

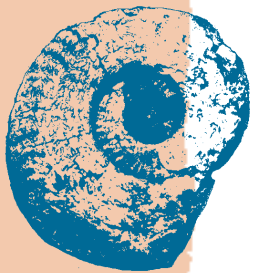
Most people collect and display something in their lives. It might be a collection of family snaps stuck into an album, or holiday souvenirs arranged on a mantelpiece, assembled and displayed without any thought of being a 'collector'. Other people form collections for a specific purpose: Old Masters for investment, or memories 'collected' on tape to preserve a changing way of life, for example.



Sometimes people give their collections to museums where they are professionally cared for and made accessible to everyone. In the past, and occasionally today, private collections often form the basis of new museums. The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, opened in 1683, is the oldest museum in Britain. It was originally a collection of 'rarities' amassed by royal gardeners, John Tradescant and his son, when they were sent abroad to collect plants in the 17th century. The collection was acquired by Elias Ashmole, an eminent antiquarian, alchemist and astrologer, who presented it, together with his own collection, to Oxford University.

The British Museum, one of the largest and most visited museums in the world, was established by Sir Hans Sloane, a scientist born in 1660. He collected rare books, fossils, precious stones, birds, plants, pictures and ancient remains from all over the world. When he died in 1753, Parliament granted money so that the collection could be bought and displayed and become accessible to more people.

Mary Anning (1799-1847) was born in Lyme Regis, the daughter of a poor carpenter. She earned money, as a child, by finding fossils and selling them to gentleman collectors. Mary attracted the attention and admiration of the scientific world after discovering and correctly identifying spectacular specimens, most of which were previously unknown. Today, many of the fossils that Mary found, form the nucleus of the collection in the Oxford University Museum, and there is a special exhibition about her life at the Lyme Regis Philpot Museum in Dorset.





Teaching ideas

You may like to start the project by discussing the idea of collecting:

- Do your pupils collect things?
- What do they collect?
- Why do they collect?
- What will happen to their collections in the future?



Development

- Visit your local museum and ask the curator to talk about why, when and how the collection was formed. Ask him/her to talk about the functions of a museum (conservation, research and education)
- You may like to invite pupils (or other local collectors) to bring in their collections, display them and talk about them
- Find out whether your local museum has 'People's Shows' when amateur collectors can bring their objects to museums for identification and display.



There is no limit to what has been, or might be collected. Some collections comprise everyday items that are easily available, such as football programmes or badges. Others are determined by a particular feature for example, military items, miniature toys, timber-framed buildings or artefacts from a particular locality. Some collections are of a more general nature. Many provincial museums have historical and environmental displays that are of both local and national interest.

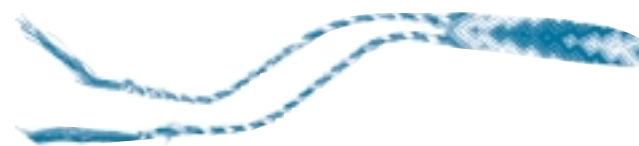
Robert Opie collects items that are normally thrown away. He has been collecting packaging and advertising materials since he was 16 years old. Robert's collection includes labels, posters and catalogues together with items such as tins, boxes and mugs with advertisements on them. He now has over a quarter of a million items, a selection of which are housed in his museum in Gloucester.

The Helicopter Museum in Weston-Super-Mare collects rotocraft and is the only museum of its type in the UK. It traces the history and development of the helicopter from Leonardo da Vinci's Airscrew design, dated 1489, through to the birth of conventional helicopters in the post-war years. There are currently 80 rotocraft in the collection, housed on part of the original 1936 Weston Airport.

Teaching ideas

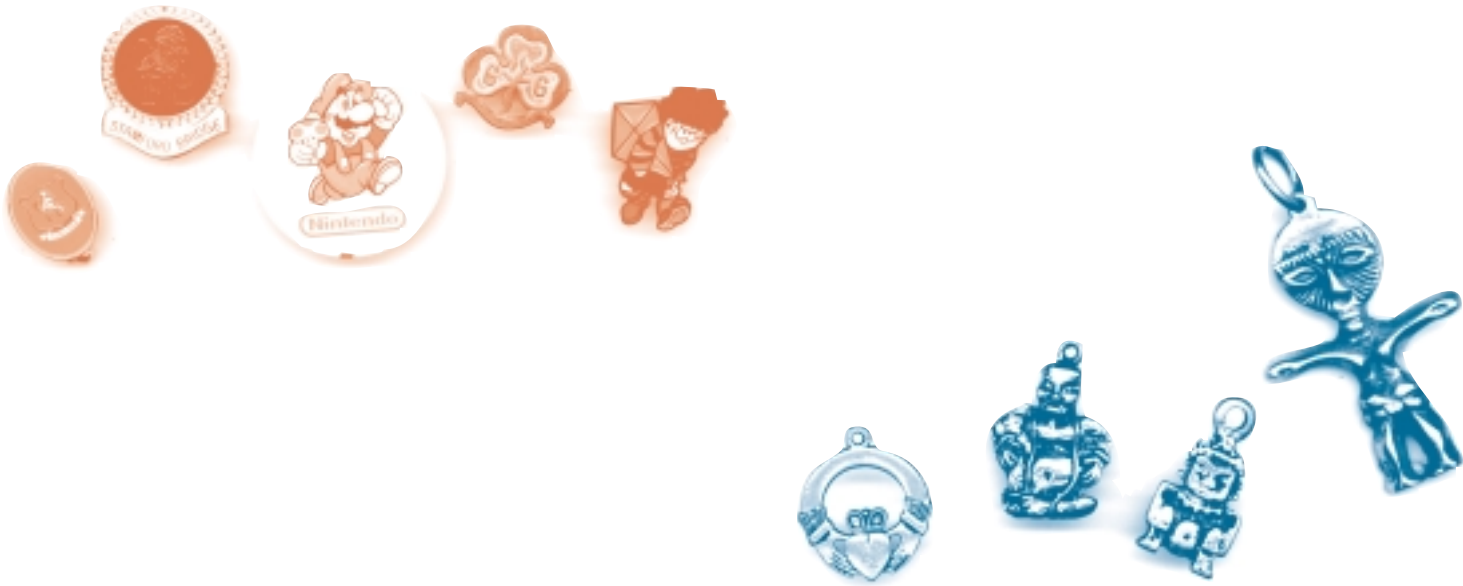
Talk about the variety of things that people collect such as:

- Small items such as coins, miniatures, jewellery
- Large items such as buildings, aeroplanes, army vehicles
- Perishable items such as packaging
- Valuable things such as Old Master paintings
- Items from a specific period such as Victorian clothes
- Things that belonged to a particular person such as a pop star or a famous scientist
- Items which are very popular now such as stickers, Furbies etc.



Development

- Discuss that what is considered valueless to one person may be valuable to another
- Explain that objects may have historical, scientific or emotional value even though they have little or no monetary value
- Invite pupils to think about what people in the year 2100 might collect from the time you live in.



Different things are amassed in different ways. Some collectors buy things at auctions, antique shops, junk shops or even car boot sales. Others join clubs and swap items. Archaeologists dig things up and some of them are displayed in museums. Some items cannot be collected in the normal way. Church brasses are 'collected' by taking an impression of the surface with a rubbing; memories, stories or accents have to be 'collected' on tape; changes to buildings or the landscape are 'collected' on film.

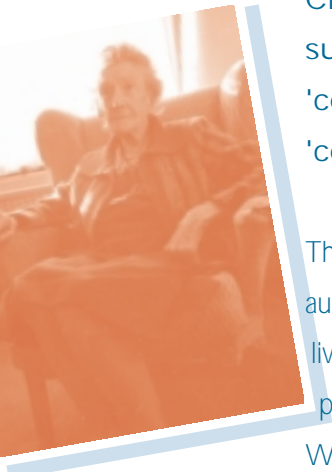
The People's Story is a museum of first hand memories, stories and autobiographical accounts of the ordinary people who once lived and still live in Edinburgh. The collection describes changes in working practices, patterns of employment, housing and homelessness, the Second World War, sport and leisure activities, health, religion and festivals. In the collection there are videos, archival film, photographs, music and sounds which document the changes four individuals have seen in their lifetimes. Their memories were taped over a period of two years.

Most archaeology involves digging below ground, but when Henry VIII's warship, the Mary Rose, was discovered lying under 12-14 metres of water just outside Portsmouth Harbour, archaeologists had to learn to dive in order to discover more about it. Thousands of objects have been brought up from the seabed, the largest of which is the hull of the ship. After cleaning, conservation and recording, many of them are now on display in a specially built museum in Portsmouth.

Teaching ideas

Talk about different ways in which collections are formed:

- bidding for items in an auction house through an auctioneer
- uncovering items in the ground through archaeology
- swapping items through collectors' clubs
- 'collecting' with rubbings, tapes, videos, film.



Development

- You may like to show how church brasses, old gravestones and coal-hole covers are collected by taking rubbings. Why not ask pupils to make rubbings of things in the school grounds, for example bricks, manhole covers, grilles etc?
- Pupils could record the memories of someone who has lived in your area for a long time
- You may also like to discuss contentious issues such as whether we should return precious objects taken in colonial times or war, or items that are illegal to collect, for example wild flowers or rare birds' eggs.



Collecting is a very enjoyable, but essentially private activity. Most collectors want to share their collections with others, and at some point, might think about setting up a museum of their own, or giving the collection to a museum. But museums are much more than collections of collections: they ensure that artefacts are properly cared for, conserved and made accessible through research, exhibitions and programmes of education.

Some schools already have well established collections and museums. Eton College, the famous public school, has a natural history museum established in 1875. Many pupils who went on to become leaders in their field, such as the biologists Sir Julian Huxley and J.B.S. Haldane, donated objects and specimens to the museum.

Suffolk Primary School in Belfast, has a museum established about four years ago and is permanently displayed in a corridor. The collection focuses on 'life in times past' and includes items such as gas masks, a tin bath, a wireless, old school desks and other school memorabilia donated by parents and the local community.

Before setting up a museum, however short-lived, you should consider where it will be exhibited? Who will look after it? You should also remember that quite valuable items are sometimes donated and you might have to seek specialist advice on their care (see sheet 6). It will also be important to establish whether the items are given or lent (and for how long), and also whether valuable items are covered by school insurance.



You will need to identify items so that your pupils can find out more about them. When they have gathered as much information about them as possible, they can then be classified and recorded.

Teaching ideas

Discuss how items can be identified:

- The local reference library will have many well-illustrated books to help them with identification
- The local museum might be willing to help with identification (but 'phone for an appointment first)
- The donor might be willing to come in and talk about an object
- Show pupils how to get further information from a museum by writing a letter that should elicit a fair response. All too often letters are written to the wrong person. If the museum is a large one send the letter to the education department. Send it to the Curator if it is a small one. Be sure to ask for specific information, for example 'information you may have on how houses were built in Tudor times' rather than 'tell me all you know about buildings in the past'. If pupils get a helpful letter back encourage them to write a letter of thanks.



Talk about how objects are classified:

- Items can be sorted into different groups for example by common features, historical period, materials, size etc.

Explain how information is recorded:

- A collector may keep a simple notebook
- A museum stores information on a record card
- Most museums also have a database that enables curators to store larger amounts of information than record cards. A database can also deal with all sorts of questions about the collection (for example, how many objects in the museum were made in 1900), without the curator having to sift through all the details.



However temporary your museum is, objects should be stored under the right conditions to avoid deterioration. You may also like to show your pupils how to repair any simple damage. Some simple rules suitable for practical work with pupils are explained here, but for more detailed further information about conservation see *Ours for keeps* on sheet 8.

Teaching ideas

Discuss some basic rules of conservation:

- Some items such as football programmes, labels, wrappers and magazines are printed on poor quality paper which turns yellow, fades, goes brittle and tears easily. These items should be mounted on photographic corners in albums

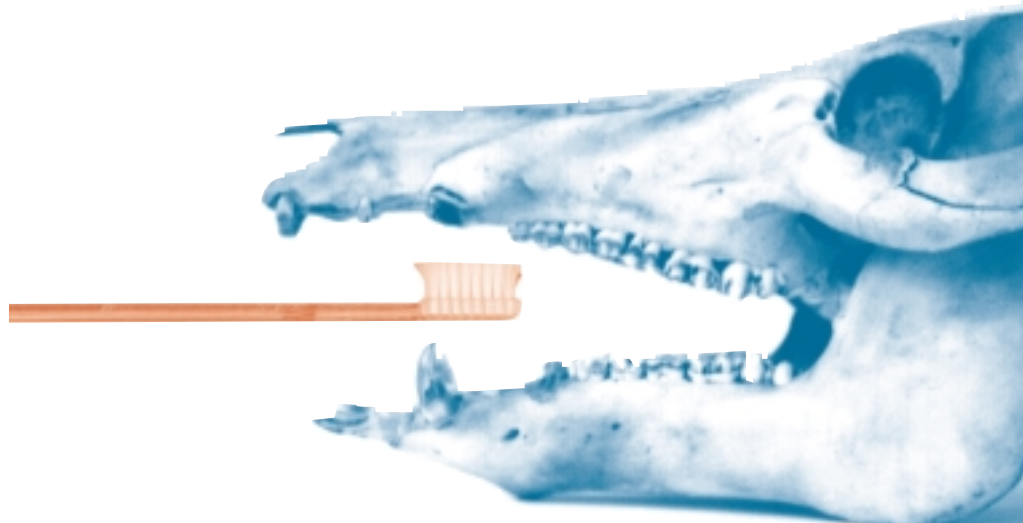


- Old photographs are sometimes valuable so don't put rubber bands round them which cause damage. Store them in flip albums made of polypropylene. Store negatives in the same way. Keep glossy photographs separate; the surface is coated with gelatine which means they will stick together very easily

- Care for fossils, bones, shells and rocks in the following way

1: Wash fossils to remove dirt. Dry carefully with kitchen paper and pick off small parts of rock and other material with a needle

2: Bones and shells should be soaked for a short time and then gently scrubbed with an old toothbrush. Leave to dry on kitchen paper. Use UHU, Lepage's polystyrene cement, or balsa cement to stick back broken bits in place



- Coins should be handled carefully. Too much handling will tarnish the surface so teach pupils to hold them by the edges.
- Never use glues such as Superglue, Bostik, Prittstick, Copydex because they are irreversible. Other materials such as Sellotape, Blue Tack and pins should be avoided because they also cause damage.
- If you are fortunate enough to have been given something old and fragile, for example an old poster or document, it will be better to have a copy made which can be handled and displayed freely.

Talk about storing collections:

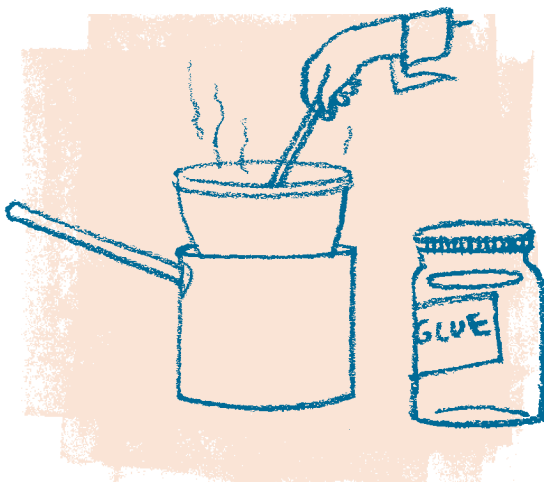
- Fossil, bones and shells are easily scratched if heaped together so they should be stored separately in boxes. Traditionally, they were stored in special cabinets with shallow drawers but they could be stored in ordinary drawers adapted by dividing them into sections with cardboard dividers
- Coins should be stored in coin albums or in envelopes stored in boxes
- Modern stamps are coated with plastic glues making them difficult to remove so store stamps on envelopes in a plastic wallet



Development

- Some large museums have their own conservation departments.

Why not see if it is possible to visit them with your pupils or organise a talk from a conservator?



Show pupils how to make their own glue that can be used for simple repairs as follows.

You will need: 50g arrowroot, wheat flakes, rice flour, or ordinary flour (all available from a supermarket); 400ml water. Mix all the ingredients all together in a heat-proof bowl. Place the bowl over a saucepan of hot water, stirring all the time until thick. Simmer for about 10 minutes.

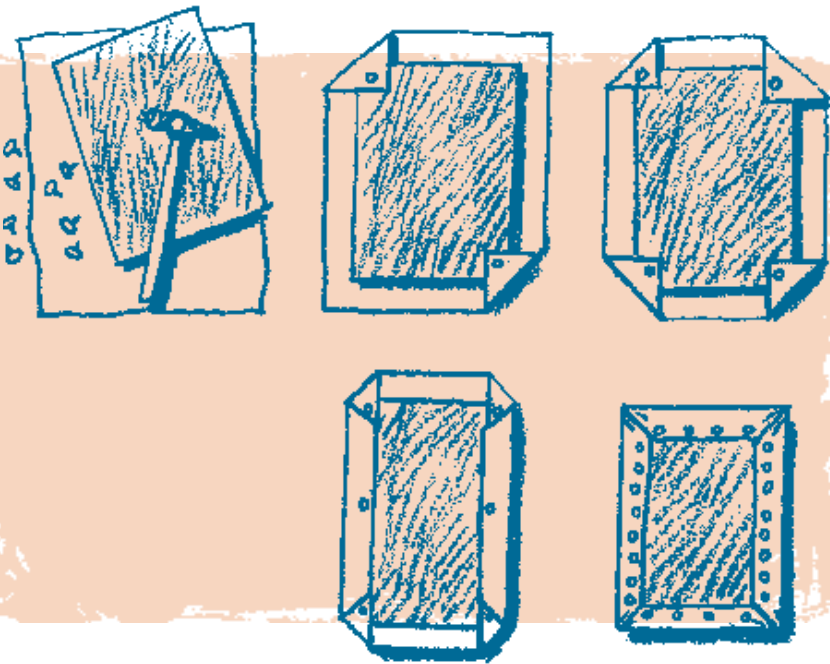
Leave to cool and store in an air-tight jar.

If your school museum attracts a number of items, you will have to make a selection. Consider how that will be made: you may wish to choose one to represent every type, or the best examples, or something chosen by every child. Then you must think about display: Will it be simply laid out on a table or more elaborately exhibited in cabinets?

Teaching ideas

Talk about display:

- Fossil, bones and shells are best grouped together
- Coins can be displayed in albums
- Badges are best exhibited on a fabric display board made as follows.



You will need: a piece of chipboard; fabric (velvet or felt is ideal); drawing pins with brass heads, a small hammer.

1: Take opposite corners of the fabric and pull tightly over the back of the board. Repeat the process with the other corners.

2: Take the opposite sides of the fabric and pull tightly over the back of the board. Secure with a drawing pin halfway down each side.

Repeat the process with the other sides.

- Be careful not to display printed and delicate items such as water colours, embroidery or photographs, in sunlight, as they will fade.



Discuss labelling:

- You may like to discuss how the displays should be labelled. Should they describe what the items are made of? How they were used? Where they were found? Who gave them and when? Pupils should also consider who will read the labels, for example if the museum is being planned specifically for people in wheel chairs, will they be able to see them?
- Why not ask pupils to design and print out labels on a computer? They will have to consider the legibility and size of type faces and whether the letters should be upper and lower case or all capitals

consider the legibility and **size** of typefaces

- Lastly, invite your pupils to give the museum a name! You may like to use the template enclosed in the pack to make a poster for the museum. Pupils might like to customise it with drawings, a collage of objects or a provocative strap line for example 'Spend a day at the V&A'.

Development

- Visit your local museum to look at the way it has been displayed. You may like to use the activity sheet (9).



The School Museum
of
Life, The Universe,
and Everything

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Developing a museum in the classroom is a valuable cross-curricular project which can be linked to the National Curriculum through most subjects, at all levels.

History/Social subjects (Scotland)

Most museums in the classroom will probably relate to the later periods specified in the National Curriculum. In addition, a museum can help pupils to understand the concepts of time and chronology and can encourage pupils to consider how our understanding of past societies is dependent on surviving evidence. But perhaps the most important aspect of having a museum in the classroom is the unlimited opportunity pupils would have to handle first-hand material.

Science/Environmental Studies (Scotland)

Science can be linked to the museum through identifying different materials, finding out about their origins, properties, uses and how certain objects change over time. Science can be linked to the effects of pollution on objects and pupils will gain a better understanding of the nature of artefacts in museums and learn to differentiate between old objects, and those in poor condition. Studying conservation will allow pupils to develop informed attitudes and values relating to pollution and the care and conservation of the environment.

English

The opportunities for linking English to the National Curriculum are limitless through discussion, articulating their responses to visits, listening to talks, writing letters, and learning new vocabulary. The project can be a useful way of teaching pupils how to use various resources such as indexes, and writing labels, catalogues and other material.

Design, technology and IT

There are opportunities for evaluating different kinds of materials and their uses, for making items for display and problem solving simple conservation problems. There are opportunities for the creative use of computers through compiling databases and designing graphics for displays.

Art

Items such as embroidery, photography and pottery may introduce pupils to genres and styles from the locality, the past and present and to different cultures. Certain objects may provide a source of ideas for their own work.

Geography

If the collection is mainly environmental or cross-cultural there will be good opportunities to use maps and atlases in locating the source of artefacts. There may also be opportunities for comparing the locality then and now.

Resources

Museums, historic houses and art galleries

Many have education services, some with handling collections. Museum education officers may be willing to help with a project on collecting and establishing a museum, however temporary.

The internet – the 24 Hour Museum: www.24hourmuseum.org.uk

The 24 Hour Museum is the UK gateway to museums, galleries and heritage attractions with up-to-date information and listings of all registered museums and galleries, as well as links to museum websites.

Record offices

Record offices hold collections of original documents including maps, plans, letters, drawings, census returns, deeds, inventories and photographs. It may be possible to organise a visit.

Books

Newbery, E & S, Fecher **In the Nick of Time - A practical guide to teaching about conservation of objects** published by N&E in association with Museums & Galleries

Commission 1994. Available from Museums and Galleries Commission, 16 Queen Anne's gate, London SW14 9AA. Tel: 0171 233 4200. Shows how conservation practices in museums and galleries can help pupils understand damage and decay. Includes photocopiable worksheets.

Ours for Keeps? published by Museums and Galleries Commission 1997. Available from MGC, as above. A practical guide to caring for collections for the non-specialist.

Museums mentioned in the text

The Ashmolean Museum, Beaumont St, Oxford OX1 2PH. Tel 01865 278000.

The British Museum, Great Russell St, London WC1B 3DG. Tel: 0171 636 1555.

Lyme Regis Philpot Museum, Bridge St, Lyme Regis, Dorset DT7 3QA .Tel: 01297 443370

The University Museum, Parks Rd, Oxford OX1 3PW. Tel: 01865 272950.

The People's Story Museum, Canongate Tolbooth, 163 Canongate Edinburgh EH8 8BN. Tel: 0131 529 4057

The Helicopter Museum, Locking Moor Rd, Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset. Tel: 01934 635227.

The Robert Opie Collection of Advertising and Packaging, Albert Warehouse, Gloucester Docks, Gloucester GL1 2EH. Tel 01452 302309.

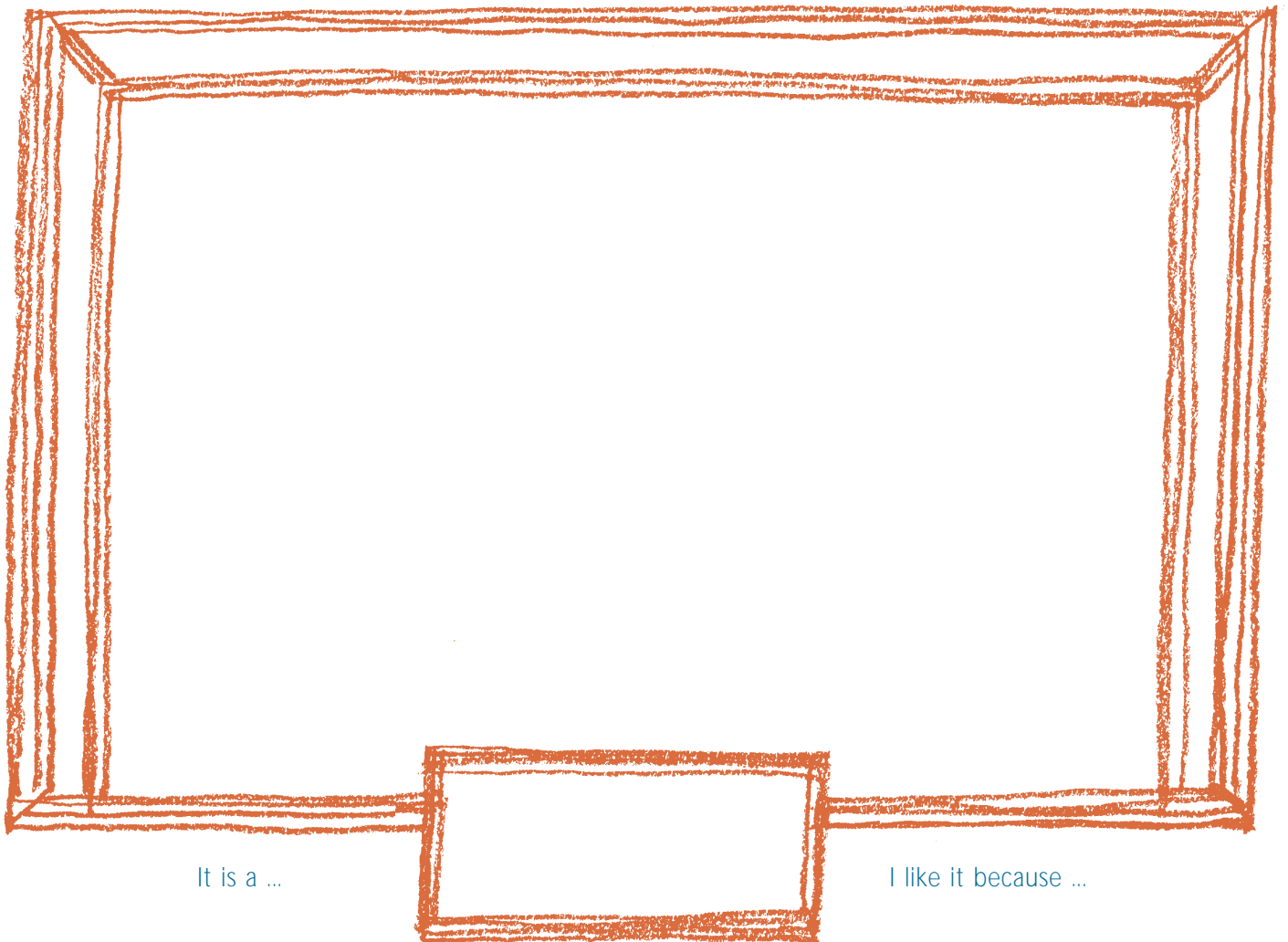
The Mary Rose Museum, HM Naval Base, Portsmouth PO1 3LX. Tel: 01705 750521.

A visit to

1 When was the museum started?

2 What type of objects does the museum collect?

3 What do you think is the most interesting object in the museum? Draw it here.



What information can you find out about it from the label?

4 Can the displays be used by:

Very young children:

Easily?

Not very easily?

Not at all?

People in wheelchairs:

Easily?

Not very easily?

Not at all?

Blind people:

Easily?

Not very easily?

Not at all?

Put a circle round the answers you think are best.

5 If you were in charge of this museum what changes would you make?

I would ...