catalyst
SCIENCE DISCOVERY CENTRE AND MUSEUM

Annual Newsletter reflecting on 2022

Happy New Year everyone!

I joined the team in August 2022 and at the time of writing I have been in post for just over five months. In those few months I have learnt and experienced so much at Catalyst, it seems like I have been here for much longer.

Soon after joining I found myself recruiting to replace several team members. For a moment I wondered what I had done wrong! Chris on the front desk was retiring after 25-years dedicated service. She will not be forgotten as her photograph is captured on the courtyard gates. Oliver was leaving to undertake teacher training. Becci was leaving due to increased demands of her other job. Thankfully all have returned, Chris as a volunteer, Oliver and Becci as casual staff. Once the Catalyst bug has bitten there is no escape. We soon welcomed new team members, Emma, Helen, Sarah, Pauline and Olivia have joined the team and are looking forward to helping make your visit exciting and memorable.

In November we had a celebration event recognising the achievements made during the pandemic refurbishing our complete ground floor. Work was funded by a grant from the Welcome Trust along with generous support from several local businesses. We were joined by the Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire Lady Redmond, The Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham, The Local Mayor Mark Dennett and many other supporters of Catalyst. We gave thanks to the Catalyst team, past and present, for all their hard work. If you have not been recently then please do call in, I am sure you will be delighted with the transformation.

At the November event we launched the next phase of development. We have been lucky to receive a National Lottery Heritage Fund Grant for what we are calling Project Synergy. The project aims to enhance Catalyst in two distinct ways. Firstly to refurbish our first floor gallery. The Birth of an Industry gallery is now 25 years old and tells the story of the chemical industry up to the 1940's. We aim to rejuvenate this gallery, focusing on the local heritage of the North West, bringing the story up to date and casting an eye to the challenges of the future. Secondly the grant will also help us to engage with many different stakeholders. The aim to make our heritage offer accessible to new and under-represented audiences in an exciting and meaningful way. This is a multi-year project which the team and I are looking forward to getting stuck into.

In my short time at Catalyst we have also faced some challenges. Just ahead of the heating season I received notification that the annual heating bill was increasing by over 500% to £54,000pa! With help from industry friends we have managed to reduce this bill to £44,000pa but still a significant proportion of our operating budget. With the cost-of-living crisis we are mindful to not raise entry prices if possible. Our solution needs to be to drive visitor numbers so please tell your friends and family about the Catalyst experience! We are also very grateful for the ongoing support from corporate sponsors.

Our visitor numbers over this last year have been record breaking. In the past twelve months we have welcomed over 35,000 visitors, 216 school groups and 45 sleep over groups. We have undertaken corporate and community events and continued to develop our outreach offer. The team are looking forward to continuing this growth in 2023.

I wish you, your family and friends a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year and hope to see you all this year. Best Wishes and Thank You for your support of Catalyst.

Lee

Dr Lee Juby, CEO Catalyst Science Discovery Centre & Museum Trust Ltd

Changes at Catalyst

Staff Changes

Sadly this year we said goodbye to former CEO Martin Pearson who led Catalyst through the recent £1m refurbishment programme and re-opening after Covid. We thank him for all his hard work and dedication to Catalyst and wish him well for the future.

We were thrilled in August to welcome Dr Lee Juby as our new CEO. Lee has spent over 25 years in the commercial development of advanced technology with a focus on energy efficiency and carbon reduction. He has assisted a number of start-up businesses bringing new solutions to address these issues. He has welcomed the opportunity to bring his commercial and leadership skills to support the team at Catalyst.

In September we said goodbye to Christine Hutchinson, our Visitor Services Team Leader who retired after being with Catalyst for 25 years. We wish her a long and happy retirement! Also in September we said goodbye to Abbey Williams, our café assistant and Oliver Macaulay one of our weekend science presenters who began a PGCE at the University of Cambridge. We are however, pleased to say that he is remaining as a casual member of staff and will rejoin the education team in the holidays!

We welcomed a number of new members of staff to Catalyst in the last twelve months; Clare Lightfoot joined us as Community Engagement Coordinator and Lee Doring joined us as Maintenance Technician. We welcomed Emma Stokes as Visitor Services Manager. Sarah Morton, Helen Slater and Louise Nevitt joined her team at reception and Ann Smith joined the cleaning team.

In the café we welcomed Olivia Bailote and in our education team we welcomed Pauline Hall as one of our weekend science presenters.

The ceremonial handing over of the keys from Chris to Emma as Chris retired!

Catalyst celebration

Thanks to funding from The Wellcome Trust and UKRI Inspiring Science Fund, Catalyst has been able to undertake a comprehensive programme of change and refurbishment. On 8th November this was formally opened by Lady Redmond, Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire at a celebratory event which marked the successful completion of the project. Invited guests included Lady Redmond Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, Sir Phil Redmond, Metro Mayor of the Liverpool City Region Steve Rotheram, Mayor of Halton Councillor Mark Dennett, representatives of funding bodies, industry partners, supporters and education providers.

Dr Diana Leitch Chair of Trustees, Leader of HBC Cllr Mike Wharton, Sir Phil Redmond, Lady Redmond Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, CEO of Catalyst Dr Lee Juby and Mayor of Halton Cllr Mark Dennett

New staff member

We're excited to say that the newest member of the Catalyst team, Paige Halliday, joined us on Monday 9th January. History graduate with an MA in Heritage Management, Paige will head up the National Lottery Heritage Fund project as Heritage Project Manager.

Trustee news

This year we've had a number of changes to the board of Trustees. Dr Diana Leitch stepped down as Chair (to Deputy Chair) and has been succeeded by Dr Jenny Clucas as Interim Chair. We thank Diana for her tremendous work over the last few years, and for guiding Catalyst through the pandemic.

Also this year we saw the retirement of Bob Roach, Andrew Ritchie and Cllr Sandra Baker. We thank them all for their commitment throughout their involvement with Catalyst and we wish them well for the future.

New trustees that joined Catalyst this year included Cllr Noel Hutchinson, Jennifer Hart and Julian Hought. We look forward to working with them as we move Catalyst forward.

New Patrons

In November we were thrilled to welcome two new patrons. Royal Patron George Windsor, Earl of St Andrews is a direct descendent (through his mother the Duchess of Kent) of Sir John Tomlinson Brunner who worked in the Catalyst building in the 1860s and went on to found the great firm of Brunner Mond at Northwich. Dr Helen Czerski is a British physicist, oceanographer, writer and broadcaster. Both have said they are honored to become Patrons and are delighted to help Catalyst in whatever ways they can.

Credit Alex Brenner

Grants and Sponsorship

National Lottery Heritage Fund

The great news this year is that we have received initial support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to implement the Synergy Project. We thank our Trustees and the funding team at Halton Borough Council for their help and advice with the bid. This project aims to make our heritage offer accessible to new and under-represented audiences in an exciting and meaningful way. Development funding of £99,500 has been awarded to help us progress plans to apply for a full National Lottery grant at a later date. The building that houses Catalyst was once home to the offices of Gossages Soap Factory and members of the Gossage family and the Friends of Catalyst have kindly donated match funding towards this project.

The heritage of Widnes and the surrounding area is important for people to understand, not just the genesis but its relevance to the modern world and how it has shaped the area. Through co-creation, we plan to engage the community with the local heritage and use our vast archive to design and develop heritage programmes and exciting new, interactive exhibitions.

The Co-creation consulting team of Ruth Darling, Claire Pitt, Rachael Prime and Dave Bixter has been appointed and will shortly be organising engagement activities with various groups in the local community.

Paige Halliday has been appointed as Heritage Project Manager and will work closely with the Co-Creation Consultants. Paige joined Catalyst on Monday 9th January and we look forward to working with her.

Made possible with Heritage Fund

Bitrez and CPS Ltd

This year we are excited to be working with Managing Director of three successful businesses Paul H Jones FRSC on two different projects funded by Bitrez and CPS Ltd. At a new information station exhibit, visitors to Catalyst can discover how the chemical industry has a vital role to play in delivering more sustainable solutions for society and contributing to the net-zero targets by 2050. We are also working with Paul on an interactive game to be installed later this year which will take players on a journey of discovery through careers in science based industries.

Paul Jones with the Net-Zero information station exhibit

Chemistry at Work Week

January 2023 will see the return of our ever popular Chemistry at Work Week where we work with industry partners and local schools to highlight the many and varied career paths that are available within the STEM sector. We are delighted to say that the event from 24th - 27th January is being jointly sponsored by The Royal Society of Chemistry and local company Lanxess and we thank them both for their support.

We have a very busy week planned with 375 pupils booked over the 4 days and representatives from 17 different industry partners including Lanxess, BYK, Inovyn, Croda, Astra Zeneca, CBA and Innospec to name a few. We thank all our industry partners for supporting this event and we look forward to enthusing and exciting pupils about careers in science.

ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY

LANXESS Energizing Chemistry

Sponsored school visits

Over the last twelve months we have been extremely grateful to AllPAQ Packaging Ltd, Lanxess, Livent and Seqirus who all sponsored school visits to Catalyst for pupils from their local community. Their support paid for the coach transport, admission to Catalyst, a hands-on workshop and a science show for each class. We thank them all for their incredible support.

Catalyst would like to thank the following for their support over the last 12 months;

2M Holdings
ALLpaQ Packaging Limited
Ames Goldsmith
Arts Council England
ASDC
Ashton Chemicals
BASF
Bitrez Ltd
Mr John Blewett
Brunner Family
BYK
Dr N Carey
Ceimig Limited
Chemical Industries Association
Dr Jenny Clucas
Mr Roy Coldwell
CPS Ltd
Professor Alan Dronsfield
Friends of Catalyst
Gossage Family
Halton Borough Council
Mr Richard Hunting CBE
Ingevity
Innospec
Inovyn
Koura
Lanxess
Dr Diana Leitch
Livent
Meade-King Robinson
Mersey Gateway Crossings Board
MIND Halton
National Lottery Heritage Fund
North West Hydrogen Alliance
Novelis
Royal Society of Chemistry
RS Clare
Seqirus
Stephenson Personal Care
Univar
Victrex plc
Mr Andrew Warren
Mr David & Dr Katharine Yaxley

In brief

We'd like to say a huge thank you to Mr John Blewett, the Brunner Family, Chemical Industries Association, the Gossage Family, Halton Borough Council, Mersey Gateway Crossings Board, NW Hydrogen Alliance, Novelis Recycling and Victrex for their continued sponsorship over 2022. Their support is very much appreciated.

Education

Biodiversity boxes

Thanks to funding from NERC and the Association of Science and Discovery Centres, Shanna, our Education Assistant designed and delivered a whole set of biodiversity boxes to St Edwards RC Primary School in Runcorn as part of the Operation Earth Project. The boxes contained instructions and equipment for loads of fun activities for families to complete at home.

Awards

In March we were absolutely delighted to win the Chemicals North West Charity of the Year Award for the second year running! The science capital boxes, designed and developed by Lucinda were delivered to local families during the pandemic so it was fitting that Lucinda was there to accept the award!

Toddler sessions

In 2022 we trialled something completely different in our Toddler Sessions. These hour long drop-in workshops were specially designed for children aged 2+ allowing young scientists to investigate and explore at their own pace.

Over the year we investigated topics such as Bubbles, Hot and Cold, Our Bodies, Exploring the Sea, Space Rocks, Colours and Sound.

The Seeds that went to Space

Many of you will remember that in 2020 Catalyst was awarded a Space Sapling from astronaut Tim Peake, who took pips from Sir Isaac Newton's apple tree into space when he visited the ISS. On their return to Earth, these pips were grown into saplings and Catalyst was chosen to give one of only 8 saplings a permanent home.

Early last year we were approached by world leading cultural consultancy Barker Langham who were inspired and excited by the Space Sapling and were keen to develop a temporary exhibition for Catalyst to tell the story. We were thrilled! Members of their team Heather Wark (former Catalyst Education Assistant) and Eleanor Suggett worked with pupils from Widnes Academy West Bank to think about the design of the exhibition and to write space inspired stories to be included in form of apples in the final design. The exhibition ran from April to November and now has a permanent home in the education lunchroom at Catalyst!

Outreach events

As well as delivering a staggering number of workshops and activities to over 200 schools last year, Lucinda and Shanna also found time to deliver 30 workshops or shows in schools on outreach sessions! Workshops and shows delivered in schools included Tasty Toothpaste, Glorious Gases, Fantastic Plastic, the Light Show, Destination Space and they even took the Planetarium out a few times too!

Home Educators

We are really pleased to say that workshop sessions for home educating groups have been a great success over the last 12 months. Our education team put tailored programmes together and a number of groups have made multiple bookings, some visiting once a month, some twice a month. A great way for home educated pupils to access hands-on science.

Planting the sapling

Halton Borough Council, Environment Services Department cared for our sapling until we were able to plant it in a specialy designed space garden funded by Halton Borough Council.

Mayor of Halton, Councillor Mark Dennett opened the garden along with pupils from Widnes Academy, and Astronaut Tim Peake sent a special mesage too. Listen here https://youtube.com/shorts/6vknSh0-fkU

Industry Support

Throughout the year we have been supported by some brilliant industry partners. We are grateful to Ingevity, Innospec, Stephensons Personal Care and Univar for donating resources that we use in our hands-on workshops.

Heritage News

Portraits of an Industry

In October we were delighted to announce the acquisition of a portrait of Dr Neil George Marr, Chief Medical Officer of the Metals Division of ICI, painted in 1945.

Between 1944 and 1946, ICI had a collection of 56 portraits, painted by prominent British artists, of workers in 26 different ICI factories across the UK. Copies of each portrait and a biography of each sitter were made into a commemorative book entitled Portraits of an Industry. We are delighted to add this important painting by Bernard Fleetwood-Walker to our collection. Discovering the whereabouts of the 56 portraits in this ICI industry set has long been a quest! This particular painting now joins two other portraits in our collection, of Winifred Burgess and William Tyler. Out of the 56 portraits, the whereabouts of only 11 are known so the search continues! All three portraits will soon be on display in our Birth of an Industry gallery.

Digital archives

We now have 72,000 items in our digital collection thanks to the efforts of Catalyst Collections Officer Judith Wilde and her team of archive volunteers, Carol, Jean, Pat, Pete, Sandra and Tim. Great work!

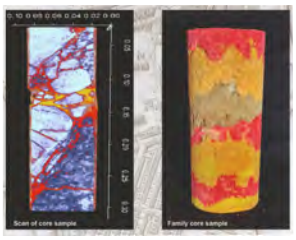
Sad news

This year we were saddened to hear of the sudden death of Jonathan Davies one of our archive volunteers. He had been a valued member of the team and he will be missed.

The World Reimagined

The World Reimagined was a fantastic national exhibition of 103 unique globes across the UK exploring the history , legacy and future of the Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans through the work of incredible artists. We were thrilled to host one of the globes outside Catalyst from August to October.

Heritage HQ



In February we welcomed local artists Neil Musson and Jono Retallick who hosted a free drop in workshop to celebrate the heritage of Widnes. Visitors to Catalyst shared memories of their ancestors and created a 'core sample' to represent their family history. These core samples were then displayed at an exhibition organised by Heritage HQ at St Maries in Widnes.

Community Engagement

Out and about

Since joining Catalyst in May, Clare Lightfoot our Community Engagement Coordinator has been out and about in the local area, introducing herself and Catalyst to members of the community.

She took bubbles to the Great Get Together, a family event at the Snig in West Bank then Clare and Stuart one of our volunteers took hands-on activities to local libraries and to the World of Glass in St Helens.

MindLab

Our award-winning mental health programme, MindLab continued last year in conjunction with Mind Halton. Each week, participants took part in counselling sessions followed by a hands-on workshop led by our Education Team. Another programme is already being planned for 2023.

Heritage Open Days

In September we took part in the National Heritage Open Days events, opening for free on the 10th, 11th, 17th and 18th. On the last weekend we welcomed representatives from the Daniel Adamson Steam Ship, Widnes Historical Society and Runcorn and District Historical Society who brought displays and hands-on activities for our visitors to take part in which was a great success.

Dementia Cafe

Clare introduced a new dementia café initiative to support members of our local community living with dementia. Held on the 1st Sunday of every month our café is a great meeting place for them and members of their families to chat to people in similar situations.

General Catalyst news

Energy prices

With energy prices sky rocketing in Autumn last year, the Guardian featured Catalyst in an article with Chair of Catalyst Trustees Dr Diana Leitch and our CEO Dr Lee Juby.

We were stunned when the quote for our gas bill rose by 460% from £9,700 to £48,582. We sought the help of a broker and signed a new contract for £44,000. Lee said "Energy bills are a large proportion of our cost, and although we have enough reserves to get through this, there will undoubtedly be some organisations that sadly won't survive".

Volunteer thanks

As ever, we'd like to say a huge THANK YOU to our wonderful team of volunteers. Our 'mend it, fix it' team, Colin and Chris have continued to do an amazing job. Carol, Jean, Pat, Peter, Sandra and Tim have once again been a brilliant help to Judith in the archives. In our Education Department we've had enormous help from Jonathan, John, Stuart, Jane, Rosemary, Cai, Harry, Katie, Julie, Graeme, Pam, Catherine, Joe and Paul.

Evelyn has been a great help to Lynn in the café at really busy times and it was lovely to welcome Christine Hutchinson back from retirement but this time as volunteer in the café!

Over the last 12 months we've also been supported by many of our wonderful trustees who have helped out at various events such as Heritage Open Days, giving guided tours or talks for adult groups and even helping out at reception on particularly busy days.

We really do appreciate each and every one of them and we can't thank them enough for the time they donate to Catalyst - they make such a massive difference!

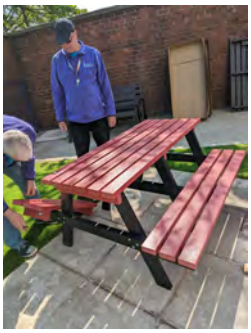
Mayoral visit

In March it was brilliant to welcome a large group of Mayors from the local region who were on a familiarisation visit around the borough. We hope they enjoyed their visit and learned a little about our local area.

We were amused to learn that according to Google, the collective noun for a group of mayors is a magnificence, how great is that?

New patio furniture

In 2021 we refurbished our outside area and created a courtyard space for visitors to use. In April 2022, Chris and Colin, our trusty volunteers assembled a range of patio furniture, including a wheelchair friendly patio table! In the warm weather, visitors were able to buy refreshments and sit outside the café or in the courtyard to enjoy the views over the estuary.

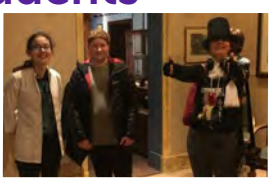


New exhibition

We are delighted to announce the installation of a temporary exhibition from the British Geological Survey. Until April 2023 visitors to Catalyst will be able to learn more about the science behind geothermal energy, the clean energy beneath our feet.

Working with local students

We're excited to be working with students from Cronton College this year. Art & design, arts and fashion students are working on a project that will culminate in an exhibition at Catalyst. Students from the science department will complete a week of work experience in January at our Chemistry at Work event, acting as guides for visiting school pupils.



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!