

*'To teach the world about Wales  
and the Welsh people about their fatherland':  
100 years of the National Museum of Wales\**

Eurwyn Wiliam, MA, PhD, FSA

In 2007, Amgueddfa Cymru—National Museum Wales celebrated two anniversaries. Its Royal Charter was granted on 19 March 1907, and the formal opening of the Museum's main building in Cathays Park was performed by King George V on 21 April 1927. There are other reasons for this lecture being delivered before the Honourable Society during this centenary year. Two of the first pleas for there to be such an institution as a National Museum for Wales came in lectures to the Cymmrodorion. In 1876, F. W. Rudler, Professor of Natural Philosophy at the newly founded University College of Aberystwyth, suggested the formation of a National Museum for Wales 'to illustrate Cambrian natural history.' The call in a lecture to the National Eisteddfod in 1883 under the auspices of the Cymmrodorion by Brynmor Jones MP was more influential: he called for an institution so that 'the artisan and the collier and the agricultural labourer may be trained to look on the relics of the past and the masterpieces of art, not with "brute unconscious gaze" but with a seeing and understanding eye.' And so we may presume that Rowland Hughes's characters, in his novel *William Jones* (1944), did, on their visit in the 1930s:

'We'll go into the Museum for a while, Crad.'

Heavens, he would have to give Wili John and Eleri a day in Cardiff, he thought to himself as they entered the Museum's splendid main hall. He could afford that, even though money was quite tight now. The large dome window in the roof threw a soft reddish light over the marble floor and walls, and William Jones stepped forward on his feet as if he were in a particularly holy temple. The two gazed long at the Drummer Boy, the bronze statue by Sir Goscombe John, and then off they went up the steps to the right.

'The Hirlais Horn,' said William Jones by the case at the top of the stairs. He spoke authoritatively, even though the word was actually 'Hirlas'.

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<sup>v</sup> This paper is an expanded version of a lecture delivered to the Society at the British Academy on 19 April 2007, with Professor Prys Morgan in the chair.

They entered a handsome gallery.

'Have you got that medal William?' was Crad's question as they passed a case of medals awarded in various wars.

'Yes, boy. That's it.'

The gallery contained many old pianos from various parts of Wales, Welsh costumes of all types, illustrations of old houses and old machinery, carts and agricultural implements, and many things that in themselves were living illustrations of Wales' social history.

'My father can remember having to wear this, William,' said Crad.

'What?'

'A "Welsh Not" for speaking Welsh in school.' .....

They turned to see the rooms of the Welsh farmhouse – a kitchen, a dairy, a parlour, and a bedroom.

'Who would think it, eh, Crad?'

'Think what?'

'That it would be possible to create a picture like this of a farmhouse kitchen. Who placed these things together here, do you think?'

'I don't know, boy. But he's quite a boy, whoever he is.'

'You get a strange feeling when you stand here, don't you?' William Jones remarked....

'...it's hard to explain it. You are standing outside a kitchen looking at the tables and the dresser and the corner cupboard and the spinning-wheel and the old clock, and yet you feel as if you are inside and part of the kitchen somehow. As if you are outside but in at the same time.' (154-56)

Others have spoken on this subject before to the Society. Douglas Bassett, then Director, addressed the Society in 1982, and that extended lecture was subsequently published in four parts in these *Transactions*.<sup>1</sup> Trefor Owen, curator of the Welsh Folk Museum, lectured on his predecessor Iorwerth Peate in 1998, and Peate himself had addressed the Society at the Royal Eisteddfod in 1968.<sup>2</sup>

Naturally enough, 2007 saw numerous contributions to creating a definitive history of the Museum. Rhiannon Mason's *Museums, Nations, Identities: Wales and its National Museums* examined the role that the Museum has chosen to play in the life of the nation, as an exemplar of the role national museums play

<sup>1</sup> D. A. Bassett, 'The Making of a National Museum', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmrodorion* (1982), 153-85; Part II (1983), 187-220; Part III (1984), 217-316; Part IV (1990), 193-260.

<sup>2</sup> T. M. Owen, 'Iorwerth Peate a Diwylliant Gwerin', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmrodorion* (1998), 62-79; I. C. Peate, 'Yr Amgueddfa Werin a Bywyd Cymru', *Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmrodorion* (1968), 28-34.

in shaping public discourses about identities and cultures.<sup>3</sup> Bruce Campbell's Ph.D. thesis of 2005 examined the original 'battle for the sites',<sup>4</sup> and other Ph.D. work in progress is looking at the historical growth of the archaeology collections, and the current educational role of St Fagans. A picture book of the Museum's treasures,<sup>5</sup> arranged chronologically by date of acquisition, appeared in July 2007, followed by a television series with celebrities presenting and speaking for a particular object, and for which the public voted.<sup>6</sup>

A series of lectures under the aegis of the Institute of Welsh Affairs was also delivered to celebrate the joint centenary of the National Library and the National Museum. Called *Myths, Memories and Futures*,<sup>7</sup> the resulting publication includes contributions by the Society's President, by John Davies, by the Museum's Director General Michael Houlihan, and others. So it is difficult to find something original to say about the history of the institution. I certainly cannot offer a detached, historian's perspective – mine will inevitably be the internal and blinkered view of a curator turned administrator, but hopefully I can bring some detachment to the exercise. But much of what I have to say will be about today, and how we see tomorrow, and that I hope will be new to many of you.

I am speaking, of course, towards the end of what will in time be seen as the second Golden Age of museum building in Britain. The first was fuelled by the expansionism and social engineering of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The founding of the National Museum and the National Library in 1907 reflected that national and civic confidence. This, the second Golden Age, has been at least fuelled and probably formed by the creation in 1994 of the National Lottery. Indeed, the Heritage Fund alone granted from 1994 until December 2006 £3.8 billion towards projects together costing £6.5 billion, and the Museum benefited substantially from that.<sup>8</sup> But just as the First World War brought the first Golden Age to an end, so pressures are now slowing down the current rate of development. These include limitations on the monies available to the Heritage Lottery Fund because of the 2012 Olympics, the failure of some Millennium projects, a continuing rise in ongoing revenue costs, and the pressures to be more socially and geographically equitable. We will see far fewer major developments over the coming decades.

Given all the activity that I noted earlier, I need do no more than provide a very quick summary of the thinking that led to the formation of the National

<sup>3</sup> Rh. Mason, *Museums, Nations, Identities: Wales and its National Museums* (Cardiff, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> B. A. Campbell, 'The Battle for the Sites : a National Museum for Wales', Ph.D. thesis, Leicester, 2005, 17, 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales: celebrating the first 100 years*, Amgueddfa Cymru, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> The former Director, Douglas Bassett, and the historian Bill Jones, also a former member of staff, hope to publish a history of the Museum.

<sup>7</sup> J. Osmond (ed.), *Myths, Memories and Futures. The National Library and National Museum in the Story of Wales* (Institute of Welsh Affairs, Cardiff, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> National Audit Office, *Heritage Lottery Fund* (HMSO, London, 2007), 8.

Museum and its early work. In the Institute of Welsh Affairs book, *Myths, Memories and Futures* (2007), Prys Morgan made the fundamental point that both the National Library and the National Museum were founded very much as a protest against the neglect of Wales and Welsh treasures by the existing British institutions. In that sense, both were fundamentally anti-British institutions. This view is supported by John Davies who notes in the same volume that 'gaining those Charters proved that history is not always written by the victors.'<sup>9</sup> The new National Museum's brief, as we would say today, was to provide a complete representation of the geology, mineralogy, zoology, botany, ethnography, archaeology, art, history and special industries of Wales. Although the Charter stressed the overwhelmingly Welsh remit, it is quite clear that non-Welsh material would be collected, and this was done from the beginning. In that sense, as Rhiannon Mason has demonstrated, the original National Museum was to be a museum for the nation, illustrating the best of culture and science as it was understood at the time, rather than being necessarily representative of the nation.<sup>10</sup> However, that was to be in the future. The Museum of 1907 was firmly rooted in national identity, culture and ownership, and its foundation was unashamedly to help provide the intellectual underpinning and articulation of a nation's cultural identity and aspirations, in common with sister institutions in other Celtic countries, and very different from the remit of most of the English national museums, which aimed to show the world to Britain, rather than the nation to itself.<sup>11</sup> The tension between these two roles – a museum of Wales, and a museum for Wales – would be a thread that still runs through the history of the Museum.

The new Museum quickly made its mark. The building itself was lauded, being described as a 'masterpiece', and standing 'alone amongst great museums as an example of intelligent planning.'<sup>12</sup> Internally, the layout proposed by the Director Cyril Fox in 1926 suggested a logical plan for the galleries.<sup>13</sup> The building was accordingly divided into 'Nature' on the ground floor, and 'The Work of Man' on the first floor. From geology, namely the structure of Wales, the visitor saw botany and zoology – the flora and fauna of Wales – through archaeology representing the life of early man, to art representing his higher achievements. Reserve stores ran parallel and behind the main galleries. This was regarded as the greatest triumph in museum planning of its generation. The journal *Nature* in 1927 described it as 'undoubtedly the best-planned Museum in the British Isles and one of the best in the world,' whilst in 1933 the Secretary

<sup>9</sup> P. Morgan, 'The Creation of the National Museum and National Library', in Osmond (ed.), *Myths, Memories and Futures*, 20; J. Davies, 'Whose Memory Do We Keep?', *passim*, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Rh. Mason, 'Representing the Nation', in Osmond (ed.), *Myths, Memories and Futures*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> M. Houlihan, 'National Museums of the Future', in Osmond (ed.), *Myths, Memories and Futures*, 93.

<sup>12</sup> B. I. Gilman, of the Museum of Fine Art, Boston, in a report commissioned by the Carnegie Trust. Quoted in D. A. Bassett, *The National Museum of Wales: a remarkable institution* (Cardiff, 2003), 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

of the Museums Association claimed that the Science Museum and the National Museum of Wales were the two museums then leading the world.<sup>14</sup>

From the start the National Museum of Wales had a very different focus from the London-centred English national museums. An early innovation was an Affiliation Scheme, launched in 1923, whereby initially thirteen museums, and later many more, were identified as partners for whom National Museum staff identified objects and provided loans.<sup>15</sup> Another important early contribution was the decision to follow the lead of the Victoria and Albert Museum in providing a service for schools. Collections were made available for loan by schools in 1924, but it was not until 1944 that the idea of a full museum school service was considered. Launched in 1948 for 400 secondary schools, and set up on a permanent basis in 1955, this became the most ambitious and logistically most complicated outreach service of its kind in Britain.<sup>16</sup> It was also ground-breaking in that it represented an early partnership, with the salaries of the staff being paid by the Welsh Joint Education Committee, itself a consortium of local education authorities, and with room and administration being provided by the Museum. The service went through hard times in the 1970s and 1980s as local authority budgets for education were trimmed, and ultimately it was taken over by the Museum. Today, over 200,000 Welsh children in organised parties visit the Museum's sites every year.

The Museum was also the first of all the national museums in Britain to have a range of out-stations. It had acquired Turner House Art Gallery in 1921, followed by the Museum of the Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association at Caerleon in 1930. The operation of Segontium Roman Fort Museum at Caernarfon was taken on in 1937.<sup>17</sup> The Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagans was opened in 1948. In 1971 the Museum's Council took the conscious decision to seek more branches elsewhere in Wales.<sup>18</sup> In 1972 the North Wales Quarry Museum was acquired, later to become the Welsh Slate Museum and now the National Slate Museum. In 1976 the Museum of the Welsh Woollen Industry at Drefach Felindre became part of the National Museum, in 1977 the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum opened in the run-down dockland area of Cardiff, and in 1978 Yr Hen Gapel at Tre'r Ddol in Cardiganshire was developed as a Museum of Welsh Religious Life. Oriel Eryri, an environmental interpretation centre, was added at Llanberis in 1981. It was later re-titled Amgueddfa'r Gogledd. These latter two, Turner House, Segontium, and the Graham Sutherland Gallery in Pembrokeshire which was opened in 1976, have since been transferred to other operators. All these branches were carefully located in an appropriate location so that Tre'r Ddol was where the great religious revival of 1848 began, whilst Graham Sutherland had painted in

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Bassett, 'The Making of a National Museum', II, 203-6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 208-12; *The Museum Schools Service*, 1950.

<sup>17</sup> Bassett, 'The Making of a National Museum', III, 250-1, 268.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 292-95.

Pembrokeshire, and so on. The Museum was thus making a conscious effort to link with communities and tell stories where they are best told. For various reasons, often economic, it did not prove viable to continue with these particular locations, but over time the Museum has invested in other locations on the same strategic principle, and sought other means of serving the whole of the Welsh population on a nation-wide basis.

The other ground-breaking initiative that the museum was involved in from an early period was the creation of an open-air museum. In 1912, a committee was formed to consider an open-air museum for Britain, and the Museum's first Director, W. E. Hoyle, was a member of that committee. Nothing came of this, but the Museum's Council itself was determined to pursue a site for an open-air museum. Several sites were examined during the early 1940s, and the generous gift of St Fagans Castle and its grounds by Lord Plymouth in 1946, and the subsequent opening of the Welsh Folk Museum in 1948, is well known. The National Museum of Wales thus founded the first open-air museum in Britain. One innovation pioneered by the new folk museum was the early and extensive recording of Welsh dialects and oral history, and much of the work subsequently done by the BBC and other large institutions like the British Library and the Imperial War Museum was based on this work. St Fagans had also always collected material and information from the urban and industrialised parts of Wales, but not buildings. In the mid 1980s this policy of presenting only a somewhat idyllic picture of a vanished rural past was being challenged, both internally and externally, and the opening of the Rhyd y Car cottages from Merthyr Tydfil – homes of William Crawshay's iron miners, built in 1805 – marked a change of direction. The presentation of these cottages, representing four different periods of history up to 1995, was a world-wide first.<sup>19</sup> These houses were followed by two other major buildings representing industrial and urban Wales, namely the Gwalia Stores from Ogmore Vale and the Oakdale Workmen's Institute, and more recently a post-war prefab was added as well.

St Fagans, at least implicitly, was a target of Gaynor Kavanagh's reservations about the work of the National Museum in the Institute of Welsh Affairs lecture series. She made her point strongly: 'The traditional Welsh kitchen was also home to traditional Welsh abuse, poverty, hunger and illiteracy .... it could be argued that traditional Welsh anything is in fact a fantasy of grand proportions. The term "traditional" is a euphemism for denial.' Globally, she felt that the National Museum 'clings to a singular narrative that fails to resonate, that deals in cliché rather than the experience.'<sup>20</sup> I do not think that she had visited either the National Waterfront Museum at Swansea or Big Pit when she wrote this, and certainly not the new approach taken at St Fagans, of which more will be said later in this paper. I would also note that few if any other

<sup>19</sup> E. Wiliam, 'Re-erection, restoration and interpretation: The Rhyd-y-car houses at the Welsh Folk Museum', *Social History Curators' Group Journal* 16 (1988-89), 33-6.

<sup>20</sup> G. Kavanagh, 'Museums in a Broken World', in Osmond (ed.), *Myths, Memories and Futures*, 48.

national museums in Britain have addressed these issues to date, but the challenge that Kavanagh has given the Museum is a real one and one that it must address.

On a wider front, the National Museum began to accept major international collections from the 1950s onwards. The great Tomlin bequest of shells was accepted in 1954, two years after the first tranche of French Impressionists from the Davies sisters, namely the bequest of Gwendoline Davies – the Margaret Davies bequest followed in the 1960s.<sup>21</sup> Peter Lord has argued persuasively that this collection transformed totally the nature of the art collections and therefore the activity that was undertaken in that department.<sup>22</sup> From being a department that looked at – and was originally meant to look at – primarily Welsh art or at least art in Wales, it became internationalist in focus, at the expense of developing and researching the art of Wales. The purchase of the since-discredited Rubens cartoons in the 1980s, and lending many of the artworks to Japanese venues whilst major new galleries were added to Cathays Park in the early 1990s, only served to heap fuel on the flames.<sup>23</sup> By way of balance, I would note that by today, a third of the Museum's art collections are by Welsh artists, a third are of Welsh subjects, and only a third – albeit the best-known third – fall outside those two criteria.<sup>24</sup> I will mention later the Museum's plans to put more of these works on display.

Offering the Welsh a window on the rest of the world, by collecting and showing non-Welsh treasures, was a sentiment not reflected in the early mission statements. Lord Pontypridd's 'mission statement' of 1912 for the new institution was 'to teach the world about Wales and the Welsh people about their fatherland.' Over the years the Museum has regarded the international agenda as of increasing importance, and a key part of its agendas for citizenship and access and cultural enrichment. But this historical duality between the inward and outward focus is still reflected in departmental collecting policies: Archaeology and Numismatics, Social and Cultural History, and Industry were and have remained almost exclusively Wales-related in their collecting activities, Art is about equal, whilst Geology and Biodiversity have more non-Welsh material than Welsh. For Archaeology, of course, all collections up to the Middle Ages belong to a period when Wales did not exist as a political entity, and up to the end of the Roman period, at least, they belong to an international context. And some of the most iconic 'Welsh' pieces are in the British Museum; of course, there was no National Museum of Wales to receive the Mold Cape when it was found in 1833. With the sciences it is clearer: plants and animals respect boundaries that are natural rather than national.

<sup>21</sup> J. Ingamells, *The Davies Collection of French Art* (National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, 1967).

<sup>22</sup> P. Lord, *The Aesthetics of Relevance* (Llandysul, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> P. Cannon-Brookes, *The History of Aeneas by Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)* (National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, n.d.); see also extensive press coverage.

<sup>24</sup> National Museums and Galleries of Wales, *Views of the Future* (Cardiff, n.d. [2002]), appendices.

But the Museum was quite late in collecting and interpreting one major aspect of Welsh life, namely industry, given that Wales was the world's first industrial nation. It was pressure from the Ancient Monuments Board that made it create a Department of Industry in 1955, and I have already mentioned some of the industrial museums that were consequently acquired.<sup>25</sup> A major activity for the Museum between 1997 and 2005 was developing and implementing a plan for the better presentation and interpretation of those industrial sites. This turned into a £50 million strategy involving major redevelopments. The beginning of this strategy was pegged around the closure of the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum in Cardiff Bay, one of the most fraught events in the Museum's history. The Industrial and Maritime Museum proved incapable of further development, contrary to the Museum's wishes, and it was decided that the only strategic way forward was to close it. The small but loyal visitor base was most upset by this, and bitter memories lingered long.

The sale of the site, however, released funds that amongst other things enabled the Museum to purchase a site in Nantgarw for a much-needed Collections Centre. At the National Slate Museum in Llanberis, a £1.8 million redevelopment project was completed in 2001, and included not only the conservation of the existing museum based in the old Dinorwig Quarry workshops at Gilfach Ddu, but also the re-erection on the site of a small terrace of quarrymen's houses removed in advance of demolition from Tanygrisiau. At the National Wool Museum in Drefach Felindre, a £2.6 million project completed in 2005 completely transformed the presentation of that site in what was once supposedly known as the 'Huddersfield of Wales'. Big Pit Mining Museum was brought into the National Museum's family in 2001, and a £7.2 million redevelopment package, largely funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, was agreed. This enabled the Museum to conserve the existing buildings and underground workings and add significant new exhibitions and interpretation, which won the Gulbenkian Museum of the Year Award in 2005. The completion of this long process was the opening of a brand new museum in Swansea in October 2005, the £34 million National Waterfront Museum, created partly in a new building by the Stirling Prize-winners Wilkinson Eyre, and which presents a synoptic view of the influence of industry on life.<sup>26</sup>

So where does the Museum stand now? The Museum is an organisation employing some 650 staff across eight sites, at an annual cost to the taxpayer of £25 million. Its core business, in support of its educational mission, is to care for the 4.7 million objects that it already holds, to enhance them for the future, and to disseminate the knowledge developed about them. How are its activities perceived? Because of its multi-sited and multidisciplinary nature, I do not think that it is seen by many of its users as a single institution, unlike the National

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<sup>25</sup> Bassett, 'The Making of a National Museum', III, 302-307.

<sup>26</sup> [R. G. Keen], *The National Waterfront Museum. The story of Wales's innovation and enterprise* (National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, 2005).



Library. Some visitors have a favourite site – the majority of visitors to most of our sites live within an hour's drive of that site – while others are interested in a particular subject. The art galleries are visited by the more elderly middle class and by tourists, the science displays by more families. St Fagans has a status akin to the National Library to Welsh speakers, but is used as a park by the locals. The Slate Museum has more English visitors than locals, while Big Pit gets more visits from French schoolchildren than from Welsh ones. The Museum's professional reputation also varies. In the sciences, it is one of the last bastions in the British Isles for taxonomy – the science of naming species – and its international standing is correspondingly high. The art collections are outstandingly good, but little-known. The Museum has a high standing in the archaeological world. It excels at aspects of social and industrial history, but has always ignored political history.

More formally, in 2000-01 the Museum was subjected to a Quinquennial Review by the Welsh Assembly Government. This was a fundamental review of the Museum's activities and its value for money, and was extremely positive about the Museum's activities:

Our principal conclusions are that the Museum is a well-governed and well-directed organisation that has recently made fundamental improvements to its arrangements for delivering the strategic objectives of the Assembly. It provides an impressive array of achievements at a reasonable cost. At the same time, its arm's-length relationship with the Assembly gives it the degree of independence necessary to its role in the long-term sustainable stewardship of the treasures vested in its trust..... We conclude that the Museum provides major benefits to the people of Wales and internationally through enhancements to access, improvements to collections, the development of its products [= sites] and partnerships and through its contributions to research.<sup>27</sup>

However, the review recommended that the Museum should look afresh at its governance structure, its Court and Council. One outcome of the resulting review of governance was the very clear realisation that the Museum's collections are held in trust for the public; it is only right, therefore, that the public should have their say in how they are used.

Today, one of the greatest challenges facing the Museum is democracy. There are several aspects to this. The first is the ownership of the collections. The collections do not belong to the Trustees, nor the Welsh Assembly Government, but rather to those for whose benefit the collections are held in trust, namely the people of Wales. How should the Museum then persuade the

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<sup>27</sup> School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, *Quinquennial Review of the National Museums and Galleries of Wales* (2001), 1, 10.

people of Wales that these are their collections, telling their stories, and ideally in a way that is accessible to them? And how much should it listen to what the public want? I know with certainty that if the Museum were to ask openly what the public want, then the answer would be ‘mummies and dinosaurs.’ So there is a considerable task of educating the public to enable them to make better use of their own collections. The Museum also has to educate the public’s elected representatives. It is important that Assembly politicians and officials must not believe that they should have the final say about the Museum and its activities. It was only the Museum’s Royal Charter and charitable status that saved it from being thrust into the flames of the Assembly Government’s vaunted ‘bonfire of the quangos’ a few years ago. The defence put up by the Museum was that it operated under Charity Law, and, as such its fundamental role is to hold assets on behalf of the nation. Under Charity Law, such assets can only be disposed of to another charity with comparable aims. In practice, too, the Museum would no longer have been eligible for major funds provided by bodies other than the Assembly Government – particularly the Heritage Lottery Fund – and monies so granted would have to be repaid. The fundamental element of the ‘arm’s-length principle’, established originally by the British Museums Act, remained crucial in order to preserve curatorial independence.<sup>28</sup>

This commitment to genuine public ownership lies at the heart of the Museum’s vision for the future. During the Spring of 2005, the Museum held a major public consultation to seek comments and thoughts from as many of its stakeholders as possible regarding its outline plans and aspirations for the next decade and beyond. Feedback was received from some 1,400 individuals and organisations, and those have helped to shape subsequent plans. The Museum believes that it has already created a reputation for its commitment to education and excellence, but over the next decades it wishes to become equally well known for its relevance to society, and for innovation. It has been innovative in the past, and it wishes to lead the field again. The Museum wants to involve communities who currently do not have access to its collections and facilities, to represent Wales’s varied cultural identities, and to promote and practise sustainability.<sup>29</sup>

Its continuous development as a learning organisation is seen as central to delivering these aspirations. Over the past few years museums, in common with other organisations, have moved away from the concept of education – which has the connotation of telling people about perceived truths – to the more inclusive learning, which is a two-way process whereby visitors and users can choose what they wish to take away with them. It also wishes to offer more clarity in all that it does. This is not just sentiment – the change of name of the

<sup>28</sup> Minutes of National Assembly of Wales Culture Committee, held at the Welsh Slate Museum, 14 September 2003.

<sup>29</sup> *Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales. A world-class museum of learning. Our vision for the next ten years*, n.d. [2006]; *Creating a World Class Museum of Learning. Development Plan 2006/7-2015/16* (Cardiff, 2006).

overall organisation to Amgueddfa Cymru—National Museum Wales was carefully considered, as was the re-naming of the individual sites. The acronym WISYWIG – what you see is what you get – is entirely apposite.

The physical manifestations of this should become apparent to visitors at the Museum's two main sites over the next decade. At National Museum Cardiff, the logic of Fox's thinking of 1926 will be extended when the building will be separated into a first floor dedicated to art, and a ground floor dedicated to natural history. It is interesting to note that the loyal address of 1912, when the foundation stone for Cathays Park was laid, described the Museum as 'this National Home of Science and Art.' This work will be undertaken in a number of stages. The Museum's presentation of archaeology was moved in 2007 from where it had been for many years, in the Upper West Wing, to the ground floor, where it re-opened as a major temporary exhibition examining 'Origins'. However, this is merely an interim position; the aspiration is that the presentation of archaeology, during the next decade, will cease at the Cardiff site, and be moved to St Fagans, giving the opportunity of telling the story of Wales throughout the ages on one site. The first step in this long process began with the re-opening of one of three galleries there, again with a major temporary exhibition, this time dedicated to examining the concepts of 'belonging' – essentially what is it to live in Wales today? Another of St Fagans' contributions to celebrating the centenary was the opening of the re-erected medieval church of Llandeilo Tal-y-bont, with its interior re-created to how it would have looked in the early sixteenth century.

The Museum has identified the redevelopment of St Fagans as a museum telling the unbroken history of Wales as its first strategic target. The second long-term priority, partly because it is likely to cost less than the third, will be developing the Natural History Museum at Cathays Park. The third strategic aspiration, developing a proper National Gallery, depends entirely on a commitment from the Assembly Government – there is no way that the Museum itself could fund a major extension to the existing building, if that is what is deemed necessary. That is certainly what the Museum itself would like. In the meantime, the galleries vacated by Archaeology are being upgraded so as to advance this aim.

Museum collections, of course, can, and should, play a vital part in the construction of cultural identities. The value placed upon artefacts, monuments and landscapes is culturally contingent, and iconic treasures are central to the construction of identities. However, it may be that currently a sense of national pride in Wales is increasingly being challenged by a series of local agendas. This is perhaps inevitable. Communities, regions and even whole nations are fighting to maintain their own identities; in the cultural sector, for instance, this has led to demands for restitution. On the international scale it is for the Parthenon Sculptures to be restored to Greece; on the national scale it is for the Mold Cape to be restored to Wales; and on the regional scale it is for everything

ever found in north Wales to be re-housed in a new national museum in north-east Wales, though no doubt the natives of north-west Wales would have a view on that. And every single community wants its own provision. Only in Wales, it seems, is there a debate today about where a new national art museum should be located – everywhere else it would be automatically assumed to be in the capital. Pride in the nation and, by extension, in the capital, is being replaced by a very locally-focused agenda of ‘we want it; we want it now; and we want it here.’ This seems to represent a very real change from the 1950s and 60s, when local authorities were often so delighted that a building from their area was chosen for re-erection at St Fagans that they would contribute financially to the process. Today, local people and press alike tend to see this as stealing their heritage, even though the Museum has never accepted a building other than as a saviour of last resort.

The definition of a ‘national’ museum was originally based on quality: these museums housed the collections which were clearly identifiable at the time as the best in the country. But fashions change and knowledge, and the search for it, moves on. Unlike libraries, there is no statutory requirement for local authorities to provide a museum service. In England, some collections in local museums have been ‘designated’ as being of ‘national’ quality, and those institutions accordingly are eligible for more funding. In Wales, collections in local museums have not been so designated, and the National Museum continues to dominate museum provision. In Wales, there is one national museum currently operating seven sites, with some eighty other registered museums – some local, some regimental, and a few private. In a recent assessment of Welsh museums,<sup>30</sup> over 600 staff worked for the National Museum, and 490 in the rest; 1.5 million visits were made to the National’s sites, and 800,000 to the rest; the National Museum’s total expenditure in 2005–6 was £26.7 million, as against £11.6 million for the rest of the sector; and, finally, whilst the National Museum has some 4.7 million objects and groups of objects in its collections, all the rest together have 767,000 items.

But there is another possible criterion for ‘national’ standing, namely all those collections cared for on behalf of the nation. In a very real sense, local authority museums are also funded by the taxpayer, albeit through a slightly different route. So should all collections held in publicly-funded museums in Wales (the National Museum, local museums, and university museums) be re-defined as the national collection, or the distributed national collection? Certainly, I think we must identify the total pool of assets that we all hold, and work strategically on integrating collection policies and strategies, just as some research agendas are already treated. The new White Paper on Heritage Protection for the Twenty-First Century, released in draft in March 2007, will result in the various forms of preservation – the lists of historic buildings, the schedules of ancient monuments, and the register of parks and gardens – being brought together to provide a single point of information about all nationally

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<sup>30</sup> J. Henderson and P. Parkes, *Spotlight on Museums. CyMAL Baselines 2006* (CyMAL 2007).

designated heritage assets in Wales.<sup>31</sup> So I think we should also move to a single register of museum assets in Wales, which could be graded by importance and cared for appropriately.

One clear way forward for the Museum, in the meantime, is to continue to develop its partnerships with appropriate local museums, where treasures, both local and from other areas, might be shown in the form of a temporary exhibition or semi-permanent display. With the financial assistance of the Assembly Government and the Esmée Fairbairn Trust, the Museum currently has two formal partnership schemes. Cyfoeth Cymru Gyfan—Sharing Treasures was launched in 2001. Five museums took part in the pilot programme, Brecon, Ynys Môn, Wrexham, Pontypool and Carmarthen. Projects included new exhibitions and redisplay of existing long-term loan material. New partners for 2006–8 are Scolton Manor, Abergavenny and Llandudno. Celf Cymru Gyfan—Artshare Wales is a sister programme for art, partnering Bodelwyddan Castle, the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea, Oriel Davies in Newtown, Oriel Mostyn in Llandudno, and Ruthin Craft Centre. Through these programmes, local museums and galleries are able to develop their infrastructure and capacity so that they can display objects from our collections. An even more formal partnership is that with the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, where the Museum supports an art gallery being built as an extension to the tourist information centre at St. Davids, and opened in 2008.

The Museum is also developing its outreach work to encompass communities as well as schools. A major trial, called 'On Common Ground', worked successfully to interest young people in several areas in heritage and museums, but keeping such an initiative going is very resource-hungry.<sup>32</sup> In 2007, too, the Museum launched its website-based virtual museum (*Rhagor-e-museumwales*), designed to overcome the geographically-fixed nature of its existing sites and enable people throughout Wales, and indeed the world, to have access to its collections and our knowledge. This will also give the Museum an additional outlet for the considerable amount of subject-based and museological research that it generates; it has recently strengthened its policy and strategy for research.

A huge challenge over the coming years lies in persuading those who do not currently visit the Museum's sites to do so. Free admission is only one of the keys to doing that. Relevance is of least equal importance. Apart from in the sciences, the Museum's collections of contemporary material are weak, and this must be a major area of activity henceforth, so that the curators and museum interpreters of the future will have the means of telling today's story, as well as the Museum having the ability to tell contemporary stories now. Becoming relevant may also mean becoming controversial, a task museums have traditionally shied away from. But they do have something that the universities

<sup>31</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Welsh Assembly Government. *Heritage Protection for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2007).

<sup>32</sup> [S. Greenhalgh]. *On Common Ground* website, containing the text of independent valuation, <http://www.oncommonground.co.uk/home.htm> (accessed 30 September 2008).

do not have, namely an existing public face, and the Museum increasingly sees its role as one of not only creating knowledge but also mediating it to the public.

But fundamentally, in the words of Paul Loveluck, the Museum's President, the role of the Museum is 'not to tell one story, to tell you what to think. We are here to enable you to think, to decide for yourselves ..... to create meanings from the past to illuminate the present and stand some chance of being relevant for the future.'<sup>33</sup> Its primary purpose remains an educational one, but, in line with changing thinking, it has shifted from the original Charter view to teaching people about things, to teaching them how to think about things. The greatest contribution the Museum can make to society today is to help create informed citizens, who can think about themselves and their role in the world. There are increasing numbers of newcomers to Wales, and the Museum must teach them about the Welsh, and the Welsh about them.

The way ahead for the Museum in the near future, therefore, lies in being able to be both a source of specialist knowledge and also an opener of minds. Over the past few years, Howard Gardner, Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard University, has developed the concept of multiple intelligence. He argues that the twenty-first century will belong to people who think in certain ways. Those who cannot develop these cognitive abilities will face a bleak future at the mercy of forces they cannot understand – overwhelmed by information, unable to succeed in the workplace, and incapable of making judicious decisions about personal and professional matters. The parochial mindset decreed to our species through evolution – when people rarely left their small communities – is not much use for survival in the global village, in which citizens, money, information and cultural trends flow easily across borders. So influential has been Gardner's thinking that Harvard University has overhauled its core curriculum of what all its students should learn, having recognised that the oldest, richest, and most influential college in America was not adequately preparing its graduates for life outside its ivory towers. To quote the person leading that review, the philosopher Professor Alison Simmons, 'we are not trying to say that an educated man or woman needs to know this, that and the other. What we are saying is that an educated person should have a certain set of capacities; interpretive capacities, problem solving capacities, reflective capacities and critical capacities, to help them through the world.'<sup>34</sup>

Interpretive techniques within our grasp today mean that the Museum can offer these facilities world-wide to all who desire to take advantage of them. I will end by quoting another, much lauded, contemporary American thinker, however unlikely that might have sounded a few years ago. I refer to former Vice-President Al Gore, but I do not want to talk about his film *An Inconvenient*

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<sup>33</sup> P. Loveluck, 'Museums and national identity in post-devolution Wales', lecture delivered to a joint meeting of the Society of Antiquaries of London and the Cambrian Archaeological Association at Cardiff in 2003.

<sup>34</sup> A. Ahuja, 'Thinking ahead', *The Times*, 4 April 2007.

*Truth*; rather, I want to mention his new television channel, called 'Current TV' for 18-34 year olds, with 30% of its content provided by viewers, which was launched in Britain in March 2007. Gore's thesis is that the invention of printing brought knowledge directly to the people, leading to the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason. Television then re-feudalised the world. Whilst there are many so-called interactive programmes today, television fundamentally is a one-way medium – it tells us, and we listen.<sup>35</sup> So like Al Gore's new television channel, the Museum's aspiration – I suspect like that of many leading museums worldwide – is to provide the basic raw material – that is, the collections and the knowledge associated with them – so that people can construct their own meanings at their own pace. Museums will become theatres for debate more than platforms for preaching one truth, and so they should be.

I have no doubt that this approach will serve better those whom the Museum already serves reasonably well – people interested in history, art and the world around them. This approach may well be the one that it will follow for the next decade or two, and developing technology will help. Who, a decade ago, thought that there would be today more mobile phones than people in Britain? New devices will mean that the technologically-savvy will be able to download museum knowledge and interpretation to their own hand-held devices. But not all will have the means or the interest to do so, and society may polarise into the technologically-enabled and the technologically-challenged. Equally, those who traditionally do not visit museums are probably the ones going to be most in need of certainty in their lives. As the world develops increasingly into an ever-confusing place, and all the old certainties disappear in the face of climate change and the pressures that will put on all our lives and those of our descendants, I think at least some people will require the Museum once again to create new truths for a new age, exactly as they required, and the Museum responded, one hundred years ago.

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<sup>35</sup> S. Armstrong, 'Coming soon, to a screen near you', *Sunday Times*, *Culture* supplement, 11 March 2007.