

## Collecting Covid-19

26 October 2021

Prof Elizabeth Crooke

Delivered to Covid Conversations:  
NHS Voices of Covid-19

Read our blog posts

[www.ulster.ac.uk/museumscovid19](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/museumscovid19)

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“Covid has enabled opportunities around collecting and proving the **relevance of museums**”

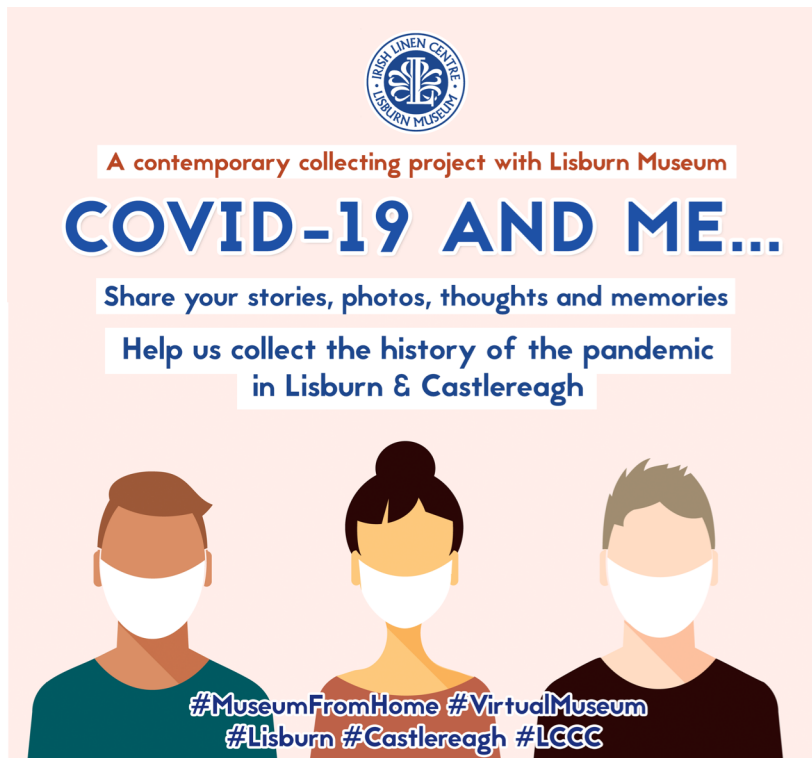
“and how they’re a chance for people to kind of **record** their experiences and **share** their experiences and **come to terms** with what’s happened”.

“We see that as a **responsibility** around what we’re doing now, and what that means to audiences, that there’s that **important record for the future** around this extraordinary period in time”

*Hannah Crowdy,  
National Museums Northern Ireland*



*Mother and Nest (2020) Claire Miskimmin  
for She Sells Sanctuary © Claire  
Miskimmin [NMNI Collection]*



“we knew we were living through something very big and, given the museum’s social role, we felt a **responsibility to collect** at a time of crisis”

“100 years from now people will want to know what happened”

“**some testimonies were very personal, very raw.** They won’t be used immediately. We have an **ethical duty** not to use those stories just now”

Collette Brownlee  
Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum

**Collecting opportunity:  
Increase in new collections of  
non-Covid material**

## Types of Material in NI collections

Medical Related	e.g. scrubs, NHS tributes, locally made hand-sanitizer & masks.
Public info.	e.g. Prime Minister’s letter, Government Guidance
Clothing	e.g. T-shirt sold to raise funding for a domestic abuse charity
Photos	e.g. of empty streets, Covid19 -related signage.
Art, crafts, writing	e.g. Quilt inspired by the NHS
Testimony	e.g. Personal diaries and accounts
Anti-Vax	e.g. Ephemera

Photo: Tower Museum  
Collection Derry City  
Strabane District Council



## Reasons for not focusing on building up significant pandemic collections

“**none of us had the headspace** to go and search out [collections] ... we consciously took a step back from that ... and looked at ways we could link with people and uplift people” (Anon 2)

“it was very much a **knee-jerk reaction**. [Another] Museum is doing Covid collecting and let’s jump on the bandwagon... it was all incredibly naïve” (Anon)

“Part of it might be as simple as we all thought this was going to last 3-4 weeks at the outset, possibly 2-3 months” (Anon 4)

## Going forward...

- **Rationalising collections.** ... the ‘profusion predicament’ in museums.
- **Representativeness:** less anti-vac material.
- **Timing:** some museum curators not sure when audiences will be ready for display on Covid.



## Pandemics Past and Present (Ulster Museum) by Eastside Partnership, 2021



Photos: Eastside Partnership

For more information on the Museums, Crisis and Covid19 Project please go to [www.ulster.ac.uk/museumscovid19](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/museumscovid19)  
 Open Access Article: Communities, Change and the Covid19 Crisis <https://journals.le.ac.uk/ojs1/index.php/mas/article/view/3533>