

The Scottish National Portrait Gallery ready to re-open

☒ The Scottish National Portrait Gallery is that very imposing red sandstone building on Queen Street with the turrets. It has been there for over 120 years, constructed as a purpose-built gallery, but this is the first time it has been refurbished. It has cost £17.6m to turn the galleries into something more modern, more spacious and more inviting to the public.

It houses 3,000 paintings and sculptures, 25,000 prints and drawings and 38,000 photographs, both historic and modern.

The floor space available to the public has been increased ☒ by over 60 per cent by intruding into areas that were formerly used as office space. The modern feel is enhanced by the use of films to showcase what Scotland really looks like, and who its people really are. Although the gallery is named the Portrait Gallery there are actually landscapes here, both paintings and photographs. It was explained that the intention is to portray the whole country, and not just the people in it.

There is a glass lift so big it could take you and 47 others from the ground to the top floors at one time.

A library which was originally on the top floor has been ☒ moved and is now on the second floor. Yes, you read that correctly. They took a whole library and moved all the shelves, the wooden lined walls and put it on a different floor. And the new library space will be open to the public. This is really the main difference. It now feels that one has the right to be poking around this gallery, rather than having the feeling that you were intruding, as it did sometimes feel

in the past.

The rooms on the top floor mainly have natural light from the skylights, but the side windows have been opened up too in a couple of the galleries. Some of the exhibitions might be ruined by sunlight however, so there are screens which can be affixed to the window spaces and then easily removed when a new exhibition is put in place. This means the various top floor suites are very flexible spaces.

✘ The £17.6 million refurbishment has been funded by generous contributions from the Scottish Government, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Monument Trust and a number of charitable bodies. This has been supported by an innovative and engaging public campaign which has given donors the chance to sponsor historical figures in the stunning frieze created by William Hole in the Gallery's Great Hall; individual stars in Hole's mural mapping of the night sky, which adorns the Hall's ceiling; or to include a photograph in 'Put Yourself in the Picture', an electronic donor screen and online gallery.

John Leighton, Director-General of the National Galleries of Scotland, commented: "The new SNPG will be a superb setting to showcase rich traditions of Scottish art and photography; it is also a forum where issues of history and identity come to life through art; perhaps, above all, it is a place where individual and collective stories and memories come together to create a fascinating and imaginative portrait of a nation."

James Holloway, Director of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, added: "Scotland's national portraits at last have a home worthy of them. Our great iconic building now looks tremendous and is the perfect showcase for our rich and unique collection."

First Minister Alex Salmond said: "The Scottish National Portrait Gallery celebrates well-known Scots from throughout the ages; whether they are some of our greatest thinkers or

our modern actors and actresses. All aspects of Scottish life and achievement are encapsulated in the many artworks which will now be displayed to their utmost as part of this ambitious £17.6m restoration project. The improvements to the magnificent building will allow visitors to experience much of what architect Sir Robert Rowand Anderson envisaged in his original design as it continues to showcase Scotland's greatest asset—its people.”

But the most important thing is that they have kept the ground floor cafe, and they have introduced free wifi...

✘ Entry is free and the gallery reopens to the public on Thursday 1 December 2011.