

Edinburgh's largest ever inventory project launched as 'Auld Reekie is Retold'

'Auld Reekie Retold' has been officially launched by Museums & Galleries Edinburgh. This will be the largest collections inventory project ever undertaken in the organisation's history and, over the course of three years, the ambitious project will see the recording and cataloguing of the collection of over 200,000 objects which are housed in stores and venues across the City, in preparation for a move to a new store where those objects can be safely stored and effectively managed.

Auld Reekie Retold isn't solely based on collection management. It will also connect objects in the collection, which has been growing steadily since the 1870's, with people and places in the City, uncovering new stories from Edinburgh and its residents. The project will harness that public and professional knowledge about objects in the collection to share it with visitors, both in person at the museums and digitally throughout the project.





That gathered knowledge and data will also be used to develop exhibitions and displays in the future – with all work designed to consolidate Museums & Galleries Edinburgh's position as a leading Scottish cultural institution and to help better serve the people of Edinburgh and visitors from across the world.

Earlier this year, Museums & Galleries Edinburgh stood in solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement and pledged to play an active role in standing up to racism. Auld Reekie Retold is an important opportunity for greater understanding of the origins of the collections and the way they have been catalogued.

Throughout the lifecycle of the project, the impact of Colonialism will be highlighted, seeking to educate and bring new perspectives and hidden stories to light. Future phases of the project will involve working with diverse communities across Edinburgh to record objects in new ways that better reflect today's world.

Permanent museum staff have been joined for the project by three dedicated Collections Assistants whose work focuses on matching objects with any existing records, updating the information currently held and carrying out research. Prior to Covid-19 restrictions being in place, work was underway in object stores across the city and although some of this work is now paused, team members are very much continuing to work through digital records.

Below are a few examples of some fascinating stories and objects that have already come to light, as part of work carried out prior to lockdown, with many more future stories and news of new discoveries and calls for public input being shared across the duration of the project.





Consider for instance a tiny round metal stamp used for impressing on to wax, with the name and Trinity address of William Flockhart. Flockhart and his partner Duncan were surgeon apothecaries who produced a number of drugs and medicines in the 1840s. Among the customers on their books were James Young Simpson, the inventor of anaesthetics, and Florence Nightingale.

Or a playbill printed on a 100,000 Deutschmark note for a play at the Lyceum Theatre entitled "Tons of Money", staged in 1925, a time when hyper-inflation in Germany had reached a point where money was no longer worth the paper it was printed on. While people were paying for loaves of bread with wheelbarrows of cash, in Edinburgh, the bank note was used to advertise the ironically titled play.

The project will create a web of connections across the collections held by Museums & Galleries Edinburgh, from archaeology to social history. An example of this is the rediscovery of a small silver pendant of the Six Feet Club from the 1830s. There were a surprising number of secret and

not-so-secret societies in Edinburgh at this time, each with its own particular niche interest or membership rule.

This club was dedicated to athleticism, and to be a member you had to be a man and oddly enough six foot tall. Sir Walter Scott was made an honorary member despite not being six-foot-tall and left with a limp by a bout of childhood polio.

Sometimes the finds are a little closer to home, like the Ronson Escort 2000 Hairdryer. A “portable” hairdryer from the 1970’s, designed to be used at home and worn like a satchel with a tube that connected to a shower cap style hood which would allow you to go about your day as you dried and set your hair; as long as your day was only two feet from a plug. This was aimed at the modern women leaving her hands free to get on with her day, but from anecdotes from users it seems to imply it had varying results.





Once lockdown restrictions have eased and the museums reopen, Auld Reekie Retold will continue at pace. There will be a series of exhibitions hosted across the collection including Museum of Edinburgh, The Writers' Museum and the Museum of Childhood, allowing visitors the opportunity to learn more about the various processes involved in maintaining the collection and to connect with objects, bringing them to life in the process.

Thanks to a grant from Museums Galleries Scotland Museums Development Fund, the project will also feature a programme of public events and tours to enable visitors and special interest groups to engage with the collection and to share in the discoveries made.

While restrictions are in place, these events will be online, but when visitors are welcomed back in to the museums, they will be able to see and handle real objects themselves. Information will also be made available digitally with regular updates, news and behind the scenes blogs and podcasts shared

via www.edinburghmuseums.org.uk, www.capitalcollections.org.uk and through social media using the hashtag #AuldReekieRetold.

Museums & Galleries Edinburgh's collections belong to the City, and Auld Reekie Retold aims to give every citizen of Edinburgh a sense of ownership of and connection to its objects and their stories as the organisation moves into a new dynamic phase of museums development with people, past and present at its heart.

Project Manager Nico Tyack said: "Auld Reekie Retold is a truly unique opportunity for Museums & Galleries Edinburgh to catch all the stories our collections can tell us about Edinburgh. From Jacobite muskets to life in tenements, Edinburgh Rock to Pride, medieval St. Giles to the Festival Fringe, we hope to spark conversations about our amazing collections and their hidden histories, gathering new insights for future generations to enjoy."







Councillor Donald Wilson, Culture and Communities Convener, said: "Our world class collections are a powerful record of our journey to the present day as well as a window to the past where we can discover links to the Edinburgh and Scotland of yesterday. We are lucky as a city to have this resource but at the moment much of it is hidden and inaccessible.

"This is very important behind the scenes work as we review how we currently meet the needs of our citizens and how we can better use our collections. I have long believed there is untapped potential in our collections and Auld Reekie Retold

is allowing us to develop and gain a fuller understanding of what we have. By recording and cataloguing the collection of over 200,000 objects, it will also highlight those items that can be used for online resources and future exhibitions”.

Councillor Amy McNeese-Mechan, Culture and Communities Vice Convenor, also added: “This project will help to broaden participation with our Museums & Galleries and ensure their long-term relevance. This is the story of our city and it needs to be told. It is only by understanding how we got to where we are now that we can know where we want to go in the future.”