

Conducting Audience Research at the Charles Dickens Museum in 2024

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This report represents the work of WPI undergraduate students submitted to the faculty as evidence of completion of a degree requirement. WPI routinely publishes these reports on its website without editorial or peer review. For more information about the projects program at WPI, please see <https://www.wpi.edu/project-based-learning/project-based-education>.

Abstract

Like other museums in London and elsewhere, the Charles Dickens Museum suffered a dramatic decline in attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic, but museum attendance has almost returned to pre-pandemic levels. Building on prior research, our study aimed to understand how visitor demographics, interests, and expectations and community engagement have evolved since the pandemic. Through interviews and observations, we identified visitor characteristics, local perceptions, and barriers to attendance. The vast majority of visitors to the Dickens Museum are immensely satisfied, but there are still opportunities to improve the visitor experience. We recommend enhancing accessibility, targeted marketing, and improving the labels to increase legibility.

Acknowledgements

The team would like to thank the many individuals who aided us over the course of this project. Without their continued help and support, this project would not have been possible.

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Executive Summary

Background and Methods

Museums are a staple of education and entertainment across a wide range of visitor demographics, and they can be driving forces for tourism and economic growth for their local community. The Charles Dickens Museum, a heritage house in London, has commissioned a team of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) to follow up on a previous visitor study, completed by another WPI team in 2022, as part of their efforts to remain aware of their audience's experience and expectations.

The main goal of the project was to determine the demographic characteristics, interests, and expectations of visitors to the Charles Dickens Museum, and how those characteristics have evolved since the COVID-19 pandemic. The team identified three main objectives: interview and observe current visitors to see how they interact with the museum; determine levels of awareness and engagement of the local community; and complete comparative analysis with the 2022 study.

Results

Visitor Demographics

The team collected demographic information from exit interviews. Based on our findings, about 88% of participants identified as White or White British, and about 70% of participants stated they were from the UK. Furthermore, approximately 78% of participants were aged 45 or older, while the gender distribution among participants was relatively even, with about 54% identifying as female.

Visitor Experience

Visitors overwhelmingly had a positive experience at the museum, with 98% of visitors reporting that they had a "good" or "excellent" experience, and more than 95% of visitors also remarking that they would recommend the museum as a place to visit. Dickens's study was a standout space, with 23% of visitor responses mentioning the room or the writing desk inside as one of the highlights of their visit. Other favorite rooms included the Kitchen, the Dining Room,

and the Bedrooms. Visitors also enjoyed getting a sense of Dickens's life and their conversations with room stewards.

Observations and exit interviews also collected visitor feedback about how the museum could potentially improve. About a quarter of visitors had no suggestions for improvement. Some of the feedback we received included: requests for an increased focus on Dickens's books; issues with the audio guide; difficulties reading certain labels or written artifacts; and requests for the museum to include more biographical information on Dickens. The team also received feedback suited to potential future exhibitions, such as an exhibit on modern adaptations of Dickens's work, or on the women in Dickens's life, especially his wife.

Community Involvement

Out of the 24 people surveyed, 70% were interested in visiting the Charles Dickens Museum, with more than 50% stating that a local discount or a special event and/or exhibition would motivate them to visit. 56% of the interviewees held a positive view of Charles Dickens, with no negative opinions being reported. Lastly, the average age of the interviewees was seen to be younger than that of the exit interviewees, and more than 40% expressed that they rely on the Internet as a source for local activities, while 25% rely on word of mouth, indicating possible avenues that the museum can explore to expand their audience to this younger demographic.

Recommendations

Audio Tour

Many visitors were unaware of the audio tour both prior to their visit and during the purchasing of their tickets. We recommend that the museum increase billing of the audio tour on their website and during ticket purchases, including a notice to bring headphones or earbuds if visitors plan on using the guide. We also recommend including more technological support for the audio guide, such as on the audio guide platform or in the museum map.

There were also some issues with connectivity to the audio tour, especially in the basement. The team recommends ensuring that the Wi-Fi signal is strong enough to support the audio guide in all rooms, and that visitors be advised to connect to Wi-Fi when they begin using the audio guide.

Labels and Transcription

Many visitors expressed their difficulty reading and understanding handwritten letters and documents displayed due to unclear handwriting and low lighting. We recommend providing complete transcriptions of these written artifacts and increasing the brightness or contrast of each label in order to enhance readability.

Several visitors were confused with the origin of certain artifacts, and some expressed their desire for more historical and biographical context. To distinguish which items were owned by Dickens and which are more representative of a Victorian atmosphere, we recommend increased labeling, clearly indicating artifact origins. In addition, we recommend the promotion and wider distribution of the handout that includes historical information on Dickens, or its integration into the audio guide QR code system.

Lastly, we recommend increasing signposting of the desired path through the museum, as well as adding labels to rooms, as a means of aiding visitors in navigation.

Awareness of Museum and Programs

Many visitors discovered the museum through third party platforms rather than its own social media or website. To enhance outreach efforts, the team recommends the museum establish a dynamic social media presence, including content such as exhibits or interactive features, targeting a younger demographic.

Moreover, there appeared to be a lack of awareness among visitors regarding certain museum events and programs, which are not prominently advertised within the museum or on their website. The museum provides guided tours and offers its venue for private parties, providing a unique opportunity to engage with audiences. These promotions are not easily accessible on the museum website, so we recommend the museum improve the visibility of these promotions on their website and social media to showcase these events. Additionally, we recommend putting more flyers onsite at the museum about these events in high traffic areas such as the tearoom or gift shop. Implementing these recommendations will allow the museum to maximize its influence on the public and potentially increase visitation across new audiences.

Table of Authorship

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Acknowledgments	RD	RD
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Purposes of Museums	TM, NP	RD
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Visitor Studies and Audience Research	RD, NP, JR	All
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Introduction

Museums are a staple of education and entertainment across a wide range of visitor demographics, and they can be driving forces for tourism and economic growth for their local community. Ballatore & Candlin (2022, p.213) estimate that “[i]n England alone, before the COVID-19 pandemic, museums attracted up to 100 million annual visits, with a turnover of £2.64 billion per annum.” Now, four years after the initial lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, travel and museum visitation are beginning to recover, nearing the levels experienced before the pandemic.

The Charles Dickens Museum is a small heritage house museum in central London dedicated to preserving artifacts relating to the life and works of world-famous novelist Charles Dickens. As the world continues to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, they have sought to better understand their audience and their involvement with their local community. Yorina et al. (2022) completed a study that involved surveying visitors and residents of the nearby area to determine visitor characteristics and create recommendations for the museum on how to better serve their audience and community. The museum commissioned this study to determine how these characteristics have continued to evolve since 2022.

The overarching goal of our project was to analyze the evolving demographic profiles, interests, and expectations of visitors to the Charles Dickens Museum in the post-COVID-19 era. To accomplish this aim, the team delineated three primary objectives:

- Objective 1: Determine the demographic characteristics, interests, and expectations of current visitors.
- Objective 2: Assess the levels of awareness and engagement among members of the local community and identify barriers to their attendance.
- Objective 3: Compare the current visitor profile with previous visitor profiles, including the last in-depth research in 2022.

To achieve this goal, the team used various methods, including short and long exit interviews, visitor observations, and interviews with members of the local community. Data from these interviews and observations were then analyzed using platforms such as SmartSurvey, Microsoft Excel, and Python to see general trends and create useful recommendations for the

museum staff. The data were also compared to other available data, including those from the previous Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP) completed in 2022. Our team ended up creating three primary categories of recommendation for the museum team: improvements to the audio guide; increased information on artifacts and navigation; and wider awareness of the museum and its programs.

Background

Chapter Introduction

This chapter serves as a review of the literature relevant to several topics at the core of our project. First, we will explore the purposes, impacts, and goals of museums around the world and in the UK. We will then discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the museum sector, and how it has been able to recover following major lockdowns. Then, we outline the motivations and methods behind audience research in museums before concluding with background on the Dickens Museum and its specific motivations for this project.

Purposes of Museums

The UK is home to a variety of kinds of museums, from large-scale science and natural history museums and art galleries to smaller, more focused historic houses like the Charles Dickens Museum. All of these museums, however, are united by three common purposes: to maintain their collection; to conduct research; and to educate their visitors on the items in their care. As defined by ICOM, the International Council of Museums (2022):

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.

The ICOM definitions have changed over time, and this most recent definition reflects a prominent shift in the museum community from an authoritative, didactic perspective on curation to one that centers the visitor experience and entertainment (Falk, 2016) and that endeavors to engage local communities (Golding & Modest, 2013).

Economic Impacts of Museums

In addition to their educational and preservation-focused roles, museums also have an immense impact on the economy of the areas around them. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 257.5 million museum visits in the UK (Visit Britain, 2023, p. 19). More specifically, in 2019, independent British museums like the Dickens Museum received 24 million visitors per year, with 10 million of those visitors being from areas outside the local community; they are also estimated to have directly contributed almost £500 million to the British economy (Association of Independent Museums (AIM), 2019). Using different metrics, Ballatore & Candlin (2022, p. 213) estimate even larger economic impacts. They assert that “[m]useums are a vital part of the British cultural and economic landscape, and have a crucial role in heritage, tourism, and education. In England alone, before the COVID-19 pandemic, museums attracted up to 100 million annual visits, with a turnover of £2.64 billion per annum.”

Museums are key tourist destinations, drawing people from around the world to see their exhibitions and learn about their collections and research. Figure 1 shows the percentage of visitors to museums in different regions of the UK that came from overseas in 2022. As can be seen, 9% of visitors to UK museums (“ALL”) came from other countries, while 22% of visitors to London museums came from abroad.

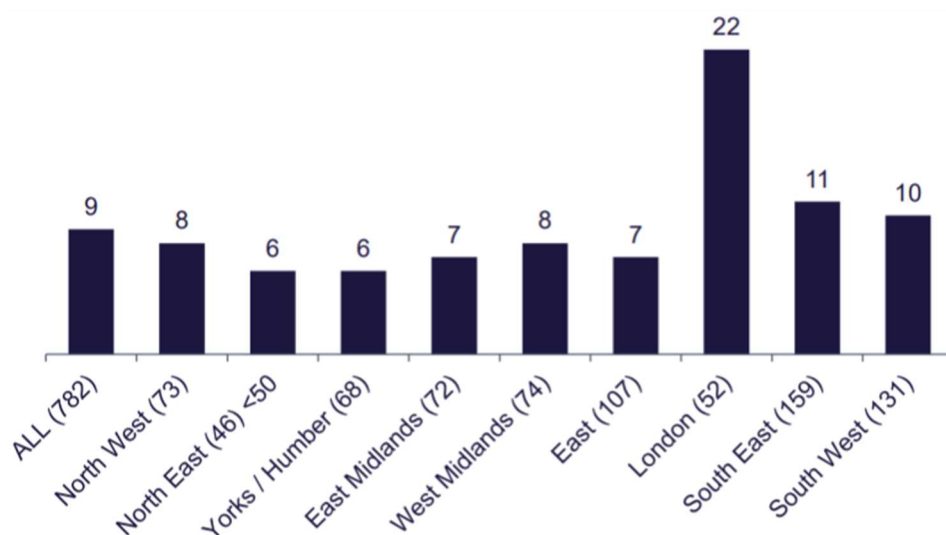


Figure 1: Percent of UK museum visitors from overseas in 2022 (Visit Britain 2023, p.30)

As discussed in Zhang et al. (2016), museums can indeed be proven to be driving forces behind tourism. Certain large museums have increased tourism in their area by upwards of 20%, and tourists around the world tend to visit at least one or two museums during their time travelling. This indicates that museums play a significant role in generating income for their local area beyond just employment and price of admission. Hotel stays, increased restaurant diners, and transportation fares all factor into the economic impact of museums. Further, since the ICOM definition dictates that museums operate as nonprofit organizations, the money directly generated by independently funded museums is fed back into the local community instead of returning to distant shareholders, further boosting the economy of their nearby area.

Social Impacts of Museums

Museums have also become aware of their social responsibilities to an increasing extent in recent years. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021) found that museums have become particularly “concerned about their role in society, as they are aware of changes, particularly in the context of equal rights, social justice and climate change” (p.6). Many larger museums have also come under fire in recent years for artifacts in their collection that reflect the legacies of colonialism and imperialism, with cultures demanding the return of stolen artifacts, while the museums holding them claim that they serve as better caretakers and are able to display these artifacts to a wider audience.

As a small cultural museum with few, if any, artifacts, that originated from outside of Britain, the Dickens Museum does not feel the same social pressure as, say, the British Museum. However, it is still important to recognize that museums do play a role in educating societies about their culture and history, and their responsibility to do so ethically.

Further, museum involvement and engagement with their local community can have a significantly positive outcome on their operations, such as by raising money or addressing social concerns. In their constant attempt to contribute to and support their communities, museums often focus on their interactions with diverse communities, or communities that have historically been excluded from mainstream society (Jones, 2015). The “Collaborative Museum,” a new definition proposed by Golding and Modest (2013), serves as an approach to museum operation

that highlights the importance of addressing power relationships with their communities, and emphasizing the need to switch from a tokenistic approach to a more genuine one.

Attracting an Audience

Museums constantly strive to attract visitors, both in-person and online. A museum that fails to attract visitors not only fails to gain money through donations, admission costs, and merchandise sales, but it also fails at its fundamental purpose of displaying its collection to the world. Museums must identify their target audiences; develop exhibits, programs, and events that are attractive to these audiences; and determine how they can improve their marketability and accountability to these audiences (Moreno-Mendoza et al., 2020).

People attend museums for a variety of reasons, and not all of them are strictly related to education. Falk (2006) categorizes the motivations behind museum visits into “social and recreational; educational and self-fulfilling; cultural in large and small ways; evocative of awe and reverence; and restorative” (p.152). Some visitors seek recreation and entertainment from museums; museums will not attract such visitors if their exhibits are considered dull or uninteresting. Other visitors may seek out education, wishing to learn more about history, culture, science, and art through the museum’s collections. Visitors may also seek a connection to the society and culture that created the artifacts on display, whether that be their own heritage or another culture of interest. Finally, museums can play a spiritual role, prompting audiences to wonder at the depth and variety of the human experience, and restoring their sense of awe or connection to the museum’s subject. Museums must balance these various expectations and kinds of visitor, keeping in mind that most visitors do not fall cleanly into one single motivation, to attract an audience.

With so many roles to uphold, museums are constantly seeking to refine and improve how they deliver their experience. This often takes the form of changes to exhibits or other displays; the programming and events offered by the museum; or other facets of the museum experience, such as the gift shop. An important part of this process is determining how effective these changes are at helping the museum balance its many roles and attracting the many kinds of visitors it seeks. Visitor studies, as discussed below, play a crucial role in this determination.

Impact of COVID-19

A major factor that has recently impacted museums is the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in 2020. During the pandemic, many countries closed their borders and discouraged domestic travel, which greatly decreased museum attendance worldwide. In 2020, 83% of museums closed for some length of time, with the average closure being 150 days. In 2021, 43% of museums were closed again. For those that were able to remain open, the drop in tourism resulted in a 70% reduction in attendance (UNESCO, 2021, p.5).

With such a significant obstacle in place, many museums were forced to implement new programs to increase attendance. Often, such measures included shifting focus from international visitors to those who live nearby, since long-distance travel was largely impossible for most of 2020. Another measure was to look for new ways to reach visitors and establish a relationship with them. There was a remarkable 380% increase in the number of online classes offered by museums during this time. However, after the pandemic, it seems that people are keen to return to in-person museum visits. For example, a survey of Polish museum visitors after the pandemic found that despite the digital experience offered, people still wanted to enjoy traditional forms of the museum experience (Gawel, 2023).

Visit Britain finds that tourism has not yet returned to its pre-pandemic levels, and that despite a 42% increase in visits to British attractions from 2021 to 2022, the total museum visitation remains below where it was in 2019 (Visit Britain, 2023, p.19), as shown in Figure 2. A spokesperson for the Department of Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) expressed more hope for the future, saying “It is encouraging to see that the numbers of visitors to our museums and galleries continue to increase following the pandemic” (Kennelly, 2023). Right now, it is incumbent on museums to determine their strategies for the future in terms of their approach to exhibits, programs, and events and the balance they are trying to achieve between in-person and online visitation. Visitor studies can play a crucial role in this regard.

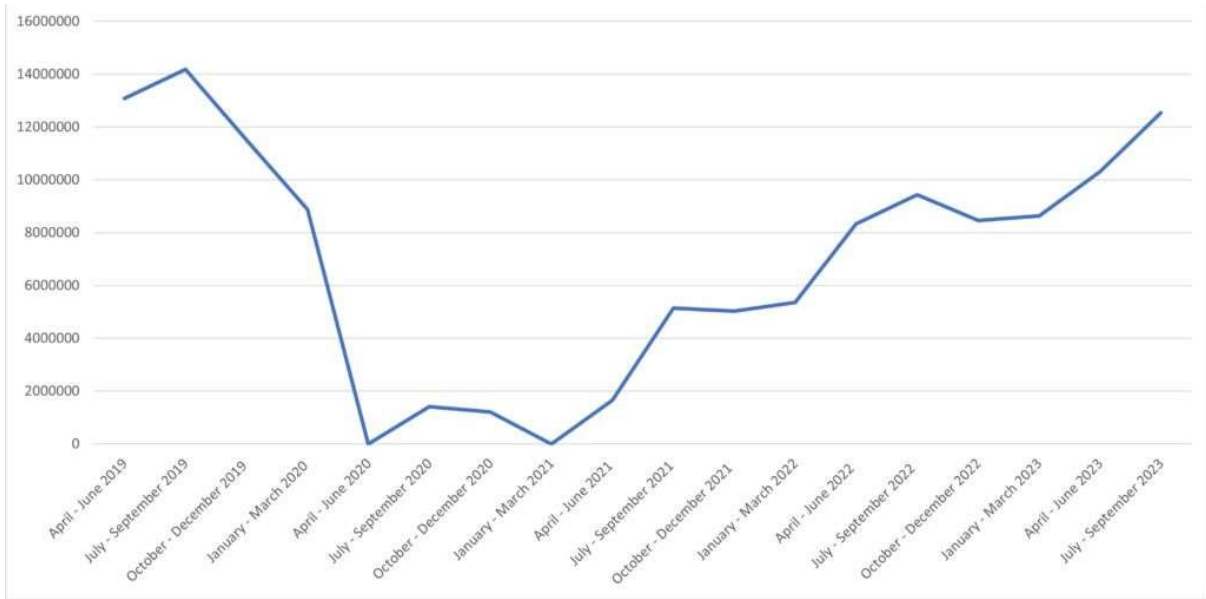


Figure 2: Visits to DCMS-sponsored museums between 2019 and 2023 (Kennelly, 2023)

Visitor Studies and Audience Research

For museums to thrive, understanding the overall visitor experience through audience research is crucial. Museum curators heavily rely on this research to shape future goals and implement changes for the institution's overall improvement. Also known as “visitor studies,” audience research can be characterized as the practice of examining visitor satisfaction, motivation, interests, prior knowledge, and takeaways. Visitor studies can be separated into two broad categories: tracking studies and studies of visitors’ motivation and interests. These methods produce both two quantitative, or number-based, data and qualitative data (Anderson, 2019).

Data on visitor behaviors, socio-demographic attributes, and correlative relationships are often collected using quantitative methods such as observations and surveys (Coffee, 2007). Data on visitor emotions, opinions, and motivations are often collected using qualitative methods such as open-ended interviews (Davis & Michelle, 2011 & Anderson, 2019). However, visitor studies typically use a mix of both quantitative and qualitative methods, including tracking and observations, surveys with a mix of open-ended and closed questions, and qualitative interviews.

History of Tracking Studies

Museum visitor studies were first introduced in the late 19th century at the Liverpool Museum. Researchers introduced the concept of categorizing visitors based on their behaviors in the museum and organized visitors into students, observers, and loungers (Jones, 2015). In the early 20th century, Melton (1935) and Robinson (1928) were the first researchers to perform systematic observations of visitor behavior in museums (Yalowitz & Bronnenkant, 2009, pp. 47-50). They focused on the right-turn bias, reporting that about 70% of museum visitors take a right when entering a gallery, an early exploration of how visitors tend to interact with museums and how museums can use this knowledge to better cultivate the audience experience (Scharine & McBeath, 2002).

Visitor tracking studies were not widely used in museums, however, until the 1980s and 1990s (Hein 1998, Hooper-Greenhill 2006, Yalowitz & Bronnenkant, 2009). Yalowitz & Bronnenkant (2009) give credit to Stephen Bitgood for conducting groundbreaking research in visitor tracking and developing many of the techniques that are still used today. Bitgood (2006) observed how visitors circulate through museums, and concluded that visitor knowledge and personal interests, as well as exhibit factors, such as architecture and organization, influence the paths visitors take. Tracking studies were used primarily to evaluate exhibits and galleries before or after installation to try to match them to visitor interests and expectations. Researchers such as Beverly Serrel (1998) developed several metrics, such as attractiveness, holding power, and dwell times to measure the impact of exhibits and different forms of interpretation on visitor engagement. Without easy ways to measure learning in museums, researchers assumed that longer dwell times signified greater engagement and hence learning (Borun et al. 1998).

Technology integration and digital tracking, introduced in the 1990s, were the next major innovation in conducting visitor studies. For example, museums have used infrared sensors to monitor crowds, helping them develop effective exhibition layouts (Jones, 2015). Today, with the advances in technology and the use of big data, audience research has moved into the digital era.

An early problem in visitor studies was the lack of a consistent approach (Jones, 2015). In his attempt to establish a common ground in visitor studies research, Bitgood proposed five areas of study in visitor research: audience research and development, exhibit design and development, program design and development, general facility design, and visitor services.

Understanding the reasons people visit or choose not to visit a museum helps identify factors that influence visitation and leads to the gathering of valuable data for strategic planning (Bitgood & Shettel, 1996). By obtaining information about visitors' interactions with artifacts, navigation inside the museum, and engagement with displays, museums can develop programs and exhibits that meet visitors' needs and optimize the museum's design.

Changing Approaches to Education in Museums

UK museums are evolving to cater to diverse visitor motivations, education, and learning styles, influenced by Howard Gardner's theory of different learning styles, which underlines that not everyone learns in the same way (Gardner, 1983). They are transitioning from traditional static exhibits to interactive experiences, informed by research on visitor expectations, to engage different types of learners and interests. This shift includes integrating technology and collaborating with schools to make learning more dynamic and accessible, emphasizing the importance of visitor feedback to stay relevant and innovative. Museums aim to offer varied content that appeals to all, underpinned by a commitment to educational value, demonstrating their role as proactive cultural and learning institutions in a changing society (Polyudova, 2022).

Visitor Motivations & Learning Styles

Audience research and visitor studies have encouraged museums to shift from didactic to visitor-centric approaches to the design of exhibits, programs, and events. This means that museums have shifted from approaches that emphasize what visitors *should* learn according to curators and other staff to what visitor *wish* to know and in what forms. Visitors are no longer viewed as empty vessels to be filled with information, but rather as active participants in their own learning (Falk 2016).

To do this, it is first necessary to understand what brings people to museums. Extensive research has been done seeking to categorize the motivations of people who go to museums and what role a museum may fulfill in their lives. These motivations can be represented as education, entertainment, social events, life cycle, place, and practical issues (Falk, 2016). The experiences of visitors can also be narrowed down into categories based on what visitors enjoyed or found satisfying during their visit. These categories include object experiences with artifacts in the museum, cognitive experiences from the intellectual and educational parts of the visit,

introspective experiences from the feelings the exhibits and interactions evoke, and social experiences with others during the visit. Falk (2016) suggests that visitors can also be classified into one of five roles depending on how they engage with the museum:

- “Explorers” are driven by their own curiosity related to the museum’s exhibits.
- “Facilitators” seek to aid the learning of other people in their group.
- “Professionals” or “Hobbyists” feel a connection between the exhibits in the museum and their professional lives (Falk, 2016).
- “Experience Seekers” visit museums because they believe it is an important destination and something to do.
- “Rechargers” search for a spiritual or restorative experience during their visit and see museums as a place where they can escape the troubles of their everyday lives.

It is also important for museums to account for people’s learning styles as people have different ways of learning new information. Visitor studies revealed that there are different learning styles, with Gardner’s notion of multiple intelligences stating seven: logico-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, intra-personal, and inter-personal (Hawkey, 2004). This framework was developed to encourage museums to evaluate what visitors were learning more systematically. The General Learning Outcomes (GLOs) shown in Figure 3 can be used to assess how well existing exhibits and exhibitions educate their visitors, and to design new exhibits and exhibitions that might better promote the desired learning outcomes.

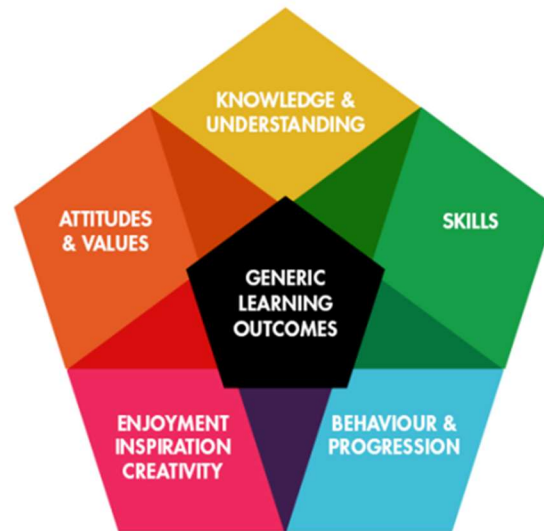


Figure 3: Hooper-Greenhill et al categories of museum general learning outcomes (Arts Council, 2023)

Although few museums now use the general learning outcomes explicitly, the notion of learning outcomes is now embedded in the museum world in the UK and US. Overall, the evolution of museums reflects an effort to enhance the visitor experience. Visitor studies have been central to this evolution as they provide insights into understanding diverse visitor interests, learning styles, and motivations for engaging with museum exhibits and programs. This ongoing shift from didactic to visitor centric approaches showcases museums' commitment to accommodating the needs of their audiences.

Like other museums the Charles Dickens Museum consistently aims to engage diverse audiences and conducts visitor research to enhance the visitor experience. Although visitation has rebounded post-pandemic, the museum is interested to know if and how the visitor profile has changed.

The Charles Dickens Museum

The Charles Dickens Museum, located in the heart of London at 48 Doughty Street, Holborn, is a small cultural museum dedicated to one of the world's most celebrated novelists. The museum is housed in Dicken's only surviving London home, where he penned some of his most famous works, including *Oliver Twist*, *The Pickwick Papers*, and *Nicholas Nickleby*—works that have made him internationally famous (Charles Dickens Museum, n.d.). The Dickens family, including his wife Catherine and their three eldest children, lived in this building from March 1837 to December 1839, coinciding with the early years of Queen Victoria's reign. The museum's origins trace back to 1925 when the house was renovated and opened to the public as the Dickens House Museum. Its rooms, including Dickens's study, the family bedrooms, and the servants' quarters, are set up as they would have been during Dickens's residence, offering visitors a unique glimpse into Victorian middle-class life in London. Popular exhibits include the study, where Dickens wrote numerous articles, essays, short stories, and novels (Irvine, 2021), as well as their annual Christmas decorations, where the entire museum is decorated for the holiday in Victorian fashion (Charles Dickens Museum, n.d.).

Today, the Charles Dickens Museum boasts a collection of around 100,000 items, encompassing manuscripts, rare editions, personal items, paintings, and more (Irvine, 2021). These artifacts provide insight into Dickens's life, his work, and the era he lived in. The museum also engages the public through special exhibitions, workshops, performances, and talks that celebrate Dickens's legacy. Moreover, the museum houses a cafe and a gift shop to enhance the visitor experience. Open Wednesday to Sunday, the museum invites exploration of Dickens's world, his creative genius, and his impact on literature and society (Charles Dickens Museum, n.d.).

The Charles Dickens Museum is a self-funded museum, meaning that their primary source of revenue comes from admission charges and charitable donations. Beyond these two primary sources of revenue, they regularly seek funding from public agencies such as the Arts Council England (Charles Dickens Museum, n.d.). These agencies require certain demographic and engagement information from the Dickens Museum, providing further motivation for them to understand their visitor's experiences and visitor profile beyond the general desire to appeal to their visitors.

The museum is embarking on a fresh round of evaluations, prompted by the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 which left its mark on cultural institutions worldwide. In 2022, a team of Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) students was enlisted to assess visitation patterns at the Charles Dickens Museum. The museum is now keen to understand how visitor demographics, behaviors, and expectations have evolved since this last evaluation and the implementation of recommended changes. This renewed evaluation effort underscores the museum's commitment to continuously improving the visitor experience, ensuring accessibility, and adapting to the changing needs and expectations of its audience.

Methods

Chapter Introduction

The goal of this project was to determine how the demographic characteristics, interests, and expectations of visitors to the Charles Dickens Museum have continued to evolve after the COVID-19 pandemic. To complete this goal, the team identified three project objectives: (1) determine the demographic characteristics, interests, and expectations of current visitors; (2) assess the levels of awareness and engagement among members of the local community and identify barriers to their attendance; and (3) compare the current visitor profile with previous visitor profiles, including the last in-depth research in 2022.

To complete these objectives, the team used a variety of methods, including surveys, interviews, and visitor observations, which are discussed in more depth below. A breakdown of the tasks associated with each objective is shown in Figure 4.

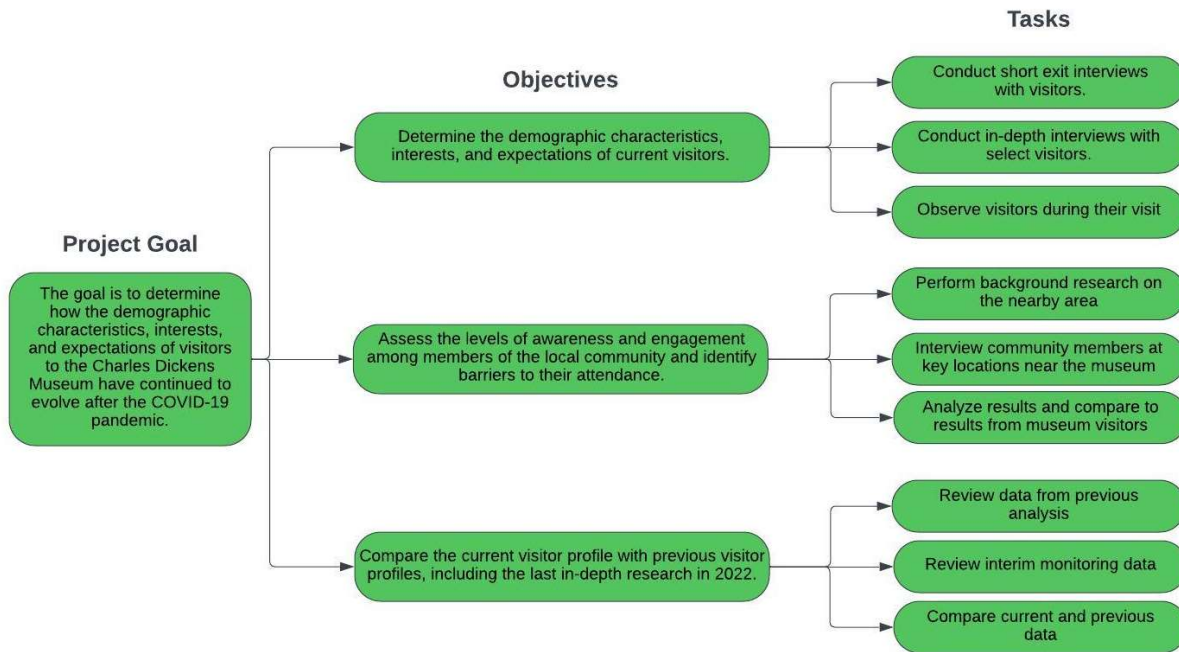


Figure 4: Task-Objective Diagram

At the request of the Dickens Museum staff, the team spent the bulk of the data collection phase conducting short- and long-form interviews with visitors and observations in selected rooms. We surveyed local community opinions in tandem with the in-house observations and

interviews, and then completed analysis of the data using tools such as Python, Microsoft Excel, and SmartSurvey, the platform in which the data was recorded.

Objective 1: Determining Visitor Characteristics, Interests, and Expectations

We determined visitor characteristics, interests, and expectations through a combination of methods, including interviews and observations. We used brief exit interviews and longer, in-depth interviews to collect visitor demographic information such as age, background, and education level and more qualitative data, such as visitors' interests, expectations, and satisfaction relating to the museum. We also observed visitors in the museum to identify how people move through the museum, which exhibits were viewed as most "attractive," and how long visitors spend at different exhibits ("dwell times"). We discuss each of these approaches in more detail below.

Exit Interviews

The Dickens Museum has used two types of survey instruments in the past: (1) a short form exit survey referred to as the "speedy survey" and (2) a longer form survey. We used both surveys to comprehensively evaluate the visitor experience while gathering data on visitor demographics. At the conclusion of our data collection process, we had completed 56 "speedy surveys" and 30 longer surveys.

Develop Protocols and Pretest Instruments

A short-form survey was used by the WPI team in 2022 and adapted in collaboration with museum staff for our project (see Appendix A). It includes basic demographic questions and brief questions about the visitors' experience at the museum. A long-form survey, also adapted from one used by the WPI team in 2022, delved more deeply into a comprehensive range of topics, including visitor demographics, their overall visit experience, specific areas for potential enhancements, and highlights of their favorite aspects within the museum (see Appendix B). These surveys were used as a basis and script for our short-form and in-depth interviews.

We consulted with Dickens Museum staff to review instruments and administration protocols to identify any necessary modifications prior to implementation. After having an open

dialogue with our project hosts, we altered the surveys to better reflect the museum's needs. This included reorganizing questions to ensure the interviews flowed smoothly. These adjustments enhanced our data collection process and allowed us to conduct informed analysis of the responses.

Implementation

As visitors approached the exit of the museum, a team member politely asked if they were willing to provide feedback on their visit. If they agreed to provide feedback, they were then offered complimentary coffee or tea and asked if they preferred a short interview lasting about 5 minutes, or a longer interview lasting 10 to 15 minutes. The team also tended to not approach visitors who were in large groups or visitors who were at the museum with children. Both surveys were programmed on the platform SmartSurvey, and each interview had two team members present, with one asking the questions and the other transcribing the interview on a laptop.

Both types of interviews took place in the boardroom of the museum to provide a quiet area where visitors felt comfortable answering questions. Two tables were set up, accommodating two interviews at once for maximum efficiency. We began by reading participants the appropriate informed consent statement (see Appendices A and B). When the interview reached the demographic questions, we informed visitors that we were collecting this at the behest of the Arts Council, and we also assured that they could choose "prefer not to say" for any of the questions. The team member recording the responses in the SmartSurvey platform would also turn their laptop to the visitor and allow them to individually answer these demographic questions rather than ask them face-to-face what might be perceived as awkward or sensitive questions.

Analysis

The team divided the survey analysis into two categories: one focused on visitor profiles and examining demographic data, while the other focused on visitor feedback, primarily museum content and motivations for visiting. After exporting the demographic data from the SmartSurvey platform to Excel, the team combined the data from both surveys. After cleaning the data in Excel, the team used Python, specifically the Pandas and NumPy libraries to get the percentages

and total counts for each category. Visualizations of this data were then generated using the Matplotlib library.

To enhance visitor feedback analysis, the team identified key questions for improving museum content and increasing visitation rates, deemed significant by museum staff. Data from both surveys was compiled in Excel, and charts were made to visually represent percentages associated with these questions.

Observations and Tracking

The team performed visitor tracking and observations of 113 total visitors to gather data on visitor interests, engagement, and experience at selected rooms in the Charles Dickens Museum. The goal was to understand visitor interactions with various exhibits and displays, and to provide insights into visitor preferences and behaviors within the museum environment. Working closely with the museum staff, we clarified what the museum was looking for and why. Consequently, the team identified areas of interest and provided the museum with valuable insights such as which exhibits are most attractive and how long visitors spend at different exhibits, overall contributing to the museum's effort to understand its audience and better design exhibits.

Develop Protocols and Pretest

The first step of the development of the observation protocols was to identify key rooms, locations, and exhibits of interest in consultation with the museum staff. The team also analyzed interview responses to determine which areas were drawing the most and least attention by visitors. From these conversations, we identified the Nursery, the Dining Room, and the Kitchen as rooms of primary focus, with secondary focus being placed on the Main Bedroom and the Drawing Room. A floor plan showing the locations of the exhibits within the museum can be found in Appendix C.

We developed a standardized observation sheet when we arrived onsite by spending several days scanning different areas of the museum and consulting with the museum staff. The team used the observation sheet to systematically track visitor movements from entry to exit

within a given room, documenting which exhibits or displays visitors engaged with and their dwell time within the room.

Brief intercept conversations were conducted with the tracked visitors at the end of their time in the room, gathering information on visitors' immediate reactions. These interviews were guided by the questions outlined in Appendix D. Depending on the volume of visitors, the visitor sample was randomized, with every third visitor crossing the threshold of the room getting selected. For group visits, one adult member of the group was tracked, and children were excluded from the tracking process. Notices were placed at the entrance of the museum to indicate that visitor observation and research was in progress, and visitors were asked for consent before beginning the intercept conversations.

The observation and intercept conversation protocols were pretested with a small visitor sample, ranging from 3-6 visitors. This step was crucial to revise and improve protocols based on findings and lessons learned. Additionally, the pretesting helped the team learn how to minimize visitor disturbance, allowing visitors to interact with the museum as authentically as possible.

Implementation

The team conducted observations of approximately 40 visitors per primary focus room at different times of day and days of the week, ensuring a broad sample. The rooms with a secondary focus only received about 5-10 observations. One team member was assigned to each room and was responsible for recording observations and visitor responses on their cell phone or tablet.

The observations focused on identifying which aspects of the museum drew visitors' attention and which did not, as well as any comments they made or questions they asked museum stewards while in the room. Visitors' emotional responses and feedback on specific sections of the museum were collected at the end of their time in the room. The implementation phase offered the team flexibility while observing, encouraging the team to not strictly follow the structured template, and come up with observations of their own.

Analysis

During the analysis phase, the team determined the dominant pathways taken by visitors and dwell time spent in each room. Visitor interests, which areas drew the most attention, and which areas attracted less attention were identified using Excel and SmartSurvey. The context behind the room observations and information gathered from the brief intercept conversations (mainly qualitative responses and feedback on specific exhibits) is integrated in the results.

Objective 2: Determining Community Awareness and Engagement

Like other small museums, the Dickens Museum has struggled to engage effectively with the local community. The team assessed the levels of awareness about and engagement with the Museum among members of the local community and identified barriers to their attendance. To achieve this objective, we conducted background research on the demographics and socioeconomics of the area around the museum, identifying areas of interest and performing street-intercept interviews.

The team consulted with the Dickens Museum staff to determine their perspectives on what constitutes the “local community”—whether it included specific wards of London, residents within a 1-mile radius, or another criterion. Following our discussion with the team, we identified and concentrated our efforts on two nearby parks: Russell Square Garden and Brunswick Square Gardens.

The surveys were conducted with a two-person approach, where members of the team recorded their answers into the SmartSurvey platform using their phone or a tablet. These quick street-intercept surveys generated a nuanced understanding of the broader public sentiment, which supplemented the findings from the interviews with community leaders. The script for these general-public interviews can be found in Appendix F.

This methodology was designed to provide a thorough understanding of the local community’s engagement with the Charles Dickens Museum. By combining background research with in-depth interviews, the project aims to uncover actionable insights that can inform strategies to enhance local participation and attendance.

Objective 3: Comparative Analysis

The team's primary comparisons were drawn between our results and those from the 2022 report by the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) team. The previous team conducted their research in a similar way to our team, so data from our short and long interviews were directly comparable to their data. The results of the 2022 survey are available in the IQP report (Yorina et al., 2022) and the raw data were available from the Dickens Museum staff to provide a more complete picture of their results.

The team used similar data analysis methods on these data as we did for our own data (see above). Quantitative data, such as ages, were graphed to gain a sense of the population both at the museum and in the wider British community during the interim period. Qualitative data, such as visitor satisfaction, were “coded” to gain a general sense of how the museum is doing. In this step, the team was aided by the fact that the surveys and interviews we used are nearly identical to those utilized by the 2022 team and the museum-collected data.

Once the results were available for comparison, the team compared the 2022 and 2024 visitor profiles alongside the interim data. This allowed us to discover how visitor demographics, experiences, and interests, and expectations have changed as the world continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. This comparison also showed which potential audiences are available to the museum, and where they are succeeding or perhaps struggling in attracting these potential audiences. We used visitor feedback and the other data we collected to inform our recommendations to the museum.

Finally, the data gathered from the local community were similarly analyzed and compared to results from the museum visitors to determine what local demographics may be under- or over-represented in the museum’s visitorship and what the museum might be able to do to better understand and reach their local community.

Results and Analysis

Chapter Introduction

This chapter explores the data we collected, presents visitor profile statistics, discusses prevalent trends in reported visitor experiences, and compares our data and the data collected in previous studies.

Exit Interviews

During our periods of interaction with museum patrons, almost all visitors were invited to participate in the exit interviews. The team conducted a total of 30 long-form interviews and 56 short-form, or “speedy,” interviews. These were conducted in two rounds in 2024: first from March 13–March 24, and then from April 10–April 12. Having two distinct time periods allowed us to account for variations in the visitor profile throughout our time at the museum (such as due to the Easter holidays).

Note that since every question in the short-form interview script corresponds to a nearly identical question in the long-form script, the data has been analyzed as a single data set, without regard for short vs. long responses. However, because many questions in the long-form interview do not appear in the short-form one, and since some visitors chose not to answer certain questions, the sample size has been noted in this analysis wherever applicable.

Visitor Profile

We collected demographic information from participants in the exit surveys using the methodology described earlier. The results of this analysis are shown below in Figures 5 through 7. These figures show the museum attracts a wide range of ages, though they tend to skew toward older demographics; the survey sample represented a roughly even mix of genders, and the visitors surveyed were overwhelmingly white and from the UK.

Note that some potential sources of bias may exist in our study. The team did not approach groups with families or young children, potentially leading to a skew in the age demographic toward an older population. Additionally, since the survey was offered on a

voluntary basis and only available in English, several museum visitors who did not speak English well or who did not have the time or desire to participate were excluded from the study.

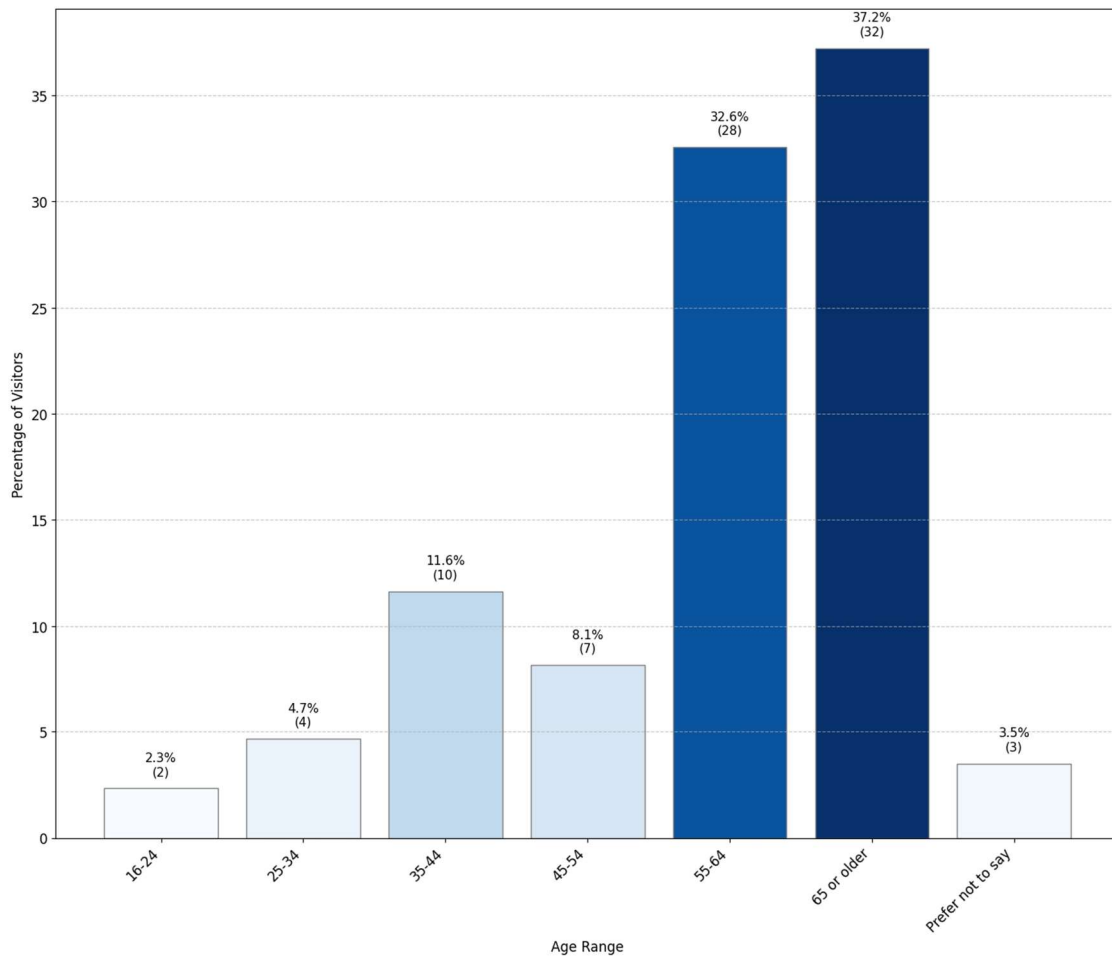


Figure 5: Percentage of visitors by age group (n=86)

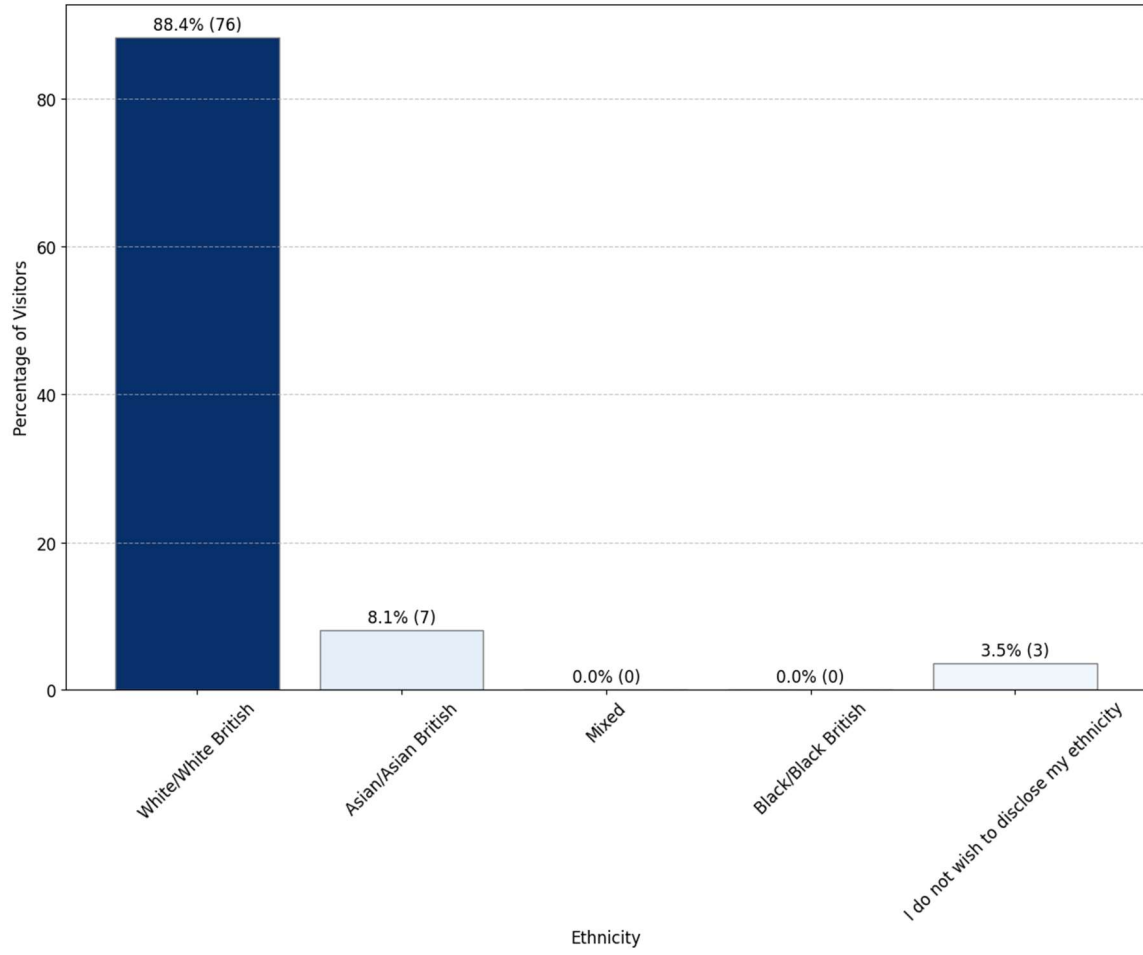


Figure 6: Percentage of visitors by ethnicity (n=86)

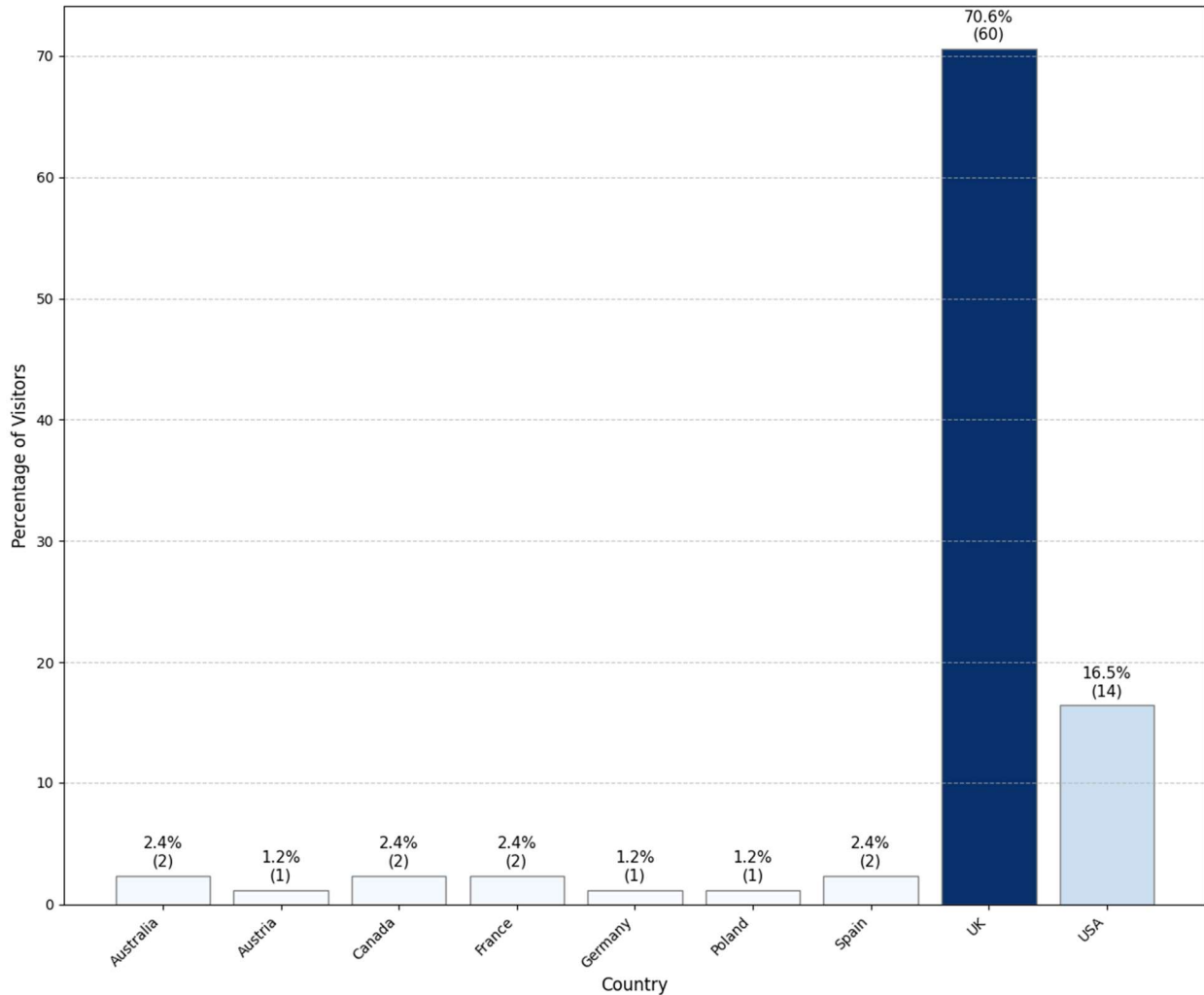


Figure 7: Percentage of visitors by home country (n = 85)

Among the 86 visitors that were willing to participate in an interview, 47 (54.7%) identified as female, 38 (44.2%) identified as male and 1 participant preferred not to disclose their gender.

Table 1 compares the demographic results from the 2022 Dickens IQP team to the results found by the 2024 team. The samples are modestly different, however since these are not representative samples of the entire population of visitors, we cannot say these differences represent a change in visitor demographics following the pandemic.

Table 1: Comparison of demographic results to 2022 IQP team

Demographic	2022 Results	2024 Results
<i>Age (45 or older)</i>	<i>67.9%</i>	<i>77.9%</i>
<i>Gender (Female)</i>	<i>66.1%</i>	<i>54.7%</i>
<i>Ethnicity (White)</i>	<i>85.2%</i>	<i>88.4%</i>

Visitor Feedback

The exit surveys conducted mainly focused on qualitative feedback about the museum experience and exhibits. For ease of analysis, the qualitative questions have been broadly categorized into four categories: visitor motivations, museum content, presentation of information, and visitor experience.

Visitor Motivations

This category of questions concerns how and why visitors decided to visit the museum. These included questions about how visitors discovered the museum, and why they decided to visit. Note that some answers in this category accepted multiple selections from a single participant so the number of responses may be larger than the total number of respondents. For such questions, each individual selection is counted as a separate “answer.” Results from questions in this category are shown in Figures 8 and 9.

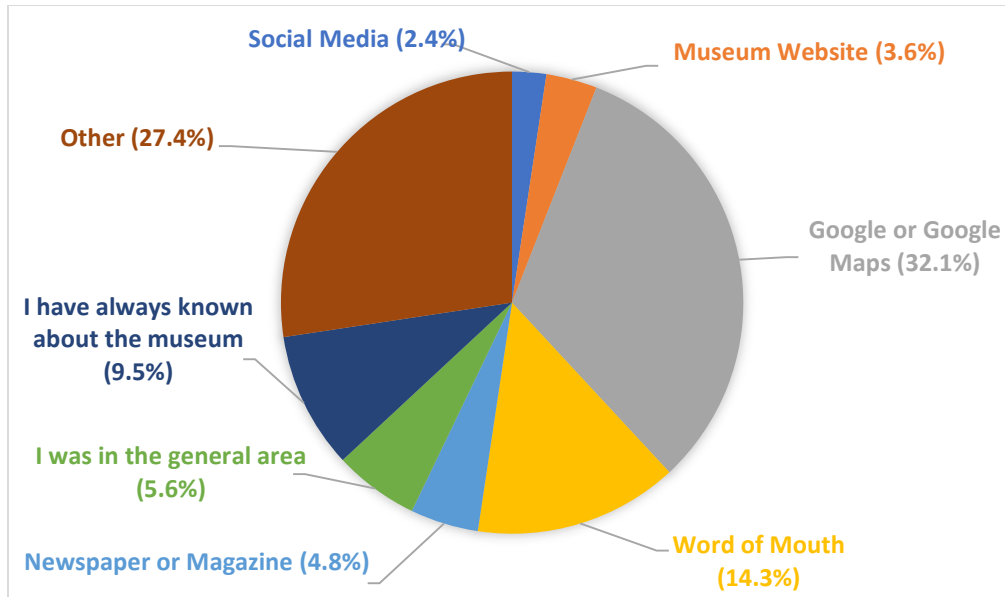


Figure 8: Responses to "How did you discover the museum?" (n=84)

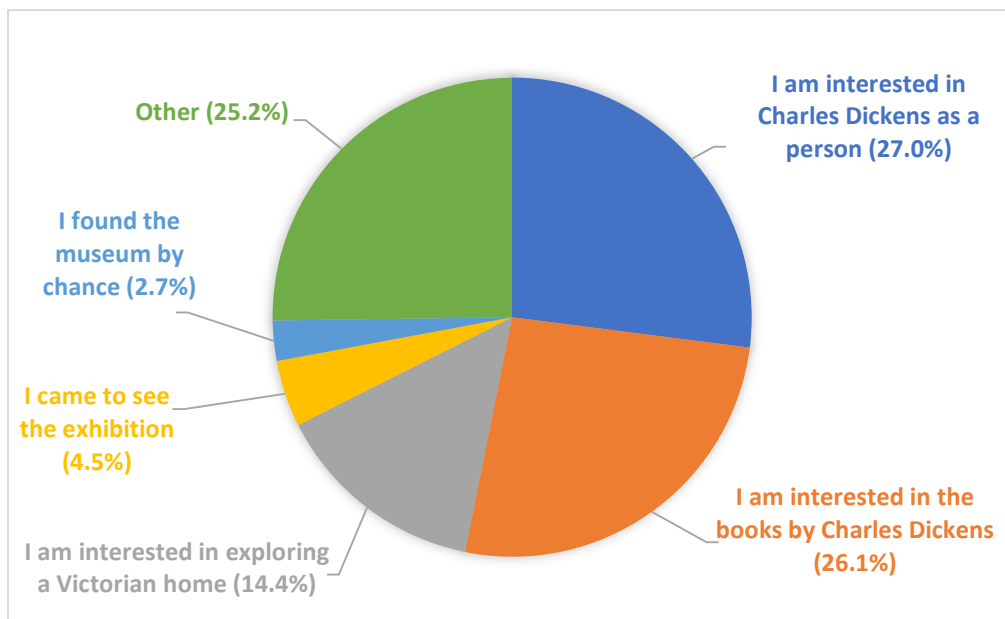


Figure 9: Answers to "What was your main reason for visiting today?" (n=85, 111 responses)

As can be seen in Figure 8, most visitors discovered the museum through Google (often either by looking around the area in which they live or are staying in Google Maps, or by looking up "things to do in London"). Answers from the "Other" category primarily related to those who learned about the museum from others they were visiting with, or those who heard about the museum through a third party promotion. For example, during the first week of interviews, a

promotion was occurring through the National Lottery that allowed visitors with a lottery ticket to attend certain museums, including the Dickens Museum, for free. The figure also shows that not many people discovered the museum through its own website, and those that discovered it through social media tended to comment that it was through a third party social media, such as a review posted to Facebook or Instagram, rather than the museum's own social media.

Figure 9 shows that most visitors attended the museum either out of an interest in the books by Dickens or because of interest in his personality and/or personal life. Responses in the "Other" category also included references to the National Lottery promotion, as well as mentioning museum-going groups that brought visitors to the Dickens Museum.

Museum Content

This category of questions concerned the primary focus of the museum, Charles Dickens. These questions aimed to determine how much visitors knew about Dickens, and how well the Museum was educating them on his life and works.

Out of 29 people, 44.8% said that they "knew a lot about Charles Dickens" prior to attending the museum, while 24.1% said they had only "read one or two of his books," and 31.0% said that they had only heard about him. This, along with the transcribed comments, suggests that most visitors come into the museum with some background awareness of Charles Dickens—that he was a Victorian author from London, and perhaps with knowledge of a few of his more famous books—but without much awareness of what he was like as a person.

Visitors were also asked what they felt the main focus of the museum to be, and which aspects of Dickens's life they wish the museum had focused on more. These responses are summarized in Figures 10 and 11, respectively. From these responses, it can be seen that most visitors surveyed perceived Dickens's private and family life to be the primary focus of the museum, with no visitors responding that his charity work or his historical era was the primary focus of the museum. Visitors said that they would like to see more of a focus on his books, and also frequently suggested topics outside these main categories. While most of the responses in the "Other" category shown in Figure 11 represent visitors who were satisfied with the way the museum presented information during their visit, other responses alluded to the suggestions for improvement discussed below.

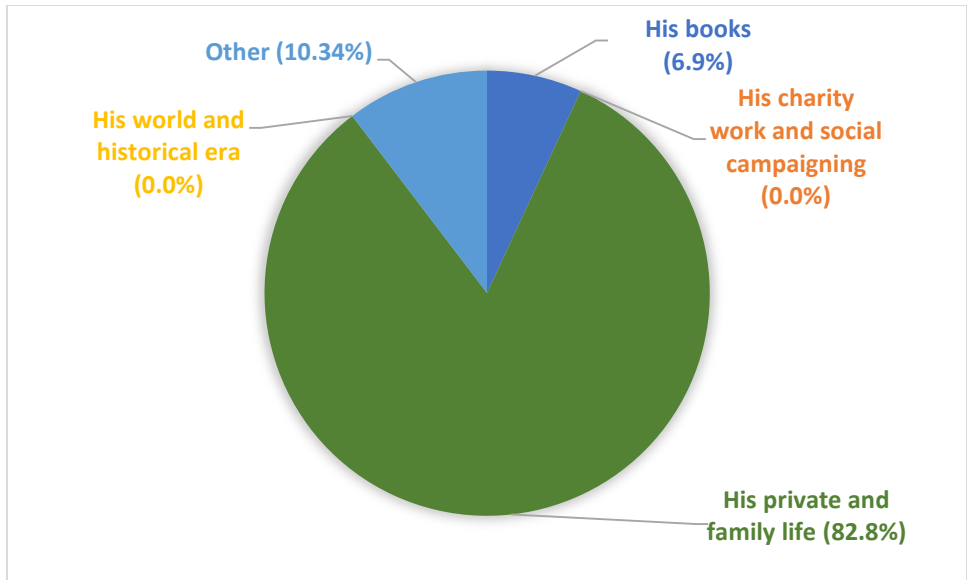


Figure 10: Responses to “What aspect of Dickens’s life did the museum focus on most?” (n = 29)

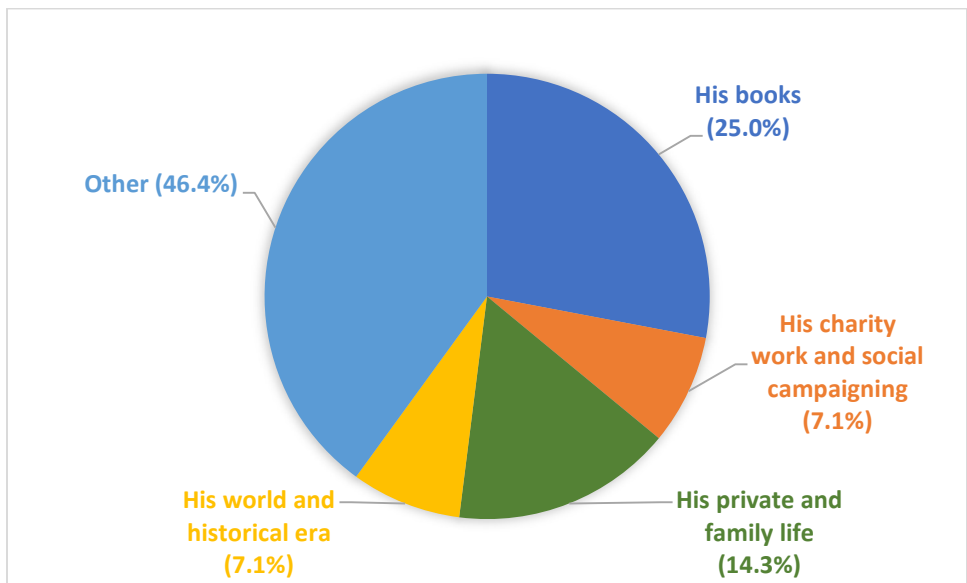


Figure 11: Responses to “What would you like the museum to focus on more?” (n = 28)

Presentation of Information

These questions dealt with how effective the museum was at delivering information to its audience, through such means as the audio guide, the exhibit labels, and the volunteer room stewards, who were available to answer questions in most rooms. Most visitors (69.0% of 29

surveyed) chose not to use the audio guide, 6.9% said they were unaware of the audio guide, and 10.3% said they did not use the guide due to difficulties accessing it. Through open-ended feedback, we learned that the basement was a problem for connections to the audio guide. However, all the respondents who said they used the audio guide (13.8%) said they enjoyed the experience and that it provided a good amount of information.

Visitors also overwhelmingly enjoyed the presentation of information in the museum. Twenty-eight (82.1%) respondents said they enjoyed their experience and learned a lot from both the volunteer stewards and from the labels. However, when asked for suggestions to improve their experience at the museum, 10.4% out of 77 visitors mentioned that the labels or written artifacts were difficult to read. They suggested the labels would be easier to read with larger type and better lighting. Others mentioned that although they enjoyed seeing Dickens's handwriting on certain letters and artifacts, they would like transcripts to be made available for ease of readability. Further, 9.1% of those 77 visitors requested more information on the artifacts and how they were acquired, a trend echoed in our visitor observations. Many visitors wanted to know what all the artifacts were without having to rely on the stewards to tell them, and many also wanted to know which ones were actually owned by Dickens and which were merely period items used to provide a historically appropriate ambience.

Visitor Experience

These questions dealt with the atmosphere of the Dickens Museum, and how enjoyable visitors found their visit. We found that 63.1% of visitors said their visit was “excellent,” and 34.5% thought it was “good.” The vast majority (98.8%) of visitors also said that they would recommend the museum as a place to visit, and 95.1% of visitors said that the museum was worth the price of admission. However, it should be noted that the first week of our interviews were conducted when free admission was available through the National Lottery, and many visitors said that they might not have visited if not for that promotion. Figure 12 shows that the museum met or exceeded the expectations of 85.7% of visitors. Compared with the previous report on the museum's visitor experience, it is apparent that the numbers have remained remarkably consistent. In 2022, 99% of visitors expressed satisfaction, rating their experience as either good or excellent (Yorina et al, 2022). This suggests that the Dickens Museum has remained consistently satisfying for its visitors at least since 2022.

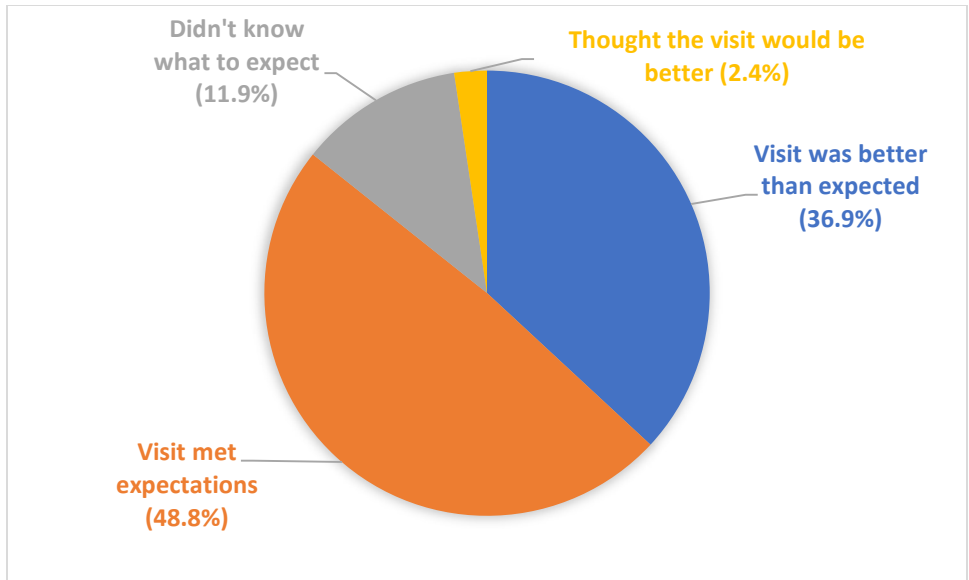


Figure 12: Responses to “How did your visit match up to your expectations?” (n=84)

A summary of what visitors reported as their favorite parts of the museum is shown in Figure 13. Note that since this portion of the interview was open-ended, some responses are counted in multiple categories.

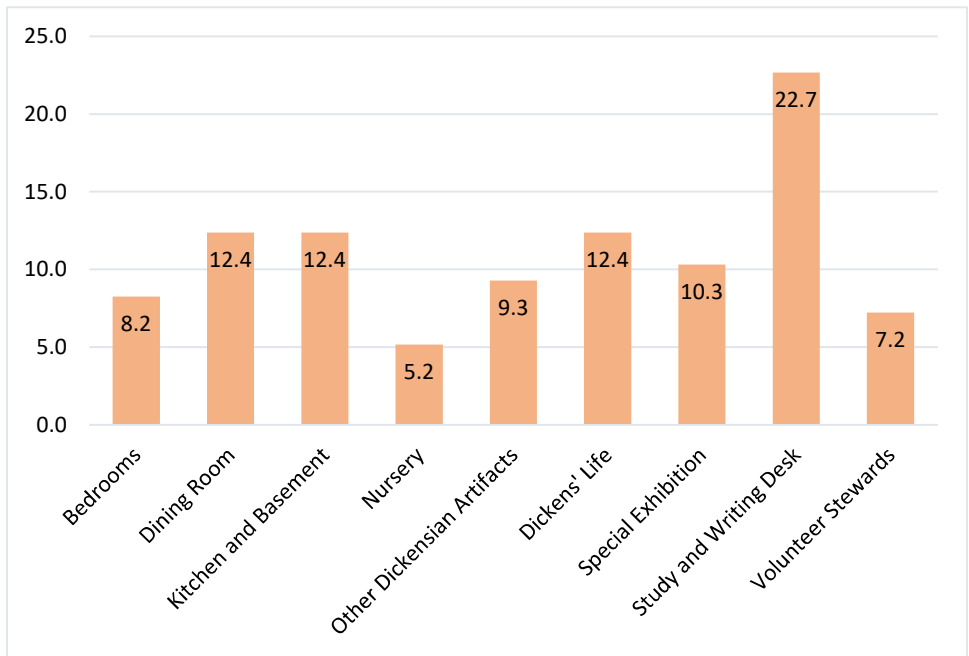


Figure 13: Breakdown of visitor’s favorite parts of the museum (n=83, 97 answers)

From this figure, many visitors were drawn to the study and the writing desk within it, though many responses also expressed particular interest in the dining room, the kitchen, and the general perspective on Dickens's life that the museum provided through its layout as a Victorian home. Comparing it to the 2022 analysis, we can see that sentiments toward each room were notably positive in that study as well. The top three highlights of visitors' museum journeys in 2022 included the Study, the Dining Room, and the Kitchen/Basement. It is worth noting that general perspectives on Dickens's life were equally emphasized in both studies, alongside the Dining Room and the Kitchen/Basement.

Visitors also provided feedback on areas they identified for improvement. Interestingly, 29.9% of the 77 visitors who answered this question could not think of any potential improvements. Beyond the points mentioned earlier, feedback included concerns regarding the audio guide, mentioned by 18.2% of respondents. Additionally, 9.1% suggested placing more information on Dickens's life closer to the beginning of the museum, while 6.5% desired a greater emphasis on his literary works within the exhibits.

During our time at the museum, it featured a special exhibition on Charles Dickens's friendship with another prominent novelist and playwright, Wilkie Collins. While some visitors criticized the extent to which the museum featured Collins, perhaps not understanding that it was part of a temporary exhibition, many others indicated that they enjoyed the exhibition. Many of those we surveyed stated that the sole factor that would motivate them to revisit the museum would be the introduction of a new exhibition or other special events. Further, some of the feedback we received requested more information on aspects of Dickens's life that seem suited to a future exhibition. Examples of such potential exhibitions include one on the women in Dickens's life, and one on modern interpretations and adaptations of his work, such as in films or modernized stories.

Room Observations

To complement the exit interviews, the team also performed room observations between April 3 and April 7. These observations mainly focused on visitor preferences and common

behaviors of visitors within each room. The analysis below focuses on three different aspects of each room:

- the average dwell time, or the time spent by each visitor within a given room;
- answers to Question 2 “What are you most drawn to in this room?” (Appendix D); and
- the potential for improvement within that room, gathered through a combination of responses to Question 3 “Is there anything in this room you didn’t like?” and Question 4 “Any other thoughts?” (Appendix D).

In collaboration with the museum staff, we chose to focus the majority of our observations on the Dining Room, the Kitchen, and the Nursery. We selected the Dining Room for observations because it was rarely mentioned in previous exit surveys, likely because it is near the beginning of the museum and therefore not top-of-mind for visitors by the end of their tour. We selected the Kitchen because it was mentioned often in the exit surveys as a positive experience, and we wanted to know more about what exactly people were enjoying. We focused on the Nursery to gain more insight into what visitors want from the room prior to an upcoming renovation.

We also conducted smaller numbers of observations in the Main Bedroom and the Drawing Room to gain a sense of the other floors of the house. On the advice of museum staff, we decided to omit observations in the Study room, which included Charles Dickens’s writing desk. The main reason was that many visitors comment on it at length in exit surveys. More specifically, as seen in Figure 13 above, out of 83 responses to the question “What was your favorite part of your visit today?”, 22.7% of the answers referred to the writing desk. Therefore, we considered additional observations to be redundant. The locations of the rooms analyzed below can be found in the floor map found in Appendix C.

Dining Room

We conducted 24 observations in the Dining Room. Visitors spent on average 3 minutes and 15 seconds in the room. From intercept surveys after their tour of the Dining Room with 23 of these visitors, we were able to capture the features of the room to which visitors were most drawn: The clock (30.4% of people mentioning), the table (21.7%, with about half mentioning

that they specifically liked the dishware and food displays on the table), the dishware in the display cases (17.3%), and the portraits of Dickens (13.0%, with some of them not knowing what Charles Dickens looked like).

Overall, feedback about the dining room was exceptionally positive. A large majority (83.3%) suggested no improvements were needed. Two people (8.7%) said they wish the labels were more descriptive, one person stated that he did not like the plastic food on the table, and one person mentioned that he thought the room was too cluttered.

In our analysis, we discovered that visitors commonly engaged with the dining room by taking a brief tour, with stops at three primary locations. The first stop typically involved focusing on the glassware in the display case and looking at the portrait of Dickens above the mantle; the second stop was at the grandfather clock and the poster next to it, which is where the visitors spent most of their time in the dining room; the final location was the dining room table, where visitors would look at the dishware on the table and the food and faces on the plates.

Kitchen

We conducted 36 observations in the Kitchen, finding that visitors spent an average of 2 minutes and 30 seconds in this room. From intercept conversations after their tour of the room, we found that people were most drawn to the oven (with 27.8% of people mentioning it), the dishware and China sets (22.2%), the hedgehog (13.9%), the kitchen dressers (13.9%), and the old-fashioned Victorian clothing (11.1%).

Feedback on the kitchen was overwhelmingly positive, with 75% of visitors having no suggestions for improvement. Three people (8.33%) would have liked more labels, especially to indicate what artifacts were owned by Dickens and what items were used to recreate the ambience of a Victorian home typical of someone of Dickens's standing. Additionally, 5.56% of those observed commented on the room's brightness, and one visitor wished to see inside the stove, while another would have liked to have seen how the servant bell system worked.

Some visitors we observed moved through the Kitchen in a clockwise manner, while others moved counterclockwise. However, most visitors stopped to look at the sink, the oven, and the China set to the right of the door, reading the accompanying labels at each stop. Some visitors commented on the beauty of the China set, while more seemed to spend most of their time

looking at the sink and its labels, with some visitors wondering how they would pump water for the sink.

Nursery

We conducted 40 observations in the Nursery, finding that visitors spent an average of 3 minutes and 35 seconds in this room. We found that respondents were most drawn to the prison bars (55.0%), the windows (12.5%), and the children's toys, including the puppet theater (10.0%). Other objects mentioned by visitors included: the bust of Charles Dickens's father, the bed, the portrait of the children, and the raven.

Feedback to the Nursery was overwhelmingly positive, with 75% of visitors having no suggestions for improvement or any other comments. Some visitors requested more information on the children's toys, while 15.0% of those surveyed questioned the presence of prison bars in a children's room, and others expressing confusion with the fact that there was only one bed, though Dickens had more than one child while living there. Three visitors (7.5%) commented on the darkness of the room, stating that it made things hard to see.

Most visitors to this room moved in a clockwise manner, beginning with the wall of artifacts from Dickens's childhood along the lefthand wall, examining the bust of his father, and then circling around to read the label about the prison bars. Visitors seemed to be impressed and very interested in Dickens's childhood and his father. However, in this common route, many visitors were seen to be skipping over much of the nursery side of the room as they turned away from it to read the plaque next to the prison bars.

Main Bedroom

The seven visitors we observed in the main bedroom spent an average of 2 minutes and 20 seconds in the room. Four out of the seven visitors (57.1%) mentioned being most drawn to the story of Dickens's separation from his wife, and the article and artifacts in the desk that accompany this story. Two visitors (28.6%) were drawn to the bathtub in the room, and one visitor to the bed. The main source of confusion in this room was over the bath featured in the room. Since this artifact does not resemble similar items used in everyday life and was not labelled in the room, many of those entering the room expressed confusion over what it was.

Most visitors moved through the Main Bedroom by following the path around the bed from the door while pausing to look at labels and take pictures. When they reached the end of this path, they retraced their steps back to the door without pausing.

Drawing Room

The six visitors we observed in the Drawing Room spent an average of 2 minutes and 15 seconds in this room. Four out of six of the visitors (66.7%) were drawn to the reading desk that Dickens used during his reading tours. One person was most drawn to his chair, and one person was most drawn to the dominos. None of the visitors observed had any suggestions for improvement or notable questions about the room or the artifacts within it. However, it is worth noting that enhancing the exhibit with additional labels and descriptions could prolong visitors' interest. Providing more information for people to engage with would likely have encouraged them to spend even more time exploring the exhibit in detail.

Community Involvement

To understand the level of engagement that the Dickens Museum has with their local community, and to better understand what draws people to museums like the Dickens Museum, the team also conducted 24 interviews with members of the local community. We conducted 14 interviews in Russell Square, and the other 10 in Brunswick Square.

Our community interviews were structured into two main segments: initially exploring participants' general knowledge and awareness of Charles Dickens, followed by an investigation into their familiarity with the Dickens Museum and the factors motivating a potential visit. We found that 100% of the people interviewed knew who Charles Dickens was, and many of them also understood why he is known. When asked "what springs to mind when you hear Charles Dickens?" most said his writings and novels, with some individuals mentioning specific novels like *A Christmas Carol*, *Oliver Twist*, or *Great Expectations*. Some other individuals mentioned the Victorian Era he lived in as the first thing they associated with his name.

As indicated in Figure 14, the majority of the community members we surveyed held a positive view of Charles Dickens, while the rest either remained neutral or expressed uncertainty,

suggesting a mixed perception. One respondent cited disapproval of Dickens’s treatment of his wife, yet acknowledged his literary prowess, remarking on the excellence of his works. Notably, no negative opinions were voiced.

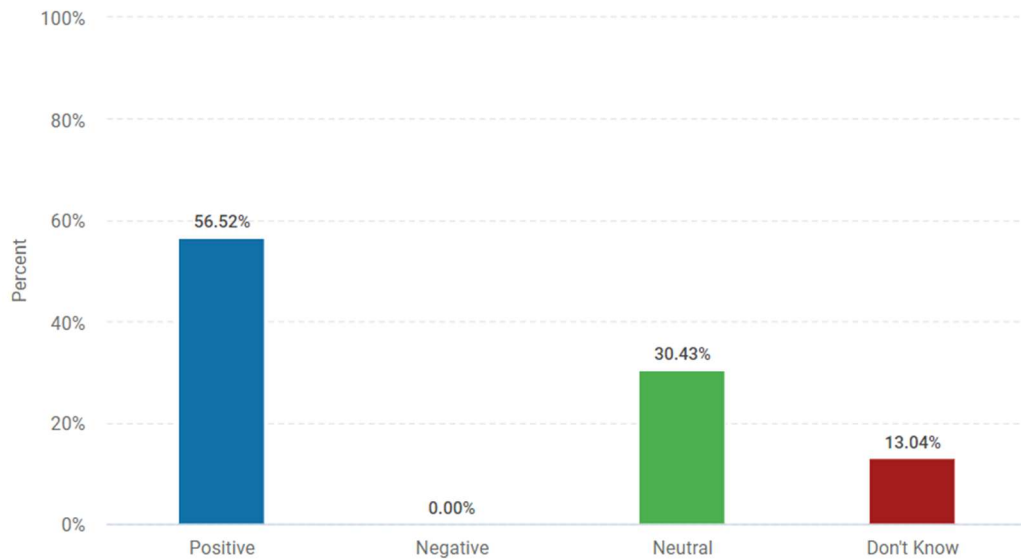


Figure 14: Responses to “What would you say your perception of Dickens is?” (n = 24)

When questioned about specific works by Charles Dickens, most respondents mentioned classics such as *Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Additionally, some mentioned titles like *Great Expectations*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *David Copperfield*.

In our community interviews, the majority (75%) resided in London. Among these London residents, a significant portion (61%) were interviewed in Russell Square, while 39% were surveyed in Brunswick Square. We were surprised to discover that only half of the interviewees who lived in London were aware of the museum’s location. This revelation is particularly striking given the proximity of the museum to the areas where our interviews took place, suggesting a potential opportunity for the museum to enhance its engagement with the local community and improve signage. Furthermore, our findings revealed that an overwhelming 70% of the individuals we interviewed expressed an interest in visiting the museum, with only 17% indicating that they would not visit, and 13% expressing a desire for more information

before visiting. Delving into what might attract people to visit the museum, our data indicated that 27% favored the idea of a local discount, while 26% expressed interest in special events or exhibitions. Only 9% of those surveyed stated that they would never consider visiting the museum.

Finally, we observed a notable trend in our data collection process: the majority of individuals we interviewed in the community skewed towards a younger demographic, while participants in our exit interviews tended to be aged 55 and above. When querying community members about their preferred sources for local activities, our findings revealed a predominant reliance on the internet (41%), followed by word of mouth (25%) and social media (12.5%). These results indicate that younger demographics employ distinct avenues for activity discovery compared to their older counterparts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter Introduction

Based on our findings, we have drawn several conclusions, presented in this chapter, along with a variety of recommendations that the Charles Dickens Museum might follow to address the concerns raised by participants in our surveys and observations. These recommendations largely focus on the audio tour, the artifacts and information available in the museum, and awareness of the museum and its programs.

Audio Tour

Awareness

A considerable number of visitors were unaware of the audio guide before their arrival and were not made aware of it when they purchased their tickets. These visitors expressed a sense of missing out on a crucial part of the museum's offerings. To address this issue effectively, we propose a multifaceted approach.

We recommend that the Charles Dickens Museum improve advertisement of the audio tour guide on the museum's website and advise visitors to bring headphones or earbuds if they plan to use the guide. Furthermore, staff members should be reminded to discuss the audio tour during ticket purchases. Moreover, strategically placed signs and QR codes throughout the exhibits can serve as reminders of this resource. Lastly, to assist visitors facing technical difficulties with the audio tour, we recommend the inclusion of a troubleshooting guide in both the museum map and the platform hosting the audio guide offering practical solutions to common issues.

Connectivity

Another noteworthy concern is the connectivity issue experienced by some visitors, particularly in the basement area where the main museum Wi-Fi signal appears to be inadequate. This issue undermines the effectiveness of the audio tour, leading to frustration and disengagement among visitors. The basement presents a pivotal part of Dickens's life, and the audio guide provides a wealth of additional interpretive material. We recommend the museum

test the Wi-Fi signal strength and extend coverage into areas with poor connectivity, possibly by implementing a Wi-Fi extender or a long-range router. It may also be possible that some visitors were not connected to the Wi-Fi at all and were experiencing a lack of cellular signal rather than a lack of Wi-Fi. In this case, the museum should be sure to remind all visitors using the audio guide to connect to their Wi-Fi network instead of relying on data. By implementing these recommendations, the museum can ensure a seamless and enriching visitor experience regardless of location in the house, and thereby foster greater visitor satisfaction and encouraging repeat visitation.

Artifacts, Interpretation, and Navigation

Artifacts & Information

Another concern expressed by visitors was confusion about the origin of items within the museum. More specifically, they struggled to distinguish artifacts that were originally owned by Dickens from those used by the museum to create the ambience of a Victorian home. In addition, certain artifacts were unlabeled and unfamiliar to visitors, leaving them uncertain about their significance. Examples included the bathtub in the Main Bedroom, and the food on the table in the Dining Room. A potential improvement could be to provide a clear and brief description or overview of the items in each room, including each item's significance to the period, and designating which ones were owned by Dickens. This overview could be in the form of a label, or a sign placed on a wall or next to specific groups of artifacts, such as the kitchen dressers, that contain different types of items.

In some of the interviews, visitors reported their desire for more historical information. The majority of visitors had little prior awareness of Charles Dickens as a person or of the Victorian era. Some visitors suggested that being offered information on Dickens's life at the beginning of the visit would have given them context for the rest of the museum. This information could take the form of a timeline of Dickens's life along the entry hall to the museum, or as a part of the museum guide or the QR code system used in the audio guide. The museum may already have some background information available on a handout in bullet-point

format, but few visitors were offered this information, so increasing distribution of such a handout could help visitors understand the context of the museum.

Readability

One concern expressed by multiple visitors during our interviews was the readability of labels and handwritten artifacts within the museum. Many visitors had difficulty reading certain artifact labels or handwritten letters displayed in the museum due to unclear handwriting or low lighting. Although visitors deeply appreciated seeing Dickens's original handwriting, they could not understand the content. Many requested that full, typed transcriptions be made available so that they could read the text more easily. Additionally, some visitors also requested more light on the labels, especially in darker areas like the Kitchen or the Nursery. Because the lighting of each room is indicative of the period during which Dickens lived and the museum wishes to maintain the historical atmosphere, we recommend increasing the brightness or contrast of each label in order to enhance readability.

Navigation

Some visitors also expressed their desire for clear labeling of every room upon entry. Given the museum's small size, when compared to the extensive information offered, people were sometimes confused about which room they were viewing. The similarity between some of the rooms (e.g. the second floor, which has multiple bedrooms) creates more confusion, adding to challenges concerning navigation. A detailed floor plan and an audio guide are offered to visitors; however, some visitors do not take advantage of these resources. We recommend the placement of labels at the entrance of each room, clearly stating the name and primary theme in a font that catches the visitors' attention. As a result, the visitors can feel more comfortable with the information they are about to read and formulate a better understanding of the room.

Awareness of Museum and Programs

Many visitors discovered the museum through third party platforms or promotions rather than the museum's own social media or website. Additionally, many seemed unaware of certain events and programs offered by the museum, such as private tours and parties, as they are not

prominently advertised, either within the museum or on the museum website. Increasing the visibility of these offerings through targeted marketing could enhance visitor awareness and engagement with the museum.

To increase outreach, we recommend the museum prioritize a vibrant social media presence offering engaging content such as event updates and interactive features to attract younger demographics. Moreover, creating partnerships with local influencers and community organizations could expand visibility and engagement across more diverse audiences.

To enhance visitor awareness of special museum programs and events, we recommend the museum utilizes their social media platforms to showcase these events. The museum provides private guided tours to visitors and offers its venue for private parties such as drinks receptions, family parties, and dining experiences, presenting an opportunity to uniquely engage with audiences. However, these promotions are not easily accessible on the museum website, only being mentioned in the “About Us” section.

We recommend the museum enhance the visibility of these events on their website, ensuring they are prominently featured for visitors to the site. Lastly, we recommend the museum includes more flyers about these events throughout the museum in high traffic areas for visitors to see. Some potential locations include the Tearoom where visitors are sitting down and would easily be able to view these flyers. Another potential location is near the front desk where the gift shop is located, so it will be visible when the visitors first enter the museum and when they exit. These recommendations will ensure the museum is maximizing their influence on the public in hopes to increase visitation across new audiences.

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Appendix A: Short-Form Interview Script

The contents in this appendix and Appendix B are adapted from the methods used by the 2022 IQP team (see Yorina et al., 2022), their exit survey, and the long-form survey used by the Dickens Museum.

Participants who agree to participate in an interview with the team will be asked if they prefer a short-form or longer interview (see “Objective 1: Determining Visitor Characteristics, Interests, and Expectations” in Methods). Participants will then be read the informed consent paragraph before beginning the interview with the appropriate script for their preference. Items written in italics represent comments on the script and will not be spoken aloud during the interviews.

Informed Consent

We are a team of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA. We are collaborating with the Charles Dickens Museum to perform audience research and determine how their visitorship has evolved since the Covid-19 pandemic. We are not employees of the Charles Dickens Museum, and we are looking for honest feedback regarding the museum. We are currently interviewing visitors who have just completed their tour of the museum. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and can be revoked at any time. Further, the study will remain entirely anonymous. No identifying information will appear in the questions or in any reports or publications. If requested, an electronic copy of the report can be provided at the conclusion of the study.

Short-Form Interview Script

28. What was your main reason for visiting today?

Example answers may include: “I am interested in Charles Dickens and/or his works;” “I am interested in exploring a Victorian home;” “I came to see a specific exhibition;” and “I found the museum by chance.”

2. How did you discover the Charles Dickens Museum?

Example answers may include: social media, the museum website, Google, word of mouth, a newspaper or magazine, or being in/from the nearby area

3. How did you enjoy your visit?

Visitors will also be prompted for any comments they may have regarding why they answered the way they did.

4. Which of the following would apply to you?

- a. This visit was way better than I expected
- b. I expected the visit to be good and it was
- c. I didn't know what to expect from this visit
- d. I thought this visit would be better than it was.

Visitors will again be prompted for comments regarding their answer.

5. Would you recommend the Charles Dickens Museum to someone you know?

Answers will indicate "yes," "no," or "I'm not sure."

6. Do you think the Charles Dickens Museum was worth the ticket price?

Answers will indicate "yes," "no," or "Don't Know."

7. How often did you feel each of the following emotions during your visit?

- a. Happy
- b. Engaged
- c. Comfortable
- d. Interested
- e. Amazed

f. Entertained

8. What was your favorite part of your visit today?

9. How do you think we could improve your visit today?

The following demographic information was collected on a tablet or laptop computer given to the participant by the team rather than through interviews to help avoid awkwardness on the part of the interviewer and the participant, and encourage honest responses. Visitors were reminded that these data are used by the museum to help when applying for funding and encouraged to leave questions blank or use a “prefer not to say” option if they feel uncomfortable answering certain questions.

10. What country do you currently live in?

11. Which age group are you from?

a. Prefer not to say

b. 16-24

c. 25-34

d. 35-44

e. 45-54

f. 55-64

g. 65 or older

12. Which gender do you identify as?

a. Prefer not to say

b. Female

c. Gender Fluid

d. Male

e. Trans

f. Other (please specify):

13. Which of these groups do you most identify with?

a. I do not wish to disclose my ethnicity

White

b. British

c. Irish

d. Other

Asian or Asian British

e. Chinese

f. Indian

g. Pakistani

h. Bangladeshi

i. Any other Asian Background

Mixed

j. White and Black Caribbean

k. White and Black African

l. White and Asian

m. Any other mixed background

Black or Black British

n. Caribbean

o. African

p. Any other black background

Other Ethnic Group

q. Any other Ethnic Group

r. Other (please specify):

14. How would you define your sexuality?

a. Prefer not to say

b. Bisexual

c. Gay Man

d. Gay Woman

e. Straight / Heterosexual

f. Other (please specify):

15. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

a. Prefer not to say

b. Yes

c. No

16. If yes, would you feel comfortable sharing details of your disability with us? This helps us to consider your needs so that we can improve your visit experience.

a. Prefer not to say

b. Hearing impairment

c. Learning difficulties

d. Mental ill-health

e. Mobility impairment

f. Physical coordination difficulties

g. Progressive conditions

- h. Speech impairment
- i. Visual impairment
- j. Severe disfigurement
- k. Other (please specify)

Appendix B: Long-Form Interview Script

The contents in this appendix and Appendix A are adapted from the methods used by the 2022 IQP team (see Yorina et al., 2022), their exit survey, and the long-form survey used by the Dickens Museum.

Participants who agree to participate in an interview with the team will be asked if they prefer a short-form or longer interview (see “Objective 1: Determining Visitor Characteristics, Interests, and Expectations” in Methods). Participants will then be read the informed consent paragraph before beginning the interview with the appropriate script for their preference. Items written in italics represent comments on the script and will not be spoken aloud during the interviews.

Informed Consent

We are a team of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA. We are collaborating with the Charles Dickens Museum to perform audience research and determine how their visitorship has evolved since the Covid-19 pandemic. We are not employees of the Charles Dickens Museum, and we are looking for honest feedback regarding the museum. We are currently interviewing visitors who have just completed their tour of the museum. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and can be stopped at any time. Further, the study will remain entirely anonymous. No identifying information will appear in the questions or in any reports or publications. If requested, an electronic copy of the report can be provided at the conclusion of the study.

Long-Form Interview Script

1. Was this your first visit to the Charles Dickens Museum?
2. *If the participant says they have visited before:* When was your last visit?
3. How did you hear about the Charles Dickens Museum?

Example answers may include: social media, the museum website, Google, word of mouth, a newspaper or magazine, or being in/from the nearby area

4. Who did you visit with?
5. Why did you visit the Charles Dickens Museum?
6. What was your main reason for visiting today?
7. Overall, would you recommend the Charles Dickens Museum as a place to visit? 8. How did you enjoy your visit?
9. Do you think the Charles Dickens Museum offers good value for the money?
10. How did your visit match up with your expectations?
11. Overall, have you had an enjoyable visit to the museum? Before your visit today, how much did you know about Charles Dickens? Additional comments are welcome.
12. Before your visit today, how did you perceive Charles Dickens as a person?
13. How do you perceive Charles Dickens as a person now that you have visited the museum?
14. What would you say the museum focused on most, during your visit today?
15. In future, what would you like to see the museum focus on more?
16. Before your visit today, what were you expecting to see?
17. How did you find your welcome to the museum today?

I felt very welcome

I received all of the information I needed

They will answer either "Agree," "I'm not sure," or "Disagree" to the above statements.

18. Did you use the free audio guide?
19. If yes, how did you find the audio guide experience?
20. What did you think of the information provided in the museum.

21. Overall, how did you find your visit to the museum?
22. Which of the following statements most closely match how you felt during your visit?
- a. Happy
 - b. Engaged
 - c. Comfortable
 - d. Interested
 - e. Amazed
 - f. Entertained
23. How would you say the museum measured up against your expectations? 24. What was your favorite part of your visit today?
25. How do you think we could improve your visit today?
26. What would you have liked to have seen at the museum / what could we do to encourage you to come back?
27. Do you feel the museum connected with you? Did it provide an emotional response or resonance to you?
28. Please tell us any other thoughts or comments you have?
- The following demographic information was collected on a tablet or laptop computer given to the participant by the team rather than through interviews to help avoid awkwardness on the part of the interviewer and the participant, and encourage honest responses. Visitors were reminded that these data are used by the museum to help when applying for funding, such as from the Arts Council, and encouraged to leave questions blank or use a “prefer not to say” option if they feel uncomfortable answering certain questions.*
29. What country do you currently live in?
30. If you currently live in the UK, do you live in London?
31. What age group are you from?

- a. Prefer not to say
- b. 16-24
- c. 25-34
- d. 35-44
- e. 45-54
- f. 55-64
- g. 65 or older

32. Which gender do you identify with?

- a. Prefer not to say
- b. Female
- c. Gender fluid
- d. Male
- e. Trans
- f. Other (please specify)

33. Do you consider yourself to be or identify as:

- a. Prefer not to say
- b. Bi-sexual
- c. Gay man
- d. Gay woman
- e. Straight/Heterosexual
- f. Other (please specify)

34. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- a. Yes

- b. No
- c. Don't know
- d. Prefer not to say

35. If you answered 'yes,' would you feel comfortable sharing details of your disability with us, this helps us to consider your needs so that we can improve your visit experience.

- a. Prefer not to say
- b. Hearing Impairment
- c. Visual Impairment
- d. Speech Impairment
- e. Mobility Impairment
- f. Physical Co-ordination Difficulties
- g. Reduced Physical Capacity
- h. Severe Disfigurement
- i. Learning Difficulties
- j. Mental Ill-Health
- k. Progressive Conditions
- l. Other (please specify)

36. If you answered yes, please share any thoughts you have in terms of how well the museum facilitated your visit, in relation to your disability.

37. Which of these groups do you most identify with?

Asian or Asian British

- a. Chinese
- b. Indian

- c. Pakistani
- d. Bangladeshi
- e. Any other Asian background

Black or Black British

- f. Caribbean
- g. African
- h. Any other black background

Mixed

- i. White and Black Caribbean
- j. White and Black African
- k. White and Asian
- l. Any other mixed background

White

- m. British
- n. Irish
- o. Other

Other Ethnic Group

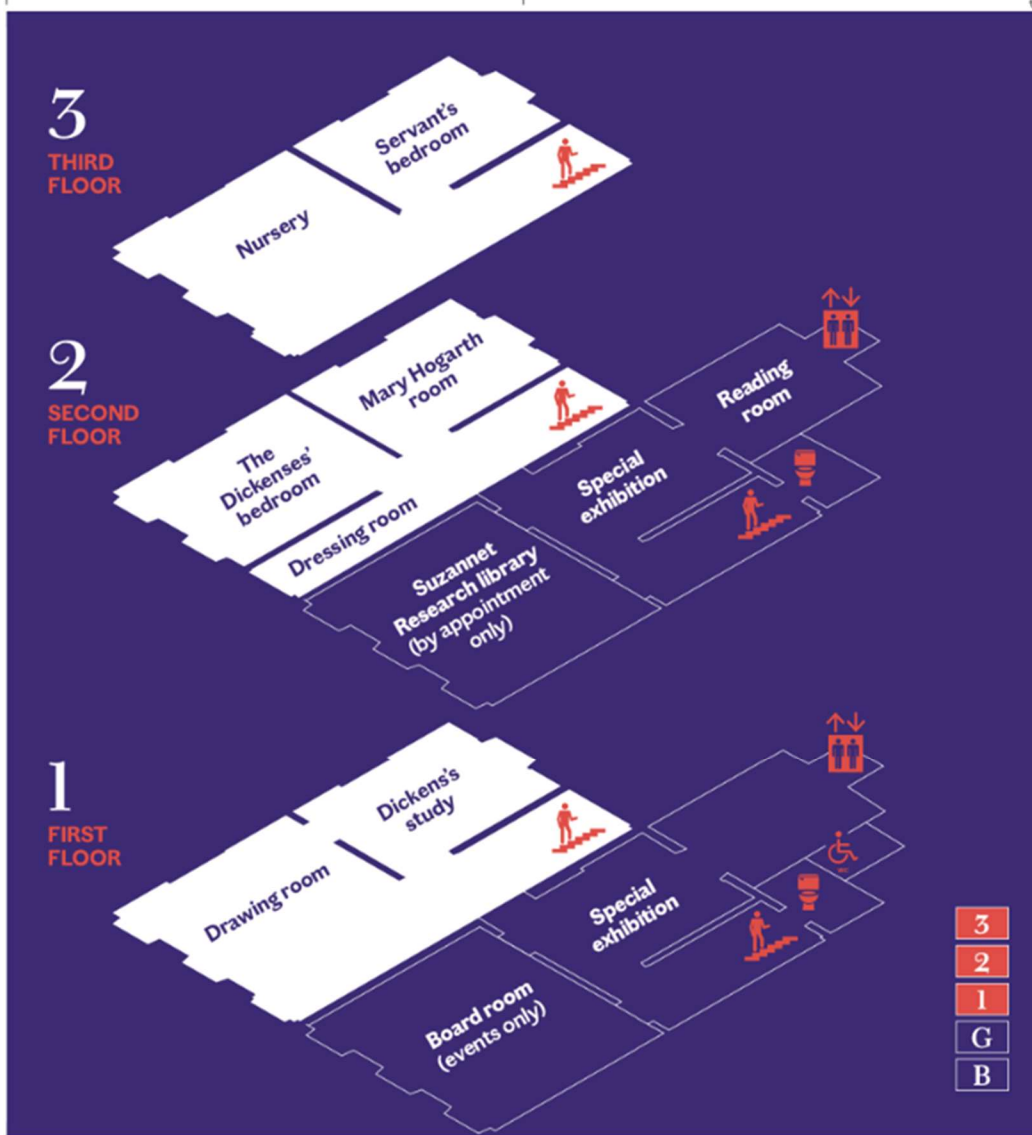
- p. Any other Ethnic Group
- q. I do not wish to disclose my ethnic origin
- r. Other (please specify)

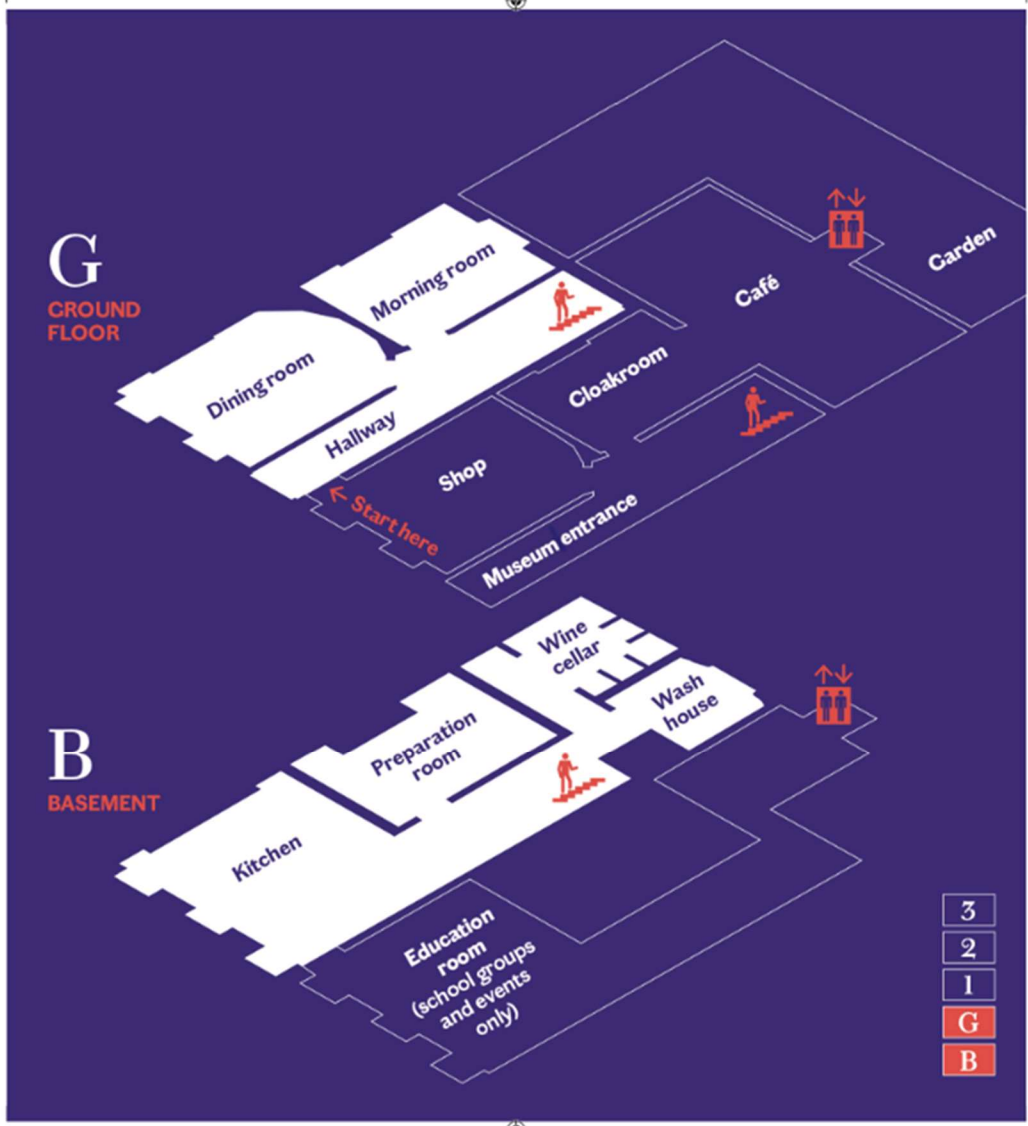
38. Which faith or religious group do you identify with?

- a. Prefer not to say
- b. Agnostic

- c. Atheist
- d. Buddhism
- e. Christian – Catholic
- f. Christian – Other
- g. Christian – Protestant
- h. Hinduism
- i. Islam
- j. Jainism
- k. Judaism
- l. Shinto
- m. I have no articulated belief system
- n. Other (please specify)

Appendix C: Museum Floor Plan





Appendix D: Intercept Conversation during Observations

The following questions will be asked to visitors that the team has observed at the end of their time in the room in which they are being observed. They will be read the following consent script, then asked the questions below.

Informed Consent

We are a team of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA. We are collaborating with the Charles Dickens Museum to perform audience research and determine how their visitorship has evolved since the Covid-19 pandemic. We are not employees of the Charles Dickens Museum, and we are looking for honest feedback regarding the museum. We are currently interviewing visitors after they have completed their interactions with specific exhibits in the museum. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and can be stopped at any time. Further, the study will remain entirely anonymous. No identifying information will appear in the questions or in any reports or publications. If requested, an electronic copy of the report can be provided at the conclusion of the study.

Intercept Conversation Script

1. What room are you in?

- Hallway
- Dining Room
- Morning Room
- Kitchen
- Still Room
- Wash House
- Drawing Room
- Study
- Main Bedroom

- Dressing Room
- Mary Hogarth Room
- Nursery
- Servant's Room
- 1st Floor Exhibition Room
- 2nd Floor Exhibition Room

2. What are you most drawn to in this room?

3. Is there anything about this room which you don't like?

4. Any other thoughts?

Appendix E: Street Intercept Questions

These questions are designed to be brief and easy to answer, suitable for quick interactions in public spaces. Participants will be read the informed consent paragraph before the questions begin, and the interviewer will record which location this interview is being conducted at.

Informed Consent

We are a team of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA. We are collaborating with the Charles Dickens Museum to determine how their involvement with the local community has impacted the community and the museum. We are not employees of the Charles Dickens Museum, and we are looking for honest feedback about your perceptions of the museum. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and can be stopped at any time. Further, the study will remain entirely anonymous. No identifying information will appear in the questions or in any reports or publications. If requested, an electronic copy of the report can be provided at the conclusion of the study.

Interview Script

1. Have you heard of Charles Dickens?

If they have not, skip to question 6.

2. What springs to mind when you hear “Charles Dickens”?
3. Would you say your perception of Charles Dickens is positive, negative, neutral, or do you not know?
4. Can you name any book(s) by Charles Dickens?
5. Do you find Charles Dickens interesting?
6. Do you live in London?
7. Do you know where the Charles Dickens Museum is?

8. Does the Charles Dickens Museum sound like a place you'd be interested in visiting or revisiting if you've been there before?
9. If you visited the Dickens Museum, what would you expect to find?
10. What might entice you to visit the Charles Dickens Museum?
 - a. Local discount
 - b. A special event, such as a performance
 - c. A special exhibition on something cool
 - d. Honestly, I would never visit the museum
 - e. Other (please specify)
11. Where do you look to do things locally?