The motivation for creating the Museum of Scotland, and the educational effectiveness of its history content for the visiting public

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The Director of National Museums Scotland, Dr Gordon Rintoul, kindly allowed access to many unpublished documents in the NMS archive, and members of his staff helped to trace and retrieve them from the bowels of the earth, where they had to be temporarily stored during the rebuilding of the Royal Museum.

The staff of the National Library of Scotland, and Edinburgh Central Library were unfailingly courteous and helpful, as were the staff of Edinburgh University Library, and of NMS Library, despite both being plagued by rebuilding work, which, for NMS Library in particular, required the mining of levels of whose existence I had not been aware!

Professor Lynch kindly drew to my attention the existence of his complete set of the papers of the Exhibition Review Committee, in 'Special Collections' in the University Library. This was a rich seam of information on how the displays in the Museum of Scotland were created, which has not been published, is not in the NMS archive, and probably exists nowhere else, unless other members of that Committee have retained their own sets.

I am grateful to many members of staff of NMS, at all levels, for their patience and courtesy in responding to my endless questions and requests for sight of unpublished documents. It is really invidious to mention particular names, but I feel I should record my special thanks to, in alphabetical order, Stuart Allan, Stephen Allen, Willie Anthony, David Caldwell, David Clarke, George Dalgleish, Hannah Dolby, Alison Dow, David Forsyth, Jenni Fuchs, Catherine Holden, and Geoff SwInney. Jenni Fuchs, Visitor Studies Officer, gave access not only to unpublished evaluations, but also to samples of questionnaires that I could adapt for my own survey. I owe a great debt of thanks to those volunteer guides who undertook interviews for that survey, to Elizabeth Scott for her guides' CD-ROM and her photographs, and to Teresa Gourlay for material on guide training.

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However, the use I have made of these documents and discussions, and all opinions, and errors of commission or omission are my sole responsibility, and do not in any way imply the approval of the management of NMS or of any of the other organisations mentioned.

Abbreviations

ASVA	Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions
DCMS	Department of Culture, Media and Sport
DNH	Department of National Heritage
GEM	Group for Education in Museums
GLOs	Generic Learning Outcomes
GMS	Glasgow Museums Service
IWM	Imperial War Museum
MAB	Museums Advisory Board
MGC	Museums and Galleries Commission
MGS	Museum and Galleries Scotland
MLA	Museums, Libraries and Archives (Council)
MoS	Museum of Scotland
NGS	National Galleries of Scotland
NMAS	National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland
NMGM	National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside
NMS	National Museums Scotland
NTS	National Trust for Scotland
RM Project	Royal Museum Project
RSM	Royal Scottish Museum
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SUSM	Scottish United Services Museum
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum
VSG	Visitor Studies Group

Disclaimer/declaration

I was a member of the Museums Advisory Board, a Trustee of the National Museums of Scotland, and a member of the Exhibition Review Committee. So I started this research with some (unpaid), semi-insider, background knowledge. My being personally known to several curators, as a former Trustee, had the advantage that they probably spoke more freely to me than to strangers. Similarly, other staff may have been more willing to trace documents in the NMS archive for a former Trustee, and give access to unpublished working material.

However, at the time of writing, it is more than fourteen years since I ceased to be a Trustee, and nearly twelve since the Museum of Scotland opened. So the passage of time should have lessened any possible personal prejudice in favour of displays which, after all, were devised by professional curators, and not by me. Moreover, my long service as a volunteer guide has put me in direct touch with external views – the visiting public's reaction, as consumers. I have made a conscious effort to avoid personal opinions, and to rely on the content of published and unpublished material, and on the views of others who have written or spoken to me, or taken part in my visitor survey. No one can be completely objective, but I have done my best, and have not refrained from criticism, with the benefit of hindsight.

I was also Honorary Secretary of the Intellectual Access Trust – the charity that commissioned *Access in Mind,* one of the publications referred to in this dissertation. However it was researched and written entirely by the Project Officer, so I have no personal responsibility for its content.

This dissertation has been composed by me, is my own work, and has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification.
R. D. Cramond

Abstract

My aim was to investigate the motivation for creating the Museum of Scotland, and the educational effectiveness of its history content for the visiting public,.

Part One examines the creation and purpose of the Museum of Scotland. What was its origin? Why have a Museum of Scotland at all? What was the motivation of the Trustees and staff who campaigned and raised funds for it, and created the displays? (This Part draws mostly on primary sources such as unpublished Trustee, Advisory Board, and Committee reports, minutes and papers, letters; and Hansard).

Part Two summarises the views of academic authorities and museum practitioners on the role of museums in education and learning. Their writings parallel the change in thinking in NMS, described in Part One, from primarily just collection and conservation of objects, to a vision of displaying to the public the 'Wealth' of historical and cultural heritage that had been collected. (This Part is almost entirely based on secondary sources – published books and articles).

Part Three analyses how far the displays, as actually mounted, embody the vision of the creators. What do visitors get from the labels, interpretation, audio guides, guided tours, and interactives? (This is based partly on personal observation of the displays, influenced by published authorities on display techniques, partly on personal discussions with several curators, and partly on access to an important, unpublished primary source – the minutes and papers of the Exhibition Review Committee which monitored the creation of the displays).

Part Four discusses attempts to evaluate visitor reaction. This Part analyses reports on unpublished visitor surveys of 'Special Exhibitions' by the National Museums of Scotland, Glasgow Museums Service, Merseyside Museums and Galleries, and the Imperial War Museum (North). It also contains a completely new visitor survey of the Museum of Scotland displays, geared specifically to Generic Learning Outcomes. It was organised and undertaken by this researcher, with help from several NMS volunteer guides, who conducted some of the interviews. It was supplemented by discussions with visitors in 'mini groups' and by feedback from two history teachers about visits by their students.

The overall conclusion is that visitors did indeed learn from good, object-based displays, but many visitors, even native Scots, had disappointingly little understanding of Scottish history before their visit.

Introduction

Aim and shape of the Research

Aim

To investigate the motivation for the creation of the Museum of Scotland and the educational effectiveness of its history content for the visiting public.

Intentions

To explore whether the object-based displays in the Museum of Scotland (MoS) give visitors a better understanding of the historical background to these objects? What do visitors get from the objects themselves, the labels, audio guides, guided tours and interactives? How helpful is the interpretation? Can an object-based museum complement learning from history textbooks, or even inspire visitors to seek further historical information? (A "display" can be either a group of small objects, in a display case, or a large, freestanding object such as a Pictish stone. Both will have an explanatory label).

Method

There are four Parts.

First, what was the thinking behind the creation of the Museum of Scotland (MoS), the single most important national history museum in Scotland or even in Britain. (The justification for this claim is in Appendix One). How did it come about? Why have a Museum of Scotland at all? What were the aims of the Trustees and staff who campaigned and raised funds for it?

Jordanova claims that museums are increasingly important 'for those who want to understand attitudes to the past'. But they have 'significant silences; their processes of selection, management, budgeting and interpretation are rarely accessible to the public'.[1] I want to get behind Jordanova's 'significant silences'.

So **Part One** recounts the long, suspicion-ridden history of how two quite separate institutions, with different origins and motivations, were eventually pulled together, reluctantly, to form the National Museums of Scotland (NMS) in 1985. Its Trustees and

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[1] Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London, 2nd Edition, 2006). 127-9

staff then formed the vision of a Scottish history museum, which would be more than storage space for collections of objects, and lobbied for what is now the MoS. What motivated them? What was their vision? Researching this history explains why the museum came to take the form it does, by discussing the influence of the architects' building design on the structure of the curatorial displays. Was it to be just a storage shed, or a building of outstanding merit in its own right, worthy to house outstanding objects?

Part Two then discusses how the change from a drive for more storage space, to a 'Let's show the public what we've got' ethos, was paralleled and supported by a contemporaneous change of view by academic authorities and museum professionals. Both the creators of the MoS, and independent thinkers and writers, were wanting a museum which reached out to the visiting public, with educational and outward looking, not inward looking, displays.

Part Three offers a critique of how far the displays, as actually mounted, embodied the vision of the commentators and creators. How did labels, interpretation and other means, put across learning messages? How successful were these methods, given that object-based displays face obvious difficulties in presenting aspects of history, such as the Enlightenment, which have few objects?

Finally, **Part Four** evaluates visitors' reaction. How much do they learn about Scottish history by visiting the National Museum of Scotland? **How successful are the displays in promoting public interest in education and life-long learning in Scottish history, and inspiring visitors to find out more? That is the fundamental aim of this research, and arguably the justification for the creation of the Museum**.

So this quadripartite method treats, successively, the **vision** of the creators, the **thinking** of the commentators, the **content** of the displays, and the **reaction** of visitors.

Outcome
The **Overall Conclusions** are set out on pp.159-161.

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PART ONE – The creation and purpose of the Museum of Scotland

In *The Making of the Museum of Scotland,* Professor McKean wrote that 'The Museum of Scotland, its displays and its architecture, will soon be taken for granted, as though it had always been there'. [2] In fact it did not exist until the Queen opened it on St. Andrew's Day, 1998, after many years of lobbying, disputes, long-drawn-out negotiations and fund raising. The very concept of such a museum had to be argued for and justified. However, McKean was right: MoS has become an accepted major attraction. In the financial year 2009/10, (while the Royal Museum (RM) was closed), it welcomed a total of 599,820 Scottish, UK, and international visitors. [3]

Until 1985, the national museum institutions in Scotland were two entirely separate bodies – the Royal Scottish Museum (RSM) in Chambers Street, Edinburgh, run directly by the then Scottish Education Department, and the National Museum of Antiquities for Scotland (NMAS), in Queen Street, run by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, but funded by government.

David Steuart Erskine, 11th Earl of Buchan, founded NMAS as the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1781. John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute, was the first President of the Society. (His descendant, the 6th Earl of Bute, led the pressure for the MoS that was eventually opened in 1998).   After the Antiquaries' Museum had for about 100 years been based in a succession of shared premises, John Ritchie Findlay, the proprietor of *The Scotsman,* gifted the Queen Street building. The National Portrait Gallery got the west wing in 1889, and NMAS occupied the east wing in 1891. [4]

By 1929 pressure had built for a separate home for NMAS. No money could be found, so action languished until, in 1949, the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries demanded government action, and on 5 April, 1951, the then Secretary of State for

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[2] Charles McKean, *The Making of the Museum of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2000). xiii.
[3] Statistics provided by Hannah Dolby, Communications Officer, NMS.
[4] R.B.K. Stevenson, 'The Museum, its beginnings and its development'*, in A.S. Bell, *The Scottish Antiquarian Tradition (*Edinburgh, 1981). 144.

Scotland, James Stuart, appointed a Committee, chaired by Sheriff J. R. Philip. Its terms of reference were 'To inquire into the scope and functions of the NMAS and its relations with other institutions, and to make recommendations for its administration in the light of the conclusions reached on these matters'. The Philip Committee's report is discussed in detail in Appendix Two, but, briefly, it recommended that there should be a new building. [5] It emphasised the archaeological predominance of the NMAS collections at that time (31 July, 1952), and its recommendations were based almost entirely on finding greater space for these objects. There was no suggestion at that time that the new building should be a museum of the whole sweep of Scottish history.

In 1953 the Scottish Office acquired a possible site at the end of Chambers Street, thus implicitly accepting the Philip report. The NMAS Trustees and staff accordingly assumed that the site had been bought for them. However the RSM regarded the purchase as answering its own perception of 'being grossly short of space'. It did not intend to relinquish 'its expectations for the site next door'. [6]

After more than twenty years of argument about these competing claims, plans were drawn up to build an extension to the Chambers Street building. Work was about to begin in 1976 when there was an economic crisis, and the resultant government financial cutbacks forced abandonment of the scheme. In any case, it was still not clear by whom, or for what, a new building would be used, so it might have been premature to provide it before disagreements on content and control had been resolved. There was still no vision of a 'Museum of Scotland'.

In February 1979 another Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr (later Sir) Alwyn Williams, was appointed to inquire into the functions of the National Institutions. Its remit was:

> Having regard to likely developments over the next 25 years, and to the continuing pressure on resources, to consider for the National Museums and Galleries of Scotland their respective functions, including their educational role; their management, organisation and inter-relationship; the method of providing their financial support from public funds; their relationships with other private and publicly owned Museums and Galleries; and their accommodation needs; and to

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[5] *Report of the Committee on the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland*, Presented by the Secretary of State for Scotland to Parliament (Cmd. 8604, HMSO 1952).
6 McKean, in *The Making of the Museum of Scotland*. 8.

report.

The Williams Committee's report runs to 106 pages. [7] It recommended that the government should legislate

> to establish a new Museum, called the Museum of Scotland, based on the existing collections of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland…This name should have immediate appeal...the new Museum should be more than a repository for collections satisfactorily catalogued, conserved and researched. We would expect it to contribute greatly to the interpretation of Scottish culture, and to be a magnet for visitors to Edinburgh, and educational groups of all ages who want to learn about Scottish history...(this is) our most important single recommendation. However, It is not necessary to include the adjective "national" in the title...indeed to do so could give the wrong impression of the range of the Museum's collections.

The Museum of Scotland should be accommodated on the former John Watson's School site, while the site at the west end of Chambers Street should be developed for the Royal Scottish Museum. (The Committee insisted on including this recommendation in their final report, despite having already been told by a government Minister that the John Watson's School site would be adapted for use by the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art). [8]

This was the first official mention of a free-standing Museum of Scotland. The RSM had been formed by a merger of the University's Museum of Natural History with the Industrial Museum, and was completed in 1864 as the 'Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art', (later re-titled the Royal Scottish Museum (RSM)) and not as a national history museum. The collections of NMAS were primarily of archaeology. Neither institution had claimed to be pre-eminently a Museum of Scotland, and even this first mention of a 'Museum of Scotland', was still driven largely by the urgent need to give more space for displays of the objects in NMAS.

It seems unlikely that the Williams Committee's opposition to the adjective 'national' had any political connotation under a Unionist government. The Committee argued that many great national museums, like the Science Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), and the Tate Gallery did not have 'National' in their titles. Its thinking

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[7] *A Heritage for Scotland, Scotland's National Museums and Galleries: the Next 25 Years,* (Edinburgh, 1981).
[8] This is mentioned in the Addendum to the Williams Committee's report.

was that NMS at Queen Street had space amounting to only 1,650 square metres, compared with 21,950 square metres for the RSM at Chambers Street. [9] That was why the Committee urged the government 'to commit sufficient funds to bring the Museum's status in every respect up to that of the Royal Scottish Museum'. So, while the Committee wanted a Museum of Scotland, it was to be based on, and give more space for, the collections of the NMAS. It did not argue for a museum that would showcase the whole sweep of Scottish history. **The concept was still primarily object-based.**

The Committee also emphasised outreach, by increasing the number of loans and travelling exhibitions, and by recommendations on communication with as wide public as possible. It urged efforts to train teachers and students in schools and colleges in the use of museum resources, and the provision of education facilities, including activity areas and handling collections.

The emphasis on education was later incorporated in what became the MoS. As early as 1990 Mary Bryden, Head of Public Affairs in NMS, had written that 'It will be a prime educational resource for students at all levels and of all ages'. [10] She set up a Curriculum Advisory Group, and a Junior Board of twelve boys and girls aged 9-14 to advise on services offered to their age group. She expanded the existing schools programme, developed a team of volunteer guides, and increased the programme of talks and lectures.

The Committee made 116 wide-ranging recommendations. For example, there should be a Scottish Museums Commission; an Advisory Board on Photographic Collections; a joint trading company for the Museum of Scotland, the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) and the RSM; and a Trust to raise funds for a new Museum of Industry in Scotland, to be located in or near Glasgow. There should also be consideration for a Lowland Museum of Rural Life to parallel the Highland Folk Museum. This 'might be pursued in co-operation with the National Trust for Scotland'. Help should also be

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[9] See Figures 4 and 5 on pp.36/7 of Williams.

[10] Mary Bryden, 'Shaping and Selling the Idea', in J.M.Fladmark (ed.), *Heritage and Museums, Shaping National Identity* (Shaftesbury, 2000). 29. (On page 39 Fladmark records that she was in the lead in winning a 1995 Charter Mark Award for excellence and provision of services to the public, presented to her, for NMS, by the then Prime Minister, John Major).

offered to the Western Isles Islands Council for setting up a Museum of the Western Isles.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (George Younger) thanked the Committee and accepted that legislation should be introduced to establish a Museum of Scotland based on the collections of the NMAS. [11] He regarded this as the 'first priority in giving effect to the Committee's recommendations'. He intended to make a further statement 'in due course' about action on the many other recommendations. No such announcement was ever made, and these other recommendations were quietly dropped. However, the Committee's recommendation for a Museum of Rural Life, in co-operation with the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), proved prophetic. NMS and NTS co-operated to open, on 2 July, 2001, the National Museum of Rural Life, at Wester Kittochside, based on the NMS collection of agricultural implements, together with a farmhouse, steading and fields that had been bequeathed to NTS.

Younger added that he would introduce a Bill to constitute a 'widely representative Board of Trustees whose first task will be to create a major new institution on the basis of the collections which are at present held by the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland'. Once established, he believed it would 'win the support of Scots at home and abroad'. He would give priority in museum and gallery spending over the next few years to providing adequate premises for the new museum. But he rejected the Williams Committee's call for RSM to remain under the control of the Scottish Office. Instead, he wanted to examine whether the management of the RSM and of the projected MoS should be brought together under the same Board of Trustees. This, too, would require legislation.   A consequent consultative paper in August 1982 argued that a single organisation for both museums could improve efficiency, by merging and sharing administrative and other overhead costs. [12]

On 23 July *The Scotsman* reported the Secretary of State as saying that

> I share the Committee's view that our first priority must be to establish a
> Museum of Scotland, which will be the prime repository for artifacts
> representing the cultural heritage of Scotland. This is an imaginative concept

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[11] Scottish Office Press Notice 763/82, dated 22 July, 1982, consulted in NMS archives.
[12] Traced in NMS archive, with the help of Directorate staff. I am most grateful, because the building work for the RM Project has required the archive to be moved temporarily to a less accessible store.

which has attracted widespread interest and support.

However, *The Scotsman* report appeared on an inside page, attracted no leader comment and was not followed, in subsequent editions, by any further mention or analysis, or by any reader's letter. Nor did the newspaper mention that the Secretary of State was going to make a further statement on the action he would take on other recommendations in the Williams report. So, despite Younger's claim of 'widespread support', the announcement that there was to be a Museum of Scotland did not seem to attract much public interest at the time.

Both museums felt threatened by the loss of separate identity inherent in being combined under a single Board of Trustees, and wrangling continued. So in April 1984 the government decided to resolve the difficulty by appointing yet another Committee, the Museums Advisory Board (MAB), to advise on how to achieve a single museum organisation, combining RSM and NMAS. This was no easy task. NMAS staff thought that they were simply going be taken over by the bigger institution, and both institutions continued to be concerned, in the absence of a decision on how, and by whom, any new building would be used.

The Board's remit was:

> To advise the Secretary of State for Scotland on matters concerning the future operation, under one Board of Trustees, of the Royal Scottish Museum and the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, having regard particularly to the planning and future development of a Museum of Scotland within the new structure, including its accommodation needs and its links with existing collections, both national and local.

It was chaired by the Marquess of Bute. Its membership is listed in Appendix Three. The remit was narrower and more specific than the Williams Committee's. For example, it was not called on to look at the National Galleries. However, in his Foreword to the MAB's Report, the Chairman wrote that it owed much to the Williams Committee, 'indeed, our work is an extension of theirs and reflects much of their thinking'.
The Board faced two major problems: -

• How to devise a management structure which would combine the disparate curatorial and other staff of the two institutions, while reassuring both that it was a genuine merger and not a takeover.

- How to develop a Museum of Scotland within that structure. What would be the purpose, content and ethos of such a museum, and on what site?

The Board consulted other museums, academic institutions, relevant societies and organisations, and visited storage sites and the National Museum of Wales, the Welsh Folk Museum, and the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum. After thirteen meetings in only a year, its report was presented to the Secretary of State on 20 May, 1985. [13] In his Foreword, Bute wrote:

> Our recommendations... can, over a decade, give Scotland a national museums complex befitting an educated community with an important tourist industry...what we seek to promote is, essentially, a new national museum for Scotland, more cost-effective and efficient than its predecessors, and making a substantially greater contribution to the community than has been the case in the recent past.

Despite the use of 'for', rather than 'of', Scotland, this was stronger than Williams in its emphasis both on a 'national' museum and on its role to serve the community and tourism.

The Board's answer to the first problem was comprehensive recommendations on collecting policy, documentation, conservation and analytical research, archaeological fieldwork, education and public relations, design and photography, libraries, curatorial departments, exhibition policies, outstations, accommodation, display space, storage, administration, staffing, conditions of employment, funding, marketing, trading, support from government, and the future programme of work. Members discussed the most appropriate title for the new, combined structure. 'Queen's Museum' was suggested, to avoid possible criticism that the name of NMAS would disappear, but the title of RSM was being retained. However, it was decided, at the MAB's very last meeting, that 'Royal Museum of Scotland ' should be adopted, because the concept of a Museum of Scotland had attracted such widespread interest and support (see page 20). Proposals for a Museum of Country Life, a Museum of Industry and a Media Museum were all considered, but set aside for a variety of reasons, not least funding constraints. Relations with Historic Scotland at Edinburgh Castle were discussed on 27 February, 1985. The Board wanted more space to be released for the Scottish United Services

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[13] *Report to the Secretary of State for Scotland by the Museums Advisory Board, under the chairmanship of the Marquess of Bute (*Edinburgh, 1985). Issued to the Press on 19 June.

Museum (SUSM). (This eventually happened, to form the present National War Museum). [14]

The sensitivities in combining two sets of curatorial expertise are illustrated in the minutes of the MAB meeting on 21 December, 1984. They record that the NMAS Trustees had doubts about bringing RSM and NMAS under one Board, because some NMAS staff might not wish to be employed by the new Board. The minutes also show that on January 17, 1985, there was a lengthy meeting between the MAB, the NMAS Trustees and the Society of Antiquaries. At its end, Bute is recorded as saying that although there would not always be two distinct museums, it was probable that 'there would continue to be two very clear strands, one of which would largely represent the collections in which the NMAS Trustees and the Society were interested'. After further meetings with staff, the Board recommended that the curatorial departments should consist of Archaeology; History and Applied Arts; Science, Technology and Working Life; Geology; Natural History; and the SUSM. The last remained, free-standing, at Edinburgh Castle. The first came from NMAS. The second and third combined NMAS and RSM staff. Geology and Natural History staff came entirely from RSM.

In answering the second problem the Board considered whether

> to retain two almost entirely autonomous institutions... one of which, in furtherance of the Williams Committee's recommendation, would be developed into a Museum of Scotland... or to integrate the two museums into one cohesive entity, and to draw on aspects of both existing collections to further the concept of a Museum of Scotland.

The Board opted for the latter, but there would be two strands: one focussing on the history and culture of Scotland, based on the NMAS collections, and one on international themes, based on the RSM collections. A Museum of Scotland should not be inward looking, but should allow both home based Scots and visitors to appreciate the richness and diversity of Scottish life and culture in its international context: and so 'realise what is the contribution this small country has made to life, knowledge and culture in many parts of the world'.

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[14] MAB papers were not published, but consulted in the NMS archive. Not indexed, but traceable by date.

This recommendation formed the basis of what were to become the World Collections in the Royal Museum and the Scottish Collections in the Museum of Scotland. The foundation stone in the passage connecting the two buildings reads 'The World to Scotland' in one direction and 'Scotland to the World' in the other. The Queen unveiled it on 7 July, 1994, at a ceremony marking the breakthrough of the opening which would link the two buildings.

The Board asked 'What and whom should Museums be for?' In the past, interpreting the collections to the public had been regarded as less important than acquisition, conservation, research and security, because if the opportunity for preservation were missed, it might never recur. So museums would be able to work up displays only when more funding became available. But now MAB argued that a major purpose of the National Museums must be to enlighten, instruct and stimulate the public. This should not be at the expense of scholarly research, because the knowledge base remained essential.

> The subject matter should not be adulterated in the pursuit of popularity…. Presentations should be designed to hold the attention of visitors from the casual initiate to the specialist. This will in turn require a somewhat different emphasis from many of the Museums' Curatorial staff, who should ideally combine an expert knowledge of their subject with a desire and ability to communicate the results of their research into the collections to a large and varied audience.

MAB was urging an important change of museum mindset towards greater emphasis on presentation to a wide range of the potential visiting public. The museum must not be exclusive, but inclusive and outward looking. This wording went further than Williams. An integrated departmental structure need not lead to similarly departmentalised displays. Greater emphasis should be placed on multi-disciplinary display galleries, and on grouping objects in new ways, 'for instance in period-dominated, rather than discipline-dominated arrangements'.

This, too, was a major change – from galleries based on curatorial collections of objects, to displays 'associated with Scottish history'. This important phrase suggests that it is from about the MAB report onwards that we can date the change of drive, from the need to find space to house collections of objects, towards the vision of a museum to display the sweep of Scottish history.

The MAB Report concluded that

- There should be 'the greatest possible degree of integration of the existing Museums.

- 'The principal facilities of both museums should be brought together on a single central site'.

- 'Additional central accommodation should be provided in a building...on the vacant site next to the RSM building in Chambers Street'.

- 'Displays focusing on the history and culture of Scotland should largely be concentrated in the new building…(they) should use non-Scottish objects to highlight interactions and outside influences in the areas dealing with Scottish history and culture; and Scottish material should be incorporated in the displays of the international collections'.

The fourth conclusion reflected the outcome of discussions on whether the NMAS collections should form the basis of a free-standing, basically separate Museum of Scotland, or whether they should simply be added to the RSM collections in a single, unified and extended, Chambers Street complex. The MAB minutes show that one Board member expressed the fear that the former might be too inward looking and parochial, but it was championed in a paper discussed at the next meeting, on 21 December, 1984. It argued that 'this small country' had made a 'disproportionate contribution to European and indeed world history, through literature, soldiering, merchanting, engineering, exploration, architecture, town planning, mathematics, the law and religious thinking'. Appendix Four has a full text of the argument in this paper – that the new building should major on the history and culture of Scotland – which was accepted at that meeting, and anticipated the aim and vision of a history museum, which later found eloquent expression in Magnusson's preface to the *Wealth of a Nation*. Thereafter the minutes record no further doubts about a separate MoS.

In sending the MAB report to the Secretary of State, Lord Bute wrote in his covering letter of 20 May, 1985, that

> We found the patient lying under a leaky roof, weak from a thousand cuts, demoralised by a long history of uncertainty and disappointments, and generally in poor shape due to irregular and often inadequate sustenance. We produce for you a detailed diagnosis and set out a comprehensive course of treatment to give the sufferer a new and exciting lease of life...I hope that we have adequately met the terms of the brief you gave us and that our conclusions will be of genuine use in your wish to give a greater priority to the

National Museums in the service of Scotland. [15]

In contrast to the fate of the Philip and Williams reports, the Secretary of State promptly accepted the MAB report. However, he indicated that the question of funding for a new building would have to await the outcome of the next Public Expenditure Survey. On 20 June, 1985, *The Scotsman* reported,

> The Museum Advisory Board certainly shares the lively spirit that presently imbues what used to be the quiet world of the curator and the local historian. Imagination, enlightened values and, perhaps above all, decisiveness populate the pages of its report... The Minister's response has been just as swift but a mite less decisive.

While noting that Mr Younger had accepted the MAB report, *The Scotsman* said that he had sounded a bit 'coy' on providing the finance for the capital cost of the additional accommodation. The Scottish Office's financial wizards could conjure up that kind of cash 'without even plugging into their computer'. Surely the money would be there 'when all the Government's spending plans are stamped "approved" by the Cabinet this winter'. (The MAB report seems to have inspired greater acceptance both from the government and the Press than had the Williams report three years earlier, perhaps because its range was narrower, and more strongly focussed on the case for a Museum of Scotland).

The Secretary of State invited the members of MAB to be founding Trustees of what was now, after an Act of Parliament (The National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985), the National Museums of Scotland. The Marquess of Bute was again the Chairman. Robert Smith, (later Sir Robert, and then Lord Smith of Kelvin) became Vice Chairman, and then Chairman in 1993, when Bute died. In addition to the members of the MAB, other founding Trustees included Jim Craigen MP, John S. McCracken CBE, Magnus Magnusson MA FRSE, and Iain A. Noble MA. [16]

Trustees in general served for an initial four-year term, but several were re-appointed twice and even three times. All appear to have been appointed for the personal knowledge and experience they could bring, and not for any political motivation. They

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[15] Letter consulted in NMS archives, courtesy of the Director.

[16] NMS *Annual Report* for 1986.

gave their time and expertise as a public service, without financial reward, other than reimbursement of travel expenses – testimony to their genuine commitment to NMS.

Neither the MAB Report nor the Act provided that the MoS should be on a specific site, nor that its displays should be based on collections of Scottish history, culture and heritage. These decisions were left to the founding Trustees. The statutory objectives of the NMS, as defined in the Act, are set out in Appendix Five. Their emphasis on exhibiting to the public, raising public awareness, and providing education, put into legal effect the recommendations of the Williams and MAB Reports. Appendix Six contains a summary of the contents of the Reference Manual for the Museum of Scotland Project, which provides much of the factual material used in this dissertation. [17]

The site at the west end of Chambers Street had already been cleared of its previous buildings (including the first Chinese restaurant in Edinburgh), in preparation for the abortive attempt at relocation in 1975/6. After examining other possible sites, the founding Trustees were soon united in deciding that they wanted the new building to be on that site, and that it should house the Scottish collections.

Accordingly, on 28 October, 1985, Bute wrote to the Secretary of State asking for a 'clear indication of commitment now from government' to the provision of a new building on that site. On 11 November Mr Younger replied that

> decisions on resources will have to be taken in the context of public
> expenditure priorities overall.   I simply cannot say now what commitments I
> will be able to make or how they will be phased.

In January 1986 Malcolm Rifkind took over as Secretary of State. In a letter of 27 January, congratulating Mr Rifkind on his appointment, Lord Bute expressed 'some dissatisfaction' about the amount of future financial support which the National Museums was likely to get, particularly in relation to major capital developments.

> I cannot disguise the extreme disappointment I and my colleagues feel about
> the complete absence of any assurance of Government support for the
> construction of a building on the vacant Chambers Street site. This concept
> was absolutely central to the MAB's recommendations. Failure to endorse this
> recommendation must call into question the Government's commitment…
> Every month which is lost puts off still further the prospect of our eventually
> being able to redisplay adequately the former NMAS collections and to fulfil the
> expectations about a "Museum of Scotland" aroused during the passage of the

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[17] *The Museum of Scotland Project: Reference Manual,* June 1996. Unpublished, but a bound copy is available on the reference shelves of the NMS Library.

National Heritage (Scotland) Bill. [18]

However the amount of grant-in-aid for 1986/87 enabled NMS to stage *The Enterprising Scot* exhibition, in the Royal Scottish Academy building, during the 1986 Edinburgh Festival. The idea was partly

> to contribute to the emerging Museum brief, to test how the collections might be displayed, but – above all – to create public support for the new building in the teeth of government obduracy. [19]

The preface to the book of the exhibition said that it 'reflects the diversity of the collections and the comprehensive interests of the National Museums of Scotland'. It contained seventeen essays on subjects such as the 'World perspective', 'New frontiers', 'Scottish plantsmen', 'Industrial enterprise and the Scottish universities', 'Paisley, a textile town', 'The Stevensons', 'Scottish explorers in the Arctic', 'Oriental links', 'Shipbuilders', 'Persian art', 'Sir Joseph Noel Paton', 'Photographers', Hugh Miller', and so on. [20] Some of the subjects were not included in the MoS, as it was opened in 1998, but may appear in the revamped RM in 2011.

In a letter to Bute, dated 12 September, 1986, Rifkind expressed support for the principle of a Museum of Scotland, but 'given other pressures on expenditure, I could not at present commit funds to cover the costs of a major new building'. He added that before any commitment could be given, 'we would need to be clear what is proposed, what it would cost, when it might start and over what period the commitment might extend'. Bute replied, on 17 October,

> You profess support for the development of the Museum of Scotland concept, but you seem to be unable to accept that its realisation is impossible without a new building. Chambers Street is a mess and Queen Street is a disgrace, of which any self-respecting nation with a long history and a rich culture would properly be ashamed. That is a situation which has pertained and worsened over many years, and I have no wish to be an apathetic subscriber to its continuance.

It was an implied threat of resignation, and if he had resigned, all or most of the Trustees would have followed him. [21] Bute added

> It is unhelpful, to say the least, for your officials to resurrect dismissed ideas of private sector sponsorship...Certainly, we shall raise some funds...but it would be naive and unrealistic to expect to do so with any degree of success unless the inevitable fund-raising campaign were preceded by an announcement of Government's commitment, in

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[18] This exchange of letters was also consulted in the NMS Archive.
[19] McKean, in *The Making of the Museum of Scotland*. 26.
[20] Jenni Calder (ed.),*The Enterprising Scot, Scottish Adventure and Achievement* (Edinburgh, 1986).
[21] Source: - Conversations with several Trustees of the time.

principle, to the new building on this site as a cornerstone of its future museums policy.

As one senior civil servant remarked, these were unusually frank terms in which to address a Cabinet Minister. [22] (Bute had also written in frank terms to the previous Secretary of State on 1 August, 1985, complaining about the 'most dilatory reaction' of government officials to the Trustees' requests on staffing and other matters. 'I do not know whether this is caused by ineptitude or indifference...Frankly, I am fed up and would rather resign than continue in so ridiculous a way'). Bute could be outspoken because he was not interested in any financial, social, honorific, or political reward. Like all the Trustees, he was giving his time and services free, as a public service. He was rich, owning Mount Stuart and extensive landed estates. He was the 6th Marquess of Bute, had no need to look for his name in the next Honours list, and had no political ambitions. He could express his views, without fear or favour, to any one, however highly placed.

Rifkind replied on 24 October, reiterating that he could not give a commitment to a new building at Chambers Street until the financial basis had been defined. However he added that 'I have authorised some expenditure to enable you to attract sponsorship'. The Trustees used this money (£20,000) to produce a booklet, *St. Andrew, will he ever see the light?* This question was answered on the inside front cover.

> Yes, St. Andrew will see the light, but only if we create a new and exciting Museum of Scotland. The 15th century oak carving of St. Andrew, portrayed on the front cover, is just one of the innumerable national treasures that lie in the dark storage cellars of the National Museums, rarely seen because of lack of display space. Is this good enough for Scotland? We in Scotland have never had an adequate home in which to display our rich cultural heritage. On the following pages we show why and how this nation's finest and most historic objects, collected over hundreds of years, should be seen by one and all in a new and visionary Museum of Scotland. [23]

It featured a statement signed in facsimile by all the Trustees.

> **A Museum of Scotland – the reason why.** The reason is obvious. We owe it to ourselves, our ancestors and our children to provide a lasting display of the cultural heritage of this small but influential Nation and, by so doing, demonstrate that Scotland holds an undisputed historic wealth. Scotland stands almost alone amongst countries of its size in having nowhere to tell the full story of its peoples and to show properly its most treasured possessions. This is a disgrace, long recognised by many.

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[22] Maldwin Drummond (ed.), *John Bute, an Informal Portrait,* (Norwich, 1996). 40.
[23] *St. Andrew, Will He Ever See the Light?* Brochure by the Trustees (1986). Not published, but widely circulated. Available in NMS Library.

> We, the Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland, recently appointed by the Secretary of State, believe that the time has come for a fresh initiative to achieve a Museum of Scotland. We need your help and support.

The booklet was issued to the media and to influential individuals, organisations, societies and companies thought to be sympathetic or potential donors. Each copy was accompanied by a letter from Lord Bute asking for help to achieve a new museum and urging all readers either to write a letter to him endorsing the need for a Museum of Scotland, and requesting that government should make a commitment now to a new building, or to pledge or send a contribution to a 'fighting fund'. **It was a direct, outspoken, appeal for public support over the head of the Secretary of State.**

Bute answered the Secretary of State's request for clarification of what was proposed, by setting up a *Museum of Scotland Working Group.* Its remit was

> to express the philosophy underlying the proposed new building which will influence its architectural form and animate what it contains...to indicate the main functions of the new building and to define its relationship to the existing Royal Museum building...to draw up a brief which will form the starting point for an architect; the foundation of a prospectus; and the basis of plans for promotion and publicity...to take forward the planning of displays which the new building will house*.*

Keepers and curators, inevitably and understandably, put in more bids for their own favourite objects than any building on the site could possibly accommodate, but the Group's report to the Trustees on the 'proposed Museum of Scotland' was completed after nine months of intensive discussion and agonised pruning. [24]

It recommended that
- There should be an international architectural competition to design the new building.
- The chief purpose of the new building must be to present evidence about Scotland and its past.
- The Scottish displays should be the major feature of the new building, and occupy most of the available space.
- The displays should be in broadly chronological sequence, consisting of four major time bands – making the landscape; early populations of Scotland; kingdom of Scotland; and modern Scotland from A.D. 1707.

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[24] *Report of the Museum of Scotland Working Group,* 1987. Unpublished, but consulted in NMS archive, courtesy of Director and staff.

- The library should be in the new building, bringing together all the NMS libraries except that at SUSM (in the Castle).

- There should be a shop and a restaurant.

- The shop should be where the ground floor of the Chambers Street building and the new building adjoin.

- Consideration should be given to locating the restaurant on top of the building to take advantage of the views over the city. The restaurant might be open at times when the rest of the building is closed to the public, and accordingly a separate entrance would be useful.

- A prospectus should be produced about the need for, and use to be made of, the new building. It should be issued quickly to raise awareness of the Scottish collections as an under-used national asset, and to inspire both government and public support. Leading controllers and editors of the media in Scotland should be circulated with information about the prospectus and the launch date and their co-operation should be sought.   (This was done in *St. Andrew - will he ever see the Light?).*

- There should be a new group, established by the Trustees, to raise funds for the new building.

These recommendations were accepted, and indeed embodied, in what became, just over a decade later, the MoS, except that, for lack of space, the library was situated in the RM. However, it did incorporate all of the NMS libraries except SUSM's. The bulk of the report was taken up by a detailed list of the proposed displays, and the selected objects.

Private and public pressure for government support followed, including the mounting of exhibitions. From June to December, 1989, NMS mounted *The Wealth of a Nation* in the Royal Museum. The lavishly illustrated book of the exhibition had a Foreword by the late Magnus Magnusson (one of the Trustees) – an eloquent, heartfelt plea for a Museum of Scotland to house that 'Wealth'. [25]
He wrote that NMS had

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[25] Jenni Calder (ed.), *The Wealth of a Nation in the National Museums of Scotland* (Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1989). vii.

the finest and most extensive collections of Scottish material in existence. These collections form a marvellous treasury of Scotland's past, to be held in trust for the future. The function of a great national museum is to preserve and elucidate and present to the world that heritage of the hand, that patrimony of the intellect; for these collections form the landscapes of the past that it is the business of the museum to map....

But Scotland's past is not to be defined only within its own boundaries. A National Museum also reflects a nation's place in the history of the wider world, the impact on civilisation as a whole of Scotland's entrepreneurs and explorers, her scientists, her frontiersmen of the spirit, her "worthies" in every sense of the term. They were purveyors of qualities and ideas and attitudes and products that had germinated in Scottish soil...Today museums are no longer dusty, echoing mausoleums full of ugly glass cases – what Sir Flinders Petrie once called "ghastly charnel houses of murdered evidence". Today the aim of the best museums is not only to care for their collections properly, but also to promote public understanding and enjoyment by presenting them in, literally, their best light... In order to house and conserve and display the Wealth of the Nation as it deserves, we need a new Museum of Scotland building to give it the setting it deserves.

The above, though lengthy, is worth quoting in full because **Magnusson's Preface is probably the single, most forceful, coherent and comprehensive statement of what Trustees and staff wanted the Museum of Scotland to be, which is central to the aim of this Part of the research – to trace the vision of the creators of the MoS, which included its educational potential.**

St. Andrew, will he ever see the light? and *The Wealth of a Nation* both attracted much media and public interest. On 4 February, 1989, *The Weekend Scotsman* had a front page feature article by Rob Brown, headed 'Disgracing St Andrew'. That headline strap surrounded a photograph of the carving of St. Andrew.

Hidden in a cellar, this 15th century oak carving is just one of the many Scottish treasures that will not be seen in the forthcoming *Wealth of a Nation* exhibition. Why? Because, despite many years of promises, there is no room to display them.

The article described the forthcoming displays (taken from an NMS press release) and quoted the St Andrew brochure. Rob Brown wrote,

only a small proportion of the National Museums' unsurpassed Scottish collections can be seen by the public because there is simply – some would say scandalously – no place to display them on a permanent basis...The wealth of our nation is stuffed away in a series of dark storage cellars...because the country's present representatives have been unprepared to commit enough of the nation's resources to their full and proper public display.

In June, when the exhibition opened, there were lengthy feature articles in *Scotland on Sunday – The case for a Treasures House,* by Magnusson – and the *Sunday Times, A dazzling display of Scotland's riches,* by Marina Vaizey. She wrote of a 'staggeringly

wide range, depth and breadth of their holdings…a dazzling treasury of more than 500 objects…this sampling…reinforces the well-advanced claims for a new building for a Museum of Scotland'.

Another exhibition was mounted in 1990 at the McLellan Galleries, Glasgow, jointly by NMS, NGS, the National Library of Scotland, and Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries. Its purpose was 'to celebrate the very best that Scotland has produced in the fine, decorative and industrial arts'. The book of the exhibition was published jointly by the four institutions.[26]

This PR effort was eventually successful. On 16 January, 1990 the government finally agreed to find the money for the new museum building, (amounting to £32.5 million) provided the Trustees raised the money for the displays. The Minister of State, Ian Lang, cut the first turf with a JCB, and in 1994 the Queen laid the foundation stone at what was then the western extremity of the Chambers Street building. The Trustees, always mindful that government had cancelled the earlier project in 1976, were delighted. These personal ministerial and royal presences had made it more difficult for the government to resile.

However, the creation of the Museum of Scotland was still not entirely secure. In 1995 a new Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, who had of course no personal commitment to the project, was thought to be more right wing than his predecessors, and NMS got wind from officials of possible widespread cuts in public funding. The Trustees, still haunted by the 1976 cancellation, feared a repetition, despite foundations and other works having been completed, so that there was a huge, concrete lined hole in the ground. It was made clear to the Scottish Office that if the project were cancelled, all of the Trustees would resign. The government accepted that 'the train had already left the station' and the building work continued. [27]

The above account appears in the Chapter, *A Fresh Start*, of McKean's *The Making of the Museum of Scotland,* and is based on his interview with Sir Robert Smith. He had access to all the relevant original papers held by NMAS, so his book can be regarded as

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[26] Wendy Kaplan (ed.), *Scotland Creates – 5000 years of Art and Design* (London, 1990).
[27] McKean, in *The Making of the Museum of Scotland*. 92.

authoritative. Some of his other comments are both illuminating and amusing. For example, he writes on pages 28/29 that the Trustees had used the £20,000 given to them for a promotional prospectus to produce *St Andrew, will he ever see the light?*

> NMS pressed on with its strategy of outwitting the government...Bute genially dispatched a progress report to the Secretary of State on 3rd July, 1987. Almost as a postscript, he drew attention to the St. Andrew brochure he enclosed…They had utilised government money to produce a document implicitly attacking the government for prevarication…Bute thanked Rifkind graciously for paying for it!

An international competition was held to select architects to design a building that would be, in Bute's words, 'something of excellence and remark'. From the 371 entries, the successful architects were Gordon Benson, a Glaswegian, and David Forsyth, a Geordie. The retaining walls and foundations were started in May 1993, and completed before the contract for the main construction was let. This may have helped to achieve completion of MoS within budget, because the main contractor could then tender and build without possible difficulties with the substructure. It was also completed almost on time. ('Almost' because staff were cleaning floors and display cases with vacuum cleaners and dusters the night before the opening ceremony).

The architects' brief was to design the building round the objects. The atrium on Level 3 had to be tall enough to take the height of the Newcomen Beam Engine and the floors on Levels 3 and 4 had to be strong enough to take the weight respectively of the Newcomen and the *Ellesmere* locomotive. They both had to be lowered into the building before the roof went on. This meant stopping the traffic in George IV Bridge one Sunday, when what seemed like most of the children in Edinburgh turned up, to see a huge crane lowering the *Ellesmere*, encased in plastic, through the open roof.

McKean, an eminent architectural historian, goes into detail about the architectural competition and the physical creation of the building. However, this dissertation is about the making of the displays inside it. This work was led by the Exhibition Review Committee, chaired first by Professor Christopher Smout, the Historiographer Royal, and then by Dr Anna Ritchie (Past President of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland). It co-opted Professor Lynch and, from time to time, other respected academics. The Director of NMS and Mary Bryden (Head of Education and Public Affairs) attended, along with Dr David Clarke, Keeper of Archaeology, as Head of Exhibitions for MoS,

Twin Watkins was the Secretary, and Jenni Calder the Script Co-ordinator. Other curators and NMS staff attended according to their subject interest. [28] Jenni Calder is a widely published author on a variety of topics. Her appointment as script co-ordinator shows that writing skills as well as curatorial expertise were considered essential for presenting the displays to visitors. Keepers and curators developed displays and made presentations, illustrated by maps and diagrams that got down to the nitty-gritty of which objects should be displayed and in what way. So the proceedings of the Committee occupy many bulky files, recording a great deal of expert thought and work by staff, Trustees and academic advisers.

The biggest difficulty for the Exhibition Review Committee was how to reconcile the historians' desire to present reasonably comprehensive displays of the whole sweep of Scottish history, with the curators' difficulty in finding relevant objects. It had to

- consider how important subjects like the Enlightenment could be presented by displays of objects,
- persuade enthusiastic, professional curators to reduce the number of objects illustrating their own subjects, and
- adjudicate between their competing claims.

This called for judgement and tact, but both Professor Smout and Dr Ritchie, whose own professional knowledge was universally respected, excelled in the chair. Moreover, all had to accept both that the number of objects had to fit in to the limited available space, and that the collections had not grown by deliberate strategy, but by the personal enthusiasms of previous curators and the generosity of donors.   Sometimes curators and committee had to look for, and try to acquire, objects to fill the gaps, or to work out how themes which lacked suitable objects could be displayed by illustrations, wall boards, touch screens or otherwise.

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[28] Professor Michael Lynch donated his complete personal set of papers of the Exhibition Review Committee to Edinburgh University Library. They are available in 'Special Collections'. I am grateful to Professor Lynch for drawing their availability to my attention, for they are not in the NMS Archive. All references to, and quotations from, this Committee are taken from this set of papers, but the use made of them is, of course, my own responsibility.

The amount of work was enormous. At one meeting alone, which considered only three of the seven sections on Level 1, there was a formidable, fifty-six-page dossier. It covered the preferred circulation route and chronology, the key concepts and themes, the design approach, the balance between open displays and cased objects, and the messages which each displayed item, or case, should convey. There were plans and diagrams of each case or uncased object, lists of the objects proposed for each display, with descriptions and justifications, and detailed budget costs for the cases, lighting, graphics and contingencies. There were similar dossiers for all other display sections on all levels, sometimes repeated several times, as later drafts were produced, after comments on the first drafts.

The minutes reveal detailed discussions about methods of presentation, historical accuracy, and interpretation of events or themes. For example, one member thought it a pity that the period covered by the *Kingdom of the Scots*, which to many Scots **is** Scottish history, had only twenty per cent of the overall space in the museum. The discussions were frank, but always courteous, and on several occasions any differences were not so much between curators and committee members, as because both faced limitations on their ideas by the architectural design. (See Part Three).

Analysis of the extent to which displays of objects, in a building of limited size, embody the mass of recently published, academic re-interpretations of historic events, themes and motivations, would be fascinating (and controversial), but would call for an entirely separate – and huge – research dissertation. However, historians might care to consider a point put to the Committee by Jenni Calder.

> An underlying principle... was to draw attention to the understanding of the past that can be drawn from material culture. Presentation of the national past to be found in the Museum of Scotland would not necessarily be the same as that found in history books, as our key sources were objects, **which tend to be overlooked by mainstream academic historians.** (Bold is this researcher's).

The Exhibition Review Committee produced a 'Mission Statement'.
- To tell the story of the Scottish land and its people through the display and interpretation of the incomparable collections of the NMS.
- To provide a prime educational resource for students of all ages, and in particular for school pupils aged five to fourteen, in accordance with national guidelines for curriculum and assessment in Scotland.
- To provide a world-class attraction for all those with an interest in Scotland's past.

- Fifty per cent of displays should be capable of being understood by the average ten year old

- At least eighty per cent of the text messages should be understandable to at least eighty per cent of the visitors.

The Mission Statement analysed **existing** audiences – formal educational visits; informal/general interest visitors; tourists; and visitors with special requirements. All these should continue to be targeted. **Potential** audiences were examined through levels of interest – 'baby browser' (casual visitors whose interest is easily diverted); interested browsers who see museums as 'a good thing'; general visitors with a special interest, or who know what they are going to look at; special interest visitors such as school groups; and specialists who have some in-depth knowledge of an area of the collections. Again, attempts should be made to cater for all of these. The aim was to create an 'inclusive museum'.

The Committee's 'Exhibition Guidelines' ruled that there should be clear visual messages, and a 'strong Scotch accent of the mind' (a quote from Robert Louis Stevenson).

> Our presentation, language and tone should all contribute to conveying the material and cultural environment of Scotland and Scots. Someone helicoptered blindfold into the Museum of Scotland should at once have a sense of where s/he is.

Accuracy was important. There should be acknowledgement of gaps in the collections, plain English, and an appreciation that many visitors from the rest of the UK, or from overseas, will not have any detailed knowledge of Scottish history. (Part Four shows that this is also true of some Scots!).

The Committee's papers reveal how ideas and proposals for the displays, and the route through them, changed over time. Successive maps and plans show that even the positioning of iconic objects such as the Cadboll Cup, the Monymusk Reliquary, the Coronation Ampulla and others changed, sometimes more than once, before the final positioning was agreed. For example, there was considerable discussion of whether the Monymusk Reliquary should be in *Early People*, because it is Pictish, or at the entrance to *Kingdom of the Scots*. The fact that it was believed to have been carried at Bannockburn won the day.

A brief for *First People* ran to 220 pages, and an 'essay' on *The Church from 1560-1690,* prepared by Hugh Cheape, and submitted, as a draft, to Professor Lynch, reads like an article for publication. The input of the academic historians was considerable. On 17 November, 1993, Professor Lynch made comments and suggestions on the first draft of the ground floor 'story board' which ran to five close typed A4 pages. Professor Smout, on 30 August, 1994, submitted a seventeen page paper on *The 17th Century Challenge.* Many other examples could be given.

Both the Committee, and the Trustees as a whole, recognised that MoS could not offer a comprehensive history of Scotland. The Director wrote

> We would not be presenting a history, as written in textbooks, with objects as three-dimensional illustrations. The objects should speak for themselves, and should occupy the primary role in all displays. Their status would, of course, vary through the museum. The prehistoric artifacts are the basic, nearly the only, evidence of man's activities at the time, in the absence of historical documents. As time moves on, the fundamental importance of the object as the sole or major source of knowledge tends to diminish. We cannot hope for balance, as a historian may attempt to achieve in a book…
> The Scottish Enlightenment is one of the major episodes in the development of intellectual thought, and it is widely held to be of international significance. But there is rather little in our collections to illustrate David Hume's theory of causation or even Adam Smith's division of labour. Nonetheless we cannot ignore the Enlightenment. We shall have to be subtle. [29]

Similarly, David Clarke wrote,

> The key premise has been that objects can provide windows into the past available through no other sources. But because the Museum of Scotland is primarily a presentation of the surviving three-dimensional material it can never aspire to being a comprehensive summary of Scotland's history. This apparent weakness the museum has sought to turn into a benefit. It has quite deliberately constructed its presentations around the idea that much of the evidence is available elsewhere in Scotland – in, for example, other museums, the properties of Historic Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland, and the landscape generally. The hope is that the Museum of Scotland will create in visitors the wish to explore more. [30]

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[29] R.G.W. Anderson, 'Meeting Public Needs?' in *A New Museum for Scotland,* proceedings of a symposium in the Royal Museum on 16 October, 1990. Unpublished, but consulted in the NMS archive.
[30] D.A. Clarke, 'New things set in many landscapes: aspects of the Museum of Scotland', in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,* Volume 128 (Edinburgh, 1998)*.*

He also emphasised that the MoS can deal only with the objects we have got. 'For example there is nothing on the work of the Kirk overseas simply because we have no objects, although it is an important subject. The same goes for William Wallace'.

Fund Raising

NMS seconded Dr Sheila Brock, Head of Public Programmes, to work as Campaign Director on raising funds for the displays. She had the support of an influential (see Appendix Seven) Council of Patrons, led at first by Lord Perth and then by Lady Dalkeith, and of an arm's-length charity – the NMS Charitable Fund – chaired by Ivor Guild. The final total raised was £16.25 million. The appeal's success may have been helped by its timing. In a discussion with this author on 15 December, 2008, Dr Brock said that people in the USA and Australia were aware of the political situation in Scotland. So the lobbying for MoS came when Scotland's profile was being raised by the push for devolution. She could not put a figure on any difference this might have made. Americans also seemed susceptible to her argument that MoS would tell their story as well as ours.

The Opening

Her Majesty the Queen opened MoS on St. Andrew's Day, 30 November, 1998. That evening Trustees, staff, and others who had helped, had the party to end all parties in the main hall of the Royal Museum, with music, dancing, food, a good deal of alcohol, and a mixture of joy and relief that MoS had been opened on time and on budget. The Museum was widely welcomed.

Joyce McMillan wrote in *The Scotsman* on 28 November, 1998, that

> The collections shown in this museum will be a revelation, a magnificent treasure-trove of objects that sometimes confirm our ideas about history, and sometimes…challenge them in seriously important ways…What they have tried to do…is to create a record of Scotland which finally puts Scotland itself, its people and their material culture, right at the centre of the story. It made me feel...more aware of the huge diversity and complexity of Scottish life.

On St. Andrew's Day itself, *The Scotsman* published a twenty-four page special souvenir supplement, *Inside the Museum of Scotland.* The editorial, by Robert Dawson Scott, said

> We are at last able and willing to tell our own story, to ourselves and to the

> world, rather than simply being a chapter in someone else's...It is a magnificent addition to the cityscape from the outside...Inside, Scotland's story unfolds... Last year it was the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao which got the world talking. But that was only an art gallery. This year, it will be the Museum of Scotland which will be on everyone's lips, a nation's story.

The supplement summarised the content of MoS, floor by floor, with colour illustrations, maps, and lists of highlighted exhibits, each with a photograph and text.

One journalist alleged that the absence of objects about William Wallace smacked of 'snooty deadhandling or Establishment feartie factor'. *(Scotland on Sunday,* 29 November, 1998). However, as noted on page thirty-two above, Trustees and staff, including the Director, and the Head of Exhibitions, had recognised that MoS could not offer a comprehensive history of Scotland. It wasn't a 'book on the wall'. As early as the meeting of the Exhibition Review Committee on 10 October, 1995, Professor Devine had said that visitors might expect to find mention of William Wallace in the displays, and the minutes of the next meeting, presciently, record that films like "Braveheart" have raised the expectations of the public about people like William Wallace and Robert the Bruce'*.* So, with hindsight, publicity at and before the opening might have emphasised the difference between a book and a museum, and that the absence of relevant objects limited the ability to display important topics like the Enlightenment, and iconic figures like Wallace.

Mel Gibson's film had been a huge box office success, gaining several Academy Awards (though none for historical accuracy). So when journalists found little about Wallace, at a time so close to the opening of the Scottish Parliament, the atmosphere was conducive to political conspiracy theories. Fiona Watson's verdict is that

> "Braveheart", despite obviously hanging its hat on an historical peg, has little or no basis in historical reality…It is, essentially, "pulp fiction" and there is nothing wrong with that, so long as we know it for what it is. [31]

Analysis of Part One

1 The creation of a Museum of Scotland was not inevitable.

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[31] Fiona Watson, 'Braveheart: More than pulp fiction?' in Arnold, Davies and Ditchfield (eds.), *History and Heritage: Consuming the Past in Contemporary Culture* (Shaftesbury, 1998). 139.

As McKean had predicted, MoS is now an accepted part of the Edinburgh, Scottish, and international tourist scene. When it was only a little over two years old, *The Scotsman* reported that 'For many Scots, denied access to their history in the classroom, the objects and narratives were a revelation and the museum acquired an iconic status'. [32] But its creation was not inevitable. There had been no mention of a 'Museum of Scotland' until the Williams Report in 1982, and even then there was little public interest until the MAB Report in 1985. That was followed by years of struggle, arguments, profile raising exhibitions, lobbying, and even an appeal directly to the public over the head of government. Moreover, public funding was available only for the actual building. The Trustees had to raise the money for the displays. Such was the uncertainty, that even after building work had started and the foundations excavated, a perceived possibility of cancellation led the Trustees to threaten to resign, before government finally agreed that the building should be completed. Sadly, Lord Bute died before the opening of MoS, whose creation he had personally done so much to achieve. The effect of his personal, public 'clout', and leadership had been considerable.

2 The drive was at first curatorial – object driven – but became history driven.

The initial push, after World War Two, came from acceptance that the NMAS building in Queen Street was wholly inadequate to house the archaeological collections. More space was needed. The concept of a history museum came much later, after many years of wrangling about whether any new building should be wholly for the NMAS collections, or should be shared with the RSM. The idea of a stand-alone, national museum of Scotland's history did not arise, fully fledged, at a single moment in time. Like Topsy, it 'just growed'. But from the MAB report in1985, it increasingly took centre stage, gaining articulation in the outright propaganda of *St Andrew, will he ever see the light?* and in Magnusson's heartfelt preface to *The Wealth of a Nation.* **It was from about 1985/6 onwards, that the drive changed from just providing more space for objects, towards the vision of creating a freestanding museum of Scotland's history, heritage and culture.**

3 Emphasis on presentation to the public increased.

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[32] Mike Wade, *The Scotsman*, 21 February, 2001, page 15.

While the importance of conservation and scholarly research was retained, there was greater emphasis on presentation to the public – a change in the traditional mindset of any curators who were not already fully seized of the importance of public engagement. Arguably, the collections of the NMAS had been acquired primarily for research, whereas the RSM, from its incarnation as the Industrial Museum, saw itself as having a mission to engage with the 'artisans', in a bid to 'civilise' the newly industrialised and urbanised working class. (An account of this thinking, based on research by G.N. Swinney, is in Appendix Eight). However, Dale Idiens, on retiring as Acting Director of NMS, wrote that when she joined the then Royal Scottish Museum in 1964, her new boss 'felt strongly that the Museum would be a far nicer place to work if the public could be kept out'! [33] So some individuals at that time still saw engagement with the public as an unfortunate chore.

4 The underlying beliefs.

The thinking behind the creation and content of MoS was that the sheer wealth of the Scottish collections, and their educational and tourism value, should be presented to a very wide and inclusive audience, at home and abroad. The history and cultural heritage of this small nation, which had made a disproportionate contribution to European and world history, should be shown in displays that were outward rather than inward looking, stressing Scotland's connections to other nations and other cultures. This could be achieved only in a new building devoted to these displays. It was a 'disgrace' that no such building existed.

Professor Lynch has argued that there were

> four ingredients of expectation for the long awaited Museum of Scotland. Here was a long awaited national treasury. Here, too, was a new national museum for a nation which, in the 1990s, was in process of re-inventing itself. The Museum also provided a centrepiece for a capital city…fourthly it was to be built on an iconic site, at the edge…of the Old Town, beside the Greyfriars Church. [34]

5 Politics and identity.

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[33] Dale Idiens, Farewell article in *Carnyx*, the NMS Staff Newsletter (Issue 19, April 2002).

[34] Michael Lynch, Shannon Lecture, at Carlton University, Ottawa, 2003. Unpublished, but kindly made available by Professor Lynch.

A strong sense of **national identity** is evident – for example, the Exhibition Review Committee's emphasis on the need for a 'strong Scotch accent of the mind'. However, only two of the Trustees had any obvious, active political affiliation – one Labour MP and one Conservative MP. So this sense did not come from any political intent, but from a shared pride in Scotland's unique national culture, of both historical and educational value, which the strength of the Scottish collections could illustrate to the public at home and abroad. It paralleled an increasing awareness of a history separate from, but related to, English history, fed by a growing output of excellent academic publications, and by the then current discussions about political devolution. Hugh Cheape, a lead curator in devising the displays, said, in an informal discussion with this researcher, that **the Museum of Scotland was a 'custodian', not a 'creator', of national identity.**

After MoS opened, Professor McKean concluded that

> notions of identity have a habit of seeping through the cracks. The fact that it emerged a Museum of largely chronological national narrative highlighted by selected icons is certainly a consequence of a national consciousness, and that structure had strong implications for the displays... the exterior of the Museum...is Scots in that it is unlikely that it could have fitted so well anywhere else in the world... It is only possible to state that it is a building of international quality that could only have been built in Scotland. [35]

Mark Jones, Director of NMS, wrote that MoS

> is not a book on the wall, a reproduction of received history illustrated by a few rather embarrassed and irrelevant objects. It starts from the belief that objects themselves have something to tell us about the past and that the evidence which they provide is complementary to, not illustrative of, knowledge derived from documentary sources…Three Unionist Secretaries of State provided the funding that enabled the Museum of Scotland to go ahead. Not one of them intended this decision as a precursor to or a validation of the creation of a Scottish Parliament. Yet it would be difficult to argue that the opening of the Museum at a time of constitutional change was pure coincidence. Both will be seen in retrospect as resulting from a single shift in the mood of the times. [36]

Dr Caldwell, Keeper of 'Scotland and Europe' in NMS, agrees that 'it reflected the mood of the time'. [37]

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[35] Charles McKean, 'A House Built For Identity', in Fladmark, *Heritage and Museums: Shaping National Identity*. 141.

[36] Mark Jones, 'Why a Museum of Scotland?' in Fladmark, *Heritage and Museums: Shaping National Identity*. 9.

[37] Unpublished lecture by Dr David Caldwell, *Kingdom of the Scots, Ten Years on,* in NMS on 21 November, 2008. Note from personal attendance.

In *The Scotsman* on 30 November, 1998, the day before MoS opened to the public, Magnus Linklater wrote that

> there is no doubting its intent. This building and its contents are about Scotland the nation.…It challenges head-on the notion that Scotland only began to flourish properly after 1707.   Yet it was a consistent plank of the Tory case in the 1980s that Unionism was the foundation on which modern Scotland rested, with the implication that everything that had gone before was narrow and unstable…All this makes it ironic that the man who finally gave the museum project the go-ahead was Rifkind...Whether (he) would have been quite as enthusiastic had he realised that the building would be completed and opened so close to the launch of a Scottish Parliament, giving it an even greater political impact, is doubtful. At the time he would have been horrified.

So, although the Trustees, staff and others who lobbied for MoS were not driven by any political intent, its creation was well timed, in that it rode on the back both of increasing interest in Scottish history, and increasing public and media debate about Scottish political devolution. Professor Lynch has pointed out that, in the twenty years before MoS opened, more books were published on Scottish history and culture than in the whole of the rest of the twentieth century. [38] Similarly, a Constitutional Convention, set up after the 1987 general election, published a 'Claim of Right for Scotland' in 1989, demanding a Scottish Parliament with law making powers.

A referendum in 1997 produced a majority for the creation of a Scottish Parliament, and the Scotland Act became law in November 1998 – the same month as MoS was opened! It could also be argued that the choice of St. Andrew's Day for the Royal opening indicates an at least subliminal recognition by the Trustees that the new museum was becoming a symbol of Scottish identity. The then Director, Mark Jones, told this researcher, in a personal discussion in the V&A on 26 June, 2009, that the Labour Secretary of State for Scotland, Donald Dewar, was somewhat taken aback by the quotation from the Declaration of Arbroath at the entrance to *Kingdom of the Scots*. He thought it was possibly making too much of a political point! Mr Dewar certainly believed that 'cultural identity…does not necessarily take a nationalist form'. [39]

But as Professor Lynch has asked (see Appendix One), 'which identity and whose

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[38] Lynch, in Shannon lecture.
[39] From Mr Dewar's speech on 29 September, 2000 at a conference in Dublin, *Ireland and Scotland: Nation, Region, Identity*, reported in *The Scotsman* 12 October, 2000).

Identity?' Is Scottish national identity how we see ourselves – what we regard as our real heritage? Or is it how others see us – which we may regard as just tartan and bagpipe, shortbread tin, stereotypes? Much has been written by William Ferguson and many others on what constitutes Scottish identity, and a discussion of how, and to what extent, it is presented by the displays in MoS, would be a major undertaking, outwith the scope of this dissertation.

6 An object based Museum cannot tell a comprehensive history.

Because of gaps in the collections, and because objects alone cannot adequately present subjects such as evolution of thought in the Enlightenment, philosophy and religion, Trustees and staff accepted that the displays in the Museum of Scotland could not be a comprehensive account of Scotland's history. They wanted stories to come out of the objects, rather than have a 'book on the wall' presentation.

Mark Jones also said, in the discussion referred to above, that while history based on documents certainly does have strengths, much is omitted from the written record – for example, the testimony offered by the illiterate. The object record is also flawed, but in a different way. Objects are often silent on events, but tell much about the people who made them. So the argument that an object-based museum cannot tell real history is not valid: it just gives a different but complementary dimension. His example was that a basic implement, such as a scythe, was in common use, unchanged, for many centuries. This shows the continuity of social life. A history museum should not have an inferiority complex. MoS may not tell the full story, but it tells part of the story, by adding to the written record. Sometimes, too, an object offers a surprise – Keir Hardie's silver teapot was donated to him, although it was an upper-class luxury. That symbolised the great respect in which he was held.

It is also useful to bear in mind Ambrose's argument.

> Our past has never been so popular. Nor has it to date played so important a role in the leisure and tourism economy...Museums with their emphasis on interpreting material culture are at the forefront...But they are not alone... there are many other equally important ways in which the complex story of the nation is being taught through words and music, buildings and landscapes, drama and film. It is this overall diversity of approach which makes the effective and accurate presentation of Scotland's past such a challenge for the future. [40]

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[40] Timothy Ambrose, in the Preface to *Presenting Scotland's Story,* (Edinburgh, 1989).

This line of argument by Jones and Ambrose – that museum displays can supplement and add to the written record, is persuasive. It is developed in greater detail in *History Beyond the Text.* (See Appendix Ten). [41] In Part Four of this dissertation, *Scotland: A Changing Nation* demonstrates how combining objects, labels and interpretation with paintings, film, audio and music, can offer just this kind of 'diversity of approach' which curators can use to add other dimensions to the written record.

Motivation of the Creators

Finally, what is the answer to the original question – why have a Museum of Scotland at all? What was in the minds of those who lobbied for it, and created the displays?

- The underlying motivation was to go beyond collection and conservation of objects, **to display to the public the historic and cultural *Wealth of a Nation*.** It was a 'disgrace' that the collections had not been properly displayed, and it was high time that St Andrew should 'see the light'. A new museum was needed to display this Wealth. Although research and conservation remained important, there should be a change of curatorial mindset. The displays should be outward, not inward looking, with much greater emphasis on presentation to, educating, and attracting, the public.

- **This vision had to be fought for.** MoS was not a 'given'. It took years of vigorous lobbying and work by Trustees and staff to convince government and public that a Museum of Scotland should exist at all.

- **The motivation was cultural, not political**. Although the museum was opened so close in time to the opening of the Scottish Parliament, it was not intended as a political statement. After all, the government funding for the MoS was approved by unionist, Conservative, administrations, and its opening was welcomed by a unionist, Labour, Secretary of State for Scotland.

- However, there was a strong **sense of Scottish cultural and historical identity.** There was pride in the belief that this small country had punched above its weight in contributing to European, and indeed world, history through

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[41] Sarah Barber and Corinna M. Peniston-Bird, *History Beyond the Text: a Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (Routledge, London, 2009).

    soldiering; merchanting; engineering; literature; exploration; architecture; religious, political and economic thought.

- Although there was to be a "strong Scotch accent of the mind", the displays **were not to be parochial**, but should emphasise the connections between Scotland and other countries.

- It was accepted that an object-based museum **could not offer a narrative of the whole sweep of Scottish history like a textbook**. There were gaps in the collections which could not be made good. Nevertheless, MoS was to be a public resource for education and life-long learning, building on the earlier work of the Education Department. **(This is fundamental to the aim of this research).**

- The aim was **inclusive**. The displays should not be just for the educated middle-class, but for people of all ages and backgrounds

Part Three explores whether the displays in MoS express and fulfil this vision.

PART TWO. The Role of Education and Learning in Museums.

Introduction

Part One considered why and when the Museum of Scotland was created, and the motivation of its creators. Although its genesis was arguably as early as 1781, it was only as recently as 1984/5 that the primary motivation changed, from simply providing more space for collections of objects, to using these objects to display to a visiting public the historic, cultural and educational 'Wealth of a Nation'. That change paralleled, in both time and substance, a change of view, by both academic authorities and museum practitioners, on the role of museums in education and learning. This Part considers that change of view, over the last twenty-five years or so, because it must have influenced, consciously or sub-consciously, the thinking of those who created the displays, and has certainly influenced the critique of the displays in Part Three of this dissertation.

Background – The Lack of Education and Customer Care in the 1980s.

In 1984 the Scottish Museums Council (SMC), now Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS), organised a major conference, in Glasgow. [42] Several papers condemned the disappointing lack of customer care and marketing. **Neil Cossons**, at that time Director of the National Maritime Museum, London, wrote

> I have to admit that curators are often their own worst enemies, and that if museums and curators are to survive into the next century, then there has to be a fundamental reappraisal of the functions of both...the thirst on the part of the public at large for what the museum can and should provide is for access, for quality, for personal attention, politeness, cleanliness, efficiency, value for money, for visibly responsible and professional collections' management, in short for all those qualities that museums have not been particularly expert at providing in the past. [43]

Kenneth Hudson, administrator of the European Museum of the Year award, argued that any museum is essentially a business. Members of the public are its customers and it must meet their reasonable demands.

> The museum's customer may not always be right, and he may on occasion be tedious, but he exists, he has a vote and he pays the taxes and entrance fees

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[42] *Museums are for People,* Conference Proceedings (SMC, Edinburgh, 1985).
[43] Neil Cossons, 'Making museums market oriented'*, in *Museums are for People*.

which make it possible to continue.[44]

Victor T.C. Middleton, senior lecturer at the University of Surrey on marketing studies in tourism, wrote,

> Psychologically, curators are inclined to look inwards to their collection and conservation needs, rather than outwards to potential visitors and their needs for information, display, entertainment and education. Such inward-looking preoccupations have evidently dominated the museum world, while outside it there has been what amounts to a revolution in customer expectations as well as massive change in the opportunities available to all the public. [45]

In 1987 **Timothy Ambrose**, at that time Acting Director of the SMC, wrote,

> It is becoming more generally recognised that education should be regarded not simply as an introduction to life, but as a lifelong process for all in the community…there are substantial opportunities for forging closer collaboration between the education sector and museums.

He noted that in Scotland only six museums, out of a total of about four hundred, had education officers. So he urged greater investment in museum education. [46]

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, of the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, urged that museums should work more closely with teachers. She concluded that 'in the next 20 years the museum must swing its emphasis away from collections and towards people...It is time for the museum educator to step forward with greater confidence than ever before'. [47] (Twenty-three years later her recommendation is accepted doctrine, even if not always put fully into practice).

In 1993, after **Ambrose** became Director of the SMC, he emphasised the importance of comfort and convenience for users – somewhere to sit down, helpful staff, the needs of children or nursing mothers, and so on. 'The most successful museums are those which put their users first …Caring for your visitors and users is as important as caring for your collections'. [48]

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[44] Kenneth Hudson, 'Museums and their Customers'*,* in *Museums are for People.*

[45] Victor T.C. Middleton, 'Visitor Expectations of Museums', in *Museums are for People.*

[46] Timothy Ambrose (ed.), *Education in Museums - Museums in Education* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1987). Preface.

[47] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, 'Museums in Education: Towards the End of the Century in Education', in Ambrose, *Education in Museums - Museums in Education.* 49.

[48] Timothy Ambrose*, Managing New Museums, a Guide to Good Practice* (SMC, Edinburgh, 1993). 75-6.

That four such respected, experienced figures were unanimously urging the need for major changes by museums in customer care, and in their educational and learning role, shows that in the 1980s too many in the museum community had failed to realise that their world had moved on. Museums were no longer 'cabinets of curiosities' for the few, or collections to be treasured primarily by and for professionals. It may surprise us now, that so relatively recently Ambrose, with his first hand knowledge of museums, from his role in SMC, still felt it was necessary to urge so strongly the need for customer comfort, and for an educational and learning role in museums. This research discusses how that role came to be accepted, and shows that NMS was an early starter in educational work, even before MoS was created.

From the 1990s – a sea change, in both government and academic thinking, about the educational role of museums.

In 1995, the Preface to *Museums and the Education of Adults* claimed it was the first book published in the UK that addresses what museums can do in adult education. [49] In Chapter 2*,* **Lalage Bown** wrote,

> museum collections may be used by people who do not have access to the
> written word, either because they have missed out on literacy altogether or because they have a different language or different script. Museums, in such cases, provide a possible alternative to literacy – communication through artifacts rather than writing. [50]

In Chapter 4, **David Jones** stressed that adults engage in learning from choice and their learning activities are self-directed. Children attend school because they have to, but adults engage in educational activities because they want to. So if adults do not like the learning context, they will cease to attend. If they do not like the way exhibits are arranged or labels are written, they may ignore them and leave. They have a power not enjoyed by children. [51]

David Anderson**,** Head of Education at the V&A, was commissioned by the Department of National Heritage (DNH) 'to review the current activities of museums in the United Kingdom as centres for formal and informal learning, and identify how this function can

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[49] Alan Chadwick and Annette Stannett (eds.), *Museums and the Education of Adults* (Leicester, 1995).

[50] Lalage Bown, 'An Adult Educator's Perspective', in Chadwick, *Museums and the Education of Adults.* 37**.**

[51] David Jones, 'The Adult Learner', in Chadwick, *Museums and the Education of Adults.* 66/7.

be effectively developed.' The result was his major report, *A Common Wealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom.* [52]

The Preface claimed that

> **Museums in the United Kingdom have always been seen as educational institutions. Yet this is the first comprehensive report to examine their educational role in full**. Its publication reflects a renewed awareness of the contribution that museums make to lifelong public learning*. (Bold text is this researcher's).*

In 1994 Anderson had sent a questionnaire to 1,600 museums in the U.K. A second survey was sent, in 1995, to the 210 museums whose responses showed that they provided for education. He also organised 'colloquia', in association with the ten Area Museum Councils in the UK, including one at the City Art Gallery in Edinburgh on 28 August, 1995. They were attended by more than 350 museum staff and other professionals.

Anderson reported that about half of museums made no deliberate provision for education, fifteen per cent made almost none and the remaining thirty-five per cent ranged from basic to comprehensive. Less than 400 out of nearly 1,700 registered museums employed an education specialist. Most museum managers said that education was in the second order of priorities, after collection management and display. Only twenty-two per cent, even of the museums that had education specialists, invited them to contribute to gallery design. His verdict was that 'The omission of education specialists from development of a museum's most important educational resource is a cause for serious concern'.

In Scotland the 'long tradition of adult education provides a fertile ground for community initiatives by museums …uniquely in the United Kingdom, local authorities in Scotland have a statutory duty to ensure that there is adequate provision for cultural activities, including museums'. However many areas in Scotland have few museums and fewer specialist education staff... Museums in Scotland that responded to the first questionnaire were less likely to make educational provision a priority than museums in any other part of the UK. [53]

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[52] David Anderson**,** *A Common Wealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom* (DNH, London 1997).

[53] Anderson, in *A Common Wealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom.* 16.

(This criticism did not apply, as will be shown, to NMS).

Anderson's Introduction argued that
> museums are educational institutions of immense expressive power and authority. They communicate with us across the boundaries of language, culture and time. Through museums, we have direct contact with peoples of all ages and cultures…and expand our understanding of what it means to be human…Museums can no longer justify their existence, as many have done in the past, principally in terms of the care and display of their collections. [54]

Anderson went on to argue that the role of museums in public education was not only desirable for the wider public benefit, but was the 'golden key' to unlock benefit for museums themselves, by generating greater media interest and financial and political support. The NMS Trustees were already fully seized of this argument. As early as 1986 they had issued *St. Andrew, will he ever see the light?* So, a decade ahead of Anderson, they had not been blate about 'generating media interest' and seeking 'financial and political support'.

He stressed the importance of a welcoming attitude by front of house staff.
> For those members of the public whose private domain may be impoverished and insecure, the existence of a clean, comfortable and beautiful place which is theirs to enter and share with others as of right, brings particular benefits...Members of the public – and particularly children – often learn and remember more from how they were treated by the museum than from the formal content of the displays. [55]

The 'Customer Service Standards for Visitor Operations', quoted in Appendix Thirteen, amply demonstrate the importance which is attached by NMS management to welcoming visitors to MoS, with the resultant benefits to their learning experience.

Anderson deplored (p.23) that most museums do not conduct research and evaluation of visitor learning. This criticism arguably justifies the research in this dissertation on visitor learning outcomes.

The UK general election of 1997 resulted in a victory for New Labour under Tony Blair. The new government changed the name of the Department of National Heritage to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and asked Anderson to update his

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[54] Anderson , in *A Commonwealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom.* xii.
[55] Anderson, in *A Commonwealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom.* 8.

report to take account of its policy initiatives in education and culture, new lottery funding, and the establishment of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), which replaced the MGC. The result was a second edition of Anderson's report, but the original recommendations and targets remained unchanged, with its conclusion that 'museums are a vast public learning resource that awaits development'. [56] The Foreword by Alan Howarth, Minister for the Arts, said

> Education surely should be central to the work of museums and galleries....
> David Anderson's report has had an immense impact on both the museums
> and the education communities. But a great deal has happened in the last
> two years, not least the election of a new government committed to
> realising the benefits of the emerging learning society.

Anderson's reports in 1997 and 1999 mark a sea change in the thinking and support of successive governments, at ministerial level, about the educational role of museums. [57]

NMS had anticipated the change in thinking. Mary Bryden, Head of Public Affairs in NMS, had in 1990 set up a Curriculum Advisory Group and a Junior Board, expanded the existing schools programme, developed a team of volunteer guides and increased the programme of talks and lectures. As early as 1984, she was offering case study examples of good museum education. Later, Sue Mitchell, Education Officer at NMS, edited *Object Lessons, the Role of Museums in Education*, as part of the Museums Education Initiative (1994/6**).[58] It seems fair to conclude that NMS was already fully committed to the role of education before MoS was created.**

Anderson's Reports were paralleled by writings on Education and Learning in Museums, by both respected academic authorities and museum practitioners.

Hooper-Greenhill traced the evolution of museums, from the Medici palace in fifteenthcentury Florence, through 'cabinets of curiosities', the 'cabinet of the world', and the 'Repository of the Royal Society of England'. She argued that, at the birth of the

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[56] David Anderson, *A Common Wealth: Museums in the Learning Age,* (London, 1999).
[57] In February 2006 the MLA commissioned further research on education in museums. The resultant report, *Museum Learning Survey 2006,* is available from the MLA website, but its statistics are not comparable to the earlier ones, because they apply only to England.
[58] Sue Mitchell (ed.), *Object Lessons: the Role of Museums in Education* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1996).

'public museum', there was a division between the private space, where the curator produced knowledge, and the public space, where the visitor consumed the product. [59] This had changed. She forecast developments of the kind that, in 2010, NMS were proposing, as part of the RM Project. Visitors would have access to locational information and guidance for market segments such as families, 'culture vultures', 'self-developers' and 'lifelong learners'. A Research Library would complement this, with computers catering for experts and 'aficionados'. [60]

In 1994, against the background of a 'very severe recession', **Hooper-Greenhill** wrote that the museum must fight its corner against other claims to funds. [61]

> A new role has to be found for museums.   The museum has become an establishment for learning and enjoyment…it is the educational potential of museums, founded on their unique collections, that gives them their particular market niche within the leisure industry.

She returned to this in 1995, in *Museum, Media, Message*. Museums were at a time of great crisis.

> Many museum people are losing their jobs, and many others are under threat...it is not only museums that are suffering. Schools are losing teachers, and leisure facilities such as swimming pools are opening less frequently; many businesses have closed down, and very many people live in daily fear of losing their jobs. [62]

It is clear from her writings that in the early 1990s museum educators were extremely worried by the then current financial crisis, which is now chillingly paralleled by the global financial crisis of 2008/9, and the UK coalition government's intention to make major public sector funding cuts.   This dissertation was completed before the date when the detail of these cuts was announced.

Many of Hooper-Greenhill's points, including the need to cater for family audiences, for audience development and partnerships, and for research into visitors' satisfaction and customer care, have now been widely accepted in principle (if not yet always fully

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[59] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London and New York, 1992). 202.
[60] Source: a talk to the NMS volunteer guides, on 13 July, 2009, by Evelyn Simpson, Head of Information Services, and Mark Glancy, Library Operations Manager.
[61] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors* (London and New York, 1994). 2.
[62] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (ed.), *Museum, Media, Message* (London and New York, 1995). 2.

implemented in practice*).* She wrote that quantitative research on visitor demographic profiles had been undertaken, but

> what do we know about what visitors do once they arrive in a museum or gallery? Research here is lamentably thin in Britain...(However), we are beginning to ask what we can do to behave in a more sensitive way towards our audiences. We are beginning to wonder what 'evaluation' is and whether it can help us to do our jobs better.

She argued that visitor research is an essential management information tool, and should include both qualitative and quantitative research. [63] She referred to the assessment of visitor responses to the NMS Discovery Room in 1990, as an example of qualitative work. (See Part Four).

In effect, she was urging the need for evaluation of visitor learning, as attempted in the survey described in Part Four.

Nigel Pittman, Head of the Museums and Galleries Division of the Office of Arts and Libraries, wrote that the policy of any museum should be an education policy.

> In the past, too many museums – and worse still, art galleries – have been content to put objects on display in a way that encourages appreciation of them from a purely aesthetic point of view. The message for the future has to be that this isn't good enough. Too often galleries have been planned by curators and designers who fail to see the need for communication. If education in its broadest sense was considered, it was as an afterthought, frequently too late to alter the planning or design. Planning an education policy should help with that, but what is really needed is recognition that education is a key component of every museum's raison d'être. [64]

(Pittman was formerly Secretary to the Trustees of NMS. Perhaps he took to his new post the ethos he experienced in NMS?).

Serrell emphasises that human beings are governed by many factors that most of us have in common – 'the need for physical comfort and non-threatening spaces, feelings of hunger or fatigue'. Museums should cater for 'basic drives ("Where's the toilet?") before attempting to help visitors to achieve higher levels of consciousness'. She argues for 'a very powerful modality: the real thing'. Museums display real stuff,

> and that's why visitors come: to look at it...to get to see the real thing…to find out how big/small/shiny/awesome it really is. For many people, their experience with the real thing will always be of primary importance. [65]

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[63] Hooper-Greenhill, in *Museum, Media, Message.* 4-6.

[64] Nigel Pittman, 'Writing a museum education policy', in *GEM Newsletter* 43, 1991.

[65] Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (London and New Delhi, 1996). 39 and 67.

Lalage Bown agrees.

> Because museums offer the sight, and sometimes the handling of objects they have an immediacy which no other learning source can offer. Books, radio, television are all, in a sense, second hand. A museum offers everything at first hand. [66]

Maureen Matthew writes about the need for an ongoing visitor survey with the focus on the visitor's perspective on his or her own learning. [67]

> In preparing our exhibits and educational programming, we tend to become focussed on our goal for the exhibit and exclude discovery of learning that may be relevant and important to the adult visitor...museums conduct surveys on visitor demographics, on what museums are interested in the visitor learning, but can there not be an on-going visitor survey with the focus on the visitor's perspective on their own learning? Regardless of the original intent of the exhibit, what did the visitor learn that was important to him or her?

This is precisely why Parts One, Three and Four of this research compare the **intent** of the creators, the **content** of the displays, and the **learning outcome** for visitors.

Hein discusses the contrast between traditional, didactic and expository **teaching**, as in schools, and **discovery learning**, where learners interact with the material in a way that changes how their minds work as they learn. Displays are passive, while discovery is active. He goes on to describe ladder and network theories. [68] Ladders build up knowledge incrementally, whereas networks build relationships that can spread out in different directions according to the previous experience of the learner. (Level 3 in the Museum of Scotland arguably offers both. Down the centre there is incremental progression from a peasant, agricultural economy to an industrial economy – cruck house, hand power, water power, steam power. On the north side there are displays about separate trades and industries – tobacco, wines and spirits, shoemakers, carpenters, goldsmiths, the Merchant City, ceramics, glassworks, pewter, mining, a colliery model, wrought iron, cast iron, and bank development. It could be argued that all of these 'networked' from the central theme of transformation, from a peasant to an industrial economy. However, there is no evidence in the proceedings of the Exhibition

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[66] Lalage Bown, in *Museums and the Education of Adults*. 37.
[67] Maureen Matthew, 'Adult Learners', in Gail Durbin (ed.), *Developing Museum Exhibitions for Lifelong Learning* (London, 1996). 71.
[68] Hein**,** *Learning in the Museum* (London and New York, 1998). Chapter 5.

Review Committee that Hein's writings on ladder and network theory directly influenced the layout of Level 3).

Hein dislikes the traditional, didactic method of teaching because it assumes that knowledge has an existence independent of the learner, who is a passive recipient. Conversely, constructivism – the idea that all learners construct meaning for themselves – takes account of what is already in the minds of learners. (He admits that this approach was not how he taught his children to cross the busy street in front of his house!). He concludes with 'We know the range of visitor reactions to their museum experience is tremendous; we know that powerful, enriching, even life- changing moments are possible in museums. **Visitors do learn in the museum'**. [69] (Bold text is this researcher's).

 Falk and Dierking, too, maintain that people do learn in museums. [70] But they admit that documenting that learning is difficult. They describe case studies in the various locations in the USA and Australia, from which they conclude: -

- That the traditional "transmission - absorption" model of learning, as in formal school teaching, is not applicable to learning in museums. (Indeed they argue that it doesn't quite work in schools either!). .
- That people can mentally organise information effectively, if it is recounted to them in a story, which often utilises cultural artifacts. (This argument is supported by this researcher's personal experience in conducting several hundred guided tours of MoS over ten years. Many visitors, unprompted, have said that what they most enjoy and remember, is the story behind an object. Other volunteer guides agree. However, the story should be about the object itself, not the person who happened to own it at one time, unless the owner, as in *Nicholas and Alexandra* (see Part Four) is essential to the object's story).
- That visitors' prior knowledge, experience and interest, and what they talk about, during a visit and afterwards, are different for each person. So it has proved very difficult to get compelling evidence for learning from museums. Ideally, they should

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[69] Hein, *Learning in the Museum.* 179.

[70] John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (London and New Delhi, 2000). Chapter 9.

be re-surveyed by telephone, several months later, and asked how much they recall and what conversations or personal events have jogged their memories.

- That their own and many other studies strongly support the premise that museum experiences facilitate some degree of learning in virtually all participants, **although not necessarily the learning an educator would predict.** (Bold is this researcher's).

Re-surveying visitors, as they recommend, may indeed be the ideal, but there are obvious, practical difficulties, of time and cost, which ruled out any attempt by this researcher to do so. However, Part Four discusses alternative attempts to get more feedback from visitors than can be obtained simply from a questionnaire-based survey.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, **Foucault** (1926-84) ranges widely over grammar, literature, mental health, medicine, sexuality, science, political economy, biology, natural history, taxonomy and psychopathology (which last he calls a 'pseudo-science'). [71] He has read widely and thought deeply, and his analyses, challenges and somewhat convoluted arguments leave lesser mortals struggling in his wake.

He defines *Archaeology of Knowledge* as follows.

> This term does not imply the search for a beginning; it does not relate
> analysis to geological excavation. It designates the general theme of a
> description that questions the already-said at the level of its existence: of
> the enunciated function that operates within it, of the discursive formation,
> and the general archive system to which it belongs. Archaeology
> describes discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive.

His aim is to cut himself off from the 'history of ideas' until he has shown in what way his 'archaeological analysis' differs from the descriptions of the 'history of ideas'. He lists four differences between archaeological analysis and the history of ideas – 'the attribution of innovation, the analysis of contradictions, comparative descriptions, and the mapping of transformations'.

He argues that 'archaeology is much more willing than the history of ideas to speak of discontinuities, ruptures, gaps, entirely new forms of positivity, and of sudden

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[71] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London and New York, 2002), translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith). 196, also 148, 155 and 187.

redistributions'. Whereas previous practice tended to build up in a linear fashion, his archaeology

> proceeds in the opposite direction: it seeks rather to untie all those knots that historians have patiently tied; it increases differences, blurs lines of communication, and tries to make it more difficult to pass from one thing to another.

He urges historians and curators to accept the limitations of objects, documents and linear history, and to link them to developments and discontinuities of thoughts, progressions, inventions, and cultural assumptions. Put more simply, in explaining history, linear successions should give way to discoveries in depth. Beneath the level of the history of governments, wars and famines, other history levels should be taken into account – sea routes, agriculture, mining, drought and irrigation. 'The history of science, philosophy, thought and literature have evaded the work and methods of the historian'.

However, while his challenges to academic historians and the creators of displays must give us pause, they arguably go beyond what is practical in displaying objects. One cannot expect visitors to grapple with the depth of Foucault's thinking, which goes much farther than the contrast between Butterfield's *Whig Interpretation of History,* and Marxist theories of *History from below.* [72]

Nevertheless, the curators who devised the displays in MoS have gone some way towards presenting the complexity of history and the discoveries that Foucault describes. For example, the Stewart Gallery, on Level 1, follows the traditional, linear telling of history, from Bruce to James VI and I, whereas Level 3 shows the effect of discoveries and inventions in transforming Scotland from a peasant agricultural economy to an industrial economy. Again, the religious displays on Level 1 have a linear narrative from the National Covenant of 1638 to the Roman Catholicism of James VII and II, but also show the human consequences, in the Peden mask and other objects, of the persecution of the Covenanters. Another example is *Scotland: A Changing Nation* on Level 6, which is linear from World War One to the present day, but is also strong on social, domestic, industrial, entertainment, and political changes.

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[72] See extracts in Adam Budd, (ed.) *The Modern Historiography Reader: Western Sources* (Routledge, London and New York, 2009).

Do these displays reflect the conscious or subconscious influence of Foucault's theorising on the thinking of curators? Or was the primary influence just that the closer we get to modern times, the more objects and documents become available, the faster inventions appear and the greater becomes awareness of the acceleration of social changes?

Putting Theory into Practice

A Teacher's Guide to Learning from Objects is a booklet that does exactly what it says on the tin. Its aim is to

- show how the ability to interpret objects aids our understanding of the world,
- show that specialist knowledge is not essential to learning from objects,
- help teachers to make use of objects in the classroom and at sites,
- make objects central to the curriculum, not simply classroom decorations, and
- show cross-curricular applications and teaching techniques. [73]

The book is about both classroom learning and visits to museums, which is where people tend to think about studying objects. Objects can be things commonly found in the classroom or home. As one of the many practical examples, on page 9 there is an illustration of a wire coathanger, changing its function when re-used as a car aerial! It argues that people who do not read or write easily, or those with learning difficulties, will often relate well to objects. (That is confirmed by the research in *Access in Mind,* listed in Part Three).

It is a well-written argument for the value of learning from objects, and for how teachers can put useful, inspiring, imaginative, lessons across to their pupils in the classroom, as well as in museum visits. Although originally published in 1990, the number of reprints is testimony to its continuing value.

Object Lessons: the Role of Museums in Education, is another useful handbook of good practice in delivering education in museums. In the introduction, Professor Martin Kemp,

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[73] Gail Durbin, Susan Morris and Sue Wilkinson, *A Teacher's Guide to Learning from Objects* (English Heritage, London, 1990). 3.

Chair of the Advisory Panel on Education in Museums and Galleries, (and former
Professor of Art History at St. Andrews) argues that

> Anyone who has seen the apparently inert objects in a museum coming to
> life under the shining eyes of curious pupils, heard the buzz of discussion
> between children, teachers and curators, and witnessed the creative
> projects stimulated by a new kind of experience, will know what is possible.

The booklet gives examples of partnerships between museums, schools and Education
Departments, and case studies of good practice in many subjects, including language,
mathematics, the environment, art and design, and so on. It deals with training in
museum education for both teachers and museum staff. Everyone who comes into
direct contact with teachers and pupils should be included. [74] Not just museum
educators, but also administrators responsible for telephone bookings, and museum
attendants, who have extensive knowledge about the exhibits that they see all day,
every day. If attendants

> are aware of the context in which the displays are likely to be used by schools, they can
> provide information and direction where appropriate which will enhance the learning
> experience for pupils.

So, like the *Teachers Guide, Object Lessons* is a valuable, practical guide, written in
clear, plain English, on how to use museum objects and displays to get across
information and understanding, not just about history, but also the environment and
other subjects in the curriculum. Its emphasis on the value of partnerships, and on
training both for teachers and museum staff, including attendants and others not
labelled as educators, should be useful to all museum managers, and is already
practised in MoS, by many loans and joint exhibitions such as the tour of the Lewis
chess pieces, by the work of the education staff, and by the training of attendants.

In conclusion, I suggest that it is impossible to say how far the writings above, and the
work of the curators in NMS, influenced each other, consciously or sub-consciously. The
curators certainly had access to the books, because nearly all are available in NMS
Library, while Hooper-Greenhill attended a symposium in NMS, NMS personnel
attended Anderson's Edinburgh 'colloquium', and Bryden's examples of good
educational practice, and the lobbying of the public for an MoS actually pre-dated
Anderson's *'A Commonwealth'.* But what can be said is that curators and writers agreed

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[74] Sue Mitchell (ed.), *Object Lessons: the Role of Museums in Education* (Edinburgh, 1996). 86.

that museums should not simply collect and conserve, but should reach out to the public, with displays that **had an educational and life-long learning role, and that they should make people feel welcome and comfortable**. Parts Three and Four examine whether the displays in MoS fulfilled these aims, and how successful they were in increasing visitors' interest in, and knowledge of, Scottish history.

PART THREE. The Displays in the Museum of Scotland

Part One researched the **intentions** of the creators of the displays in the Museum of Scotland (MoS). This Part analyses the **content** of, and the **techniques** used in, the displays that were actually created. How far did they succeed in putting across to the visiting public the creators' vision of the historic, cultural and educational value of this 'Wealth of a Nation'?

It has seven Sections.

>1 Techniques used in the displays.
>
>2 Layout of the original displays.
>
>3 Criteria used in assessing the techniques and layout.
>
>4 Analysis of the displays on Level 0
>
>5 Analysis of the displays on Level 1
>
>6 Analysis of the displays on Levels 3 and 4
>
>7 Analysis of the later, 2008, display on Level 6.

The analyses are based partly on personal observation, guided by published authorities on display techniques, and partly on unpublished primary sources – principally papers of the NMS Trustees, of the Exhibition Review Committee which monitored the creation of the displays, and letters and seminar papers in the NMS archive. These papers offer a glimpse 'Behind the Scenes at the Museum'. (Apologies to Kate Atkinson!).

SECTION ONE   Techniques used in the Displays

Museum Guidebook

In 1988 NMS published a guide to the MoS, written by Jenni Calder. Only remaindered copies of a short, souvenir booklet, dated 2004, with illustrations of some selected objects, are now available. Currently (2010) there is no guidebook to MoS.

Calder explained that *Early People,* on Level 0, introduces 'the exhibition's absentees', through figures sculpted by Sir Eduardo Paolozzi. Each of the four groups of figures highlights a theme. ***A Generous Land*** looks at resources and how people used them. ***Wider Horizons*** explores the movement of people, goods and ideas. ***Them and Us***

examines issues of conflict, imperialism, and power. ***In Touch with the Gods*** deals with spiritual life. Each display case includes a map and a timeline, to show where objects were found, and their approximate date.

These explanations were useful because visitors get no similar information from the labels in Level 0**.** It seems a pity that no up to date version of this guide, including the 2008 gallery*,* is currently available. Several visitors interviewed for the survey in Part Four said, unprompted, that they would have welcomed a small, illustrated guide which they could have taken home, to show friends and relatives what they had seen, and indeed to refresh their own memories. In the absence of a guidebook, information about the objects is provided in the following ways.

Labels

Scripts in MoS had to avoid jargon and be written by people with writing skills. Text for the introduction to each theme was limited to a maximum of 100 words, sections within each theme to 150 words, introductions to topics to 200 words, and labels for individual objects to thirty words. Where cases had many small objects, there would not be room for labels for each. So group labels had to be produced, and the information cut to the bone. The graphic designers produced type sizes that conformed to existing NMS guidelines and ranged from eighteen points for object labels to twenty-four points for wall panels. [75]

Audio Guides

There are **audio guides** in English, Gaelic, French, German, Italian and Spanish. Their purpose was not to provide curatorial information, but to **add another dimension** to the visitor experience. Calder wrote,

> We wanted to use sound to provide something generic to that medium…We developed an audio guide with words contemporary to the displays, plus music and sound effects where appropriate. The aim was to enhance the narrative of the exhibits, to allow visitors to hear contemporary language, and to evoke experience in a more immediate way…It was a major task, and a major collaboration between curators, research assistants, myself as scriptwriter, the production company Heritage Productions, the BBC and Antenna Audio. The BBC partnership allowed us access to their archives, which provided most of the music and sound effects. [76]

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[75] Jenni Calder, 'From Artefacts to Audience', in J. M. Fladmark (ed.), *Heritage and Museums: Shaping National Identity,* (Shaftesbury, 2000). 48-50.
[76] Calder, in Fladmark. 51.

A later version of the audio guide, with a different contractor, contained fewer sound effects, music or attempts to produce contemporary or unfamiliar language.

Interactives

There are **interactive touch screens** at important objects such as the Clarsach, the Maiden, the Bute Mazer, the Peden Mask and the *Ellesmere* locomotive. Professor Lynch told this researcher, in a personal comment, that he believes that it was originally intended to have more interactives, but this ambition was thwarted by lack of money. He also stressed that it is essential to provide enough funds to repair interactives quickly when they (inevitably) break down. (Professor Lynch was a member of the Exhibition Review Committee).

Guided Tours

There are free, hour-long tours, at three fixed times each day, by volunteer guides. Two are on 'Highlights' of the Museum while the third offers a specialised theme, such as 'The Jacobites'. It is possible to book tours, charged at £2 per head, for visiting groups. If a group has more than fifteen visitors (which can happen when a cruise ship comes to Leith or Rosyth), NMS will try to get enough guides to ensure that no individual group has more than fifteen. A training CD-ROM for the guides was illustrated by photographs taken by Elizabeth Scott, and produced by David and Odile Hughson. It contains voice-overs from several guides on their own favourite Highlights.[77] (The recruitment and training of the guides is described in Appendix Nine). There are thirty-eight entries on the audio guide, compared to 113 on the guides' CD-ROM, but this comparison is invalid. The audio guide is geared to the needs of first-time visitors who are looking for a basic selection of the most iconic objects, whereas the guides' CD-ROM is a research and training tool, from which guides can choose, and learn about, the objects that they want to include in their tours**.**

But no reconstructions

Calder explained that

> We decided against reconstructions and tableaux, for two reasons. We wanted the
> emphasis to be on the real thing, and we believed that reconstructions could detract from

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[77] Information gleaned from NMS brochures, Visitor Services Staff, and the volunteer guides.

the object. Reconstructions can communicate a great deal and can be a very valuable source of understanding (dioramas are used to considerable effect in *Beginnings*). But they do not necessarily help visitors to understand artifacts. **And this underlines the keystone of our approach: we were not telling Scotland's story illustrated by objects. Our aim was to present the stories objects could tell.** [78]

Limitations of Object Based Displays

In a seminar on *Interpretation and Cultural Identity* in NMS on 25 June,1999, Dr David Clarke, Keeper of Archaeology, emphasised that the MoS can deal only with the objects NMS have got – 'for example there is nothing on the work of the Kirk overseas simply because we have no objects, although it is an important subject. The same goes for William Wallace'. [79]

Neal Ascherson puts it this way,

> How does a Museum of Scotland commemorate the Covenanters, except with a tattered flag, a gallows leaflet or a bible? How can a shelf of books, however world-shaking their contents, do justice to the power of the Scottish Enlightenment? How can a parchment sheet (the Lubeck letter) evoke the passionate myth of the "Guardian" whose name was given to wells and trees and stones all over the country? [80]

On the other hand, Appendix Four refers to an exhibition which 'was a revelation, even to some of us…who should have known better the international status of what we already have'. It was *Angels, Nobles and Unicorns, Art and Patronage in Medieval Scotland*, mounted by NMAS in August and September 1982. It showed what could be done by displays of objects in the Scottish collections. In a personal comment, Professor Lynch referred to its 'seismic impact' and thought it was 'perhaps the ultimate inherent case for an object-based treatment of medieval Scotland'.

SECTION TWO

The Layout of the Displays

The displays are in **roughly chronological order**. *Early People* (8000 B.C.- A.D. 1100) is in the basement (Level 0). *Kingdom of the Scots* (900-1707) is on Levels 1 and 2. *Scotland Transformed* (1707- nineteenth century) is on Levels 3 and 4. *Industry and Empire* (1707-1914) is on Level 5. Level 6 was originally *Twentieth Century Scotland*,

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[78] Calder, in Fladmark. 46.
[79] Unpublished, but consulted, by kind permission of the Director, in the NMS archives.
[80] Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices* (London, 2002), 44.

but re-opened (2008) as *Scotland: A Changing Nation* (World War One to the present day).

Inside Levels 1 to 6 the displays are also in roughly chronological order, but on Level 0 they are not. Dr Clarke has explained the thinking behind the archaeological displays. [81]

> ...   Because the Museum of Scotland is primarily a presentation of the surviving three dimensional material, it can never aspire to being a comprehensive summary of Scotland's history. This apparent weakness the museum has sought to turn into a benefit. It has quite deliberately constructed its presentations around the idea that much of the evidence is available elsewhere in Scotland – in, for example, other museums, the properties of Historic Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland, and the landscape generally. The hope is that the Museum of Scotland will create in visitors the wish to explore more. *Early People*...eschews the more usual chronological approach, structuring the material instead into four major themes. These examine key issues: **resources, contact between groups, power and social structures** and, finally, the **rituals associated with death and belief.**
>
> The main displays have been constructed with a clearly defined route in mind…a journey through prehistory and early history. At various points visitors will encounter major works by Andy Goldsworthy reaffirming that there are still among us individuals with the same awareness, knowle*dge* and appreciation of their natural environment that was probably second nature to prehistoric people. But more than this, his works, along with those of Paolozzi, emphasise the importance of visitors using their imagination to engage with the distant past...sites are a key backdrop...but there is no attempt to bring those sites into the museum. They have to be experienced in their own landscapes and not through cropped versions decorating a building in central Edinburgh...There is for the creators of this exhibition a clear route through it, **although early experience with our visitors suggests that its clarity is much less obvious to them.**

(Bold text is this researcher's. The length of this quotation is justified by its being an authoritative account of the thinking behind the non-chronological layout of *Early People*).

Ascherson, whose *Stone Voices* evokes the atmospheric, landscape power of the stones of pre-history, praises the Level 0 displays. 'Against the pre-medieval show…the rest of Scottish history stands no chance'. After listing the Pictish symbol stones, and other iconic objects, he concludes,

> Visually there is no contest…In the silence, the objects from before 1200 steal the show. Imagination flies straight to them, and stays there with the "barbaric " jewellery, the undeciphered rock inscriptions, the stone faces with their narrow noses and bulging lentoid eyes, the vivid and yet utterly

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[81] David A. Clarke, 'New things set in many landscapes: aspects of the Museum of Scotland', in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, Volume 128. (Edinburgh, 1998).

lost language of Pictish carved symbols. [82]

Experts and enthusiasts like Ascherson can understand and appreciate Dr Clarke's approach, but the visitor survey in Part Four shows that many first-time visitors are puzzled by the layout, and would welcome more explanation.

Clarke himself went on in his article to acknowledge that a lot of people feel comfortable with conventional displays: people need reassurance as well as challenge.

> As one moves up the building, the landscape becomes apparently more familiar...The visitor is now in an environment where the stories have all been told…Here is history created from texts and translated by the museum environment into a three-dimensional panorama...with sufficiently familiar names – Robert Bruce; Mary, Queen of Scots; Bonnie Prince Charlie – to make one feel comfortable wandering in it.

SECTION THREE
Criteria used in assessing the techniques and layout

Analysis of Labels

Are the labels easy to read? Do they follow the guidelines on readability in *Access in Mind: towards the Inclusive Museum,* a research report on accessibility – not in terms of physical access, but **intellectual access**. [83] Are they at the right height, distance and angle? No text over a background graphic? Plain, not fancy fonts? (Sans serif fonts are thought to be easier to read by people with dyslexia). Plain language? A hierarchy of information? Sufficient contrast between text and background?   (The need for enough contrast applies not only to labels but also to the presentation of objects. George Dalgleish told this researcher, in a personal discussion, that silver should not be displayed against a white background, but against a contrasting deep colour, as in the *Silver - Made in Scotland* exhibition in NMS, which he curated).

The author, Ann Rayner, emphasises that the content of her guidelines do not present the results of original research, but simply attempt to bring together the results of work by many others. She gives a full list at the end of her section on labels (p. 62). They include guidance issued by the Smithsonian Institution, GEM (the Group for Education in Museums), the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Carnegie UK Trust, the National

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[82] Ascherson, *Stone Voices.* 44/5.

[83] Ann Rayner, *Access in Mind: Towards the inclusive museum* (Intact, Edinburgh, 1998).

Maritime Museum, the Science Museum, NMS's *A Practical Guide to designing Exhibitions to include people with disabilities* (G. Nolan, 1997), James Carter, and others. However, as her guidelines offer a convenient summary of the consensus of these authorities, they have been used, together with Beverly Serrell's *Exhibit Labels. An Interpretive Approach,* as the main criteria in this research. [84]

The Foreword, by Neil Postman, to Serrell's book gives a useful overview.

> An ideal museum would invite us to engage all of our senses...but we rarely hear anything, and are usually forbidden to touch; smelling is out of the question. And that is why the words that are used to tell us about the objects displayed are of such critical importance. They must carry the burden of making us feel, hear, smell – yes, and even see – what we are looking at...Serrell writes about how to create interpretive labels so that words will compensate for sensory experience denied.

Serrell recommends that labels should be placed directly next to what they are about, because they 'will be read more than labels keyed by a number on the text and placed at a greater distance away'. (While this is no doubt true, it is not always possible. For example, in Level 0 of MoS there are about 5,000 objects. It would not be practicable to put a label beside each). She also offers guidance on font size, bold and reversed out print, avoidance of block capitals, and contrast. [85]

> Many museums make the mistake, for aesthetic reasons, of having soft looking labels, such as white on grey, or brown on tan, which render labels less legible than they should be. Aesthetics must be balanced with the reader's need for legibility.

More guidance is in Coxall's *Museum text as mediated message.* [86] She discusses how to write labels that avoid assumptions that the writers are not aware of.

> I am not trying to suggest that it is possible for museum staff to produce exhibitions that are completely impartial and value-free. This would not be realistic and there is even a case to argue that it would not be desirable. However, it would be possible to raise the consciousness of writers in order that they are more aware of the process by which meanings are constructed and communicated. If this could be achieved they would have more control over the unconsciously mediated messages in their texts.

A writing checklist, by Carter and Hillier, is also useful. [87] It offers basic guidelines for writing museum texts, especially interpretive panels and labels, which largely tally with the guidance in Rayner and Serrell.

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[84] Beverly Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (London and New Delhi, 1996).
[85] Serrell, in *Exhibit Labels* . 235 and 195/6.
[86] Helen Coxall, 'Museum Text as Mediated Message' in *Women, Heritage and Museums* 14, (1990) 15-21.
[87] J. Carter and D. Hillier, 'A Writing Checklist', in Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (ed.), *The Educational Role of the Museum* (London, 1994).

Carter describes the Fry test of readability (counting sentences, syllables etc), which measures complexity of language, and the Cloze procedure, which indicates how readers interact with text and how much they really understand it. He suggests a benchmark of trying to write for a reading age of 12, in an exhibition for the general public. This is because the readers are not necessarily highly motivated and are likely to be standing, with distractions, including wandering children. So he explains that you're not solely writing for people who have a reading age of 12. It's just that you need to make your text as easy to read as possible. [88]

McManus describes research that shows that visual observation of the reading behaviour of visitor groups underestimates the amount of reading actually done. [89] People **do** read exhibit texts.

On the other hand, Bicknell and Mann warn that,

- Few, if any, visitors will have the time, concentration, determination, or interest to look at everything in the exhibition, let alone read everything.

- Visitors browse through an exhibition looking for cues to make them stop.

- Most people spend only a short time at most of the exhibits and pass by, having seen little to tempt them to stop.

- Most people spend a much longer period looking at a small number of exhibits – the ones they actually stop at.

- There should be an understandable logic to the arrangement of the exhibits, so that visitors can know where they are, and can identify where they want to go next.

- Each exhibit and each group should have a bold title to be read from approximately five metres. The title should allow people to sum up the exhibit as they pass by, and decide whether they want to stop. [90]

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[88] James Carter, 'How old is this text?' in *Environmental Interpretation*, February 1993, reproduced in 'Readability Tests', Chapter 36 in Gail Durbin (ed.), *Developing Museum Exhibitions for Lifelong Learning* (London, 1996).
[89] Paulette McManus, 'Oh yes they do: how museum visitors read labels and interact with exhibit texts', in *Curator* 32 (3) 1989.
[90] Sandra Bicknell and Peter Mann, 'A Picture of Visitors for Exhibition Developers', in *Visitor Studies Conference 5*, (Science Museum, London, 1993).

Analysis of Orientation, Interpretation, Audio Guides and Interactives

On **orientation,** will visitors be able to find their way easily around the displays? This researcher's analysis is based on the reactions of visitors themselves (see Part Four) and on work by Bitgood, who argues that

> Visitors tend to have a more satisfying experience and acquire more knowledge when they are given information about where to go, what to expect, how long it might take to visit, where to find rest rooms, etc. [91]

He gives principles of wayfinding, use of 'you are here' maps, signs and landmarks.

Bitgood also writes that introductory orientation devices are often ignored, perhaps because visitors want to get right to the exhibits. [92] So orientation material must be designed so that it does not compete with exhibits. He adds that visitors are reluctant to enter dark areas. They are more likely to follow lighted pathways. (This is borne out by the small number of visitors to the former European Art Gallery in the RM, which looked dark from the outside. Source – personal observation, and discussions with Front of House staff).

How good is the **interpretation**? This is an unfamiliar term to many people. It does not mean translation. It is what Freeman Tilden, the 'Father of interpretation', listed as 'Provoke, Relate, Reveal' – do something to provoke interest, then relate it to something a visitor understands. (An example could be, don't say 'twenty feet high', but 'the height of a double-decker bus'). And then reveal – explain the significance of the object. [93]

Is the interpretation of the displays satisfactory in these terms? As Lorna Ewan, Head of Interpretation at Historic Scotland, puts it,

> Interpretation is not about panels on walls; it's about the message. Our job is to work out what is likely to interest people most...And then identify the best way of communicating that...The message should always come before the medium. [94]

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[91] Steven Bitgood, 'Visitor Orientation and Circulation: some general principles', in Durbin, *Developing Museum Exhibitions for Lifelong Learning.* 149.

[92] Steven Bitgood, 'Problems in visitor orientation and circulation', in Hooper-Greenhill (ed.), *The Educational Role of the Museum* (London, 1994). 70/72.

[93] Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (North Carolina, 1957).

[94] Lorna Ewan, in *Historic Scotland Journal,* Winter 2008.

According to Lisa Roberts,

> Interpretation is the single most basic purpose of an exhibit. Whether implicit or explicit, interpretation is embedded in the act of display – in how a thing looks, in what surrounds it, in what is said or not said about it...Interpretation is in part an act of negotiation – between the values and acknowledges (sic) upheld by museums and those that are brought in by visitors. [95]

'Interpret Scotland' is an inter-agency initiative to improve the quality of interpretation in Scotland. It has a steering group of representatives of seventeen major Scottish organisations who practise interpretation, including NMS and NGS, ASVA (the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions), Historic Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the NTS, MGS and Visit Scotland. Its journal gives guidance on all aspects of communication – graphic panels, creative installations, publications, live interpretation, audio tours, multimedia, and AV. The journal is now available in digital form at *www.interpretscotland.org.uk.* It contains guidance, and case studies of good practice that have influenced this analysis.

Other publications on interpretation that have informed and influenced this analysis include SNH's *Provoke, Relate, Reveal,* [96] and Veverka's *Interpretive Master Planning.*[97]

Serrell combined labels and interpretation. She wrote that 'Interpretive labels' tell stories; they are narratives, not lists of facts. 'Any label that serves to explain, guide, question, inform or provoke – in a way that invites participation by the reader – is interpretive'. [98] There are some labels that tell short stories in MoS – for example, in the *Reivers* case, in *Kingdom of the Scots*, the label by the Junior Board tells the story behind Wat o' Harden's spurs.

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[95] Lisa C Roberts, 'Educators on Exhibit Teams: a New Role, a New Era' in *Journal of Museum Education*, Fall, 1994.

[96] Scottish Natural Heritage, *Provoke, Relate, Reveal: A Policy Framework for Interpretation* (Perth, 1997).

[97] J.Veverka, *Interpretive Master Planning* (Montana, 1994).

[98] Serrell, in *Exhibit Labels.* 9.

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If there are **audio guides** or **interactive devices**, what do they contribute to visitors and how easy are they to use? **Serrell and Raphling** warn that only a few people at a time can use a computer interactive. [99] Computers have less intrinsic interest than the real objects and often have no more attracting power than low-tech interactives. People average only around 30 seconds at an exhibit element, so a short computer programme, with quick turnover, will be used by more visitors.

Methods of Learning

Although museum displays depend heavily on labels, methods of learning are not confined to reading text. This concept is expounded in *History Beyond the Text: a Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources.* [100] Chapters cover Fine Art, the Cartoon, the Photograph, Film and Television, Music, Oral History, the Internet, and Landscape and Architecture, as well as material culture – the object. (More detail about its content is in Appendix Ten).

Howard Gardner suggests that there are seven types of intelligence: linguistic (used by writers); logical-mathematical (used by accountants and scientists); spatial (used by sailors, surgeons and sculptors); bodily-kinaesthetic (used by craftspeople, athletes and dancers); musical (used by musicians and teenagers); interpersonal (the ability to understand other people, used by teachers and religious leaders) and intrapersonal (self awareness). He argued that although we put a high valuation on the first two, all seven are equal. [101]

It seems generally accepted, by Veverka and others, that people tend to retain ten per cent of what they hear, thirty per cent of what they read, fifty per cent of what they see, and ninety per cent of what they do. Unfortunately, few objects in MoS can be touched. However, the Education Department organises handling sessions by appointment, particularly for people with learning disabilities. The objects in these sessions are usually

[99] Beverley Serrell and Britt Raphling, 'Computers on the Exhibit Floor', Chapter 24 in Durbin*, Developing Museum Exhibitions for Lifelong Learning*
[100] Sarah Barber and Corinna M. Peniston-Bird, *History Beyond the Text: a Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (London, 2009).
[101] Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences.* (New York, 1983).

duplicates, or can be touched without being damaged. There are also displays in the *Discovery Zones,* where visitors can dress as Jacobites, Roman soldiers and others.

On the **use of sound**, a decision of principle was taken at the meeting of the Exhibition Review Committee on 8 March, 1994 [102]. At the end of a discussion on acoustics, the Director (Mark Jones) said that

> it would be a mistake to allow sound to permeate constantly throughout the building and the presumption should be that most themes will contain no audio elements. Acoustic consultants had indicated that attempts to use sound effects to create impressions of reality have the greatest potential to be disturbing to other areas of the exhibition. This was particularly true of speech, where there was a conflict between projecting speech intelligibly and avoiding disturbance to visitors elsewhere in the gallery.

The Committee agreed that sound must be used very sparingly. This was reinforced by a ruling in *The Museum of Scotland Project,* an unpublished paper produced by the Project Office in March 1996. [103]

> sound spillage ...is one of the most distracting features of much modern museum display. For this reason the use of sound in any MoS exhibition will be restricted and will require specific justification and agreement by the Steering Group.

Sound is indeed scarcely used in the original galleries. Visitors can hear a clarsach being played, but it is at such a low volume that they have to be very close to the screen to hear it. However, there are many sound effects in the 2008 gallery on Level 6.

SECTION FOUR

Analysis of the Displays on Level 0.

In *Early People,* the Paolozzi Sculptures, and the Hilton of Cadboll Stone, have been selected for analysis, because they dominate the entrance area, together with some objects which are generally accepted as 'Highlights', and others that demonstrate interpretation.

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[102] As explained in Part One, the Exhibition Review Committee papers were not published, but Professor Lynch's complete set is in Edinburgh University Library's *Special Collections.*
[103] *The Museum of Scotland Project* paper is in the NMS archive, traced by the Director's staff.

The Paolozzi Sculptures

On entering Level 0 (the basement), visitors look down a flight of seven steps (with a wheelchair hoist beside them) to four groups of greater than life-size bronze figures. What is their purpose? There is no main label, or audio guide entry, explaining the groups as a whole, but there is a label on a wall or plinth at each of the four groups.

Paolozzi Sculptures
(Photo Courtesy Elizabeth Scott)

The wall label for the first group reads,

From their things to their lives

. Making your way from one group of figures to the next mirrors your journey through the exhibition. This first group, 'A Generous Land', relates to the beginning of the exhibition. Here early people use their wits and skills to make the most of the land and its resources, allowing them to live comfortably and well.

Every object has a descriptive label. A number relates each object to a time line and a map, telling you how old the object is and where it was found. Text panels offer some interpretation of the objects.

The first group has twelve pieces of jewellery. One is a pair of brass brooches. The map shows that it was found on Islay, and the time line that it dates from about A.D. 500. (This example shows how visitors can identify the date and origin of any piece of jewellery in the four groups).

The labels for the other three groups are headed '**Moving Around in Their World'***,* *'***Expressions of Power'**, and '**Beyond the World'***.* They emphasise respectively that early people moved around quite a lot, that we know little about how they acted towards one another, except for relationships based on power, and that their beliefs and practices, such as disposing of their dead, seem alien and unfamiliar*.*

Analysis of the Presentation of the Paolozzi Figures

Labels and orientation

The labels make clear how little we know about early people, and invite visitors to use their imagination. However they do not explain the purpose of the Paolozzi statues, nor that the entrance to the 'exhibition' to which they refer – the main archaeological displays -- is beyond and behind the third group.

In a letter to this researcher, dated 1 June, 2009, Dr Clarke wrote, in reply to this criticism, that he 'argued all through the MoS process that there should be comprehensive orientation'. However, the architects resisted any signage, and he remembered the architect, Gordon Benson, saying 'the building signs itself'. Dr Clarke disagreed, and believes that the architecture of the building makes orientation difficult. 'There was a clear choice, that there should be no strong route taken, by most of the Trustees and senior management, a view that I still think wholly mistaken'.

In a separate, personal discussion of this point, in his office in the V&A, on 26 June, 2009, Mark Jones, former Director of NMS (now Sir Mark) thought the difficulty was in part a clash of two very strong personalities – David Clarke and Gordon Benson. He accepted that management was not in favour of single, strong routes through the displays.   But he thought that offering routes is a problem for all museums. How far should a single narrative be imposed on the visitor? All displays represent the point of view of their creators, but a permanent display should not necessarily follow a single route, presenting an authoritarian argument. A printed text must be followed in sequence, but people looking at objects in a building are likely to think in a non-linear way. It is said that everyone gets lost in the V&A, but one of his colleagues replied 'and why is that a problem?' **Should you have a prescribed way through, or just present the visitor with an experience?**

He added that he did not think that the architects resisted all signage. Subliminal orientation is important, and Benson and Forsyth believed in that. For example, anyone who sees the Newcomen beam engine knows exactly where s/he is. The MoS building is itself part of the story. It frames views and has Scottish shapes built into it. Benson and Forsyth's own book presents and illustrates this argument. [104]

A counter to Sir Mark's argument (not discussed with him) could be that the V&A differs from the MoS, in offering a quite contrasting experience. It has magnificent collections of objects, organised in themes, such as ceramics, which the visitor can choose according to personal taste or interest, whereas in MoS visitors probably expect a layout offering a consistent narrative of how the history of Scotland and its inhabitants developed, from the earliest times to the twentieth century. Having consciously chosen their own themes of interest, visitors to the V&A may feel in less need of orientation than visitors to a museum like MoS.

As noted earlier, Dr Clarke has himself accepted, in the light of experience, that the route through the archaeological displays is not obvious to visitors. They are unlikely to realise, from the labels alone, that the displays are grouped by four themes and not, as they might expect, either chronologically, or by peoples. Guides report visitors as asking, for example, 'Where are the Roman objects?' and having to be told that the displays are not grouped that way. However, anyone reading the labels carefully should take Dr Clarke's point that we know so little about early people that we must use our imagination, in looking at the objects.

Audio Guide

Ascherson argues that this area is object rich. 'The objects from before 1200 steal the show'. [105] Yet the audio guide has no entry for either the Paolozzi sculptures or the Hilton of Cadboll Stone. This seems surprising, given their intrinsic importance, the impact of their sheer size, and the way they dominate this whole area.

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[104] Benson+Forsyth, *Museum of Scotland* (London, 1999).
[105] Ascherson, in *Stone Voices*. 45.

Tours

The guides' training CD-ROM explains that the sculptures were designed by Sir Eduardo Paolozzi, gives his biography, describes his international reputation, lists some of his other well-known works and explains that the four groups of sculptures introduce the four themes. Were guides to use all this in a tour, it would take at least four and a half minutes, which is too long for any single highlight in an hour-long tour. However, it is intended to be a quarry of background information, to help guides answer questions. The CD-ROM also explains the colour coding. The labels in each theme feature a different strip of colour. However, the colours are pale, so the necessarily subdued lighting means that in practice museum visitors with less than 20/20 vision, find it difficult to differentiate them. Moreover, in the lack of an explanation of the colour coding, it may be doubtful whether visitors understand its significance.

The above is based on personal observation by,
- reading the labels,
- listening to the audio guide,
- looking at, and listening to, the volunteer guides' training CD-ROM,
- discussing with several guides, and Front of House staff, their experience of questions by, and comments from, visitors.

The Hilton of Cadboll Stone

The **label** at this huge stone reads,

> **A Female Aristocrat**
>
> Before the Romans invaded Scotland, images of human beings are very rare indeed. From then onwards, there are more of them, almost always seen on monumental sculpture. Here, a female aristocrat, riding sidesaddle, is the central figure in an elaborate panel depicting a hunting scene. Hunting was a favourite aristocratic pursuit, and this scene is more concerned with honouring the aristocracy than with picturing a real hunt. The sculptor's placing of the woman in the scene is a tribute to the person who commissioned the cross – a woman of some importance.

The map and timeline show that the sculpture was originally in Easter Ross, and is dated to about 850 A.D.. The guides' CD-ROM adds that the mirror and comb usually indicate a high-status woman. It questions whether it is just a hunting scene? For example, why are the hunters carrying shields? It draws attention to the typical Pictish symbols such as a crescent and V rod, and to the reverse side, with the date 1676, and the initials of

Alexander Duff and his three wives. At one time this side had a cross, excised so that it could be used as a gravestone. It adds that the original base of the slab has now been found, and a replica erected on the original location.

In January, 2010 an excellent touch screen was installed beside the Stone, to give all the above information, and more. Glenmorangie sponsored it, because their distillery is close its original site. Visitors should be able to learn easily, from label and/or touch screen, what this object is all about.

The Hunterston Brooch

There are two labels. The first, **'The Brooch and the Journey'** stresses its exquisite craftwork, the wide-ranging contacts of its jeweller, and that it bears witness to groups of people whose organisation, based on relations of power, was emphasised through social display. The map and timeline show that it was found at Hunterston in Ayrshire, and is dated to about A.D. 700. The second label, '**The Essence of Display'** speculates that it was probably made at a royal site such as Dunadd, from rare and precious materials – gilded silver, gold and amber. Anyone seeing it would understand that the wearer was a person of great power, because it is much bigger and better than any other contemporary brooch. It could have been a gift from a ruler to someone of great importance.

The audio guide gives most of the information in the first label and adds that it was found in 1830 and is one of the museum's finest treasures. It explains that royal control of the craftsmen who could make such brooches was as rigorous as the laws governing their use. In a personal tour, which Dr Clarke gave to the volunteer guides on 10 January, 2000, he explained that the Brooch represents not only the **processing** of resources but also **power** and **contact** with other areas. **So the first three themes are linked in this single object – it sums up the journey through the exhibition.**

The CD-ROM gives more detail about the high quality of workmanship, including filigree and granulation, and the way it was worn, and adds that the Brooch had different owners: the Norse name Melbrigda is scratched on its reverse.

Some visitors may be content just to admire this beautiful object, but those who read the

labels, and/or listen to the audio guide, or go on a tour, should readily understand that it is really a symbol of power, and an example of the high quality of artistry in metal that was possible in the so-called 'Dark Ages' more than a thousand years ago.

The Cramond Lioness

The label reads,

A Roman Officer's Memorial

> Death was not simply a matter of disposing of the body. It was a very important social occasion, at which the living affirmed their relationships with the deceased and with each other. Funerary rites, at various times and in various ways, marked aspects of the dead person's identity. This imposing stone monument signalled the status of a high ranking Roman, for whose grave it was intended. The sculpture expresses the Roman symbolism of death. The Lioness devouring the naked, bearded man represents the destructive power of death. The two snakes on the base symbolise the survival of the soul.

The map and timeline show that the lioness was found at Cramond, and is dated to about 200 A.D.. The audio guide says that it was discovered by accident in 1997, nearly 1800 years after being carved for a Roman officer's grave. It goes on to repeat the label. The CD-ROM explains that the lioness was carefully lifted out of the river Almond by crane, cleaned, and conserved just in time to be displayed at the opening of MoS.   NMS and the City of Edinburgh Council jointly own it.

Visitors who look at this big, impressive object, read the label, or listen to the audio guide, or go on a tour, will surely learn something about the Roman attitude to death and the afterlife.

The Carnyx

The label, map and timeline give the basic information about this war trumpet. The audio guide gives a shorter version of the label, and draws attention to the enlarged drawings at the back of the case, which make its use clearer – a useful piece of interpretation. The CD-ROM adds that the carnyx was once common throughout Europe between 300 B.C. and 200 A.D., gives information to back this up, and says that this one is exceptionally fine. It explains that the reconstruction, displayed beside the original, took over 400 hours of study of sources such as the coins shown in the case. The label, map, timeline and drawings should give most visitors a good understanding of the purpose and use of the carnyx.

The Rotten Bottom Bow

The label is unusually long (258 words) but, with the map and timeline, gives a good explanation of how it, and the different arrowheads, were made and used for hunting mammals, birds and fish. The audio guide is much shorter, with only two of the paragraphs in the label. The CD-ROM tells how it was found, adds that it is the oldest hunting bow ever found in Great Britain or Ireland, and that it pre-dates, by some seven or eight hundred years, the bow subsequently found with the so-called 'Iceman' in the 1990s in the Italian Alps. It explains that the bow is made of yew, a tree which had disappeared south with the Ice Age, and which had not yet returned to Scotland. Anyone who has the time and interest to read the label, or who joins a relevant tour, should learn how hunter-gatherers lived, before most people started to live by farming.

Interactives

There are no interactives in *Early People.* However, there is a plasma screen which shows what form dwellings took, and how they were built, in several periods, starting in about 8000 B.C., through to the Romans and the Vikings.   It runs on a permanent loop. Visitors can sit on a bench while watching it, and casual observation, during many visits to the area, suggests that it is well used and appreciated! (Benches and seats are relatively scarce in many museums, but are much valued by visitors, because standing, or walking slowly, is tiring).

This dissertation does not discuss the sections of Level 0 that deal with geology, wildlife and bio-diversity. However, they are strong on interactives and short films, and even an apparently esoteric subject like radiocarbon dating is clearly explained. There is also a huge diorama with three sections, dealing respectively with the Caledonian Pine Forest, the Lowland Oak Forest, and the Tundra. Observation suggests that it is popular with family parties.

Analysis of the *Early People* Displays
Labels

The labels are well written in Plain English, and are easy to read. They have a simple font, adequate type size, are left justified, have good contrast between text and background, and are positioned so that they can be read, without either stooping or stretching, by people of different heights. Thankfully, too, they do not use design

gimmicks such as strident colour, or text over a background graphic, both of which make text difficult to read by people with less than 20/20 vision or who have poor literacy. They simply give what good labels should give – the basic information about the age, location, purpose and significance of the objects.

NMS put a great deal of work and thought into labels and communications. As noted earlier, the appointment of Jenni Calder as script co-ordinator demonstrates that while the **content** of the text had to be provided by the curators, the **presentation** used writing, rather than purely curatorial, skills.

A Communications Seminar was held on 22 September, 1994 [106]. It included two acknowledged experts on learning and communications – Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, and David Anderson, (then of the V&A), author of *A Common Wealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom*. Hooper-Greenhill produced at the seminar the checklist for legible and accessible text by Helen Coxall, a specialist in museum language, whose work has been discussed in Section Three above.

A paper on labels at the Exhibition Review Committee's meeting on 7 November, 1996 presented Coxall's checklist and the guidelines that were being drafted for Rayner's *Access in Mind*. The Committee agreed that 'education and communication specialists needed to have final oversight on comprehensibility and clarity'. **The labels in *Early People* observe all of these guidelines, and can be regarded as examples of best practice.**

There was also input from the **Junior Board**, which was set up in March 1996, in partnership with Scottish Enterprise, 'to ensure that the new Museum both delights and communicates effectively with children aged 5 –14'. Its twelve members in that age group came from a spread of schools from Shetland to the Borders. The Board met five times a year to advise on ways of making displays more interesting and fun, and to assess multimedia programmes. Board members did surveys in their own schools. The consensus was that this age group wanted less reliance on text, more pictures and more things to do. They were put off by text that was too long, or the writing too small. They

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[106] The proceedings of the Communications Seminar were not published, but were consulted in the NMS archives.

wanted more exciting ways of telling a story – by audio-visual, IT, reconstructions, or re-enactments. Nonetheless, they believed that the objects themselves were best. They also wanted to meet the staff, to have more working exhibits and to have guided tours. (The volunteer guides now provide tours specifically for children).

Audio guides

The audio guides often simply repeat the information on labels, but are valuable for people with impaired vision or poor literacy, and for visitors whose first language is not English, because they offer the information in several languages. (Given that visitors to MoS come from all over the world, it would have been impracticable to offer translations in many languages on each label). However, some visitors reported, in the survey in Part Four, difficulty in finding the objects that offer audio explanation. A map is provided with the guide, but with 5,000 objects on this level, and only ten with an audio guide, it can be difficult to pick out from the map the precise location of the next object featured on the guide.

Many people are put off visiting museums because they do not like being faced with labels carrying big blocks of text. A United Nations report found that twenty per cent of the adult population of the UK are 'functionally illiterate'. [107] By that is meant they cannot be trusted to read the labels on medicines, and give children the correct dose. A frightening statistic!   If museums are to be truly inclusive, and reach out to groups of people who do not normally visit museums, labels should be very easy to read and/or supplemented by audio guides, if the museum can afford them, or by visual material such as photographs or drawings**.** NMS certainly took great care in designing and writing the labels, and limiting the amount of text. This national institution has set a very high standard in both readability and serious content – which are not easy to reconcile.

Volunteer guides

The guides' CD-ROM gives much more information than the labels or audio guides – often more than the average visitor needs. But it is a quarry from which guides can extract information according to what they judge to be the level of interest of any

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[107] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1998* (New York and Oxford).24. The Scottish Literacy Commission Report, Dec.2009, estimated that 18.5% left primary school without being functionally literate – i.e. able to function in adult society. (Consulted on their website).

particular group. The information does not usually repeat the information on the label, because guides will have read it. It gives supplementary information, or background stories about the object. The value of a competent guide is in his/her ability to react to the widely varying needs of a particular group, and to tailor his/her presentation according to their knowledge, interests, and reaction. As reported in Part Four, one visitor remarked that you can't put questions to a label.

Orientation

The visitor survey in Part Four shows that absence of an obvious route confuses some visitors. They want to know the way to the most important displays. However, grouping displays by four non-chronological themes is an interesting idea, and has the advantage of making possible some illuminating comparisons. For example, as discussed later, they show that the Romans were far in advance of the native people of Scotland in the development of rotary querns, and that the Vikings had developed clinker built ships, capable of crossing the Atlantic, at a time when people in Scotland were using boats hollowed out of logs.

Doubts about the layout of *Early People* were raised in the Exhibition Review Committee as early as 20 April, 1993. Professor Smout, from the chair, expressed concern about the need 'to clarify the degree of disagreement between the architects and curators. Professor Jones, who chaired the Client Committee (the committee of the Trustees charged with supervising the building programme) said that the disagreement 'was greatest with the First People's gallery, where there was some conflict between the communication needs of the displays and architects' understanding of the building'. [108]

At the same meeting, Dr Lynch (as he then was) expressed reservations about the treatment of the Picts and the handling of early Christianity. The chairman said he was anxious that the process of reviewing the display should not hold up progress on the building, and Ian Hooper, the Project Director, said that the programme was running 'a bit behind'.

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[108] As previously explained, all references to the proceedings of that Committee are taken from Professor Lynch's set of its papers in *Special Collections,* but any errors of commission or omission in the use made of them are, of course, this researcher's sole responsibility.

An important paper by the Project Director on 7 June, 1993 shows the concern to deliver the project on time and on budget. [109] It reported that, in early April, 1993, a scheme for the 'ground floor' (sic) had been discussed by both the Client Committee and the Exhibition Review Committee. At that point the architects 'were entitled to think that the scheme would only be subject to minor modifications, as part of a more detailed design development process'. However at the end of the second week of May a 'critique' by the curators had been given to the architects. It proposed alterations, including replacement of the relatively free circulation pattern by a single route through the gallery. This would entail some structural changes, and the architects had expressed concern.

In the fourth week of May the architects had been informed, at a meeting of the Client Committee, that the alterations proposed in the 'critique' were not to be pursued. In June a 'post-critique' meeting, intended to form the basis for an agreed report to both Committees, had been cancelled, and the situation remained unresolved. The Project Director's paper commented that, over the past two months, 'a position of broad agreement had been transformed into one of uncertainty'. There could be adverse consequences for the project, in terms of design quality, cost and programme.

To resolve this difficulty, the paper ruled that in future

> all formal communications from NMS will be channelled through the Project Director, who is the client's sole representative...on the project as a whole. In the event that the architects are requested by others to pursue a course of action which…was likely to have financial, programme or operational implications…they should refer the matter to the Project Director. Pending a formal instruction from him, the design team should take no action to deal with such a request.

In short, the paper made clear that any change to the displays that would in any way affect the structure – e.g. by altering the position of dividing walls – would not be accepted, in case it endangered delivery of the project on time and within budget.

While this ruling seems thereafter to have been observed, discussion of orientation continued. At the meeting of the Exhibition Review Committee on18 November, 1993, Mary Bryden, Head of Public Affairs in NMS, presented a paper on the importance of orientation. 'What can visitors see? Where can they find it? Where is the best place to

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[109] The Exhibition Review Committee papers are not indexed, but are boxed in roughly chronological order. Any particular paper can be traced only by its date.

start? Are there recommended routes? Are there "star" displays?' Her paper said that orientation might be provided through signage, leaflets, published guides, IT or information staff. The questions in her paper were perceptive, and anticipated the reactions of visitors. (See Part Four).

Lady Rosebery, in her paper to the Committee dated 29 January, 1996, argued that it should be remembered that visitors had limits. On average they would spend one-and-a-half to two hours in the whole museum, including a rest stop and a shop stop. They needed to be able to see how to go and come back refreshed, or how to enter midway on a subsequent visit. This would particularly apply to 'exhausted mothers with thirsty or loo-seeking children'. Visitors should not miss the object-rich and interesting land, emigration and Viking sections. She pleaded for 'vista gaps'. **'We must be user-friendly'.**

On16 May, 1996, the Committee again discussed *First People.* (The official title of this gallery was not decided until all the displays had been finalised. So early papers alternate between *First People* and *Early People*). Dr Clarke expressed the curators' continuing concern that the material that had been on display in Queen Street could not be fitted into the available space in the MoS. Professor Jones emphasised that the Board of Trustees had for long accepted the overall design of the building, and there could be no question of reopening discussion. The Committee agreed, but felt that it was important to be aware of the curators' concern.

In his personal letter of 1 June, 2009 to this researcher, referred to above, Dr Clarke accepted that Benson and Forsyth were 'outstanding architects strongly grounded in a developed philosophical position'. However, because

> the architectural competition.had been to find a design, not a designer, there was no opportunity for them to have the detailed briefings and discussions with the curatorial teams that would have enabled a more unified design reflecting the aspirations of both the architects and curators.

He added that the result was 'a protracted period' during which he, and his colleague James Simpson, developed an outline design. This took some time, just when Lord Bute's illness meant that he was playing an ever-decreasing role. The result was that

the architects 'could always suggest that decisions counter to their ideas ran the serious risk of delaying the Project.'

The above leads this researcher to suggest that an introductory orientation board could be helpful, to explain what is, to visitors, an unfamiliar layout. It could say that the archaeological displays are laid out by four themes, and not by chronology, or by peoples, and that the purpose of the Paolozzi statues is to introduce these four themes. It could perhaps indicate a preferred route. Alternatively, visitors entering Level 0 could pick up a leaflet giving this information. The survey in Part Four records that several visitors asked for more guidance on routes, by leaflet or otherwise.

Interpretation

There is no sophisticated interpretation in the form of touch screens, interactives or films in *Early People,* apart from the big plasma screen. However, the layout by themes lends itself to interpretation by conjunction. For example, one of the first display cases shows how grain was ground into flour by both the 'saddle' quern – which was used from about 4,000 B.C. to the late centuries B.C., – and the later rotary quern.   Rotary querns continued in use in parts of Scotland until the early part of the twentieth century, as shown by a photograph of someone using a rotary quern in the Northern Isles in 1890. Not so early a people!   The rotary quern native to Scotland is dated to about 200 A.D., whereas the Roman version, though more sophisticated, is 200 years earlier. Visitors should be able to learn how early people made their flour, and get the point that the Romans had much more advanced technology than the native peoples of Scotland. Interpretation like this helps visitors to use their imagination, as urged in the labels, to understand how early people lived.

Several other displays have similar examples of interpretation – often a clear, informative label with a 'mock up' or illustration. A display case with axe heads, chisels and knives, each of them with a plastic handle inserted, shows how the tools would have been held, and what they would have looked like in use. Another case explains that bowls, cups and other rounded objects were shaped by being turned on a lathe, powered by hand or foot. There is a photograph of a man turning chair legs, using such a lathe, in Oxfordshire, around 1930. Apart from illustrating how the lathe worked, this again makes the point that it is surprising how long some early technology survived.

In *Getting Around,* there are two log boats. The label says that getting around by boat, on rivers and lochs, was easier, in the absence of roads, than movement on a land with mountains, bogs, and forests. The log boats were hollowed out from single tree trunks. The older one is dated to the very beginning of the Christian era, and the later to 1,100 A.D.. They are next to a display about Viking ships, clinker built, and capable of ocean voyages, at least a hundred years earlier than the later log boat. This conjunction should help visitors take the point that Viking ships were crossing the Atlantic, when people in Scotland had only log boats for rivers. (There may, however, have been some crossover in dates of construction, because the Lords of the Isles made extensive use of boats).

A display about flints explains that in Scotland there were three main sources, including Den of Boddam. The many pits dug at this site could be regarded as Scotland's first factory industry. A fine example of a completed arrowhead is displayed above examples of cobbles, hammer stones, anvil and flakes of flint, numbered for easy identification, so that even visitors with no knowledge of archaeology should be able to understand how flint tools were created.

In a case about the preparation of natural fibres, there is a photograph of a woman spinning with a drop spindle in Argyll in 1897. The label explains that drop spindles were long, thin pieces of wood, and the spindle whorls were used to weight the spindles. A good deal of skill was needed.

It was the presence of a spindle whorl that proved that the Viking site at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland was a settlement, and not just a raiders' camp. Women must have been present, because Viking men did not spin! During the tourist season costumed women give live demonstrations of how to use drop spindles, and invite visitors to try. Live demonstrations are expensive, but a film clip, like the one on Level 6 to illustrate 'waulking', could be adequate. For example, in a short film at the Scottish Lighthouse Museum at Fraserburgh, a retired lighthouse keeper demonstrates how he lit the burner for the delicate paraffin gas mantle. You didn't just strike a match! [110]

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[110] This paragraph is based on personal observation, during visits to L'Anse aux Meadows and Fraserburgh.

An imposing, full-size model of a horse is displayed with elaborate headplate, saddle, harness, and silver buckles. All the surviving material, numbered and labelled for identification, is mounted on the horse, with plaster connections to represent the original leather. It shows clearly what a horse would have looked like, when in full dress for a Roman parade.

A Carnyx (war trumpet) is displayed both as originally found, and as a full-size modern replica. Some Roman coins featured the Carnyx. They are tiny, so the case contains enlarged pictures of them. Both the horse and the Carnyx are good examples of display interpretation to help visitor understanding.

Under the heading *Scotland's first weapon of war*, a label says that, about 5,500 years ago, an arrow tip lodged deep in someone's back. 'Was this evidence of deliberate killing? A murderous shot from a personal enemy? Perhaps this is the first known victim of armed conflict in Scotland?' The case contains ancient arrowheads fastened on to modern plastic shafts, together with the actual arrowhead, shown clearly embedded in someone's vertebra. This is an example of interpretation **provoking** interest, **relating** to modern thinking and **revealing** the significance.

On 30 January, 1996 Dr. Clarke presented to the Exhibition Review Committee a paper outlining the messages which the archaeological curators wanted to get across to visitors.

- That 5,500 years ago we first see evidence of injuries by weapons.
- That the Roman army was an alien phenomenon in scale, technology and organisation.
- That mass production enabled every Roman soldier to have a complete set of weapons and armour, in contrast to the native warriors.
- That a Roman soldier was also a builder, surveyor, cook and craftsman.
- That when the Romans left, they tried to keep the frontiers secure by making contact with friendly tribes and bribing others.
- That literacy was vital to the success of the Roman Empire and was brought to Scotland by the Romans.

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The first of these is illustrated in *Scotland's first weapon of war*; the second and third by the horse dressed for parade; the Roman parade helmet, the Carnyx and displays of weapons; the fourth by the Distance Slab from the Antonine Wall, the Roman rotary quern, and exhibits on leatherwork; the fifth by the Traprain silver hoard; and the sixth by displays about Roman script, Ogham script and Viking runes. Arguably, therefore, these messages about life in Scotland in Roman times should indeed get across to those visitors who have the time and the interest to look closely at the relevant objects and read the labels.

To sum up on **interpretation**, visitors are encouraged to use their own imagination, given that we know so little about early people. There is no sophisticated interpretation, apart from the plasma screen. However, there are several good examples of interpretation by comparison of closely positioned objects, and of labels supplemented with a photograph or 'mock up'. This may well satisfy visitors with enough time to stop, think and read, while the Roman horse and the Carnyx are sufficiently striking to grab the attention even of casual browsers, and are easily understood.

SECTION FIVE

Analysis of the Displays on Level 1.   Kingdom of the Scots

The group of displays near the entrance is selected for analysis because it illustrates the difficulty, without having labels of intimidating length, of giving visitors complex information about the mix of peoples at the time of the Wars of Independence. The group also marks the transition between the displays in Level 0, based on themes, and displays on Level 1, based roughly on chronology. Other displays, such as the Clarsach and the Mary, Queen of Scots, jewellery, are also selected for this critique because they are obvious to visitors, and are accepted 'Highlights'.

The Level 1 displays deal with the period from about 700 A.D. to 1700 A.D., and are laid out in traditional, roughly chronological order. This should make orientation easy, but opinions differ. Martin Spring argues that

> The downside of the high density layout is that it is labyrinthine, contorted and disorientating, with large and small spaces combined in a seemingly random fashion. It

   is a topic that draws frequent, yet differing, comments from visitors. [111]

He reports one regular visitor as saying 'I get lost, but it doesn't bother me – I find it stimulating'. Another agrees that it's confusing, 'but I like it because you don't know what's going to be around the next corner'. An Italian visitor takes the opposing view. 'You see one thing and then get distracted by others. It's not easy to understand'.

The entrance to *Kingdom of the Scots* leads into a small antechamber containing the Monymusk Reliquary, a sandstone cross slab from Angus, and other objects. The label for the cross slab quotes Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History' of A.D. 731 as saying that in Britain there are five languages and four nations – English, British, Scots and Picts – each with their own language, but united by the study of the scriptures in the fifth – Latin.

Written on the wall there is a lengthy, four-column list of the kings of the Picts and Scots, taken from medieval king lists. The label says that it bears witness to a long tradition of kings of Scots for centuries before Robert the Bruce came to the throne in 1306, and the call for Independence in the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320,

The Declaration of Arbroath

The best known quotation from the Declaration of Arbroath is inscribed on the wall.

> So long as a hundred of us remain alive we shall never under any circumstances be brought under English rule. For we fight not for glory, nor riches, nor honours, but for Freedom alone, which no good man gives up except with his life.

The label reads, 'These still resounding words appeal for freedom in the face of conquest by England'*.*

This 'Letter of the Barons of Scotland' to Pope John XXII, dated at Arbroath on 6 April, 1320, stated the determination of the 'whole community of the realm' to maintain the independence of Scotland and to support King Robert Bruce. (The words in their original form were in Latin).

Michael Lynch called it 'the most celebrated document in Scottish history'. [112] However, volunteer guides report that some visitors think that this extract is racist – anti-English.

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[111] Martin Spring, 'A Revisit to the Museum' in *The Building Magazine,* 26 January, 2007*.*

[112] Michael Lynch, *Scotland: a New History* (London, 1991). 111.

The guides have to explain that it is a plea against Edward II of England's policy of continuing the attempt of his father, 'The Hammer of the Scots', to bring Scotland under his rule.

It could be argued that another extract from the Declaration, about removing Bruce from the throne and replacing him, should also have been quoted, as foreshadowing the contractual theory of monarchy: that the king is answerable to his subjects. Contrasting views on this, by academic authorities, are quoted in Appendix Eleven.   All agree that the Declaration of Arbroath is a very important document, but differ in the emphasis placed on the importance and historical validity of the king list, on whether the Declaration enunciated a constitutional principle, and on whether it may have influenced the American Declaration of Independence.

None of this emerges from the labels or the audio guide, and it is not suitable for inclusion in a one-hour 'Highlights' tour. However, some of it is covered in the volunteer guides' CD-ROM. So any guide who offers a specialist theme tour can try to touch on the importance of the Declaration, if any group of visitors seems interested and the guide feels that he/she has enough time and knowledge.

The conclusion must be that it is very difficult for a display of objects to enter into an important, but complex history discussion, particularly when, in this antechamber, the two most relevant 'objects' are inscriptions on a wall.

Monymusk Reliquary

The label invites the visitor to look at the back of the case where, in an enlarged illustration of the ornamentation on the silver plates, 'the intertwining beasts are closely related in style to similar decoration in the Lindisfarne Gospels'. The audio guide adds that 500 years after it was made it was carried before the Scots army at the Battle of Bannockburn. It adds that when the Reliquary was made different peoples with different languages and different identities lived in the country that we now call Scotland. They eventually came together with one ruler, one religion, one language, and St. Andrew as their patron saint.

A wall label headed '**Scotland defined – land and people become a Kingdom**''
introduces the next group of displays by explaining that the peoples who came together
included Picts, Britons, Angles and Scots. Scandinavians and Anglo-Normans joined
them later. They spoke Pictish, Welsh, Anglo-Saxon, Gaelic, Latin, Norse and French.
They came to adopt the name and identity of the Scots.

Displays about the peoples of Scotland

Visitors then enter a long gallery with, at its beginning, a wall label explaining that the
objects here are drawn from different peoples, with their own traditions and ways of life,
who lived in a land that has emerged as Scotland. This thesis is displayed by placing
together a Pictish stone from Moray, an Anglian stone from the south-east of Scotland,
and Norse chess pieces that were found in Lewis. These objects are close by displays
about the Britons, whose capital was at Dumbarton, and 'Na Gaidheil' – the displays
about the Scots who came from Ireland and whose capital was at Dunadd.

Labels at each give their origin and language. For example, the **Britons** label says that
they were a Celtic people living in much of Britain at the time of the Roman invasion, but
were pushed westward into Cornwall, Wales, Cumbria and southern Scotland. Their
language was an early form of Welsh. Their display case contains items from their
settlement at Traprain Law, a striking feature of the East Lothian landscape. Again,
the **Norse** label says that the Vikings came in the late eighth century, at first to raid and
then to settle. They ruled much of north-west Scotland for over 400 years – about the
same length of time as the Stewart dynasty later ruled over Scotland.

A wall map has place names, colour coded to show areas settled by the Norse (Orkney,
Shetland, the Western Isles and Islay), the Picts (north-east Scotland), the Angles
(south-east Scotland), the Britons (south-west Scotland) and the Gaels (the Argyll area).
Another wall map shows that different languages and origins are suggested by family
names. Towards the north and west, surnames indicate Gaelic, (e.g. MacDonald,
MacLean, MacDougal), Norse, (e.g. Anderson) or mixed Gaelic and Norse (e.g.
MacLeod and MacAulay). Towards the South many names indicate the settlement
between about 1100 and 1250 A.D. of Norman-French families from parts of England
(e.g. Lindsay and Barclay) and from Normandy and Brittany (e.g. Bruce, Hay, Beaton,
Sinclair, Grant).

Lewis chess pieces

They are made of walrus ivory, were found on the west coast of the island of Lewis in 1831, but carved in the late twelfth century. The label says that they are a legacy of a time when the Norse ruled the Hebrides. The chess pieces were probably made in Scandinavia, but belong equally to the Gaelic world where they were clearly valued. Evidence for this is in a thirteenth century Gaelic prose poem, addressed to Angus of Islay, described as 'King of Lewis'. It lists his inheritance from his father Donald: 'To you he left his dwelling place, his breastplate, his tapering sword, his treasure, his brown ivory chessmen'.

The audio guide gives similar information, but is shorter. The CD-Rom gives a good deal more information. For example, it draws attention to how the berserker is chewing the top of his shield. It explains that the dating can be precise because of how the bishop is wearing his mitre, and tells how the chess pieces came to be acquired by NMS and the British Museum.

Berserker, Lewis chesspieces
Courtesy Elizabeth Scott

Na Gaidheil

This section contains a fourteenth century cross from Argyll, a powerful symbol of the distinctive Gaelic culture of the Western Highlands and Islands. A wall panel explains that Gaelic had been the language of most of Scotland and Ireland, and that in the Middle Ages the Gaelic tradition had continued, mainly in the north and west, especially under the patronage of the MacDonalds, Lords of the Isles. The Lordship had a vibrant art, a rich oral tradition for poetry and song, and a duty to protect and provide for its people.

A panel headed '**The Highlands and Islands – their two cultures'** says that the Lordship was powerful in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries until 1493, when it was suppressed by King James IV. But Gaelic culture continued to thrive, until critically damaged by the severe government response to the Jacobite rising of 1745. A map shows the extent of the Lordship, and its main clans. There are two display cases about Finlaggan, the centre of the Lordship of the Isles, and the NMS excavations there.

These displays make a very important point – that many different peoples came together to form what is now Scotland. However, the labels, taken together, are rather long. It seems doubtful whether the majority of visitors will pause long enough to read them all, and grasp the whole message. **Hein** supports this. [113] He reports that tracking studies have established that visitors follow individual paths, spend very little time in front of individual objects, stop at only a fraction of objects on display and, after about fifteen to twenty minutes viewing, all but the most dedicated become fatigued, and stop less often, or end their visits.

However, in MoS the two maps of place names and family names illustrate the point clearly and briefly, so that visitors who stop to look at them will grasp the general picture of a wide mix of peoples, with no single ethnic origin.   Personal observation, on several separate days, tracking (unobtrusively, from a short distance) about a hundred visitors who arrived singly, in couples or in small family groups, found that the majority merely glanced at the labels and went straight to the clarsach and the Lewis chess pieces. **It was the obviously iconic and centrally placed objects that attracted their**

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[113] George E Hein**,** *Learning in the Museum* (London and New York, 1998). 102/3.

attention, not the totality of the story conveyed by the whole group. This was admittedly a small and unscientific survey, but it was confirmed by discussions with several members of the front of house staff who monitor this gallery all day and every day. It is not, of course, part of their job to undertake surveys, but they see where thousands of visitors mainly go, and what attracts their attention.

Yet if the museum is to cater, not just for tourists, and others who simply want to see 'Highlights', but for **all** visitors, a balance has to be struck between using objects and labels to make an important historical point, and accepting that many visitors will refuse to read a lot of text. MoS attracts nearly 600,000 visitors each year from many different countries, of all ages, all educational backgrounds, and with widely varying degrees of interest in, or knowledge about, Scottish history. (See visitor learning survey in Part Four). **The displays must attempt to reach all of them. 'Mission impossible'? Perhaps, but the labels in this section are interesting and informative, and it seems necessary, for a history museum which has national status, to offer them to those visitors who want to learn more about Scottish history, and not just to have a quick tour of highlights**. It would be interesting to undertake much more detailed research than this dissertation can, on how many visitors, with what motivation, get the learning message that this group of displays is offering.

This analysis follows the layout as visitors experience it. However, in a personal e-mail to this researcher on 17 November, 2009, and a subsequent telephone conversation, Professor Lynch elaborated the point he had made at the Exhibition Review Committee meeting on 29 April, 1993. With the benefit of hindsight he felt there was

> a lack of linkage between Level 0 and Level 1, and perhaps at times an uneasy compromise or balance between object-based displays and a (rough) chronological treatment. Originally, it had been intended that there should be a few visual images, without documented explanation. I particularly remember the idea of having a glass aperture in the floor of Level 1 to show a Viking grave...to establish some sense of continuity. That particular idea was jettisoned because of cost. Also, the distinctive themed approach taken in Level 0 put demands on satisfying the expectations of visitors who did know something of Scotland's early medieval history and would expect some chronology to contextualise objects.

He thought that areas demanding attention included Picts and early Christianity, together with kingship and the emerging of what Professor A.A.M. Duncan called 'the making of the kingdom' – the emerging sense and territorial extent of 'Alba'. The result was to

place added pressure on where to start in Level 1, where there were, for the period *ca.* 750 –1700, fewer objects than for any other period, and especially so for the period up to the Wars of Independence.

So it could be argued that the displays in the first part of Level 1 might or should have been in Level 0, because, though differently configured, they covered much the same period.

Dr David Caldwell, Keeper of 'Scotland and Europe' in NMS, has also pointed to the lack of objects about early medieval history on Level 1. In an unpublished lecture in MoS, on 21 November, 2008, *Kingdom of the Scots: 10 years on*, he said that there is no mention of the importance of the cult of St. Margaret and the reign of David I in introducing the Norman-French language and a coinage, and in turning Scotland's back on the Celtic St.Columba and adopting instead the Mediterranean St. Andrew.

This again shows the difficulty of providing visitors with a narrative history of Scotland in the absence of contemporary objects, and even of adequate surviving documentary evidence. For example, Dr Caldwell pointed out that even a document as important as the 'Scotichronicon' is not in Scotland but at Corpus Christi College.

Professor Lynch also suggested that if Level 1 had started with David 1 it would 'have had the effect of integrating better *Towns and Trade*, currently in a narrow cul-de-sac'. Part Four confirms that few visitors seem to enter this area, although it has good displays, including the 'Gunnister Man', of particular interest for visitors from Shetland. However, visitors need only ask any NMS attendant for directions. Personal checks with several confirmed that they all knew where he was. **Their knowledge of layout and objects is a valuable supplement to visitors' learning experience.**

Other Displays on Level 1
The Bute Mazer

Two labels explain that it is a drinking cup, made soon after the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. It uses heraldry, easily understood at the time, to demonstrate Bruce's authority as king. He is represented as a lion, surrounded by shields in the coats of arms of his main supporters. The lion, symbolising power, had been adopted by the Scottish

monarchy as early as the twelfth century. The shield between the lion's paws is that of Walter the Steward, Bruce's son-in-law. His descendants later inherited the Scottish throne and became the Stewart dynasty. There is no audio guide, but a label invites visitors to look at an interactive screen. By touching selected parts of it, visitors can summon up more information, enlivened by illustrations, about Bruce and his followers. Observation, on many occasions, suggests that it is much used by visitors, and accordingly a potentially useful learning source.

The Maiden

The label explains that this beheading machine was used for 145 years to execute criminals and political opponents of the Crown. Executions were public demonstrations of absolute authority, by a monarchy determined to maintain law and order. There is no audio guide, but there is an interactive touch-screen. Visitors can raise the cutting blade and then press a lever to behead the victim. Observation suggests that it is very popular with visitors, especially children!   Guides can make the point that visitors are looking at the actual machine which beheaded more than a hundred people in Edinburgh, and that it was commissioned more than 200 years before Madame Guillotine was being used during the Terror of the French Revolution. From time to time a costumed interpreter sits in this gallery, as part of the free 'Slice of Life' events in MoS. Part Four shows that the Maiden makes a big impact on visitors, while the accompanying displays of thumbscrews, stocks, and other instruments of torture and punishment **offer so vivid a visual lesson in social history, that visitors scarcely need to read the explanatory labels, especially when the interpreter is present.**

The National Covenant

The label says that the National Covenant called for all Scots to band together in opposition to the religious and political policies of Charles 1, and against Roman Catholicism. It was signed in 1638 in Greyfriars Kirk, and was copied so that every burgh and parish should have and subscribe one. The term National Covenant drew on Old Testament notions of covenants between God and man, and between God and Israel. It suggested that the Scots were a chosen race, comparable to the children of Israel.

Two copies are on display, one for members of the Privy Council, and the other for the Burgh and parish of Dumbarton. The Dumbarton one bears the signature of Montrose, but the label does not draw attention to it, though the career of the talented soldier and poet, James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, epitomises the controversies and divided loyalties of the time. However, his story (somewhat romanticised by Sir Walter Scott), could not be compressed into a label. The window beside the copies of the Covenant is deliberately angled, so that, when a blind is raised, visitors can see the entrance to the Kirk where the Covenant was signed. The label does not mention this neat combination of window and display, but visitors will readily get the point if a guide raises the blind.

Alexander Peden's Mask

The label explains that Peden wore this mask as a disguise in the 1680s, when he and other preachers lived in constant danger of arrest. This period became known as 'The Killing Times'. There is no audio guide, but a touch screen explains that in 1662 King Charles II, pursuing the religious policies of his father, declared himself to be the head of the Scottish Church. All ministers were told to comply with the King's religious changes, or to stop preaching. Peden and some 350 other ministers, who were still devoted to the National Covenant of 1638, left the Scottish Church and began preaching illegally. They became known as the 'Covenanters'. A voice-over reads an extract from one of Peden's sermons. The texts in the interactive are accompanied by illustrations.

Jenni Calder wrote that

> it relates to a dramatic and distinctive episode in Scotland's history...But the object itself has its own extraordinary power and, I believe, adds to our understanding of the courage, commitment, fear and fanaticism of theCovenanting wars with an immediacy that words cannot match. [114]

Calder's view of the power of this display speaks for itself. Any visitor who stops to look at the mask, read the label, and use the touchscreen, is surely bound to get a better intellectual (and perhaps emotional?) understanding of the human consequences of the religious divisions of Peden's time.

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[114] Calder, in Fladmark. 45

The Penicuik Jewels

The case has a gold filigree bead necklace, (one of the Penicuik jewels), an enamelled locket with a sixteenth century cameo of Mary, and other objects, including a silver ryal (thirty shillings Scots), issued in1565 to commemorate the marriage of Mary to Henry, Lord Darnley. Such coins were withdrawn from circulation almost immediately. The label does not explain that this was because Mary objected to them, as portraying Darnley as her equal, though she never gave him the status of king. It is an early example of the tension between Mary and Darnley.

The audio guide says that Mary gave the pendant, which was originally two bracelets, to a servant when she was a prisoner in England. It adds that she was brought up in the French court, and brought with her to Scotland many Renaissance ideas. One of her poems is read in French, together with a short history of her forced abdication, imprisonment, and execution. As with the label, the audio guide does not give the reason for the withdrawal of the 1565 ryals. In fairness, there is no room for the story on the label, and the ryal is a late acquisition by NMS, after the audio script had been finalised. Guides can add that the gold filigree beads could be opened to contain something sweet smelling, like musk. Because there was no sanitation in those days, Mary could use the bracelets to counter the smell of her court and courtiers!
No label, on its own, could do justice to Mary's story, but the audio guide, or a volunteer guide, can offer a useful learning supplement.

SECTION SIX

Analysis of Displays on Levels 3 and 4

At first sight Level 3 looks inflexible. Neither the Newcomen beam engine nor the *Ellesmere* locomotive can be moved – the roof of the building would have to be opened to get them out! However, the displays in the alcoves along the north side could be altered. The walls separating the alcoves are just partitions, demountable panels forming lightweight frames for the display cases. If removed, they would open up large spaces, which could stretch across Level 3. [115]

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[115] Willie Anthony, Head of Estates in NMS, explained this in a personal discussion on 6 July, 2009.

On these Levels the *Ellesmere* and the Newcomen Beam Engine are selected for analysis because they are important, and so big that visitors cannot miss them. *The Monarch of the Glen* and the mining display are added because they demonstrate the power of good interpretation. No displays on Level 5 are discussed, because Levels 0, 1, 3 and 4 amply demonstrate the display techniques in the whole of the original MoS.

Ellesmere Locomotive

The label explains that Hawthorne and Company built it at Leith in 1861. The firm was established to supply locomotives to Scottish Railway Companies before there was a railway link between Scotland and England. Production continued until the 1880s, and some were exported to Portugal and South Africa. The *Ellesmere* was built for a colliery in Lancashire, and continued to work there until 1957, by which time it was the oldest working steam locomotive in Britain. The label invites visitors to compare it with the oldest surviving locomotive in the world, *Wylam Dilly*, which is on display, from 2008 to 2011, in the *Connect* gallery).

The Junior Board label says

> It seems a shame that the once powerful locomotive industry, which built the *Ellesmere*, doesn't exist in Scotland any more. It is interesting that *Ellesmere* doesn't have a cab for the engine driver. He had to stand on the outside to drive the train. OK if it wasn't raining, I suppose!

An interactive beside *Ellesmere* enables visitors to see wheels, connecting rods, crankshafts and pistons in motion. One particularly good section shows how the slide valve had a simple, but ingenious, double action, using the steam pressure to push the piston both forwards and backwards. (The minutes of the meeting of the Exhibition Review Committee on 16 May, 1996 expressed regret that *Ellesmere* would not be able to operate, for health and safety reasons and the high costs of maintenance).

The audio guide gives a shortened version of the information on the label together with a rather lengthy voiceover purporting to be from 1845 – 'the country is now in the hands of lunatics, because we are all railway mad'. It emphasises the extent to which railways were going throughout the world, from North America to China, so diminishing distance. **No one who reads the label, listens to the audio guide and/or uses the interactive**

can fail to learn a lot about the way steam engines worked, and their importance to industry, employment, and the Scottish export market.

The Monarch of the Glen

The label explains that Sir Edwin Landseer painted it in1851.

> This famous image represents the Highlands as a sporting playground and a romantic wilderness ruled by majestic animals. This was in sharp contrast to the nineteenth century reality of the Highland clearances – the displacement of people in favour of sheep, and later deer. The traditional links between clan chief and his people, sustaining large communities on the land, withered in the face of the economics of maximising revenue from the land. In some areas, people were forcibly removed to coastal settlements or to find a new life overseas. One of the ironies of the Victorian period was the portrayal of Scotland as a Highland and rural country, when the reality was that Scottish society was one of the most heavily industrialised *and urbanised in the world.*

The painting is deliberately positioned to point up the irony referred to in the label. It is hung to look down on a lighthouse, a whisky still, the *Ellesmere,* and model ships and steam engines. **Myth and Reality!** The minutes of the Exhibition Review Committee meeting on 3 November, 1995 record that the Committee felt it important to point up the contrast between sentimentality and reality – between the 1822 visit of King George IV and the Landseer landscapes, and the reality of industrial Scotland. Although *The Monarch of the Glen* was not then on loan to NMS, it now embodies that recommendation.

The CD-ROM has a biography of Landseer, including his patronage by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, who had been captivated by his romantic vision of the Highlands long before they first visited Scotland in 1842. They bought Balmoral Castle two years after this painting was completed. The CD-ROM says that Sir Walter Scott, Landseer and the *Monarch* set a fashion for all things Scottish, which others quickly followed, and tartan, bagpipes and Highland Societies flourished at home and abroad**. Scotland's past was re- invented and re-interpreted!** [116]
The painting is clearly visible from both Level 4 and the stair to Level 5, and any visitor who reads the label will surely understand the contrast between myth and historic reality.

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[116] Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland* (Yale, 2009), offers an entertainingly tendentious view of this.

Newcomen Beam Engine

The label explains that this is a rare surviving example of an atmospheric or Newcomen engine. It was used to pump water from the mine at Caprington Colliery near Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, until 1901. The label includes a photograph of the colliery, taken in 1898, and a map of the Caprington estate, showing the many shafts sunk to exploit the four seams of coal, which lay up to ninety-five metres below the surface.

A continuous video shows how steam filled the cylinder, and cold air was sprayed in to condense it and form a partial vacuum. Atmospheric pressure then forced the piston down until the process started again. Part of the brickwork is left open for visitors to see the cylinder. Several times a day a motor is switched on to operate the rocking motion of the huge iron beam, and the movement of the plunger that would have gone down into the mine.

The audio guide gives much the same information as the label, and directs visitors' attention to the video. It points out that an atmospheric engine was very inefficient, and that James Watt, by inventing the separate condenser, greatly improved efficiency. A nearby display case has a model of a 'rotative' engine built by Boulton and Watt in 1788 for their works near Birmingham. Visitors push a button to see it working. It shows both the separate condenser mechanism and how the 'sun and planet' gear turned the vertical motion of the beam engine into a rotary motion. This created a source of power for both locomotives and factories. Weaving and spinning mills could then be in cities, instead of having to be beside a river, as at New Lanark.

The survey in Part Four shows that the beam engine impresses visitors. (It can scarcely be missed!). If they read the label and/or watch the video and see the beam in motion, they **should learn that a water pump is essential for deep coal mining, and also the difference between atmospheric and steam pressure power.** If they then move a few yards they should **learn how Boulton and Watt made possible the industrialisation of cities.**

Serf's Collar

A wall panel headed '**Coal – Hard Graft',** invites visitors to imagine that they are working in a cramped, dark space at the coalface.   Colliers used the simple tools in the case for centuries: there were no machines to cut coal until the middle of the nineteenth century. Women and children worked underground, until this was banned by Act of Parliament in 1842. They performed the backbreaking tasks of pulling the coal along the seams from the face and then carrying it to the surface on ladders.   Working conditions were scarcely believable by present-day standards.

The collar's label says that it belonged to Alexander Steuart, who was condemned to death for theft in 1701. The death penalty was not, however, carried out. Instead, he was gifted to Sir John Erskine of Alva. He was ordered to wear this collar for ever, and to be branded on the forehead, with a mark the size of a sixpence, to show that he was a criminal. Serfdom was finally abolished in 1799, because it was, by then, seen as a hindrance to recruiting labour.

The case contains an original pick of the time, alongside a modern one for comparison. There is also a sledge in which the coal was dragged along to the bottom of the shaft (usually by boys, because the seam was so low), and a wooden shoulder rest. A large drawing depicts a miner lying on his side, using his shoulder rest in a low seam, and hacking out the coal with his pick. **Visitors who look at the collar, read its label, and then look at the drawing, can be left in no doubt about the appalling conditions in which miners worked. They may be surprised to learn that this form of slavery existed in Scottish coalmines as late as 1799.**

Analysis of the displays on Levels 1- 4

The **labels** are good – well written in plain English, and easy to read. The small labels in the cases provide enough information for the general run of visitors, while the wall panels cater for those who are seriously interested and want more information. However, the amount of text is necessarily limited, so labels alone can offer only limited interpretation.

Serrell advocates labels that tell a story that visitors can identify with. [117] There are several examples of this. In the Stewart Gallery, at Wat o' Harden's spurs, the Junior Board label says,

> These make me feel very close to my past, because I am descended from a Borders family like Wat's. He was a Reiver and wore those spurs on trips to steal English cattle. There's a story that when food was getting short, Wat's wife would put the spurs on a plate instead of his dinner!

On Level 3 there is a gown and stool of repentance. The Junior Board label says,

> These were made for humiliating people. Someone sat on the stool or wore the gown while the church minister read a sermon about his or her's sin. The bigger the sin, or the more the sins committed, the bigger the sermon. I think it was like being told off at school.

As discussed in Part One, both the Williams Committee and the MAB emphasised the need to cater for the widest possible range of audiences. The MoS should reach out to the ordinary visiting public, including tourists, as well as those with specialist interests. The readability of the labels, the use of Plain English, the setting up of the Junior Board and the stories written by them, show that NMS implemented these recommendations.

Some **interpretation**, such as the display on coal, is obvious, explicit and effective, on an intellectual, and even emotional level. There is also a good deal of less obvious interpretation available for those willing, and having the time, to look closely at the objects, their labels and their grouping beside other related displays. Examples include *The Monarch of the Glen,* hung to look over engineering displays, and the link between the beam and 'rotative' engines. Greater emphasis on these links would be helpful to the casual visitor, but can be pointed out on a tour. Falk and Dierking made this point – that clusters of linked exhibits should be clearly and explicitly designated for visitors, in case they fail to see the connection themselves. [118]

The **Fetternear Banner** (on the oddly titled Level 0+) exemplifies a more general point about display interpretation. Not all visitors are familiar with the Christian New Testament. So, in an increasingly secular and multi-cultural society, some will not understand the symbolism of the cockerel, or the bag round Judas's neck. The same is

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[117] Serrell, *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach.*

[118] J.H. Falk and L.D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (London and New Delhi, 2000).

true of displays referring to the Old Testament, such as the Dean panels, or indeed to many of the displays about the Medieval or Reformed Church. The obverse of this coin (and that is a phrase that should not casually be used on a label) is that visitors with a background rooted in a basically Christian cultural heritage may know little of other, even major, world religions.

Again, curriculum changes mean that fewer people now have much knowledge of classical literature or history. It cannot be assumed that all visitors will have been taught even 'small Latin and less Greek' (and how many will readily recognise that quotation?). Accordingly, depictions of Roman gods in the Traprain Law treasure may simply pass them by.

There is no easy answer, because curators and designers must make some assumptions about the level of background knowledge of likely visitors. However, **when planning displays, museum professionals should now be thinking about changes in society and, given the need to attract, welcome and interest the widest range of visitors, re-examining assumptions that may no longer be valid.**

Christine Johnstone wrote about this. [119]

> Curators must learn to accept that there is no single view of history. Everyone has their own experiences, their own narrative trajectories through which they consume history, and everyone does it in a different way...Curators and designers must create the freedom, implicitly even give permission, for visitors to make personal connections with the collections, and to share those links as they chose (sic). The possibilities are open-ended and diverse, and they must be so, for each object has as many meanings as there are people with personal visual memories to fit it.

The volunteer guides may be able to ease such problems, because they can react to each particular audience and sense when they are failing to comprehend.

The **interactives** are excellent. Examples are the touch screens for the Bute Mazer, the Maiden (a source of fun as well as information), the Fetternear Banner, the Peden Mask, the Medieval Church, the Beam Engine and *Ellesmere*. Some iconic objects without interactives are sufficiently explained by the carefully drafted labels. Their purpose and

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[119] Christine Johnstone, 'Your Granny Had One of Those! How visitors use museum collections', in Arnold, Davies and Ditchfield (eds.) *History and Heritage: Consuming the Past in Contemporary Culture,* (Shaftesbury, 1998). 74.

importance are usually fairly obvious, so need little or no interpretation. Examples are the Lewis chess pieces and the Penicuik jewellery, which are both beautiful to look at and easy to understand. However, greater attention might be drawn to some of the connections and comparisons.

Some small objects, like the Dumfries Freedom Box, (or the Hunterston Brooch on Level 0), would benefit from having an enlarged photograph of the detail. The engraved scenes on the Freedom Box illustrate an important piece of history (the abolition of the duty on water borne coal in 1793, to alleviate the domestic hardship that might promote radicalism). The scenes illustrate the story beautifully, but are so small that visitors may not make them out.

Concern about **orientation** was not confined to the *Early People* gallery. At the Exhibition Review Committee's meeting on 8 December, 1994, Professor Smout and Gordon Benson, (one of the architects), expressed reservations about proposals for displays on Level 1. The main difficulty for the curators was the lack of objects to portray the 1707 Union of the Parliaments. The architects said that the presumption was for the exhibitions to be developed within the physical framework.   Dr Clarke's view was that the thematic approach 'required contextualised displays and could not be properly achieved if the architectural design was regarded as a rigid constraint'. However Professor Jones said that any modification would have serious implications for cost and timing. The Director said that 'displays should be developed from the objects and should not, as in this case, pursue a historical storyline requiring unduly extensive use of other media to convey information about the Union'.

Eventually, revised proposals for Level 1 and other floors were agreed, subject to a recommendation by the Committee, in March 1995, that the displays 'required more graphic panels and maps to give the objects more context'.   An undated paper reveals that the curators' plea for a single route through Level 1 had been abandoned. It explained that the circulation on that floor was not intended to follow any obvious chronological sequence.

> It would not matter if visitors enter from the introductory area, or from beyond the Beaton panels. Between the two ends it should be immaterial whether the visitor progresses

cyclically, or zigzags from exhibit to exhibit. None of the neighbouring displays particularly depend on prior knowledge.

Town life and Trade required circulation on two levels.

Here again the approach is thematic, not chronological. But there should be signs pointing the visitor to approach the area via the desired entrances, either from the Rossend display or through the Kirkcaldy doorway.

No such directional signs were installed, and Part Four shows that, possibly because of this, few visitors seem to enter this area.

On Level 1 visitors are confronted by a series of options after the Monymusk reliquary. Should they turn left or right, beyond the door behind it, or go through the door beside it? More detailed maps could show visitors how to find the most iconic objects, perhaps supplemented by suggested routes, depending on how much time, or interest, the visitors have. 'If you only have half-an-hour, don't miss x, y and z'. The colour coding is again pale, but there are wall maps which show the different sections – 'Renaissance', 'Monarchy and Power', and 'Burghs'. If visitors study these maps, they will better understand the general layout.

John Allan casts light on how the architects' vision contributed to what seems to visitors to be confusing. [120]   He wrote that

the range and sovereign control of spatial experience is nothing short of astounding – toplit courtyard, cavernous tunnel, vertiginous crevasse, pillared hall, cubic cell, spacious promenade, measured enfilade, apsidal chamber, and more...There are balconies, wells, outlooks, bridges, ramps, staircases – especially staircases, which are given a special role of their own in importing the heightened frisson of discovery that accompanies the visitor from floor to floor, by allowing alternative wayfinding and a consequent sense of having made your own personal journey through the narrative.

That is an eloquent tribute to the aesthetic of the architecture, and the building is impressive, has been highly praised and has won several prestigious awards. However, many visitors may just want guidance on a way to find highlights of the collection, rather than to make their 'own personal journey'. (In fairness, some visitors enjoy the serendipity of wandering).

In the same magnificently illustrated book, Professor Duncan MacMillan takes the reader

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[120] John Allan, 'In search of meaning: an architectural appreciation of the Museum of Scotland', in Benson+Forsyth, *Museum of Scotland,* 122.

on a journey through the building. He explains how the architects' layout reflects the chronology of the displays and mirrors their feel.

> Daylight beckons to you round corners, leading you on, but helping you keep your orientation through complex spaces…The medieval church is crypt like, deliberately dark and low…but round a corner you move from religious gloom into bright daylight with the Reformation. Light floods in from a wide mullioned window that opens across the street to Greyfriars Kirk, site of so many of the Reformation's dramas, a visible link from the historic collections to the historic environment. [121]

This and other passages show how perceptive visitors can decipher the architects' intentions, and how the building's design and lighting complements its content. However, many visitors will not have the necessary time, or expert, architectural understanding.

As to how much visitors learn, a complete narrative history of Scotland cannot be provided solely by the objects which have been collected, whether by accident of survival, or generosity of donors. If that is what people want, the answer is the many excellent books by professional historians which have been published since Smout's ground-breaking work. [122] But what they will undoubtedly get is sight of iconic, and sometimes beautiful, objects, each of which illustrates some aspect of Scotland's story. As the survey in Part Four shows, even casual visitors are impressed by objects such as the Lewis chess pieces, the Maiden, the jewellery of Mary, Queen of Scots, the Newcomen beam engine and the travelling canteen of 'Bonnie Prince Charlie'. They should surely learn something about aspects of social and political history from these and other 'Highlights'. Moreover, the superb craftsmanship of the Bute Mazer, the metalwork (flintlock pistols and cannons), woodwork (Beaton Panels), and jewellery (Seton necklace), will surely convince visitors to Level 1 that Scotland was taking a full part in the European Renaissance. Sight of them adds a visual impact which is lacking in the printed page. It is 'History Beyond the Text'. (See Appendix Ten).

Part Four deals with visitor reaction but, as a trailer, here are opinions from, respectively, an expert on architecture, and an expert on museums, on the learning value of the visual impact of objects.

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[121] Duncan MacMillan, in Benson+Forsyth, *Museum of Scotland*. 116/7
[122] T.C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People 1560 – 1830,* (London and Glasgow, 1969).

John Allan suggested that 'Scotland in Essence' was an appropriate sobriquet for MoS
to indicate

> the range and authenticity of this educational and architectural experience. For even a
> day spent exploring this enthralling building and its contents will vouchsafe more insights
> and understanding of Scotland's story than might be gained in weeks of well-intentioned
> sightseeing .[123]

Professor Lalage Bown claims that

> Museums are the outcome of human curiosity, of the desire to learn. It is hard to imagine
> anyone visiting a museum for more than a few minutes without learning something new,
> whatever their age or formal educational background. Museums are resources for all
> kinds of learning and because their stock-in-trade is composed of objects, which can be
> seen and sometimes handled, they can have a greater immediacy of impact than most
> other learning resources if used imaginatively.[124]

Finally, in this section, Dr Cameron drew attention to a criticism of Levels 3-5 by Laura Hourston,
of Edinburgh University, in her 2002 Ph.D. thesis, 'Romantic nationalism and modernity as
competing narratives of identity in the Museum of Scotland, with reference to the Canadian
Museum of Civilisation (the CMC) and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa'. Her
main criticism of MoS is its 'considerable bias towards the depiction of Scotland's industrial
heritage at the expense of its folk history and culture', because of the decision not to create a
separate Museum of Industry. She argues that on Levels 3, 4 and 5 'a disproportionate area of
the Museum's display space is devoted to the representation of Scotland as a modern industrial
power in the forefront of global development'*.* She accepts that *The Jacobite Challenge, Living
on the Land,* and *Daith Comes In* do address social and folk history, but argues that the coverage
is very limited compared to industrial history.

The huge presence of the Beam Engine and the 'Ellesmere' could indeed give an
impression of such an imbalance.   However, while asserting that the industrial displays
'practically ignore the cataclysmic social side-effects that accompanied this revolution'*,*
Hourston does not mention the display that graphically illustrates the dreadful conditions
in which coal miners, including boys and women, worked, some of them as slaves. Nor
does she mention the foundry barrow, in which workers had to wheel loads of molten
iron, swilling about beside them.

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[123] John Allan, in Benson+Forsyth, *Museum of Scotland*. 120.
[124] Lalage Bown, Preface to Sue Mitchell (ed.), *Object Lessons: the Role of Museums in Education*
(Edinburgh, 1996).

The displays on *Living on the Land,* which she mentions, include spades, cooking pots, creels, lamps, peat, and food such as fish, wild birds and their eggs, including a horse-hair cragsman's rope used on St. Kilda. In *Burghs* (Levels 2 and 3) there are displays of pottery, tiles and the work of tailors, seamstresses, soutars and Jack makers. The church displays (Level 3) include symbols of social control such as jougs, branks, beggars' badges, and a gown and stool of repentance. There are also displays of weaving, embroidery, knitting and a film of Scottish textiles, past and present. So there is arguably more social comment than Hourston mentions.

The explanation may be that,

- The Level 2 displays are accessible only by a small, distant lift, and not very obvious staircases.
- The display on *Burghs* is in a corridor separate from the main atrium.
- *Textiles,* and associated displays and film, are beyond a bridge over a light well at the end of the atrium.

The visitor survey in Part Four shows that few visitors reach these areas. So the problem may be more about finding the social displays than the lack of them. Moreover *Scotland: a Changing Nation,* which has opened since Hourston wrote her thesis, places a great deal of emphasis on social history. Its displays go far to redress any perceived imbalance.

SECTION SEVEN Analysis of the later, 2008 displays on Level 6. *Scotland: A Changing Nation.*

The concept and aims of the new gallery.

It opened on 11 July, 2008, replacing the original *Twentieth Century* Gallery, and complements the original MoS displays in three ways.

- It continues the chronological history from the point where the original displays stop.
- Its displays of twentieth and twenty-first century cultural, economic and social life, industry, and technology further illustrate the argument that we can understand where we are now only if we know where we came from.
- It incorporates, ten years later, a radically different ethos in the techniques of display. Its presentation is **people focused**, through twenty-nine personal

stories, and includes films, interactive and audio-visual elements, music, art and poetry as well as objects. It has a greater emphasis than the original displays on the kind of story-based information advocated by Beverly Serrell, and on techniques of 'history beyond the text'.

In so doing, it offers visitors a somewhat different learning experience.

In a public lecture in the NMS's Dunfermline Room on 6 November, 2009, David Forsyth (the lead curator, with Maureen Barrie as content manager) argued that a twentieth-twenty-first century gallery could scarcely **not** use audio-visual, because it is a twentieth-twenty-first century technology. He added that working personally with the people who told their stories was very rewarding, and that the gallery opening was a 'raw and emotional occasion' for many of them. The curators deliberately intended to give visitors a more 'visceral' experience than in the rest of MoS, because they 'did not want to confine modern Scottish culture to a case'.

On 9 December, he kindly gave access to the (unpublished) 'Concept Brief' for the gallery, as approved by Jane Carmichael, Project Director. This was very useful, because it sets out what was in the minds of those who created this new gallery, just as Part One of this dissertation sets out what was in the minds of those who created the original galleries. The **key concept** was,

> Taking the advent of the First World War as a starting point, the gallery sets out to explore some of the major challenges, changes and continuities faced by those living and working in Scotland up until the present day. One of the major challenges for this gallery is the fact that many of our visitors will have direct experience of the subject and therefore come with their own experiences and perspectives on these key themes which have helped shape 20th and 21st century Scotland.

This tallies with the findings of respected authorities about the extent to which visitors' reaction is shaped by the different assumptions and experiences that they bring with them. For example, Christine Johnstone argued that in almost any museum, curators are guaranteed to know more than the visitors. [125] But for twentieth century social history, many visitors have a much more immediate, personal and emotional engagement than most curators. Often they have knowledge of the use and manufacture of specific objects; knowledge that the curator lacks.

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[125] Christine Johnstone, in Arnold, *History and Heritage: Consuming the Past in Contemporary Culture.*

The Brief listed the **core values** as being: people focused, accessible both physically and intellectually, presenting a non-authorial voice, relevant to target audiences, emotionally engaging, inclusive, surprising, cross-generational, and honest and open about the limitations and scope of the gallery.   The **key messages** were to show how lives and patterns of industry in Scotland changed, how people left Scotland for economic or social reasons, how the social expectations of Scots have changed, in terms of lifestyle, health, housing and holidays, and how Scottish politics have changed significantly since the end of the First World War.   The Brief also emphasised the use of **interpretation through sound and audio-visual,** as well as through objects, because the 'Key to Scottish identity is voice (speech, use of language, dialect), sense of humour, and the appreciation of music, poetry and literature'.

Forsyth drew to attention the way in which poetry, songs and quotations 'pepper the gallery', and how high resolution graphics form a kind of 'digital wallpaper'. He saw art as being part of the interpretive process. The major curatorial challenge was how to combine the essential continuity of history throughout most of the twentieth century with the dynamism of change in the last twenty years.   Social life and community assumptions changed relatively little from World War One to the sixties, with World War Two continuing the basic ethos, but change accelerated on an almost logarithmic scale from the 1970s.

The Gallery Content.
There are five main sections – War, Industry, Leaving Scotland, Daily Life, and Voice of the People/Politicians.
The section on World War One makes the point that Scotland suffered huge loss of life, and features the medals of Daniel Laidlaw VC, who piped his Company of the KOSB into attack at the Battle of Loos. Another personal display illustrates social attitudes to women at that time. Rose West, a hospital volunteer, drove over the mountain tracks of Serbia, and maintained her own vehicle, yet family attitudes after the war prevented her from driving or owning a car!   A volunteer guide reported that a group of late teenage students, on a conducted tour, found this astonishing.

A painting (art as interpretation) of an Atlantic convoy, unloading supplies manually to tenders in Holy Loch, illustrates the threats from U-boats and bombers. The convoy

could not use ports with cranes at, say, Liverpool or the Clyde because they were being bombed, while the ancient, rusty, slow, steamer in the foreground must have held back the whole convoy, making it a sitting target.

The next section tells how, after World War Two, coal and heavy engineering survived against increasing competition only with state support, whose withdrawal, in the 1970s and 1980s, destroyed them. Displays on shipbuilding include a rivet gun and model ships. A film shows welders in action and ships being launched. The function of the coils of huge drag chains, used as brakes, and their enormous scale, is vividly shown. Several links of an actual drag chain, on the floor below the screen, complement this interpretation. Unfortunately, although a label beside the rivet gun invites visitors to pick it up and feel its weight, it is firmly bolted to its base and cannot be lifted at all!

A Hillman Imp exemplifies the post-World War Two attempt to set up a volume motor-car manufacturing Industry in Scotland. This researcher personally conducted four short, tracking surveys of visitors, which suggest that the car attracts a lot of attention. The interpretation consists of projecting on to the car's bonnet the words of the refrain from '*A Letter from America'*, by 'The Proclaimers' – 'Bathgate no more, Linwood no more*,* Methil no more'. This refers to the Linwood factory, where the Imp was built, and to other industrial initiatives that failed. It is a neat commentary, in a popular modern song, on the contrast between the Highlands, where emigration was forced by earlier economic change ('Lochaber no more...'), and the Lowlands, troubled by later economic change. It will be readily understood by most adult Scots, but perhaps not by tourists.

A video shows how wool was gathered, carded, spun and then woven on a handloom. After the tweed was washed, it was pounded and pulled back and forward on a rough wooden board by teams of women. Visitors can see and hear them singing the rhythmic 'waulking' songs – a tuneful illustration of toil and teamwork that lasted for hundreds of years, in some parts of Scotland, until a surprisingly short time ago.

Another film shows the rise and fall of the Ravenscraig steel strip mill. This complements displays about the arrival of more modern industries such as microelectronics, personal computers and North Sea oil, including a very large, detailed model of an oil platform. Oil extraction is a successful new industry that overcame major engineering and

construction problems, but the curators have not shied away from the downside, because they also display sketches of workers on 'Piper Alpha', made when the artist visited it the year before it caught fire, killing 167 men.

Another example of art as interpretation is a model, by Kate Williams and John Lloyd, of the Dounreay nuclear reactor. It was kiln cast, using uranium glass, and is shown under ultraviolet light. The glowing green glass is eye-catchingly beautiful, and serves both as sculptural art in its own right and as an illustration of the reactor's iconic shape.

In a film, *One Nation, Five Million Voices*, many individual Scots, some of them well known, give their views on:

- what it means to be Scottish, British or European,
- Scots abroad,
- the reputation of Scots,
- the 'Braveheart' syndrome,
- what they miss when they're abroad,
- 'worst things',
- Scottish food,
- Scottish words.

There is a bench on which visitors can sit while watching and listening to the film. Both film and bench are popular with visitors.

Daily Life has a model of a tenement frontage and a film about housing conditions, from the Gorbals slums to post-war local authority housing schemes. This section tells how in 1979 fifty per cent of all Scots lived in rented council houses – a higher proportion than anywhere else in Western Europe. It shows how internal housing standards rose, with indoor bathrooms and toilets, central heating and labour-saving devices such as automatic washing machines (which replaced manual wringers and mangles) and refrigerators (which replaced externally ventilated meat safes).

A film about slum tenements shows children playing in a derelict battleground of broken down wash houses and crumbling buildings that make only the poorest provision for hygiene. A woman complains

> You have dampness running down walls, fungus, overcrowded families, shared toilets in a bad state of repair. Derelict, dirty, smelly, it looks bad, there's no space. You hang out your washing: all the soot comes down with the rain…and you have to wash it all over again.

Forsyth said that the curators tried to avoid giving 'a rose tinted presentation'!

The advantages of new council houses are balanced by a presentation of the downside of multi-storey blocks, including a quotation on the wall from Adam McNaughton's 'Jeely Piece' song, which humorously bewails the difficulty kids had in contacting their mothers twenty storeys above them. This is social commentary, but also expresses the Concept Brief's 'Keys to Scottish identity' in the 'use of language', 'sense of humour' and 'appreciation of song and poetry'. Here again, the song will be recognised, with affection, by adult Scots, but may puzzle tourists.

Leisure covers holidays and entertainment. A film features well-known entertainers, from stars of the variety theatres in the 1930s, up to the present day, when 'The Proclaimers' belt out the compelling rhythm of *500 Miles,* which has been adopted as a theme song by fans of their local football team. [126]

A section on suffragettes, strikers, and politics, includes:
- Winnie Ewing, whose by-election victory for the Scottish National Party in 1967, in what had been a safe Labour constituency (Hamilton), changed the face of Scottish politics,
- the building of the Holyrood Parliament (complete with a model), and
- Tam Dalyell, famous as the first to pose the 'West Lothian question'. (Why should Scottish MPs be able to vote in Westminster on English matters, while English MPs cannot vote on matters devolved to Scotland?).

Here again, the curators have not funked tackling controversial topics. They quote an article in the *Times Educational Supplement Scotland* of 29 August, 2008.

> If you ever wondered why Mrs Thatcher has never been particularly popular north of the border, this exhibition reminds visitors that she was the Prime Minister who said, in 1990, "We English, who are marvellous people, are really very generous to Scotland".

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[126] It also inspired the name of the *500 Miles* charity. It makes artificial limbs for Malawi and Zambia, and was founded by Olivia Giles, an Edinburgh lawyer who lost her limbs through meningitis.

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Analysis of Level 6.

The wall **labels** are at a good reading height, and have mostly got sufficient contrast. However, there is perhaps too much use of continuous reversed out text, which becomes tiring to read.

Orientation is by a straightforward, elongated oval route, with only one alternative path through *Emigration* instead of *Five Million Voices.* However visitors should see that these are short alternatives, either or both of which can easily be taken.

Interpretation is excellent, with labels, objects, personal stories, film, audio-visual, quotations, poetry, song and artworks complementing each other. The films are very effective – e.g. by showing the appalling housing conditions in the slums, and the delighted reactions of a woman getting tenancy of a council house which, for the first time, gave her family sole use of a toilet and bathroom. Older visitors may nod their heads in recognition, while younger ones, who have not seen the Tony Roper play 'The Steamie' will learn, to their surprise, that despite the later public reaction against huge council estates of multi-storey blocks on the outskirts of a city, with few local services, such a council flat seemed a paradise to a slum dweller in the 1950s.

Interactives are not as widely used as film. However, in the shipbuilding section, visitors can use shaped pieces of wood to form a model of a Type 45 Destroyer. In the fishing section, they can use a gauge, to determine whether a fish is big enough to be an allowable catch. In the textiles section, they can feel samples of wool and jute and look at them through a microscope. These simple interactives are robust, cheap, and not dependent on sophisticated technology that might break down. However, they fail at the recalcitrant rivet gun!

There is **considerable use of sound**. The gallery has a low ceiling, and some sound effects are so close together that they overlap. It is possible for the visitor, while listening to the film about the Gorbals, to hear *Five Million Voices* on one side and variety theatre songs on the other. Attempts have been made, since the opening, to deal with this problem, but there is still some distracting overlap, because it is difficult, and expensive, to 'cone' sound. The visitor survey (Part Four) records this criticism.

As noted earlier, the previous Director, Mark Jones, was strongly against using sound, precisely because of this risk. However, *Scotland: A Changing Nation* is not alone. The World War One exhibition in Ypres*, In Flanders Fields,* much praised when it opened in 1998, had even more severe problems. Sound effects of machine-guns, cannon-fire, poetry readings, and contemporary songs, were given in small, side by side booths, separated only by curtains. The *Holocaust* exhibition in the Imperial War Museum London, tackled this problem better, by putting different audio-visuals in what are effectively separate, walled rooms, each having only part of one side open to the corridor.[127]

Flexibility. Some displays in the original MoS will be difficult to alter in a major way, but not in Level 6. Forsyth said that whereas the displays in the other Levels are 'embedded in the architecture', *A Changing Nation* offers curators a 'tabula rasa'. He welcomes its flexibility, because curators should not be didactic about objects that visitors experienced in their own lifetime. Changes must be possible, in response to public reaction.

This later gallery is an **interesting contrast to the original galleries** of the MoS. It is deliberately '**People Centred'**, emphasising personal stories, voices, music, popular entertainment, poetry and art. Moreover, the objects frequently offer **social comment** as well as being historic artefacts in their own right. **It aims to engage the visitor's emotional as well as intellectual reactions.** (Part Four has an evaluation of visitor reaction to the gallery).

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[127] The sources for this paragraph are personal inspections of this gallery (on several visits), of *In Flanders Fields* during a visit to Ypres in 1999, and of *Holocaust* during a visit to the IWM in June 2009. Other sources for the section are Forsyth's lecture on 6 November, 2009, and a meeting with him on 9 December, 2009).

PART FOUR.   Evaluation of Visitor Reaction.

Introduction. What is evaluation, and how is it done?

In October 2003 the then Scottish Museums Council (SMC), now Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS), produced a fact sheet, *Introduction to evaluating museum interpretation.* [128] It quotes the Centre for Environmental Interpretation's definition of evaluation as, 'a systematic examination of activities where objectives are defined and performance in meeting objectives is measured'.

It lists four stages – planning (front-end evaluation), design (formative evaluation), completion (remedial evaluation), and finally summative evaluation. This is the ideal, but many visitor surveys are just summative evaluations. However, if you do not find out what your visitors already know, you cannot be sure whether the displays have added to their knowledge. That is why a special survey was undertaken for this dissertation, aimed specifically at finding out what visitors knew about Scottish history **before** visiting MoS, and what had been **added** by their visit. How far did the information that curators wanted to communicate get across to visitors, who can all respond in different ways, according to what personal knowledge, experience, and opinions they bring with them?

There are two basic types of data – quantitative (numerical), and qualitative (opinions, attitudes, perceptions and feelings). Information can be gathered from

- questionnaires – have visitors learned something new, or felt inspired to find out more, or to visit again?
- observation – where did visitors spend most time? Which broad themes, particular objects, or interactives attract them? Do they read the labels, and do they discuss the display with other family members?

Both methods were used in this research.

Visitor profiles

The first task is to establish who the visitors are. What is their socio-demographic profile, and what is their motivation? Why do they come to NMS sites, including the

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[128] Unpublished, but available to all member museums. (www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk).

MoS? Jenni Fuchs, Visitor Studies Officer at NMS, kindly gave access to research reports by Morris, Hargreaves, McIntyre, dated May 2008. [129] They were rolling, quantitative, visitor surveys, conducted at NMS sites over the three years 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8. The surveys at the National Museum of Costume were on a self-completion basis, but at other NMS sites they were interview-led, exit surveys. Because the surveys took place before the Royal Museum closed for rebuilding, they do not show MoS separately. So references to 'NMS' are to the whole Chambers Street complex.

The questionnaires covered socio-demographic profile, motivations, and responses to the museums. Their main purpose was to gather marketing information, rather than to measure learning outcomes. So there were questions such as employment status, and use and opinion of the café and shop, which have little relevance to this research. However, other questions, on previous knowledge and connection, and visitor segmentation, together with some of the key findings, are directly relevant.

On **knowledge and connection,** the research shows that the National War Museum attracts many visitors with little or no knowledge of the subject, whereas both NMS and the National Museum of Flight tend to have only about twenty-five to thirty per cent of visitors with little or no knowledge, but as much as twenty per cent who describe themselves as 'specialist'. The report concludes, 'this places demands on the interpretation strategy to be multi-layered to meet these varying needs'. NMS and the National Museum of Costume have the largest number of people with a 'connection' to the subject, but even then it is still fairly small, at twenty-four per cent in 2007.

On motivation**,** the consultants created seven distinct **Visitor Segments** – Experts, Aficionados, Self-developers, Third Spacers, Families, Site-seers (sic) and Culture Vultures. Experts include professionals on research visits; Aficionados are individuals seeking inspiration; Self-developers want informally to develop their knowledge; Third Spacers want to make the museum their own comfortable space; Families want a

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[129] Morris, Hargreaves, McIntyre, *Visitor Insights: National Museums Scotland, Research Findings*, May 2008. Unpublished reports, seen courtesy NMS.

fun/educational trip for children; Site-seers are mainly tourists; and Culture Vultures seek an uplifting or sensory experience.

The main reasons for visiting were:

- An enjoyable way to pass the time – twenty-six per cent at NMS, and fifteen per cent at Flight.
- Somewhere nice to go with friends/family – eighteen per cent at Flight.
- Improve own/children's knowledge – twenty per cent at NMS. At Rural Life twenty per cent said they wanted to educate their children, which is high, given that only a quarter of visits were made by families, which is lower than at other sites.
- Personal interest – twenty per cent at Flight. Another eleven per cent said they wanted to see 'awe- inspiring things'.

The National War Museum has a high proportion of 'Site-seers', because it is part of Edinburgh Castle, a major tourist attraction. (Forty per cent of its visitors come from overseas).

The National Museum of Flight has the highest dwell time of NMS sites, with seventy per cent of visits lasting over two hours. This is because of the size of the site, its location, and the fact that the visit tends to be treated as a whole or half day out, rather than a shorter trip that can be combined with other activities, as at the museums in Edinburgh.

One of the **Key Findings** is that about twenty per cent of all visitors find it 'quite hard' or 'very hard' to find their way around. However, In contrast, no less than ninety-nine per cent of visitors at Rural Life, and ninety-seven per cent at the War Museum, find it 'very easy' or 'quite easy' to get around. About twenty per cent of visitors to the Museum of Flight describe it as 'quite hard' or 'very hard' to find the museum, but once they reach it they have no difficulty in getting around, apart from its being very spread out.

Few visitors give improving their own knowledge as the main reason for their visit – twelve per cent at NMS, nineteen per cent at the War Museum, eleven per cent at Flight and only three per cent at Rural Life. However, forty-eight per cent at NMS, sixty-one per cent at the War Museum, sixty-three per cent at Flight and twenty-three per cent at Rural Life said that in fact they had improved their knowledge.

The conclusion is that visitors do learn from their visits to NMS history based museums, even though that was not their motivation.

Another **Key Finding** is the **use of, and response to, staff.** On average ninety-five per cent of visitors, across all NMS venues, say that staff made them feel welcome. Between twenty-five per cent of visitors (at NMS), and a high of forty-seven per cent (at Flight), made contact with staff, and those who did found them polite (ninety-eight per cent) and knowledgeable (ninety-six per cent). **These figures are a credit to NMS front-of-house staff and are highly relevant to this research because, as discussed in Part Two, visitors learn more when they feel they are welcome.**

Evaluation of Visitor Reaction to History Museums.

This evaluation is in four Sections:

1. Evaluations conducted at sites not part of NMS.
2. Visitor reaction to the original (1998) displays in the Museum of Scotland.
3. Visitor reaction to the later (2008) *Scotland: A Changing Nation.*
4   Visitor reaction to a display at East Fortune airfield about that site's history.

SECTION ONE.

Evaluations conducted at sites not part of NMS.

While the main thrust of this research is to evaluate the learning outcomes for visitors to MoS, it is instructive to look at examples of evaluation elsewhere.

St. Kilda Explored

In 1996 Glasgow Museums Service (GMS) staged this exhibition in Kelvingrove Museum and Gallery. It encouraged visitors to 'explore' the islands for themselves, using a hands-on approach. Mark O'Neill, Head of Arts and Museums at Culture and Sport Glasgow, kindly agreed to give access to the unpublished evaluation of that exhibition. What follows is a relatively short summary. All opinions, and errors of omission or commission, are this researcher's personal responsibility.

The evaluation was commendably thorough.[130] It included a demographic survey, a formative survey, a front end evaluation of visitor interests, a tracking survey, a summative evaluation, a visitor environmental/sustainability survey, a visitor comment analysis, a museum assistant survey, a teachers' questionnaire, and a survey of the use of the microscope.

The **demographic survey** found that while only ten per cent of visitors to Kelvingrove had come to specifically to see the St. Kilda exhibition, seventy-eight per cent had visited it, mostly because they had come across it by chance. As over 900,000 people visited Kelvingrove during the run of the exhibition, that implies that over 700,000 people saw at least some of the St. Kilda exhibition.

The **formative survey** consisted of random questionnaires at the design stage, to find out what the public already knew about St. Kilda. A third of even the Scottish visitors had not heard the words 'St. Kilda' before. Over a third did not know how St. Kildans lived before the evacuation, only a third mentioned NTS, and only a small number knew that St. Kilda was a bird sanctuary. None mentioned research on Soay sheep or archaeological excavations. This was a useful baseline to compare with visitors' understanding of St. Kilda and its importance **after** they had visited.

In the **front-end evaluation**, twenty visitors were questioned randomly, after showing an interest in the preliminary displays. Nearly all said they would be interested in learning about the families, what they ate, the seabirds and digging an archaeological site. These reactions are probably to be expected: most people are interested in how other people live and in subjects like live birds. Other displays, for example the reactions to *Against the Odds*, at IWM North, described later, have confirmed visitors' consistent interest in people, whatever message is trying to be conveyed.

The **tracking survey** followed individual visitors (unknown to them) round the exhibition. Sixty-one were successfully followed. There was a good spread of interest in the various activities, apart from the surveying, perhaps because it was a bit technical. The most popular was the bird count, followed by the photograph albums, and then the

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[130] The evaluation of *St. Kilda Explored* was carried out in-house. Unpublished, but available courtesy of Head of Arts and Museums, Glasgow.

microscope. The archaeological dig was extremely popular, so much so that access to it had to be controlled. Many of the text panels were read by at least a third of the visitors, but the workbooks were less popular, as looking too much like going back to school.

The **summative survey** consisted of interviews about visitors' reactions. Sixty-two per cent had looked at the photograph albums, and a third had looked at the young puffin area, the objects in the drawers, and the extinct area. Eighty-four per cent said that they liked the activities, and an impressive ninety-eight per cent believed it was an exhibition for all ages. Two-thirds said the displays would make them care more for historic buildings, archaeological remains and the natural environment. A third said they especially appreciated the opportunity of talking to exhibition staff. Nearly three-quarters said that the exhibition had made them glad that St. Kilda is a National Nature Reserve, a third said it had made them concerned for its future, and only two per cent were still indifferent to the islands. These findings justified the support that SNH had given to the exhibition.

In the **sustainability survey**, twenty-six per cent of visitors said that visiting the exhibition had made them feel personally more likely to think about conservation of the environment. Ninety-two per cent said that they now recognised that the lifestyle of the people of St. Kilda was entirely sustainable, and that it was important to make every effort to sustain the world's resources.

Visitor comments were so voluminous and varied as to defy brief or sensible analysis. However, the vast majority of visitors said that they enjoyed the exhibition, and **many mentioned that they had learned things they had not previously known.**

The **museum assistants' survey** showed that they were unanimous that GMS should include hands-on activities in future exhibitions. Two-thirds would have welcomed more training, especially on how to work with school parties, although they had had some instruction from their education department. Bad experiences were usually with irate parents whose children were really too young, or with large parties who had arrived unbooked, despite schools having been warned that booking was necessary.

The assistants enjoyed their participation: nearly all said that the day went more quickly, and they welcomed the chance not to wear a uniform. They made a major contribution, because a display with hands-on content needs the presence of staff, preferably not in uniform, to help, explain and supervise. This must have contributed to visitors' enjoyment of, and learning experience at, the hands-on activities.

This evaluation by GMS was thorough, and an example of best practice. Few evaluations run the whole gamut, from demographic and front-end right through to summative. It showed that it is possible for an exhibition successfully to put across messages, and education about social history, historic lifestyle in a remote part of Scotland, archaeology and environmental appreciation. Admittedly, it is about only one small, island community, over a limited period of historic time. But **it confirms that a well-presented history display can contribute to public understanding of a particular instance of Scottish social history.**

Merseyside Museums and Galleries

The National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside (NMGM) initiated a programme of surveys, using a business and market research company. [131] They included tracking visitors round an exhibition, interviewing them, and inviting them to respond to questions through a microcomputer. Results relevant to this dissertation include: -

- **Labels** were '**a perennial cause of concern and frequent anguish'.** There was also a need for **better orientation**. Differences were exposed between those values that put a premium on 'the number of feet coming through the door', and those that favoured 'transcendental aesthetic experiences'.

- Eventually, a full-time member of staff for visitor surveys was appointed. NMGM ruled out the employment of consultants, on grounds of cost. (NMS has a full time Visitor Studies Officer).

NMGM found that the problem with using museum staff for surveys is that the busiest and best time to collect data is also the busiest time for their own jobs. Volunteers need

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[131] Patrick Sudbury and Terry Russell (eds.), *The Evaluation of Museum and Gallery Displays*, (Liverpool, 1995).

training, and all have different backgrounds and experience. The disadvantage of using students is 'the amount of close supervision that is required in order to produce a piece of work that is of a high standard'. (These difficulties were overcome in the visitor survey in MoS, described later, because of the help of volunteer guides, all of whom had training, and considerable experience in conducting tours).

NMGM concluded that staffing had been the biggest problem in the evaluation programme, that **'data collection can be a lonely, boring, tedious job'** and that **'visitors must be relaxed and at ease with interviewers'.** (This researcher can endorse both of these statements from personal experience of the visitor survey of MoS! Indeed the need to get visitors relaxed had a strong influence on how the later part of that survey was handled).

Recommendations included better leaflets, more prominent signs, improved information panels, more seats, larger type on labels, and a reasonably priced guide**.** All of these, except the one on labels, were made also by visitors in the MoS survey.

Finally, it was accepted that a visitor's understanding of the messages in an exhibition depends on the visitor's own experience of life and companions in the museum. This endorses the arguments of academic authorities and museum practitioners, described in Part Two, that it is virtually impossible for any display to cater for all the varied understanding, perceptions and experience that visitors bring with them.

Imperial War Museum North
Against the Odds: The Story of Bomber Command in the Second World War, was an exhibition in Imperial War Museum North (IWM North), from 27 May, 2006 to 7 January, 2007. It told the stories of air and ground crews, and the impact of the bombing campaign on the people of Germany. There were interactives, to enable visitors to find out the human cost of Bomber Command operations, the technical detail of aircraft production and how bomber crew slang is still used today. Visitors received an 'identity card' with a real-life story of a person in Bomber Command.

Maurice, Hargreaves, Macintyre was commissioned to evaluate this exhibition. [132] It had a huge emotional impact on visitors, who cited the personal testimonies and accounts as the most powerful aids in delivering this experience. For example, 'You can't skirt over a telegram can you. This is advising you that your son is missing in action. That's very personal. It really brings it home'. Twenty-three per cent of visitors said they had visited to improve their knowledge, thirteen per cent because of a hobby or leisure interest, and ten per cent to see the building or architecture. Seventy-three per cent said they learned something new from the exhibition, and sixty-six per cent felt their knowledge of this passage of history had improved.

Verdict

Like *Nicholas and Alexandra* (discussed below), this shows how **a specialised exhibition can get a specific history lesson across to many visitors.**

SECTION TWO.

Visitor reaction to the original displays in the Museum of Scotland.

Comments by visitors after the opening.

From the opening of MoS, visitors could leave comments at the information desk. Every visitor who left an address received a courteous answer, usually in writing. George Dalgleish, curator of Scotland and Europe, kindly gave access to an unpublished dossier of comments within his remit. [133]

Beverly Serrell, a recognised authority on visitor evaluation, argues that **comment books 'have limited validity and are not statistically reliable, making them one of the most unscientific ways to measure visitor responses'.** Although they are a source of qualitative feedback for museum staff, they 'should never be used as the sole

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[132] The report was not published, but access to it was given, courtesy of Lindsay Ball, Head of Corporate Marketing, Imperial War Museum, London.
[133] Visitors left comments on forms at the Information Desk. They were passed to the relevant curator for answer. Neither comments nor answers have been collated or published.

method of evaluation. [134] They are primarily for the benefit of visitors, giving them a voice'.

The dossier contained 104 comments between 3 December, 1998 and 14 August, 2006. Fifty came in the first six months, then tailed off rapidly, with only fifteen in the next six months, eleven in 2001, five in 2002, six in 2003, two in 2004, none in 2005 and one in 2006.

In the first fifty, there were twenty 'snagging' comments, usually minor errors in spelling or in transposed numbering. Occasionally they were about genuine mistakes, such as assigning a town to the wrong county. In each case the reply apologised, and explained that the shortage of time available to complete the displays, before the official opening, had led to hasty proof-reading. All were rectified quickly, which explains the speedy drop after the first few months.

As Serrell points out, the 'limited validity' of such random, unstructured, comments means that they do not constitute a comprehensive, or reliable visitor survey. The only really consistent complaints were about layout, and failure to include more on the Clearances, the Enlightenment, and topics in which individual visitors had a special interest. However, some who complained that a subject was missing had simply failed to find an existing display.

Visitor survey of Museum of Scotland, 1999.

A survey of visitor responses to MoS was funded by the Leverhulme Trust, and conducted by Dr Fiona McLean and Dr Steven Cooke [135]. The responses were drawn from a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews in early 1999. The authors argue that

> Visitors bring their own preconceptions to the museum that shape the nature and perceptions of their visit...the museum can be seen as a place where people go to actively make and remake their identities, to selectively select and reject and manipulate the images and identities found within.

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[134] Beverly Serrell, 'Using Behaviour to Define the Effectiveness of Exhibitions', in Gail Durbin (ed.) *Developing Museum Exhibitions for Lifelong Learning* (London, 1996). 225.

[135] McLean and Cooke, 'Communicating Identity', in J. M. Fladmark (ed.) *Heritage and Museums: Shaping National Identity,* (Shaftesbury, 2000). 150-53.

That is consistent with the view of George Hein and others, discussed in Part Two. When asked why they had visited the museum, many visitors cited 'general interest', or 'because it was there' or because they were looking for some way of filling the time – 'basically I had an hour to spare'. The authors conclude that the museum 'is not just a place for education or for the inculcation of Scottish history. Different people use the museum in different ways'. Despite not necessarily having come for educational purposes, for many it was a space for the telling of history, 'I suppose it is outlining its entire history, its heritage'. Others thought it presented a positive image, promoting Scotland to the world. 'Basically I think it's just showing Scotland at its best'.

The authors say that, with a few exceptions, visitors did not identify the museum with overt nationalism. Those who did referred almost exclusively to the Declaration of Arbroath. 'I thought, gosh, it's so strongly nationalistic'. Others denied that MoS was telling a prescriptive story, 'You're free to make up your own mind'.

Many said it was difficult to find their way around.

> 'It's very hard to follow the map, we just couldn't work it out at all', 'It's a wonderful use of space but it's like a warren', 'The architecture is wonderful, and I know lots of people like it, but I personally find it extremely difficult to find my way around', 'You keep going into dead ends as it were, and there are so many of them. I know they are special little rooms, but the first time I came I almost panicked, you know, how do I get out?', 'I know that it's not always good to have a set path, because it allows you to choose, but I think it would be helpful if there was at least **some** visual and other ways of thinking, well, suggested routes that you might take'. (Original emphasis).

The authors conclude that for some visitors the architectural design

> disrupts the ability of the museum to tell the story of Scotland by not giving a set route to follow: there is no natural progression…the museum is perceived by both producers and consumers as a place where Scotland's story can be told, but little agreement exists on what that story should be.

Analysis of the 1999 survey.

This survey supports Conclusion Five in Part One – that those who lobbied for and created the Museum of Scotland were not driven by any political intent. The finding that many visitors complained that it was difficult to find their way supports the discussion of orientation in Part Three. **Although not specifically targeted at learning outcomes, it also shows that visitors saw MoS as a space for telling Scotland's history.**

This was the only attempt to gauge visitors' reaction to MoS, in other than primarily marketing terms, until 2009/10. However, in-house surveys of the Discovery Zones, geared to learning outcomes, have been carried out, as have visitor surveys of temporary exhibitions.

Discovery Room and Zones

The original Discovery Room was set up because pupils were being encouraged to find things out for themselves, not just from books and audio-visual sources but also through their own investigations of the world around them, past and present. NMS Education Department saw that museums and galleries could be part of this, and had objects that could be investigated. So the Discovery Room was set up as a 'hands on' attempt to build up visitors' confidence in their ability to understand objects. It also aimed to attract people who were not in the habit of visiting museums. [136]

After a trial three-week run, the Discovery Room was opened on a seasonal basis in Chambers Street, and then travelled to museums elsewhere in Scotland in 1988/9. Subjects included masks (who wears masks and why), 'Jaws' (how animals chew), printing, glass, seashells, scientific detectives and tea. It was part of the whole Chambers Street complex, and not just MoS, but some conclusions are relevant to a history museum. Members of staff wore T-shirts bearing the Discovery Room logo so that they could be easily identified, and the Education Department took a deliberate decision that they should not wear any other kind of uniform, which would lay too much emphasis on security.

Evaluation was carried out by making videotapes of the themes, which would be shown to individual visitors immediately after their visit, to stimulate recall. They would then be interviewed on audiotape. More traditional methods, such as tracking and questionnaires, were also used. Even without prompting, many visitors said that the Discovery Room was so enjoyable that they would like more interactive areas throughout the museum. All said the Room was welcoming, and pleasant. It was concluded that the Room definitely fulfilled educational objectives:

> lots of people commented that they had found out the answers to questions that had

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[136] Anne Stevenson and Mary Bryden, 'The National Museums of Scotland's 1990 Discovery Room: an Evaluation', in *Museum Management and Curatorship* (1991), 10, 24-36.

bothered them for years, e.g. how are teapot spouts made? But, despite our best efforts, the Discovery Room is perceived as a children's room.

Very few visitors read the instruction cards before beginning a theme, except when parents read them to, and helped, a child. Many clearly wanted to handle and investigate the objects immediately, and resorted to reading the instructions only after handling activities had failed through not knowing what to do next.

The Discovery Room closed after several years, but in October 2006 four Discovery Zones were opened in MoS to provide interactive exhibits for family and school visitors. The Zones were intended to integrate hands-on activities with gallery displays; to provide family/child-focused exhibits, and to support different learning styles. They were in *Early People*, *Kingdom of the Scots, Riddle's Court* and *Scots on the Move.*

A Summative Evaluation was carried out from October to December 2006. [137]   A random sample of twenty-five interview-led surveys in each Zone, 100 in all, was collected. They included both families and adult groups.

The main findings were: -
- Seventy-four per cent said that the Discovery Zones had encouraged them to visit other galleries in the museum.
- Fifty-five per cent named one of the dressing-up activities as their favourite, the most popular being the Romans. This tallied with the most common learning outcome – how different people in different ages dressed.
- Respondents wanted more costumes (and, for adults, bigger ones), more space, more interactives and better signage (the Zones were hard to find) and there were complaints that broken things had not been fixed.
- Fifty-six per cent classed their overall experience as good and forty-one per cent as excellent. Only three per cent were undecided.
- Adults thought dressing-up, and the Zones in general, were fun, and not just for kids. 'They are quite enjoyable, you can interact with history'. Families thought they were

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[137] *Discovery Zones, Summative Evaluation: Report*, January 2007. Not published. Seen courtesy of Jenni Fuchs, Visitor Studies Officer, NMS.

'a great way to share history with our kids...it is great, children are learning'.

However, some said they preferred the old Discovery Room, which was in one place.

The Zones are popular, and make the museum and its galleries more accessible for children. (However, it is disappointing that staff report that some of the costumes have been stolen so often that they have had to be removed. Even a fairly bulky piece of Roman armour was spirited away. It was deemed impractical, expensive and intimidating to have very close supervision of every visitor, as was electronic tagging of each piece of clothing).

Verdict. The Zones are clearly a successful part of the role of MoS in contributing to visitors' educational and lifelong learning in history.

Special Exhibitions

NMS evaluated visitor reaction to Special Exhibitions (usually in the former Display Gallery of the Royal Museum). Some of these dealt with specific history themes, and were therefore relevant to this research. [138]

Nicholas and Alexandra: the Last Tsar and Tsarina.

This was a very popular exhibition in the RM from July to October 2005. (It was a coup for NMS, and the curators who obtained and organised it, because many of the objects had never before been out of Russia, and NMS was its only location). A summative evaluation, in September 2005, aimed to identify how successful the exhibition had been in meeting its original objectives. [139] The methodology included a self-completion survey carried out with visitors as they exited the exhibition, and a short dwell time study. There were over 50,000 visitors to the exhibition, so the 193 respondents represent a small sample, giving only indicative results.

A large, table-top map introduced the people and places central to the story of Nicholas and Alexandra, who were connected through marriage to most of the royal families in Europe. The aims were to highlight the family relationships of the Romanovs, and to

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[138] Stephen Allen, Head of Learning and Programmes at NMS, and Jenni Fuchs, Visitor Surveys Officer, kindly agreed to give access to these unpublished evaluations.

[139] *Nicholas & Alexandra – the Last Tsar and Tsarina. Evaluation: Summative Report*, September 2005. Data gathered by volunteer Chia-Lin Chu. Unpublished. Analysis and report preparation by Jenni Fuchs.

locate key places. Eighty-two per cent of respondents thought that the map succeeded well, or very well, in highlighting the Romanov family connections, while eighty-three per cent thought it succeeded in locating key places.

Four albums contained replicas of photographs and newspaper clippings, three of which also included objects for visitors to touch. Some visitors had not noticed them, or did not look at them because other visitors were looking, or it was too crowded, or they had no time. Those who had looked at them said that they gave a 'great insight' into the private lives of the Romanovs, and appreciated the tactile experience.

Nearly seventy per cent of respondents had read all, or most of, the labels and text panels, and thought they were helpful, told the story well, and were clear, concise, and to the point. One respondent believed that they balanced 'scholarly interpretation and an acknowledgement that they must be understood by all'.

Two or more of the five audio-visual presentations were watched by eighty-six per cent of respondents, who thought they brought the people to life, showed the family in context, and gave an extra dimension to the exhibition. The film about scenes at Balmoral was particularly enjoyed.

Learning objectives were tested by a short quiz, in which respondents were asked to rate a set of questions as true or false. (For example did the Romanov dynasty rule Russia for over 300 years?). 183 respondents took part. All the questions got nearly seventy per cent correct answers, and two reached nearly 100 per cent.

Visitors were asked what they remembered most from the exhibition. Several referred to the music, specifically the piper's lament, which was described as moving and haunting. They also remembered specific facts – that the egg is symbolic of resurrection, or that Alexandra was Queen Victoria's granddaughter. Thirty-eight per cent said they felt differently about Nicholas and Alexandra, and twenty-one per cent said it had increased their knowledge about the family, and the history of that period. Importantly, seventy-five per cent said they had been inspired by the exhibition to find out more about Russian history and culture. (Whether they actually did, is not known).

Overall, the reactions were very favourable – 'wonderful', 'excellent', 'well worth another visit', 'the Museum is to be congratulated'.

Verdict

Visitors to this exhibition clearly learned more about this passage of Russian and indeed European History, and some said they were inspired to learn more. It shows that **a special exhibition, on a closely defined, specific passage of history, can be very successful in giving visitors a targeted history lesson.** It is likely to be less easy to put across the whole sweep of a nation's history, from earliest times to the present day, in a single building, with limitations both of space and of availability of objects. That is why the 2009/10 survey, discussed below, was mounted in an attempt to measure how much more visitors to MoS learn about the history of Scotland than they already knew.

Treasures of Tuscany

An evaluation of this special exhibition found that, as a display of outstanding and beautiful craftsmanship, it was a great success. [140] By its nature, not surprisingly, it was much more attractive for adults than for children and family parties. However, in terms of learning about the identity and history of the Etruscans, it was less successful. Other NMS surveys of special exhibitions, such as *Communicate*, and *Extremes: Life in Sub-Arctic Canada*, were examined but none had enough history content to justify inclusion.

Survey of Visitor Learning in the Museum of Scotland, 2009/2010

The original (1998) displays on Levels 0 to 5.

Given the lack of any survey of MoS geared specifically to how much visitors learn about Scottish history, I was encouraged by my supervisor, Dr Ewen Cameron, to undertake one. To measure the amount of learning, the **Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs).** were used. They are part of *Inspiring Learning,* a self-help tool for museums, libraries and archives, produced by the MLA. [141] There are five GLOs: -

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[140] *Treasures from Tuscany, Visitor Study, August 2004.* Unpublished report by David Walters PhD, available courtesy of Jenni Fuchs, Visitor Studies Officer, NMS.
[141] The GLOs are available on the MLA website at *www.inspiringlearningforall.co.uk.*

- Knowledge and Understanding.

- Skills.

- Attitudes and Values.

- Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity.

- Activity, Behaviour and Progression.

Skills, and **Activity, Behaviour and Progression,** have little direct relevance to this research, because they are geared primarily to employment and/or to modifying subsequent human behaviour.

Knowledge and Understanding includes knowing, learning, making sense, deepening understanding and making links. This is the GLO most directly relevant to a survey of visitor learning.

Attitudes and Values includes feelings, perceptions, self-esteem, opinions about others, increased tolerance, and empathy. This survey of MoS tried to find out what feelings, perceptions and opinions visitors bring with them, and whether they are modified by the displays.

Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity includes having fun, being surprised, innovative thoughts, and being inspired. It was hoped that the survey would find out what in the displays had surprised or even inspired visitors.

Accordingly, the aim was to produce a questionnaire that would:

- Measure any difference between visitors' knowledge, understanding and appreciation of Scottish history before, and after, their visits. This would include how understanding of displays can be helped by labels, interpretation, interactives, signage and layout.

- Elicit visitors' own perceptions and opinions (or even prejudices) about the people and passages of history presented by objects in the displays.

- Identify what surprised and/or inspired visitors, including their motivation to learn more.

In drafting the questions, and conducting the survey, the guidance in *Developing Museum Exhibitions for Lifelong Learning* was helpful. [142] In Chapter 41, Binks and Uzzell give a useful summary of the strengths and weaknesses of different methods of

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[142] Gail Durbin (ed.), *Developing Museum Exhibitions for Lifelong Learning* (London, 1996).

evaluation.[143] Q**uestionnaire surveys** are quite cost-effective, but the questionnaires must be well designed, may require the use of a computer to analyse the results, and demand considerable staff time to plan, supervise and analyse. **In-depth interviews** can give qualitative information which is very revealing, but are time-consuming, and feasible only with a small sample, so that they are difficult to make representative.

Structured interviews can deal with a larger sample than in-depth interviews, but are labour intensive and expensive. **Behavioural mapping/ observation** directly measures the public's behaviour, and can complement other techniques such as questionnaires, but is very time consuming, typically taking thirty minutes to observe one person. Staff time or observers' fees will be required.

This Chapter influenced not only the planning and conduct of this survey of MoS, but also the use of a simplified form of 'Mini Groups', as a form of in-depth interviews, and the occasional mapping/observing ('tracking') visitors, (described in Part Three). From personal experience of designing and analysing questionnaires, conducting interviews, and tracking and observation of visitors, this researcher gives all of Binks and Uzzell's findings above, especially on the time required, a heartfelt endorsement!

In Chapter 42, Serrell argues that marketing studies are not the answer, because they do not usually illuminate how visitors experience an exhibition. [144] She wrote that

> Visitors have a wide variety of ways of referring to their own learning outcomes, which can be classified as both cognitive and affective. Open-ended questions are the best prompts for seeking this kind of feedback.

This influenced both the drafting of the questions in the survey, and the attempts to use only open-ended questions in interacting with visitors.

Hein pointed out that it is difficult to get visitors to return questionnaires handed to them, for sending back, and those who do respond may not be representative of the sample approached. [145] So the questionnaires for the MoS survey were completed on the spot, by the interviewers. Only part of visitors' time is spent at the exhibits. The rest is spent

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[143] Gillian Binks and David Uzzell, Monitoring and Evaluation: the Techniques.
[144] Beverly Serrell, 'Using Behaviour to Define the Effectiveness of Exhibitions', in Durbin, *Developing Museum Exhibitions for Lifelong Learning.* 226.
[145] George E Hein, *Learning in the Museum* (London and New York, 1998). 115.

in orientation, shopping in the museum, eating, and using the toilets. Jenni Fuchs (Visitor Studies Officer) advised that answers about time spent at displays are unreliable. So this visitor survey deliberately did not ask visitors about this.

Hein also stressed that drafting a questionnaire is a skilled undertaking. 'It is difficult to develop good questions, and particularly difficult to write questions that cannot be re-interpreted by the respondent.' [146] I have no such expertise, but Jenni Fuchs kindly helped by giving sight of some questionnaires that had been used for NMS's Special Exhibitions. Using these as a template, I produced a questionnaire targeted specifically to the MoS displays, and to the three selected GLOs. Jenni indicated that the aim should be a minimum of 100 completed questionnaires. In the event, 121 were obtained, of which fifty-four were done by several of the volunteer guides. The remaining sixty-seven were personally conducted. Hein warned (p.116) that the ability of visitors to apply their own interpretation to a question should never be underestimated and so questionnaires should be field-tested, in the exact setting in which they will be used, and with the people who will be expected to respond. Accordingly, a pilot survey of half-a-dozen interviews (not included in the survey proper) was undertaken, and some questions re- drafted, before the survey was launched.

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Serrell warned that true random sampling is rarely used in museums because it is impractical to select samples during all times of the day/week/season/year. However, the sampling in this survey was fairly close to random, because the interviews, whether conducted personally, or by the volunteer guides who helped, were at different times of the day, seven days a week, over about fifteen weeks from the end of July to mid-November, 2009. That meant that August, which has a high proportion of tourists, was balanced by the end of October and beginning of November, when there are fewer tourists and more local visitors. The guides made their surveys either before or after one of their own scheduled tours, which could be at either 11.30 a.m., 1.30 p.m., or 2.30 p.m. on any day including Sunday. This saved the guide making a special trip to the museum. (This researcher conducted interviews on much the same basis, but made, in addition, many special visits, again at random times, on random days).

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[146] Hein, as above, also on p. 115

I am most grateful to the guides who helped, because it can be embarrassing, for those not used to it, to approach complete strangers and ask them to answer questions. Indeed I was myself a bit hesitant about undertaking the survey, precisely because of fear of embarrassment. As it turned out, however, most of the interviews were quite enjoyable. Many visitors were willing to answer questions, and indeed often had questions of their own about the displays. This sometimes led to their being conducted to a particular display which they had not been able to find, or which answered one of their questions.

Visitors were always grateful for this help, but it led to an increase in the time spent on interviewing. The target was two to three minutes for each interview, but it was often longer. One took at least twenty minutes! This interviewee (interview 89) was very forthcoming. He was a Forbes, interested in family ancestry. He came from Washington D.C., and had visited the Smithsonian. Visitors like him, who claimed descent from the diaspora to North America, seemed particularly willing to engage in conversation.

I did not ask my helpers how many refusals they had experienced, but I had refusals from about ten per cent of all those I approached. Very few simply ignored my approach. Most of these said either that they did not speak very good English, or that they were in a hurry. Indeed it soon became clear that there was not much point in approaching any adults who were with a small child, because they would be intent on taking the child home, or to the toilet or café, and said the child would be bored if they stopped to answer questions. That explains the relatively small amount of children listed in the survey.

The full text of the questionnaire is in Appendix Twelve, but briefly: -
Question 1 asked how much the visitors knew about Scottish history, on a scale of 1-5,
   before he/she/they came to MoS,
Question 2 used the same scale to ask how much **more** they had learned from the visit,
Question 3 asked what they had **specifically** found out that they had not known before,
Question 4 asked whether they had been **encouraged** to find out more about Scottish
   history, and if so in what way,
Question 5 asked what they **liked most**, and **Question 6** what they **liked least**.
Question 7 asked whether they had any suggestions for improvement. The remaining questions asked whether they had been to MoS before, where he/she/they lived, age

band, gender and the number of adults and children in the group. The results were entered on the spreadsheet provided by Sun Microsystems' 'Open Office' software. The number of interviews is not the same as the total number of visitors in groups interviewed, because people were approached as they appeared from different directions, whether as singles, couples, or groups of three or even more.

Usually one of the group would take the main role of interviewee, consulting others only when in doubt. Normally, however, there was a consensus in response to questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7, so only one answer is given in reply to these questions. On questions 5 and 6 – what they liked most and least, individual members of a group often gave different answers. In these cases all or most of the responses are quoted. (The answers to Question 5 tended to exemplify traditional gender stereotypes, with women often saying they liked topics such as jewellery and weaving, while men tended to favour the engineering displays).

One difficulty that should have been picked up in the pilot, but was realised only when the spreadsheet was analysed, is that when there was more than one person in the group interviewed, separate columns for gender had not been provided. The result is that while there are figures for the total numbers of visitors, by age groups, and from different places of origin, there are no accurate figures for the totals of each gender.

In response to **Question 1,** knowledge **before** the visit, on a scale of 1 to 5, where one is 'nothing' and five is 'a lot', the mean (the average) was 2.46. The mode (most regularly occurring) was 2, with 42 of the interviewees claiming to know 'a little' about Scottish history before their visit. (The visitor whose interview took twenty minutes said that he knew 4, quite a lot, for an American, but only 2 for a Scotsman!).

In response to **Question 2,** knowledge **after** the visit, the mean was 3.6, and the mode was 4, with 45 interviewees claiming to have learned 'quite a lot more'. One frequent visitor (about ten previous visits), who lived locally, said that he knew nothing about Scottish history before he started his series of visits, and gave himself only 3 after his visits, simply because he felt that he still had a lot to learn! These figures are illustrated in the bar charts.

Knowledge Before Visiting
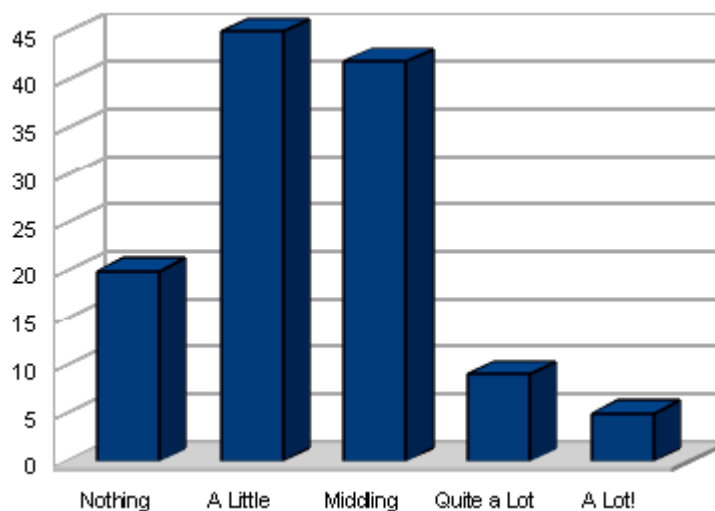
Knowledge After Visiting
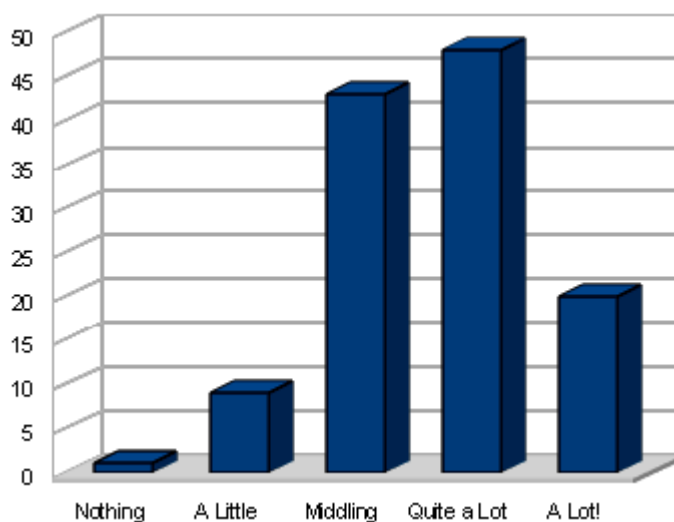
The conclusion is that the displays in MoS do teach visitors more about Scottish history. Indeed the difference between the two averages is almost certainly more than the bare figures suggest, because I tried gently to probe some of those who claimed to know 'a little' (2 on the scale) or 'a middling amount' (3) about Scottish history

before they came. I chose only those who seemed to be fairly outgoing, and most willing to answer questions, and tried not to imply an intent to show their ignorance.

It turned out that in practice even those who scored themselves 3 knew only a little. Very few knew anything at all about Scotland before the Wars of Independence and, even for later periods, their knowledge was usually confined to a little about Wallace, Bruce, Mary, Queen of Scots and 'Bonnie Prince Charlie'.   Most knew little or nothing about subjects like the early Stewarts, the Reformation, the Covenanters, Darien, the 1707 Union, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and even the achievements of Scottish engineers and inventors.

This was corroborated by many of the answers to **Question 3** below – what, specifically, they had not known before. Even on 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', several admitted that they had learned that Culloden was not a nation state battle between England and Scotland. So, **on knowledge before they came, many of those answering 3 should in practice be downgraded**, and even some of those answering 2 may have been a bit optimistic.

However, at least two interviewees had been to the NTS Visitor Centre at Culloden, and had gained a very good idea of what Culloden was really about. One of them was a girl aged about twelve, who was encouraged by her father to answer several of the questions herself. She had been taught about the Jacobites at school, as well as having been to Culloden, and clearly had a good understanding of that passage of history.

To supplement the provisional conclusion about the real extent of visitors' knowledge, I undertook (in my role as a volunteer guide) separate, informal questioning of visitors whom I conducted on five guided tours in October/November. I always start a tour by introducing myself and asking visitors where they come from, and whether this is their first visit. This helps to tailor the tour to suit the audience. For example, on several occasions I have given a 'Highlights' tour instead of the intended 'Theme' tour, because everyone in the group was a first time visitor, and no one had attended specifically for the theme.

On these five tours, totalling forty-one visitors, I asked also, in introducing myself, whether any of them had a particular interest in any aspect of Scottish history. This led

to individual interchanges that enabled me, without undue or obvious probing, to establish that the great majority knew very little about Scottish history, beyond a passing familiarity with the names of the usual suspects. Indeed two elderly native Scots complained, rather bitterly, that they had been taught practically nothing about Scottish history at school.

One visitor, from New Zealand, thought that 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' had won the Battle of Culloden! He said that people in New Zealand regarded the Prince as a romantic figure, and 'a bit of a lad'. He claimed to know 'quite a bit' about Scottish history, but it turned out in conversation that he had based this on a single visit to Edinburgh Castle, and on some knowledge of the Wars of Independence, because his middle name was 'Stirling' and he intended to visit that Castle. Another visitor, from Fife, asked about the relative ages of Wallace and Bruce, because he thought that Wallace had fought to put Bruce on the throne.

These brief discussions were interesting and enlightening. They bore out Hein's argument (see Part Two), that it would be 'wonderful' to be able to spend in-depth time with visitors, but that is not usually possible, because visitors themselves have limited time, and the museum cannot afford intensive 'shadowing', and interviewing by staff. 'This is the major reason why our knowledge of museum visitors is so primitive in comparison, for example, with our knowledge of children in schools'. [147]

I certainly found that to ask each member of the group, without carrying an intimidating clipboard, whether he/she had a particular interest, seemed to break the ice, and encourage questioning and further discussions in the course of the tour. Admittedly, these introductory discussions were informal, and too few to be statistically reliable. However, I now agree that it might indeed be revealing, or even 'wonderful', to be able to have relaxed, 'in-depth', questioning/discussion, if time and resources permitted. Hein went on,

> Interviewing visitors is usually not a rich activity; they are in a hurry, it's difficult to get them to say much, and their experience has been too fragmented and brief (and recent) for them to be very articulate.

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[147] George E. Hein, 'Evaluating teaching and learning in Museums', in Hooper-Greenhill (ed.) *Museum, Media, Message,* (London 1995). 199 and 200.

My experience suggests that this is generally true of formal, questionnaire-based, tick-box, interviews, whereas visitors can be more forthcoming in relaxed, informal, discussion with no clipboard. However, **Ian Kelman** warns that a possible danger in 'in-depth' interviews, is that the views of the articulate and/or knowledgeable may distort the validity of the findings for the majority. [148]

Question 3 was the one that visitors found most difficult to answer. Asked specifically what they had found out in the displays that they hadn't known before, they tended to hesitate and, if accompanied, confer with their partner. Twenty answered that they couldn't think of anything specific. 'The whole sweep of Scottish history'. 'Everything!'. 'Just Scottish history generally'. 'More background context', or similar wording.   One interviewee, from Tasmania, said that 'everything was new', that she had visited once before, but had to come back because there was too much to see for one visit.

The specific answers ranged widely. 'Didn't know that the Covenanters were persecuted'. 'Didn't know Scotland had a guillotine' (seven mentions). 'Didn't know Scotland had wolves and bears' (the diorama on Level 0). 'Didn't know the Romans had got north of Hadrian's Wall' (four mentions). 'The Reformation'. 'Didn't know Scots had invented so much, for example, Watt' (eleven mentions of inventors, scientists, and engineering, including ships and mining). 'The Newcomen engine' (three mentions). 'Didn't know Scotland had a harp'. 'Didn't know about the Lewis chesspieces'. 'The National Covenant'. 'The Bute mazer'. 'The geology'. 'The Reivers'. 'The jewellery in *Early People'*. There were many other admissions of lack of knowledge.

Although most answers referred to objects on Levels 1 and 3, some visitors had reached Levels 0, 4 and 5. The lack of any specific mention of objects in the *Burghs* display (in the Level 1 corridor), or of the Fetternear Banner (on the oddly titled Level +), suggests that these areas are easily missed by visitors. The relatively few (four) mentions of anything in *Scotland: A Changing Nation* suggests that it, too, is missed by many visitors, perhaps because the main lifts do not go to Level 6.

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[148] Ian Kelman, 'Responsive evaluation in museum education'*,* in Hooper-Greenhill, *Museum, Media, Message.* 210.

In reply to **Question 4**, only eight out of the 121 interviewees (about 6.6 per cent) said that they had not been encouraged to learn more about Scottish history. Of these, one came from Belgium, one from Germany, one from Korea ('I'm just on a brief visit'), one from Canada and one from 'Elsewhere in the UK'. One (surprisingly?) came from 'Elsewhere in Scotland'. One didn't answer about origin, and one (during a musical event on a Sunday afternoon), said he had been so put off by the loud music that he had given up his visit, was leaving, and was too disappointed (and even upset) to finish answering the questions. (It is true that the acoustics of the Hawthornden Court mean that very loud noises, such as from bagpipes, penetrate not just into *Kingdom of the Scots* on the same level but also down to Level 0 and up to at least Level 3).

Of the sources that visitors said they would use, there were fifty-four mentions of textbooks, eighteen of historical novels, thirty-two of television programmes, fifty-three of the internet, and twenty-five 'other'. The last usually included visiting MoS again, and/or visiting other sites, such as historic buildings or battlefields. It was perhaps to be expected that the younger age bands favoured the internet, while one fairly elderly visitor, despite (or perhaps because of?) having a child with him, said firmly that he would not use the internet because he didn't like it! (The numbers add up to more than 121 because many visitors said they would use more than one source: one said that he would use all five possibilities). The number of mentions of television programmes may have been influenced by the fact that Neil Oliver's Scottish History series was running throughout the latter part of the survey period.

It is, of course, open to doubt whether these expressions of good intentions, like New Year resolutions, would be implemented. Falk and Dierking have argued that, ideally, to measure the extent of learning, visitors should be resurveyed by telephone, several months later. [149] They should be asked what they remembered, and/or what they had done or not done after their visit. (However, this could not be done in the MoS survey. Names and telephone numbers were not taken, so any re-survey was impossible. In any event it would call for time and resources far beyond the capability of this study).

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[149] John H Falk and Lynn D Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (London and New Delhi, 2000).

The replies to **Question 5,** what visitors liked most, also ranged widely. 'The religious displays – we are American Protestants'. 'Scottish traditions, bagpipes etc'. 'Interactives, good for children'. 'Good, short, easy to read labels'. 'Design and general feel of the museum'. 'Dolly the sheep'. 'Free entry and free audio – we have to pay in the USA'. (One local resident said it was good that entry was free, but that a small charge could be made, perhaps more for tourists than locals, because 'we have to pay for entry to museums when we go abroad'). 'Beautiful building and displays'. 'The Roman displays were all new to me'. 'Pictish items'. 'The guided tour was very good'. 'The *Ellesmere* locomotive'. 'The engineering displays'. 'Peden's mask and interactive'. 'The archaeology'. 'The Newcomen engine'. 'The Kingdom of the Scots'. 'The Maiden touch-screen, my daughter played with it'. 'All of it!'. 'Church exhibits and textile machines'. 'Good layout and explanations – an intelligent museum'. 'Paolozzi with objects at right place on body – imaginative'. 'Ships, oil platform, interactives'. 'Emigration stories in *Changing Nation*'. 'Lewis chesspieces'. 'Hunterston brooch – well displayed and what craftsmanship!'. 'The geology – touching the stones'. 'The Culloden banners'. 'Mary Seton necklace'. There were many other favourable comments. Altogether, twenty comments praised the archaeology and/or the Pictish stones/Paolozzi statues.

The replies to **Question 6,** what they liked least, were equally varied but far fewer. As many as seventy-four interviewees (61 per cent) could think of nothing that they did not like. There were two complaints that the Royal Museum was closed, one that the geological map had disappeared, one, from a relatively young female visitor, that Dolly the sheep should be in 'a serious area, away from kids who run about screaming', one that silverware and pottery 'are not really history', one that the café was 'scruffy' (while the RM was closed there was only a temporary café), and one about the audio guides – 'we gave them up'. Two complaints about the lack of seats came from people who either had not noticed the folding chairs, or had not realised that they could be carried about from gallery to gallery. Nine interviewees didn't like the archaeology and/or Pictish stones – 'these lumps of stone!'. This was in sharp contrast to the twenty interviewees who liked them, and confirms the argument by Hein, Serrell, and others (see Part Two), that people bring to museums their own experiences, preconceptions and preferences, so that it is impossible to design displays to please the non-existent 'average' visitor. Only one visitor complained about the labels. He was aged over sixty-five, and said that the label at the big swords in *Kingdom of the Scots* was too low.

The visitor whose interview took twenty minutes said that what he liked least was the lack of anything about the evolution of thought. 'An imaginary debate between David Hume and Adam Smith would have been excellent'. He also did not like to feel that he was 'aimlessly wandering around...Visitors need to be steered'. He was particularly interested in the period when clan tartans started to be formalised, and said that he could easily have missed the displays on tartans. He suggested that the information desk should have a list of themes, explaining where subjects a visitor was interested in could be found.

The most unpopular feature was orientation. This attracted thirteen complaints. 'This building is baffling'. 'Difficult to find way around'. 'Finding a toilet'. 'Direction signage not adequate'. 'I got lost'. 'Difficulty in finding what was important'. On the other hand, one interviewee said 'the building is well designed, but easy to get lost – but that's good!'. This again suggests that, while most people like to know precisely where to go, because it makes them feel secure and comfortable, some like the serendipity of just wandering about.

In fairness, visitors criticise orientation in many other museums. Hooper-Greenhill offers examples from a report by the Getty Centre for Education. [150] The results of focus group discussions in eleven art museums in the USA showed that orientation was a problem for first time visitors in all of them. 'When you first walk in there, which way do you go?' 'Impossible to find your way around. I felt like I was in a rat maze'.

In reply to **Question 7**, sixty-six visitors (over 54 per cent), could not think of anything that needed improvement. Indeed, many visitors who said they had no suggestions for improvement offered unsolicited compliments. The many examples include – 'Very good impression overall'. 'I will come back again, with children'. 'Nothing not to like – good marriage of old and new architecture'. 'It's very attractive for all ages'. 'You're doing a great job'. 'Enjoyed it all'. 'Liked the museum and the standard of displays'. 'Visited once before and had to come back'. 'Very impressed by professionalism of the displays'. 'Really good museum, from geology to people and their culture'. 'Marvellous on the

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[150] Hooper-Greenhill, in *Museums and their Visitors.* 91.

whole'. One first time visitor, who lived in the Edinburgh area, said that he had enjoyed it so much that he felt guilty about not having visited the museum before. Another had no suggestion for improvement, 'unless you could make it bigger'.

Other suggestions included: 'Make it easier to find the numbers for audio'. 'More interactives'. 'Supply tap water in café'. 'More child friendliness – to manoeuvre pram around confined space'. (This probably referred to the temporary shop. It will be bigger when the RM re-building is finished). 'Provide a drinking fountain'. 'Market the guided tours better – I found out only from an announcement'. 'A lift to the roof terrace'. 'Less loud music'. 'More for children – buttons to press and dressing up'.

There were four suggestions about leaflets or brochures. 'Sell postcards with more information, and a guide book to take home'. 'Provide a leaflet saying what you should not miss, if time is short'. 'Notelets/leaflets to take away from each section'. 'A leaflet/cheap guide, with photos of highlights, to take home'. One visitor explained that while he knew that he could take photographs, it would be better to have an illustrated brochure of highlights, with text explaining the significance of each object illustrated. It would remind him of the text on the label, and could be handed round to relatives and friends.

The most common suggestion – twenty-two in all - was for better signage or waymarking. 'A pathway to tell you where to go, I just wandered'. 'Put arrows on floor. Otherwise great – and free!'. 'Better directions – the map needs more detail' (five mentions of maps). 'It would help to have a recommended route to follow'. 'Better signage' (eleven mentions). 'Provide route marking'. 'Maps on walls and pathways to important objects not to be missed'.

In reply to **Question 8**, sixty-five (just over half) of the individuals or groups questioned said that they were first-time visitors. Of these, three said they came from the Edinburgh and Lothians area, five from 'Elsewhere in Scotland', and eighteen from 'Elsewhere in the UK'. The remaining thirty-nine first-time visitors came from 'Overseas', including the Republic of Ireland. If it is assumed that anyone from outside Scotland is a tourist, then the proportion of first-time visitor groups who are tourists is very high – fifty-seven out of sixty-five (87.7 per cent).

Question 9 asked where the visitors lived. Here it seems preferable to give the total number of visitors, and not just the number of interviews, because normally those who came in groups of two or more gave the same origin. (Even in the exceptional case where one of a couple said they lived locally, but the other claimed a different nationality, it turned out that they were married, and lived together locally. So both were counted as local, rather than counting one as a tourist).

On this basis, there was a total of 208 visitors in the groups interviewed, of whom forty lived in 'Edinburgh and Lothians', forty-nine 'Elsewhere in Scotland', thirty-six 'Elsewhere in the UK', and eighty 'Overseas'. (Three did not give their origin). Of the overseas visitors, twenty-six came from the USA, eight each from Canada and France, seven from Spain, five from Germany, four from Australia, two from Italy, two from Switzerland, and eighteen from a wide variety of other countries, including Venezuela, Belgium, Portugal, Taiwan, Chile, Bulgaria, Vietnam, Japan and Korea. Only one came from New Zealand, so he was included in 'other countries'. These distributions are illustrated in the pie charts.

Data from Total Number of visitors
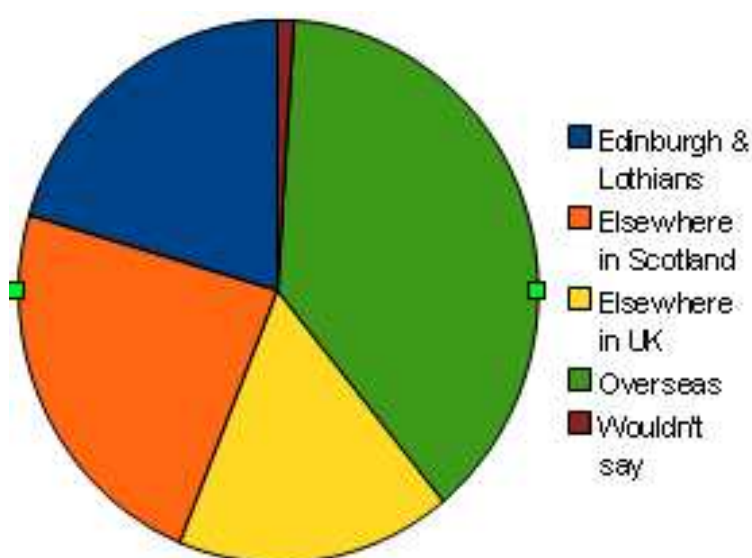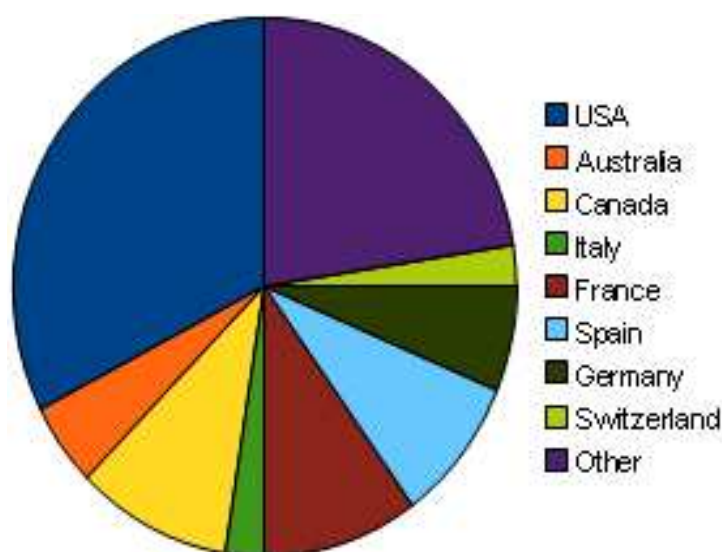
Question 10 asked about age bands. Here it seemed useful to compare the age spread of visitors from the USA with the comparable figures for visitors from different parts of the UK, because there has been speculation in the media that visitors from the USA are getting older, so young members of the diaspora may be less interested in Scotland.

- Of the forty visitors from Edinburgh and Lothians, five were under 12, three were aged 12 to 19, twenty-one were aged 20 to 44, eight were aged 45-65 and three were over 65.

- Of the forty-nine from 'Elsewhere in Scotland', six were under 12, eleven were aged 12-19, five were aged 20- 44, eighteen were aged 45-65, and nine were over 65.

- Of the thirty-six from 'Elsewhere in the UK', two were under 12, one was aged 12-19, fifteen were aged 20-44, twelve were aged 45-65, and six were over 65.

- Of the twenty-six visitors from the USA, none was aged less than 20, five were aged 20-44, thirteen were aged 45-65, and eight were over 65. This might seem to bear out the thesis that visitors from the USA tend to be middle-aged or elderly, but the eight who were over 65 were in a single group of elderly USA citizens travelling together.

Analysis of this specially mounted Visitor Survey of MoS.

In terms of the **Knowledge and Understanding GLO**, the replies to Questions 1 and 2 show that **visitors do indeed learn more about Scottish history from the displays in the Museum of Scotland**. So it **does contribute to informal, lifelong learning about Scottish history.**

Visitors tend to **overestimate the amount of knowledge of Scottish history that they already have.** There are a few exceptions – for example, the two (fairly elderly men) who complained that they had been taught nothing about Scottish history at school. The previous knowledge that was claimed turned out often, in practice, to be confined to (sometimes mistaken) stories about the usual suspects – Wallace, Bruce, Mary, Queen of Scots, and 'Bonnie Prince Charlie'. Most knew little or nothing about subjects such as archaeology, (even that the Romans had been in Scotland), the Stewarts (other than Mary), religious history and the Reformation, the Union of 1707, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and even Scottish inventors and engineers.

So the difference between what they knew before their visit and what they knew afterwards, is almost certainly greater than the averages suggest. Indeed, **the lack of knowledge of key facts, figures and issues in Scottish history, even amongst native Scots, is disappointing.** This may possibly be a hangover from previous educational curricula, because the number of organised visits from school pupils to MoS is currently very high, and the educational staff of NMS offer schools a considerable amount of history material geared to the present curriculum. (At the time of writing, the Curriculum for Excellence had not yet been introduced).

The lack of knowledge brought out in this survey corroborates research by Sidney Wood, in 1996, into the knowledge of Scottish history of pupils reaching the end of their compulsory schooling. [151] Pupils in thirty-five schools completed three thousand questionnaires, under supervised conditions. The exploration of pupils' actual knowledge, and their misconceptions, yielded results that were 'decidedly bleak'. Only

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[151] Sidney Wood,' Issues of National Identity and the School Curriculum in Scotland', in Arnold et.al., *History and Heritage: Consuming the Past in Contemporary Culture*. 215/6.

13 per cent knew what had happened at Flodden. When offered reasons why Scotland became part of the UK, 37 per cent selected 'because English forces conquered it', and 28 per cent chose 'as a result of a referendum'. 41 per cent saw the battle of Culloden as a clash between wholly English and wholly Scottish forces. 40 per cent believed that the Disruption was a split between Catholics and Protestants. Only 8 per cent were able to connect James Watt to steam power.

Professor Duncan Macmillan agrees. [152]

> How were you to know who you were as a Scot if, so far as it was taught at all, Scottish history began and ended at primary school and what you were given subsequently as a substitute was a diet of tartan kitsch? Mostly, too, primary school history added up to little more than a few names to be proud of, Robert the Bruce, William Wallace, heroes certainly, but remote and not much more than personifications of a vague and imprecise patriotism, ciphers, pegs on which to hang your unfocused sentimental pride.

Wood points to the success of Scots in the Empire, but says that this area of study is so neglected that Finlay wrote that one might be forgiven for thinking that Scotland was more of a colonised rather than a colonising nation. [153] (The current interest in studying the diaspora may remedy this).

Wood goes on to argue that George IV's 1822 visit to Edinburgh helped to popularise the kilt and bagpipes,

> thus uniting Lowlander and Borderer with the Gaelic community that they had once regarded with such suspicion...The danger lies in confusing myth with reality, in defining identity in terms that combine a romanticised misconception of the past with an intense sense of identity, shaped primarily by opposition to England. The school history curriculum should play a crucial part in enabling future citizens to recognise media images of the past for what they are.

The position has improved since 1996, when Wood wrote, but a detailed comparison with policy and practice in the teaching of Scottish history in 2010 would be outwith the scope of this research. Suffice to say that NMS currently offers a great deal of material for school visits that is tailored to the present curriculum, but this research is about informal learning by visitors, and not about the formal education of schoolchildren.

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[152] Duncan Macmillan, in Tom Devine and Paddy Logue (eds.) *Being Scottish* (Polygon, 2002). 178.
[153] R. J. Finlay, 'The Rise and Fall of Popular Imperialism in Scotland 1850 to 1950'*, in* C. W. J. Withers, (ed.) *Scottish Geographical Magazine,* Vol. 113, March 1997).

In terms of the **Attitudes and Values GLO**, the widely differing replies to Question 5, what visitors liked most, amply demonstrate that, as previously discussed, **visitors bring their own experiences, social attitudes, opinions and even prejudices with them**, so that it is impossible for displays to cater for every visitor's individual knowledge, perceptions and preferences.

In terms of the **Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity GLO, 'being surprised'** emerges from the replies to Question 3 – what visitors had found out that they hadn't known before, while their '**being inspired'** is shown by the very high proportion of visitors, about 93 per cent, who said, in reply to Question 4, that they had been encouraged to learn more about Scottish history. However, we do not know whether in practice they did so, in the absence of names, telephone numbers, and the resources to carry out follow-up interviews.

As noted above, it proved difficult to persuade adults with young children to stop and answer questions. **This survey is therefore unduly low on groups with children**. It probably also **underestimates the number of overseas visitors**, because many tourists with limited English take the audio guides, and are either not approached or not approachable.

The very wide range of answers to what visitors liked most shows that visitors had seen quite a lot of the main displays on Levels 0, 1 and 3, but implies that they had not found the less obviously visible or accessible galleries such as Level +, *The Burghs*, or even *Scotland: A Changing Nation.* This is a pointer to the need for more signage.

There were many fewer dislikes than likes. By far the most common criticism was of the lack of signs or waymarking. Although a few people enjoy serendipity, the great majority want to know where they are and where they should go – particularly when they have limited time, and want to see highlights that should not be missed. The **impossibility of pleasing all of the people all the time** was illustrated by the sharply contrasting views on archaeology/Pictish stones. Twenty liked these displays, but nine disliked 'these lumps of stone!'. (Ascherson would be horrified.)

The criticism of orientation was consistent with the main suggestions for improvement –
the provision of better signs, waymarking by arrows, leaflets describing where to find
Highlights, and information at the desk about where particular subjects can be found.

It is not surprising that **tourists form the great majority of first-time visitors**, but it is
perhaps more unexpected that there are more visitors, in total, from outside (116) than
inside (89) Scotland. (Three did not give their origin). The number of overseas visitors
also seems high (80 out of 208, or over 38 per cent of all visitors), especially during a
global financial crisis. However it is supported by figures from the Office for National
Statistics, showing that 'Scotland enjoyed an increase of 25 per cent in visits from North
America and 43 per cent in visits from outside Europe and North America between July
and September 2009, compared with the same quarter in 2008'. [154]

NMS's unpublished report (*Key Data Capture*) of exit interviews by Front of House staff,
for the quarter from October to December 2009, shows that of 167 interviews, covering
372 visitors, 50 per cent came from Scotland, 21 per cent from the rest of the UK and 29
per cent from overseas. [155] The lower proportion of overseas visitors, compared to this
survey, could be explained partly by the fact that October to December is a low period
for overseas tourists, whereas the survey covered a lot of the tourist season. It could
also imply that a very high proportion of overseas visitors is attracted to the MoS.
However that may be, **it seems certain that the Museum of Scotland is not just of
interest to Scottish people, but is a major attraction for tourists from a very wide
range of countries**, **some of them very distant.**

'This building is baffling'. This quote, and similar criticisms of the lack of signage, back
up the consensus of published authorities that visitors **must be made to feel
welcomed, safe and comfortable**, and they won't, if they feel lost and unsure of where
to go. Nor will their minds be receptive to learning.

Hooper-Greenhill argues that visitors need to know

> what there is to see and do... we then need to find our way to whatever we choose to do
> first. This is so basic that it would seem a waste of time writing it down except for the fact

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[154] Press reports in *The Scotsman* and other newspapers on 18 January, 2010.
[155] Unpublished study, *Key Data Capture, January 2010*, an element of the annual research programme
managed by 'Scotinform' on behalf of NMS, kindly made available by Catherine Holden, Director of
Marketing and Development, NMS.

that there are few museums that offer information of this nature. Very few museums name the comfort facilities (cloakroom, café, shop, crèchee) and direct visitors to them, and even fewer name the galleries that may be seen, or provide a list of 'top ten' objects that could be seen, or provide suggestions for how to visit the galleries according to particular interests. [156]

This is an uncannily accurate prediction of visitor suggestions in the MoS survey, about fifteen years later!

The Front of House staff are the public face of all museums and, as Falk and Dierking, Hooper-Greenhill, and others have emphasised, (see Part Two), visitors judge any museum or gallery by whether they feel welcomed or not. **'People can be the most welcoming device a museum can provide'.** [157] NMS train all members of their Visitor Services (Front of House) team in how to welcome visitors, not as a 'one off' but as part of an ongoing commitment. NMS *Customer Service Standards*, which are issued following training, are set out in Appendix Thirteen. [158] They go far to explain why NMS has a five star rating, (the highest – 'exceptional') from Visit Scotland. Welcome from staff is crucial to securing this rating, because Visit Scotland's Quality Assurance Scheme requires 'Arrival' and 'Attraction/Presentation' to score within the overall grade before that grade may be awarded. That means that the welcome, attitude, efficiency and experience of staff must be 'exceptional'. **So the Visitor Services staff of this National Institution are setting an example of best practice in customer care.**

NMS priority is, understandably, currently being given to completing the RM Project. However, this survey suggests that, when time and funds permit, it would be useful to improve orientation, signage, colour coding and way marking in the MoS, and to provide guidance at the information desk on the location of popular subjects such as tartan. Indeed I have been informed that key orientation issues (including signage) are not only currently being addressed in the RM Project, but will also, in the longer term, be in the Master Plan for display developments in the whole of NMS. [159]

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[156] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill**,** *Museums and their Visitors,* (London, 1994). 90.
[157] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors.* 97**.**
[158] Alison Dow, General Manager, Visitor Services, NMS, kindly gave access to a copy of these (unpublished) *Customer Service Standards.*
[159] Discussion with Catherine Holden, Director of Marketing and Development, 3 August, 2010.

Follow-up Trial.

There is a limit to what can be found out by using a simple, formal questionnaire.
Sight of a clipboard seems to put visitors on their guard. Unless they are fairly
forthcoming or even extrovert by nature (and some are), their answers tend to be brief.
They offer fuller and more revealing comments in informal discussions, once the ice has
been broken. This is borne out by authorities such as Falk and Dierking, and also by
eleven years' personal experience as a volunteer guide in MoS. During that time I have
conducted more than 300 tours of 'Highlights' and of specialised, themes.

As noted above, once the ice is broken, visitors become relaxed, and more ready to ask
questions. This often led to short discussions that gave greater insight into what really
interested them. So, given the limitations of a questionnaire based survey, were there
alternatives which might facilitate in-depth, informal discussions?

What about **focus groups**? NMS have been using focus groups during preparation of
the themes and displays to be installed in the RM Project. Jenni Fuchs, Visitor Studies
Officer, kindly gave access to an unpublished dossier prepared for that Project. [160]
Consultations were held in 2007 and 2008 with focus groups including 16-24s, families,
independent adults and an access panel. There were also one-off focus group
discussions with students, teachers, and community groups; observation/surveys with
general visitors; accompanied visits with families, 16-24s, and independent adults, and
an education panel. During February to August 2008 there were eleven focus groups,
with seventy-three total participants, forty-three unique participants, and fifteen who
attended multiple sessions.

Twenty-three per cent of the participants were male, and seventy-seven per cent female.
Two per cent had never visited the museum before, sixteen per cent had visited more
than a year ago, and eighty-two per cent had visited in the last year. Eighty-eight per
cent came from Edinburgh, and twelve per cent from elsewhere in Scotland. Different
age groups were represented, with the greatest proportion, nearly twenty-five per cent,
being aged 25-34. Fifty-six per cent were White/Scottish, thirty per cent White/Other

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[160] *Overview of visitor consultation,* 5 December, 2008. Prepared by Stephen Allen, Head of Learning and
Programmes, NMS, and Jenni Fuchs, Visitor Studies Officer.

than Scottish, five per cent Asian/Asian Scottish, and nine per cent African/Mixed. (The high proportion of females does not represent a typical gender spread of NMS visitors. The normal pattern is of rather more females than males – *Key Data Capture* shows that forty-six per cent of visitors are male and fifty-four per cent female. Again, eighty-eight per cent of participants in the focus groups came from Edinburgh, whereas *Key Data Capture* gives only thirty-eight of visitors as living within a thirty-minute drive from MoS).

Consultation was by visuals, soundbites, websites, mindmaps, mood boards, drawing, association, gallery critique and testing of prototypes for mechanical interactives. A member of NMS staff had to devise ways of identifying and contacting suitable categories of people, inviting volunteers, writing with briefing material to those who responded, and then organising each session of each focus group. Members were reimbursed travel expenses, and offered incentives by way of High Street vouchers for each two-hour session attended, plus appropriate refreshments – coffee or sandwich lunch. This entailed a huge amount of work, and is not a cheap or easy way of gathering desired information.

The conclusion had to be that focus groups were impossible for this research. In any case, it seeks a **summative** survey – visitors' reaction to what they have already experienced, and not a **formative** attempt to test proposals. Nor does this researcher have the time, expertise, and money, to identify and contact possible sources of volunteers, approach individuals from these sources, brief them, organise the focus groups, and reimburse the participants.

Instead, an experiment was tried. At the end of twelve guided tours, I invited those visitors who had the interest and the time, to stay on for a ten minute chat about what they thought of the displays, and whether they had learned much about Scottish history. I made clear that I wanted people who had already been round the displays without a guide, because I was not seeking comments on the tour itself. This technique would be **a less structured version of the 'Mini Groups'** which are a speciality of Scotinform Ltd, a market research consultancy which has undertaken work for NMS. [161] They define

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[161] Scotinform is in Leith. Their website (www.scotinform.com) provides information about Mini Groups.

a 'Mini Group' as 'a discussion group involving a smaller group of individuals than a focus group, approximately four or five, and moderated using a topic guide'*.*

The result is set out in detail in Appendix Fourteen, but these informal chats certainly **added length, life, depth and colour to the visitors' responses, and fully confirmed the main findings of the formal survey** – **that they liked both the building and the displays, had previously known little about Scottish history, and had learned more. They had enjoyed their visit, had been inspired to learn more, and had few criticisms.**

Feedback from two history teachers, about visits to MoS by their students, is also contained in that Appendix. It further confirms that displays in this object-based museum do help visitors to learn aspects of Scottish history.

SECTION THREE – Visitor Reaction to *Scotland: a Changing Nation.*

Stephen Allen, Head of Learning and Programmes at NMS, kindly gave access to a Visitor Evaluation of *Scotland: A Changing Nation*, which was opened in the Museum of Scotland on 11 July, 2008. [162] This new gallery, ten years on, offers a quite different learning experience, as compared to the original galleries, because it uses techniques to show 'history beyond the text'.

The evaluation covers three areas: visitor profile in terms of gender, age, place of residence and education; how visitors rated the exhibition; and learning outcomes. A quantitative survey was taken as a random sample, with 152 successful interviews out of 220 people, approached by six interviewers, from 11 July to 5 August, 2008. There were thirteen qualitative interviews to complement that survey, covering expectations and preconceptions before the visit, and experience after it.

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[162] *Scotland: a Changing Nation, Visitor Evaluation.* Unpublished. Jenni Fuchs, Visitor Studies Officer at NMS, and an intern, Johannes Deutschbein, carried out the evaluation.

The Executive Summary finds that the exhibition was a big visitor success. Seventy per cent of all respondents rated it as 'very good' and another thirty per cent as 'quite good'. Only one respondent found it 'quite poor'. It appealed both to Scots and non-Scots, with the Scots slightly more enthusiastic, because they had a more personal and emotional access to it, mainly about remembering, nostalgic feelings and identity building. Non-Scots perceived it in a rather cognitive and intellectual way, getting new information to correct their preconceived picture of Scotland. The emotional response of Scottish visitors to recent social history was anticipated, and built into the Concept Brief, by the team who created *Scotland: A Changing Nation*. (See the critique, in Part Three, of the displays in that Gallery).

The best ratings were given to the text panels and personal stories. The panels were said to be easy to read, clearly written and not too long. The personal stories made the exhibition 'more human', and appealed especially to women and older people. Less popular were the objects, and the quotes from poetry, songs and speeches. One of the most popular single elements was the film *One nation, Five million voices*.

Visitors wanted the sound levels to be reduced, and the speakers so installed that different sounds didn't conflict with each other. They also wanted more seats and more direction signs. The number of Interactives could be increased, especially for visitors with children. More than a quarter would like to use an audio guide, which would be especially appreciated by foreign visitors. Almost eighty per cent felt inspired to follow up on the topics covered in the exhibition, a quarter of whom would use the website.

Expectations and preconceptions. If visitors were Scottish, they were hoping to learn things about their country that they didn't know before. If they were non-Scottish they wanted to get information that went beyond the tourist brochures and usual clichés. Most visitors were very keen on the combination of general history themes with modern Scottish culture. It was often said that the personal perspective and social history topics were very appealing, with one visitor saying it was 'history made personal'. Another thing they liked was that it did **not** feature stereotypes, clichés, shortbread or Irn Bru, and only marginally whisky!

The **text panels** appealed to those with a non-academic education (74 per cent) and to the older visitors (72 per cent). The **objects** were liked especially by older people, probably because of memories and nostalgic feeling. Unlike the younger people, they had personal connections to many of the objects. The **personal stories** were often said to be 'fantastic', and were seen as interesting and innovative. The **quotes** from poetry, songs and speeches were weakly rated, especially by non-Scots, probably because they didn't know most of the quoted people, and couldn't relate to them. The quotes were also difficult in terms of language, especially for foreign visitors.   Scottish visitors often found them a little bit too old and out-dated. The use of **multimedia and films** was valued very positively, with no big differences between men and women, Scots and non-Scots, or young and old. Many mentioned how much they liked '*One Nation, Five Million Voices'*. Foreigners found it a little bit difficult to follow some films, since there aren't many labels or subtitles. The **interactives** got most attention from young people, whereas older people mostly disregarded them. The best rating was given by those with a non-academic education.

Criticism. Many visitors complained that the sound and noise made it difficult to concentrate on the texts and artifacts. The sounds conflicted, with different audios being heard simultaneously. The shipbuilding film, in particular, was criticised as too loud and annoying. Older people wanted more seats, especially for films. Some visitors had difficulty finding their way to the gallery, and some went the wrong way round. Some missed direction signs to the toilets and exits.

Some felt that particular topics were omitted or under-represented. They cited renewable energies, education, tourism, religion, the clans, the evacuation of St Kilda, and high culture and fine arts. Others felt that the exhibition had an urban bias and neglected the Highlands and Islands. Some foreign visitors felt that the exhibition didn't answer questions about Scotland's relation to other parts of the UK, or the role of the Royals.

Learning Outcomes. There were significant differences between Scots and non-Scots. One third of **Scots** said they had 'a little bit' of knowledge about modern Scotland before visiting, but two-thirds said 'a lot'. The majority of Scots thought their knowledge had increased 'a little bit'. Only a third found that they learned 'a lot'. They often said most

things weren't new to them but that they liked being reminded. What many Scots hadn't been aware of was the large number of Scottish inventors and engineers. Two out of three **non-Scots** had only 'a little bit' of knowledge, Twenty per cent had 'a lot', and thirteen per cent 'nothing at all'. Almost half of non-Scots said their knowledge had increased 'a lot'. They often didn't know how industrialised Scotland was, how important the old heavy industries were, or that new, high-tech, technology had arrived.

Attitudes and Values. Only a third said that the exhibition had changed their perception of modern Scotland. It had hardly affected the attitudes of Scottish visitors, and where it did, it was mostly to do with pride. Many people said that they felt very proud of being Scottish and of Scotland and its achievements. For some the exhibition had generated this pride. For others, their pride had been deepened and increased. Half of the non-Scottish visitors said the exhibition had changed their perception of Scotland 'a little bit' or even 'a lot'. The main effect was that Scotland was perceived as more differentiated. A young man from the U.S.A. said, 'Before, Scotland to me was all about kilts, bagpipes and Highland cattle. The exhibition reveals more of a complete culture'.

Follow Up. Twenty-eight per cent definitely wanted to follow up. Forty-three per cent said 'maybe'. Only twenty-two per cent were sure that they would not explore further. There were no significant differences between Scots and non-Scots. Women and older people were less likely than men or younger people to follow up. Books and the internet were the most popular ways. Of those who said they might or would follow up, a third wanted to visit the exhibition again.

Verdict

Although many Scottish visitors believed that they had not learned very much new about modern Scotland, it is significant that even they had not realised how many inventors and engineers Scotland had produced. This suggests that, as in the survey of the original galleries, they were **over- estimating their knowledge of history beyond what they could remember from personal or family experience and memories.** Non-Scottish visitors, however, had clearly learned quite a lot, especially in their perception that **Scotland was about more than stereotypes of kilts, bagpipes and shortbread-tin images.** That is valuable, and was **a main objective of the gallery.** This new

gallery also goes a long way towards answering any criticism that the original MoS galleries did not deal enough with social issues.

SECTION FOUR – Visitor reaction to a display at East Fortune airfield about the site's history.

The National Museum of Flight, at East Fortune, is on what was a genuine working airfield, and is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It still has Nissen huts, air raid shelters and other buildings, on the same layout as in World War Two, together with massive, airship size hangars of World War One vintage. (The original control tower does not belong to NMS, but statutory scheduling protects it). It is believed to be the best preserved World War Two airfield left in the UK, and its relatively unspoiled surroundings help to maintain an illusion of the 1940s.

It has an extensive collection of aircraft and related artefacts. Concorde is now a major visitor attraction, and its epic journey by road and sea, with a photo opportunity on a barge outside the Houses of Parliament, got huge publicity. The military aircraft include an iconic Spitfire, which many boys during that war wanted to fly. Each July there is an air show, with aerial displays from historic aircraft and contemporary military jets, and ground displays of World War Two vehicles and tanks, and people in 1940s uniform, demonstrating bolt action Lee Enfield P4 rifles, Bren guns and other wartime equipment.

'Fortunes of War' is a new display, whose Exhibition Design Brief set out the aim as being to 'evoke the human experience of service at East Fortune during the two world wars of the twentieth century'. [163] It explains that the exhibition explores two questions:

- What was the purpose of East Fortune airfield?
- What was it like to serve there?

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[163] The Design Brief was an unpublished working document, seen courtesy of the lead curator, Stuart Allan.

Concorde (courtesy NMS)

The primary target audiences would be 'site seers' (first time visitors, mainly tourists) and 'self developers' (non-specialists wanting 'a deeply moving experience'). The approach would use the learning styles methodology in *'Inspiring Learning for All'*, developed by the MLA.

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The exhibition opened in 2009, housed in a wartime Nissen hut, and tells how the site was a working airfield, both in the days of airships and during World War Two. It contains a map of the site, showing the size and layout of the airfield, with buttons to light up different areas. One visitor commented 'I never realised how big the airfield was'. There are simple interactives to put pieces of an engine together, to 'Target the Bass Rock', to repair an airship by sewing while wearing gloves, and to hunt a submarine. There are personal stories by text, photos, film and audio-visual presentations.

Scotinform Ltd was commissioned to undertake qualitative research on visitor satisfaction. [164] Their method was by 'Mini Groups', (described earlier). Fourteen groups were interviewed on exit from the exhibition, on two separate days (a Saturday and Sunday) in August 2009. The participants were slightly more likely to be male, and most were first-time visitors.

Summary of the evaluation

Most participants had not heard of *Fortunes of War* before their visit, but had just 'happened' upon it. Few had anticipated that it would tell them about people and the airfield in wartime. 'The Story of East Fortune' was suggested as a more informative title. Participants thought the exhibition had the right mix of interactive and traditional means of presentation, although many thought the interactives were more for children. Couples without children commented, 'If there are too many interactives then children get in the way and you can't do anything'. Unfortunately, the research found that visitors tended to miss the instruction to activate the sound on the interactive, which meant that some visitors missed out on this audio opportunity.

The majority said that the personal stories were their favourite part, as making the gallery 'come to life'. They liked being able to read at their own pace about individuals, and to take time to look at the memorabilia.

> 'The personal stories and social lives of the people here during the war
> really show how normal life could be in extraordinary times'.
> 'I liked looking at the uniforms and my husband liked looking at the log
> books and things like that. It just brings it all to life'.
> 'My sister was in the WAAF, so it makes me think of her. I remember the
> day the war broke out. We already had our gas masks by then and we

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[164] Scotinform Ltd, *Evaluation of 'Fortunes of War' at the National Museum of Flight,* (September 2009). Unpublished, seen courtesy of Jenni Fuchs, Visitor Studies Officer, NMS.

took them everywhere. My mother knitted a cover for it'.
'Fascinating to read about the first German pilot to be shot down, and it
was around here'.

Reaction to the whole exhibition was very positive. It appealed to all ages, with many saying that they would return with older relatives, who would undoubtedly have an interest in the subject matter, but also acknowledging that there were learning opportunities for younger people. All said that they would return, or recommend the Museum of Flight to others.

There were only a few recommendations on how the exhibition might be improved. One was that some of the unused hangars might be developed to show the living conditions on the base, and what happened when the airfield came under attack.

Verdict

Although the Scotinform evaluation was not specifically geared to learning outcomes, visitors acknowledged the learning opportunities, and were fascinated by the social history that *Fortunes of War* reveals. They had learned about wartime conditions, and they left saying they wanted more.

Visitors' surprise at the sheer size of the airfield, and their comments about the personal stories being about people who had actually lived and worked on it, demonstrate the **extra dimension of learning outcome, understanding, and even empathy that can be offered by a museum display which is on the actual historic site that is its subject matter.**

Overall Conclusions

The aim was to research the motivation for the MoS, and the effectiveness of its content for its visiting public.

Part One examines the creation and purpose of the Museum of Scotland. Why have a Museum of Scotland at all? What was the motivation of the Trustees and staff who campaigned and raised funds for it, and created the displays? Although the museum's origin can be traced back to 1781, it was only as recently as 1985/6 that the motivation changed from just providing more space for curators' collections of objects, to the vision of creating a free-standing museum of Scotland's history, heritage and culture.

The Museum of Scotland is now seen as a 'given' – an accepted part of the Edinburgh and international scene. But its creation was not inevitable. It had to be fought for by years of struggle, arguments, profile-raising exhibitions, lobbying, threats of resignation, and even an appeal directly to the public over the head of government. It embodies a strong sense of national identity, but the interest and pride in Scotland's history, culture, and social identity, and the wish to present the 'wealth' of the collections to the public, was not synonymous with political nationalism. However, although there was no political intent, its creation was well timed, in that it rode on the back both of increasing interest in Scottish history, and increasing public and media debate about Scottish political devolution.

Part Two shows that until the 1980s museums tended to be inward looking, to their collections, with little regard for outward looking displays and customer care. It was only from the mid 1990s that there was a sea change in government recognition of, and support for, the potential of museums for education and life-long learning. This paralleled contemporaneous writings on the role of museums, by both academic commentators and museum practitioners. NMS had anticipated that change in thinking, and was already laying increased emphasis on presentation to the public.

Part Three contains a detailed analysis of the displays in the original (1998) galleries of the Museum of Scotland. It examines how the vision of the creators was embodied in the technique of the content, in terms of readability of labels, effectiveness of

interpretation, use of interactives, and ease of orientation. It finds that Trustees and staff accepted that the displays in the Museum of Scotland could not be a comprehensive account of Scotland's history. They wanted stories to come out of the objects, rather than have a 'book on the wall' presentation. Research in primary sources, such as unpublished Trustee, Advisory Board, and Committee reports, minutes, papers and letters, explains why and how relationships between architects and curators, both committed to their respective professional outlooks, affected the layout and presentation of the displays. This Part also discusses the more 'people centred' approach of the later (2008) gallery, *Scotland: A Changing Nation.*

Part Four moves from the motivation, vision and techniques of the creators to the reaction of the consumers – the visiting public. It discusses what had been done to evaluate visitor reaction to 'Special Exhibitions' in NMS and elsewhere. In the absence of any previous such survey in MoS, a new visitor survey, specifically geared to, and measured by, the MLA's generic learning outcomes, was specially designed and undertaken for this research. The result was unequivocal: visitors learned more about Scottish history from the displays. (However, many visitors, even native Scots, had disappointingly little understanding of Scottish history before their visit).

The survey also found that while some visitors enjoyed the serendipity of just wandering, the most common complaint was that the orientation was puzzling. Some said they just did not know which way to go. This led logically to the most common suggestion – for better signage and route-marking to important objects.

Scotland: A Changing Nation successfully introduced twenty-first century display techniques, with greater use of film, art, sound, music and poetry, while *Fortunes of War* at the Museum of Flight, demonstrated the extra impact of an 'on-site' display.

The Museum of Scotland was delivered on budget, and on time, in an award winning building. It has become a major, international, tourist attraction. Crucially, for this research, the new visitor survey in MoS, together with the evaluations of Special Exhibitions in NMS and elsewhere, the informal discussions with 'mini groups', and feedback from two history teachers, all show that displays in an object-based museum can be successful in terms both of visitor enjoyment and life-long learning. Visitors do

indeed learn more about Scottish history from the displays, and even say they have been inspired to further learning. So the displays based on objects constitute a valuable, educational, life-long learning, supplement to the written history record.

This would seem to support the view of Neil MacGregor, the Director of the British Museum, about the value of object-based museums. In an article on page 10 of the Radio Times for 16-22 January, 2010 about his Radio 4 series, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, he wrote,

> It's my belief that the only way you can truly tell a history of the world is through things. If you want to know what people are thinking or feeling, you can sense this far more effectively through the objects they make, rather than the history that's written about them....Usually, it is the victors who write the history....but, significantly, objects can give you the other side, the view of those that lost, the poor, our predecessors.

Appendix One. Is MoS unique in the UK as a National History Museum?

Robert Anderson, Director of NMS, wrote,

> the fact of the matter is that no national museum, at least in Great Britain, has the ambition of presenting its cultural background, as interpreted through its natural history and material culture. Perhaps this is to be expected in London: the museums have been developed in various specialist ways, the specialisms relating to disciplines: archaeology and antiquity at the British Museum, decorative arts at the Victoria and Albert Museum, science and technology at the Science Museum, and so on. In fact, **none of them even seemed to start to present objects as evidence towards a national history**. And curiously, though the term "history museum" is common enough abroad, it is not used in this country. [165]

Professor Lynch argued that

> No museum in Britain – not the British Museum nor the Victoria and Albert – had even tried to present objects as part of a "national history". In other words, Britain **did not have a national museum and no part of the four nations in the United Kingdom had one either.** It was a startling point, which has not been given much consideration, then or since. The Museum of Scotland was to be a real "first".…By an unexpected coincidence following the referendum of 1997, a Scottish Parliament was in prospect...looking the way it did, and born when it was, the Museum of Scotland would almost inevitably come to be seen as a museum of national identity. But which identity and whose identity? [166]

The British Museum is not a Museum of English or even British History. It is a treasure house of outstanding objects collected from other countries and civilisations throughout the world. Its Director, Neil MacGregor, demonstrated this in his BBC Radio 4 series*, A History of the World in 100 Objects.* There is a National Museums and Galleries of Wales network, comprising

- The National Museum and Gallery, Cardiff, which includes an art collection, archaeology, natural history and geology.
- The Museum of Welsh Life (formerly the Welsh Folk Museum) at St Fagans, near Cardiff – an open-air museum with over forty re-erected historic buildings from around Wales.
- The Big Pit, at Blaenafon, South Wales, which has colliery buildings and offers an underground tour.
- The National Wool Museum in Carmarthenshire, with restored mill buildings and historic machinery.
- The National Roman Legion Museum at Newport, which has buildings and objects showing how Roman soldiers lived, fought, worshipped and died.
- The National Slate Museum at Llanberis, Gwynedd, with relics of the slate industry in Victorian workshops.

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[165] Robert Anderson, in a paper at a *Symposium* at the RM on 16 October, 1990. Unpublished, but consulted in the Archives of NMS.
[166] Michael Lynch, in an article in the NMS *Explorer* magazine, Autumn, 2008.

- The National Waterfront Museum at Swansea, which has a Learning Zone for formal (schools) education and informal education for families, adults and community groups.
- The National Collections Centre, Rhagor, described as "Opening our national collections". It has items about life in Wales, from 250,000 years ago to the Industrial Revolution.

No single building in the National Museums and Galleries of Wales network is dedicated to presenting the entire history of Wales. Golley-Slater suggested that while individual sites possess strong brand identities of their own, in general visitors were unaware of individual museums' relationships to other sites in the network. [167] So it seems right to claim that the Museum of Scotland is unique in Britain in attempting to present the whole sweep of the history of a nation insofar as it can be presented through objects.

Appendix Two. The Philip Committee Report

The Philip Committee recorded that in1851 the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland had handed over their whole collection as their gift to the nation. By a Treasury minute of 1 July that year, the government undertook to house the NMAS collection and to provide the staff. It left the supervision and management of the collection to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, but gave the ownership and control of the collection to the Board of Trustees for Manufactures. Then the National Galleries of Scotland Act, 1906, placed the National Gallery, the Portrait Gallery, and the NMAS together, under a new Board of Trustees for the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS). This Board was given responsibility for the 'higher control' of NMAS and ownership of its collections, but the Society of Antiquaries retained the management.

The Committee found this system to be 'anomalous' in that management was subject to 'dual control', and noted that both the Trustees of the Galleries and the Society of Antiquaries wanted change. It argued that pre-history and archaeology was becoming 'a field of increasingly specialised study', so that it was difficult for one Board of Trustees to control both a Museum of Antiquities, and Galleries of Fine Arts. It therefore recommended that NMAS be put under the single control of a separate body of Trustees. They should include the President of the Society, the Professor of Archaeology at Edinburgh University, four Fellows of the Society, four from Scottish universities and eleven, appointed by the Secretary of State, to represent archaeology, schools and other interests such as art, aesthetics, law, religion and science. This is an interesting precursor of the principle that persons appointed as Trustees to such bodies should have relevant knowledge or experience, but should be unpaid, not overtly political, and possess a public service motivation. Members of the later MAB, and Trustees of the NMS, appear to have been appointed on this basis.

The National Museums of Antiquities of Scotland Act, 1954 gave legal effect to this

[167] Golley Slater, *Site Audit Debrief.* Quoted by Rhiannon Mason, 'Nation Building at the Museum of Welsh Life' in *Museum and Society*, March 2004. 2(1) 18-34.

recommendation. While 'Higher Control' by the owner, but day-to-day management by an entirely separate, independent body does seem anomalous, it could be argued that splitting Galleries from Museums did have the disadvantage of separating visual art from material culture. However, Hansard shows that the Bill was uncontroversial. [168]

To some extent the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) has collected objects, such as sculptures and furniture, (and more recently Jacobite wine glasses from the Drambuie collection), while the NMS has acquired paintings such as the 'Piper to the Laird of Grant', 'The Coronach in the Backwoods', Landseer's 'Monarch of the Glen' and, in 2009, 'Alexander Dalrymple' (the hydrographer). However these paintings are all of considerable historic interest. There have been joint NMS/NGS exhibitions such as 'Dynasty: the Royal House of Stewart', and 'Fonn's Duthchas: Land and Legacy', where objects and illustrations complement each other. Perhaps there might be more, when both bodies have recovered from their respective efforts on the RM Project and the refurbishment of the National Portrait Gallery?

Philip recorded that between 1851 and 1902 the number of objects had increased from 2,000 to more than 70,000, and said NMAS was subject to 'grave congestion which is at present crippling its work'. An entirely new building on a central site was needed, but might take 20 years to achieve, so there were detailed recommendations to ease the pressure in the short term. Noting that the Museum of Antiquities included a Folk collection, the Committee said that a Folk Museum was distinct both in character and in popular appeal. So its site should be separate, and would need spacious grounds. It could be near Perth. Any regional museums should be related to the 'distinctive, separate cultures found in Scotland'. The Committee thought there could be one for Industrial Scotland in the Upper Clyde Valley. (There is now an industrial museum at Summerlee Heritage Park, Coatbridge).

Appendix Three.   Membership of the Museums Advisory Board

Chairman - The Most Hon Marquess of Bute, JP, DL, Hon LLD, FSA Scot.
Members - Sir Kenneth J W Alexander, BSc (Econ), CBIM, FRSE, Hon LLD, D Univ, FEIS, Principal and Vice Chancellor, Stirling University.
Ronald D Cramond, MA, FBIM, FSA Scot, Deputy Chairman, Highlands and Islands Development Board.
A Trevor Clark, CBE, LVO, MA, Councillor, City of Edinburgh District.
Dr Derek H Pringle, CBE, BSc, PhD, FRSE, F Inst P, Hon DSc, Chairman and Managing Director SEEL Ltd.
Robert H Smith, CA, AIB Scot, General Manager (Corporate Finance), Royal Bank of Scotland.
Professor Andrew F Walls, MA, B Litt, FSA Scot, Department of Religious Studies, Aberdeen University.
Sir David M Wilson, Litt D, FBA, MRIA, FSA, Director, the British Museum.

In attendance, from August 1984 onwards, Dr Robert G W Anderson, MA, D Phil, Director, Royal Scottish Museum
Secretariat -
Nigel Pittman, Secretary
Keith MacLaren, Assistant Secretary

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[168] *Official Report,* 3 December, 1953 Vol. 184 cc 954-61.

Appendix Four.   MAB paper of 21 December, 1984

It argued that the MoS would not be a tartan be-ribboned, navel gazing, 'wha's like us?' institution. Scotland had been cosmopolitan in outlook. 'Vienna 1900' demonstrated the contribution which Charles Rennie Mackintosh, his 'Glasgow Four' and the paintings by the 'Glasgow Boys', made to Impressionism, the Vienna Secession, Art Nouveau and the European avant-garde. Peter Vergo, Europe's leading expert on the period, had said that

> It was obvious that the Scots, at this time, were the artistic leaders...it is undoubtedly significant that when Hoffman, Waerndorfer and Moser were thinking about establishing a craft workshop project, later to become famous as the Weiner Werkstätte, it was to Mackintosh they turned for advice and encouragement.

The paper continued:

> There is the Scottish contribution to literature, from Barbour, Dunbar, Henryson and Sir David Lindsay through Allan Ramsay, Burns and Scott to Stevenson, Bridie, Barrie, Grassic Gibbon, Gunn and those whose long term place has yet to be defined. There is the tradition of the "Scot Abroad" from Louis the X1's Guard and Gustavus Adolphus's army to the merchants of the East India Company, Lipton, Jardine Matheson and the numberless engineering McAndrews who saw "predestination in the stride o' yon connecting rod". There is our notably democratic, but somewhat gloomy contribution to religious thinking; to banking (Paterson) and economic theory (Adam Smith); to popular myths, futile romanticism and misplaced loyalty (the '15 and the '45); to philosophy (Hume); to history (Hume, Carlyle, Sinclair and Macaulay); to architecture (the Adams, Playfair, Bryce, Gillespie Graham, Lorimer, Matthew and many moderns); to town planning (Craig); to mathematics (Napier); to law and universal free education, (despite what seems to be its recent decline); and to civil engineering (Wade, Rennie and Telford).

> There is the incredible intellectual ferment in Edinburgh in the age of enlightenment; how did a small northern city become such a centre of learning? There is the equally incredible hardship of the Clearances and the political and social ferment that has grumbled on, and bedevilled attitudes, inside and outside the Highlands, for two centuries. There is the Scottish contribution to the Industrial Revolution, from Bonawe Furnace to the Cunarders, and from the Gorbals tenements to New Lanark. Then there are the Scottish explorers (Mungo Park, Livingston, Thomson, Stuart and Mackenzie)…there is material in the collections of both museums, but particularly in the as yet virtually undiscovered NMAS, for literally dozens of exhibitions and displays, major and minor, alone or incorporated with lending from overseas institutions, to excite the imagination (and tap the pockets!) both of home Scots and of those millions overseas, in the States, and the former Colonies and Dominions, who claim Scottish descent. (A McDonald from Texas has just put the best part of a million pounds into the Clan Donald Centre in Sleat).

> The possibilities are endless if we marry the existing and future collections and scholarship with first class design, display and communication. "Angels, Nobles and Unicorns" was a revelation, even to some of us who should have known better the international status of what we already have. There is a major task and opportunity that will take 20 years, and enormous effort, energy, dedication and

money to achieve, but it could result in a unique museum telling a story of international interest and significance. The present Channel 4 "Scotland's Story", ambitious though it is by television standards, is by comparison a children's cardboard pop-up book; penny plain, tuppence coloured.

The above, though long, is directly relevant to researching the vision that informed the creation of MoS, together with Magnusson's preface to 'The Wealth of a Nation'.

Appendix Five.   Statutory Objectives of the Museum of Scotland

The Board of Trustees shall
(a) care for, preserve and add to the objects in their collections,
(b) secure that the objects are exhibited to and interpreted for the public,
(c) secure that the objects are available to persons seeking to inspect them in connection with their study or research,
(d) generally promote the public's awareness, appreciation and understanding of matters agricultural, archaeological, architectural, artistic, cultural, environmental, historical, industrial, military, scientific and social, both by means of the Board's collections and by other means, including collaboration with other institutions, as they consider appropriate, and
 (e) provide education, instruction and advice and carry out research.

Appendix Six.   Reference Manual

The unpublished *Reference Manual* for the Museum of Scotland Project was prepared as an internal document for the guidance and co-ordination of all who were working on that Project. The final version is dated June 1996. It is a bulky series of documents, which fills an entire box file on the NMS Library Reference Shelves. It is not a narrative, but a treasure trove of facts, useful as background to this research, including
• the origins of MoS,
• organisational structure,
• achieving the project,
• project design team,
• the MoS building,
• exhibition development,
• content of the exhibition,
• interactive technology,
• serving the public,
• fund raising,
• publicity and consultation.

Appendix Seven.   Patrons' Council

The Patrons' Council was chaired by the Countess of Dalkeith. It included Donald Hardie OBE DL, (Deputy Chair), Sir Kenneth Alexander FRSE DL, William Berry WS, Ivor Guild CBE FRSE WS, Michael Kennedy CA, Peter McKay CB, Neil McKerrow, The Hon. Sir Lachlan Maclean Bt DL, Derek Reid DBA, Ken Robertson, Sir Mark Russell KCMG, Sir John Shaw CBE FRSE, Robert H Smith CA, and Caroline Tisdall.

The Earl of Perth was Emeritus Chairman. Honorary Patrons included the Countess of Airlie, the Marchioness of Bute, Sir Alastair Grant, Mrs Drue Heinz DBE (USA), the Earl of Home and senior representatives from Canada, the USA, Australia and the Netherlands.

Between them they amassed very considerable public, political, financial and other influential clout and contacts, both at home and overseas.

Appendix Eight. The Industrial Museum's 'Civilising' Mission

This Appendix is a summary of the following research by Geoffrey N. Swinney.

'Edward Forbes (1815-1854), the exhibition of natural order in Edinburgh', in *Archives of Natural History* (forthcoming).

'Reconstructed visions: the philosophies that shaped part of the Scottish national collection'*,* in *Museum Management and Curatorship,* Vol. 21. 128 -142.

"I am utterly disgusted… - evening opening of the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art", in *Review of Scottish Culture*, No.16. 76-84.

In 1854 the Natural History Museum of Edinburgh University was transferred into government ownership, to form part of a new museum, along with the Industrial Museum of Scotland, on the site adjacent to the University. In 1866 the two elements were combined. Edward Forbes, 1815 to 1854, was appointed to the twin posts of Professor and Keeper in 1854. His motive was to systematise display of natural history specimens to provide a visual image of the natural order. This was intended as an antidote to radicalism and revolution, and overrode Victorian ideals of temperance and abstinence. So it led to the Museum getting an alcohol licence in 1875! However the licence was taken away in 1891.

The motive was to 'civilise' the newly industrialised and urbanised working classes, and to divert them from gin palaces and public houses. Museums offered an alternative means of entertainment, in a building seen as a place of education. Industrialisation and competition for overseas markets needed an 'upskilled' workforce. Museums, together

with programmes of lectures for artisans, were one way of achieving this. They could make the working man a better citizen and a happier man.

For Forbes, the ordered arrangements of specimens had a pedagogic role in training the next generation of natural historians, but also a social function in displaying, establishing and reinforcing the 'natural' social order. This should engender in working people a 'reverential sense of the extent of knowledge possessed by his fellow man'. For students, museums were about specimens. For the working classes, they were about organisation and order.

Forbes died within months of his appointment, but his successor, James Allman, continued his programme. The Industrial Museum was one of the legacies of the Great Exhibition of 1851. It became the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art, and then the Royal Scottish Museum. Its founders saw it as a means of supporting British industry, by exercising a 'civilising' effect on the newly urbanised working people and by promoting their understanding of both science and design. 'The nation which most quickly supports the intellectual development of its artisans must, by an inevitable law of nature, advance'. So the Industrial Museum formed part of the self-help movement associated with people such as Samuel Smiles.

Its first Director, George Wilson, said in 1857 that a 'Museum of Industry of the World', in relation to Scotland, 'will increase our civilisation and add to our power to civilise the rest of the world'. In 1864 the Museum was renamed the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art. It incorporated artificial gas lighting, deliberately to enable it to open in the evenings so that working-class people could attend it after work. To mark its jubilee in 1904 the Museum became the Royal Scottish Museum. But its prime remit remained to 'show the World to Scotland'. The complementary role of showing Scotland to the World was carried by the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.
(These roles are now recorded in stone on the floor of the passage between RM and MoS).

Appendix Nine.   Guide Training

(Teresa Gourlay, former training co-ordinator, provided much of the information on which this Appendix is based).

Potential new guides apply in response to advertisement or through word of mouth contact. They are interviewed and, if thought suitable, provisionally accepted for training. Guides have considerable independence – there is no prescribed script. So interviewers look for evidence of the candidate's ability to undertake independent study. A university degree is not a pre-requisite, but in practice many are educated to tertiary level.

During the probationary period, candidates have access to the training CD-ROM, and get a comprehensive checklist of communication skills – how to welcome visitors and set them at ease, voice projection, eye contact, interaction, body positioning, time management, and how to end a tour.

Each candidate has an experienced guide as a mentor. They work together, with the mentor demonstrating, and the candidate practising, communication skills and the selection, planning, and delivery of a tour. When the mentor is reasonably confident that the candidate is ready to meet the public, he/she will report to whoever is currently deemed responsible by the Learning and Programmes staff of NMS.

Appendix Ten
History Beyond the Text: A students' guide to approaching alternative sources.[169]

This book aims to help historians to move beyond traditional text, with chapters on art, photography, film, oral history, etc, to explain how these less traditional sources can be used. (This Appendix is an entirely subjective note of points that particularly interested this researcher, as one who agrees that history is inevitably linked to subjects such as art, geography, philosophy, language, science, sport and politics).

The editors point to a tripartite relationship between creator, created and audience. Non-traditional sources should be referenced in the same way as traditional sources, so that readers can locate the source and verify or question the historian's work. Authenticity should be open to question. For example, does the interpretation of a painting, capture the authentic voice of the artist?   If a film is commissioned, or provides a vehicle for a particular actor, does that influence its meaning?

In Chapter 2, 'Fine Art: the creative image', Barber quotes Kant as maintaining that aesthetic judgment is entirely subjective. But if all and any interpretation of a piece of art is equally valid, does it have anything to tell the historian at all? Art images often illustrate history books, but what function they serve? Do they just break up otherwise dense and intimidating text? The greater the number of images, the less scholarly? The highbrow monograph at one end of the scale, and the coffee table book at the other?

Baroque art at the courts of Spain and France represented the grandeur and pomp of empire, monarchy and aristocracy, which made a statement about autocratic politics. Portraits imply something about the era that generated them, the attitude of the artist towards the sitter, and the role of the sitter in society. To evaluate the historical contribution of any piece of art, it is essential to know the context – who commissioned it, when, and for what purpose.

MoS has an example. Landseer's *Monarch of the Glen* is the myth, spread to the world on a million shortbread tins, of Scotland as a 'land of brown heath and shaggy wood, land of the mountain and the flood'. It is a painting of its time, in the aftermath of Ossian, Wordsworth, Sir Walter Scott, and what Scott's son-in law, Lockhart, called the 'Celtified pageantry' of the 1822 visit by George IV.

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[169] Sarah Barber and Corinna M. Peniston-Bird (eds.), *History Beyond the Text: A students' guide to approaching alternative sources* (London, 2009).

In Chapter 3, 'The Cartoon: the image as critique', Frank Palmeri deals with political caricatures as a historical source. He warns that they do not necessarily tell the whole story, because other people with other views may not have been able to afford to commission or buy caricatures.

In Chapter 4, 'The Photograph: the still image', Derek Bayer writes that photographs provide information about the past that is without precedent in its nature and extent. They certainly pose problems of analysis and interpretation, for their use as historical sources, but he asks which take us closer to nineteenth century urban life – the descriptions in Engels' *The condition of the working class in England in 1844,* or the images collected in Thomas Annan's *Old closes and streets of Glasgow?*

He argues that one photograph demonstrates both the 'awesome power' of the photograph to shape our perceptions of the world, and its potential to alter meaning. It is Richard Drew's photograph of *The Falling Man*, jumping from the upper floors of the Twin Towers on 9/11, rather than be burned alive. The image is powerful but is positioned just above the centre of the frame, exactly as we would mount it in a frame for hanging on a wall. He cannot believe it was not cropped to achieve this: it was taken by a professional.

In Chapter 5, 'Film and TV: the moving image', Jeffrey Richards writes that the Mitchell and Kenyon films offer scenes of lives being lived a century ago, something we possess for no previous period of history. But films need stringent scrutiny, because studio creations were sometimes passed off as authentic footage, and newsreels were edited.

Films also change their meaning with the passage of time, and with changes in the nature and assumptions of the audience. His examples are *Brief Encounter,* a 1940s romantic drama which was greeted with disbelieving laughter by a 1960s student audience, and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon,* which had an audience, during the Vietnam war, booing every time the cavalry appeared. He also discusses propaganda films. For example, Goebbels authorised the production of *Der Ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew).*

In Chapter 6, 'Music: the composed sound', Burton W. Peretti argues that most history courses and texts make only the briefest mention of music. The reasons are that modern historical scholarship remains grounded in politics and economics and music is difficult to write about. Scores are the best, and sometimes the only, record we possess of musical performances from the pre-Edison era. But music has helped to express, and to cause, cultural transformation. So historians have to learn to read scores.

In Chapter 7, 'Oral History: the sound of memory', Peniston-Bird writes that oral history recovers the voices of those who have been hidden, such as the working classes or women. But conducting oral histories is expensive and time consuming, and oral interviews have been criticised as inaccurate and subjective, prone to exhibiting all types of bias. She accepts that human memory is notoriously inaccurate, but argues that there are techniques for uncovering contradictions, confusions or agendas.

In Chapter 9, 'Landscape: the configured space', Tom Williamson writes that landscape history has enjoyed phenomenal growth over the last four decades. It is concerned with the historical interpretation of physical structures and spaces – roads, field systems, settlement patterns, buildings, woods, hedges etc. It can give insights into

population levels, the development of farming practices etc. It can make a contribution to social and economic history.

In Chapter 11, 'Material Culture: the object', Adrienne D. Hood writes that, with access to rich documentary sources, historians have left study of 'things' to scholars, such as archaeologists, for whom artifacts are paramount. She argues that it is a mistake to ignore 'stuff', because it is a major category of evidence. Historians should learn how to understand the 'thingness of the thing'.

In short, this book is a valuable analysis of the merits – and dangers – of using various means, other than text, to put messages across to visitors. Its content influenced, in particular, this researcher's analysis of the gallery *Scotland: A Changing Nation.*

Appendix Eleven.
The Declaration of Arbroath as the Contractual Theory of Monarchy?

Professor Cowan thinks that the sentence about removing Bruce from the throne, and replacing him if he fails to live up to expectations, is significant because it states the idea of the contractual theory of monarchy: that the king is answerable to his subjects, exactly as the subjects are answerable to the king. This is one of the earliest manifestations of constitutionalism. [170]
He also argued that the Declaration appealed to such universals as freedom and human dignity, thus elevating the debate to one that far transcended the *'sometimes messy business'* of the Scottish Wars of Independence. [171].

However, Ditchburn and MacDonald argue that it is quite misleading to assume that an oft quoted passage which appears to suggest that kings could be legitimately removed if they failed to live up to wider baronial expectations) bore any resemblance to constitutional reality. The Declaration was not a constitutional treatise.[172]

Professor Lynch argues that it was only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that it acquired the status of a surrogate Scottish constitution.

> It managed to condense a mythology of the nation's past, provide a compelling vision of the relationship of kings of Scots and the Scottish people, and summarise the history of the present struggle as one in which the issue was for liberty alone that we fight...The document skilfully obscured the fact that there were not one but numerous strands to the

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[170] Edward J Cowan, *Scottish History: the Power of the Past* (Edinburgh, 2002).

[171] Edward J Cowan, 'Declaring Arbroath' in Geoffrey Barrow (ed.) *The Declaration of Arbroath*, (Edinburgh, 2003).

[172] David Ditchburn and Alastair J MacDonald, 'Medieval Scotland 1100 – 1560' in R A Houston and W W J Knox (eds.) *The New Penguin History of Scotland, (London, 2001). 162.*

struggle, as well as different sets of competing principles: the issue of liberty was for most of the political nation tied up either with feudal right and overlordship or, after 1306, the moral legitimacy of one King of Scots against another. [173]

Sally Mapstone takes a somewhat similar view.

> Where the kingdom's independence is concerned, kingly rule is predicated on the congruence of its interests with those of the political community. They also mark a defining moment in establishing Scottish national identity as something that constitutes itself in opposition to the English.[174]

Dauvit Broun argues that its significance is that 'it represents the high water mark of a Scottish vision of ancient independence. Nothing so uncompromising and compelling, at least to a medieval audience, had been attempted before. [175] But he points out that the definition of a nation as an ethnic community is a modern concept. By contrast the core idea of the Declaration was of,

> the Scots as a people obedient to the inherited authority of their king, free from the control of another king...nations were communities of submission, not people bound together equally by a common culture; they were justified by a lengthy king list...What made them Scottish was obedience to the King of Scots.

William Ferguson, too, has written about the 'chequered history' of the Declaration, and the origins and content of the king list. [176]

Visitors from the USA occasionally ask whether it is true that the American Declaration of Independence is modelled upon the Declaration of Arbroath. They are aware that April 6 is Tartan Day because of Senate resolution 155 (20 March, 1998). It stated that date 'has a special significance for all Americans, and especially those of Scottish descent, because the Declaration of Arbroath, the Scottish Declaration of Independence', was signed on April 6. Much professional academic writing exists on whether it influenced the American Declaration, but Professor Cowan sums up by saying 'for us the jury is still out'. [177] That is about all that a volunteer guide dare say, except for remarking that two of the signatories to the Declaration of Independence were Scots (James Wilson and the Rev. John Witherspoon, who became President of Princeton University).

So this Appendix exemplifies the inherent difficulty that curators face in trying to give visitors an account of an important, but controversial, piece of history without wearying them with having to read 'a book on the wall'. Yet if they had not even mentioned the Declaration, they would have been accused of 'dumbing down', or even of bowing to political pressure, as they were over the lack of a major display about Wallace.

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[173] Michael Lynch, in *'Scotland: a New History'*. 111.
[174] Sally Mapstone, 'Scotland's Stories' in Jenny Wormald (ed.), *Scotland: a History,* (Oxford, 2005). 308.
[175] Dauvit Broun, 'Pedigree of a Nation'. in Barrow, *The Declaration of Arbroath*, 3 and 7.
[176] William Ferguson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation* (Edinburgh, 1998), 42-53.
[177] Cowan, in *Declaring Arbroath*. 22.

Appendix Twelve. **Questionnaire for 2009/10 Visitor Survey in MoS.**

(The form used allowed space for notes between questions. To save paper, the spaces in this version have been compressed).

National Museum of Scotland - Visitor Survey

Good morning/afternoon. My name is ....and I am doing some research on behalf of the Museum. Could you help us with feedback? It won't take up much of your time, and we would really appreciate your input to help us in further development of the displays.

Question 1. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "nothing", and 5 is "a lot", how much did you know about Scottish history before you came to the Museum?
 (If the answer is 5, please ask whether the visitor has an academic or professional interest in Scottish history)

Question 2. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "nothing", and 5 is "a lot", how much more have you learned about Scottish history from this Museum's displays?
(If the answer is 1, ask if this was because the displays were not interesting)

Question 3. What specifically did you find out in the displays that you hadn't known before

Question 4. Has your visit encouraged you to find out more about Scottish history?
If so, in what way? Textbooks? Historical novels? Television programmes?
The internet? Other?
□ I was already familiar with the topics in the displays, but they have reinforced my interest
□ I already knew enough, and was not encouraged to find out more
□ No

Question 5. What did you like most?

Question 6. What did you like least?

Question 7. Have you any suggestions for improvement?

About you
Before we finish, I would just like to ask you a couple of questions about yourself. This helps us check which audiences we have asked for feedback. Please let me know if there are any questions you prefer not to answer, but I can assure you that all responses will remain anonymous and not be tied to any individual.

Question 8. Have you visited the Museum before?
□ In the past 12 months - (prompt: if so, how many times?)
□ Visited more than a year ago
□ First visit

Question 9. Where do you live?
□ Edinburgh & Lothians   □ Elsewhere in Scotland   □ Elsewhere in U.K.

□ Overseas □ Prefer not to say
(Prompt: If Overseas, which country?

Question 10. Which age band do you fit into?
□ Under 12 □ 12-19 □ 20-44 □ 45-65 □ 65+
□ Prefer not to say

Note to Interviewer:- Please note visitor's gender, but do not read out or ask)
□ Male □ Female
Please also note how many adults/children were in the group
□ Adults □ Children

Many thanks for your time and co-operation. I hope you have enjoyed your visit enough to come back again, and recommend others to come,

Notes to Interviewer: -
(1) NMS often conduct marketing surveys, and we should not clash with them. So if you see someone else with a clipboard, please postpone your interviewing to another day.
(2) Do not ask about guided tours, but if a visitor volunteers that they have been on a tour, please note that in the comments space.

Appendix Thirteen. Customer Service Standards for Visitor Operations.
   (This document is given to all Visitor Services Staff after training).

As a reminder of the main points of "Creating Great Visitor Experiences", here are some standards for each of the steps to remind you what is expected from each of you on a daily basis.

1. **Greeting the Visitor - the warmth of your welcome**
    □ Ensure each and every visitor you come into contact with receives a warm welcome - a genuine smile, appropriate eye contact and approachable body language, offer a greeting - a 'hello' or 'enjoy your visit' - if you catch someone's eye, smile every time!
    □ Offer them a plan of the museum without having to be prompted
    □ Acknowledge all visitors and when visitors have to wait, let them know that you will be with them as soon as you can
    □ Be pro-active - look for natural opportunities to greet visitors wherever you are situated in the museum

2. **Determining Visitor Needs - listening and questioning skills**
    □ Ensure that you actively listen to your visitors
    □ Repeat important requests to make sure you do know what they are looking for
    □ Demonstrate patience and ask relevant questions to engage and determine their needs - for example, what would they like to see?

3. **Meeting Needs - how you react and respond to what the visitor wants**

☐ Go out of your way to ensure that your visitors get at least what they expect from their visit

☐ If the visitor is looking for something a little more complicated, demonstrate flexibility and explore solutions to assist. If the visitor says something negative, listen and try and find a positive solution

☐ Do things promptly and where possible attempt to under promise and over deliver

☐ Establish that you have really helped them by asking 'is there anything else I can help you with?'

4. **Making the Moment Memorable - what you can do to make the visitor feel welcome**

☐ For example, if you can, instead of just giving directions, walk them there or direct them to another colleague

☐ Demonstrate brilliant product knowledge and highlight relevant events, exhibits or even other attractions that they might enjoy in the vicinity

☐ Discuss the events of the day with the visitor to offer point of focus for the visit - keep yourself up-dated with what's on

☐ Actively seek opportunities to find ways to please your visitors, for example, highlight relevant exhibits on their map

5. **Checking Results - asking visitors how was their visit and responding effectively to both positive and negative comments**

☐ Ask as many visitors as you can what they thought about their visit - 'how was your visit?'

☐ Ask them if they will come back again or if they would use the services again

☐ Ask them for opinions on how you can improve service - 'any suggestions on how we can improve our service?' or 'is there anything we could do differently, in your opinion?'

6. **Leaving the door open - ways of encouraging visitors to come back**

☐ Invite visitors to come back by offering them an events list or a relevant brochure

☐ Explain forthcoming events or exhibitions which may interest them - talk about the Royal Museum and when it will re-open

☐ If you know they are going to a particular location where there is a NMS property, highlight the property and offer information on how to get there and opening times etc

☐ Stand at the exit points wherever possible and offer parting greetings as visitors are leaving

Appendix Fourteen. Mini Groups, and Teacher Feedback.

First Group

20 December, 2009. Of seven visitors, three agreed to stay on for discussion – one young woman from Poland and two young men from Eire. All agreed that they liked both the displays and the building. One of the Irishmen was studying architecture at the Edinburgh College of Art. He thought the building was 'marvellous', knew that the architects were Benson and Forsyth, and had read their illustrated book about MoS.

All three had visited the museum several times before. They thought that the labels were informative, but had not noticed the colour coding. They agreed that they had learned 'quite a lot'

about Scottish history from their visits. Two thought that *Kingdom of the Scots* was the most interesting, while one of the men slightly preferred the Industrial Revolution level. Their only, unanimous, criticism was that it was difficult to find your way around the building. Indeed, they said that was why they had, for the first time, decided to join a guided tour.

To illustrate this point, the architectural student said that he had on two previous visits tried in vain to find the angled window towards Greyfriars Kirk that he had read about in Benson and Forsyth's book. So we continued the discussion while I guided them to the window and showed them how to raise the blind. (If he had asked any of the Front of House staff, they would have been able to tell him where it was). The student also asked about Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and I told him where to find that display on Level 5, while I took the other Irishman to the display of Jacobite mementoes, because he had read in a magazine an account of an unusual memento, and wondered if MoS had any. He was intrigued in particular by the Jacobite wineglass used to toast the "King over the water".
(This discussion lasted over 20 minutes, including the visit to the window).

Second Group

3 January, 2010. All five were first-time visitors, so I could not ask them about their experience of the displays without having a tour guide. However two young women from Russia seemed to have a surprising knowledge of Scottish history, so I had a chat with them. They were from Moscow, visiting Edinburgh over the New Year holiday. They were not history students, but language students, which accounted for their excellent English.

They had not heard of the Picts, but were interested in archaeology, and knew that the Romans had been in Scotland, but not for as long as in England. They had heard of Bruce and Bannockburn, Mary, Queen of Scots, and the Union of the Crowns. They were aware of the Renaissance and the Reformation, that Mary was a Roman Catholic, and that there had been religious wars. They had also heard about Jacobite rebellions and Bonnie Prince Charlie. In short, they would have scored more highly on existing knowledge of Scottish history than many of the Scottish visitors in the survey.

Admittedly their knowledge appeared to be in general terms rather than specific, and they couldn't quote dates. When asked how language students appeared to know so much history, they said they had been taught World history and European history, as well as Russian history at school. Although this was evidence from only two individuals, it suggested that history might have greater prominence in the school curricula in Moscow than in Scotland.

Third Group

20 January, 2010. A specially booked Highlights tour for ten languages students from Edinburgh University included only two first-time visitors. I had a brief chat with these two. They were not history students, and were, frankly, not particularly interested in Scottish history. (They came from Italy and France). They had previously visited simply because the museum was free, and they had thought it might be quite interesting to see beautiful, valuable or historic objects. They both said that, even with the map, which is now routinely offered to visitors at the entrance, it had been difficult to find their way around. So this conducted tour had enabled them to see Highlights that they had not found, or even known about, previously.

What they liked least was the archaeology. They thought it a bit boring. What they liked most was *Scotland: A Changing Nation*. This was because it dealt with the relatively recent past, and they could relate to the social issues and the politics, including devolution. Gender stereotyping also emerged. The male student was interested in big, iconic objects like the Maiden and the Newcomen Beam Engine, whereas the female liked the Seton necklace, and would have loved to

wear it! It so happened that the tour coincided with the start of the temporary display of the Iron Age gold. When I took them to it, one said it 'blew him away', (his English was fluent and idiomatic), and the other marvelled that such artistry was possible 2,000 years ago.

Fourth Group

27 January, 2010. Two visitors from Germany and three from the Edinburgh area. One of the Edinburgh residents was a frequent visitor, but the other two, perhaps surprisingly, were first-time visitors. All agreed to stay on for a chat, although I couldn't ask them all about their experience without joining a tour.

The two young German men were studying International Law at Edinburgh University, so their English was fluent. They had started using the audio guides (in English not German!) but had joined the tour when they heard the announcement, because they thought that the introduction to the audio guide was too long, and then they had difficulty in finding the audio numbered objects. The frequent visitor advised them that the better way to use the audio guide, particularly in Level 0, was to forget about trying to follow the numbers, and simply to wander round looking for an audio guide sign and then punching in that number. That way they would find the objects, but not necessarily in the prescribed sequence.

All agreed that even without a guide they would learn something about Scottish history just by looking at the objects and reading the labels.

When asked what had surprised them, all, except the frequent visitor, said that everything was new to them, while the frequent visitor said that he couldn't remember what had surprised him most, on his first visit, but that every time he came he found something new or surprising that he hadn't noticed before. One of the Germans said that what particularly surprised him was to learn, from discussion during the tour, that Scotland had not invented bagpipes.

Fifth Group

8 February, 2010. Of eight on a theme tour, five were first-time visitors, and three were local, fairly frequent visitors. One of the first time visitors lived in Strathaven. He had been, many years ago, to the Royal Museum, had been meaning for several years to visit MoS, and had now got round to it only because he was in Edinburgh on other business, and had time to spare.

Although I had made clear that I really wanted to speak to visitors who had previously been round on their own, all eight readily volunteered to stay for a chat. All agreed that they had learned something about Scottish history. Only one – the visitor from Strathaven – seemed to have much previous knowledge of Scottish history. For example, he remarked that the Tyndale translation predated the King James translation, and clearly knew something about the Stewart dynasty.

Two of the regular visitors said that it didn't much matter whether a visitor went round first on a guided tour or on his/her own, provided you did both. Their argument was that going round first with a guide gives you a good idea of the layout, and where to find key sections. On the other hand, visiting alone first, and then with a guide, would bring out Highlights that hadn't been noticed on the unaccompanied visit.

All thought the map useful in terms of showing the vertical chronology, but was not sufficiently detailed to guide to Highlights. One suggested that there might be leaflets saying what Highlights should not be missed if you only had an hour, and showing clearly where they were. Otherwise, without a guide, it would be very easy to miss an object of outstanding interest. All eight nodded their heads at this.

Sixth Group

The next attempt failed, because there were only four in the group, all were first-time visitors, and all had to leave to catch booked transport for wheelchairs. However, on 18 February there was a group of twenty-five, twenty of whom were visiting the museum for the first time. It was a very responsive group, many of whom asked questions. This slowed progress, but had the advantage of creating a relaxed, group atmosphere, so that all five who had visited the museum before, and about a dozen of the others, readily agreed to stay for a chat, although I had as usual made clear that I wanted reaction to the displays, and not to the tour.

All agreed that visitors were bound to learn something about Scottish history from the displays, but several of the first time visitors said that although the labels were reasonably short, there were so many that they were sure they wouldn't have troubled to try to read them all, even if they'd known which to select.

All five who had visited before said that the tour had shown them several important displays that they had missed on their previous visits. When one commented that it would be useful if the information desk had a map showing where recommended 'Highlights' could be found, everyone, including the first time visitors, nodded assent.

They had also learned things that had not been explained in the labels. For example, one man, from the Edinburgh area, said that although he had seen the 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' displays more than once before, he hadn't realised that the Jacobites were so called because Jacobus is the Latin for James. Again, none had known that bagpipes were not invented in Scotland, or that there was a national collection of bagpipes at the Piping Centre in Glasgow. One said that he had tried Level 0 on a previous visit, but had given up, and had never returned, because he couldn't understand the 'themed' layout.

These reactions arguably demonstrate that, although visitors will not see as many objects during a guided tour as they would if they simply wandered round on their own, a guide can take them directly to important objects and offer more information on them than they would get from the labels. While a selection of 'Highlights' from 10,000 objects, is bound to be subjective, (and liable to protests from curators whose own favourites have been omitted), there is a broad consensus among the volunteer guides on at least some of the objects which really should not be missed.

Most of the group had not noticed the folding chairs, and even those who had visited before, and knew that they were available, had not realised that they could be collected from one level and left on another.

Seventh Group

1 March, 2010. Of five on a theme tour, four were first-time visitors, and the other was a young Polish woman, studying in Edinburgh. She readily agreed to stay for a chat, and one of the first time visitors also wanted to stay.
The Polish student said that she had first gone round on her own, had returned for a Highlights tour, and found it so helpful that she had come back for this theme tour. She had found it difficult, even with a map, to work out where to go. She had been sure that she had missed out many important displays, and that was why she had come back for tours. Her main criticism was that the main lifts do not go to the mezzanine levels shown on the map, or to Level 6, and she had been unable to find the staircases to the mezzanines, or the small lift that went to all levels. (I later took her to it). The first-time visitor agreed that if she had walked round on her own, she might well have missed important displays.

The Polish student thought that the labels were good, and informative on the main facts about the objects, but obviously could not go into detail, or tell stories, as guides could. The first-time visitor joined in enthusiastically at this point, agreeing that what she found most interesting was

information about the historical background to objects. Examples were what happened to 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' after Culloden, and why Mary, Queen of Scots, was executed. (She had asked questions, during the tour, about both, and about the role of religious differences). She commented that you couldn't address questions to a label. She was Italian, with excellent English, and had been surprised to be told that the Prince had been born, and brought up, in Rome.

They both thought that the displays were attractive and interesting, and offered a lot of information about Scottish history and culture. I pointed out that the theme tour had not reached all Levels, had offered only a small number of displays, and was my subjective choice. However, both said that didn't matter. It would be impossible to see everything, and they were happy to settle for whatever a guide thought was important.

Eighth Group

11 April, 2010. There were three visitors on a theme tour – a middle-aged woman from Trinidad, who lives in London, a middle-aged man from Norway, and a young woman from the Ukraine. The first two had visited the Museum of Scotland previously, without a tour guide, while the third was a first-time visitor.

All three wanted to stay for a chat. The two who had seen the displays without a guide said that they had learned quite a lot about Scottish history just by looking at objects and reading the labels. Both also said that nothing in particular had surprised or impressed them; basically nearly everything was new and interesting. However, without any prompting, both also said that they had found it difficult to find their way round the displays.

The Norwegian complained that although he had found the religious galleries, he had been unable to follow the different religious practices just by reading labels. The woman from Trinidad supported this, and the woman from the Ukraine said she was also interested in religious issues, so I took all three on a twenty minute extra visit to the religious displays on Level 1. I tried to cover the Covenant, and the main differences between the Church of Scotland, the Episcopal churches, and Roman Catholicism. In response to questions, I tried to outline the religious wars of the seventeenth century, and how the communion plate, showing a man kneeling, revealed a practice not followed in the Church of Scotland, while the Holyrood silver was for use at a Roman Catholic chapel, commissioned by James VII and II.

The Norwegian said that this had answered his questions, but had illustrated the difficulty of explaining different religious beliefs and hierarchies just through relatively short labels. He added, and the others agreed, that the same would be true of trying to tackle, simply through objects, the Enlightenment, and other historical issues which were really about thought. He accepted that if these subjects were explained adequately on labels, the texts would be so long that few visitors would read them.
Given the difficulty I had in trying to cover all this religious history in a twenty minute walking tour/mini-lecture, I can, with hindsight, only agree!

Ninth Group

29 April, 2010. A party of five included two from Seattle, one from Italy and two from Aberdeen. Only the Italian had visited previously, without a guide, but all five stayed for a chat. The Italian said that on his two previous visits he had not learned much about Scottish history from the labels, because his eyesight was relatively poor, and he had difficulty in reading them, although his English was very good. The other four said, unprompted, that although they had not visited the museum before, they did not think they would have been able to find the Highlights they had

been shown, and which they found interesting, because the map gave only the general layout, and not the position of Highlighted objects. The Italian agreed.

Tenth Group

3 May, 2010. Out of a group of eleven, two, a mother and late teenage daughter, were not first-time visitors. They readily agreed to stay for a few minutes' chat. They lived in the Edinburgh area and had visited MoS three times before, without a guide.

They said that they had known relatively little about Scottish history before their visits, but had learned 'quite a bit' from looking at the objects, labels and interactives. On each occasion they had concentrated on only one area, because there was far too much to take in on one visit, if you stopped to read labels with any degree of attention. While I emphasised that I was not seeking feedback on the tour, they said that they had missed several of the highlights that I had selected. In particular, I was surprised to learn they had not previously noticed the 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' display, although they had previously visited Level 3. This seemed to be because that display is behind the Cruck House, and, from personal observation, visitors' tendency on entering Level 3 is to turn right, towards the Newcomen Engine.

Eleventh Group

16 May, 2010. Out of a group of fourteen, twelve were first-time visitors, perhaps because the tourist season seemed to have started in earnest. The two who had visited before, without a guide, were a German woman and a Spanish man, both probably in their twenties. They readily agreed to stay for a chat.

Both said they were 'quite interested' in history, but knew very little about Scottish history. On their previous visit, they had both realised, from looking at the map, that it would be impracticable to try to visit the whole museum. So each had decided to look at only one area, the woman at part of Level 0, particularly the Roman exhibits, and the man at part of Level 3, on the industrial displays. They both said that they had learned 'quite a lot' from the labels but only because they had gone slowly, and had taken the time to read the label properly at each exhibit that had taken their fancy. They had not taken an audio guide, because they both spoke fluent English.

They both also said that they had come back because they had found the museum very interesting, and thought that they would try a guided tour in the hope of getting a better idea of the layout, to help them decide what area to choose on any subsequent visit. Although I did not ask them, they volunteered the view that they had found the tour useful for that purpose. The man said that a more detailed map, or information leaflet, would be useful, and the woman agreed.

Twelfth Group

Several tours in May and June consisted entirely of first-time visitors, probably because the tourist season was in full swing. Accordingly none were suitable as a Mini Group. However on 20 June there were two ladies from Edinburgh and six from Hong Kong. The Edinburgh ladies had visited the museum several times, and readily agreed to stay for a chat. They had been to all the main levels, but not to the mezzanine with the Fetternear banner.

They said they were interested in history, and indeed had signed up to an Edinburgh City Council class. They both said that they enjoyed the displays and had learned quite a lot from reading the labels, but their difficulty was in finding their way around and, given the sheer number of objects, identifying those likely to interest them most. After several visits on their own, this had

encouraged them to join several tours with different guides. These tours had been beneficial both in giving them further background, beyond what was in the labels, and in taking them to displays which were clearly important.

The tours in July were entirely of first-time visitors, so I gave up attempting Mini Groups for the rest of the main tourist season.

Feedback from Teachers

Carnegie College, Dunfermline.

Twenty HND students came in two groups for a booked tour on *Scotland from 1789-1918*.

Their tutor, asked whether the students had found the tours useful, replied that

> It may sound rather cliched, but being able to view artefacts does help to 'bring history alive', and certainly makes learning more three dimensional.
> We are led to believe that most learners are visual/and/or kinetic learners and obviously the rich variety of visual/kinetic/audio stimulation in a museum can only help to develop multidimensional understanding. In my experience, students will gain more from a museum visit if they already have an understanding or a context in which to understand the displays. Therefore some kind of previous related teaching/learning is essential. Guided tours are also very useful, because they provide a context within which to understand the displays, and also because they provide an added sensory dimension to the learning experience.
> One aspect of the museum visit that is useful to us, as social scientists, is the multidisciplinary nature of the displays/experience. Life doesn't happen in pigeon holes called Psychology/Sociology/Politics and History and it is helpful that in the museum students are able/encouraged to explore themes from a multidisciplinary perspective.

Source – e-mail from Mary Wallace, Carnegie College.

George Heriot's School, Edinburgh.

The Head of History wanted to move his S5 students' consciousness away from texts to artefacts, as other evidence of Scotland's past. After their tour of MoS, he asked them

'Did you learn anything about Scottish Reformation history through the displays in the museum?'

Only one said that they 'did not really help me learn'. The others all said 'yes'. Specific responses included: -

'Yes. It particularly gave me an impression of how different Scotland used to be'.
'I learned a bit about Scottish Reformation history from the displays; the written bits were good'.
'I learned about Scottish history, yes. I think being able to see things helps to learn'.
'Yes, we did learn things through the displays as they provided a little physical window as opposed to purely words'.
'The displays were interesting to look at and reading the descriptions tended to answer most questions. The displays helped the learning process'.
'Displays in the museum made the history more accessible and placed the knowledge in its context'.

'You can learn from museums, but only with prior knowledge'.

Other responses were on the same lines.
Source – e-mail from Mike McCabe, Head of History.

This was useful feedback from two professional teachers and their students, and **reinforced the main finding of this research – that displays in this object-based museum do help visitors to learn aspects of Scottish history.**

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