

2025

WHIPPLE MUSEUM
OF THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE





Saturday visitors in the Main Gallery explore Physics & Glass. Photograph by My Linh Le.



Foreword

Welcome to the Whipple Museum's 2025 Annual Report. This was another record-breaking year for the Museum. Our monthly Saturday openings continue to be a huge success, and these, along with a busy schedule of events, helped us to grow our audience by 30% compared to 2024. I'm delighted with the positive visitor response to regular weekend opening, and we look forward to expanding this program to weekly Saturday opening in 2026.

The single most important event for the Museum came in May, when we celebrated our many friends and supporters, most notably the extended 'Whipple family'. We are hugely grateful for the support that the Whipple, Young, and Rowe families have provided to the Museum over the first 80 years of its life. 2025 saw yet another example of this support: the significant gift left to us by the late Sylvia Young, which endows a Learning Fund that will support education and public outreach for generations to come. The Museum could not achieve what it does without the generosity of our benefactors, and we thank them all for their support.



The refurbishment of the Museum's Learning Gallery headlines our major projects for 2025. It's now a welcoming, fun, and flexible space for our Learning programme, which, with the help of our brilliant team of volunteers, engaged over 5,000 people in 2025.

Further afield, the Museum partnered with Curating Cambridge and ARTiSTORY in the development of *From Magic World to Science*, which launched in Shanghai in July. This immersive exhibition uses reproductions of Cambridge University treasures to explore the history of science from Pythagoras to Hawking.

The Museum was delighted to receive an uplift in our Higher Education Museums & Galleries funding from Research England, in recognition of our increasing support for global research in the history of science. This has enabled us to double our capacity to support research and teaching with the appointment of our new Collections Assistant, Adam Priestley.

There are numerous other achievements and milestones to

discover in this report. None of these would have been possible without the hard work and commitment of the people who make the Whipple Museum such a thriving public institution. We are proud to be embedded within Cambridge's Department of History and Philosophy of Science, and I want to extend a huge thank you to its staff and students for backing the Museum's vision to grow and inspire life-long engagement with science and its history.

Within this large family, it is the seven core staff members in the Museum who make this vision into reality. We could not continue to improve every day without the hard work and passion of these individuals: Adam, Alison, Annie, Hannah, Morgan, Steve, and Victoria. It was a great pleasure to see them shortlisted for the University's 2025 Professional Services Awards in the 'Creating an Inclusive and Welcoming Community' category. A richly deserved recognition of all their work.

Joshua Nall
Director

Our mission is to use our collections to explore, challenge, and share stories from the history of science.

Our vision is for people to have a richer understanding of knowledge as a product of diverse cultures throughout history, inspiring a life-long engagement with science.

Our strategic priorities are:

Research

Be a world-leading centre for research into the material culture of the history of science.

Visitor Experience

Develop an inspiring, accessible, and inclusive Whipple visitor experience.

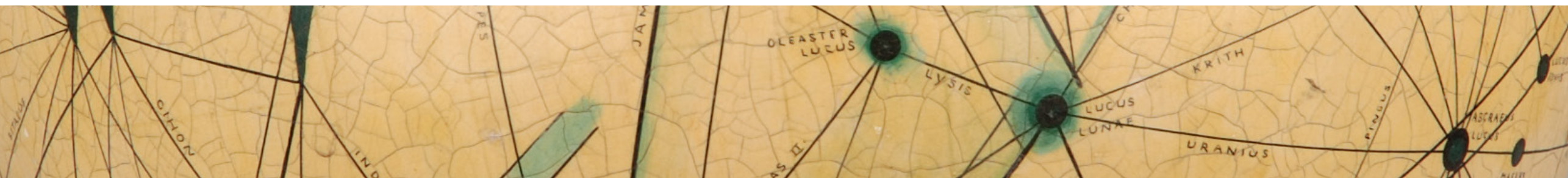
Learning

Support people of all ages to explore science and history in new ways, challenging perceptions and inspiring discussion.

Partnerships & Networks

Play a full and active role locally, nationally, and internationally.

Our overarching priority for 2024–2029 is **growth**, to achieve our full potential as a popular and vibrant public space.

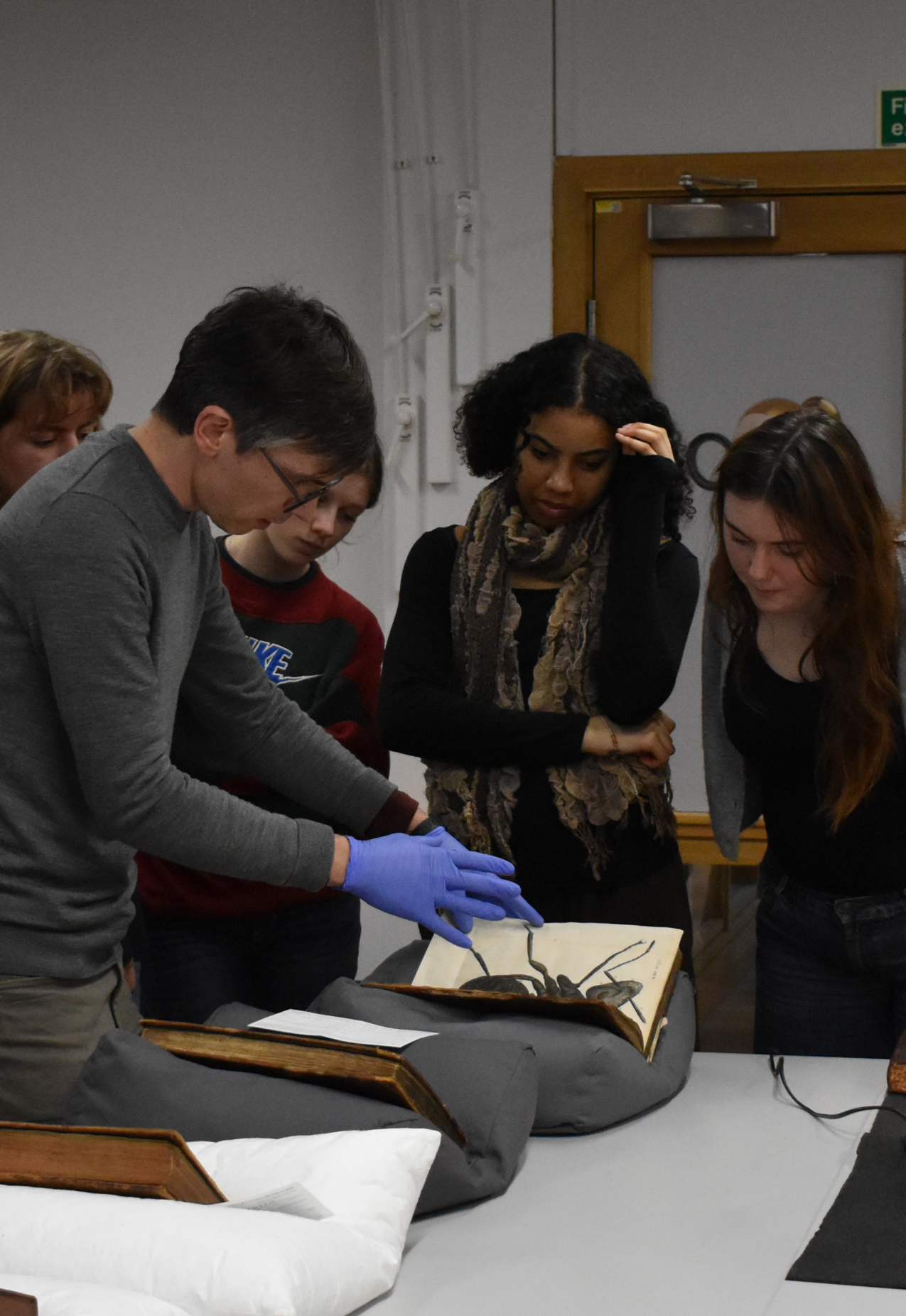


Research & Collections

The Whipple collection is one of the most intensively researched of its kind in the world. It's investigated not only by an international community of historians of science, but by our own students. This year thirteen courses across the Department of History & Philosophy of Science and beyond drew on the Whipple collections.

Thanks to an uplift in funding from Research England, in 2025 we doubled our capacity to support research and teaching with the arrival of our new Collections Assistant, Adam Priestley.

*This page and overleaf:
Teaching with the collections*



2025 collections snapshot

119 objects audited to improve accessibility

24 objects conserved

41 visits from researchers studying 268 objects

163 research enquiries answered

168 objects used in teaching

6 incoming loans and **12** outbound loans

1 new Collections Assistant



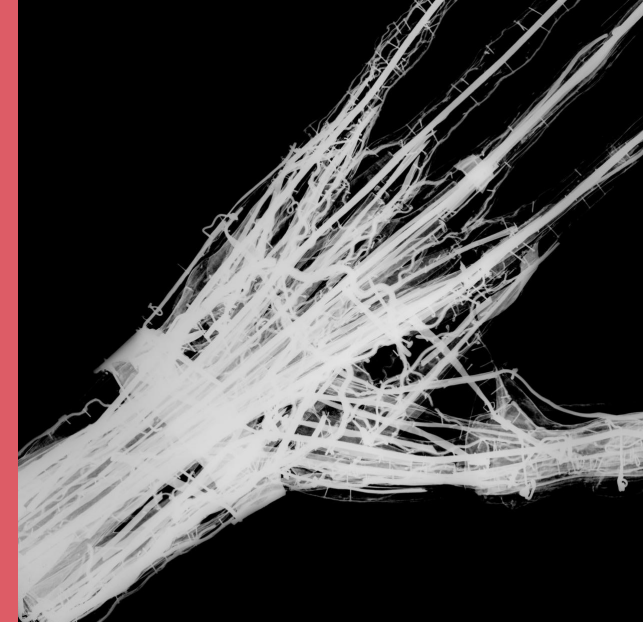
Above: Wh.1081, one of the sextants studied in this year's new Primary Source course

"Many thanks for the use of your excellent new facilities, for making my day so successful and for looking after me so well."

- Visiting researcher

T numbers solved

This year's exhibitions have a long-term legacy in much improved documentation of the Whipple's Cavendish Laboratory collection. 17 mystery objects that had been assigned temporary (T) numbers have now been formally accessioned and identified. We will present this project at the national Collections Trust Banish the Backlog conference in early 2026.



Conservation

UCM Conservator Deborah Walton continues to give vital care to the collections. With the help of the Fitzwilliam Museum, scientific analysis has enabled us to understand more about our objects. X-ray photography has revealed the metal skeleton of the Auzoux hand model (X-ray above) and a suspect portrait miniature has been investigated as part of our longstanding research into forgeries in the collection.



Loans

Loans out included to National Gallery's exhibition *Wright of Derby: From the Shadows*, where our air pump (Wh.3194) accompanied Joseph Wright's painting *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* (1798). The exhibition tours to Derby in 2026.

Since January, Museum visitors have been able to see oldest-known surviving English astrolabe, on loan from a private collector.



Material culture in HPS

This year, the Whipple collections continued to enrich the academic life of the Department of History & Philosophy of Science.

Objects featured in teaching across a range of courses—including *Physical Sciences*, *Empire & Modernity*, *Sociology of Scientific Knowledge*, and *Instruments & Material Culture, 1550–1800*—as well as the 2025 Anita McConnell Lecture, delivered by Professor Paola Bertucci (Yale) on “Navigating Origin Stories: The Mariner’s Compass as a Narrative Instrument”. Mariner’s compasses from the collection were displayed in the lecture theatre, giving students and attendees direct access to the material culture at the heart of the lecture (below).



The Sextant

Part II students explored one of the key instruments of the 18th century in a new Primary Sources paper, *The Sextant: Instruments & Documents in the Quest for Longitude*.

The paper draws on the Museum’s collection of navigational instruments, bringing them into dialogue with a defining episode from British imperialism: the quest to find longitude at sea.

Print & Material Sources

This graduate seminar organised by the Whipple Museum & Library gives our students access to the Whipple and other scientific collections across Cambridge.

This year’s highlights included visits to Churchill Archive Centre, the Needham Institute and Queens’ College, and hands-on printing sessions in the University Library’s Historic Print Room.



Student Research

MPhil students in History & Philosophy of Science & Medicine and in Health, Medicine & Society have the opportunity to produce a piece of original research on an object or book in the Whipple collection. This year’s essays shed light on a diverse selection of objects. Some—like this year’s Jim Bennett Prize-winner—explore recent acquisitions, while others shed light on intriguing objects—like Samuel Morland’s speaking-trumpet—that were awaiting their historian in the stores.



“Ladies of drunken and scientific habits: caricaturing women in late Georgian England” by Ella Sheddick (Wh.6813 & 6814)

Jim Bennett Prize 2025



“The Lloyd Evan Williams Trial: Understanding scientific instrument forgery in 1970s England” by Ava Szepessy (Wh.1639)



“‘O that Stentrophonical Tube’: Sir Samuel Morland’s Speaking-Trumpet and Wh.4428” by Joe Clarke



“Computerising Characters: A History of the Chinese Encoder (Wh.5201)” by Mina Nixon



“Playing the Age of Invention (1833): Science, Caricature and the Future” by Louis Boswell (Wh.6795)

Archives

Archivist Victoria Brunton has made the Whipple's rich archival collections more widely accessible than ever before.

Victoria joined the team in November 2024 and has been improving the storage and cataloguing of archival materials. She has worked closely with Collections Manager Morgan to design and fit out two new store rooms, operational from summer 2026. The new stores will increase our overall storage capacity by 13%. One of the spaces will be the Museum's first dedicated paper store to house archival material, including our collection of trade literature relating to Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company, W.G. Pye & Co. and other instrument manufacturers.

Find us online

The Whipple Museum & Library are now on the University's archive database ArchiveSearch, making our holdings much more accessible to researchers. Find us at archivesearch.lib.cam.ac.uk/repositories/45



The Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company Archive

The Archive contains important records relating to the Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company, including customer order instrument data cards for instruments purchased from CSIC (left). In theory, it will be possible for future researchers to connect individual instruments with their original purchaser, going back to the very early 20th century. Victoria has listed, cleaned, packaged and reboxed the CSIC material ready for transfer to the new archive store.

The Charles Elcock Archive

Belfast-born naturalist, curator and professional microscopist Charles Elcock (1834-1910) was an expert in the highly-specialised work of mounting foraminifera fossils on slides: minute, single-celled organisms dating to 540 million years ago. Elcock's microscope and many of his slides are popular with visitors in the Main Gallery, but Victoria's work has given us a greater understanding of the breadth of the Elcock material on paper. It ranges from beautiful watercolour paintings to meticulous handwritten notes on natural history and archaeology, some of which are pictured on the right.



Acquisitions

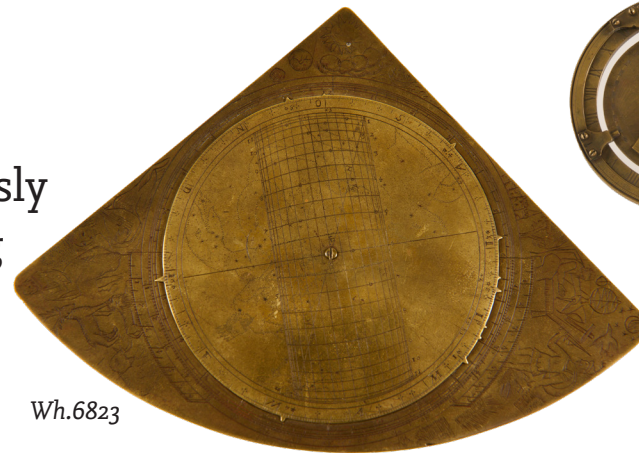
The objects on this page were all accessioned in 2025, either purchased by the Museum or generously donated. Many have already been used in teaching and research or are on public display.



Wh.6820



Wh.6853



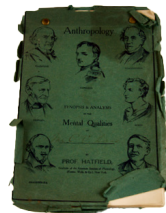
Wh.6823



Wh.6851



Wh.6825



Wh.6855



Wh.6854



Wh.6822



Wh.6826



Wh.6827



Wh.6824



Wh.6821



Wh.6828



Wh.6830

Wh.6820. Thomson's pattern dry card compass, by James White, Scottish, late 19th century

Wh.6821. Three engraved boxwood printing blocks, by Thomas Bewick, English, early 19th century

Wh.6822. Casio HR-110T printing calculator, by Casio Computer Company Ltd., Japanese, 1989 (c)

Wh.6823. Gunter quadrant, by Nathanaell Heighemore, English, 1633

Wh.6824. Gunter quadrant, by John Checkley, English, 1691

Wh.6825. Folding wooden Gunter quadrant, English, 1694

Wh.6826. 'The Lady's Companion to the Worktable', by Mrs Garnham, English, 1864

Wh.6827. Standard metre, used in the Cavendish Laboratory, English, 1882

Wh.6828. Augsburg dial, given by R.S. Whipple to his grandson, by Johan Schreterger, German, late 18th century

Wh.6830. Horary quadrant, by Joseph Wells, English, 1663

Wh.6851. Ring dial, fake, by Lloyd Evan Williams, English, 1970 (c): one of a study collection of fakes acquired from the dealer Tesseract

Wh.6853. Gunter quadrant with sundial and replacement gnomon, by W. Hayes, English, 1665

Wh.6854. Early electrical machine, English, 1830 (c)

Wh.6855. Phrenological document "Synopsis & Analysis of the Mental Qualities of Mr C.V. Lane", English, 1921

Wh.6857. Sector, by Chapotot, French, late 17th or early 18th century



Saturday in the Main Gallery
Photo by My Linh Le

Visitor Experience

2025 was a second record-breaking year for visitor numbers. Monthly Saturday openings, a busy programme of events and exhibitions, and improved communications channels meant our audience increased 30% compared to 2024.

Our improvements to the Whipple visitor experience were informed by the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) Community Panel, which spent six months “in residence” at the Museum, giving us expert feedback on all aspects of our public-facing offer.



The year in numbers

26,778 visitors: +30% compared to 2024

89% were visiting for the first time

91% rated their experience as good or excellent

13 new exhibitions, displays and trails

5 new gift shop products designed

“What a wonderful experience and the lovely [Visitor Services Assistant] couldn’t have been more helpful. I’d recommend to anyone visiting Cambridge to definitely visit... or even twice like me!”

- Visitor feedback, September



A new gift shop!

The Whipple gift shop is growing! The first products, designed and sourced by Visitor Services Assistant Annie, went on sale in July. All our products are sustainable and made in the UK. We also secured funding for fixtures, fittings and a till system, which will be in place for the start of the 2026 summer holidays. This new income stream will help ensure the long-term sustainability of the Museum’s public activities.

Whipple Scribble

Everyone is welcome to Whipple Scribble, our new creative sketching club launched in 2025. Four relaxed evenings of sketching in the galleries took place this year.

“Electric, enthusiastic, atmospheric”

- Whipple Scribble attendee



Community Panel

The University of Cambridge Museums Community Panel spent the first half of the year in residence with us. The Panel met every member of the team, and gave us expert critique on all aspects of our visitor offer and our long-term strategic planning to ensure we meet the needs of our local communities. Their advice and encouragement was invaluable!

“We are seeing that immediate change and it’s fed back to us so we know we are making a difference.”

- Community Panellist

Exhibitions

This year's exhibitions brought Cambridge physics home to Free School Lane. We explored the Museum's important collection of instruments from the Cavendish Laboratory of Experimental Physics and the craftsmen who originally made and maintained them.

Physics & Glass (Main Gallery, May 2025-present), curated by Hannah Price, is our tribute to the art of the scientific glassblower. The exhibition features highlights from our collection of beautiful, intricate 19th- and early 20th-century glassware, and considers the relationship between researcher and technician through the lives of the Cavendish Laboratory's technical team.

Physics & Glass followed *The Cavendish Laboratory & the Birth of the Atomic Age*, which completed a successful run in April. 10,921 people attended the exhibition during its run from December 2024 to May 2025, with 358 joining tours and talks. Curatorial research was made available through a free, take-home newspaper, and collaborative Instagram posts with the Cavendish communications team helped us reach over 88,000 people online.

All the exhibition visitors we surveyed agreed that they "learned something new about the history of physics" and "something new about the history of Cambridge". 87% strongly agreed that "objects like these are important for understanding the world we live in today."

*"I had read about this
experiment before but I had
no idea what it looked like"*

– Exhibition visitor

*Detail of glass vacuum tube,
Wh.1995, in Physics & Glass
Photograph by Hannah Price*

Learning

The Whipple Learning programme aims to support people of all ages to explore science and history in new ways, challenging preconceptions and inspiring discussion. Thanks to a generous bequest from Robert Whipple's descendants, the future of Learning at the Museum is now secured.

As well as working with nearly 4,000 young people in the Museum, Learning Coordinator Alison Giles travelled across the county to bring history of science to local schools and community settings. In total, over 5,000 people engaged with the learning programme this year. We were also delighted to support a museum studies student placement focused on Learning, with student Jason Lok evaluating the new Learning Gallery displays and interactives.



“Alison brought it to life! I’ll be bringing my grandchildren to visit.”

– Tour attendee



*Exploring the Learning Gallery activity boxes
Photograph by Annie James*

In 2025, the learning programme supported:

1771 *primary age school students*

1082 *secondary age school students*

138 *early years children*

113 *learning sessions, family & community events*

348 *volunteer hours*

*“Brilliant tour today ...
Well-researched and
uncovered important and
underrepresented history of
some of the people behind the
science. Thank you!”*

- Bridging Binaries tour attendee

Fun at Little Stars

*Photographs by Annie James (above)
& My Linh Le (below)*

Little Stars

There's a strong evidence base that museum activities for early years children can have long-term benefits for language and motor skills, especially important for 2025's toddlers and children who were born during the COVID lockdowns. Our first regular early years provision was launched with this in mind. Little Stars takes place every month with sensory play activities for tots and their grown ups.

Festival Fun

This year's Cambridge Festival (March) was busier than ever before, with 8 members of the Department sharing their research through lunchtime talks.

Open Cambridge (September) was architecture-themed. In celebration of the 17th-century Main Gallery, we held 1618 Day, exploring the history of the building, our 17th-century collections, and how we care for them.

New Tours

This year, we launched new volunteer-led Whipple Highlights and Black History of Science tours, which join our existing Bridging Binaries LGBTQ+ History tours. Volunteers are given training in delivering tours and are encouraged to research and personalise their own tour.

Free hand-trails are available year round, ensuring the topics are available to the general visitor.



A new gallery for learning

The redisplay and refurbishment of the Learning Gallery is now almost complete. We believe it to be the first gallery in Cambridge interpreted entirely for children.

It has now been fully redecorated with new furniture, lighting, a cosy reading corner and an eye-catching light installation in the ceiling by artist James Tunnard. Six new displays bring the themes of the learning programme to life, each with a handling box for interactive exploration. The Wall of Calculators has already proved itself a big hit with visitors, presenting 113 examples from the Hookham Collection.

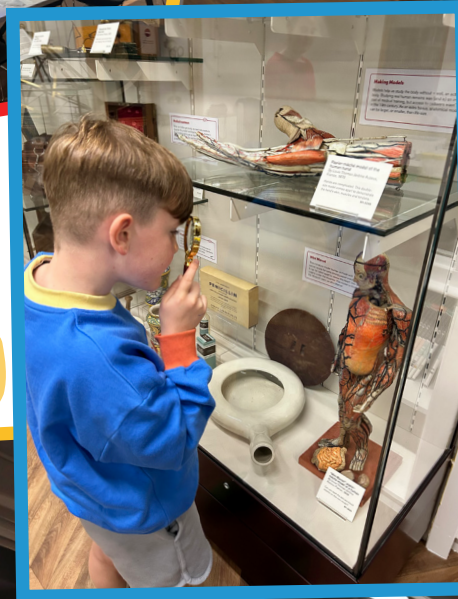
“A stylish, experimental room for children that encourages independent thinking rather than pressing colourful buttons.”

– Visitor, July 2025



“Fun, informative, engaging.”

– Family visitors, Oct 2025



“It was marvellous seeing the Wall [of Calculators].”

– TripAdvisor review, Sept 2025

Photos by My Linh Le, Steve Kruse & Annie James



Partnerships & Networks

In 2025, the Museum's partnerships enabled us to play an active role locally, nationally, and internationally in the museums sector and in the academic community.

Every member of the team made a contribution to a local or national network, including GEM (the national network for museum education) and Museums in Cambridgeshire (our county museums). Whipple staff also supported local independent museums as trustees and mentors.

We partnered with the Department of HPS, University Library and Sedgwick Museum to create a new AHRC-funded PhD studentship, enabled by the Connections & Communities in the East of England collaborative doctoral programme. The studentship, on "The history and heritage of the discovery of environmental change and the interpretation of place in the East of England", began in October.

"Thank you all for the huge amount of work put in by the Museum and Library to make the BSHS conference such a success.

We have increased our membership by a quarter as a direct result of the meeting."

– Conference convenor

Munich to Cambridge

The UCM's close ties with Germany's Leibniz-Gemeinschaft association of research museums are nurtured by the Whipple's Director of Research, Liba Taub. In December, we hosted Leibniz Research Fellow Bernadette Mishkha of the Deutsches Museum. Bernadette is using Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company archives as a case study for AI handwriting recognition—a technology that could transform access to the information they hold.

BSHS Conference

In July, the Department of HPS hosted the Annual Conference of the British Society for the History of Science (BSHS), with more than 200 speakers from over 20 countries, including Director Josh. The Learning Gallery hosted material culture-focused sessions. We extended the public opening hours of the Museum for the duration and offered behind-the-scenes tours and research access to the collections for delegates.



Accreditation Success

Accreditation is the museums sector's nationally-agreed standard. Collections Manager Morgan mentored volunteer-run Whittlesey Museum through their Accreditation return, giving guidance on standards and the development of their policies and procedures.

We were delighted to hear Whittlesey achieved Full Accreditation in 2025: many congratulations to the team!



The Team

Morgan Bell	Collections Manager
Victoria Brunton	Archivist
Alison Giles	Learning Coordinator
Annie James	Visitor Services Assistant
Steve Kruse	Operations Manager
Jason Lok	University of Leicester student placement
Joshua Nall	Director
Hannah Price	Curator
Adam Priestley	Collections Assistant
Deborah Walton	Conservator (University of Cambridge Museums)

Museum Committee

Francesca Anthony
Hasok Chang
Zhi-Yu Chen
Rosanna Dent
Jack Dixon
Marta Halina
Staffan Müller-Wille
Charu Singh
Richard Staley

With many thanks to...

The Museum's incredible community of volunteers.

The University of Cambridge Museums Community Panel.

Colleagues in the Department of History & Philosophy of Science, and, in particular, from the Professional Services Team: Francesca Anthony, Toby Bryant, Adriana Dote, Lukasz Hernik, and Louisa Russell; the Whipple Library: Jack Dixon and Elizabeth White; and the Whipple Invigilators: Kim Alexander, Vladimire Bumatay, Laura Burgazzi, Ellen Bridson, Monte Cairns & Cassandra Zie Yang.

The University of Cambridge Museums; the School of HSPS; and our funders and benefactors, whose generosity made much of our work possible.



The Wall of Calculators
Photo by Steve Kruse

Cover image:

*Exploring the Learning Gallery at Little Stars, the
Museum's new early years programme*

Photo by Annie James.



**Whipple
Museum**
of the History of Science

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UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
MUSEUMS
& BOTANIC GARDEN



**Research
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