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A Heritage Institution Exploring its own Ancestry: Glasgow's Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

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Upon opening in 1901, Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum provided a permanent home for Glasgow's growing civic collection of fine art, natural history, industrial and archaeological objects. The original displays remained largely intact until a major renovation, restoration and re-hang, carried out under the banner of the Kelvingrove New Century Project (KNCP), was initiated following the museum's centenary. This paper explores the complicated relationship Kelvingrove has with its own heritage, something it shares with other museums similarly established during the museum building boom of the late-Victorian period. It addresses this interaction between past and present, offering a study of the recent renovation that is grounded in a consideration of the museum's beginnings. Examining a variety of materials including historical sources, reports commissioned during the KNCP, and relevant research offered by scholars and museum professionals, the paper assesses the claim made by Glasgow Museums that the renovation constituted a "twenty-first-century revision of the democratic and inclusive ideals on which the museum was founded" (O'Neill 2007, 395). The resultant analysis presents the argument that this narrative, which links certain elements of the institution's history with the objectives of the renovation, was deliberately promoted in an effort to couch change within a larger sense of continuity. Although Kelvingrove now largely reflects the KNCP's desired outcomes in terms of re-conceptualized galleries and ease of movement throughout the museum for instance, this discourse is not as seamless as Glasgow Museums presents it as being, thus making it worthy of interrogation.

Keywords: Heritage, Victorian Museum, Museum Practice, Custodianship, Inclusivity

All we know for certain is that Kelvingrove, that magic portal to the world and everything in it, will continue to shine as a beacon of civilization, learning, cultural understanding, and optimistic appreciation of what makes our world mostly wonderful as well as occasionally terrible. (Gray 2006, 104)

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum first opened to the public in May 1901 as the Palace of Arts, a central feature of the Glasgow International Exhibition. Like its predecessor – the International Exhibition of Science, Art and Industry of 1888 – this festival was held in Kelvingrove Park, a large public park designed by Joseph Paxton located west of Glasgow's city center in a developing middle-class suburb. One could be forgiven for thinking the assessment highlighted above, which positions the museum as a "beacon of civilization and learning," was made at the time of the museum's opening, perhaps appearing in a newspaper article or souvenir program.¹ In actuality, it is from a far more current source. Taken from a book published by Glasgow Museums the year

¹ Muriel Gray, *Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum: Glasgow's Portal to the World* (Glasgow: Glasgow Museums, 2006), 104.

Kelvingrove re-opened to the public following the conclusion of a four-year renovation, the excerpt refers not to Kelvingrove's original Victorian mandate, but rather to its present direction.

The above remark encapsulates the complicated relationship Kelvingrove has with its own heritage, something it shares with many other museums similarly established during the museum building boom of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. This interaction between past and present, and how it was negotiated over the course of the Kelvingrove New Century Project (KNCP), is the topic of this paper. Offering a focused study of the recent renovation, one grounded in a consideration of the museum's beginnings, the intention is to present a nuanced discussion of the complex connections between these two periods in the institution's history. Specifically, the paper's main object of analysis is the contention forwarded by Glasgow Museums that the renovation project represented a "twenty-first-century revision of the democratic and inclusive ideals on which the museum was founded in the Victorian period."² Having consulted a variety of materials including historical sources, reports and studies commissioned as part of the KNCP, and relevant research and analysis offered by scholars and museum professionals, I would like to suggest the KNCP was purposefully framed not as an opportunity to implement a completely new direction, but rather as an occasion to reinvigorate the museum's ties to its Victorian past. Glasgow has a very strong local tradition of visiting Kelvingrove,³ and while this served as a positive impetus for the museum's refurbishment I believe it also introduced a major challenge. Not only faced with the significant task of needing to develop and enact strategies that would bring the museum in-line with current theories of display, interpretation and audience engagement, museum staff simultaneously had to manage a pronounced sense of popular ownership and attachment. Emphasizing key connections between the museum's past and present was a carefully constructed rhetorical strategy employed to help manage the at times divergent interests of museum staff and city residents. I believe museum officials forwarded a narrative, which deliberately linked elements of the institution's history with the motives and objectives of the renovation in an effort to couch change within a larger sense of continuity. Although Kelvingrove now largely reflects the KNCP's desired outcomes in terms of re-conceptualized galleries and ease of movement throughout the museum for instance, this discourse is not as seamless as Glasgow Museums presents it as being, thus making it worthy of interrogation.

² Mark O'Neill, "Kelvingrove: Telling Stories in a Treasured Old/New Museum," *Curator* 50, no.4 (2007): 395.

³ See Lawrence Fitzgerald, "Building on Victorian Ideas," in *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, ed. Suzanne MacLeod (New York: Routledge, 2005), in which Fitzgerald cites and discusses the unpublished report "Large-scale quantitative survey amongst Glaswegians to assess the popularity of Kelvingrove Museum, architecturally to other important buildings in the city," compiled by Lowland Ltd for Glasgow Museums in 1999.

According to Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, Kelvingrove houses “one of the supreme European civic collections.”⁴ The idea of Glasgow having a municipal art gallery and museum dates to the 1850s when the City Council acquired a large number of notable artworks from Archibald McLellan, a prosperous coach-builder and magistrate. When it formally opened on October 25, 1902, the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum (later renamed Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum) displayed works from McLellan’s collection alongside objects from the old City Industrial Museum. Funding for this new cultural attraction principally came from revenue generated by the Glasgow International Exhibition of Science, Art and Industry held in 1888. Styled after London’s Great Exhibition of 1851, this exhibition, which established Glasgow as a suitable host of this particular kind of large public event, was organized with the express purpose of raising funds for the construction of a purpose-built civic art gallery and museum.⁵ J.W. Simpson and E.J. Milner Allen, pupils of Alfred Waterhouse architect of London’s Natural History Museum, won the commission for the design of the building and construction began in 1893.

Kelvingrove’s formidable red sandstone exterior, a mass of turrets, spires and arched windows executed in a revivalist Spanish Baroque style is contrasted by a relatively simple internal architectural plan based on a wide, double-height central aisle flanked by two, perpendicular wings. This floor plan directed how the museum’s collections were first displayed, dividing them into four principal areas. The original layout saw fine art on the upper floors, natural history in the East Wing, the industrial arts (technology and archaeology) in the West Wing and sculpture in the Central Hall. Within these broad disciplines, each gallery was then dedicated to a specific subject such as zoology, geology and paleontology. Reflecting late-Victorian and Edwardian theories of knowledge and conventional methods of display, objects were arranged taxonomically inside glass cabinets and were accompanied by very little didactic material. According to Glasgow Museums, these displays “survived largely intact for the next hundred years” until Kelvingrove closed to the public in 2002.⁶

Mark O’Neill, Head of Glasgow Museums over the course of the KNCP, regards Kelvingrove as the “last and greatest achievement of [Britain’s] Victorian municipal museum movement.”⁷ Inaugurated in 1845 by the Public Museums Act, this period of expansion of civic institutions did not begin in earnest in Scotland until 1887 with the passing of the Public Libraries (Consolidation)

⁴ Fitzgerald, “Building on Victorian Ideas,” 133-134.

⁵ Following this inaugural exhibition, Glasgow was the site of three more international exhibitions: the Glasgow International Exhibition (1901), the Scottish Exhibition of National History, Art and Industry (1911), and the Empire Exhibition, Scotland (1938).

⁶ Glasgow Museums, “The Early Years at Kelvingrove,”

<http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/ourmuseums/kelvingrove/aboutKelvingrove/History%20of%20Kelvingrove/Pages/The-Early-Years-at-Kelvingrove.aspx>, accessed September 21, 2011.

⁷ O’Neill, “Kelvingrove,” 379.

Act, which gave Scottish local authorities the power to establish museums and libraries.⁸ The two chief impetuses behind this movement were the mutually reinforcing tenets of philanthropy and financial gain.⁹ Museums were seen as particularly well equipped to cultivate a more civilized society because of their capacity to educate, and by extension 'socialize' those of a lower status, a link between cultural programs and social management noted by contemporary commentators like Thomas Greenwood and G.B. Goode.¹⁰ It was believed that cities with museums integrated into their cultural landscapes would benefit from a working class in possession of a general knowledge of art, design and technology, which would have the resulting effect of increasing productivity, thus helping maintain Britain's industrial and commercial edge.¹¹ Largely due to shipbuilding and the success of peripheral industries like iron-ore production and mining, Glasgow had a considerable urban, working-class population, a fact city officials were all too aware of. As one Chief Constable observed, this demographic, largely made up of local Glaswegians and migrants from northern Scotland and Ireland, represented an "accumulated mass of squalid wretchedness unequalled in the British Dominions."¹² In light of these social, cultural and economic factors, it is perhaps not surprising arguments in favor of the positive social role of museums resonated particularly strongly in Glasgow, and were thus fervently taken up. Kelvingrove's founders had much more wide-reaching concerns than simply securing a permanent home for the growing civic collection. They conceived of it being a space for informally educating the public, displaying the fruits of object-based research, and showing the latest products of industry and engineering.¹³ The art gallery and museum was to be a producer of knowledge, an aspiration firmly in-line with dominant discourses that positioned museums as both philanthropic institutions and as custodians of cultural property.¹⁴ In short, Kelvingrove was to be a focus for civic and cultural pride and a powerful tool of social improvement. These notions were clearly articulated by McLellan in his Deed of Bequest. Drawn up "on account of [his] long connection with Glasgow," McLellan regarded his gift as a "humble testimony to [his] attachment to its citizens," and as a demonstration of his "desire for their welfare and elevation."¹⁵ Justifying his stipulation that the collection be devoted to "public use and exhibition," McLellan explained that "the study of what are called the 'Fine Arts' is eminently

⁸ Museums and Galleries Commission, *Museums in Scotland: Report by a Working Party, 1986* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1986), 15.

⁹ Nick Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case: The Past, The Heritage and The Public* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), 85.

¹⁰ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 18-24.

¹¹ Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case*, 85. See also George E. Hein, *Learning in the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1998) for discussion of the history of museum education.

¹² As quoted in Andor Gomme and David Walker, *Architecture of Glasgow* (London: Lund Humphries, 1968), 103.

¹³ Fitzgerald, "Building on Victorian Ideas," 134.

¹⁴ Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), 109-28.

¹⁵ Archibald McLellan, "Deed of Bequest," in *Catalogue Descriptive and Historical of the Pictures in the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum Kelvingrove*, James Paton (Glasgow: Robert Anderson, 1906), v-vi.

conducive to the elevation and refinement of all classes, as well as intimately connected with the manufacturing and mercantile prosperity of the community.”¹⁶ Considering the private nature of this type of document it is somewhat surprising details of McLellan’s bequest were so openly shared with the public, dispersed through early museum catalogues and other official publications. As a result, the conditions and language of McLellan’s bequest have come to occupy an important place in the historiography that has been built up around the museum, even becoming the source of a kind of origin myth.

This notion of popular ownership and of there being an intimate relationship between Kelvingrove and city residents has remained a powerful concept, as evidenced by its continued expression in official museum sources such as the publication cited at the beginning of this paper. Discussing Kelvingrove’s foundation Muriel Gray states, “it may well be argued that the egalitarian mix of classes and of the educated and the illiterate set the tone for the inclusive and welcoming nature of this brand-new cultural facility that Glasgow had just been gifted.”¹⁷ Maintaining that Kelvingrove has, since its beginning, successfully attracted a wide range of visitors helps create this sense of continuity between the museum’s past and present, and it is a claim that at least initially seems to carry some degree of accuracy. The numerous surveys and studies completed over the course of the KNCP revealed that when the initiative was launched in 1998, Kelvingrove stood as the sixth most visited museum in Britain.¹⁸ What is more, it attracted a remarkably high number of regular visitors with around half of those surveyed noting they had been to the museum ten or more times.¹⁹ Additionally, close to a majority of visitors came from the greater Glasgow area with 30% residing in Glasgow itself and 19% traveling from the city’s immediate outlying areas.²⁰ For O’Neill, these statistics reflect the “deep sense of ownership by Glaswegians of their museums in general and of Kelvingrove in particular.”²¹

As is often the case with constructed narratives however, this tradition of welcoming a range of visitors can be questioned. In 2001 Newman and McLean began a large research project examining how museums can contribute to greater social inclusion, and looked at museum-based community development initiatives in Glasgow and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. A program Newman and McLean studied was one based at Glasgow’s Transport Museum that involved residents of Easterhouse, a large post-war estate on the fringes of the city, which, like many housing projects in Glasgow,

¹⁶ McLellan, “Deed of Bequest,” v-vi.

¹⁷ Gray, *Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum*, 18.

¹⁸ Maria Economou, *Evaluation Strategy for the Re-Development of the Displays and Visitor Facilities at the Museum and Art Gallery, Kelvingrove*, prepared for Glasgow Museums by the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, June 1999), 2.

¹⁹ Fitzgerald, “Building on Victorian Ideas,” 134-136.

²⁰ Maria Economou, “Evaluation Strategies in the Cultural Sector: The Case of the Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow,” *Museum and Society* 2, no.1 (2004): 32.

²¹ O’Neill, “Kelvingrove,” 380.

suffers from pronounced social deprivation.²² When this research was carried out, the Transport Museum was located immediately across the street from Kelvingrove, thereby – quite fortuitously – allowing for a comparison between the two cultural attractions. In addition to being in close proximity, and so serviced by the same public transit options, both museums offered free entry, a feature common to all heritage sites and programs managed by Glasgow Museums. Equally well, however, neither could easily accommodate those with physical disabilities since one entered both buildings via multiple flights of stairs. As a result, Kelvingrove and the Transport Museum were in much the same position relative to factors identified by Newman and McLean as those most likely to hinder museum visiting, these being location relative to public transport, the charging of entry fees, physical access to buildings and intellectual access to exhibitions.²³ Despite not being prompted to do so, a number of the participants from Easterhouse voluntarily compared the two museums, with a proportion contrasting their predominantly positive experiences visiting the Transport Museum with Kelvingrove, which they felt was “oppressive.” When asked why this was the case, one respondent stated, “some of the attitudes of the people when you're walking around ... thinking to themselves, what are they looking at the paintings for ... It's as if we should not be able to appreciate art.”²⁴ Although this is just one study, it is important to highlight since the findings indicate Kelvingrove was not necessarily used by a broad range of visitors before the renovation, therefore challenging its purportedly long-standing tradition of engaging a diversity of audiences.

The insistence on Kelvingrove being an object of popular attachment due to a history of inclusivity begins to look increasingly less secure when one considers the stated aims of the KNCP. In the late-1990s, Glasgow Museums began investigating how Kelvingrove could be “accessible and responsive to visitors' and potential audiences' interests, needs and aspirations.”²⁵ As alluded to earlier, Kelvingrove exists in a city with severe social and economic depression: almost a third of the population experiences some of the highest rates of poverty combined with the lowest levels of education attainment in Britain.²⁶ Male life expectancy in some areas is as low as 54.²⁷ The current

²² Mooney and Danson offer an interesting discussion of the concept of the “dual city”, a facet of post-industrial decline, in relation to Glasgow's urban landscape. Whereas in many North American cities areas of poverty are concentrated in a downtown core, in Glasgow the pattern is reversed whereby social deprivation is concentrated in the outer limits of the city in housing estates built after the Second World War. See Gerry Mooney and Mike Danson, “Beyond 'Culture City': Glasgow as a 'Dual City',” in *Transforming Cities: Contested Governance and New Spatial Divisions*, eds. Nick Jewson and Susanne MacGregor, 73-86 (London: Routledge, 1997).

²³ Andrew Newman, Fiona McLean, and Gordon Urquhart, “Museums and Active Citizenship: Tackling the Problems of Social Inclusion,” *Citizenship Studies* 9, no. 1 (2005): 52.

²⁴ Respondent testimony cited in Andrew Newman and Fiona McLean, “Capital and the Evaluation of the Museum Experience,” *Journal of Cultural Studies* 7, no.4 (2004): 488.

²⁵ Fitzgerald, “Building on Victorian Ideas,” 133. See also Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case* for an extensive analysis of the composition of museum-going publics in the UK. Merriman considers a range of different factors that make an individual more or less likely to visit a museum such as class, age, gender and ethnic background. Citing research conducted by Bourdieu and Darbel (1991), he explains that in Britain museum visitors are generally well-educated and socially and economically mobile.

²⁶ O'Neill, “Kelvingrove,” 380.

socio-economic situation in Glasgow has many causes, however, a key factor is the decline of heavy industry, thus making it a legacy of sorts of the conditions Kelvingrove's founders were aspiring to improve at the turn of the last century. Engaging with those outside of the traditional museum-going public, and outreaching to under-serviced and under-represented communities became a priority of the KNCP. This suggests museum staff were very much aware that a proportion of Glaswegians regarded Kelvingrove as less welcoming than other cultural attractions in the city, a realization that echoes reflections offered by participants in Newman and McLean's study. Furthermore, it betrays a sensitivity to the possibility that the museum's activities were no longer reflecting or enacting its core principles. These early initiatives were also launched in reaction to the fact that a majority of displays still closely resembled those that had been developed almost one hundred years earlier. This rather staid impression was exacerbated by the condition of the building itself, which was showing increased signs of disrepair. By the end of the decade, however, a clear research agenda had been set and an extensive evaluation program had been implemented. Developed by Maria Economou, Kelvingrove's Evaluation Strategy reflected the increasing awareness amongst museum professionals of the importance of evaluation, although at the time it was one of only very few such strategies being implemented in the museum and heritage sector, either in the UK or internationally.²⁸ The detailed plan created the infrastructure for what became the largest research and consultation exercise in Glasgow's history.²⁹ This strategy differed considerably from other models in large part because it was designed at the beginning of a major re-development, which not only meant it was integrated into the planning process, but also could be used as a tool to support key activities of the renovation once it was in progress.³⁰ One of the main outcomes of Glasgow Museums' adopting this Evaluation Strategy was the formalization of a set of core goals:

1. Maintain an informed picture of the profile of visitors to the Museum
2. Understand what visitors want from a visit, their interests, preferences, and needs
3. Communicate with non-visitors and study their reasons for not visiting the Museum
4. Involve all members of curatorial and exhibition development staff with evaluation procedure and communication with the visitors
5. Keep in touch with the latest developments in visitor studies and evaluation research and translate their relevance to the Museum
6. Improve physical and intellectual access to the building
7. Improve physical access to the collections
8. Improve intellectual access to the collections
9. Create an Orientation Centre to improve the orientation and experience of visitors
10. Create discovery, event, and display study centres to enhance visitors' experience
11. Create Object Cinemas to enhance visitors' experience

²⁷ Audrey Gillan, "In Iraq Life Expectancy is 67. Minutes from Glasgow City Centre, it's 54," *The Guardian*, January 21, 2006.

²⁸ Economou, *Evaluation Strategy*, 1.

²⁹ Fitzgerald, "Building on Victorian Ideas," 133-5.

³⁰ Economou, *Evaluation Strategy*, 31.

12. Create Story displays to enhance visitors' experience
13. Improve visitor facilities (Economou 1999, 8-39)

Identifying these very clear objectives in the renovation's earliest stages meant evaluation could be carried out holistically. Furthermore, they would serve as anchors to all subsequent research initiatives conducted during the renovation, thus helping move the project towards its intended goals.³¹

Following the adoption of the Evaluation Strategy, "substantial and wide-ranging stakeholder research" was carried out.³² Employing varied research methods, the aim was to develop an understanding of how best to address the interests and abilities of the larger and more diverse audiences Kelvingrove hoped to engage with. An access audit and building usage survey based on interviews and participant observation helped determine how the building's layout could be changed to facilitate both physical and intellectual movement through gallery spaces. In addition to survey-based research, various committees, peer groups and focus groups were established. Museum and related professionals were not the only ones given a voice during the consultation process however. Rather, feedback regarding major project and display proposals was also sought from panels specifically made up of education professionals, schoolchildren and representatives from socially excluded groups such as ethnic minorities and those with varying types and degrees of disability.³³ Through the Evaluation Strategy and subsequent qualitative and quantitative research, museum staff not only identified a diversity of target audiences, but began listening to what these groups wanted from the city's largest museum. This approach reflects contemporary analyses of the ways museums have variously regarded their publics. According to Bennett, whereas in the Victorian period public museums were ostensibly "for the people", since the Second World War museums have increasingly moved towards being "of the people." As a result of this shift, museums have become increasingly aware of the importance and validity of displaying an interest in the "lives, habits, and customs" of those outside of the traditional museum-going public.³⁴ In short, through the various research initiatives conducted over the course of the KNCP Kelvingrove found itself heeding the advice of prominent museum scholars like Eilean Hooper-Greenhill who, in the mid-1990s, advised museums that they must "communicate or die."³⁵

³¹ Economou, *Evaluation Strategy*, 31.

³² Fitzgerald, "Building on Victorian Ideas," 136.

³³ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

³⁴ Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonisation* (London: Routledge, 2004), 109. Interestingly, in discussing this shift, Bennett cites the example of another cultural attraction in Glasgow, the People's Palace which he sees as "exceptional" for the way it successfully represents the city's history as an ongoing interaction between "the ways of life and popular entertainments of ordinary Glaswegians" and "their political traditions" (2004, 125-6).

³⁵ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Their Visitors* (London: Routledge, 1994), 34.

Findings from the extensive research programs carried out as part of the KNCP revealed the public expected an “object-based, visitor-centered, storytelling museum.”³⁶ Feedback from visitors and non-visitors made clear the desire to see displays that communicated the human story behind each object, and galleries that demonstrated a clear relevance to the public’s interests. As a result, development of the new structure and thematic design of Kelvingrove was informed by two principles: the strengths of the collection and audience interest.³⁷ Upon re-opening in 2006 it was evident dramatic changes had been enacted to the building and the exhibition spaces it enclosed. To facilitate ease of movement, divisions that were not original to the building had been removed wherever possible, and the basement had been converted from storage into public spaces including education rooms and an accessible ground-level entrance. The number of displayed objects had been increased by 50%, and galleries had been entirely re-conceived and re-mounted. Reflecting stakeholder feedback that made clear the desire for changing displays, a flexible modular system was installed to allow for regular modifications, removals and additions to gallery content. The aim was that from 2008 onwards at least two stories would be changed every year, amounting to between 20 and 30 percent of the museum’s displays appearing in some way changed within the first decade after re-opening. Additionally, the intention was that a variety of external partners including independent curators and academics, but also artists and musicians would work with the museum to generate this new content.³⁸ Displays would only remain unaltered if they were found to be of continuing relevance to visitors after having been re-evaluated according to the criteria outlined in the museum’s Evaluation Strategy. For O’Neill, operating at this steady pace of renewal would allow the museum to move away from the more commonplace model of “peaks of refurbishment followed by slow decay and dating.”³⁹

Currently, Kelvingrove has twenty-two themed galleries spread out over its two floors, some quite traditional (i.e. Ancient Egypt, Italian Old Masters, Mackintosh and the Glasgow Style), and others less obvious and even challenging (i.e. Animals on the Edge, Cultural Survival, What is Beauty?). The Glasgow Stories gallery for instance tells six stories ranging from James Watt and the steam engine to cases of domestic abuse in the city, and from the popularity of country music to the history of the city’s South Asian community. These somewhat self-contained stories are built around objects in the museum’s collection, often brought together in ways that reflect a decidedly inter-disciplinary approach. A display cabinet addressing changing perceptions of the female body for instance features a nursing corset from the early twentieth century, centrally placed and surrounded by a mixture of materials. Described as being “worn by women who wanted to get their

³⁶ O’Neill, “Kelvingrove,” 379.

³⁷ Fitzgerald, “Building on Victorian Ideas,” 138.

³⁸ O’Neill, “Kelvingrove,” 393-395.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 393.

figure back after having a baby,” the accompanying information panel adds that the corset can also be seen as a demonstration of the “pressures of fashion,” and the effects these have had on women’s relationships with their own bodies.⁴⁰ To the right of the corset are souvenir postcards dating from the same period featuring images and slogans commenting on the campaign for women’s suffrage, which successfully convey the diversity of opinion that surrounded this very public topic. To the left of the corset, contrasting these seemingly light-hearted pieces of ephemera, is an iron bridle or branks of European origin likely used as a tool of torture, punishment and public humiliation on women accused of practicing witchcraft in the early-modern period. As this example illustrates, the new gallery spaces contain very little secondary material such as mock-ups and replicas. A notable exception however, is the use oral history testimony which is present in a number of galleries either in the form of audible recordings projected into discreet spaces, or as transcribed excerpts integrated into information panels. Staying in the same gallery, in addition to hearing the voices of women recounting their experiences of domestic abuse, one can read the reflections of those who immigrated to Glasgow from the Indian Subcontinent in the 1960s. Prominent information panels that identify speakers by name alongside a photograph of them helps reinforce the fact that the accounts one is hearing are those of ‘real-life’ residents of Glasgow. Indeed, the testimony was collected through community engagement programs conducted as part of the KNCP. The hope here is that this dynamic and multi-storied approach will encourage visitors to reflect on the materials being presented to them, and allow them to form their own unique connections between these items, ones that extend beyond the loose themes that inform each gallery space.

Demonstrating an awareness of the need for rigorous audience engagement, a policy firmly in-line with contemporary museological theory, the overarching aim of the KNCP was to develop an understanding of what people wished to see in the museum, and what they hoped to take away from their visit. As has been elaborated upon, the changes that resulted from the renovation were framed by museum officials as ways of returning to the activities that were ostensibly at the center of Kelvingrove’s operations when it first opened to the public. Although there is some truth to this, in that there is a very strong focus on object-based presentation and education, the museum’s new intellectual framework dramatically contrasts an earlier Victorian model. As Alison Brown explains, “Kelvingrove was founded on the basis of Victorian conceptions of how the world and knowledge are structured,” with artifacts arranged according to dominant disciplinary categories.⁴¹ The renovated Kelvingrove marks a major departure from this exhibitionary paradigm. No longer is the viewer faced with a closed narrative that follows a chronological or geographical arc. Gallery

⁴⁰ Information panel, Nursing Corset, early twentieth century, cotton with steel fastenings, E.1986.101.9 (Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum, Glasgow, UK).

⁴¹ Alison K. Brown, “The Kelvingrove ‘New Century’ Project: Changing Approaches to Displaying World Cultures in Glasgow,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 18 (2006): 37.

spaces do indeed reflect the strengths of the collection, but this is done in a more open way, allowing one to consider the story of individual objects in relation to a looser thematic structure. The result is a museum which tells a multitude of stories and presents more voices than just that of the omniscient curator.

Reactions to the renovated Kelvingrove have largely been positive. The institution has seen a marked increase in the number of annual visitors, even reaching 3.2 million in the first year after re-opening.⁴² It has also been well received within the museum sector, even being lauded as one of the “few memorable paradigm-shifting museums” alongside the Holocaust Memorial Museum and Te Papa: The National Museum of New Zealand.⁴³ In the above discussion it has been suggested that a crucial facet of the refurbishment process was a bringing together of the Victorian museum with its twenty-first century self. Positioning the renovation as an active engagement with the museum’s history provided a way of implementing major changes to the museum’s intellectual framework and physical appearance in the face of significant apprehension. Or as Mark O’Neill describes it, “great public anxiety that a cherished institution would be ‘improved worse’ by modernization.”⁴⁴ This strategy is exemplified by O’Neill’s framing of the KNCP as a process of “recovery”, which implies it was more concerned with looking back to the museum’s past, than it was with initiating a new direction.⁴⁵ This paper has explored this discourse by placing it both within a historical context, and contemporary critical discussions of the role of museums. While promoting this narrative was undoubtedly an astute way of managing diverse stakeholder interests, it can be troubled in places. This is particularly the case with regards to the museum’s supposedly long-standing tradition of inclusion, a precept advocated in official literature, but which is called into question by opinions like those expressed by participants in Newman and McLean’s study, voiced just before the museum closed in 2002. Additionally, I believe this narrative at least partially overshadows the genuinely innovative nature of some of Kelvingrove’s new policies and objectives. The rhetoric of “recovery” detracts from the fact that the museum’s new displays are informed by a dramatically different intellectual framework compared to the one favored when the museum first opened. Galleries are now based around thematic storylines, not disciplinary categories, and displays strive to engage the viewer, hoping the way topics are presented resonate with visitors’ own lived experiences. This approach unquestionably demonstrates greater responsiveness on the part of museum curators and planners. The issue of whether these new strategies have attracted the broader audiences and created the more inclusive museum environment that were so sought after when the KNCP was initiated remains unclear however. Whether conducted by Glasgow Museums, external

⁴² O’Neill, “Kelvingrove,” 379.

⁴³ Elaine Heumann Gurian, “Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum,” *Curator* 50, no.3 (2007): 358.

⁴⁴ O’Neill, “Kelvingrove,” 380.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 386.

partners, or independent scholars, further research is needed in order to assess the outcomes of the renovation project, and in particular evaluate the extent to which the core objectives outlined in the Evaluation Strategy have been met. The above discussion and analysis represents a specific line of inquiry within such a body of research, seeking as it does to unpick certain aspects of the relationship between the museum's past and present, something that came to the fore over the course of the Kelvingrove New Century Project. As such, the intention of this paper has been to forward a nuanced understanding of a complex renovation process. One through which Kelvingrove engaged in reflexive museum practice and developed an informed awareness of visitor expectations, while simultaneously showing a deep sensitivity to public opinions concerning the museum's place in Glasgow's history, and within the city's rich social and cultural fabric.

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