

Creating the Museum

Exploring the Museum Impulse in Local, Regional and National Contexts

Friday 26 September 2025
Saturday 27 September 2025

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Pigott Theatre
The National Gallery

About the Conference

Susanna Avery-Quash

Senior Research Lead:
Partnerships, Networks and
Initiatives, the National Gallery

Mark Westgarth

Professor of History of the Art
Market, University of Leeds

MGHG Board Members

While the birth of the concept of the museum has attracted lots of scholarly attention and the desire to create new museums is now a global phenomenon, the question of how individual museums, their collections, buildings and personnel, come into being has not been widely considered. Various periods have seen the flourishing of local, regional and national museums, of large or smaller scale. Some passionately wished for museums ultimately stalled, and some proposed museums never quite appeared. Some museums were created for particular audiences, while others evolved from earlier forms of collecting.

To further develop our understanding of the reasons for creating museums, and to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the creation of the National Gallery in London, this conference will focus on why and how galleries and museums internationally/globally have emerged and evolved. The conference will explore the different ways in which museums and public art galleries come into existence and the impulses, rationales and objectives for 'creating' museums and what the future impulses for creating museums might be.



Day 1: Schedule

Friday 26 September 2025

Keynote

- 10:00 **Arrival via Sainsbury Wing Entrance**
Tea & Coffee served outside the Pigott Theatre
- 10:30 **Welcome and Introduction**
Jack Hartnell, Head of Research at the National Gallery
Mark Westgarth, Chair of the Museums and Galleries History Group

Introduced by Sria Chatterjee, Head of Research at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art

- 10:35 **Keynote Lecture: Old Collection, New Spaces, New Perspectives, New Audiences**
Gus Casely-Hayford, Director of V&A East

Panel 1

Museums Across Borders

Chaired by Caroline Cornish, Research Associate at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

- 11:10 **Exile as Museum Impulse: The Role of Museums in Materialising the Tibetan Nation and its People**
Emma Martin, Senior Lecturer at the University of Manchester
- 11:30 **Musée Khai-Dinh – Museum Creation as Civilising Mission**
Diêu Ly Hoàng, MA Student at the Technische Universität Berlin
- 11:50 **National Gallery (London) / National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC): The Anglo-American Inheritance**
Elizabeth A. Pergam, Co-Chair of the Society for the History of Collecting
- 12:10 **Questions**
- 12:25 **Lunch Break (1 hour 5 mins)**

Panel 2

Museums and Social Change

Chaired by Mark Liebenrood, Postdoc Researcher at Birkbeck, University of London

- 13:30 **'Beaubourg' and May '68: The Museum Between Social Reconciliation and Cultural Subversion**
Nicolas Heimendinger, Postdoc Researcher at Paris Nanterre University Centre Pompidou

Panel 3

Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge

Chaired by Kate Hill, Professor of History at the University of Lincoln

- 13:50 **A Museum as a Tool for Community Cohesion: The Creation of Hackney Museum in the 1980s**
Rebecca Odell, Project Curator at Hackney Museum
- 14:10 **Bifurcated Gaze(s): The Museum of Mankind in Post-imperial Britain as Case Study**
Olga Nikonenko, PhD Candidate at University College London
- 14:30 **Questions**
- 14:45 **Break for Tea & Coffee (30 mins)**
Served outside the Pigott Theatre
- 15:15 **Whose Line is it Anyway? Mummy Portraits and the Boundaries of Collecting at the National Gallery**
Alan Crookham, Chief Librarian and Archivist at the National Gallery
- 15:35 **The Creation of the Gallery of Mineralogy and Geology at the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle (Paris) as a Mirror of a Hierarchy of Sciences**
Adèle Chevalier, Postdoc at the Center Alexandre-Koyré, CNRS; Diane Courtin, PhD candidate at PALOC, National Museum of Natural History; and Romane Le Roux, PhD candidate at IMPMC, National Museum of Natural History
- 15:55 **Seeds of Change: Eco-Museums, Climate Museums and Emergent Ecologies of Practice**
Colin Sterling, Senior Lecturer in Heritage, Museums and the Environment at the University of Amsterdam
- 16:15 **Questions**
- 16:30 **Questions from Attendees on Day 1**
Chaired by Kate Retford, Head of Research Resources & Publications, Paul Mellon Centre
- 17:00 **Drinks Reception (1 hour)**
Served outside the Pigott Theatre
- 18:00 **Close of Day 1**
The National Gallery remains open until 9pm on Fridays, so attendees may wish to visit the collection after Day 1 of the Conference finishes.

Day 2: Schedule

Saturday 27 September 2025

- 10:00 **Arrival via Sainsbury Wing Entrance**
Tea & Coffee served outside the Pigott Theatre
- 10:30 **Welcome and Introduction**
Susanna Avery-Quash, Senior Research Lead at the National Gallery
Mark Westgarth, Chair of the Museums and Galleries History Group

Panel 4

A Provocative Reflection on 'Creating Museums'

Chaired by Jack Hartnell, Head of Research at the National Gallery

- 10:35 **Roundtable Discussion**
Fiona Candlin, Director of the Mapping Museums Lab, Birkbeck, University of London; Tony Butler, Director of Derby Museums; Rachael Browning, Director of Programme and Policy, Art Fund; and Kate Hill, Professor of History, University of Lincoln
- 11:15 **Break (15 minutes)**

Panel 5

Museums, Networks and Ecologies

Chaired by Laia Anguix, Postdoc Researcher at Utrecht University

- 11:30 **The Making of the West Bund Museum**
Anqi Li, PhD Candidate, University of Hong Kong
- 11:50 **A Blessing or a Curse? A Longer Look at the History of Loans Between the National Gallery and the Nation's Galleries**
Susanna Avery-Quash, Senior Research Lead at the National Gallery
- 12:10 **Measled Pork and Alimentary Adulteration: The Food Museum at South Kensington and Bethnal Green**
Mary Clayton-Kastenholz, CDP PhD Candidate at the Warburg Institute and Victoria and Albert Museum
- 12:30 **Questions**
- 12:45 **Lunch Break (1 hour)**

Panel 6

Museums, Institutional Identity and Transformation

Chaired by Zoë Varley, CDA PhD Candidate at the University of Leeds and the Wellcome Collection

- 13:45 **Charting the Museum Impulse Through Shifting Tides: Trinity House and the Elusive 'Museum of Leith'**

Alina Botezatu, PhD Candidate at the University of Stirling and Historic Environment Scotland

- 14:05 **Erasing Convent? The Museum Impulse and the Reframing of Female Religious Heritage**

Sabina Rosenbergová, Assistant Professor of Cultural Heritage & Marie Curie Fellow, Centre for Religion and Heritage University of Groningen, Netherlands

- 14:25 **The Reinvention of the National Gallery for the Twentieth Century: How Conflicting Agendas Shaped the Purpose of the Nation's Art Collection**

Elena Greer, Property Curator at Kingston Lacy, National Trust

- 14:45 **Questions**

- 15:00 **Break for Tea & Coffee (30 mins)**

Served outside the Pigott Theatre

Panel 7

Museums, People and Organisations

Chaired by Anna Reeve, Research Fellow at the Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London

- 15:30 **Oxford University Museum of Natural History: Creation and Use 1854–1914**

Helen Goulston, CDP PhD Candidate at the University of Birmingham and Oxford University Museum of Natural History

- 15:50 **'The finest geographical museum in the world': Curating Exploration at the Royal Geographical Society**

Emma Yandle, PhD Candidate on the Techne-AHRC funded project 'The Geographical Museum: Making Knowledge Through Objects', Royal Holloway, University of London and the Royal Geographical Society, with IBG

- 16:10 **Looking Back and Looking Forward: The Founding Collection and Contemporary Collection at the History of Science Museum, University of Oxford**

Sumner Braund, Curator of Founding Collections at the History of Science Museum, University of Oxford; and Tina Eyre, Curator of Oxford Science at the History of Science Museum, University of Oxford

- 16:30 **Questions**

- 16:45 **Reflections on the Conference (Conference ends 17:15)**

Felix Driver, Professor of Human Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London

Keynote

Keynote: Day 1 – Friday 26 September

10:35

Old Collection, New Spaces, New Perspectives, New Audiences

Gus Casely-Hayford

Director, V&A East and Professor
by Practice, SOAS

Dr Gus Casely-Hayford is a curator and cultural historian who writes, lectures and broadcasts widely on culture. He was previously the Director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, the most comprehensive collection-based museum and research centre dedicated to African art in the world.

Over the course of his career, Gus has been a constant champion for the arts. He has presented two television series of 'The Lost Kingdoms of Africa' for the BBC (and wrote the companion book), two television series of 'Tate Britain: Great Art Walks' for Sky and has worked for every major British TV channel. His TED talk on Islamic culture has been viewed more than a million times. Former Executive Director of Arts Strategy, Arts Council England and Ex-Director of InIVA, he has offered leadership to both large and medium scale arts organisations. Gus has lectured widely on art and culture, including periods at Sotheby's Institute, Goldsmiths, Birkbeck, City University, University of Westminster and SOAS. He has advised national and international bodies on heritage and culture including the United Nations and the Canadian, Dutch and Norwegian Arts Councils. In 2005 he deployed these leadership, curatorial, fundraising and communications skills to organise the biggest celebration of Africa Britain has ever hosted with Africa 2005 when more than 150 organisations put on over 1000 exhibitions and events to showcase African culture across London.

In 2018 his contribution to the arts was formally acknowledged when Gus was awarded an OBE. Amongst a range of honours, he has also been awarded a Kings College Honorary Fellowship for service to the arts and a SOAS Honorary Fellowship for service to Africa. He speaks widely, gave a SOAS

Introduced by Sria Chatterjee
Head of Research, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art

Cont...

Centenary lecture, judged the Art Fund's Museum of the Year award, The RIBA Gold Medal, British Architecture Pavilion at Venice, advised the Royal Shakespeare Company on their 2016 production of 'Hamlet' and joined the English Heritage's 'Blue Plaques Group'. In 2023 Gus wrote and presented a ten-part series, BBC radio series 'Torn', on the history of fashion and contributed to a landmark PBS TV series on African history, presented by Henry Louis Gates, and a Discovery Channel series on 'World Culture'. Gus has been a Trustee of the National Trust and the National Portrait Gallery, a Committee member on Tate Britain Council, and a Caine Prize Chair and Trustee.

Abstracts

Day 1
Friday 26 September 2025

11:10

Exile as Museum Impulse: The Role of Museums in Materialising the Tibetan Nation and its People

Emma Martin

Senior Lecturer,
University of Manchester

'[A] national museum far from home'. This was how the catalogue of the inaugural exhibition at Tibet House in New Delhi, India described the Tibetan government-in-exile's first cultural institution in 1965. Indeed, this was the first public museum built by Tibetans anywhere, whether in Tibet or in exile. This paper considers exile – the period after March 1959, when the 14th Dalai Lama, followed by more than 80,000 Tibetans, fled from Tibet following the Tibetan Uprising in Lhasa after a decade of increasing colonisation by China – as a moment that created a museum impulse for Tibetans. Drawing on museum-making events from 1959 to the present, the aim of this paper is to offer an account of the social and political contexts for the development of several cultural institutions by exiled Tibetans, all of which are in India, the host nation of the exile community and its government.

Developing the concept of exiled museology, this paper will consider the types of museums produced and when, before considering the roles of international organisations and curators in the development of what was for Tibetans a new form of cultural production. These projects speak to Fiona McConnell's (2016) notion that institution-building in exile is a rehearsal, as Tibetans practice state-like governance in preparation for a return to Tibet. However, this paper will also think about these institutions as part of a 'political assemblage' (cf. Bennett, 2020), setting them within an international configuration of social movements, NGOs and international aid programmes as a way to reflect upon the messages and meanings threaded into their interpretation.

11:30

Musée Khai-Dinh – Museum Creation as Civilising Mission

Diêu Ly Hoàng

MA Student, Technische
Universität Berlin

While the histories of museums in the Euro-American context have been comparatively well studied, research on museum creation in colonial contexts remains in its early stages. In August 1923, the Musée Khai-Dinh was founded through decrees issued by the Résident Supérieure d'Annam and the royal court of Hué, the then capital of present-day Việt Nam. The museum aimed to assemble artworks representative of the social, ritual and political life of Đại-Nam, whose territories had become a French colony and protectorates in the 19th century. This paper critically examines the creation of this museum within the broader framework of French colonial governance in so-called French Indochina. Using archival documents from the École Française d'Extrême-Orient and meeting protocols of the Association des Amis du Vieux Hué – the founding society of Musée Khai-Dinh – I analyse the process of museum-making and interrogate the colonial rhetoric of the 'civilising mission'.

This paper demonstrates how the French colonial regime strategically instrumentalised the Musée Khai-Dinh and its collection to justify and consolidate their rule in French Indochina. In doing so, they shaped narratives about Vietnamese heritage while silencing indigenous voices. This paper addresses key questions: what were the origins of the Musée Khai-Dinh's collection? How did French colonial administrators and Vietnamese elites contribute to its creation? Whose perspectives were marginalised in the process? And ultimately, how did the museum function within the broader machinery of colonial power? By unpacking these issues, this study contributes to discussions on the entanglement of museums, colonialism and the politics of representation.

11:50

National Gallery (London) / National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC): The Anglo-American Inheritance

Elizabeth A. Pergam

Co-Chair, Society for the History of Collecting

That London's National Gallery was the model for Andrew Mellon's vision of The National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, is well-known. Less familiar are the ways in which the British model of collecting and museum-building have informed institutions in the USA. Not only did Mellon's accumulation of paintings reflect his connection to the United Kingdom but so did many of the most well-known collections (private and public) formed by those in the USA. Most tellingly this transatlantic alliance has been institutionalised in the fact that the National Gallery of Art has a department of British and American art.

This paper will examine the circumstances around Mellon's 1937 gift to the nation, his understanding of the mission and scope of the British template, and the ways in which British methods, scholarship, curatorial practice and, most importantly, British-owned objects were imported into the USA. The National Gallery of Art stands at the end of a half-century museum building boom in a post-Civil War United States characterised by rapid industrialisation and rapid growth in fortunes of the so-called 'Robber Barons'. Its core collection – the 1937 gift of Andrew Mellon – echoed the Western tradition in painting valorised by the collections displayed in William Wilkins' Trafalgar Square. However, the millionaire banker turned Secretary of the Treasury was only one of many who looked to Britain's aristocratic-banker-merchant philanthropic model. An examination of Mellon's collecting in the context of US institution-building in the 20th century will demonstrate the long-term legacy of the north Atlantic cultural ties.

13:30

'Beaubourg' and May '68: The Museum Between Social Reconciliation and Cultural Subversion

Nicolas Heimendinger

Postdoc Researcher, Paris Nanterre University / Centre Pompidou

The project to build a multidisciplinary cultural centre in the heart of Paris, designed around a modern and contemporary art museum, was launched by Georges Pompidou in 1969, eighteen months after the events of May that led to his election as President of the Republic. Given this context, but also because it represented a break from the traditional forms of high culture – in both its architecture and artistic programming – the Beaubourg museum has often been presented as a response to the social crisis that erupted in 1968. Based on numerous archival documents and interviews, this paper explores how these political motivations shaped the conception of the new National Museum of Modern Art from 1969 until its inauguration in 1977.

Within France's presidential cabinet and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, the politicians and officials overseeing the implementation of this unconventional museum project saw it as a way to channel protests by providing a means of release for social tensions. Cultural liberalisation was seen as a response to the new aspirations of the youth, which, after 1968, had become a major public policy concern. In contrast to these concerns, other official experts brought into the heart of the state apparatus a critique of alienation in modern societies, openly inspired by the ideas of May '68, and viewed the Beaubourg project as an instrument of both cultural revolution and social emancipation. Far from the simplistic models of state co-option or instrumentalisation of art, the creation of the Centre Pompidou was thus marked by intense debates and internal tensions within both the artistic and governmental spheres. As this paper aims to demonstrate, the diverse and often contradictory political interpretations of this presidential project are a crucial factor in explaining the innovative artistic and museographic choices that define 'Beaubourg'.

13:50

A Museum as a Tool for Community Cohesion: The Creation of Hackney Museum in the 1980s

Rebecca Odell

Project Curator, Hackney Museum

In 1986, the staunchly left-wing and highly politicised Hackney Council in east London decided to create a new museum for what was then 'Britain's Poorest Borough'. This in part was a response to the challenges of caring for legacy historic and art collections held by other council departments, and the need to find a use for a vacant property. However, this new museum came at a time of great economic hardships for residents as well as social considerations around race, sexuality and disability. Within this context, the stated purpose of the museum was to 'develop a pride in Hackney as well as fostering harmonious relations between Hackney's different communities'. The staff of the new Hackney Museum had the challenge of developing a community museum and collection 'from scratch', and opening its doors to the public just 10 months after the appointment of its curator.

The surprise discovery in the area of an Anglo-Saxon logboat, a rare and significant archaeological artefact, helped secure the future of the fledgling museum. However, from the earliest curatorial choices the wider equalities agenda of the local authority are reflected. This included the adoption of a new approach to a 'local' museum or collection, less concerned with the geographical origin of items, and more focussed on the relevance to the communities living in the borough. This paper will examine the circumstances leading to the creation of Hackney Museum and argue that it can be seen as part of the 'anti-racist' efforts of Hackney Council at the time. It will also explore how the influence of this origin has continued and evolved over 40 years in two other 'new' versions of the Hackney Museum: a new premises in 2002, and a redeveloped permanent display due to open in 2026/7.

14:10

Bifurcated Gaze(s): The Museum of Mankind in Post-imperial Britain as Case Study

Olga Nikonenko

PhD Candidate,
University College London

The Museum of Mankind (1970–1997) stands as one of Britain's most significant yet critically overlooked experiments in temporary museum creation, offering a powerful lens through which to examine institutional responses to decolonisation. Housed in a repurposed building at 6 Burlington Gardens, this institution for less than thirty years exhibited the British Museum's non-European collections during a critical period of Britain's post-imperial transformation. By dissecting the Museum of Mankind as a compelling case study, this paper directly confronts a central question of the conference: what can museums that never quite came into being, or museums that came and went, tell us? The British Museum and the National Gallery functioned as complementary institutions that crystallised Britain's divided cultural vision. Both emerged from 19th-century imperial expansion and nation-building ideology, cementing a cultural hierarchy between 'Us' and 'Them': the National Gallery elevating European art as universal achievement, while the British Museum's ethnographic collections relegated non-European artefacts to the status of scientific specimens and curiosities.

The Museum of Mankind – positioned at this institutional fault line – reveals tensions inherent in Britain's cultural self-definition during decolonisation. Through the analysis of exhibition strategies, curatorial voices and institutional rhetoric, this paper demonstrates how the Museum of Mankind's experimental display strategies reflected shifting understandings of national identity in late 20th-century Britain, particularly when contrasted with the more traditional and largely unchanging nature of the National Gallery.

15:15

Whose Line is it Anyway? Mummy Portraits and the Boundaries of Collecting at the National Gallery

Alan Crookham

Chief Librarian and Archivist,
National Gallery

Over the course of its history the National Gallery has encountered many boundary lines with other museums and galleries. In its earliest years, part of its collection came under the guardianship of the British Museum. During the middle of the 19th century, most of the British School paintings were housed in gallery space provided by the South Kensington Museum. In 1897 the Tate Gallery was founded as the National Gallery of British Art, an annexe of the National Gallery; it achieved complete independence in 1955, but the collections continued to fluctuate between the two institutions for decades afterwards. This paper focuses on one of those boundary lines.

It examines the acquisition of a group of mummy portraits in 1888 by the National Gallery. It traces the growth of this area of the collection until the 1930s, at which point the portraits were placed on long loan at the British Museum. Under new powers of transfer established by the Museums and Galleries Act 1992, the objects were formally deaccessioned by the National Gallery and added to the British Museum's collection. The paper seeks to map the acquisition and transfer of the mummy portraits, whose movement between the two institutions speaks to the history of public collecting and changing priorities for display. Who decides the scope of the collection? How are the boundaries of collections defined and what factors influence changes to them? And how does this episode inform our understanding of today's boundaries for the National Gallery?

15:35

The Creation of the Gallery of Mineralogy and Geology at the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle (Paris) as a Mirror of a Hierarchy of Sciences

Adèle Chevalier

Postdoc, Center
Alexandre-Koyré, CNRS

Diane Courtin

PhD Candidate, PALOC, National
Museum of Natural History, Paris

Romane Le Roux

PhD Candidate, IMPMC, National
Museum of Natural History, Paris

The Gallery of Mineralogy and Geology at the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle in Paris, which opened to the public in 1841, is one of the earliest examples of a building built especially for museum purposes. It was also the first major gallery to be erected on the site of the Jardin des Plantes, with the aim of decongesting the Cabinet of Natural History, created under the Ancien Régime. This paper examines the choices made during the 1830s to separate the geology and mineralogy collections from the Cabinet of Natural History, where only zoological specimens remained. It also analyses the addition, within two symmetrical pavilions at the ends of the gallery, of the library and of the botanical collections, previously housed in another building since 1807.

The organisation of the Museum and decisions concerning this institution required the agreement of the collegiate assembly of professors. This paper aims to understand their motivations for the creation of a gallery (particularly for mineralogy, geology and botany) and their expectations in terms of the use of the collections (location, classification, display). Overall, the communication deals with the place dedicated to each science in the gallery and discusses the extent to which its design reveals a hierarchy of knowledge and collections, suggested by the extraction of botany and the library over the course of the following century, finally dedicating the building to the two disciplines initially considered (geology and mineralogy).

15:55

Seeds of Change: Eco-Museums, Climate Museums and Emergent Ecologies of Practice

Colin Sterling

Senior Lecturer in Heritage,
Museums and the Environment,
University of Amsterdam

In recent years a number of new, experimental museums have emerged to address the issue of climate change and the climate crisis in different ways. These include the Climate Museum in New York, Climate Museum UK, the Klimaatmuseum in Amsterdam, and the Houston Climate Justice Museum. These emergent counter-institutions respond to particular social, economic and ecological contexts, but they all share a commitment to rethinking the purpose and function of museums in the face of ecological breakdown. Typically, such museums move away from static object-centred displays to prioritise community engagement, multi-media storytelling, and in-situ exhibitions and creative interventions.

In this sense they rehearse some of the main strategies and agendas of eco-museums, which emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s at a time when the environmental crisis was becoming an important part of museological discourse. At the same time, contemporary climate museums clearly address something quite different from early eco-museums, most notably bringing together the local and the planetary to confront the scale and urgency of the climate crisis through art and culture. Linking together these two moments of museum formation, this paper will argue that while emerging climate museums may seek to fundamentally shift museological praxis, their reliance on specific funding mechanisms, ways of working and stakeholder relationships greatly determines their scope to enact meaningful change.

Abstracts

Day 2

Saturday 27 September 2025

10:35

Roundtable – A Provocative Reflection on ‘Creating Museums Now’

Chair: Jack Hartnell

Head of Research,
the National Gallery

Fiona Candlin

Director of the Mapping Museums
Lab, Birkbeck, University of London

Tony Butler

Director, Derby Museums

Rachael Browning

Director of Programme and Policy,
Art Fund

Kate Hill

Professor of History,
University of Lincoln

What are the current impulses for creating museums, locally, nationally and internationally? What are the opportunities, and challenges, for creating museums in the future?

Our Round Table will offer reflections on some recent museum examples and discuss and debate how and why museums emerge.

11:30

The Making of the West Bund Museum

Anqi Li

PhD Candidate,
University of Hong Kong

The 2010s saw a surge in art museum openings across China, yet their developmental histories remain underexplored in academic discourse. This paper examines the West Bund Museum in Shanghai, inaugurated in November 2019 through a partnership with the Centre Pompidou, known as the Centre Pompidou x West Bund Museum Project. This paper examines this unique pseudo-franchising model, exploring its establishment, significance and impact on the West Bund Museum's identity and influence. I argue that the West Bund Museum emerged from three interconnected factors: the urban renewal of Shanghai's West Bund area, the global influence of Western art museum franchising, and China's cultural diplomacy efforts to strengthen its soft power domestically and internationally. Building on my concept of the 'Bilbao Effect 2.0', which redefines the museum effect beyond the Guggenheim Bilbao model, this paper positions the West Bund Museum as a case study in leveraging art museums for cultural, urban and geopolitical agendas.

Extending my earlier journal article on Hong Kong's M+ museum (Bilbao Effect 2.0: The Making of M+), this study adopts a social and cultural history lens to trace the West Bund Museum's development. It incorporates perspectives from the art market, land and urban renewal policies, and Sino-French cultural exchange, while analysing exhibitions from curatorial and cultural-political perspectives. As the first cross-disciplinary study of the West Bund Museum, this paper contributes to broader discussions on museum creation, highlighting the interplay of local, national and global forces in shaping contemporary cultural institutions.

11:50

A Blessing or a Curse? A Longer Look at the History of Loans Between the National Gallery and the Nation's Galleries

Susanna Avery-Quash

Senior Research Lead:
Partnerships, Networks and
Initiatives, the National Gallery

As an important part of the National Gallery's Bicentenary in 2024, 'National Treasures' saw twelve UK museums and galleries hosting exhibitions, each featuring a masterpiece from Trafalgar Square. Loans from the national collection, whether to temporary exhibitions or as long loans, is not a new initiative. Indeed, the practice started soon after the Gallery was reconstituted in 1855, when Sir Charles Eastlake was appointed first Director. The talk will shed light on two early loan initiatives by the Gallery during the later 19th century: certain long loans to the National Galleries of Edinburgh and Dublin, of both new historic acquisitions and modern British art, that couldn't find hanging space at Trafalgar Square, and the systematic loan over two decades from 1868 of selected groups of works on paper from the massive and celebrated Turner Bequest to numerous regional art galleries.

Interestingly, not all these loan initiatives were greeted with equal enthusiasm; while George Mulvany, first Director in Dublin, privately expressed gratitude for the support he received from Eastlake, the rising art critic John Ruskin publicly voiced criticism of what he perceived to be the Gallery's attempts to palm off second-rate works under the guise of acting with exemplary public-spiritedness. The paper will ask what these early episodes reveal about the impetus and motivations of the National Gallery in relation to its sister organisations: what role did loaned paintings play in forging relationships between London and the regions? What were the perceived benefits as well as the drawbacks of this kind of activity for the institutions concerned? And what has the legacy been on the museum world of these pioneering loan activities?

12:10

Measled Pork and Alimentary Adulteration: The Food Museum at South Kensington and Bethnal Green

Mary Clayton-Kastenholz

CDP PhD Candidate,
Warburg Institute and Victoria
and Albert Museum

I propose to speak on the Food Museum, a collection that formed part of the South Kensington Museum and its Bethnal Green branch in the 19th and early 20th century (1857–1928). Despite its survival for more than 70 years and being reported in the 1860s as the second most popular collection in South Kensington (after paintings and before ornamental art), the Food Museum has been overlooked and undervalued in secondary literature around the South Kensington Museum. Using a cache of newly discovered 1860s labels and frequently overlooked printed sources such as annual reports and select committee documents, I will discuss the Food Museum as an unusual collection that was nonetheless emulated in other institutions nationally and internationally.

Duplicate labels were sent as far as Chicago and Toronto, and both labels and specimens were shared with the Government Central Museum in Bombay/Kolkata, as well as many museums in the UK. The Food Museum is a fascinating case study, and my talk will tie into several of the conference themes. It has an interesting story of formation out of a larger conceptual 'Economic museum' for the education of the lower classes, and some of its exhibits have a clear relation to contemporary concerns – particularly the adulteration of food. The Food Museum was classed as a 'Chemical' collection by several eminent scientists, and thus I will also speak about the clear challenges arising from displaying chemistry at a time when the discipline itself was still being defined. My paper will end with a reflection on the value of collections made of ordinary/cheap/literally perishable objects, both to 19th-century visitors and 21st-century historians.

13:45

Charting the Museum Impulse Through Shifting Tides: Trinity House and the Elusive 'museum of Leith'

Alina Botezatu

PhD Candidate at the University of Stirling and Historic Environment Scotland

Leith claims its distinct identity, as a port with a long history of far-reaching connections, as a former burgh negotiating its status against its powerful neighbour Edinburgh, and as an industrial urban landscape going through stages of flourishing, decline, ruination and regeneration. Since the 19th century to the present-day, a wealth of local initiatives mobilised these different identity strands, generating a kaleidoscopic heritage landscape. This paper engages with the under-explored research potential of this landscape, charting the museum impulse in this marginal, multilayered space, as the first study that investigates what appears as a conspicuous absence: a museum of Leith.

According to historical records, a 'museum of Leith' in the traditional sense, as a collection located in a dedicated building, had only a brief existence for less than a decade in the early 20th century. Challenging traditional frameworks, the paper shows that a 'museum of Leith' had a persistent existence, as a concept moving between latency and actively pursued cause, in resonance with the undergoing transformations of Leith. To account for the contextual complexity, this elusive museum is approached in relation with another institution from Leith that assumed the status of 'museum': Trinity House, the Corporation of Mariners and Shipmasters, operating in the same building since 1816, where they maintained and developed a collection transferred into public ownership in 2004. Mapping how Trinity House negotiated the idea of museum as part of their identity, tensions and synergies are revealed at the intersection with initiatives for establishing a 'museum of Leith'. The paper contributes with one of the few Scottish case-studies to the research efforts that illuminate the intricate processes underpinning the museum impulse in geographically and culturally peripheral environments.



14:05

Erasing Convent? The Museum Impulse and the Reframing of Female Religious Heritage

Sabina Rosenbergová

Assistant Professor of Cultural
Heritage & Marie Curie Fellow,
Centre for Religion and Heritage
University of Groningen,
Netherlands

The transformation of religious institutions into museums is a recurring topic in heritage studies. This is particularly visible in the secularisation of sacred spaces, the reclassification of religion as culture, and the shifting narratives that reframe them within national, artistic or historical contexts. However, the specific situation of musealised female convents and their gendered histories remains understudied. In 18th- and 19th-century Europe, the forced secularisation of female convents, followed by emerging national heritage policies, led to their dual marginalisation: as religious institutions affected by secularisation, and as female-led spaces whose histories were often overlooked in favour of gender-neutral or male-dominated narratives. Focusing on three case studies, this contribution discusses how female convents were redefined through their conversion into museum spaces.

The Monastery of Poor Clares in Prague, today part of the National Gallery, shifted from a female-centred religious space to a national museum for medieval art. The former Monastery of San Salvatore in Brescia, now the Museo di Santa Giulia, underwent a similar transformation, emphasising its regional and European significance over its monastic past. The Essen Abbey, today the Essen Cathedral Treasury, prioritised a universal Catholic narrative that overshadows its long history as a powerful regional female institution. These European cases parallel a broader trend in museum-making in which certain histories are marginalised to serve new institutional and nationalistic purposes. By examining the motivations behind these transitions – whether political, ideological or practical – this work focuses on the discussions on how museums emerge, evolve and construct narratives, particularly in relation to gendered histories at local, regional and national contexts.

14:25

The Reinvention of the National Gallery for the Twentieth Century: How Conflicting Agendas Shaped the Purpose of the Nation's Art Collection

Elena Greer

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This paper will highlight the role of personal agendas and interpersonal dynamics in contact with broader political contexts in steering the course of a national institution. The National Gallery at the turn of the 20th century faced an identity crisis. The institution was wedged between the expansion of the discipline of art history and the increasingly political role of museums that saw paintings become pawns of national power games. Wrapped around this tension was the social purpose of the Gallery: an educational and moral force for good and an aesthetic exemplar for emerging artists.

The director Sir Frederic Burton had scholarly aims for the gallery, championing a series of acquisitions that encouraged lateral thinking about the development of artistic practice and hanging the new Barry Rooms as a source book for practicing painters. Ultimately the vision for the new century was one of aesthetic excellence and the showcasing of canonical artistic genius, in competition with other wealthy nations, namely Germany and the USA, seeking art as a national trophy. This vision was enabled by a Treasury Minute of 1894 that altered the power structure of the Gallery, essentially divesting the director of ultimate authority and creating the administrative system alive today. Nonetheless, the story is one dominated by individuals, not bureaucracy. At the heart of these debates are individuals: the director, Sir Frederic Burton, his trustees including the archaeologist Sir Henry Layard, successive Prime Ministers, Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone, and prominent art-world figures such as Sir J.C. Robinson. Based on extensive archival research of personal papers, this paper will offer a behind the scenes view of the unique and varying motivations of a range of individuals whose conflicting intellectual, social and political contexts shaped the direction of the Gallery into the 20th century.

15:30

Oxford University Museum of Natural History: Creation and Use 1854–1914

Helen Goulston

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Opened in 1860, the Oxford University Museum of Natural History was part of the campaign to improve the provision of science education at Oxford University. As such, the Museum was created for a specific audience, with purpose-built facilities that enshrined a specific educational rationale. Yet, it also occupied a hybrid position: a university institution, but open to the public and with perhaps surprisingly broad aims for education. This presentation examines the Museum's founding aims and, more unusually, reflects on how the Museum's role evolved in subsequent decades.

At the heart of this research is the Museum's Gothic-Revival building. The building was configured to support a science education whose breadth and interdisciplinarity was underpinned by natural theology. It was designed to facilitate learning through multiple resources; alongside the University's natural history collections were facilities for practical instruction, lecture theatres and a library. As one contemporary commentator stated: 'The building is intended for a museum in the largest sense of the word'. However, the model of education on which the Museum was founded was soon outdated. This presentation traces how the Museum's roles shifted as the principles that had guided its creation were assailed by rapid changes to science education. I examine how the Museum's changing uses can be identified in the building's interior. Its original design provides insights into the educational models that underpinned the Museum's creation, whilst later alterations and additions chart the Museum's evolving institutional functions and identity. Studying the Museum building enables reflection on how a museum with a clearly defined role at its creation then evolved.

15:50

'The finest geographical museum in the world': Curating Exploration at the Royal Geographical Society

Emma Yandle

PhD Candidate on the Techné-AHRC funded project 'The Geographical Museum: Making Knowledge Through Objects', Royal Holloway, University of London and the Royal Geographical Society, with IBG

When the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) was founded in 1830, its mission to promote geographical knowledge did not include forming a collection. Yet, over time, objects arrived. Travellers donated 'curios' – objects acquired in the countries they visited – but many offered personal relics of exploration. Through their use in foreign and far-flung locations, these everyday items – from clothing and equipment to navigational instruments – were transformed into objects worthy of collection and display, acting as stand-ins for travellers' heroic deeds and scientific discoveries. In 1900, the Society's President used his annual Address to argue for new premises creating 'the finest geographical museum in the world'. Thirteen years later, when the RGS moved to South Kensington's museum district, it established a museum at the centre of its new headquarters.

This paper will consider what the RGS meant, or hoped for, by 'a geographical museum' in the early decades of the 20th century. Through new research into the collection and displays, it will seek to understand the museum's position and purpose within the wider geographical and imperial workings of the Society. Particular attention will be paid to how the RGS began to actively craft a collection capable of telling its desired narrative of geographical progress. Archival documents reveal how the Society sought to fill 'gaps' in its collection by targeting individuals, or their descendants, for relics, using the language of exploration to chase objects down 'tracks', or of military action to acquire them through 'raids'. Whilst many items collected by explorers abroad were already dispersed into museum collections, the Society's focus on these individuals' personal effects, arguably led to a geographical museum not about the wider world, but about ourselves.

16:10

Looking Back and Looking Forward: The Founding Collection and Contemporary Collection at the History of Science Museum, University of Oxford

Sumner Braund

Curator of Founding Collections
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University of Oxford

Tina Eyre

Curator of Oxford Science at
the History of Science Museum,
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The History of Science Museum (HSM) at the University of Oxford celebrated its centenary in 2024. The 100th anniversary prompted the museum to examine its creation and consider its next 100 years. This examination revealed an organic, at times idiosyncratic, institutional history in which the intellectual interests and social connections of its curators and directors and the economic pressures facing a new institution were profound forces. A collection created the museum in 1924, and it raises the question: to what extent does a founding collection shape a museum over the course of its lifecycle? Lewis Evans (1853–1930) was an English businessman and independent scholar who built a globally significant collection of over 800 medieval and early modern time-keeping and astronomical instruments.

His donation of these objects to the University of Oxford in 1924 led to the creation of a new museum of the history of science. Subsequent directors and curators have shaped the collection which has grown to include instruments of chemistry, medicine, photography, horology and, most recently, the material culture of the COVID-19 pandemic. Looking forward to its next century, the museum has turned its focus to contemporary collecting of Oxford science. We, the Curator of Founding Collections and Curator of Oxford Science at the HSM, propose to bring the collections we curate into conversation with each other in a joint paper. We will explore fundamental questions related to our museum's creation and future development, asking: once a collection creates a museum, what happens to it? Does it remain relevant? What connections, if any, exist between the founding collection and the contemporary collection? And, is it important that connections do exist?



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Alongside National Gallery staff, both MGHG Board members and Paul Mellon staff are involved in hosting panels for the conference.

About the Museums and Galleries History Group

The Museums and Galleries History Group (MGHG) was founded in 2002 and inaugurated in 2003 with the symposium *Museums and their Histories*, held at the National Gallery in London. The MGHG provides a platform for debate and contact among all those who seek to understand museums and galleries from historical and theoretical perspectives. The interests represented are wide-ranging, interdisciplinary and international and the Group also acts as a forum for considerations of the place of museum history within academic discourse and its importance for current museum practice.

The Board consists of a mixture of academics and professionals who work in the museum and galleries sector. MGHG are honoured to have the distinguished historian of collecting and museums Dr Arthur MacGregor as their President. Do consider joining the MGHG!

Website: <https://www.mghg.info/>

About the Paul Mellon Centre

Based in London's Bedford Square, the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art is an educational charity and research institute that supports new ways of understanding British art history and culture. The Centre supports new research in British art and architectural history and of British visual culture understood more broadly. Every year they award £1 million across a variety of funding opportunities to individuals and organisations. They run a thriving programme of events both in person and online. These events are geared to scholars, students and all those with a general interest in British art, offering the chance to engage with an extraordinary variety of topics, ideas and thinkers. The Centre also publish peer-reviewed monographs and catalogues on an ever-expanding range of topics, alongside a host of innovative digital publications, including their open access journal *British Art Studies*. Visit their Public Study Room where you can explore their rich library and archival holdings. They support young people to explore British art and art history by providing opportunities to share their unique perspectives and engage with ideas through a variety of approaches. They foster inclusive communities that prioritise collaboration and connection. Their networks connect and support researchers and professionals engaging with British art, at different stages of their working lives.

Website: <https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/>

THE NATIONAL GALLERY

The Museums and
Galleries History Group

MGHG
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Page 3: Charles Joseph Hullmandel (1789–1850), *The Louvre or the National Gallery of France; No. 100 Pall Mall or the National Gallery of England* (the bottom image depicts No. 100 Pall Mall, the first National Gallery, opened to the public on 10 May 1824) © The National Gallery

Page 26: Coloured engraving by Thomas Hosmer Shepherd (1793–1864), showing Trafalgar Square with the Wilkins Building in the background, 1850 (detail). The National Gallery opened in the Wilkins Building on Trafalgar Square in 1838. © The National Gallery

Page 33: National Gallery's Sainsbury Wing exterior and surrounding area, 30 May 2025. The Sainsbury Wing was refurbished as part of the Gallery's NG200 Bicentenary capital projects, reopening to the public in May 2025. © The National Gallery

All information correct at time of publishing.