

# **NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF SCOTLAND RESPONSE TO THE CULTURE COMMISSION CONSULTATION PHASE 1**

## **Summary**

On behalf of everyone in Scotland, NMS cares for collections of international, national and regional importance. Our own vision - to be "a world class museums service that informs, educates and inspires", our collections and our knowledge and expertise place us in a strong position to contribute to a new vision for culture in Scotland. We are committed to expanding our services across Scotland, in partnership with the museums, educational and cultural communities, and to enabling and empowering our partners.

Because of the quality and size of our collections, and our broad knowledge base, we play a key and unique role in the Scottish museums community. We are a national centre of excellence, in curation, collections care and conservation, museum based learning and exhibitions. The expertise and experience of our staff is used by the cultural community throughout Scotland. Our international relationships enable us to promote Scotland abroad while enabling people in Scotland to enjoy outstanding international exhibitions. We believe that we can play a key role in a transformed cultural sector, and that we can help build a national partnership of museums, delivering exciting and excellent services as part of a new cultural landscape.

## **1. The National Museums of Scotland**

On behalf of the people of Scotland, the National Museums of Scotland (NMS) cares for and enables access to museum collections of national and international importance. NMS has in its care over 3 million objects, from many subject areas, collected over 200 years. They are the largest and most diverse museum collections in Scotland by a significant margin, and in a great many areas comprise the most representative concentration of material in Scotland for a particular subject area. They represent not only Scotland, nationally, regionally and locally, but also cultures worldwide, science and technology and the natural world.

In 2003/04 there were 1.3 million visits to the 6 museums that NMS operates<sup>1</sup>. We were founded in 1985 by Act of Parliament, and have a statutory responsibility to care for and add to our collections and to provide access to them. We are funded by the Scottish Executive; are governed by a Board of Trustees which is appointed by Scottish Ministers, and are, through the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, accountable to the Scottish Parliament. We have about 400 staff, who together represent a breadth and depth of expertise unique in Scotland – in research, collections management, conservation, learning, marketing, estates management, visitor and commercial operations.

We have always worked in partnership with the "non-national" museums community, which comprises local authority funded museums, independent, university and regimental museums. Within this wider museums community there

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<sup>1</sup> The Royal Museum and Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, the National War Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh Castle, the Museum of Flight in East Lothian, the Museum of Scottish Country Life in East Kilbride and Shambellie House Museum of Costume in Dumfries.

are also many collections of significance, and together with those of NMS and the National Galleries of Scotland they can be described as the "distributed national collection".

## **2. NMS's Vision for the Future**

In 2003, after consulting widely across our stakeholders – users, partners, the Scottish Executive, Trustees, staff and the museums and cultural community - we launched a new vision for the 21<sup>st</sup>. Century:

### **"A world class museums service that informs, educates and inspires"**

Our vision is founded on the belief that museums have a vital role to play in enabling people of all ages to learn and develop, to explore our heritage, encourage international understanding, enhance community development and contribute to cultural tourism and economic development. It is a vision which aligns to the First Minister's vision for culture in Scotland "as the most potent force for individual change and social vision".

Our vision involves delivery of excellence in three areas:

- people across Scotland and worldwide can use and enjoy the national collections;
- people in Scotland can see outstanding international collections from elsewhere;
- people can benefit from collections held in museums everywhere in Scotland, through the provision of advice, sharing expertise, loans, partnership working and other means.

## **3. NMS's role in a 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland**

**In this response we set out the role that a centrally funded national museums service should play in a transformed cultural framework.** We believe that, because of our established collections and expertise, we can make a contribution of unique and significant value in achieving the vision which the museums community has created. In NMS, Scotland already has a critical mass of capacity in terms of collections, expertise and experience. In the sections below we set out how we can and wish to contribute. We have used the 5 questions set by the Commission as a broad framework, and we have included a series of illustrative case studies in an appendix.

The existing relationships between the national and non-national sectors in Scotland provides a distinctly different context within Scotland in comparison to the rest of the UK. For many years Scotland can be said to have been leading the way within the UK in terms of the supporting and enabling role played by its National Museums and National Galleries. This includes loans, conservation, curatorial and collections management advice and training. While this activity may not have been the result of an explicit and clear national framework or plan, it does mean that there already exists a strong foundation on which to build.

In 2003 we significantly strengthened our historical commitment to working nationally by explicitly making a national role one of our seven core Strategic Aims:

*To fulfil a national role by working in partnership with the museums, cultural and educational communities of Scotland to deliver accessible services, advice and expertise.*

Against this background, NMS believes that it is now time to develop a coherent framework for museum provision as a whole across Scotland. NMS has been an active member of the Museums and Galleries Working Group which has produced a vision and recommendations for the Cultural Commission. NMS fully supports those recommendations as the way forward for our sector.

#### **4. The delivery of services and access to them. How best to provide cultural facilities and ensure the widest access to them?**

In NMS, the public has a service which plays a key and unique role in the Scottish museums community, one which supports and enables the preservation of and access to the distributed national collection, for learning, personal development and creative engagement. Fundamental to this role is the quality and size of the NMS collections, and our knowledge of them. This enables NMS alone to combine intimate knowledge of museum and other collections across Scotland with a wide-ranging awareness of international developments and trends. Our singular relationship with the museums, educational, cultural and scientific communities involves many forms of partnership, on which we believe we should build for the future delivery of cultural entitlements:

- Strong, well presented central collections are a vital element in the maintenance and development of a positive national identity. NMS's collections inform the public understanding of Scotland as a nation through the high quality displays in the Museum of Scotland and the learning resources and outreach that flow from them. There are opportunities for us to do more of this, through partnerships, such as the joint NMS/National Galleries of Scotland and National Library of Scotland exhibition planned for the 2007 Year of Highland Culture.
- We have the capacity to put on major exhibitions of material from other national institutions from across the world, helping to position the new Scotland firmly and visibly within the international community. Our many international loans have a similar impact. NMS exhibitions travelling internationally promote an understanding of Scotland as a forward looking nation building on a rich history and a record of creativity and innovation [Case Study 1].
- NMS provides a source of reputable, informed and current advice and information available nowhere else in Scotland. In effect, NMS is expected to be able to identify objects or sources on behalf of the Scottish museum community. This is achieved through a combination of staff knowledge and research, and participation in and awareness of, the international academic community. For many in the Scottish museum community NMS is the principal doorway to this wider world [Case Study 2]. The expertise which we can provide, based on the national collections, together with that of the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland, is key to the operation of the National Fund for Acquisitions, which

provides grants to museums, galleries, libraries and archives throughout Scotland to acquire material.

- NMS supports community access to heritage through collaborative research and fieldwork [Case Study 3]. Equally important are collaborative international projects which build relationships between Scotland and communities round the world [Case Study 4].
- NMS's collections are a resource for the whole of the museums community. Loans from the national collections, well documented, conserved and presented, can add immeasurably to a community's experience of its heritage, and the understanding of visitors to the area [Case Study 5]. Last year NMS lent over 1,500 objects to over 100 venues in Scotland. There were 140,000 visits to special exhibitions where material from the national collections was on loan.
- NMS's holds internationally important scientific collections, a geological and zoological record which is the basis for an active research programme, much of which is undertaken in collaboration with other organisations in the UK and internationally. This activity illustrates the wider role of museums in creating knowledge across many disciplines, and for NMS in particular in maintaining a role as a centre of scientific excellence for Scotland. Our scientific research has many practical applications, for example, in supporting conservation and environmental projects [Case Study 6]

We believe that the expansion of these services, in partnership with non-national museums, local authorities and other sectors will be a key element in broadening access to heritage within a cultural entitlement. However there needs to be a better resourced and focused strategic framework within which the impact of these partnerships can be maximised.

##### **5. Education: How do we develop artistic, cultural and social skills and provide cultural knowledge?**

The key factor about museum learning is that it has been shown to benefit learners of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. Well constructed learning programmes that enable people to investigate objects and explore their making and meaning, arouse curiosity and engage creativity across a range of learning needs and styles. However the quality of the learning outcomes are dependent on having the necessary skill, professionalism and resources for development and delivery of the programmes, whatever the target audience. NMS's Learning and Programmes team has built up expertise in the delivery of learning over many years for an increasingly diverse audience. We are one of the major providers of learning opportunities in museums in Scotland, and in 2003/04 over 148,000 people participated in our programmes. We support learning in several different ways:

- We deliver learning services at our museums but also, increasingly, within communities, working in partnership with museums, schools, arts and community organisations [Case Study 7]. Unlike many local authority funded museums, we can and do work across regional boundaries and our touring

programmes are unique in this respect [Case Study 8]. We provide opportunities for all sections of the community to have access to learning throughout their lives including mainstream visitors, school and university students, families; for under-represented target groups such as young adults (outside formal education visits) and people who may experience or perceive barriers to participation, due to physical, economic, geographical or cultural factors and to people who are visiting Scotland. All of this activity is underpinned by research which enables us to understand our audiences and how they learn.

- We have a proven track record in facilitating a more strategic approach to museum education in Scotland [Case Study 9] and in defining and promoting best practice.
- We create innovative learning resources available across the museums community [Case Study 10] and contribute to curriculum development through partnerships with organisations such as Learning Teaching Scotland.
- We have a significant role in promoting and supporting science education in Scotland [Case Study 11]

We have already made a strategic commitment to expand our delivery of learning, and we are doing so by investing in improved educational facilities at our museums and by establishing a new Access and Outreach team which is focussing on developing programmes for excluded groups and for delivery within communities. We believe that, within a strategic framework for museum delivery, we can play a key role in developing and delivering high quality museum based learning as part of a cultural entitlement:

- We could operate community based services on a truly national basis, such as collaborating with the National Galleries of Scotland and others to develop touring resources that reflect our shared collections and support learning interests that are often not well resourced at local/regional level, such as multi cultural programmes (involving for instance touring 'faith boxes').
- We could develop a greater range of collaborative activity and projects that can enhance museum education services either because NMS loans form the basis of a project or because a local/regional audience can benefit from a national context provided through linked resources, materials and services. Research by our Access and Outreach team indicates that local audiences are often keen to engage with the national collections because there is a strong perception of their value and importance.
- We could use our expertise and experience to help build a strategic learning infrastructure within the museums community. We could assist with audience research, defining standards and creating resources both direct and virtual which the whole sector could use.

## **6. Infrastructure**

NMS has played an active role in the Museums and Galleries Working Group. We fully support its recommendations. These include a recommendation that the role of NMS and THE National Galleries of Scotland should be recognised within a Scottish Museums Partnership, as providing:

- services based directly on our collections,
- advice, expertise and other support to build capacity for delivery across the museums community.

#### **7. Marketing and Promotion: How to increase and broaden the profile of the audience and the public engaging with cultural activity in Scotland?**

A cultural entitlement is founded on the premise that it will be of benefit to everyone in Scotland. For this to happen cultural services must be both accessible and relevant to the people who are entitled to use them. This requires 3 things to be in place:

- There is a need for a better understanding of audiences, both users and non users of cultural services. Some larger museums, such as NMS, undertake robust market research to inform the development of services. Many smaller museums have no resources to do so. There are numerous private and publically funded studies of participation in cultural activity, use of the heritage and activities by tourists. There is, however, no strategic framework to ensure that useful and consistent data is collected across Scotland or that it can be shared within and between sectors. NMS has the expertise and capacity to contribute within such a framework to the benefit of the museums and wider cultural community in Scotland.
- Delivery of excellent, accessible and relevant services. People in Scotland should receive services of an assured quality as part of their cultural entitlement, and the museums sector has put forward proposals to ensure that they are able to deliver on this. NMS is committed to using its collections and knowledge to enhance the experience of museum visitors and users in Scotland and abroad. Exhibitions such as the collaboration between Groam House Museum, Rosemarkie and NMS, for the Hugh Miller Centenary [Case Study 12], show how the national collections can widen and enrich community access to heritage. The delivery of the Masterplan for the renewal of the Royal Museum in Edinburgh, will not only create new interactive displays and facilities in an iconic building in the centre of Edinburgh, which will themselves appeal to a wider audience, but will be a focus for developing best practice in interpretation and learning, in partnership with other museums, the communities which they serve and the wider cultural and education sectors.
- Free access to cultural assets, such as museum and gallery collections, in ways which make it easy for people to use them without barriers imposed by distance. The museums sector has proposed the creation of a museums portal for Scotland. Such a portal would enable people to find out what museums there are, where they are and how to use them. It would also enable people to experience the collections, well explained and illustrated. The national collections, their richness and complexity and their links to collections over Scotland and the world, will be a key element of content. NMS has built up experience in digitisation projects and is keen to establish partnerships to create this content.

**8. Encouraging Creativity: What is the best way to maximise the creative potential of the people of Scotland?**

Museum collections inspire creativity. They are probably some of Scotland's least exploited cultural assets in this respect. Museums can create social capital, empowering individuals and groups, stimulating dialogue and challenging accepted views. The collections of NMS and NGS represent Scotland's largest repository of art, science and natural history. They form the basis of creative activities, such as workshops, art competitions, dance and drama, which often link across disciplines. These can reach out to excluded people [Case Study 13], stimulate contact with the creative industries (such as workshops associated with the *Game On: the History, Culture and Future of Videogames* exhibition which involved representatives from the games industry), or provide an opportunity for families to learn together (such as the weekend family activities in the Museum of Scotland).

It is also the case that museums can provide an appropriate public space for contemporary art, showcasing the creative excellence of Scotland's artists and craftspeople in a context that links to the collections. The recently completed installation by Ian Hamilton Finlay, linking the displays in the Museum of Scotland to the experience of Scotland's fishing communities, is an example of this.

**9. Cultural Entitlement**

NMS fully supports the recommendations on cultural rights and entitlement put forward by the Museums and Galleries Working Group:

**Cultural Rights**

**The museums community believes that there should be a national cultural right of access to cultural heritage.**

**Cultural Entitlement**

A national cultural entitlement should include:

- Every school child should be able to visit a museum of assured quality and within a reasonable distance, as part of curriculum based activity.
- Access for everyone to museum collections of assured quality and within a reasonable distance.
- Access to museum services which are responsive to community needs and aspirations.
- Online access to significant museum and gallery collections and services in Scotland through a national "museum portal".

## **ANNEX 1 - CASE STUDIES**

### **1. The Smithsonian Folk Life Festival**

NMS was one of the organisations which represented Scotland at the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival, held in Washington DC in 2003. The Festival focused on the cultures of Appalachia, Mali and Scotland, and was attended by over 1.1 million people. NMS's exhibition *Celebrating Scotland's Crafts*, showed in the Arts and Industry Building of the Smithsonian Institution during the Festival and beyond, and was visited by more than 270,000 people. Drawing on NMS's knowledge of traditional and contemporary Scottish crafts, NMS staff led a number of narrative sessions during the Festival, where Scottish craftspeople discussed their work, introducing the audience to both the crafts process and the regional history and tradition behind it. NMS also gave a series of family storytelling workshops at the Festival, enabling participants, many of whom were very young children, to find out more about Scotland and its historic links to the USA.

### **2. Scottish Silver: a national collection**

From the mid 1950s, NMS has been building a comprehensive, documented collection of Scottish-made silver. To date the collection consists of around 3,000 pieces of marked domestic and ecclesiastical silver ranging in date from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century to the present together with a related archive of sources involving Assay Office records, extracts from family and business papers, burgh records, craft incorporations records, photographs, extracts from sales catalogues, etc. The collection has particular strengths and weaknesses but it is a truly comprehensive and national one with undoubted international significance. It has been developed firmly within the context of the general history of Scotland and Scottish material culture.

During the same period several Scottish museums have begun to expand and develop their own local silver collections. In general, this has been done in the spirit of collaboration and, in many instances, was undoubtedly encouraged by the existence of the NMS collection. Most Scottish curators responsible for silver collections have made use of the national collection. NMS has been a consistent supporter of local museums in developing the strength and importance of their collections. This help ranges from supplying research or contextual information through to working with them on application to external grant-giving bodies or providing support with direct funding through the NFA. NMS alone provides the crucial overview for the whole of Scotland. In particular, we maintain what has become the national research collection of makers' marks, both in terms of actual representative pieces in the collection, and through the archive of over 3,500 representations of makers marks.

Clearly, no serious research on Scottish silver is possible without reference to the NMS collection. As important, the presence of such a collection provides a key element in providing accurate information to the community. For example, Banff Museum would easily identify a locally-made piece of silver brought in by a member of the public. But if it was not local, they would pass it on to NMS in the full knowledge that curators of the national collection will be able to identify any Scottish piece. But equally, NMS's international specialists and their networks will ensure identification no matter where in the world the piece was made.

### **3. Bronze Age Cemetery, Leven, Fife**

In 2003, the makers of *Time Team* for Channel 4 TV approached Dr Alison Sheridan of the NMS Archaeology Department to act as a Bronze Age artefact specialist during the excavation of a Bronze Age cemetery at Leven in Fife. The programme about Leven was broadcast to an audience of over 3 million people in January 2004.

The Fife Region Archaeologist asked Dr Sheridan to co-ordinate the post-excavation writing-up of the artefact and human remains finds from this cemetery. Accordingly, she wrote the specialist report on the pottery and some of the stone finds, including an earlier find of a jet bead in NMS collections since the 1940s, organising the necessary analytical work to aid identification of particular aspects of the stone items. She arranged for Alan Saville (also of NMS Archaeology) to report on the flint knife from one of the burials. She organised osteologists to write up the human remains as part of the NMS Archaeology's initiative to document all Scottish archaeological human remains. And finally, she arranged for the radiocarbon dating of the bones in the University of Groningen, facilitated by the existence of NMS Archaeology programmes of radiocarbon dating, featuring the use of facilities at this University.

The resulting excavation report, incorporating this work, is about to be published in *Tayside & Fife Archaeological Journal* and so will be widely available. As Fife Museum Service has indicated its unwillingness to bid for the finds, they will likely become part of the national collections. There they will be available for loan in the future, accompanied by any updates to the information already assembled.

### **4. The Dogrib Project**

Indigenous peoples from the northern territories of Canada will enjoy unprecedented access to cultural artefacts held in Scotland in a 3 year programme which is part of a developing international strategy at NMS. In a linked travelling exhibition, audiences throughout Canada will be able to experience Scotland's collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century artefacts from the Dogrib and Dene communities in the North West Territories.

The Dogrib and Dene communities accept the NMS's ownership of the items and respect the way the museum has cared for them for nearly 150 years. Both partners agree the way forward is for the NMS to continue to care for the objects and through a partnership to enable the community to access them.

The programme, a collaboration between NMS, the Dogrib Treaty 11 Council, the University of Dundee and the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, includes a tour of communities, a larger, national travelling exhibition, curatorial skills transfer and developing a website devoted to the collection which will allow worldwide access.

### **5. Kilmartin House Museum**

Kilmartin House Museum in Argyll is an award winning museum that enables visitors to explore and interpret the uniquely rich pre-historic landscape of the Kilmartin Glen. Kilmartin House Museum has almost no collections of its own, and many of the key objects on display are loans from the NMS archaeological collections. These include the Glebe Cairn vessel, which was excavated from a cairn that can be seen from the museum itself.

## 6. The Health of our Seas.

Marine biologists in NMS, in partnership with Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Association for Marine Science, Natural Environment Research Council, Fisheries Research Services and various universities, are involved in major initiatives to evaluate the health of our seas. The studies involve examination of the fauna of the deep Faroe-Shetland Channel, Irminger Sea and Rockall Trough and inshore waters such as the Firth of Forth and the thirty designated marine Special Areas of Conservation. NMS taxonomic expertise is aiding in the identification and classification of the animals found and NMS is the repository for the specimens – thus making the survey truly scientific by preserving the material for future re-evaluation, and enabling environmental agencies to discharge their statutory responsibilities. A special exhibition of photographs on the Firth of Forth survey was shown in NMS.

## 7. Birnie Hoard Excavations, Elgin, Moray

NMS and Elgin Museum are delivering a programme of learning activities to support the archaeological excavations at Birnie, near Elgin, Moray. The site has yielded two major Roman coin hoards and these form the basis of activities for schools and local community groups, such as workshops to find out more about the process of excavation and handling of finds, and an open day to meet the archaeologists and many other specialists involved.

## 8. Discovery on the Move

*Discovery on the Move*, a travelling exhibition with a strong interactive learning element, has visited 23 venues in 15 local authority areas across Scotland, including schools, community centres, local museums and – for July 2004 – The Gyle shopping Mall in Edinburgh, reaching almost 42,000 people. NMS will create a new *Discovery on the Move* to start touring in 2006.

*I would very much like to see this come back on a regular basis. It's difficult to describe how absolutely important this kind of thing is to children with little or no chance to go to national museums.* Youth and Community Leader, Shetland Islands, 2002.

## 9. Heritage Education Forum partnership with Cultural Co-ordinators in Schools

A Heritage Education Forum was set up in November 2002, chaired by NMS, with membership from a wide range of organisations in the heritage, arts and education sectors:

- Historic Scotland
- National Archives of Scotland
- National Galleries of Scotland
- National Library of Scotland
- National Museums of Scotland
- National Trust for Scotland
- Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland
- Scottish Museums Council
- Scottish Natural Heritage

Forum members have developed a training programme for Cultural Co-ordinators in Schools, and are developing online resources for the Co-ordinators to use.

#### **10. e learning**

NMS is an approved provider of content for National Grid for Learning resources and has completed several innovative e learning projects, both large and small scale, including:

- A package of on line and video learning resources were developed to support the successful *Game On* exhibition in the Royal Museum. This resource was developed in partnership with Learning Teaching Scotland, and made available through the NMS web site. The materials supported curriculum learning and teaching for the 5 to 14 and secondary age ranges.
- The Egypt CD is a CD version of the Royal Museum's Egypt handling box, which is the most popular single resource that is available to visiting schools. The CD version consists of high quality images of each of the 16 objects in the handling box, together with information and teaching resources. This has been distributed free to all schools in Scotland as a tool for classroom based activity, or to prepare school groups for a visit to the Royal Museum.

#### **11. Science meets Culture**

NMS's strategic approach to science, technology and the interactive revolution is paying dividends in creating new audiences, a strength which NMS is well placed to share across the sector. Over 17,000 adults and children enjoyed *Science Zone* last year making the Royal Museum the largest venue for the Edinburgh Science Festival. Visitors had a chance to see chemistry in a whole new light thanks to *Sport by Design*, as part of *Chemistry Week*. Visitors can text with their feet in the *Communicate!* Gallery, a new gallery supported by BT which brings together 160 objects for communication, from around the world.

#### **12. Hugh Miller Bicentenary Exhibition at Rosemarkie**

An initiative by Groam House Museum, Rosemarkie, Ross-shire, in collaboration with the NMS and other contributors, produced the highly successful exhibition *Hugh Miller (1802-1856): Local Hero* which showed at Groam House from June 2002 to April 2003, marking the bicentenary of Miller's birth in Cromarty nearby, and his extraordinary life as stonemason, author, Black Isle folklorist and historian, newspaper editor and geologist. In his native Black Isle Miller collected many of the fossils which were the basis for his insights into the story of life on earth. Groam House drew on elements of the NMS exhibition on Miller, *Testimony of the Rocks*, shown in the Royal Museum earlier in 2002, adding material of particular local interest, and arranging events which included programmes for local schools, a public lecture by an NMS curator, and an evening of folk tales and song.

#### **13. Creating the Past**

Over 2 months in 2002 a group of 70 young people from youth and community groups from the Edinburgh Social Inclusion Partnership area collaborated with the performance group Reckless Sleepers and NMS staff, in *Creating the Past* a project to interpret the archaeological collections. The project was funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and culminated in a series of public performances in the Royal Museum.