



# THE WIRE WORKS

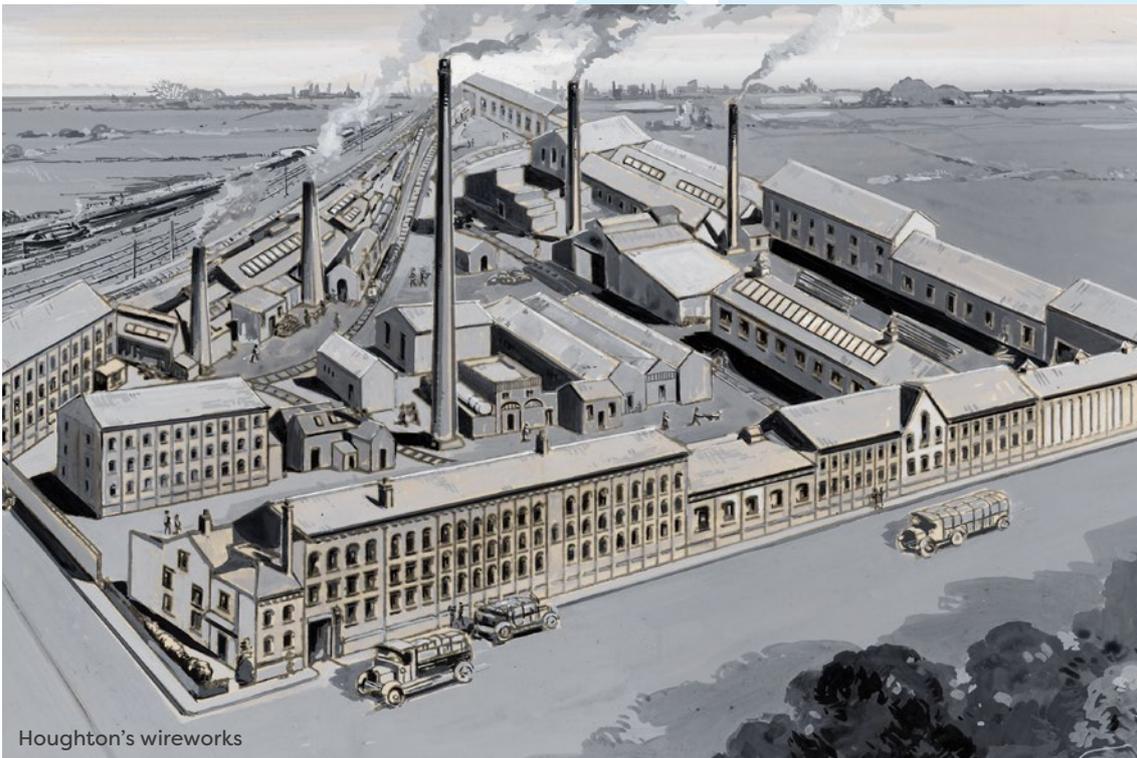
## A Final Evaluation Report April 2022

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## Section 1 - Introduction

National Lottery Heritage funded project, **The Wire Works**, got under way in 2020, to highlight and celebrate the legacy left by the wire industries, which dominated Warrington's employment structure for over a hundred years, from the 18<sup>th</sup> until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, putting the town at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution.

Warrington is steeped in history dating back to Roman times, with each area having its own unique story to tell. However, many residents are disconnected from Warrington's central cultural offer and some communities, particularly those areas that were expanded when Warrington was designated a 'New Town' in the 1960's, don't feel that they have this local heritage to celebrate. A public online consultation in 2018 revealed that Warrington people are unsure what the identity of the borough is, and while heritage and history are considered to be a very important part of developing a sense of place and character, many people feel that Warrington does not celebrate its heritage enough.



Houghton's wireworks

This project was a perfect opportunity to address Warrington's low engagement with its own heritage, highlighted when it ranked low on RSA's first Heritage Index in 2015. Focusing on one of the borough's most significant industries, the project aimed to highlight Warrington's wire connections to new audiences and reinforce the important message that heritage underpins place-making strategies. The importance of this industry to the town is reflected in the nickname 'The Wire' given to Warrington's Rugby League Football club and also adopted by the Independent Local Radio station, Wire FM.

Wire was Warrington's biggest industry for more than two centuries and the stories surrounding this highly significant aspect of our heritage are in danger of being lost, particularly as most of the factories have now closed and been demolished. The designation of Warrington as a New Town in 1968 led to an expanding population with no connections to the wire industry at all. With an increasing population has come a decrease in an awareness of the significance of 'wire' amongst the majority of Warrington's residents. The award-nominated design of the new Time Square car park in the town centre was inspired by Warrington Wire, and yet the connection is little known amongst the general public.

The final generation of workers from three out of four of the original main factories in Warrington are now in retirement – this project will collect their stories and secure them in our local archives for future generations.

# Section 2 - Project Aims and summary

## 2.1 The Timeline

### 2020

#### January

Press Release - Announcement of Grant

#### February

Call out and Oral History training (Part 1)

#### March

**Covid-19 announcement. Project suspended.**

### 2021

Project resumes as things start to (slowly) get back to normal.

#### February

Oral History training session (Part 2)

#### March

Announcement - The Wire Works Relaunch

#### May

Video for schools produced by WMAG

#### May, June, July

Sessions in Bewsey Lodge delivered by Laurence Payot, supported by Claire Wellens. Filming by Ludovico. Sessions in Priestley delivered by Christine Wilcox-Baker, Wire Presentation delivered by Philip Jeffs from WMAG, visit from Lockers staff.

#### October

The Wire Works Exhibition Launches in Golden Square.

#### November

The Wire Works Exhibition closes

#### December

Evaluation and follow up discussions

### 2022

#### January/February

Wire section added to WMAG website

#### March

Oral history volunteer co-ordinator recruited.

Final report completed and submitted.



Team



Team Research

## 2.2 The Aims

Our aims for The Wire Works Project were:

- To highlight the importance of the 'Wire' industry to Warrington, particularly during the Industrial Revolution, and the lasting impact of the industry's success on the people of Warrington and the town itself.
- To engage a wide audience in recognising and celebrating Warrington's wire heritage.
- To involve communities in gathering the stories of our wire industry, in order to develop the identity of Warrington and a shared pride in place.
- To deliver a highly attended exhibition for the general public that reflects the intensive project work and refreshes the heritage stories around the wire industry in Warrington.
- To ensure the legacy of 'Warrington Wire' is firmly placed within the heritage of our town.



## Section 3 - The Components

In total, there were 5 project components.

### 3.1 Oral Histories

The first stage of our project was to begin the process of collecting oral histories from those with some form of connection to Warrington's wire industries. Through the press and social media we issued a call out for people with personal or family history connections with these industries, past and present, to come forward to share stories, old photos or artefacts.



On 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020, our first Oral History training session was delivered by Ros Livshin from the Oral History Society at Pyramid Arts Centre. This was attended by 12 volunteers, although 3 subsequently dropped out after discovering the process of collecting oral histories was more involved than they had thought.

Unfortunately, the project was interrupted by Covid-19 in March 2020. The entirety of Culture Warrington staff were furloughed, schools and colleges were closed and WBC staff were seconded to other roles meaning the work had to be put on hold.

The delayed second Oral History training session took place on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021. Due to the ongoing Covid situation, we were unable to safely meet in person and so this was delivered online.

In total, only 10 oral histories have been collected to date with the majority recorded before the pandemic. As with a number of other oral history projects the COVID pandemic proved a major obstacle, but an additional learning experience for future projects of this nature has been the need to factor in not just training and equipment, but the considerable staff time needed to successfully co-ordinate and administer an oral history project on this scale.



During the period of the exhibition over 50 people came forward with stories of the wire industry and many of these have agreed to be interviewed at a future date. The removal of many COVID restrictions and the success of the UK vaccination programme means we are hopeful to catch up with many of these people. As there is not enough staff capacity to coordinate this amount of work Warrington Museum have enlisted the help of a volunteer to co-ordinator further interviews over the next 6 months.

The oral histories, once deposited, will be added to Warrington's archives and local studies collection where they will be accessible to the public and will form an invaluable resource in telling the story of Warrington's wire industries, potentially forming the basis of future projects.

### 3.2 Media

Local media production and creative education company, Ludovico, led by actor and producer Darren Jeffries, were the creative force behind all of the media that has been produced as part of the project. The films were intended to capture some of the most interesting stories in our quest to unearth, discover and celebrate Warrington's industrial wire heritage, ensuring that the project reached wider audiences.

The short videos were released at regular intervals between April and July 2020, and again when the project resumed between March and November 2021. Each of the videos were released across our dedicated social media channels, The Wire Works:



@thewireworkswarrington



@thewireworks



@thewireworkswarrington

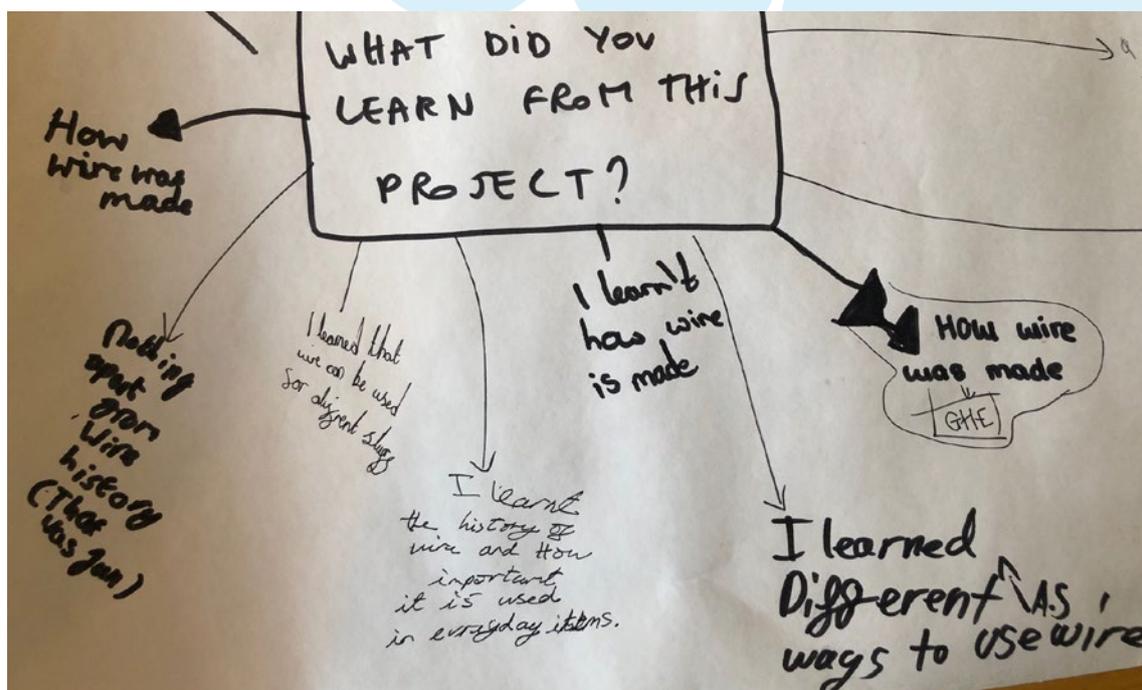
### 3.3 Our Education Partners

At the start of the project we set out to work with three educational settings: a primary school, a secondary school and a sixth form college. After the interruption of Covid, the secondary school dropped out, leaving us with Bewsey Lodge Primary School and Priestley College.

The work with schools was scheduled to take place during the summer of 2020, but had to be re-scheduled due to the pandemic. To maintain the momentum of the project online materials for schools involved in the project were created and made available to other schools and the general public.

#### Bewsey Lodge

During the summer term of 2021, a class of Year 5 children from Bewsey Lodge Primary School worked with artist Laurence Payot to create a video piece, 'Through the Mesh', exploring wire's main properties. Created just after the Covid lockdown, the children used the metaphors of wire to talk about feelings of safety, isolation, fear and connections. All the poems, patterns, and movements in the video were created by the children under the direction of Laurence. Choreographer Claire Wellens supported the movement element and Ludovico produced the final video.



## Priestley College

The Wire Works offered Priestley College Architecture AS level students the opportunity to design and make work for a public exhibition in collaboration with an established professional artist, Christine Wilcox-Baker. The task was designed to offer the students the opportunity to work to a 'brief' as they would in a 'real-life' professional situation, working through the various stages and culminating in the presentation of their work in a significant public setting.



Due to the ongoing constraints of Covid and a high level of student infection during this period, delivery of the project took place as a hybrid model consisting of online presentations by the artist and, when college protocol allowed, the artist visited the students face to face and worked in a socially distant manner with them in the marquee.

The sculptures were finished to a very professional standard and were curated within the exhibition by Christine and staff from Priestley College. The wire and meshes were generously provided by one of our sponsors, Locker Group Ltd of Warrington.



### 3.4 The Exhibition

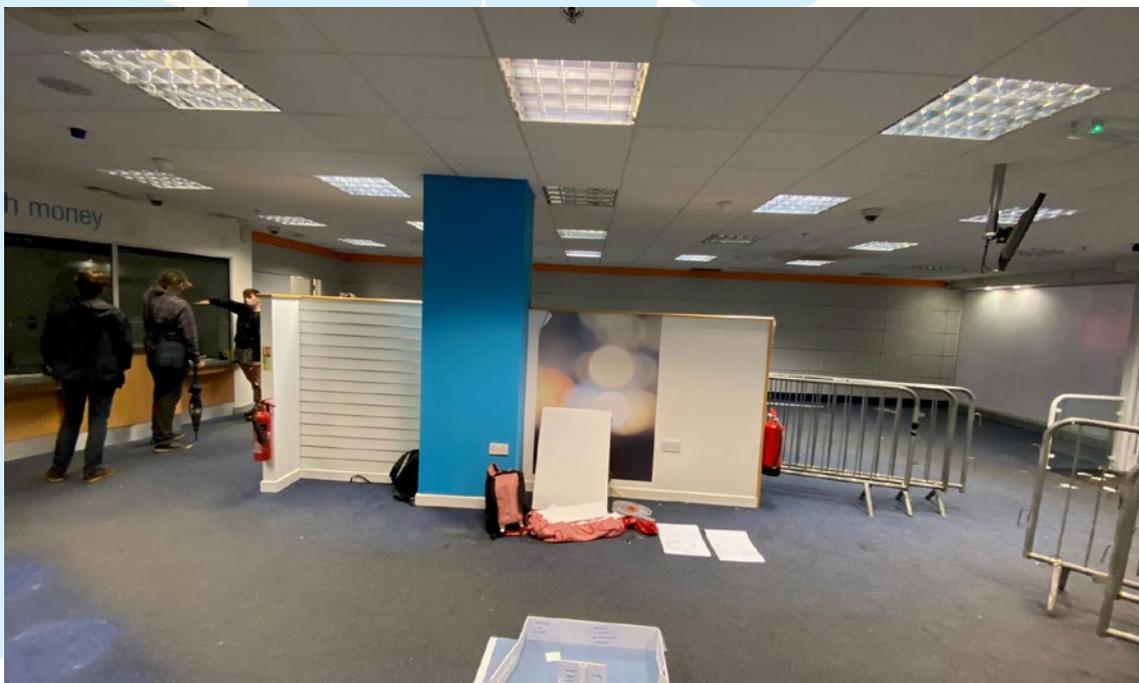
The Wire Works exhibition was a culmination of all the work that had taken place since the start of the project. Opening on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2021 in an old Co-Op Bank in Golden Square Shopping Centre, The Wire Works offered over **1,800** visitors an interactive blend of heritage and art, including sculpture, film, dance, poetry and real-life accounts of what it was like to work in a wire factory in Warrington. The exhibition was the perfect place to capture the fascinating stories of Warrington's wire heritage.

**40** people attended a pre-opening launch evening on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October, with guests including senior members of WBC and the lead member for Culture.

On the first day of opening to the public, the exhibition attracted **224** visitors.

The exhibition was open to the public on Wednesday through to Saturday, from 10am to 5pm and on Sunday from 11am to 4pm.

The exhibition closed its doors on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021. On the last day, visitors to the exhibition were treated to a 'Meet & Greet' with Warrington Wolves Rugby league players and Mike Nicholas, former professional rugby player and wire worker.



The Wire Works Exhibition consisted of:

- **Introductory panels**

Set the context of the exhibition and thanked NLHF, partners and sponsors.

- **Inspired by wire**  
Sculptures

The displays featured Priestley College students' 3D creations alongside some of their initial plans and sketches. As they were placed near a large window opening onto an area of high footfall, very often it was the sculptures that drew people into the exhibition, with many commenting on the aesthetics of the display and mistaking the work for that produced by a professional artist.



- **Activity table**

Designed by Laurence Payot, activities included creating wire mesh patterns both on paper and also using a light box and coloured filters.

- **Through the mesh**

A dark room where people could sit and watch the video created by Bewsey Lodge Primary School pupils with Laurence Payot.



- **The Collection**

The security desk of the old bank, with its glass windows, lent itself to the display of valuable objects from the museum's collection. The display included:

- a bird's nest made out of wire found at Rylands wireworks in the 1960s;
- sections of the 19<sup>th</sup> transatlantic telegraph cable that was made in Warrington;
- a selection of tools used in the wire-making industry such as tungsten carbide dies and wire gauges;
- examples of different wire products historically manufactured in Warrington i.e. wire mesh, wire rope etc;
- examples of wire objects still made in the town such as heat shields, filters, fencing masks etc.



- **Women in Wire**

It was agreed between members of the project team that there would be a 'Women in Wire' section in the exhibition to reflect the important role that women have played in this industry and to address the general lack of representation of women and their roles in industrial history.





● **Winifred ‘Winnie’ Weaver**

Inspired by her research into the history of wire making in Warrington, this work focuses on women in wire. ‘Winnie’ is designed to represent women working in wire companies through the centuries. The name ‘Winnie’ arose spontaneously during the making process and only later was it realised that her formal name ‘Winifred’ contained the letters of the word ‘Wire’.

The ‘torn’ section of skirt at the back of her dress references the early days, before considerations of health & safety, when corrosive substances would splash and damage workers clothes. The pins on her pendant tell of the cottage industry origins when women and children would make pins – their hands being the nimblest. Her headscarf is a throwback to those worn by the 1950’s bed frame makers.

The materials used are all drawn from the range of sophisticated meshes and wire products still being utilised in Warrington today in a wide range of applications from oil filtration to architecture and including filters for Covid-19 hospital ventilators.

The materials and the framework fabrication were generously facilitated by Locker Group Ltd. of Warrington. The sculpture can now be seen in Warrington Museum and Art Gallery’s pop-up in Golden Square Shopping Centre.

- **Voices in the Wire**

This section of the exhibition featured snippets from 6 interviewees who had taken part in our oral History collection:

**Jean Fisher** – Former Wire Mesh Welder at Sankey Green Wire Weaving Company

**Vincent Doodson** – Former Machinist and Union Steward at Greening and Sons Limited

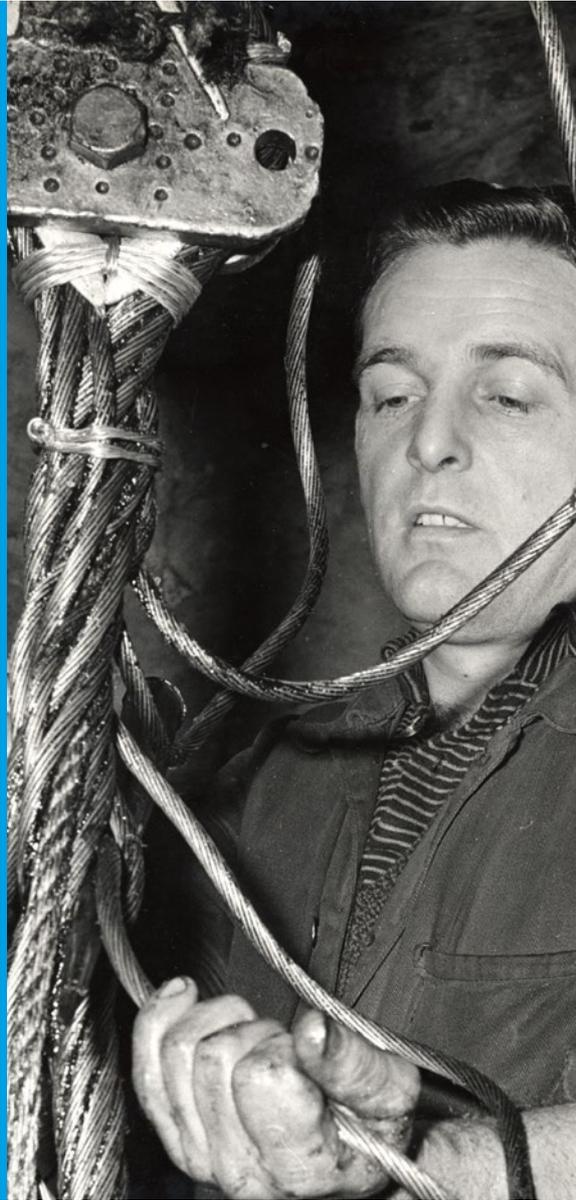
**Briar Rosamund Melbourne** – Former Typist at Rylands Brothers Limited

**Sue Potter** – Former Stationery Department Supervisor at Rylands Brothers Limited

**Peter Bond** – Former Machine Shop Progress Chaser at Thomas Locker and Company

**Mike Fenney** – Former Sales Rep at Rylands Brothers Limited

Visitors to the exhibition could also watch the 6 of the media pieces produced by Ludovico, which played on a small screen on a loop.



- **The History of Wire in Warrington: Timeline**

The Timeline was positioned along the longest wall in the unit and told the story of Warrington's wire industry from 1775 through to 2005.

- **Warrington Wire Around the World**

A large map of the world was displayed with 6 examples of places in the world where Warrington wire has been used, from the Tsing Ma Bridge in Hong Kong, to swimwear in California.

A pull-up banner was added at a later date with a list of many of the uses of wire made in Warrington as we became aware that many people did not know how widely used wire is and how significant Warrington has been to the wire industry.

- **Lady Gaga**

Whilst researching for the project, we discovered that one of Lady Gaga's extravagant dresses had wire from Warrington in one of its components. We had a representation of the dress made in life-size form so that visitors could have their photos taken wearing Lady Gaga's dress.



- **Locker Wire Mesh Rugby Ball**

The 'Locker Wire Mesh Rugby Ball' was fabricated by Locker Group Ltd especially for the exhibition, to celebrate the close historic links between Warrington Town, 'The Wire' rugby team and the Locker Group. A basket on the top of the ball was a wire mesh 'Faraday Cage' which demonstrated a very modern application for wire mesh in the RFI/ EMI industry to prevent 'Radio Frequency Interference' (RFI) and/or 'Electromagnetic Interference' (EMI). Visitors to the exhibition were able to put their mobile phones inside and test the cage by getting someone else to call them.

#### **The Website**

Out of a desire to see the project continue beyond the end of the exhibition, Culture Warrington have developed a section of their website in response to the project

The website records much of the research that was gathered over the course of the project and includes a simple timeline of the town's wire making heritage, details on 25 of the companies involved in the town's wire industries, a section on women in the wire industry and the various uses that Warrington wire was put to around the world. The website is very much a work in progress that everyone involved in the project would like to develop further in the future allowing current and future generations the opportunity to learn about Warrington's wire heritage.



Mike Nicholas, MBE and Warrington Wolves players

# Section 4 - Outcomes

## 4.1 Oral Histories

There is no doubt that Covid impacted on this aspect of the project the most and that under normal circumstances we could have achieved much more. However, plans are in place to continue with oral history collections following the recruitment of a volunteer co-ordinator by WMAG who will aim to collect at least a further 30 oral histories.

The exhibition was instrumental in ensuring that the Warrington wire communities were given the opportunity to contribute positively to the project and to contribute to our bank of knowledge about the industry. During the period of the exhibition, around 18 items were donated to the museum. Items include: examples of knitted wire still made in the town; historic photographs of the works, presentation items (letter openers, glass tumblers), sales gifts (parks of playing cards), personal items (the key used to turn on one of the wire making machines at the last active wireworks in the town centre). Things are still coming in!



### NLHF Outcomes achieved:

- Heritage will be identified and better explained;
- People will have developed skills.



## 4.2 Media

The 13 core films were released over social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) throughout the project and were intended to engage audiences across a wide range of sectors. Posts were regularly seen by followers of WBC, Culture Warrington, Warrington Guardian, Warrington Worldwide and others through tags and shares.

Comments on posts tended to be positive about the project or offered information about their own connection with the wire industry.

A detailed report of social media engagement indicates that there was a high level of engagement when the project was first announced.

- The oral history interviews with wire workers had an average number of views of around 214 the first time they were shown.
- The most viewed film was of rugby legend Mike Nicholas, with 26,700 views.
- Although it is not possible to identify which audience demographic viewed these films, engagement was consistently high throughout the project. The addition of a Warrington 'celebrity' figure definitely helped to boost our viewers, which in turn could have had a potential impact on the number of visitors to the exhibition.



Made possible with

**Heritage  
Fund**

### NLHF Outcomes achieved:

- A wider range of people will be involved in heritage;
- Heritage will be identified and better explained.

## 4.3 Our Education Partners

The rationale behind working with schools was:

A greater range of people, including young people, will have learned about Warrington's wire heritage, its impact globally, and how this is reflected in wire production today.

As a result of their work being displayed in The Wire Works exhibition, more people were informed of Warrington's wire heritage through visiting the exhibition to see the young people's work, as family members and friends of the participants.

### Bewsey Lodge Primary School

Although schools were once again open, delivery took place under very challenging circumstances as some Covid restrictions were still in place. All stakeholders worked together to overcome any difficulties and to complete the project in time.

Feedback was collected from the pupils by the class teacher and Laurence, the artist who worked with them. Questionnaires and creative evaluation techniques were used to evaluate the work completed in school, and feedback from the exhibition was given anecdotally by the teacher.



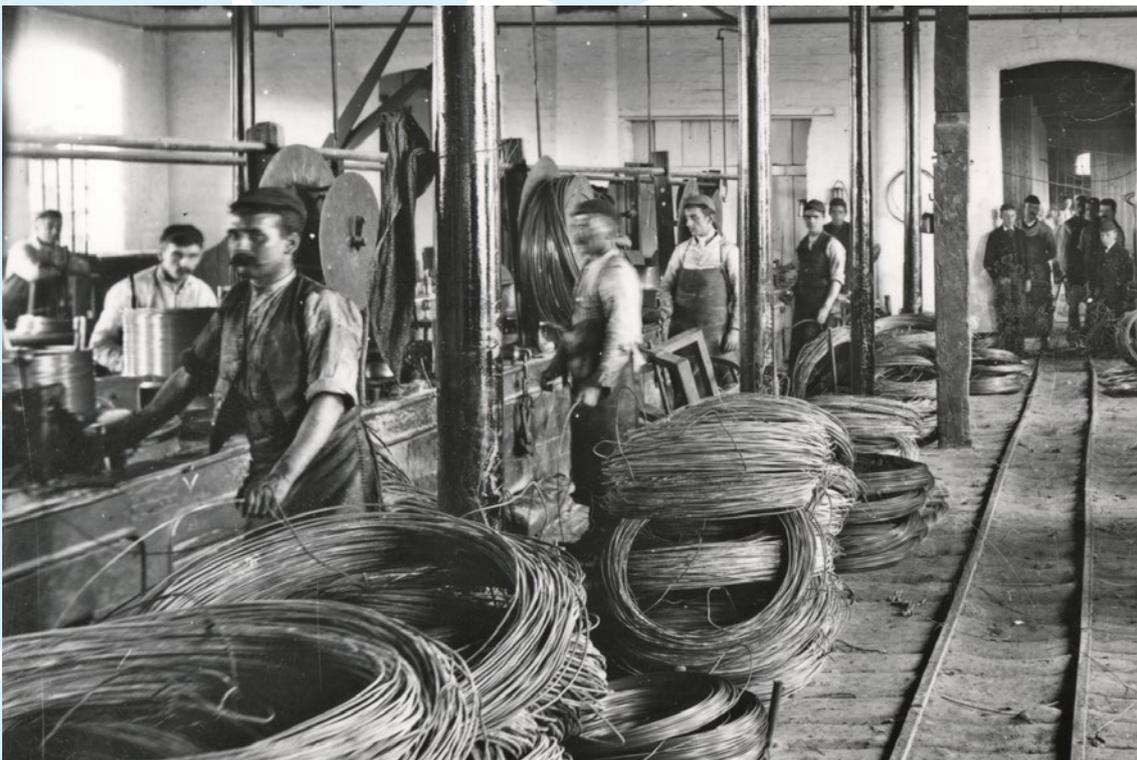
Here is a summary of the feedback:

- The children seemed to have enjoyed the project and were super keen throughout.
- The children were so excited by seeing their art work come together and they loved learning more about their local history.
- The children learnt more facts about the use of wire from Warrington around the world.
- The children seemed really interested in the mechanisms and engineering of wire and have suggested a visit to a local factory.



- Showing the children everyday objects made with wire was a good way to engage.
- Asking the children to imagine a wire factory and design their own machines was a good way to give them ownership of their learning.
- Imagining a factory using sound and creating vocal soundtracks was fun and quite effective.
- School staff were supportive of practitioners and the children were well behaved and enthusiastic.
- It was really helpful having the teacher present during the last sessions.
- The exhibition was brilliant; the information was interesting and easy to understand for the children and the interactive art activity was great.

Although the school is situated in an area where various wire works would have been situated, none of the cohort were previously aware of their town's industrial past. Engagement of the pupils was high, both during the creative process and the visit to the exhibition. In addition to the knowledge gained, pupils also improved their writing and dance skills and learned how to perform in front of a camera. Some of the children brought their families back to the exhibition to see their work, suggesting they had a sense of pride in the work they created.



## Priestley College

As with the primary school, adaptations had to be made to the project due to ongoing Covid issues and therefore the time the students spent with the artist was reduced. However, Christine offered excellent support to the students so that the work could be completed on time and to a high standard. College staff were extremely supportive of the work and highly engaged in the process from start to finish.



Feedback, collected from college staff, was as follows:

- The opening event with the talks from the artist, the museum and Locker Group employees was a really strong way to kick the project off and many of the student's ideas came directly from that one event.
- The resource packs that Christine provided were valuable with students still referring to them for support in the last weeks of the project.
- Christine's time in the college was very valuable and students really appreciated someone other than college tutors offering them advice and guidance.
- The project felt like a post-Covid celebration: students being allowed to work in teams; the opportunity to use materials and processes that were new to them; the students did not need to record their contextual thinking and jump through the assessment criteria.
- The experience could be to add to UCAS applications if students were applying for art subjects.
- Feedback from students was overwhelmingly positive after seeing their work in the exhibition and there was a strong sense of achievement when they were in the space.
- It was pleasing to see how much the public engaged with the project, and therefore engaged with the students work and Priestley College.
- Having the films to support the process has meant that there is a really strong archive of the project as well as promotional material.



Made possible with

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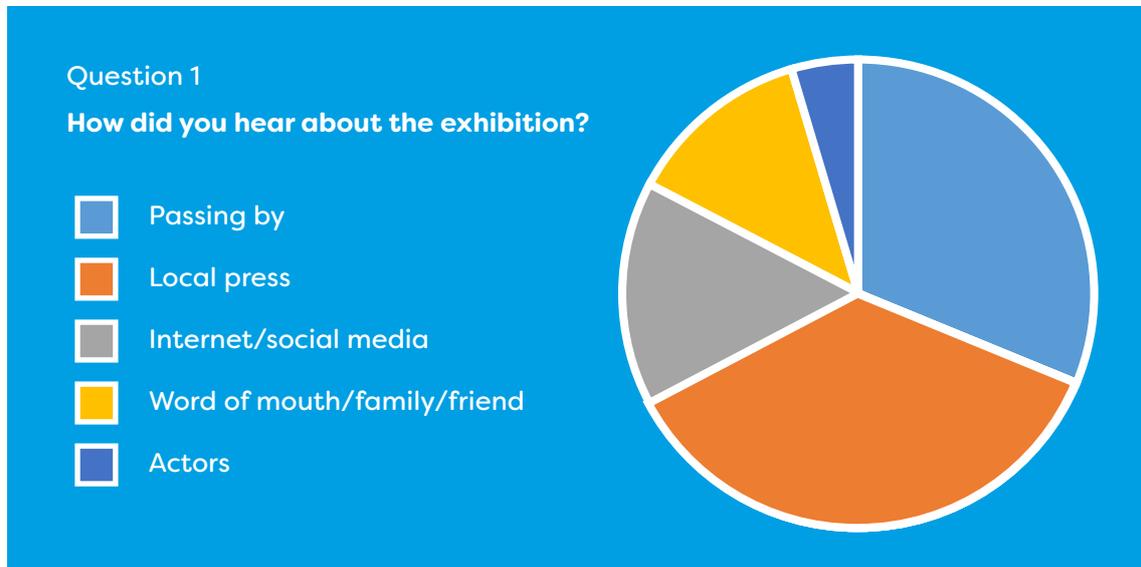
### NLHF Outcomes achieved:

- A wider range of people will be involved in heritage;
- Heritage will be identified and better explained;
- People will have developed skills;
- People will have greater wellbeing.

#### 4.4 The Wire Works Exhibition

The Wire Works Exhibition was the climax of the project and was instrumental in delivering our aims.

At the exhibition, visitors were asked if they would like to provide feedback and 369 surveys were completed. The findings of the surveys are explored below.



Most respondents had heard of the exhibition via the local press (Warrington Guardian, Warrington Worldwide and Radio Warrington), demonstrating that it had been well publicised. Fewer respondents had heard about the exhibition through social media, which is perhaps an indication that our heritage audiences are more likely to get information from a local publication, even if online, than from social media channels.

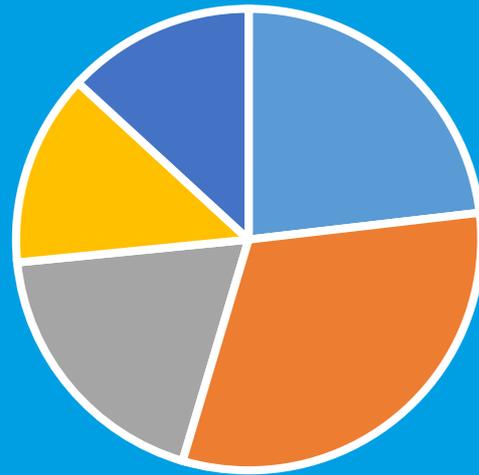
As the unit was in a high footfall area of a popular shopping centre, many visitors were incidental and had been in the area for other purposes. As the responses to question 2 indicate, many thought the exhibition looked good from the outside and were drawn in by the artwork on display.



## Question 2

### Why did you come in?

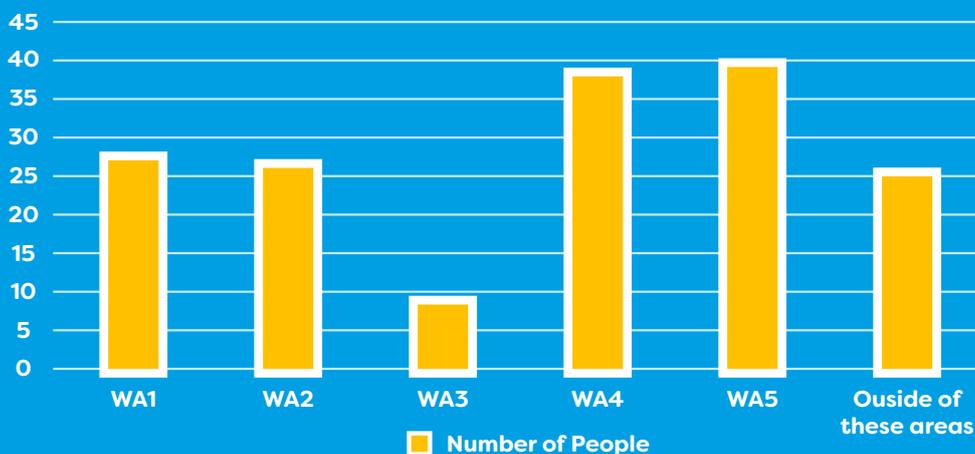
- I/family member work/used to work in the wire industry
- I'm interested in the history of Warrington
- I'm interested in the industrial history
- I'm interested in the artwork
- It looks good from the outside



Question 2 allowed the respondents to tick more than one option so the responses reflect this. Many who had been 'passing by' also indicated that they were interested in the history of Warrington. A large proportion of visitors had connections with the industry and some of these had not previously heard about the exhibition but had been passing by.

The first day of the exhibition had the highest daily total of visitors, which was partly due to the walkabout actors who directed visitors from different parts of the shopping centre. This kind of engagement is extremely beneficial for the opening of an event as it attracts visitors who would not normally visit this area of the shopping centre but who are likely to engage with the heritage of the town and spread the word.

## Question 3 - Where are you from?



**WA1** - Town Centre, Woolston, Paddington, Orford.

**WA2** - Dallam, Longford, Orford, Padgate, Winwick.

**WA3** - Lowton, Golborne, Birchwood, Rixtonwith Glazebrook, Culceth, Astley.

**WA4** - Grappenhall, Moore, Latchford, Thelwall, Appleton, Appleton Thorn.

**WA5** - Burtonwood, Westbrook, Penketh, Great Sankey, Whitecross.

When comparing the place demographics of visitors to the exhibition with visitors to the museum, the proportion of visitors from WA1, WA2, WA4 and WA5 are more balanced – the demographics are usually more heavily weighted towards WA4 and WA5. The proportion of visitors from WA1 and WA2 is higher than expected which may reflect the fact that there were wireworks situated in WA1 and WA2, or may reflect the usual demographic of the shopping centre.

The relatively low proportion of visitors from WA3 was unsurprising – these are largely areas that expanded in the 1970s (some of them only joined the borough in 1974) by which time the town centre wire industries were contracting.

Only one respondent was from Lymm (WA13), although there may have been other visitors who did not complete the survey.

Overall, the origin of the visitors reflect a typical ‘heritage audience’ in Warrington, with a larger proportion of visitors from areas surrounding the town centre. There was also a substantial level of observed anecdotal evidence (not necessarily captured in the visitor feedback forms) that the exhibition attracted a higher than usual number of retired male visitors. It would therefore be fair to say that we have been successful in attracting new audiences to the exhibition (there were other sources of evidence to suggest this), but there is certainly still some work to be done in engaging people from outlying areas in future heritage projects.



Question 4 - Participants were asked: What did you like?

Below are some examples of responses:

I enjoyed my visit and have a better understanding of how Warrington became such a vital town for this industry.

More of these events and exhibitions would be good.

Good mix of visual, boards and videos.

Extremely interesting and beautifully presented.

Interesting reminder of working as a female welder and being paid less than the men.

Make it a permanent exhibition.

Very interesting to see one of the major industries of Warrington being recognised and exhibited.

Presentation excellent.

Although I lived in Warrington since 1960, I did not know the importance of this industry for the town.

Educational and inspirational

Great to see history is still being collected.

Really proud of impact Warrington has had on the world.

I never knew Warrington had a history of wire manufacturing.

Very informative.

Reminiscing stories told by dad of his happy time at Greenings.

Loved the use of space, the timeline and the clear interpretation. Really interesting display.

I was amazed at the information I didn't know until I came in.

So interesting and got us talking about our past.

### Question 5 - Participants were asked: What could be better?

Most responses were very positive and a small proportion gave areas for improvement, which will be used to build our resources in the future, and for evidence of need for future projects. Below is a summary of the general comments made:

Within the exhibition, people would have liked to see:

- A map illustrating where factories were situated and what is there now
- More information on the machinery used, e.g. loom
- More information about working conditions
- More detail about processes, such as wire drawing
- More pictures and photos
- More information gathered from those who worked in the industry
- More images from the factory floor
- More exhibits, including older items
- Object handling / samples to touch
- Footage of the industry

Specific comments:

- Move video to avoid sound bleed with oral histories
- Time Square car park poster bigger
- Through the mesh sound issues
- Some labels too small
- More advertising around town

General comments for follow-up and/or future planning:

- Bigger space, more exhibits
- Make it permanent
- Content online
- Booklet for people who can't get in to exhibition
- Should be developed further in line with importance of industry to our town
- Permanent industrial museum

The Wire Works exhibition created the greatest amount of engagement. Many visitors had connections with the wire industry and the general feedback was extremely positive, with most feeling that that it was important that this aspect of Warrington's heritage was finally being recognised and stories were being told.

Many visitors to the exhibition were shoppers, who had come in because it looked attractive from the outside and were surprised at how significant the industry had been in Warrington and the impact it had worldwide. The interpretations within the exhibition were hugely successful in explaining the importance of this industry in Warrington's history and the feedback from questionnaires gives us a clear indication of this. There were many comments, both in questionnaires and orally to the volunteers, which suggested how little of this industry was previously known.

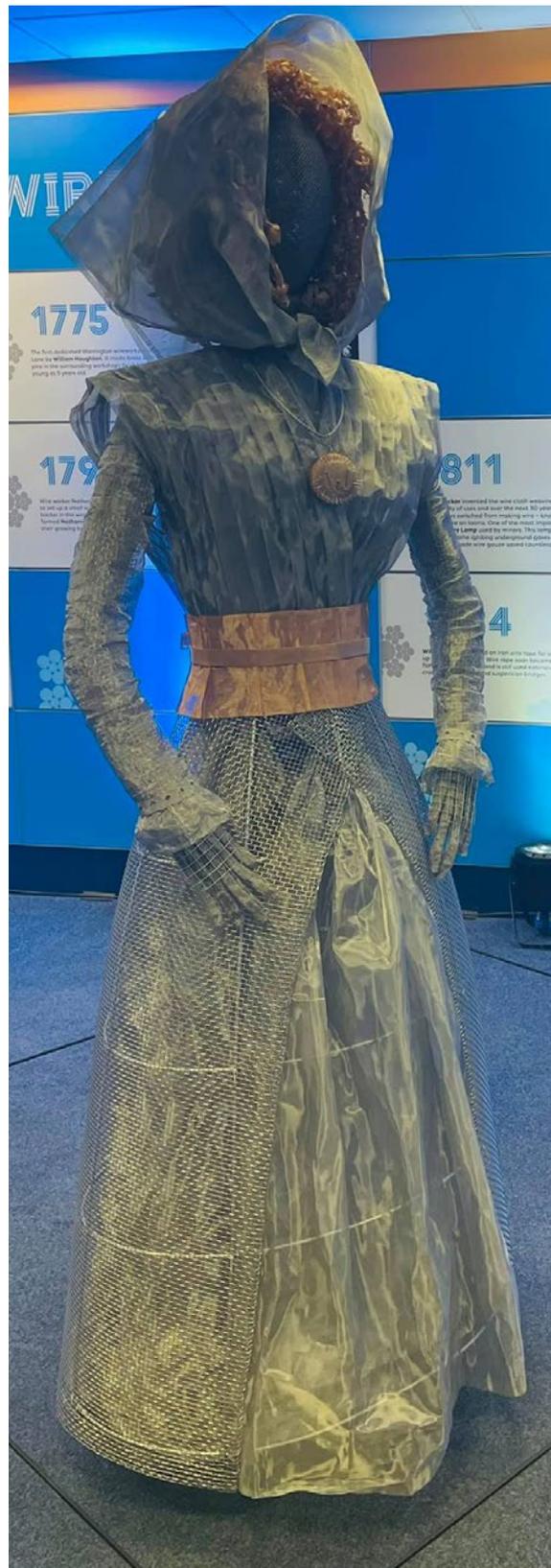


The Wire Works had a huge impact on the wellbeing of both visitors and the volunteers who the exhibition. Many people had stories to share and volunteers reported that people were usually extremely enthusiastic when reminiscing, some even getting emotional. A degree of intergenerational interaction was observed with parents and grandparents talking about their working lives to their children and grandchildren. Some commented that it had been an extremely positive experience and how fantastic it was to see this aspect of Warrington's heritage being celebrated. The member of staff who covered the majority of the shifts made the following observation:

**“The pride people had for the work they did was immense. Physical posture changed and bodies took up more space in the world as stories of working life were told. I really think they were realising their own value as they spoke.”**

The volunteers also felt that as well as gaining a lot of new knowledge about the wire industry, they also gained confidence in approaching visitors and answering their questions. Some volunteers felt that they had honed their inter-personal skills which had been negatively impacted due to the isolation aspect of the pandemic. This was evidenced through informal chats with them, but also an end of project questionnaire, which indicated that they had got a lot of enjoyment out of the project. 100% of the volunteers said they would volunteer for a similar project again.

A new social media platform was set up specifically for The Wire Works (FB, Twitter and Instagram) and followers increased across all three during the exhibition. In total, there were over 700 people following The Wire Works on social media. Individual posts sometimes reached over 1,000 people, with the announcement for the opening of the exhibition reaching around 24,000 people.



#### NLHF Outcomes achieved:

- A wider range of people will be involved in heritage;
- Heritage will be identified and better explained;
- People will have developed skills;
- People will have greater wellbeing.

## 4.5 Website

One of the consistent messages that came across from the research phase of the Wireworks project (and which was reinforced by responses by those visiting the exhibition) was the lack of any available online resources about the Warrington wire industry, particularly the wire manufacturing side which has now all but vanished from the town. Culture Warrington aim to address this through the website section but this is a work in progress and will continue to develop over time.

During the exhibition period, one thing that was regularly requested was a current map of Warrington but with all of the Wire Works marked on, both existing and those which have been demolished. Unfortunately, we were not able to commission this during the project but will add it to future plans.

[The Wire Works - Warrington Museum and Art Gallery \(culturewarrington.org\)](http://culturewarrington.org)



Made possible with

**Heritage  
Fund**

**NLHF Outcomes achieved:**

- Heritage will be identified and better explained.



## **Summary of outcomes achieved:**

### **A wider range of people will be involved in heritage**

- The location of The Wire Works exhibition ensured a steady flow of visitors, particularly at weekends. Visitor numbers were above average.
- The location of the exhibition (a busy shopping centre square) ensured that many of the visitors were not 'typical' heritage visitors.
- Specific groups were engaged in the project who would not usually have a lot of engagement in heritage, such as young people through the work with schools / colleges and retired men who had worked in the wire industry.
- The exhibition encouraged inter-generational conversations – children and grandchildren were being brought by the older people who had worked in the industry.
- The online videos made during lockdowns reached a variety of audiences.
- Vast audiences were reached through our social media channels and this was likely to include large numbers of people not typically engaged in Warrington's heritage.
- The mix of art and heritage drew in new audiences.
- The connections with the town's rugby league team, formerly known as 'The Wire' ensured engagement from rugby audiences.

### **Heritage will be identified and better explained**

- The exhibition was finished to a professional standard, despite being a pop-up in an empty shopping centre unit.
- The interpretation boards were well-presented – people commented that they were clear, informative and interesting.
- Many people came forward with stories and artefacts, enabling Warrington Museum to add to their collections and archives.
- A video was produced to be used by schools.
- The 13 core videos were produced to engage audiences across a wide range of sectors, telling the story of the industry from different points of view.
- A dedicated section of Warrington Museum's website has been created (work in progress).

### **People will have developed skills**

- 8 volunteers received oral history training.
- 10 volunteers provided invigilation within the exhibition and developed communication and inter-personal skills, alongside increasing their knowledge of the wire industry in Warrington.

### **People will have greater wellbeing**

- The volunteers involved in the delivery of the exhibition reported a sense of achievement and that they had enjoyed the experience.
- The young people who created work for the exhibition experienced a great sense of pride in seeing their work being professionally displayed.
- Visitors to the exhibition who had connections with this industry expressed their delight in seeing this aspect of the town's history being recognised in this way.
- Visitors to the exhibition who had no previous knowledge of the significance of Warrington's wire industry were largely impressed with the scale of the industry and some stated that they felt more pride in their town.

## Section 5 – Learning

In terms of learning, we have considered what worked well and what we would improve upon in future projects.

### Highlights:

- The project team managed to maintain momentum and enthusiasm in spite of the project being interrupted by Covid and delivery of the main activity being delayed by 12 months.
- The team were excellent at engagement, produced high quality, professional work and were versatile and flexible throughout.
- Social media engagement was high.
- We have quality films as a legacy of the project which can be used for future engagement and will become part of Warrington Museum's archives.
- The exhibition had very high footfall and engagement.
- The young people were more interested in heritage than was expected.
- The project gave a voice to a section of Warringtonians who thought they had been forgotten.
- Other wire companies were discovered (it was previously thought that only Locker Group existed) and engaged with the project.

### Learning for future projects:

- When a project involves the collection of oral histories, it would be more beneficial to include a temporary post to co-ordinate the process, from organising volunteer training, through to documentation.
- Social media needs to be used from the start to promote the project and widen engagement.
- There needs to be clear expectations of what will be expected throughout the project from each team member and frequent team meetings.
- The exhibition hugely accelerated engagement in the project – if possible, the exhibition should be closer to the start, or in the middle of the project, rather than at the end. In this case, the end point could have been later to give us time to follow up on new information.
- The exhibition could have maintained engagement if it had been open for longer – more budget would be required for this.
- More activities within the exhibition would have led to a wider reach of engagement. A schools' programme could have been developed. More budget would be required for this.
- A more detailed evaluation plan from the outset would have made collecting evidence easier – this should be factored into time and budget costs more carefully.
- Knowledge of costs for developing an exhibition of this scale and accompanying activities has increased significantly, and therefore a much more accurate budget forecast could be made in the future.

## Section 6 – Conclusion

On the whole, 'The Wire Works' was highly successful in terms of achieving what it set out to achieve. The project highlighted the importance of this industry to Warrington and engaged a whole new demographic in the town's heritage. The enthusiasm with which wire workers, past and present, and their families, came forwards to share memories, photographs and artefacts is testament to the prominent place this often overlooked aspect of Warrington's past has in the story of our town and its communities.

The Wire Works Exhibition was a key factor in the success of the project and reflected the hard work that the team had put into producing high quality work, despite the many challenges brought about by Covid, even after project activity resumed in early 2021. Through its high levels of footfall and involvement of communities it made a significant contribution to the development of a sense of identity and pride, and therefore made an important contribution to the place-making agenda.

The project has provided a model, as well as much learning, for future local heritage projects – the involvement of educational settings; an exhibition in a high footfall area which combines heritage and arts; a call-out for oral histories; a social media campaign and engaging film footage. Although there is still a lot of work to be done to collate, document and celebrate Warrington's industrial heritage, this project could be seen as the first step towards ensuring the legacy of 'Warrington Wire' is firmly placed within the heritage of our town and a catalyst towards heritage being at the centre of place-making strategies.



## Section 7 - Next Steps

- Continue to collect oral histories from the people who came forward as a result of the exhibition by recruiting a volunteer to co-ordinate the process.
- Continue to develop the dedicated page to The Wire Works on Warrington Museum's website.
- Include 'wire' in future heritage events, using the media produced and oral histories collected.
- Look for opportunities for further funding to continue to celebrate Warrington's industrial past, not only wire but industries such as brewing, tanning, soap and nuclear.
- Explore the potential of a small 'sculpture park' which celebrates the industrial heritage of the town.

### Quotes

**"In terms of any constructive comments to look at improvements for next projects, I'm struggling! Considering the climate that we undertook the project I think it is a resounding success."**

Teacher, Priestley College

**"I liked learning about the history of wire because now I can tell my family about it."**

Student, Bewsey Lodge Primary School

**"The children have really enjoyed being part of the project and are excited to see their work in a real exhibition like professional artists."**

Teacher, Bewsey Lodge Primary School

**"As for me, it has started a real interest/curiosity to find out more. It has been a thoroughly worthwhile experience."**

Member of staff from Culture Warrington who did the majority of the shifts at the exhibition.

**"Really worthwhile - seems so fundamental to the town that something like this exhibition should be available permanently. The exhibits and the layout were excellent and extremely professional - I never heard any criticisms or complaints."**

Volunteer at the exhibition

**"I think the public reaction was overwhelmingly positive, I don't believe I spoke to a single person who thought it wasn't worthwhile. Many visitors commented that it was about time."**

Volunteer at the exhibition

**"I enjoyed my visit and have a better understanding of how Warrington became such a vital town for this industry."**

**"Extremely interesting and beautifully presented."**

**"More of these events and exhibitions would be good."**

**"Make it a permanent exhibition."**

**"I never knew that this place had sent so much out into the world. Reading about the bridges, the cables and all the other things on the map has made me feel really proud to come from here. I never knew and I'll always think of Warrington differently now."**

**"Although I lived in Warrington since 1960, I did not know the importance of this industry for the town."**

**"I'm really proud of the impact Warrington has had on the world."**

Visitors to the exhibition

# Acknowledgements

The **Wire Works** project, co-ordinated by Lynn Radcliffe (Cultural Partnerships Development Manager) from Warrington Borough Council, could not have been possible without the dedication, hard work and support of our partners and sponsors.

**With special thanks to The Wire Works team:**

**From Culture Warrington (Warrington Museum & Art Gallery): Craig Sherwood - Collections Officer, Philip Jeffs - Archives Officer**

Founded in 1848, Warrington Museum & Art Gallery is one of the oldest public museums in the UK and the first to be established in a manufacturing district. Since 1857 the museum has been housed in a purpose-built Grade II listed neoclassical building which retains much of its Victorian character. The museum's collections contain over 200,000 objects covering a wide range of subjects such as Archaeology, Art, Ethnology, Natural History, Photography and Social History, and while the majority of the collections relate to Warrington and the surrounding areas, some of the items are undoubtedly of national significance. The museum also hosts an award-winning programme of events and temporary exhibitions, as well as running regular free family-friendly craft activities throughout the year.

<https://wmag.culturewarrington.org/>

**Ludovico: Darren Jeffries, Founder and Producer, Grant Archer - Visual Artist**

Established in 2019, Ludovico is a cultural company specialising in media production and creative education. Founded by actor and producer Darren Jeffries, Ludovico is packed with established artists dedicated to creating the culture, breaking boundaries and sharing success.

Through its own foundation Ludovico also supports Warrington's creative community, working with Warrington Contemporary Arts Festival, Neighbourhood Weekender Festival, Warrington Voluntary Action and First Act Drama to provide training and opportunity in the arts.

<https://helloludovico.co.uk/>

**Laurence Payot - Cross-disciplinary Artist**

Laurence Payot is a cross disciplinary artist, weaving socially engaged and participatory approaches with digital and new technologies. She works in collaboration with people and communities to create collective rituals, objects or video work that question and re-invent our sense of belonging. Working with other creatives (poets, sound artists, film-makers, choreographers) is a key part of her practice, allowing her to respond to people and places in the most appropriate and intuitive way.

<http://www.laurencepayot.com/>

**Christine Wilcox-Baker - Artist and designer**

Christine Wilcox-Baker is a professional artist, designer and project manager. She has a very enquiring mind. Researching her subjects, learning new skills and portraying her discoveries in a range of media to suit each piece of work really drives her forward. A key part of her work is storytelling and she uses visual imagery to portray information in order to engage the viewer in different ways. The stories come through her own research and with input from collaborating with diverse individuals and organisations.

Christine previously worked with Locker Group Ltd, on a sculpture for a silver medal winning garden at RHS Flower Show Tatton Park. This sculpture is now on permanent display in the grounds of Knutsford Town Council offices. With her current work, Christine has been keen to showcase a centre of technological excellence based in Warrington through the use of some of the wide range of wire meshes and wire products from Locker Group Ltd.

[www.axisweb.org/p/christinewilcoxbaker](http://www.axisweb.org/p/christinewilcoxbaker)

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