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Title: Kelvingrove's New Natural Science Displays - Ten Years in the Planning

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Source: Sutcliffe, R. (2006). Kelvingrove's New Natural Science Displays - Ten Years in the Planning. *NatSCA News, Issue 9*, 32 - 35.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/251>

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Culture and Leisure Services (Museums), Glasgow City Council
Kelvingrove's new natural science displays - ten years in the planning**

Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow will re-open in July 2006 after a complete refurbishment of both the building and its contents. The approach of the displays is multi-disciplinary, with particular attention to accessibility - both intellectual and physical. The long and often hard path from conception to final delivery will be described.

Introduction

The original Kelvingrove Museum opened in the former Kelvingrove House in Kelvingrove Park in 1872. An extension was added in 1876, but even so it soon became too small for its purpose and it was decided to build a much larger building to accommodate the city's growing collections. The building was mainly funded by the proceeds from the International Exhibition held in Kelvingrove Park in 1888. The current building opened to the public as part of the 1901 International Exhibition on 2 May 1901. It officially opened as the Art Gallery & Museum on 25 October 1902.



Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow

By the 1990s, Kelvingrove's facilities were no longer up to required standards and it was starting to look its age. Areas had to be cleared of exhibits to protect them from damp and poor ventilation. The electrics were of particular concern, as the circuits were becoming overloaded with all the electrical equipment now required in a modern museum. The decision was made to fully refurbish and re-display the entire building. Kelvingrove closed to the public on 29 June 2003.

Planning

The planning had started back in 1996. From the start it was agreed that all non-original features of the building, such as temporary walls, offices in galleries, etc would be stripped out of the building, so that the architecture of the building could be seen to advantage.

A considerable amount of audience research was undertaken. Visitors and non-visitors alike were consulted. Demographic surveys were carried out and focus groups and advisory panels were set up, including an Education Panel and a Junior Board. Story titles were evaluated and different styles of labels and computer interactives were tried out at Kelvingrove and other museum venues.

Initial funding was obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to do prototypes of two stories (Italian Renaissance Art and St Kilda) in 1999/2000. These addressed issues relating to modular systems, conservation, IT, text, etc and were fully evaluated by both staff and selected visitors. Scottish Natural Heritage were closely involved at the planning stages, and awarded a large grant towards many of the natural history displays, which were relevant to Scotland. In total the cost of the renewal of Kelvingrove was £27.9 million. The aim was to create modern facilities, services and displays while ensuring the restored building itself can be seen to its best effect and enjoyed by all visitors.

Key changes in the internal layout to Kelvingrove include a new temporary exhibition space, a conference and lecture theatre, education rooms, a restaurant, and shops, as well as new lifts, staircases, toilets etc. There will also be the Campbell Hunter Education Wing, which is due to open in 2007.

The Building

Before work on the building could begin, everything had to be de-installed, packed and transported from Kelvingrove to new purpose-built stores at the Glasgow Museums Resource Centre (GMRC). The only objects to stay were a single piece of sculpture; the Egyptian granite sarcophagus of PaBaSa and Sir Roger the Asian elephant, which were all too heavy to move. They remained (carefully protected) in the building.

Meanwhile, on site at Kelvingrove the building was gutted – new areas were excavated under previous floor levels to form a new lecture theatre and kitchens. The basement was re-developed to create an exhibition space, restaurant, education rooms, shop and offices. Two new glazed conservatories were added to form extensions to the new restaurant and education facilities. New lifts, stairways and extra toilets were installed. Recent office additions and partitions in public areas were removed and the stonework was cleaned. The whole building was re-wired and repainted. By late 2005 the building works were completed and the task began of installing the new displays.

The Displays

There are approximately 100 stories and about a quarter of them contain natural history objects. The building is divided into two main themes: Expressive Arts (in the east side of building) mainly covering art and related objects, but with a few natural history specimens; and People and the Environment (in the west side of building). As well as four galleries devoted almost entirely to natural history this part includes a Cultural Survival gallery, a Conflict gallery, including arms and armour and the Holocaust, Early Settlers, with Scottish archaeology, and Glasgow Stories, from sectarianism to James Watt.

A multi-disciplinary approach has been employed where possible, with a few natural history objects turning up in very unexpected places.

A few examples of stories from the **Life Gallery** give a feeling of the displays:

Sir Roger the Asian elephant is the first animal you meet as you enter the Life gallery. He lived at the Scottish Zoo in Glasgow in the late 1890s, but in 1900 he had to be shot after he developed musth and became violent. A baby elephant, called Kelvin, is displayed beside him. Visitors will be able to work out how much he weighs in an interactive.

The most obvious exhibits here form the **Nature's Record Breakers** display. These are basically a Guinness Book of Records and contain a wide variety of objects.

The skeleton of the **Baron of Buchlyvie** – a Clydesdale horse - was another record breaker – having been sold for a record amount of money back in 1911. This multi-disciplinary exhibit includes a silver statuette of the horse, medallions and some of his horseshoes.

The museum ran a poetry competition and the winning poem '**Flying is like ...**' is based on specimens of insects, birds and other flying creatures in the museum. Some of these are in a case, but the birds are suspended high up in the gallery, flying alongside the Spitfire.

There are also some geological stories in this gallery. **Understanding a Landscape** looks at the rock types and the geological processes that have determined the present day landscape of the lower Clyde. The display is centred on an oil painting by John Knox showing a view looking down the Clyde – *The First Steamboat on the Clyde* (about 1820). Lights and images will be projected onto the painting to tell the story.

Mineral Beauty features some attractive minerals from the collection, together with associated jewellery. There is also a display of fluorescent minerals.

Our Solar System is about Fulton's Orrery, reputed to be one of the best examples ever made, dating from the 1830s. Several meteorites are also displayed.

The Creatures of the Past gallery contains stories about:

Age of Fish

Fossil Reptiles from Elgin

Fossils under your Feet

Tracks, Trails and Dinosaur Tales

Scotland's Lost Wildlife

Wildlife in Danger.

Hunting

Scotland's Wildlife gallery contains stories about:

Aliens
 Birds from your Window
 Camouflage
 Famous Scottish Wildlife
 Life in Scottish Lochs
 Wild about Glasgow
 A Fish's Tale

The other area devoted to natural history is the **Environmental Discovery Centre**. This is an area where school groups can have hands on experience of natural history, but which is also open to other visitors when classes are not booked in. The space is all about biodiversity, including sections on key features of plants, invertebrates and vertebrates; variety in shells, seeds and gulls; and woodlands and seashore habitats and food chains. It also has an observation beehive.

Other stories feature major natural history elements - **St Kilda: Living with the Land**, with Soay sheep, St Kilda Field Mouse and sea birds; **The Last Pearl Fishers in Scotland** examines the Freshwater Pearl Mussel, *Margaritifera margaritifera* and related species. **Animal speak** is aimed at young children and explains how animals communicate. **Animal Armoury** has some amazing juxtapositions between armour and animals – such as gauntlets and Armadillos.

An Object Cinema – **Arctic Lives**, which looks at the way of life of the Inuits, also includes several Arctic animals. There is also an area called the **Mini Museum**, especially for pre-5s. This includes a number of zoological specimens relating to feet and faces.

If visitors want to know more about some of the stories, or individual objects, they are directed to the **Study Centre**. This area has a large number of extra specimens on display, but with minimal interpretation, representing some of the vast number of objects in storage. Here visitors can consult books or speak directly to knowledgeable staff. They can also access the museum's Public Access System, which has more detailed information about many of the objects on display within the museum.

Throughout Kelvingrove, the emphasis has been on accessibility. There are more interactives and lots of objects are on open display – some of which can be touched.

Generally there is also much more information than previously available, despite the fact that curators were limited to only 30 word labels and 100 words for text panels. Many of the labels are 'investigatives' and pose questions – encouraging visitors to look more closely at the objects to discover the answers.

All the text was initially written by curators or research assistants and then edited in consultation with an Education and Access curator, Research Manager and the museum's Managing Editor.

Problems

It is inevitable that with such a large project there have been a few problems.

- First of all too much was happening at the same time – decanting the entire building, opening GMRC, re-structuring the Museum Service at the same time - and then starting to work on the new Riverside Museum part way through!
- It was decided to change designers several months into the design phase of the project, which in effect lost about 9 months off the schedule.
- Costs of cases meant that some original designs were reduced in scale, or meant that some specimens had to be put on open display
- Staff changes caused all sorts of problems and one story (A Fish's Tale) had 4 different curators working on it at different times!
- There was a general lack of understanding of 'natural history issues', as the designers regarded many of the objects like art objects and didn't want to have specimens in context, sitting in their habitats. Indeed, with the exception of a couple of small examples, there are no dioramas in the displays, despite the wishes of curators.
- There was difficulty obtaining some key specimens such as a Ruddy Duck for Aliens and Hares and Ptarmigan for the summer winter diorama. A few objects had to be dropped because they couldn't be sourced.

- There was a general consensus that there are not enough labels in the displays. This is partly because standard size labels take up too much space. Some objects are fully labelled; others are not.

Despite these problems, most of the displays look really good. All the new displays will be evaluated and there will be changes made to any displays, which are not working, or could work better.

Kelvingrove Museum re-opens 11 July 2006. A new Museum for a new Millennium

For up to date information, see www.glasgowmuseums.com

Paul Richards, Curator of Natural History, Sheffield Galleries & Museums Trust
Street safari: The next generation

The refurbished Weston Park Museum in Sheffield opens in 2006. A key element of the What on Earth! gallery will be the process of field natural history itself. It will provide tools for observation, identification and active involvement in the recording process. Street safari is an HLF funded project to take these concepts out of the museum into a North Sheffield community. It aims to link people, via the museum with experts from the local natural history society, develop skills and provide equipment for the ongoing recording of the area. It is increasing awareness of the value of natural history and presenting opportunities to get directly involved in the scientific process. Street safari has so far proved very effective in not only cascading these skills down to the next generation of naturalists, but has provided significant new biological records for a very under-recorded area of the city.

Weston Park Museum

: The city museum has been closed for 3 years, but later this year we will be opening the newly re-furbished Weston Park Museum in Sheffield. This £17m project has largely been funded by £12.1m of HLF money. As part of this process we have had to pack up and move our entire collections, build a new store and totally gut the existing City museum. We return, bigger and better than before with a new natural science gallery called 'What On Earth!' and for the first time a dedicated display about our unique weather station.

When designing the gallery, with the appropriate acronym, WoE, we unsurprisingly began as any of you would with a very similar brief to the strap-line of this conference, "To promote the understanding of natural science and create an increased awareness and fascination of the natural world".

We all try to be unique in our response to this challenge, but that pretty much sums up the foundation of our aims.

The new gallery is divided into 5 main theme areas with the last being Nature Lab:

- Close to home
- Ancient lands
- Weird & wonderful
- The Power of nature
- Nature lab



This has a different style to the rest of the gallery and is the main 'hands-on' bit. In here we look at the process of how to be a field naturalist, through areas called Watch, Identify and Take part.

The first two are self-explanatory.

- *Watch* has binoculars, ID charts, live bees and ants, encouraging visitors to observe the world around them.

There is also a video conferencing area which will allow us make live links to other organisations, field activities or talks such as those presented at the Darwin centre where people in Sheffield can directly interrogate speakers beyond the city.