

## Beamish – The Living Museum of the North

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### 1. Introduction

As part of the Economics for Global Business module and the MBA programme overall, we are trying to help students develop a greater appreciation of the need for sustainability and the relationship between social and economic responsibilities, so that in future they are more able to develop and implement sustainable business plans and policies. The visit to Beamish museum aims to help students engage with these issues from an economic perspective.

Beamish is a “working museum” set in 350 acres only 9 miles away from Durham City, in which visitors can get an impression about life in the 1820s, 1900s, 1940s, and most recently the [1950s](#) in the North East of England.



Unlike most museums, Beamish does not usually display objects in glass cases but instead the museum collects historic buildings from across North East England and then displays e.g. furniture, tools and other possessions to illustrate how people lived and worked in the past. Staff and volunteers bring Beamish to life and demonstrate e.g. traditional skills or explain how people would have lived and worked in the past and allow visitors to actively engage and ask questions.

Beamish receives on donations of items and buildings from the public, though it sometimes also uses reconstructions (which are often made in the museum itself). The majority buildings you will see at Beamish are not replicas but original buildings, which were moved – brick by brick – from their original locations where they were often threatened with dereliction, to the museum.



In addition to the buildings, the museum is also famous for its vast collection of mostly original – and working – modes of transport, including horse drawn carriages, electric trams and steam trains.



Beamish museum's charitable objective is "to advance the education of the public by studying, collecting, preserving, interpreting and exhibiting to the public buildings, machinery, objects and information illustrating the development of industry and agriculture and a way of life in the North of England."

In 2020/21 Beamish experienced the most challenging year in its 50 year history. The charity generates about 95% of its income from visitor revenues, so the lock downs due to the Covid infections posed serious risks to the organisation's survival, especially as their Business Interruption insurance indicated that they would not pay out. Luckily, the government and the Arts council provided grants which helped Beamish survive. The charity has since recovered in terms of visitor numbers and in 2022 welcomed 788,602 visitors, which was a 30% improvement compared to 2021 and close to the 800,000 visits they experienced in 2019/20, prior to the Covid pandemic.

These visitor numbers made Beamish the 11<sup>th</sup> most visited paid-for visitor attraction in the UK and the most visited one in North East England.

Beamish is operated by about 448 employees and 500 volunteers.

As part of its social responsibility for its employees, Beamish has been phasing out zero hour contracts, to give their employees more security with regards to work and income, and they are trying to reduce large scale seasonal hiring, for the same reason.

## 2. Required Reading

Please read the following pages on **Beamish's 2024 Annual report**:

- Trustee report (pp. 1-7).
- Financial statements (pp. 20-23, 29-31).

In order to give you a better idea about how Beamish is usually funded, please find below some information on Beamish's account for the year ending January 2024. In this year Beamish Museum received £16.017 million in form of income and endowments and had an expenditure of £17.567 million.

Income and Endowments		Expenditure	
Donations and legacies <sup>1</sup>	£1.203M	Raising funds (Finished goods and consumables)	£2.175M
Admissions income	£8.074M	Trading	£2.626M
Sale of Guidebooks	£0.009M	Fundraising	£0.095M
Other income	£0.465M	Operation of the Museum <sup>2</sup>	£11.080M
Retail and catering income	£6.149		
<b>Total</b>	<b>£13.244M</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>£17.567M</b>

Data from before the Covid pandemic suggest that in 2017/18 Beamish was visited by over 760,000 visitors with about half of them coming from lower income groups and half of the visitors being tourists from outside the North East of England. About 75% of the visitors from outside the region stayed overnight, with most also visiting other attractions in the area.

By 2023/24 the visitor numbers had increased to 801,000 visitors.

In 2025 Beamish won the prestigious UK Art Fund museum of the year award:

Khomami, N. (2025) '**Joyous, immersive' Beamish wins Art Fund museum of the year award**, *The Guardian*, 26/06/2025

Judges praise County Durham attraction's 'remarkable attention to detail' in bringing history to life.

Beamish, the Living Museum of the North, has won the prestigious Art Fund museum of the year award, the largest such prize in the world. Awarding it the £120,000 prize, judges called Beamish a "joyous, immersive and unique place shaped by the stories and experiences of its community".

The open-air museum in County Durham, which is celebrating its 55th anniversary, brings north-east England's Georgian, Edwardian, 1940s and 1950s history to life through immersive exhibits. Visitors engage with costumed staff and volunteers and experience regional stories of everyday life. The museum has a longstanding commitment to preserving local heritage.

The prize was presented on Thursday night to Rhiannon Hiles, the chief executive of Beamish, by the comedian Phil Wang, a judge for the awards, at a ceremony at the Museum of Liverpool. "Beamish is a worthy winner of this year's award," Wang said. "Our visit was one of the most fun days I've had in years. An unbelievable level of commitment from staff, and a jaw-dropping amount of detail ran through everything. They had to drag me kicking and screaming out of there!"

Jenny Waldman, the Art Fund director and chair of the judges, called the museum "a jewel in the crown of the north-east" and said the judges were "blown away by the remarkable attention to detail of its exhibits across a 350-acre site and by the passion of its staff and volunteers". She added: "With three-quarters of adults in the north-east of England saying museums make them proud of where they live, Beamish is a shining example of how museums enrich and celebrate local communities."

In 2024, Beamish welcomed more than 838,630 visitors and remains the region's most visited attraction. It recently completed its Remaking Beamish project, which included the recreation of a 1950s town developed with community input. The project involved more than 32,000 community members, 14,338 schoolchildren, and 35,000 volunteer hours to create 31 new exhibits. The aged-miners' homes also opened in the past year, telling the story of the pioneering welfare provision for retired miners in County Durham.

The museum has been commended for its exceptional visitor experience, receiving the travellers' choice award and the national visitor welcome award at the 2024 Museums + Heritage awards. It provides innovative educational programming for 40,000 schoolchildren annually.

The Horrible Histories author Terry Deary recently said he was a huge fan of Beamish. Back in the 1980s when he was working as an actor, Deary said he would take schoolchildren there and perform educational theatre to teach them "what war was about" – including stories of bewildered soldiers returning home, and deserters.

<sup>1</sup> Government agencies £0.445M, Local Authorities £0.183M, Individual Donations £0.138M, Remaking Beamish (Other Donations) £0.437M.

<sup>2</sup> Of this staff costs account for £6.451M. Staff costs for Trading were £2.000M and for Fundraising were £0.095M).



Beamish was one of five finalists. The other shortlisted museums were Chapter (Cardiff), Compton Verney (Warwickshire), Golden Thread Gallery (Belfast), Perth Museum (Perth & Kinross), which will each receive £15,000. The museums were commended for their deep connection with their local communities and areas. The culture secretary, Lisa Nandy, said the award recognised “the extraordinary contribution that Beamish has made to celebrate the heritage of the north-east and to showcase this to the world through thousands of visitors every year”.

### 3. Beamish Price Policies

#### - Beamish Unlimited Pass Prices

Pay once and visit for a whole year FREE of charge, including daytime events. Unlimited Tickets are not valid for Evening Events.

Adult	£33.00	Family (1 Adult + 2 Children)	£71.00
Senior (60 years) / Student	£25.00	Family (2 Adults + 2 Children)	£82.00
Child (5 – 16 years)	£20.00	Family (2 Adults + 3 Child)	£92.00

The website of a local bus company advertises that museum offers visitors arriving by public transport a 25% discount on their entry ticket (see: <https://www.gonortheast.co.uk/beamish/>).

#### - Friends of Beamish Membership Prices

Join the Friends of Beamish and you will get a fantastic package of FREE entry (including daytime events), guidebook and quarterly magazine, plus great discounts and exclusive offers.

Adult	£43.00	Family (1 Adult + 2 Children)	£65.
Senior Citizen Individual / Student	£35.00	Family (2 Adults + 1 Child)	£81.00
Senior Citizen Partners	£57.00	Family (2 Adults + 2 Children)	£92.00
Child (5 – 16 years)	£30.00	Family (2 Adults + 3 Children)	£102.00

#### - Educational Admission Rates (for one admission only)

Students - £7.50 (full-time)

#### Home Sweet Home Onsite Learning Activity (2023)

Onsite activity, £35 per session (admission costs apply)

Children **will be welcomed into Pit Cottage No. 5 on Francis Street in The 1900s Pit Village where they will have the opportunity to handle up to 30 artefacts that tell the story of life in the cottage.**

After a sit down and a chat to set the scene, pupils will have the opportunity to do real jobs in a real house. They will work in groups to do various domestic chores including cleaning, tidying, washing the clothes and beating rugs. The session will end with a discussion about how these compare to modern domestic tasks.

This activity will enable children to:

Gain a better understanding of the domestic life of a miner’s family in the early 1900s.

Explore the differences and similarities between home life then (the early 1900s) and now.

**Target Age:** Key Stage 1

**Activity Cost:** £35 per session (admission costs apply)

**Duration:** 45 minutes

**Group size:** Half class

**Season:** All year round

We can also offer a [Home Sweet Home](#) as a remote learning activity for those schools who cannot make it to the museum.

### 4. The Beamish site visit

As part of the Economics for Global Business module we will visit the museum (**Saturday, the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2025**), in order to:

- explore the practical application of key economic concepts and theories.
- explore the socio-economic setting of North East England, which will be your home for the next year. This will provide you with a much better understanding of local people’s social, economic and cultural history and hence should help your integration into the local community.

- explore the effect of limited access to banking and social security or insurance on people's lives and economic development. This is a problem that still affects many developing and emerging economies, in particular those which high levels of inflation, but is also an issue for marginalised groups in advanced countries.
- consider how the museum applies relevant economic concepts in its ticket and activity pricing policies. In this, the museum needs to balance its economic responsibility to ensure the financial sustainability of the museum and its charitable objective in relation to its educational objectives.
- develop a better appreciation of the potential contribution of the charitable sector for economic and social development. In this context you will have the opportunity to consider a range of relevant economic issues:
  - \* The potential impact of charities and cultural organisations, such as Beamish, on regional economic growth, both
    - ~ directly as employers and investors in people, as well as investors in buildings or infrastructure, and
    - ~ indirectly, e.g. via spill-over effects for the [local tourism](#) or catering sector. In this context, think about the rationale for and the potential impact of new investments into self-catering cottages on site which will allow visitors to stay on site overnight.
  - \* Managers in Beamish need to manage both paid employees and volunteers (and, at times, third party contractors). What challenges and opportunities are managers of Beamish likely to face by relying on both paid employees and volunteers? Consider how the museum benefits from the skills of its volunteers and how the training and work experience it provides might help volunteers in their future careers (incl. outside of Beamish).
  - \* How Beamish contributes to [environmental sustainability](#) and how it tries to balance or combine environmental sustainability and financial sustainability.
  - \* Which of Beamish's activities are recorded in the official GDP (gross domestic product) figures, which aim to measure the level of economic activity in North East England and the UK? What does this imply about the difficulties of measuring the level of economic activity and about the use of GDP to compare welfare, wellbeing or economic development between regions or countries or over time?
  - \* As part of the link between economic and social responsibility, consider e.g. the impact of "dementia friendliness" on the operation, social contribution, and financial position (both in terms of costs and benefits) of Beamish. Consider how support for people suffering from dementia<sup>3</sup> and those facing [mental health struggles](#) fit with the museum's overall aims and objectives.

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<sup>3</sup> Dementia is a group of related symptoms which are related to decreasing brain function, which can be due to a variety of reasons (such as Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia), and which are manifested by problems such as progressive memory loss, reduced thinking speed, increasing difficulties communicating, planning activities and making decisions. Dementia sufferers often also suffer from a low mood and become apathetic, and might have problems controlling their emotions (e.g. they might more easily get confused, frightened or angry and might have frequent and abrupt mood changes). While most dementia sufferers tend to be older, it can also affect some young people.

Dementia sufferers often find that their short-term memory is impaired, while their long-term memory works much better. For this reason they often find it easier to connect with sights and sounds from their childhood and adolescence, than with events which happen currently.