

## Reuse, Refill, Rethink

**New display to open at London's Museum of Brands  
15 November 2023 – 15 May 2024**

A new display that uses the past as a guide for informing the future of sustainability in packaging is to go on show at the Museum of Brands. Reuse, Refill, Rethink will open on 15 November, running until 15 May 2024.

The display will showcase a variety of products and demonstrate the difference between refillable, returnable (prefill) and repurposed product packaging of the past, present, and future. It will explore how current developments in packaging have historical significance and how we might learn from the past when envisioning new models of reuse for the future.

Recycling has become the norm for addressing our problem with plastic waste, but recycling is often challenging and encourages a throwaway culture. Currently, less than half of our plastic packaging waste is successfully recycled. Reuse is (re-) emerging as an alternative, to help us transition to a circular economy. Reuse can save resources, reduce litter, reduce waste, and if containers are used enough times, save water, carbon and energy. However, this requires significant buy-in from users, including consumers, commercial organisations, and national policymakers. To achieve real benefits, the product must stay in circulation and be used for the same purpose. Research by the 'Many Happy Returns' team at the University of Sheffield shows that an item like a reusable plastic coffee cup needs to be used approximately 9 times to have a lower carbon footprint than the single-use alternative.

The key focus of the display includes:

- Change in crisis - examples from wartime Britain which are being resurrected, including the return of empty jars.
- Returnable milk bottles, dating back to the 1960s, plus later alternatives including sachet milk, Jugit and plastic bottles.
- Dizzie reusable packaging, which allows retailers and brands to introduce returnable packaging to their range.

The Museum of Brands is delighted to be working with the University of Sheffield Grantham Centre for Sustainable Future's 'Many Happy Returns' project. This is a £1 million research project, funded by UK Research and Innovation through the Smart Sustainable Plastics Packaging Challenge as part of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund. The multidisciplinary team has examined consumer reactions to reusable packaging

in store and in the home, the role of language in encouraging reuse, the technical and scientific basis for making reusable packaging mainstream, and has worked closely with manufacturers, designers, brand owners, retailers, and policymakers to reduce the environmental impact of single-use plastic packaging.

Alice Kain, Museum of Brands Curator says: *Using the museum's collection of packaging we have identified many examples of how containers have been reused in the past. Historic labelling informed the consumer what to do with it- for example that a container had a deposit, or that they should save cardboard, or return a bottle to the milkman. With this project we have been able to chart the changes in this messaging and the packaging materials themselves. We hope by using this information we can look at how systems of packaging are being developed today for a more sustainable future using models of reuse.*

Sarah Greenwood, Packaging Technology Expert/Leader at the University of Sheffield and co-lead of Many Happy Returns says: *Reusable packaging has enormous potential to help solve the single-use plastic problem and the climate crisis. If a container is used 20 times, the raw materials used and waste created will be just 5% of what they would have been if it was used only once. Encouraging people to return containers for reuse, e.g., with a cash deposit, gives those containers a value and they are less likely to end up as litter.*

*We are delighted to be working with the Museum of Brands on this collaboration and hope that it will stimulate interest in reusable packaging.*

Rorie Beswick-Parsons, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Sheffield says: *The growing interest in reusable packaging and the move towards a circular economy often overlooks that it has a significant history, but one that is not fully understood or accounted for. As such, in addition to the display we are also planning several workshops where we will aim to record participants past experiences and memories of reusable packaging. We hope that by using reusable objects in the workshops, we will uncover recollections and stories from those who can remember when reuse was commonplace.*

The Museum of Brands is open from 10:00 to 18:00 Monday to Saturday and 11:00 to 17:00 on Sundays and Bank Holidays. The Museum is located a short walk from Ladbroke Grove tube station at 111-117 Lancaster Road, W11 1QT. [www.museumofbrands.com](http://www.museumofbrands.com)

Contact: email [info@museumofbrands.com](mailto:info@museumofbrands.com) or telephone 020 7243 9611.

For press images click here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/zceb22c0b1cfdcm1yqcsb/h?rlkey=1sowflnjuhzgydzt1b0qxy48&dl=0>

**For media enquiries please contact Pandora George at Bullet PR**

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### **About the Museum of Brands**

The Museum of Brands was established in 1984 by consumer historian Robert Opie. It offers an emotional and nostalgic connection to British lifestyle and culture through the Time Tunnel, temporary displays, activities and talks. Starting in the Victorian era, it spans decade by decade over 200 years of British consumer culture, showcasing historic and

contemporary household packaging, toys, magazines, wartime ephemera, technology, travel, fashion and royal souvenirs, offering visitors a chance to discover changing design, branding and packaging trends.

The Museum is an independent educational charity that has an outstanding learning department which reaches 10,000+ individuals each year, offering interactive workshops, activities, and resources for learners of all ages. The Museum delivers external events, consisting of over 150 hires per year for a range of companies, from household brands to leading national charities. It hosts between 10 and 15 professional development talks per year from well-established speakers within the marketing and advertising industry. Living Brands is a three-year multi-sensory outreach programme for people living with dementia and their carers and families designed to encourage reminiscing through creative activities and narratives. The programme is generously funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, Linbury Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation and City Bridge Trust. The Museum of Brands is funded by income generated through admissions, retail, learning, venue hire, charitable grants and donations. Registered Charity No. 1093538  
[www.museumofbrands.com](http://www.museumofbrands.com)

### **About Many Happy Returns**

Many Happy Returns was a £1 million research project, funded by UK Research and Innovation through the Smart Sustainable Plastics Packaging Challenge, part of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund. The project aimed to enable reusable packaging systems that have the potential to reduce the environmental impact of single-use plastic packaging by keeping packaging material in circulation for as long as possible.

Working in partnership with packaging manufacturers and designers, brand owners, retailers and policy makers, the multidisciplinary team: (i) looked at the language that people use to describe different types of plastic and actions associated with their reuse and disposal, (ii) examined historical and contemporary models of reuse (for example, beer, mineral water and soft-drink beverages, and supermarket refill stations), (iii) identified what people might be willing to reuse, when, and why, (iv) assessed the environmental impacts of a range of different reuse models in a range of different contexts, and (v) investigated the suitability of current and emerging plastics for reuse.

More details - Many Happy Returns [website](#) and video links ([short](#) and [extended](#)).