a whole. In 2011, that responsibility passed to Arts Council England.

Despite the reorganization, most subsequent surveys retained close links with the accreditation scheme. In 2002, the Northern Ireland Museums Council published 'Mapping Trends', which included a directory of all museums in the province (excluding the nationals), with further iterations of the report following in 2007, 2012, and 2016 (NIMC, 2016). These reports only included accredited museums. In England, the Museums Libraries and Archives Council produced a Digest of Museum

Statistics in 2006, which included ‘private museums’ in its breakdown of the sector by governance, but provided no further analysis. (Greenwood & Maynard, 2006). The Mendoza Review followed in 2017, which as noted above, focused on accredited museums.

The situation is slightly different in Wales. In 2007, CyMal, (subsequently renamed the Museums Archives Libraries Division) conducted its first ‘Spotlight’ report, which provided a detailed overview of museums in Wales, with further reports being published in 2007, 2011 and 2015. All organizations that ‘regard themselves as museums’ are invited to participate in the Spotlight surveys, so in principle they are more inclusive. However, the Museums Archives Libraries Division reports state that ‘the accreditation scheme enables differentiation between organizations which merely collect and display artefacts, and genuine museums committed to meeting the UK definition of a museum in full’, and thereby identifies the characteristics that it expects to find in a museum (Newman, 2015, p. 7). Unsurprisingly, then, the 2015 Spotlight survey only included three unaccredited museums, and all the core museums that have consistently returned data over the lifespan of the survey are accredited. Hence, while surveys of Welsh museums are less explicitly tied to the accreditation scheme, they are still very closely aligned to it.

Of the four UK nations, Scotland has generated the most inclusive official list of museums. This is primarily because it uses the ICOM definition of museums, which does not require museum collections to be held in trust, only that it is ‘a non-profit, permanent institution’ (ICOM, n.d.); nor do they insist upon accreditation. The Scottish Museum Council’s National Audit of 2002 only required organizations to endeavour to meet appropriate standards of stewardship and public service to be included in the survey (Scottish Museums Council, 2002). Likewise the annual

Visitor Attraction Monitor studies published by Museums Galleries Scotland features a number of unaccredited venues (Martinolli, 2014). Nonetheless, there are many Scottish museums that do not reach the prescribed standards and thus are excluded from those studies.

Thus, non-professionalised, independent museums appeared frequently in the Standing Commission reports of the 1960s and 1970s, when definitions were not used and accreditation did not exist, and also featured in the reports during the 1980s. These types of museum begin to be erased from the official record in the 1990s, and by definition do not appear in the lists of accredited museums published by Arts Council England. Unaccredited museums are and were excluded from reports by the Northern Ireland Museums Council, are rarely included by the Museums, Archives, Libraries Division in Wales, and are peripheral to surveys of English museums. Apart from in Scotland, the official UK museum sector has been redrawn without unaccredited museums.

Classifying the missing museums

In the first phase of the Mapping Museums project the research team collated data from available surveys and conducted extensive research to identify museums that were missing from those sources, drawing on historic and specialist guidebooks and gazetteers, archival data from the Association of Independent Museums, and consulting tourist boards and websites, such as the Museum Association 'Find a Museum' database (Candlin and Poulovassilis, forthcoming). In the course of conducting this research it became clear that one of the advantages of using accreditation as the starting point for a survey is that it produces a clearly defined and documented sector. Accreditation teams across the UK have already undertaken the

work of definition and so there is no ambiguity as to which venues should be included or excluded. In contrast, the Mapping Museums research team had to decide the parameters for their enquiry.

Our approach to definitions will be discussed at length elsewhere (Candlin et al., forthcoming) but, briefly, we took the lead from prototype theory, which comes from the cognitive sciences. Whereas a definitional model insists on key characteristics and fails to capture the complexity and fuzziness of categories in the real world, prototype theory develops Ludwig Wittgenstein's conceptualisation of categories in terms of family resemblance (Wittgenstein, 1988). This approach recognises that the objects or instances within a category do not necessarily share all the same elements, and that some may be more central to the category than others (Rosch, 1973). For instance, the definitional model would consider a bird as having a set of features, such as feathers, wings, and ability to fly, yet a robin can fly and a penguin cannot and both are understood to be birds. Similarly, the British Museum occupies a huge neo-classical building and has eight million objects in its collection, while the Burston Strike School Museum is located in a tiny building and only has a handful of items on display, but within the current cultural and historical context, both are recognisably museums. Following this logic, the Mapping Museums project did not set formal conditions for an entity to be included as a museum or attempt to police a firm boundary between museum and not-museum. Rather we conceived of 'museum' as a 'radial category' (Lakoff, 1987) where certain institutions are incontrovertibly understood to be museums, with others sharing in enough 'familial' traits of those central institutions.

We had long discussions about familial traits within the research team and with members of the accreditation team at Arts Council England. While the accreditation

process requires applicants to comply with the Museums Association definition, there are still grey areas where an organisation may meet the required criteria but may not be a museum in a straightforward sense. For instance, there are questions as to whether a boat qualifies as a permanent structure, the line between historic buildings and museums, what counts as public access, and how many objects comprise a collection. Interestingly, most of the assessments we made chimed closely with the working process of the accreditation team. We also took our data to all nine regional groups within the Museums Development Network who queried the specific judgements we had made about individual museums. These conversations helped us amend or refine the venues that we chose to include. Generally, however, we expected museums to have collections that were placed on display, to be open to the public (even if that was for limited periods of time), to be concerned with the task of preservation, and to occupy a defined space (i.e. not to consist of a collection of objects distributed around an institution). We made no judgement about the quality, scope, or subject matter of these venues' collections. We excluded zoos, aquaria, botanical gardens, archives, and libraries unless they had a dedicated museum space.

The Mapping Museums team also classified these museums according to governance, subject matter, and size. These categories were motivated in part by Kenneth Hudson's claim that the majority of museums established in the post-war period were small, independent and concentrated on single, popular or non-academic subjects (Hudson, 2004). Hudson wrote prolifically on independent museums and was director of the European Museums Forum, so his observations were made on the basis of his wide experience, but were not underpinned by hard evidence. We wanted to examine his correlations between those museum characteristics, their date of

foundation, and their location, although in this article we focus specifically on accreditation.

While classifying museums in relation to governance was relatively straightforward, doing so according to subject matter was less so. The most recent schema for categorising the overall theme of a museum (as opposed to artefacts or collections within a museum) was devised as part of DOMUS in 1994 and was largely structured according to the traditional academic disciplines. Although this system is still in use by the Museums Association's 'Find-A-Museum' service, it does not adequately encompass non-academic subject areas or provide sufficient detail for research purposes. The Mapping Museums team therefore decided to design a new system of subject classification. We started by grouping the museums in our database into recognisable categories such as 'arts' and 'transport'. If a number of similar museums did not easily fit into the existing classes then we devised a new class, and where possible we introduced sub-categories when a single group was large and unwieldy. Thus, the system is not symmetrical and large categories such as 'war and conflict' have several sub-categories while the relatively small class of 'food and drink' has none. Again, we tested our classification system, firstly with professional archivists and secondly with the Museum Development Network.

The project team also considered museum size. Size is generally measured in relation to visitor numbers, and in cases where several criteria are taken into account, such as income and staff numbers, visitor numbers are always factored in. The problem is that records pertaining to visitor numbers are not always accurately dated, so the year they refer to is often unclear.[5] Furthermore, museums use different methodologies to collect data, and thus it is misleading to compare figures as if they were like for like. To help circumvent this issue we decided not to present definite

figures but to divide museums into broad categories. For this analysis, the museum size was classified into three categories based on annual visits: small (0 to 10,000 visits); medium (10,001 to 50,000 visits); large (50,001 to one million visits); and huge (over one million visits). When there was no available information on visitor numbers, we used predictive testing to establish size classification.[6]

Finally, establishing opening and closing dates posed a challenge because of the infrequency with which this type of information is captured in the public record. We had evidence for the year of opening for 88% of the museums in our dataset and an exact closing date attached to 13% of venues. We knew that a further 6% of museums were closed, but did not have a precise date for that occurrence. When it proved impossible to specify a particular year, we used date ranges, adopting a probabilistic approach to estimate the likelihood of a museum being open or closed at a given date. For example, if a museum is known to have opened between 1965 and 1969, then an increasing value starting from 0 in 1964 (certainly closed) to 1 in 1969 (certainly open) is assigned to each of the years, which comprise the range. All of the statistics in this article consider museums that were open at the end of 2017.[7] We have not included museums that were open but which closed before 2017.

Characteristics of Unaccredited museums

What then did we find? What characterises unaccredited museums and does the profile of the sector change as a result of their inclusion?

The first point to note is that over half of all museums in the UK are unaccredited (see Table 1). This expands the Museum Association's estimate that unaccredited museums comprise one third of the sector. It is possible that unaccredited museums are run to professional standards and that the staff have chosen

not to undertake the accreditation process, but it certainly indicates that there are more museums that cannot achieve these benchmarks or are indifferent to that process, than those that do. Rather than being the norm, the majority of museums – according to our definition – do not belong to this professional system.

Investigating our data in relation to governance, we found unaccredited museums of all types (see Table 2). Yet while a significant number of Local Authority museums are not accredited, most unaccredited museums are independent. By definition, private museums are unaccredited, but it is also notable that almost half of museums that are constituted as a not for profit or trust status are unaccredited. We were unable to establish the governance of some unaccredited museums, although as national museums are easily identifiable and Local Authority and University museums are expressly claimed as such, it is probable that the museums of unknown governance are all independent. None of these venues appeared on either the Charity Commission or Companies House registers, and so we have also assumed that the vast proportion of 'unknowns' within the governance category are run in an ad hoc manner and are also in private hands.

As well as being primarily private and not for profit organisations, unaccredited museums tend to operate on a small scale. We found that the vast majority of museums in the UK are small, in that they attract less than 10,000 visitors per year. As Table 3 shows, this category is dominated by unaccredited museums with 60 % of small museums being unaccredited as compared with 23.2% and 20.7% of medium and large institutions. This is not surprising because, as discussed above, accreditation is closely tied to funding, so unaccredited museums are often less able to raise external funds to support their organisation, and hence to provide exhibitions or events that attract larger audiences. While there are exceptions, for instance the

Museum of Witchcraft in Cornwall is not accredited and has visitor numbers of between 50,000 and 70,000 per annum, there tends to be a mutually reinforcing link between low income, low numbers of paid staff, and low visitor numbers.

Unaccredited and accredited museums are similar with respect to subject matter in that there are significantly more museums devoted to local history and historical buildings than any other subject (see Table 4). The ranking of most topics in the accredited and unaccredited sectors is also comparable, but this approximate hierarchy hides real variation across the subject index as a whole and within individual categories. For instance, 65.9% of arts museums are accredited, as are 82.6% of museums with mixed subject matter, a category that includes major 'universal' museums such as the British Museum and those that have general collections, as is the case in many county museums. These disparities are unsurprising given that local authorities have historically founded both types of museum and it is more usual for Local Authority museums to be accredited. In contrast, unaccredited museums often address subjects that fall outside of the traditional academic canon, such as rural industry, transport, and belief and identity. Museums of food and drink, sports and leisure, and the services (police, ambulance, nursing, prison) are almost always unaccredited. The classification 'other' contains museums that do not comfortably fit into any of the twenty subject categories we devised, and these too are predominantly unaccredited.

The same trend of museums with a traditional, academic subject matter being more likely to be accredited occurs at the level of sub-categories (see Table 5). The exception is 'large houses' where unaccredited stately homes and country houses outnumber accredited venues. These venues tend to be held in private ownership and are not eligible for accreditation, hence the large numbers. Otherwise unaccredited

museums continue to appear in the non-traditional subject areas. For instance, the sub-category of 'religion' has slightly more accredited museums (57%) whereas 'ethnic group' has far fewer (23.5%). The sub-category of 'regimental museums' is heavily weighted towards accredited museums (76%), whereas museums of wartime bunkers are entirely unaccredited. On similar lines, unaccredited museums are much more likely to belong to categories that relate to specialised or niche topics. The category 'natural world' has a number of sub-categories including mixed (which covers traditional natural history museums with a wide scope), dinosaurs, and fossils. The first sub-category is almost entirely comprised of accredited museums, the latter two sub-categories, of unaccredited museums. Likewise, within the category 'industry and manufacture', the sub-category 'industrial life' (which applies to museums that address a wide range of lived experience) is predominantly comprised of accredited museums, while 'steam and engines', and 'mining and quarrying' are predominantly unaccredited. A number of sub-categories have no accredited museums. Wartime bunkers, church treasuries, fairgrounds, the museums of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, and museums devoted to shops, each contain between three and ten museums respectively, all of which are unaccredited.

Finally, the Mapping Museums team considered rates of closure among unaccredited museums. Taking figures over the last three decades (i.e. since the accreditation scheme was formally launched) we can see that the rate of closures among unaccredited museums vastly outpaces those that had accreditation (see Figure 1). Our data does not track when museums gained their accreditation status or if they lost it, so it is possible that some of the museums that are shown as being accredited may have lost that status before they closed, but it is important to note that unaccredited museums close with more frequency than accredited museums. As Table

6 shows, since 1990, 25% of unaccredited museums have closed, whereas only 2% of accredited museums have closed.

Unaccredited museums, then, have four main distinguishing characteristics. They can be found in all the different categories of governance, but the vast majority are independent (and do not belong to one of the main heritage bodies). They are predominantly small museums that attract relatively few visitors. They are much more likely to concentrate on a single non-traditional or specialised subject than accredited museums, and they cover a greater range of topics. Finally, they are much more likely to close than accredited museums.

The politics of surveys

There is no right way to demarcate the UK museum sector. Its borders will be differently drawn depending on the remit of the survey, the organization that undertakes the survey or compiles the list, and the processes by which data collection is undertaken. The constitution of the sector is intimately linked to notions of professionalism and also forms part of a wider conglomeration of organizational structure, the distribution of public funding, and to the instrumental use of the arts. Those concerns and processes change over time, and surveys reshape the sector accordingly. None of the ensuing surveys is anymore 'true' than the next, the sector is not defined in advance of the surveys, and there is no conveniently flagged line that naturally separates the museums from the non-museums.

Importantly, however, the process of surveying produces quite different versions of the sector, which recognises different kinds of cultural practice, places, and different groups of people. Once unaccredited museums are factored in, the sector becomes much bigger and much more heterogeneous. The sheer quantity of small

museums becomes far more evident as does the number of independent museums. A large private museum sector reappears, which includes both small scale and commercially oriented museums. Trusts or not-for-profit organizations that are not affiliated with the large heritage organizations have even greater prominence as do community museums and those run by special interest groups. There are also large numbers of stately homes, which represent real privilege, both in terms of assets and class. By extension, a model of the museum sector that includes unaccredited museums also includes a greater diversity of practitioners. Unaccredited museums are far more likely to be run by volunteers, enthusiasts, individuals, families, and by business people than their professional counterparts. These groups begin to emerge more clearly as do their priorities and concerns, and their contribution to cultural life.

This account of the sector includes museums that occupy makeshift or short-term premises and that cannot be defined as institutions, museums where visitors enter into someone's home, and museums that only exhibit ephemeral objects, intangible heritage, or where the displays depend primarily upon text and images. The temporary, DIY, the experimental, and innovative all appear on the map. New subjects also come into focus and they concentrate on specialised and non-traditional single subjects: church treasuries, ethnic identities, fairgrounds, flower arranging, lace-making, waterworks, wartime bunkers, windmills, and waterworks.

Including unaccredited museums in surveys also shows the sector to be highly changeable. Museums come and go with far greater rapidity than previously thought, and for that reason the precariousness of museum practice comes into view. Museums open and close at a regular rate, and do not keep their collections for posterity.

The high rates of closure among unaccredited museums also indicate that the co-process of accrediting and editing out has real effects on particular sections of the

museum community. Some of these are to the advantage of individual museums and to the sector more generally. Accreditation functions as a useful yardstick by which organisations can allocate funding without having to investigate the particularity of individual venues, while gaining accreditation enables museums to apply for that funding. There is help for museums who want to join the accreditation scheme. Arts Council England run the Museum Mentors scheme that pairs experienced professionals with smaller museums to help them make applications and to submit their annual returns. Likewise, the Museums Development Network, which has regional branches across the UK, similarly encourages museums that are seeking accreditation, and it is likely that working towards and achieving the benchmarks set by the Museums Association definition and by accreditation helps museums to attract and retain audiences and thus to survive.

Yet there can be disadvantages in working towards professional benchmarks. In many cases the owners of private museums rely on the income they gain from admission fees, and in some instances their exhibitions are located in their own home – whether that be a castle or a front room. Thus the prospect of applying for charitable status could come at real personal cost – they could potentially lose their income and control over their own residence and collection.

The accreditation and mentoring scheme can also inadvertently undermine non-professional staff and close down on possibilities for how a museum might be run. Bethany Rex has analysed the process whereby local authority museums assets are transferred to independent societies, and she found that the accreditation scheme established distinctions between professionals and the groups who were taking over museums. The scheme played ‘a subtle gatekeeping role’; by stressing the routine

performance of conventional tasks, it constrained the ability of the new staff and volunteers to imagine different, non-standard ways of running museums (Rex, 2018).

Even more importantly, the conditions under which independent museums operate can limit their ability to apply for accreditation. The capacity to reach established standards of conservation and management is dependent on funding and infrastructure. Unaccredited museums may not be able to afford to buy permanent premises, or install a security system, or create proper storage for their collections. Similarly the ability to reach professional standards is dependent on the presence of staff to undertake routine and specialist work. In some instances, museum volunteers and trustees have a wide range of skills, but this is not always the case. The Museums Development Network does provide some professional training in the various aspects of museum work but there is considerable variation in capacity across the network so training is not available in all regions, not all courses are open to staff from unaccredited museums, and they have to be paid for.

It is not simply that unaccredited museums continue apace, albeit ignored by the official bodies, but that recent versions of the museum sector penalise venues that do not comply with dominant definitions of museums or meet the standards set by the accreditation process. Not being accredited means that these museums are rendered ineligible for public sector and most charitable funding. However, the ability of museums to conform to a particular model in order that it may be recognised and become eligible for funding, is predicated on it being already well established and having some financial security. Thus, the defining, accrediting, surveying processes further entrenches a situation wherein venues that have money and infrastructure have the opportunity to maintain it and those that do not have cannot acquire it.

Clearly, there are numerous small museums that have gained accreditation and are extremely proud of having done so. One could also argue that there are numerous museums in the UK and that there is no pressing need for more, or that established museums are already under considerable financial pressure and resources should not be spread more widely. There is also a question about whether or not all museums should exist in the long-term. Nonetheless, there is an issue as to whose culture and perspectives are put on exhibition and preserved. The groups who do not have access to funds find it harder to tell their stories or to explore their concerns in a museum context, and museums that recount narratives that are not featured in established institutions are much more likely to fail.

The staff who are engaged in the creation of official versions of the museum sector do not necessarily intend to support the status quo or to disenfranchise the poorer, ad-hoc, less established venues and their associated workforce. The administrative processes of defining, accrediting, and surveying are largely indifferent to the content of museums, but nonetheless there is an actual loss of diversity, experiment, and historical texture within the official museum sector, and not just at the level of representation. While the accreditation scheme, Museum Association definitions, and the surveying process may all be undertaken in good faith, and with care, arguably they also have deeply unethical outcomes.

Collecting data on unaccredited museums

In 2017, Arts Council England commissioned DC Research to conduct a scoping study on data management across the museum sector. The authors observed that museums had to provide data to numerous organisations, that there was considerable overlap between the various submissions and that this degree of repetition generated considerable frustration within the sector. In response, DC Research advised Arts

Council England to create a new system for data management, where museums would only submit information once via an online portal, and that this information would be available to all the organisational stakeholders. We wholeheartedly endorse the analysis and the remedies put forward by DC Research, but with one exception: that the new data management system should include unaccredited museums.

In their report, DC Research advised that the focus of a new system should be on collecting data from accredited museums. The rationale was that accreditation was a straightforward mechanism for deciding which museums should be included or excluded. Otherwise, 'there would be no clear consensus about where the line should be drawn' (DC Research, 2017, p. 21). Accreditation does indeed provide a easy way to delimit data collection but, as we have argued, it also produces an overly selective version of the sector that is skewed towards professionalised museums, favours conventional forms of practice, and disadvantages museums that do not have accreditation. Thus, we strongly advocate the inclusion of unaccredited museums within any data management system, as we have done in the Mapping Museums research project, and as Museums Galleries Scotland did in their National Audit and continue to do in their annual Visitor Monitor Reports. While drawing the line does present challenges, that task is not beyond wit, and as we noted above is already regularly addressed by Arts Council England's accreditation team.

Including unaccredited museums in a national database would provide a more fully rounded account of the sector and would enable a better understanding of museum practice across the UK, in all its capacities and forms. Having a database where that information is stored could underpin a greater level of strategic planning, support, and potentially funding. For instance, several branches of the museum development network work with county forums for museums and heritage. Their

concern is with economic and cultural impact across the board, and they are not concerned with the division between accredited and unaccredited museums. However, that information is not currently available.

Including unaccredited museums in surveys could also help the museum services in other respects. In the course of our research, we found a great deal of disparity in levels of local knowledge. We frequently visited Museum Development Network offices where staff had highly detailed historical knowledge of all the museums in their area but on other occasions the opposite was the case. In other instances, experienced officers were familiar with the museums in their immediate area but had little awareness of museums that were just over a county or regional border and thus fell outside their remit, even though the venues were geographically close to hand. As the system stands, the awareness of unaccredited museums generally depends on the long-term experience of the staff in question, and is not necessarily transferred when there is a change in staff.

Recording information on unaccredited museums could help the museum services identify museums that have the potential to apply for accreditation. While accreditation does have a normative effect, bringing museums into the professional fold indisputably helps their chances of surviving. The museum services could also use the data to identify groups of unaccredited museums where there are strategic or ethical reasons for providing assistance. For example, over the past few decades the museum sector has endeavoured to represent the history of minority ethnic groups and of deaf and disabled people to a much greater degree than was previously the case. Yet, in the past six decades there have only been twenty-two museums devoted to belief and identity in the UK. Five have closed since the late 1990s including the Guru Nanak Sikh Museum and the National Gypsy Museum. Of the museums

currently open only four are accredited. There is only one museum apiece devoted to deaf people and to people with learning disabilities, neither of which are accredited. Given the risks of closure among unaccredited museums, it may be strategically useful to provide higher levels of support on a selective basis.

Support could be similarly targeted at unaccredited museums according to location. Knowing their whereabouts would facilitate the creation of networks and links between unaccredited museums, or indeed between accredited and unaccredited museums. If unaccredited museums could work together and offer mutual support, or if the Museum Development Network offices could target development work at particular clusters, then that could help alleviate some of the problems of working in this part of the sector.

In all these cases, support could take the form of advice, facilitation, and targeted training. A more ambitious proposal would be that the national bodies for museums follow the precedent set by the Heritage Lottery Fund and waive the requirement that museums must automatically be accredited in order to qualify for funding. Clearly, arts funding is limited at present, but tactically using small amounts of money would have a significant impact on some of these museums. It is also worth noting that while the majority operate on a small scale, there are still significant numbers of medium and large unaccredited museums that presumably have an impact on the area, both in terms of generating tourism, and in terms of employment. Again, identification is the first step to considering how the sector could better support them for the benefit of the local economy.

Finally, our analysis of surveying, the politics of data collection, and of the characteristics of unaccredited museums leads us to the conclusion that standards should not always be prioritised above other qualities. It is important that objects are

cared for and that museums are well run, but it is also important to tell alternative stories and to encourage innovative and experimental forms of museum practice.

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Notes

[1] For more information on the Mapping Museums project see: http://blogs.bbk.ac.uk/mapping-museums/about/

[2] For information on the required standards for the accreditation scheme as of 1971 see Museums Association, 1976, pp. 5-6.

[3] From 1997 questionnaires were sent out separately from the accreditation returns.

[4] The final report on the DOMUS survey noted the change in definition and commented that 'It is assumed that there was no change in Accredited museums as a result of the change in definition'. (Wright et al., 2001) 4.n.1 The minutes of the accreditation team meetings but not indicate whether or not that was the case.

[5] For example, the Museums Association 'Find a Museum' service often includes visitor figures for each of its entries. Representatives of each museum update their own entries and in some instances, it is clear that visitor numbers may remain unaltered in the database for a number of years, while evidently pertaining to the current year.

[6] The model uses a random forest classifier on a combination of characteristics of museums (accreditation, governance, English region/country, subject matter, Output Area Classification 2016), that is, we establish correlations between size and other characteristics and use those patterns to predict the size of further museums. The accuracy of the predictive classification is 87%. The process is the most reliable with respect to small or large museums and slightly less reliable in relation to medium sized museums. To improve accuracy, the research team manually checked museums that were predicted to be medium sized.

[7] The statistics in this article were generated from the Mapping Museums dataset in July 2018 (Version 8). To avoid having a partial record for 2018, we only included data up until the end of 2017. The accreditation data is from 2016. Due to differences in the way we count museums, and the challenges of identifying closed museums, our total numbers of accredited museums very slightly differ from those provided by ACE.

	No. museums	%
Unaccredited	1635	50.7
Accredited	1589	49.3
Total	3224	100.0

Table 1: Total number of museums open in 2017 broken down by accredited museums vs. unaccredited status.

		No. museums			% museums	
		Accr	Unaccr	*Total*	Accr	Unaccr
Government	/Gov/Cadw	-	3	*3*	-	100
	/Gov/Local Authority	562	147	*709*	79.3	20.7
	/Gov/National	52	5	*57*	91.2	8.8
	/Gov/Other	7	4	*11*	63.6	36.4
	Government total	621	159	*780*	79.6	20.4
Independent	/Indep/English Heritage	32	17	*49*	65.3	34.7
	/Indep/Historic Env. Scotland	2	10	*12*	16.7	83.3
	/Indep/National Trust	145	36	*181*	80.1	19.9
	/Indep/National Trust for Scot.	8	14	*22*	36.4	63.6
	/Indep/Not for profit	754	723	*1477*	51	49
	/Indep/Private	-	441	*441*	-	100
	/Indep/Unknown	-	120	*120*	-	100
	Independent total	941	1361	*2302*	40.9	59.1
	/University	73	18	*91*	80.2	19.8
	/Unknown	-	51	*51*	-	100
	Total	1635	1589	*3224*	50.7	49.3

Table 2: Total number of museums open in 2017 broken down by accredited vs. unaccredited museums according to governance status.

	No. museums			% museums	
	Accr	Unaccr	Total	Accr	Unaccr
small	887	1358	2245	39.5	60.5
medium	344	104	448	76.8	23.2
large	403	105	508	79.3	20.7
unknown	1	22	23	4.3	95.7
Total	1635	1589	3224	50.7	49.3

Table 3: Total number of museums open in 2017 broken down by accredited vs, unaccredited museums according to size.

	No. museums			% museums	
	Accr	Unaccr	Total	Accr	Unaccr
Archaeology	52	38	90	57.8	42.2
Arts	153	79	232	65.9	34.1
Belief and identity	31	54	85	36.5	63.5
Buildings	249	300	549	45.4	54.6
Communications	7	6	13	53.8	46.2
Food and drink	1	14	15	6.7	93.3
Industry and manufacture	63	79	142	44.4	55.6
Leisure and sport	15	64	79	19	81
Local histories	468	272	740	63.2	36.8
Medicine and health	16	15	31	51.6	48.4
Mixed	128	27	155	82.6	17.4
Natural world	24	23	47	51.1	48.9
Personality	92	73	165	55.8	44.2
Rural industry	38	73	111	34.2	65.8
Science and technology	10	10	20	50	50
Sea and seafaring	42	56	98	42.9	57.1
Services	6	29	35	17.1	82.9
Transport	77	149	226	34.1	65.9
Utilities	11	22	33	33.3	66.7

War and conflict	143	172	315	45.4	54.6
Other	9	34	43	20.9	79.1
Total	1635	1589	3224	50.7	49.3

Table 4: Total number of museums open in 2017 broken down by accredited vs unaccredited museums according to subject matter.

	No. museums			% museums	
	Accr	Unaccr	Total	Accr	Unaccr
/Belief and identity/ Church treasuries	-	6	6	-	100
/Belief and identity/ Ethnic group	4	13	17	23.5	76.5
/Belief and identity/ Freemasons	3	5	8	37.5	62.5
/Belief and identity/ Other	1	4	5	20	80
/Belief and identity/ Religion	8	6	14	57.1	42.9
/Belief and identity/ Religious buildings	15	20	35	42.9	57.1
/Industry and manufacture/ Clocks and watches	1	3	4	25	75
/Industry and manufacture/ Industrial life	7	4	11	63.6	36.4
/Industry and manufacture/ Metals	7	7	14	50	50
/Industry and manufacture/ Mining and quarrying	14	24	38	36.8	63.2
/Industry and manufacture/ Mixed	5	2	7	71.4	28.6
/Industry and manufacture/ Other	10	13	23	43.5	56.5
/Industry and manufacture/ Potteries	4	5	9	44.4	55.6
/Industry and manufacture/ Print	0	2	2	-	100
/Industry and manufacture/ Steam and engines	2	7	9	22.2	77.8
/Industry and manufacture/ Textiles	13	12	25	52	48
/Natural world/ Dinosaurs	1	4	5	20	80
/Natural world/ Fossils	-	3	3	-	100
/Natural world/ Geology	4	6	10	40	60
/Natural world/ Herbaria and gardening	3	2	5	60	40
/Natural world/ Mixed	12	2	14	85.7	14.3
/Natural world/ Other	-	5	5	-	100

/Natural world/ Zoology	4	1	5	80	20
/War and conflict/ Airforce	12	39	51	23.5	76.5
/War and conflict/ Bunker	-	10	10	-	100
/War and conflict/ Castles and forts	25	38	63	39.7	60.3
/War and conflict/ Event or site	10	21	31	32.3	67.7
/War and conflict/ Military	9	22	31	29	71
/War and conflict/ Navy	8	7	15	53.3	46.7
/War and conflict/ Other	3	11	14	21.4	78.6
/War and conflict/ Regiment	76	24	100	76	24

Table 5: Selected museums open in 2017 broken down by accredited vs unaccredited status, according to selected sub-categories.

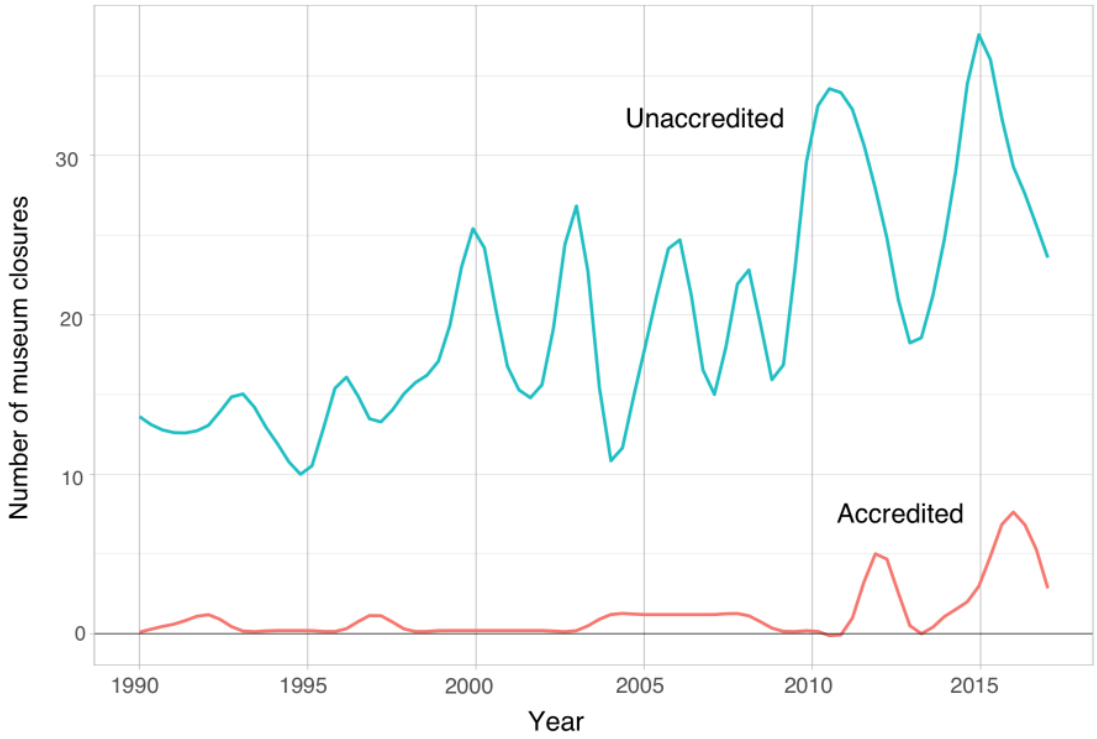

Figure 1: Rate of closure of museums per year according to accreditation status, 1990–2017.

	Mus. in exist. in 2017	%	Mus. closed since 1990	%	Closed within category (%)
Accredited	1,650	50.6	34	5.8	2.0
Unaccredited	1,612	49.4	552	94.2	25.5
Total	3,262	100	586	100	–

Table 6: Closures of museums in 1990–2017 according to accreditation status. The table shows that 2% of accredited museums and 25.5% of unaccredited museums closed during this period. The percentage of museums closed within an accreditation category is calculated as (*museum_closed_since_1990* / (museum_in_existence_in_2017 + *museum_closed_since_1990*) * 100).