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Title: Something Fishy: The Leedsichthys Project
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Abstract
The Leedseichthys project was a MA Esmée Fairburn grant funded project centred around a Leedseichthys specimen in Peterborough Museum. This specimen was excavated from the local brick pits in 2002 and is the most complete specimen of this giant Jurassic fish ever found. The project used this internationally important research specimen to deliver scientific outcomes in addition to a wide programme of public activity. We brought together all teams across the heritage service to produce a website, half term events, innovative marketing strategies, and even publish a children's book!

The Project - reeling it in
In 2015 Peterborough Museum was awarded a grant of £65,300 from the MA Esmée Fairburn Collections Fund to deliver the project.
This involved working with Dr Jeff Liston to identify and document the bones, training existing staff and volunteers to prepare, conserve and pack the remaining bones, and to deliver a website designed to help interpret the specimen for the public. The website would also be a first stop for researchers, and act as a gateway to Peterborough Museum’s wider important Jurassic marine reptile and fossil fish collection. Alongside this the project wanted to deliver these public engagement events, and a resource for schools.

Taking Shape - a new way of working
This project took a fresh approach to the management and delivery by bringing together a project board at the start, which included staff from marketing, front of house, events, education, collections and senior management. By engaging across the board and having a clear shared aim of the vision for the project, the whole service was able to support and feel personally invested in the project.

The project board then worked with Dr Jeff Liston alongside a dedicated set of geology volunteers, and the Heritage Collections Manager.
A professional palaeontological conservator, Nigel Larkin, was contacted to train volunteers and existing staff to prepare from different areas in the service, to prepare the remaining fossil bones, and look at the best way to store them. This helped uplift staff and volunteers to improve sustainability in the future, as a way simply outsourcing the preparation of the bones would not have done.

bigjurassicfish.com
The vision was to interpret the Leedseichthys found through an online exhibition, to address the many difficulties of displaying the original specimen. The online exhibition shows where the bones were originally found, the story of the fish, and continues with the bones rising out from the map and into the skeleton of the Leedseichthys fish. The visitor can then find out more by selecting up to 20 individual bones to be able to see a 3D image with layers of information, before the skeleton then changes into an interpretation of what Leedseichthys might have looked like, as it swims away.

New Ways of Public Engagement
To achieve this vision, the project used 3D photo telemetry for the first time, and had to produce the first ever full skeleton drawing of a Leedseichthys, as none existed.

The Big Jurassic Fish Hunt
Leedseichthys was used as the focal point for the delivery of Peterborough Museum’s February half term activities, targeted at a family audience. To introduce and engage the audience with the subject ‘Dr. Jurassic Jeff’ became the face of the marketing for the event, challenging visitors to come and help him ‘research’ the Leedseichthys fish.
Visitors were encouraged to be a palaeoantologist for a day, undertaking different science based tasks including Palaeoart, studying microfossils, stratigraphic dating by identifying zone fossils, and estimating size through comparative anatomy. In addition, visitors got to talk to the team of volunteers and experts preparing the Leedseichthys skull bones.
Over 2,600 visitors were reached over the week, with over 88% of those surveyed saying they learnt something new. This event demonstrated that collections at the core of an event can attract as great an audience as more popular subjects!

Summary
The project was unique for Peterborough Museum in the way that it was delivered bringing in an expert to work with staff pulled from across all sectors of the service to engage and enthuse about this uniquely important specimen. The project successfully entwined scientific research and public engagement, demonstrating that putting the collection and research at the core of the offer can still deliver an exciting and successful public engagement offer, smashing visitor targets.