

The National Museum of Scotland reopens this Friday





The recently refurbished National Museum of Scotland is to open again this Friday morning at 10 after a building programme which has taken three and a half years to complete. The management is very proud of the fact that the £47.4m project is being delivered on time and within budget. The museum has been closed during that time, and the renovations have allowed new collections to be organised and more accessibility afforded within the Victorian building in its sixteen new galleries. Over the years the museum had become a tired old building with some internal doors built up, and many visitors losing their way in the intricate arrangement of corridors. Dr Gordon Rintoul, Director of the National Museum of Scotland, explained that there was a clear need to revitalise the building. One of the other factors in the need for redevelopment is that the new part of the museum had opened next door and rather eclipsed the 150 year old part of the institution. Now the two will be joined together for the first time.

The simple fact was that investigations proved that only 10% of the visitors went to any of the collections above the ground floor. So that is perhaps why most people are asking about the goldfish...which have been moved to new homes at the People's Palace in Glasgow we were told.

The ambitious project is only part of a 15-year masterplan for the museum, during which more funds were raised than actually needed. Funding for the project came from Heritage Lottery Fund, The Scottish Government and £13.6m from private sources. Dr Walter Grant Scott, the founder of Charlotte Square financial firm Walter Scott & Partners, [donated £1m to the](#)

[project](#) and this has ensured that one of the galleries has been named after him. Poignantly one of the names on the supporters board is former UK Supreme Court Judge, Lord Rodger of Earlsferry, [who died last month.](#)

Ralph Appelbaum of Appelbaum Associates was responsible for  the design of the building, and said that he wanted to ensure that mothers with prams would no longer be seen struggling to ascend the steps at the front of the building. To this end there is a new street level entry in the former storage cellars. From the vaulted ceilings and sandstone walls of the new entrance museum-goers can either ascend in the glass lift, or walk up the stairs to the Grand Gallery which is the old entrance hall. This was modelled on London's Crystal Palace and retains a feeling of vast space and light. Eighty per cent of what is now on public view has not been seen before, and one gets the feeling that the curators have all enjoyed raiding the storage facility at Granton to find new things to show off.

 On the walls here is the Window on the World, a fabulous idea to showcase as many objects as possible to entertain those sitting in the new cafe area on the first floor balcony. Here there are over 800 pieces exhibited, which is apparently the largest single gathering of objects in the UK. Curator Alexander Hayward explained that this reflects the 'cabinet of curiosities' which many Victorians displayed in their homes in an effort to display their own social standing. One of the almost unbelievable objects on display is the whale jawbone which is inscribed with what is known as a 'scrimshaw' carving, perhaps the largest in the world, depicting the chase to kill the whale.

Displayed alongside are some old manual typewriters, a part of a girder from the Tay Bridge and a 14th century knight's helmet. The variety is delightful and engaging. It offers a snapshot of what one might see elsewhere in the museum as well as some articles which are displayed for no other reason other

than they are things of beauty.

From the ground floor extending up several levels at the eastern end of the Grand Gallery, are the Natural World Galleries. The animals on the ground level are those which walk the earth's surface and those suspended above are of the flying or swimming variety. This will undoubtedly be a favourite place. It is impossible to describe well enough the number and sheer scale of the exhibits here, even in a photograph.



The animals are all new, and are interwoven almost seamlessly with huge hanging screens showing films of sea creatures swimming in our oceans. Two areas have been set aside specifically for families to explore together called Adventure Planet and Imagine.

We met with some key people involved in the project to find out more:-

[Reopening of National Museum of Scotland July 2011 \(mp3\)](#)

When we were there, workmen were of course still putting the final touches to the museum. But, although we hope they are gone by the time you get there, we think you will like what they have done!

