



CURIOSITY

Building a City of Curiosity - a vision for Hull in the spirit of Sir James Reckitt

The main object of a free library is not only in satisfying a thirst for knowledge, but to create a thirst where it is now absent

– Sir James Reckitt

Born in 1833, Sir James Reckitt remains one of Hull's most famous citizens - a pioneering industrialist, for many years the head of Reckitt and Sons, a philanthropist and city leader, and a powerful advocate for public libraries. He founded the first free public library in the city in 1889. 2024 was the centenary of his death.

He is famously quoted as saying: 'The main object of a free library is not only in satisfying a thirst for knowledge, but to create a thirst where it is now absent'. In the wake of his centenary, we aim to breathe new life into that sentiment by championing a mission to build a culture of curiosity in Hull, to make it a City of Curiosity.

There is a growing understanding that a city cannot be rebuilt, cannot be reimagined, through material things alone. New buildings, improvements to the environment, new jobs are all part of the journey, but it also needs community life, and community institutions to be built afresh, fractured communities to be revived.

Around the world, in societies where many of the building blocks of strong community life have been lost, where common shared spaces have shrunk, where technology has often isolated people or brought them into conflict, where trust in collective action and political processes is low, where people are fearful of change, where the boundaries between truth and falsehood have been blurred, the task of building strong, knowledgeable communities is vital.

The growth of a culture of curiosity is central to this; a defining characteristic of a 'knowledgeable community'. A culture of curiosity exists where people remain

genuinely curious about themselves, where they live and the world about them, are open to new knowledge, willing to listen, tolerant of different perspectives, slow to judge but also capable of discerning truth from misinformation. A culture where people feel empowered to keep asking questions and to assume agency in shaping their collective future. It represents a modern interpretation of James Reckitt's desire to create a thirst for knowledge.

We aspire to enable a movement that sparked into life in 2024 and will last for the next decade and more. We aspire to foster a connected array of initiatives, events and activities, projects and organisations, dedicated to allowing a sustainable culture of curiosity to develop.

We will need curiosity ourselves, and passion and imagination too, to understand how to bring this about. We will need to give local communities themselves the means of developing their own responses to the vision. But Hull is not lacking in passion and imagination, nor in a belief in the power of community, and we are confident that the curiosity is there to be unleashed.

The James Reckitt Library Trust is a leading proponent of this vision and has already provided enabling funding to lay the foundations. Public libraries certainly have an important part to play in achieving it. The public library service in Hull has already made the development of strong, knowledgeable communities its strategic mission, and the Trust will back our public libraries in making its full contribution to the development of a culture of curiosity. But the Trust is not alone.

Already we have established a small group of passionate individuals and organisations who want to be involved in the gestation of this mission. It is open to others to become involved, and to join in the growing activities which nurture curiosity. We are looking for contribution of ideas and energy, not merely resource. We value enthusiasm and commitment and prioritise action over governance. We believe that collective and focussed effort can breathe new life into the city, for the benefit of all.

If you are interested, contact us via Dave Lee, Curiosity Creative Director, at dave@curiosityhull.co.uk. Let your curiosity be your guide.

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