

BACK ON TRACK — FACING TWIN CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

A joint [Rural Museums Network \(RMN\)](#) and [International Association of Agricultural Museums \(AIMA\)](#) sharing event.

In 2021, the [Museum of English Rural Life](#) (The MERL) at the University of Reading, UK, hosted the AIMA Congress, [AIMA 2021](#). At that time, owing to Covid-19 restrictions, Congress was online. Now that it is safe to travel once more, The MERL is welcoming both AIMA and UK-based RMN members to see the Museum, and to hear about recent developments addressing environment sustainability, colonialism, and reinterpreting our collections to include more diverse rural and urban communities. We shall also welcome other UK speakers from the RMN and there will be opportunities for international networking.

The meeting takes place from 9 to 11 May 2025. There are no delegate charges and we can advise on local hotels. The cheapest and closest hotel to the Museum is [Sure Hotel by Best Western Reading](#). For other options please see the links available in [this brochure](#). As visitors to the University of Reading you would be entitled to a discount.

Reading is on the London underground system now and only 30 minutes away via train.

OUTLINE PROGRAMME

Friday 9 May – Afternoon/Evening

Arrivals, drinks at The MERL, and dinner at suggested local restaurants

Saturday 10 May – Morning

1. Guided tours around current displays at The MERL
2. Presentation on the *Our Country Lives* redevelopment project as a whole
3. New themes and how we aim to introduce them over the coming years

Saturday 10 May – Afternoon

4. Introduction to community engagement theme
5. Lisa Harris, Collection and Interpretation Manager, The Food Museum – *Rethinking the Rural Life Museum: Rebranding, Collections Audit and What comes next?*
6. Phillippa Heath, Head of Learning and Engagement, The MERL – *"Nothing about us, without us": How our understanding of rural collections at The MERL has been deepened through consultation, connection, and collaboration with communities*

Saturday 10 May – Evening

A list of local restaurants will be provided to delegates.

Sunday 11 May – Morning

7. Introduction to the sustainability theme
8. Adrian Fitzpatrick, Sustainability Manager National Museums NI – *details to be confirmed*
9. Introduction to The MERL's Garden redevelopment, Edible Gallery project
10. Themed presentation from AIMA speaker and presentations from the floor on sustainability theme – *details to be confirmed*

Sunday 11 May – Afternoon

11. Accompanied visit to Museums in Oxford

If you would like to give a 5 minute presentation on your museum's work on sustainability, please contact us at [MERL Events](#).

