

The objects in museums' collections tell stories about people, places, nature and thought. It is only possible to understand the world around us if we understand its past, both natural and man-made. The stories told by these objects, brought to life by study and display, help more easily explore common themes and threads through history and relate those to the present day. Some of the most comprehensive and internationally important collections of natural history, ethnography, technology, art, literature and design are held by UK museums - and so these world collections tell world stories.

UK museums have a rich history of working in partnership with their counterparts overseas to unlock and tell these world stories. This forms the bedrock of long-established international relationships, formed through collaboration on ground-breaking research and exhibitions on subjects as varied as Old Masters paintings, palaeontology and antique arms.

Loans, academic study, acquisitions, special exhibitions, research, staff exchanges and maintenance of the permanent galleries provides the means of building international networks and relationships. This work maintains UK museums' pre-eminence; allows them to ensure greatest public access to their collections and their expertise; and ensures they are able to deliver a relevant and vibrant public programme.

Museums' audiences are potentially larger than ever, with easier access to information about the collections. New technology ensures quicker and wider cultural and information exchange, and so these audiences are more curious about the world around them. They pose questions 21st century major museums are able to consider through the stories told by their objects. By doing this however, other opportunities open up for

museums, and are opened up by museums for others with a role in community and international relations, and tourism and investment. By recognising and being aware of this, and working strategically and sharing information, the potential of this work can be maximised.

Museums' motivation for working internationally may be to maintain their high standards of collections care, research and display, however these activities can have a wider impact beyond just the presentation of an exhibition. **Museums have a role in economic growth and investment, cultural exchange, the preservation of memory and exploration of identity, and diplomacy.**

Why is museums' international work important now?

In the early 21st century, the world is undergoing fundamental and rapid technological, economic and social change. A museum's audience has never been so large and not everyone will experience the museum by arriving at the main entrance. The way people engage with cultural activity has changed markedly, and so has the exposure to different forms of cultural exchange. Audiences are no longer passive recipients of museum activity, and experiencing the cultural output of another country or culture is no longer the preserve of an elite few. Fuelled by social media, the internet, smartphone technology, global news, more accessible international travel and globalisation, cultural exchange is now easier and more immediate than ever before. It can be accessed by both individuals and mass audiences. The impact of the growth of Asian and South American economies, political events in North Africa and the Middle East, and daily news and opinions are brought directly into the homes, inboxes and Twitter feeds of the general public. Areas with

rapid economic growth and political change are now familiar and visible to a UK audience, making the UK public more curious about their culture, history and heritage. The reverse is also true – in countries where UK museums have not historically had an audience, new technology satisfies a desire to discover more about the world. Half of the 26 million downloads of the BBC Radio 4/British Museum podcast *A History of the World in 100 Objects* were made outside of the UK .

A consequence of economic and civil society development across the world has been a desire to improve the museums and galleries sector in those regions because they are a source of national pride. There is therefore a demand to improve existing facilities and the skills of the museum workforce, as well as to showcase the treasures and tell the history of the nation. Furthermore, museums and galleries form part of an emerging tourism industry as well as playing a larger role in formal education. Improvements to the museums sector may include the building of new facilities designed by internationally renowned architects, the improvement of existing buildings which house the country's national collections or the development of training programmes for new staff. As the sector is not always as established, those managing the improvement look to the UK (and elsewhere in Europe and the US) for advice on almost every aspect of the development and management of new or improved facilities and their collections. New facilities can be large and include purpose-built temporary exhibition spaces, and with their creation comes an increasing demand for large-scale touring exhibitions to fill them and entertain a middle-class with a disposable income, more leisure time and a curiosity about a wider world they can more easily access than ever before.

Economic growth and investment

International cultural activity is a driver of economic growth through tourism and provides a means for the museums to encourage overseas investment. Both are critical in the current economic climate.

Publicly-funded museums help encourage and inspire growth within the creative industries. Museums are exploring their newly accessible worldwide audience through the development of services and products, some harnessing new digital technologies to do so and working with UK technology companies to do so. Museums license the use of images, film, and sound recordings to commercial organisations across the world.

The UK's major museums are some of the country's major tourist attractions. The UK is home to three of the five most visited art museums in the world. 25% of overseas visitors to London visited the British Museum in 2010/11 ; there were 17.7 million overseas visits to DCMS-sponsored museums in 2010/11 and the National Museum of Scotland is the most visited attraction outside London; and there are now more visitors each year to the museums on Exhibition Road in London than to the city of Venice . The UK's major museums, with their remarkable collections, world-class exhibitions and excellent reputations, clearly drive inward tourism meaning they provide a significant economic benefit to their region. The UK Government launched the GREAT campaign in September 2011, demonstrating the importance of the industry to encouraging greater economic growth. International visitors generate direct income for museums via secondary spend on site, however a real economic impact is felt on the area local to the museum through visitors' spend on retail, transport, accommodation and food. In 2006, overseas visitors to major UK museums and galleries are estimated to have spent £436 million as a result of their visit.

Major museums not only provide a reason to visit the UK, but they also represent the UK as a significant part of "UK plc". Excellent yet less formal relationships developed through cultural activity can help to create a positive context within which more formal economic and trade relationships can flourish.

In certain circumstances, touring exhibitions can provide investment for major museums. There is a demand for large exhibitions overseas. In Japan, visiting special exhibitions is an extremely popular pastime and they are frequently the most visited art exhibitions in the world . Similarly, figures released in April 2012 show the marked increase in popularity of temporary contemporary art exhibitions in Brazil. The development of new museums with large temporary exhibition spaces, particularly in Asia, has created a greater demand for touring exhibitions and consultancy services. Major UK museums are well-placed to be able to provide such services. Although a number are already engaged in such projects in Saudi Arabia, India, Russia, the UAE, Qatar and Singapore, there may be the opportunity to do more. By engaging in these long-term projects, UK museums can develop a relationship with audiences, academics and artists in that region, and develop collaborative projects built on trust and local understanding.

Cultural exchange

Museums loan objects across the world – either to be part of an exhibition or as one of a museums' own touring exhibitions. When the Science Museum, V&A and the British Museum lent objects to the Urban Footprint Pavilion (curated by the Shanghai Museum) at the 2011 World Expo in Shanghai, 5.41 million people saw them during the course of the Expo. In 2010/11, the National Galleries of Scotland lent nearly 400 objects overseas; Tate's international touring exhibitions were seen by nearly 1.65 million people in 2010/11; and from March 2009, 58 masterpieces from the National Museum Wales' Impressionists collection toured the United States for 18 months.

The V&A's Beatrix Potter collections are in demand from Japanese institutions because of the enduring popularity there of the author; the National Maritime Museum explores its location on the Meridian at Greenwich in the *Longitude* exhibition at venues in Sydney, Beijing, Washington and Chicago; and the Museum of London used the continuing fascination with the city of London as the reason to tour 70 contemporary and historic photographs to the Seoul Museum of History.

The cities where UK museums' exhibit, lecture and collaborate with artists are no longer just in their familiar regions of North America and Western Europe. Museums still work in New York, Paris and Berlin, but they now also collaborate with institutions in Kuala Lumpur and Kobe, Moscow and Mumbai, Riyadh and Rio de Janeiro.

High profile loans into the UK also generate a rise in international interest in the UK museums sector. When the British Museum hosted the First Emperor exhibition, not only did over 800,000 people visit the exhibition but visits to their website from East Asia increased markedly. Museum activities generate a phenomenal amount of press interest across the world. The Natural History Museum's acquisition of the Tissant Martian meteorite was reported in, amongst other publications, the Tehran Times and the New York Times and on news websites in Pakistan and Morocco. Many museums' websites make this information more easily available on their websites (or in the British Museum and V&A's case dedicated websites) in a variety of non-English languages.

UK audiences also see different parts of the world as major museums borrow objects and work with artists, curators and communities from across the world to enhance their own public programmes.

In 2012, the Science Museum displayed the pod used in the 2011 rescue of the Chilean Miners; 350 objects were lent by Chinese institutions to the Fitzwilliam Museum for *The Search for Immortality*; the Scottish Gallery of Modern Art borrowed drawings by Edvard Munch from a private Norwegian collection; and Tate Modern displayed recent work by artists living in Tangiers and Beirut in *I decided not to save the world*.

Memory and Identity

Museums are uniquely able to present objects and exhibitions without agenda, allowing visitors to explore their own history, culture and identity, as well as that of those they see as "other". The development of and importance placed on cultural institutions, particularly museums and memorial centres, in the wake of significant world events demonstrates a need for institutions which record and reflect tragedy, history and cultural identity. It is often part of the reconciliation process after major civil unrest to reconstruct and preserve cultural heritage, and museums play a continuing role in reconciliation and understanding. Museums have offered their assistance with projects in Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Iraq and Rwanda. The Imperial War Museums has long commemorated the Holocaust through major exhibitions, international conferences and through the provision of assistance to museums who have significant and pertinent collections, such as the Majdanek State Museum in Poland. In January 2011, IWM hosted an international conference on research into Nazi Persecution, involving 180 academics from 17 different countries which had academic and diplomatic significance. The three day conference, the third on the theme, covered psychiatry, philosophy, literature, sociology, history and anthropology. In 2009, IWM London mounted the temporary exhibition *Unspeakable* - a display of artworks, including some by camp survivors who eventually settled in the UK.

Culture's role in diplomacy

A person's view of the world can be formed by what is immediately accessible to them – art, photography, literature, music and films, the media, food – and museums utilise these and their objects to tell stories. Visitors to the touring exhibitions *China: Journey to the East* and *Takhti* (and accompanying events) at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums' venues were able to more fully explore the history and culture of day-to-day life in China and Iran. Museums help maintain important community relations. As part of a locally-funded programme, the National Media Museum does this by working with Pakistani people who have recently arrived in Bradford, by hosting ESOL classes and engaging communities through the annual International Film Festival.

Museums are frequently able to maintain good relationships when more formal channels of communication prove challenging, meaning cultural exchange can flourish in the most unlikely of circumstances. It is UK museums' independence and freedom from the direct control of government which allows them to pursue such relationships. The British Museum lent the Cyrus Cylinder to the National Museum in Tehran in 2010, at a time when formal diplomatic relations were challenging. 1 million people visited the exhibition. Similarly, the V&A has a long-established relationship with the Kremlin Museum in Moscow resulting in reciprocal exhibition loans, whilst Tate and the Henry Moore Foundation have also lent objects to the institution. Furthermore, the National Museum of Scotland and the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg will co-produce the exhibition *Catherine the Great* in Edinburgh in 2012, and Royal Museums Greenwich and the State Hermitage Museum have collaborated on an exhibition about Peter the Great.

Museums and galleries are also involved in international education programmes. Over 12,600 pupils from 38 countries have taken part in Tate's award winning *turbinegeneration*. Research suggests that a child's life chances can be improved by taking part in this project, enabling them to develop their language skills, self-confidence and sense of self-worth by enabling them to learn about cultural differences by working with children in different countries.

Museums are a crucial part of the UK bilateral relationships – including with India, China, Japan, Russia, Brazil, Pakistan and the Gulf – with an emphasis on reciprocity and partnership. The broad programme of UK museum activity with Indian institutions, loan exhibitions like *From Steep Hillside*:

Ancient Rock Carvings from Dazu at National Museum Wales, and partnerships like the Natural History Museum's with Saudi Aramco in Saudi Arabia, all help promote better understanding and a very positive context for wider negotiations to take place.

The significance of the cultural element of the UK relationship with Oman was clearly demonstrated by the opening of *The Art of Seeing Nature: Masterpieces from Tate Britain* at Sayyid Faisal bin Ali Museum in Muscat by the Sultan of Oman and HM The Queen as part of the British contribution to the National Day of the Sultanate of Oman in November 2010.

A healthy, vibrant cultural relationship strengthens the diplomatic ties for the UK. Some museum directors have emphasised the wider significance of culture in international relationships by accompanying Government Ministers on their international visits – including the Prime Minister, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the Scottish First Minister and Welsh Minister for Heritage.



A BRITISH MUSEUM TOUR

CHINA

JOURNEY TO THE EAST

Supported by BP A CHINA NOW legacy project

30 January - 9 May 2010

SUNDERLAND MUSEUM & WINTER GARDENS

Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens
Burdon Road, Sunderland, SR1 1PP
Tel: (0191) 553 2323
Textphone: 18001 0191 553 2323
Email: sunderland@twmuseums.org.uk
www.twmuseums.org.uk/sunderland
Open: Monday - Saturday 10am - 5pm
Sunday 2pm - 5pm
Nearest Metro station: Sunderland

Free entry

Image: Earthenware roof tile in the form of Guan Yu riding his horse. Made in north China between 1480 and 1620 © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Sunderland City Council

TYNE & WEAR ARCHIVES & MUSEUMS

Preeminent collections and expertise

Museums can only remain major tourist attractions, explore their potential to earn more of their own income and play a role in creating good cultural relations if they maintain their status as world class institutions and can compete for attention on world stage. However, in the 21st century, it may only be possible to be world class if you work internationally, otherwise a museum could quickly become anachronistic. The Tate, V&A and British Museum have all set up acquisitions committees for specific regions from which they would like to invest in acquiring objects. Many museums develop relationships with academics, community groups and artists overseas to build up their knowledge of different communities, people and regions – and then build this into the research and interpretation of their own collections.

UK museums have long shared their practical skills and expertise with others, and learnt from colleagues across the world by the same means. Staff from Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia and Ghana worked on collections in the British Museum and at their UK partner museums. Ghanaian curators re-hung parts of the British Museum's Living and Dying Gallery and British Museum staff oversaw the renovation of the ethnography collection store at the National Museum of Kenya. Major cultural institutions engage in ambitious mass participation web projects (such as Old Weather and Solar Stormwatch which Royal Museums Greenwich are a part of) and digitisation of collections (such as the British newspaper archive by the British Library) to gather knowledge and make collections available to academic communities across the world for study.

Long-standing relationships are fostered and maintained through academic activity such as the study of Latin American art, Ancient Mesopotamia and the care of African textiles. Academic research is a fundamental part of museums' operation. It is the means by which the world can be better understood using museum collections. More than 300 scientists work at the Natural History Museum on projects that help us better understand the natural world and human interaction with it, such as the study of biodiversity in Borneo pests, and insect-borne diseases by researching the Brazilian blood-sucking blackfly. National Museum Wales has similarly led the study of Molluscan Biodiversity in East Africa, whilst the Wallace Collection has been part of an international research project studying the metallurgy of steel by using their Asian arms collection.

Case Studies

From sell-out touring exhibitions attracting audiences of thousands to staff exchange programmes which share expertise between nations; from relationship-building in regions where government relations faces challenges to scientific research that saves lives; UK museums have an impact in every region in the world.

1. International tour of the 2009 Jameel Prize exhibition by the V&A

The Jameel Prize is a bi-annual international award for contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic tradition. Its aim is to explore the relationship between Islamic traditions of art, craft and design and contemporary work as part of a wider debate about Islamic culture and its role today. The Jameel Prize 2009 exhibition has been on tour in the Middle East from January 2010 to March 2011. The exhibition visited: the National Museum, Saudi Arabia; the National Museum, Syria; the Beiteddine Palace, Lebanon; the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization, UAE; Sakip Sabanci Museum, Turkey; and La Villa des Art, Morocco. The tour is organised by the V&A and supported by Abdul Latif Jameel Community Initiatives.

2. turbinegeneration, Tate

This unique educational programme brings together schools, galleries, artists and cultural organisations from across the world to explore contemporary cultural issues and exchange their work online. The project links 275 schools, 40 galleries and cultural organisations and a similar number of artists from 40 countries (and growing). It was granted patronage by UNESCO in 2010. Participating countries include Brazil, China, Colombia, France, Ghana, Greece, India, Kenya, Portugal, Poland, Russia, Spain and the UK. Schools and colleges can register to collaborate with an international partner to explore their cultures and exchange ideas and artwork online. This is supported by a free downloadable project pack to initiate an ongoing dialogue between schools in different countries during which they explore Tate's resources and other collections of art in their area.

3. Tyne & Wear Museums Archaeology

Tyne and Wear Museums Archaeology established itself as a leading provider of commercial and commissioned archaeological services in northern England with areas of special expertise which are in demand nationally and internationally. This has included work on UNESCO World Heritage Sites. A further aspect of their work is a long standing partnership with the EarthWatch Institute, involving international students conducting archaeological excavations.

4. HMS Belfast and St Petersburg

HMS Belfast worked in partnership with the Severnaya Verf shipyard in St Petersburg during 2010-11. The shipyard arranged the funding, building and shipping of replacement masts for the ship as part of a series of events to mark the role of the Belfast in the Arctic Convoys during

the Second World War. A dedication ceremony was held in the presence of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh and was attended by Russian dignitaries. As part of the ongoing relationship being built with Russian contacts, HMS Belfast hosted the annual Russian VE Day commemoration with an event attended by HRH The Duke of Kent, the Russian Ambassador and veterans of the Arctic Convoys.

5. Natural History Museum in Singapore

Natural History Museum (NHM) has been working with W Architects and the National University of Singapore to create a new museum and research centre to house the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research. Using knowledge and skills gained from planning, designing and delivering the award-winning Darwin Centre, NHM has assisted with the creation of this new scientific cultural centre. The Museum is currently working with partners on the



brief development, space planning strategy and facility specification for this exciting new museum and collections research centre which will open in 2014.

6. Bradford International Film Festival and National Media Museum

Bradford International Film Festival exists to bring the best of film to the National Media Museum in Bradford. The Museum sits at the heart of Bradford, UNESCO's first City of Film. The 17th Festival took place in 2011, and showcased over 190 titles drawn from over 60 countries. In 2011, delegates visited the festival from over 15 countries and the event attracts a number of high profile visitors to Bradford.

7. National Museums Scotland and National Museums Malawi: *David Livingstone I presume?*

David Livingstone I Presume? exhibition is presented in Edinburgh during the bi-centenary year of the birth of the famed Scottish missionary. Livingstone still has a strong presence in African culture, particularly in Malawi. The purpose of the formal partnership with the National Museums Malawi is to share knowledge and raise the profile of Livingstone, and enhance the information presented to audiences in Scotland and in Africa. Both organisations would like to work together beyond the exhibition, and National Museums Malawi has identified specific knowledge and skills requirements needed to develop a new National Museum in Lilongwe. National Museums Scotland also hopes to ensure a legacy from the exhibition can be left in Malawi.

8. UK Museums working with South Africa

When the Science Museum re-developed its popular hands-on interactive gallery Launchpad in 2007, the exhibits were donated to the Unizul Science Centre in South Africa. Following the success of the Launchpad Outreach Programme in the UK, the Science Museum entered into a partnership with the Unizul Science Centre. Staff from the Science Museum's Learning Unit visited the centre in April 2011 to work with both the Unizul staff and those from other science centres across South Africa. Participants shared skills and resources required to deliver science shows, workshops and programmes. Tyne and Wear Museums and Archives work in partnership with Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum. They work together on projects involving source communities and young people, and these fed into the 2012 exhibition *Journeys in Beadwork* at Shipley Art Gallery.

9. Afghanistan

Using the network created by the World Collections Programme (and accompanying seed-funding), the British Library, British Museum, and British Library and Tate in Afghanistan worked together to deliver a series of high profile exhibitions and capacity building projects with partners in Afghanistan. Tate worked with Simon Norfolk to hold workshops for young Afghan photographers. This created two exhibitions in 2011 – *Views of Kabul* at the Queen's Palace in Kabul, and *Burke + Norfolk* at Tate Modern. Furthermore 16,000 people saw the British



Library's exhibition of reproductions of works from their John Burke archive in *Afghanistan Observed*, at the Queen's Palace before it then toured to Herat. The British Museum borrowed over 200 objects from the National Museum of Afghanistan for the popular *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World* and providing training to curators from the museum. The exhibition was opened by the UK Foreign Secretary and the President of Afghanistan.

10. UK Museums and Qatar

A number of UK cultural organisations work with cultural authorities in Qatar. It shows the benefit of investment in long-term collaborative cultural relationships and has resulted in large-scale exhibitions in the UK and Qatar, the sharing of expertise and the study of UK collections. It has covered a variety of disciplines including libraries, museum education, portraiture, and contemporary art.

Maximising the potential

Long-term planning is critical to the successful development of productive cultural relationships. This demonstrates a desire to establish a meaningful and reciprocal engagement which is consequently more sustainable. One-off projects rarely make a lasting impact. Recent investment in specific geographic areas, over a longer period of time through the World Collections Programme, Stories of the World and Connections through Culture demonstrates the benefits of taking a more strategic approach. These programmes have also built a better level of working knowledge within the sector.

Therefore, in order to achieve greater co-ordination, better planning and to maximise the potential of museums' international programmes and ambitions, NMDC's members will seek to develop and maintain good working relationships with key bodies and:

- Provide timely and tailored briefings to relevant Government departments, the Devolved Administrations, the British Council, UKTI and other strategically important organisations with similar interests. The production of a calendar of overseas touring exhibitions may assist in the planning of cultural deliverables for VIP visits and programmes;

- Through a standing group of international leads from member institutions, NMDC members will better share information, knowledge and skills to ensure most efficient use of available resources and to maximise opportunities available; and
- Seek to develop relationships with organisations that benefit from the impact of museums' international work.

End Notes

- i British Museum
- ii http://www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/news_and_press/press_releases/2011/bm_reaches_record_audiences.aspx
- iii Analysis provided by Marketlink Research for Tate Galleries
- iv The National Railway Museum and the British Museum have worked in Sierra Leone; the British Library, British Museum and Tate have all developed significant projects with colleagues in Afghanistan; the British Museum worked with the British Army and Iraqi authorities in Basra, Iraq; the Museum of London has worked with museum colleagues in Rwanda.
- v Visitor figures published by DCMS
http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/research_and_statistics/8609.aspx and Travel Trends 2010, ONS
- vi Calculated using figures published by DCMS, 2011.
- vii <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/nov/11/london-exhibition-road-cultural?newsfeed=true>
- viii VMuseums and Galleries in Britain: Economic, Social and Creative Impacts (2006)
www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/Travers_Report.html
- ix <http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/annualreview1011.pdf>, p.44
- x National Galleries of Scotland
- xi Tate Galleries
- xii Beatrix Potter's books used to form part of the curriculum in Japanese schools and are consequently popular. The V&A lent 86 objects to the exhibition *Beatrix Potter – Affection for Art and Nature*, and the Picture Book of Peter Rabbit which toured to five venues in Japan in 2010.
- xiii British Museum
- xiv <http://www.tehrantimes.com/science/95394-rare-martian-meteorite-given-to-science>
- xv <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/09/science/space/meteorite-from-mars-is-at-home-in-london-after-a-world-tour.html>
- xvi <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/atfig/atfig10.pdf>
- xvii <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/atfig/atfig11.pdf>
- xviii <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/index.html>
- xix <http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/annrep/2010to2011/main-achieve/intdevelop/index.html>

