catalyst
SCIENCE DISCOVERY CENTRE AND MUSEUM

Annual Newsletter 2021

Season's Greetings everyone!

I always find writing this end of year summary an interesting and thoughtful piece. In a busy day to day working life, it is all too easy to skip over some tremendous achievements and challenges that have been overcome. As we went into 2021, for all of us - let's be honest – it was a very uncertain and perhaps unsettling time. No one could predict how the year would turn out for us all personally or what our beloved 'Catalyst' would look like in the future. Fast forward a year and all I can say is 'Wow!'. We not only survived a global pandemic and a business that was closed for 15 months but we have emerged so much stronger, so much more confident and so much more able to deliver what we love doing.

We have taken the opportunity to transform ourselves, we have designed and delivered new offers, we have upgraded our infrastructure, we have upskilled our team, we have worked hard to break-down barriers and as a result we've seen some fantastic business results (those stories are all over this newsletter). The joy of seeing families and schools rock up and the noise level go through the roof has been heart-warming.

We have won two awards for our ground-breaking Mental Health programme working with Mind, Halton. We saw our busiest summer in 30 years and although our 'Schools programme' and 'Sleepovers' in the Observatory are not back up to pre-pandemic levels, we are confident they will return in 2022. We can't control the external factors or Government policy or Pandemics but we can control what we do best, we preserve our past and we educate our future scientists. My judgement is, after a difficult year, families just want to have some fun, kids want to do hands-on stuff and learn new things, we all want to smile and laugh and we want to fill up any soul that comes through our door with a smile, a coffee and a cake!

As those who have supported Catalyst over many years know, it is much more than a place to educate, to have fun, to hold an Archive. We make a bridge between our past and our future and who delivers that – we do! We are the fantastic staff and volunteers, a dedicated group of Trustees, Friends of Catalyst, our sponsors, suppliers, fellow colleagues in our industry and, of course, our Visitors & Schools.

I'm very proud to say, I've been part of the Catalyst team in a period of unimaginable challenge for everyone and how we have all responded to that in a calm but positive way.

I wish you, your family and friends a peaceful and restful festive period and hope to see you all in 2022.

Best Wishes and Thank You for your support of Catalyst.

Martin

Martin B Pearson, CEO Catalyst Science Discovery Centre & Museum Trust Ltd

Trustee news

This year we sadly said goodbye to three people from our trustee board. David Yaxley, retired but is still a great supporter and sponsor of Catalyst. Professor David Hornby retired to take over as Chair of the Friends of Catalyst and Councillor Pamela Wallace retired after being a valuable member of the board since 2006. We thank them for all the contributions they made and wish them well for the future.

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Catalyst Science Discovery Centre
Catalyst Museum

Catalyst reopening

Completed refurbishment

Thanks to a grant of £754,600 from the Inspiring Science Fund from the Wellcome Trust and UKRI and an additional £55,000 in November 2020 we are thrilled to say that our refurbishment is complete!

Like many other science centres and museums, we sadly had to close our doors on 20th March 2020 due to the pandemic and we remained closed until 27th May 2021. However, during that time we were able to complete our refurbishment programme and are thrilled to say that the whole of the ground floor has been completely transformed, including new signage on the front of the building and at the side by the new café entrance and a new courtyard area adjacent to the glass lift. To complete the new look, the uniforms were redesigned to include the new logo and these were issued to all staff and volunteers too.

We are extremely proud of our transformation and have received extremely positive comments from our visitors.

Since re-opening, we had the busiest summer holidays and October half term in over 30 years and everyone who paid for general admission was issued with an annual pass so they could visit as many times as they like over the next 12 months. With such a great offer, we attracted visitors from as far afield as Scotland, Kent, Devon and even Northern Ireland!

New offers

After such a long break, we've been delighted to welcome back school groups for hands-on workshops, adult groups for illustrated talks and tours and of course uniformed groups for our ever popular sleepovers.

This year we expanded our offer to also include Heritage afternoon teas, served in our stunning 4th floor, glass-walled Observatory gallery, planetarium shows in our new inflatable planetarium and science birthday parties which include a meal and an interactive science show!

One happy parent said "Indy's party was absolutely brilliant! Thank you so much. The workshop was fabulous, Rob was excellent and great at entertaining the kids. The ladies in the café were also brilliant, so helpful and the kids really enjoyed the food. The interactive galleries went down a treat, we had to drag the kids out of there! You really did go above and beyond to ensure my son had a fabulous birthday."

Pupils help design new exhibit

Before we re-opened to the public, year 6 pupils from Widnes Academy, West Bank were treated to a private tour. Back in 2018, Catalyst worked with the pupils (then in year 3) to explore the types of exhibits pupils wanted to see when we refurbished our ground floor gallery. As young consultants, the pupils worked with Dan Bird from Whitefire Associates to develop ideas for the Time Capsule exhibit which has now been installed in our ground floor gallery!

Under 5s Playlab

As part of our refurbishment programme, this year we were excited to open our under 5s Playlab, thanks to sponsorship from William Blythe. Children have been having a great time taking on the roles of scientists!

Heritage Open Days

This year we took part in both Heritage Open Days weekends on 11th/12th and 18th/19th September. We opened our doors for free both weekends and attracted over 1000 visitors!

Grants and Sponsorship

Culture Recovery Fund - Round 2

In April Catalyst was awarded a grant of £79,500 from the Government's £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund which helped organisations recover and re-open after being closed for over 12 months.

More than £300 million was awarded to thousands of cultural organisations across the country in the second round of support from the Culture Recovery Fund.

NW Hydrogen Alliance

Visitors to Catalyst can now take on the climate change challenge thanks to a new 'Net Zero' interactive exhibit sponsored by the North West Hydrogen Alliance, representing over 30 of the UK's most influential organisations driving forward a hydrogen economy in the region. The game is based on the North West and some of the projects anticipated to be delivered over the coming years.

New Heritage Room opened at Catalyst

Catalyst is housed in what was once part of Gossages Soap Works. Established in 1855 on Spike Island, Gossages was at one time the largest soap company in the UK if not the world and in October we were honoured to welcome back Mr Peter Gossage along with family members, friends and colleagues to officially open The Gossage Room, in what was the admin building of Gossages from 1908 until 1933. This new heritage room, refurbished during the pandemic with funding from the Gossage Family, now proudly displays the portraits of William and Frederick Herbert Gossage, artefacts and photographs of the soap industry and a huge, wall filling bookcase containing much of our library archive.

Double Celebration at Catalyst

There was cause for a double celebration in October when friends and relatives of the famous Brunner family gathered to witness the naming of the Henry and John Brunner Room in the Catalyst archives, and the presentation of two artefacts for permanent display in the museum. The room was formally opened by George Windsor, Earl of St Andrews whose mother Katharine, Duchess of Kent is descended from the Brunner family. The two artefacts are family heirlooms and comprise a ceremonial key presented to Sir John Brunner on opening the Transporter Bridge in 1905 and a silver table bell, presented in 1913 after the Transporter Bridge generator was replaced by mains power.

Operation Earth 2.5 with the ASDC

We are delighted to be taking part in a project called Operation Earth 2.5 with funding from UK Association for Science Discovery Centres in partnership with NERC. Our Planet Awakens workshops ran at the same time as COP26 and we are working with St Edwards RC Primary School in Runcorn on a family, science capital project.

Catalyst would like to thank the following for their support this year;

Ames Goldsmith
Arts Council England
ASDC
Ashton Chemicals
Emma Biaggi
Biffa Award
Mr John Blewett
Brunner Family
Dr Ingeborg Buschmann
BYK
Dr N Carey
Ceimig Limited
Chemical Industries Association
Dr Jenny Clucas
Mr Roy Coldwell
Professor Alan Dronsfield
Emerald Kalama
Friends of Catalyst
Gossage Family
Halton Borough Council
Mr Howard Hopwood
Mr Richard Hunting CBE
INEOS Community Fund
Ingevity
Innospec
Inovyn
Koura
Dr Diana Leitch
Less Common Metals
Meade-King Robinson
Mersey Gateway Crossings Board
MIND Halton
North West Hydrogen Alliance
Novelis
Mr Peter Peake
Mr Andrew Ritchie
Royal Society of Chemistry
RS Clare
Stephenson Personal Care
UKRI
Victrex plc
Viridor Credits
Mr Andrew Warren
Wellcome Trust
William Blythe
Mr David & Dr Katharine Yaxley

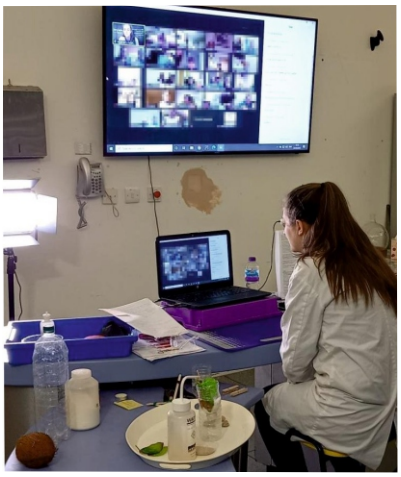
In brief

We are pleased to announce that **Mersey Gateway Crossings Board** are to sponsor the Tidal Timelapse exhibit in the Observatory Gallery whilst Runcorn based **Koura** have joined our periodic table sponsors, sponsoring the element Fluorine. We thank them both for their support.

Education

Catalyst Camp with a Difference

January 2021 saw the whole country locked down again and we knew that uniformed groups were finding it increasingly difficult to engage with their groups remotely. Hence the introduction of the Catalyst Camp with a Difference virtual workshops! Groups could book hour-long, digital sessions over Zoom which delivered a mixture of lab based demonstrations from our Education Team and three practical activities that young people could carry out in the comfort of their own home! With careful planning and equipment lists distributed in advance, groups learned how to filter water, make a fire extinguisher and build a raft to help them escape, should they ever find themselves marooned on a desert island! Great fun was had by all, in a Covid secure setting. We even had a group from Scotland join us!

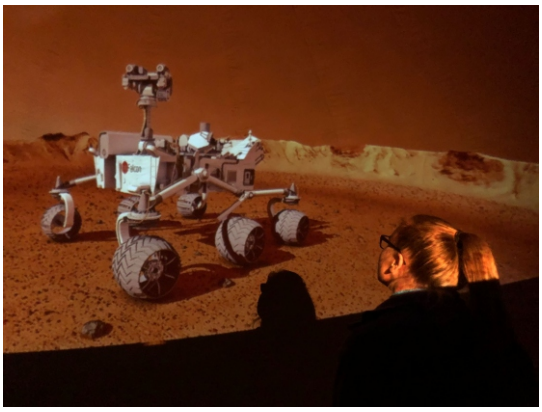


Digital offer for schools

This year we also developed a digital offer for primary schools called the Marvellous Materials Adventure which could be delivered over Zoom or Teams. Pupils saw a variety of demonstrations all linked to materials and their properties then they conducted their own practical science investigations. A great learning experience for pupils when they weren't able to leave their classrooms!

Planetarium Shows

In October half term, we ran our very first Planetarium Shows for the general public, delivered in our new, inflatable planetarium! Visitors joined us for an immersive journey into space, learning how to identify constellations before going on an epic ride in the hunt for alien life. These proved to be so popular that we increased the number of workshops on offer each day! We will be running more shows from 27 - 30 Jan, 24 - 27 Mar, and 28 Apr - 1 May for both schools and general public!



Ellesmere Port STEAM Festival

Lucinda and Shanna loved being part of the Ellesmere Port STEAM Festival in October. During the week long event, hosted by the National Waterways Museum, they taught 19 sessions and inspired almost 300 school pupils about science with our Fantastic Plastic workshops!

Bug hunting!

We've been out and about into the community again this year. In August our education team took the biodiversity mat to Halton Lea Library for a bug hunt with families as part of their 'Let's Go Green' celebrations!

Radio stars

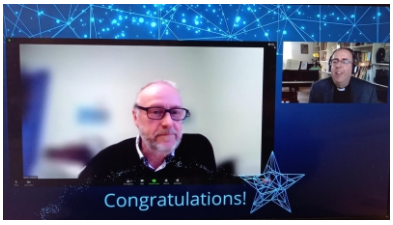
We were very excited to be asked back to Kids Live at 5 on Lymm Radio in October. Shanna our Education Assistant did her first radio interview, highlighting our October half term family activities.

Community Engagement

MindLab Project wins two awards!

We are delighted to announce that our unique MindLab programme that links mental health and wellbeing with science, won two major awards during 2021.

In March, at a virtual ceremony, we were awarded the Chemicals Northwest Charity of the Year Award 2021 by Rev Richard Coles who said the judges agreed that the award would be recognition for the local community, for Catalyst's own ground-breaking vision, the staff, volunteers and trustees that never gave up!



Catalyst secured the second prestigious award in June at a glittering virtual CIA Awards ceremony hosted by BBC personality Chris Hollins. On winning the CIA Reputation Award, Martin Pearson CEO of Catalyst said "We are absolutely delighted. This project has sought to play a meaningful, civic role providing mental health support to the most vulnerable during the pandemic and we are incredibly proud that is has been recognised in this way."

Two Centuries of Stink Exhibition

Intriguing aromas have long been a feature of life in Widnes. With the arrival of the chemical industry in the 19th century, the town changed beyond all recognition, gaining a reputation as having the deeply unpleasant 'Widnes Odour'. With funding from Arts Council England, Catalyst commissioned world renowned olfactory artist and designer Kate McLean, who spearheaded the practices of 'smell-walking' and 'smell-scaping', to work with our collection and local community to explore the smells, scents and stinks of Widnes from the 19th century up to the present day, turning two centuries of stink into visual and sensory form for the first time. The smell-walks took place when we re-opened, over May bank holiday and the exhibition, opened in July, runs until 9th January.

Borough of Culture 2021

In September Catalyst was invited to host a fabulous art installation as part of Halton Borough Council's Borough of Culture Celebrations. Visitors to Catalyst explored what it meant to find light in their lives, in themselves, in others and in the world around them. The immersive sound and light installation, funded by Arts Council England was hosted by Catalyst for 10 days before continuing its journey across the country.

Continuing the Borough of Culture celebrations, Catalyst also hosted some brilliant street theatre. Funded by the European Regional Development Fund, the street theatre toured the borough, appearing at Catalyst, Runcorn Station, Halton Libraries and Runcorn Shopping City.

Disability Awareness Day

We were thrilled to be invited back to exhibit at the 30th Anniversary of Disability Awareness Day at Walton Gardens in September. It was a great day for support groups and services, equipment suppliers, holiday and transport information to come together with a sports zone, arts marquee, live bands, dance and drama. We are grateful to our valuable volunteers Peter and Mary going out and about again, spreading the word about Catalyst!

General Catalyst news

Heritage News

As you will have read earlier in the newsletter, we received a generous donation from the Gossage Family earlier in the year which enabled us to completely refurbish the Gossage Room. Firstly, a new ceiling was installed with a new lighting system, the carpet was replaced, cupboards were removed, walls were knocked down and repositioned, an accessible toilet was installed and a huge, wall filling bookcase was installed which has enabled us to share some of our archive library with the public for the first time! The finished room was officially opened at an event in early October.

Also in October we held an event to officially rename the archive room as the Henry and John Brunner Room and we renamed the link corridor on the ground floor as the Brunner Gallery. The event was attended by members of the Brunner family, friends and colleagues, many of whom had never visited the area where their ancestors began their careers.

Elsewhere in the archives, Carol and Jean are almost half way through the stock take in readiness for next year's accreditation. Tim and Peter (above) have scanned almost 1000 slides and have brought to life some rare images from glass plate negatives. The rest of the team worked hard with preparation for opening the new Gossage Room, scanning documents and sorting and filing paperwork. To date we have digitised a staggering 64,985 items from our collection including photos, reports, magazines and workers records!

Staff changes

We have had a number of staff changes this year. We were sad to say goodbye to Paul Meara who had been with Catalyst since it was an exhibition in the town hall over 30 years ago. We wish him well for the future and thank him for everything he did for Catalyst over the years. We also said goodbye to Jade French, Heather Wark and Amy Lunt and we thank them for their hard work and commitment to Catalyst. Very sadly we also said goodbye to Ann Mohamed who passed away in September. She made such a difference to the Catalyst team and she will be missed very much.

We welcomed a number of new staff this year too. Michelle Phillips is our new Finance Manager, Shanna McNamee is our Education Assistant, Nicola Daffern joined us as Bookings Assistant, Emma McNeil and Rob Moor joined the weekend science presenter team and Abbie Williams joined the team in the café.

Also this year we were really pleased to welcome three young people on the Government Kickstart Scheme, Louise Nevitt, Katherine Nulty and Emma Jones each joined us for a six month contract. Their help and assistance was invaluable over an extremely busy reopening period.

Catalyst installs Gossage Plaque

In June, Catalyst was delighted to install a blue plaque to recognise the support that Gossages Soap Works gave to the local community of Widnes. The building where Catalyst is based, used to house Gossages Soap Works and in 1925, Gossages demonstrated their commitment to the local community by funding a new wing at Highfield Maternity Hospital. The first male and female babies born in the new wing took the name Gossage with Ethel Gossage Dennet being born on 8th January and Alexander Gossage Rowse on 11th January 1925.

The blue plaque was funded by Mrs Mary Rowse, widow of Alexander Rowse to commemorate the support of Gossages for the local community and to act as a lasting reminder for her family.

Volunteer thanks

As we re-opened in May, we were really pleased to welcome back our team of valuable volunteers after such a long break and we'd like to thank them all for the help and support they have given us this year. Colin and Chris, our 'mend it, fix it' team have done an amazing job, Peter, Tim, Carol, Jean, Pat, Sandra and Jonathan have been an enormous help to Judith in the archives, Stuart, Jonathan, Catherine, Jane, Harry and Rosemary have all helped out in Education this year, Evelyn was a great help to Lynn in the café at really busy times and last but not least, Peter and Mary have been invaluable, taking the Catalyst stand to events, running guided tours for adult groups and helping out on busy days such as the Heritage Open Days. We really do appreciate each and every one of them and we thank them for the time they donate to Catalyst - they make such a huge difference!

And finally . . . As always, we'd like to say a HUGE THANK YOU to all of our supporters, volunteers, trustees, patrons, sponsors and friends. We could not continue to provide such an outstanding experience for our visitors without your help and support, it is greatly appreciated!