

## **Archives, Libraries & Museums London**

### **MARY SEACOLE BICENTENARY LONDON 2005**

#### **CASE STUDY**

##### **FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE MUSEUM**

Interviewee: Alex Attewell (Director)

##### **PROJECT MANAGER**

Rudi Page

##### **Summary:**

A museum aiming to “contribute to people’s knowledge and development in terms of health and educational opportunities and inspire (them) to reach their potential” through promoting an understanding of the legacy of Florence Nightingale. The bi-centenary of the birth of Mary Seacole (a nurse of African ethnic origin who served in the Crimea at the same time as Florence Nightingale) was the focal point of a programme based on three themes – Education and Training, Professional Development and Historical Perspectives. Working with a freelance project manager and adopting his “Synergy Model” to effect diversity changes both in the museum and within the local NHS Foundation Trust which funded the project.

##### **Key Relevant Themes:**

- Creating accountability
- Working with a multi-stranded strategy
- Diversity through “branding”
- Partnership with public institution (NHS Foundation Trust) to effect structural change and accommodate diverse workforce

##### **Background**

The Florence Nightingale Museum had for some years worked to develop its accessibility through a particular focus on community education. Its work with schools, including special educational needs schools, and its museum based events held for the benefit of local Lambeth and Southwark residents introduced its collections and its services to communities for the first time and had drawn very positive feedback from participants.

The Museum has historically maintained close associations with Guys and St Thomas’s Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, which was itself making concerted efforts to pursue a diversity agenda, not least because it was the largest employer in Lambeth and served one of the most ethnically diverse areas in London. Its staff composition reflected local demographics.

## **Background Cont'd**

The Hospital Chairman identified the bi-centenary of the birth of Mary Seacole as an opportunity for collaboration on achieving a number of separate objectives.. Though in the Victorian era Mary Seacole had been a woman greatly celebrated for her contribution to nursing care in the Crimea and thereafter, recognition of her achievements had faded. Her African mother and the fact that she originated in Jamaica resonated in view of the ethnic make up of the local area.

A stakeholder committee was formed to develop activities that would appropriately mark her life and influence. Representatives were drawn from the Trust, nursing and midwives' bodies as well as Black Cultural Archives, the Mary Seacole Memorial Association and the Caribbean Nurses Organisation. There was consensus that the programme should go much further than a one off exhibition and that a fitting tribute to her legacy would see lasting organisational changes that would widen access to educational services and enhance staff development.

A project manager was appointed in October 2004 to oversee the implementation of the programme. He was a consultant who had an impressive track record of introducing changes that encouraged greater diversity in workplaces spanning the commercial, public and voluntary sectors including the health field. Working with the three broad themes agreed by the stakeholder committee: Education and Training, Professional Development and Historical Perspectives, he adapted an implementation model that was based on the twin principles of facilitating dialogue between individuals, institutions and the community and reducing the impact of "disparities of commitment" by allocation of clear roles and responsibilities. The clear and public lines of accountability were central to the planning and achievement of the programme.

## **The Project**

As stated, activities under the programme were divided into three principal themes. These were identified by the the Project Manager in collaboration with the stakeholders. Each will be considered in turn.

**Education and Training:**

London South Bank University (LSBU) held a one day education forum for students and lecturers in nursing, midwifery and the allied health professions. Attendees were from London and the south east with representatives of the Nurse's Association of Jamaica, the Caribbean Nurses Organisation and its student body. The event was addressed by Sir Trevor McDonald (LSBU Chancellor), representatives of principal stakeholders, with a keynote address by the recently retired Chief Nurse from Department of Health.

The Museum also contributed to primary school level education. Education packs were designed and tailored to the needs of the core curriculum. Existing relationships with teachers facilitated visits and allowed staff to assist on English and art assignments based on the life and work of Mary Seacole. It sparked discussions with the children and inspired them to write on her background and her potential as a role model. The artwork of the children was used extensively as part of the exhibition and in subsequent publicity.

Collaboration with Kings College led to Mary Seacole featuring in their promotion of nursing as an access course and as a positive career option in its "Uni 4 You" campaign.

**Professional Development:**

An intrinsic element of the programme was the involvement of senior personnel in the NHS Trust introducing structural changes aimed at encouraging greater diversity within the workforce and meeting the career progression needs of staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Using Mary Seacole as inspiration and a figurehead for these developments, plans are advanced to introduce a mentoring scheme for health professionals and a BME Network. Case studies of career progression by BME staff were identified by the Hospital's Facilities department and these were developed in a video shown during the Hospital's Mary Seacole branded event: "Diversity and Delivering Excellence". BME networks have been established in other fields and afford a forum for exchanges of ideas on issues affecting the place of BME staff in the relevant area. They have also been proved to lead to an effective lobby to bring about institutional changes that will positively influence career progression opportunities. The programme has also led to reviews of training undertaken within the Trust and awards schemes to recognise achievement.

## **Historical Perspectives:**

The most public manifestation of the programme was of course the Mary Seacole Bi-centenary exhibition itself: *The Wonderful Mrs Seacole*, which will run for a year until May 2006. A review of the Museum's collections revealed a stock of material that was available and other museums were generous in their lending of additional objects. Careful planning went into the promotion of the Exhibition and its opening. Extensive media interest was generated, particularly when Trevor McDonald was invited to formally open the exhibition. A partnership with Black Cultural Archives and Lambeth Archives led to part of the exhibition being dedicated to highlighting the experience of black nurses in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. A series of events and public discussions has and will continue to take place during the year to mark the bi-centenary both examining the life of Mary and examining her contemporary relevance.

### Main Findings

#### **Achieving a broad mandate**

Stakeholder committee members had to be selected carefully. There was a potential for controversy in approaching a subject such as Mary Seacole – the added ingredient of her rivalry with Florence Nightingale could have led to suspicion. However, because of the Museum's knowledge of the sector the composition was inclusive and engaged all relevant bodies and individuals. It was important to accommodate a certain amount of "messiness" in the work of the committee. Difficult questions arise in projects of this kind related to identity and different voices need to be heard as to how best to be faithful to a legacy whilst resonating in the modern world. The programme was more rounded and substantial as a result of the consensus that was achieved through this process though a balance obviously had to be maintained in order to "get the job done".

### **Making people accountable**

As previously mentioned, a central aim of the Synergy Model was to open (and keep open) communication channels between those involved at different levels of the programme as well as to induce commitment and ownership. One of the early efforts to this end was a large event at Governors Hall in London in January 2005. Billed as a celebration and giving the opportunity to raise the profile of the programme, it also compelled senior managers responsible for its implementation to lend their support and articulate their roles and specific tasks. Those involved also used the opportunity to network and make links with other participants leading to an understanding of needs and resources and addressing the “disparity of understandings and commitments” that can otherwise jeopardise projects. As an example, the Public Relations team at the NHS Trust, which was responsible for the excellent promotion of the Exhibition, learned at an early stage about the subtleties of what was planned and could adapt their strategy accordingly. This and similar opportunities were taken to ensure all parties were continuously kept on board (and on track) and were working according to the same understandings. This approach with an emphasis on accountable actions gave much more freedom to the project manager to manipulate contributions.

### **Personality led programmes**

The figure of Mary Seacole allowed, and will allow in the future, the Museum and others to introduce debates, initiatives and policies aimed at enhancing diversity to wider audiences. She provides a focal point or framework of reference within which diversity themes can be explored. Similarly, the “brand” of Mary Seacole, especially in the context of the Museum’s commercial activities e.g. souvenirs sold in the Museum shop, creates a lasting impression on the public perception of the Museum and its future activities. Care ought, nevertheless, to be taken in placing exclusive reliance on the “brand” since there are dangers of “blotting out” other aspects and perceptions of diverse cultural heritage.

### **Sustaining the momentum**

It is clear to the Museum Director that the goodwill generated by the exhibition and its related activities needs to be acted upon. He sees the inclusion of members of the stakeholder committee within a more diverse advisory panel of the Museum’s Associate Trustees as well as the creation of a ring fenced fund for diversity programmes (in which Associate Trustees will have a stake) as important first steps. Future projects, such as an oral history programme on local nurses and patients, will promote diversity more effectively as a result of the engagement of Mary Seacole stakeholders.

### **Final Thought - Museums and archives and their contemporary role**

Throughout, the Museum's role was to provide cultural leadership for the projects and to use its resources, both skills and items from its collection, creatively. They successfully established in the minds of many key stakeholders what Museums and archives could contribute to the achievement of social justice goals. Its reputation now fixed in the consciousness, future invitations to be involved in other projects with similar contemporary themes are extremely likely.

### **ALM LONDON'S OBJECTIVE**

By 2010 London's **archives, libraries and museums** will be responsive to the needs of London's diverse communities, providing Londoners with opportunities to develop their knowledge, build cohesion, access information and contribute to the unique identity of London.

London's archives, libraries and museums have an important role to play in promoting knowledge and understanding of diverse cultures and in fostering a sense of identity and racial tolerance.

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