

MAKING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

The Royal Museum Project

newsletter

February 2010

Building on success

The main building work is now more than half way through its 116 week programme and is running on time and on budget, **writes Project Director Fiona Bell.**

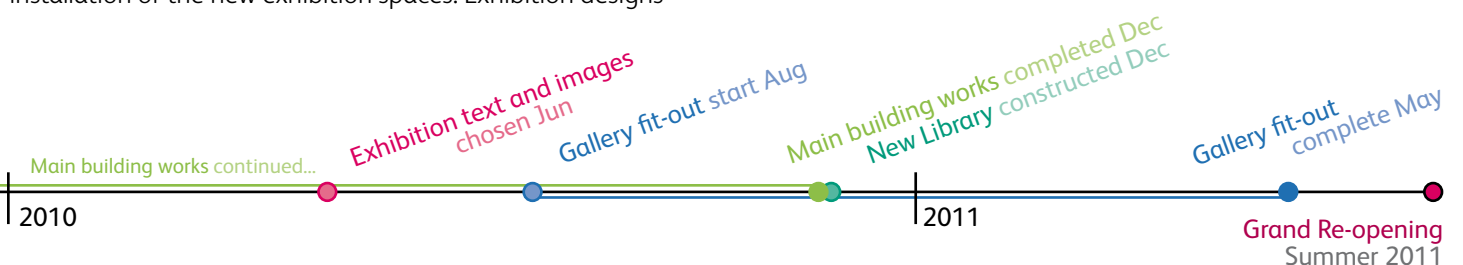
Passers-by on Chambers Street in recent months may have encountered trucks shuttling back and forth from the site as they removed more than 5500 cubic metres of soil to lower the floor level to meet the pavement level. The former stores have been opened up to create a stunning new Arrivals Hall with café and shop spaces. New openings have been formed in the Grand Gallery floor and one of two new staircases has been installed connecting the two floors. It is now possible to see the wonderful atrium rooflight from the pavement level of the building – providing a view never seen before.

The structure of a new stair to the south side of the building has been installed and the walls and roof are now going on. The new escalators that will take visitors up the centre of the building have been delivered to the site and the new openings in the floor for them will soon be finished. Previously unknown Victorian arches have been uncovered and opened up to give lovely vistas between the Chambers Street and Lothian Street ends of the building. The new special exhibition space has now been created by installing new floors in former atrium galleries and the final wall finishes are now going up. A huge scaffolding structure, as shown, was in place in the Grand Gallery to allow the roof structure to be re-decorated. This work was completed at the end of January and the scaffolding, which will take four weeks to re-build, will move into the east wing atrium gallery space. There is so much work going on that there are around 150 people working on the site at any one time.

Whilst the building alterations and refurbishment has been going on, the RMP team has also been busy preparing for the installation of the new exhibition spaces. Exhibition designs



have been completed and are out to tender. We are about to start working with software developers for our new interactives for the galleries. Good progress has been made on text writing for the galleries and work has started in earnest to source wonderful images for the displays. Meanwhile conservation work is progressing well with around 45% of objects having been conserved. There are around 50 people involved in the development of the exhibitions just now, and we will have a team of at least 30 people installing objects in 2011.



Feature interview

Behind the scenes at the Museum



We asked three of our team who have been working behind the scenes on the re-development to give us an insight into this major project: **Gordon Gibb**, Associate Gareth Hoskins architects, **Ben Adam**, Associate David Narro Associates structural engineers and **Steve Kenicer**, Max Fordham LLP building services engineers.

Your role means you get to see first hand how the museum is transformed from day to day. For visitors, who have not seen this transformation, what do you think will strike them as the biggest change when the museum re-opens in 2011?

Gordon Gibb: I believe the stunning, stone-vaulted Arrivals Hall will be the most memorable element of the Project. This dramatic space, carved out of existing basement cellars, will provide an entrance experience befitting the National Museum and allow the well-loved Grand Gallery above to be enjoyed from a completely new perspective.

Ben Adam: The most striking change to the building will be the new Arrivals Hall. The removal of stone walls and careful lighting will open up the space and display the stone vaulting to best effect, creating a buffer space before rising into the stunning, light-filled Grand Gallery.

Steve Kenicer: I would have to agree with my Architectural and Structural colleagues: the new Arrivals Hall, with stairways rising into the Grand Gallery above, will undoubtedly be the most striking feature of the refurbished museum. As visitors explore beyond the new hall, they will have time to appreciate a multitude of new exhibitions, and many galleries returned to former grandeur.

The Victorian Museum has been altered, adapted and extended throughout its history in response to growth of the National Collections, changing curatorial practices and changing patterns of



Gordon Gibb



Ben Adam



Steve Kenicer

public use. Considering its proud history have you discovered anything surprising during the work?

GG: The most interesting architectural discovery, resulting from the various adaptations throughout the museum's history, has been finding a number of long since bricked-up Victorian archways. We had always hoped to find some original features in the galleries and it was satisfying to see them appear when the plasterwork was chipped away. We are now reinstating these archways to allow visitors to move freely through the galleries as was intended by the original architects.

BA: Surprises are always part and parcel of a refurbishment project, however the archive material used for the main structural design proved fairly accurate and has meant the structural aspect to the works has progressed relatively smoothly.

The refurbishment is a big engineering challenge which is not to be underestimated, what has been the biggest challenge so far?

GG: The biggest challenge faced by the team so far has been coordinating the

designs of large scale engineering works and small scale architectural features such as glazed balustrades and sophisticated lighting schemes. All these elements are now beginning to come together on-site and the coordination will continue until the last spotlight is installed.

BA: The sheer number of separate major engineering elements requiring complex temporary propping schemes proved the biggest challenge. To achieve the architectural vision for the project and simultaneously accommodate building services needed a great deal of co-ordination and design thought early on, and a good working relationship with the contractor and the design team.

SK: The creation of the Arrivals Hall has perhaps created the greatest technical challenge for the Mechanical and Electrical design group. In its previous incarnation, the basement area was crammed with a multitude of pipes, cables, ducts and machinery – the services that keep such a large building alive. In the refurbished building, almost all of this space has been opened up to create a continuous vaulted hall. This presents an ongoing three-dimensional engineering



New galleries spotlight

Facing the Sea

problem. All of the mechanical and electrical equipment has been shunted upwards and outwards, compressed and concealed within the warren of cellars around the perimeter of the new space.

What does this project mean to you on a personal level?

GG: To be the architect on this project is a once in a lifetime opportunity and it is one that I continue to enjoy after more than five years worth of involvement! The building has thrown up new challenges every day and I have no doubt it will continue to do so for some time to come. There are times when the complexities of the project have seemed all-consuming and that is when it is best to imagine the opening day when it will all have been worth it.

BA: On a personal level, this is the dream project which may never be bettered. I was taken to the museum as a child on day trips and even then it was a magical place which inspired my thirst for knowledge and learning, and it is a privilege to bring all the training and experience to bear on a building close to my heart.

SK: My role as an electrical and mechanical project engineer is both very demanding (I have scarcely a moment on site to myself) – and highly rewarding. Working within and around the constraints of an important historic building requires seemingly enormous effort by everyone involved in the scheme. Ultimately, we all have a share in the success of this project – not least as future visitors ourselves. I look forward to wandering around the completed building with my family, enjoying the spaces and new exhibitions in relative tranquillity.

When visitors enter the new gallery *Facing the Sea* on the first floor, they will be invited to explore the unique environment and life on the islands of the Pacific Ocean.

Visitors can begin to learn about the phenomenal cultural diversity of the peoples of the Pacific and their relationship with the ocean, from the first islanders who arrived many thousands of years ago to those living there today.

The gallery, which will address questions of navigation, trade and exploration, will also convey the view of the Pacific society as reflected through art, lifestyles and contemporary communities. The gallery will feature key items such as the largest Maori canoe in a collection outside of New Zealand, a feathered cloak belonging to King Kamehameha II, the first Hawaiian king to visit the UK (pictured) and unique artefacts charting the European encounter with the region, including materials

from the voyages of Captain Cook, HMS Rattlesnake, HMS Topaz and the Challenger Expedition.

Large images of islands and seascapes will run the length of the gallery walls to help create a horizon line and set the visitor in the ocean environment and atmosphere of the South Pacific. The gallery aims to evoke the impact of living within a seafaring culture, parallels which can be drawn with Scotland.

Throughout the gallery there will be opportunities for visitors to get hands-on with interactives. In the area exploring the human settlement of the Pacific, the visitor is invited to try their hand at navigating the expansive ocean using both Pacific Islanders and Europeans navigational tools. There is also an opportunity to listen to and read poetry and songs about the sea from the perspectives of both Pacific and Scottish islanders.

As visitors leave the gallery the hope is that they do so with a new understanding of a part of the world that is very far from our shores, and will be able to reflect on the differences and similarities between islanders many thousand miles away and ourselves.



Feature

Cornerstone of an Empire

Although relatively unknown to today's public, Alexander Dalrymple led a life exemplifying service to his country during the age of Enlightenment. His influential role in Britain's maritime history makes him an outstanding historical figure. We were therefore delighted to recently acquire this important painting of a man who is so closely connected with our history and national life.

As the first Hydrographer to the Admiralty from 1795, Scottish-born Dalrymple is credited with the creation and design of the Admiralty Chart, which was subsequently developed over 150 years to form a body of over 4,000 charts, which guarantee safe navigation of the world's oceans by naval and merchant shipping. In this way, he helped lay one of the secure foundations upon which the far-flung trading posts of the British Empire was based.

Whilst translating some Spanish documents captured in the Philippines in 1752, Dalrymple found evidence proving a passage south of New Guinea now known as Torres Strait. The discovery led Dalrymple to publish a book which aroused widespread interest in his claim of the existence of an unknown continent. This resulted in Captain Cook undertaking another voyage into the South Pacific which eventually led in 1770 to the British discovery and charting of the Eastern coastline of Australia.

The headquarters of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office in Taunton are aptly named after Dalrymple and his papers are deposited in the National Archives at Kew. However the only other original likeness of Dalrymple is a pencil profile held in the collections of the National Library of Australia, which makes this portrait a rare and important addition to the Museums' collections.



The painting which is attributed to Edinburgh artist John Thomas Seton is dated 1765 and is the only known likeness of Dalrymple in the UK.

Dr Alison Morrison-Low, Principal Curator of Sciences says, "We are extremely pleased to have been able to purchase this portrait, which will be a great addition to our new *Discoveries* gallery when we re-open in 2011. It will be on display along with material from our scientific instrument collection, to represent a major but relatively unknown Scottish innovator".

Until 2011, the painting can be visited in the National Museum of Scotland in the Innovators gallery. Its display will introduce many for the first time to this Scottish pioneering leader.

Did you know that you can explore National Museums Scotland's collections online at www.nms.ac.uk/our_collections

Curator focus

Nick Fraser – Keeper of Natural Sciences

I, along with many thousand other natural scientists, am interested in one very simple question; *“How does the world work?”* The new Natural World galleries are designed to challenge the visitor to ask the same question and inspire them to learn more about the world around them.

Of course there is no such thing as a simple answer to such a question, and inevitably we must divide this question into millions of very complex sub-questions. Since the natural world recognises no political boundaries, searching for elusive answers inevitably takes us to many parts of the world. Moreover, there are no boundaries in time, so in order to fully understand where today’s flora and fauna came from and how it may change in the future we must delve into Deep Time. So the new galleries will focus on life around the entire world – not just Scotland – and will include life from the past as well as the present.

For me, one of the most fascinating periods in the history of life on earth is the Triassic over 200 million years ago. At that time all the continents were joined together in the supercontinent, Pangaea. With no Atlantic ocean the US was an overland journey from Scotland – albeit a very long one! This is the time when many modern groups of animals made their first appearance, including mammals, crocodiles, turtles, frogs and flies. Oh, and of course, the first dinosaurs! Since the late 1970s my research has focused on what brought these profound faunal changes about.

Prior to coming to Edinburgh almost two years ago, I worked for several years at the Virginia Museum of Natural History (VMNH). While there, I developed a major collaborative project with scientists from Russia, Europe



Nick Fraser and colleague showing the Deputy Director of the National Geological Museum in Beijing the Triassic plants they collected in Liaoning Province.

and the United States to look at one of the most important Triassic sites anywhere in the world. Located just 30 minutes drive from VMNH in the tobacco growing belt of the Piedmont district, the Solite Quarry, is continuing to yield some spectacular remains of reptiles, plants and insects. It holds the records for the first members of many

modern insect families, including an early blood sucking fly, water bugs and ground beetles. These animals lived in a world free of polar ice caps alongside the oldest dinosaurs. What lessons does this period hold for us today living in a world facing major climate changes? I am sure that the new galleries will make you want to learn more.

Continuing support



As these pictures show, the past few months have seen campaign events extend to the US and these have inspired and delighted our many friends and supporters there.

In October, generous supporters in the Chicago area hosted an “evening of insight and inspiration” with our curators. A special feature of the evening was a whisky tasting kindly provided by Moët Hennessy USA, who introduced guests to their Glenmorangie and Ardbeg whiskies.

In November, a gathering of supporters in New York came together to meet Alexander Stoddart, The Queen’s Sculptor in Scotland, who spoke with insight, passion and humour about the Scottish Enlightenment and its relevance as an inspiration for the Royal Museum Project.

We continue to build support for our campaign which remains on track to reach its £12m target. We invite your help to ensure that collections will be preserved for future generations and continue to captivate and educate visitors for many years to come.

To find out how you can support the campaign please call our Campaign Team on +44 (0)131 247 4095 or go online at: www.nms.ac.uk/royalmuseumproject

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the following donors to the campaign:

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