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Title: Beautiful bits that bob: redisplaying John Hunter's collection in the 21st century

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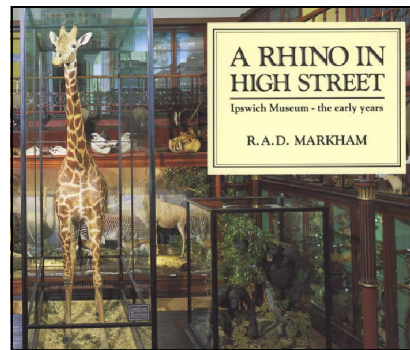
Source: Chaplin, S. (2006). Beautiful bits that bob: redisplaying John Hunter's collection in the 21st century. *NatSCA News, Issue 9*, 22 - 24.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/320>

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Paris, Modern



Ipswich, traditional

- Paris was judged too arty and alienating
- Ipswich was a disappointment, nothing new
- Horniman should pursue a middle path, keeping its cathedral architecture, the icons, which reassure about scholarship and integrity...but with a trusting invitation to develop the display of its wonderful collections, just as we have been discussing here.

Simon Chaplin, Senior Curator, Hunterian Museum, Royal College of Surgeons
Beautiful bits that bob: redisplaying John Hunter's collection in the 21st century

The Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons in London re-opened in February 2005 after a three-year, £3.1million facelift. At its heart is the collection of the 18th century surgeon and naturalist John Hunter, with over three thousand preparations of human and comparative anatomy and pathology. This paper explores the interpretation and design strategies which the project team followed to present an unusual and highly specialised scientific collection to a new public audience.

Opportunities and challenges

- The Hunterian museum houses a unique collection of 52,000 objects.
- It holds important historical resources with 3,500 Hunterian specimens, 7,000 instruments and 500 paintings and drawings.
- It also houses important scientific resources, including important primate material and human and comparative anatomy and pathology.

Challenges

- The infrastructure of the building was outdated
- The environment and security of the building was poor.
- The space was inflexible
- The building was physically inaccessible
- The Interpretation of displays and exhibits was poor.
- The design was confused
- The museum was intellectually inaccessible

The Hunterian Museum Project

Challenge: to make the collections accessible, relevant and secure for our target audiences

Accessible and Authoritative displays		Explorer	“I liked the personal information about what happened to patients, but left wanting to know more.”
Resources/facilities for teaching & research		Student	“There is so much I can use here.”
Engaging but Expert information		Surgeon	“I still find inspiration in Hunter’s work.”
Emphasise Visual appeal		Artist	“I don’t know how many times I said ‘amazing!’”

The project involved clearing over 3000 objects from the old displays and a further 10,000 from on-gallery storage. Over 4000 have gone back on display in the new museum.

Building work commenced in June 2003 and was completed in September 2004. Gallery clearance, content development and exhibit installation was undertaken by the eight permanent museum staff plus two short-term contract posts.

Vital statistics

- Cost: £3.05million (£1.5m from external funders)
- Display area: 733 sq m (from 675 sq m)
- Staff: 6 full-time, 1 half-time, 2 short-term contract

Measuring success

- 10,000 objects were rehoused and 4,200 put on display
- An accessible, secure, and environmentally controlled space was created
- This included a platform which can be used for events and public programmes
- Partnerships with other organisations such as UCL and Kingston University were developed for teaching.
- Annual visitor figures increased from 14,000 to 32,000.
- The museum received media attention and positive feedback.

Future challenges

- Operations
- Maintain revenue support: to keep admission free
- Snagging and updating: air handling, interactives, displays
- Change the staff structure: increase the use of volunteers, there are now up to 30



Still to do

- Encourage access to the collections by researchers
- Improve the collections information
- Develop more teaching partnerships
- Seeking project funding

Key message: *A specialist collection is no bar to public access*

**Kevin Walsh, Executive Officer (Programme Development)
Oxford University Museum of Natural History
'Feeling Good': a new approach to displays**

Oxford University Museum of Natural History is a listed Victorian architectural treasure, in which we display and present twenty-first century science. A fourteen month project is now complete that has seen a new approach to our fossil galleries, and an entirely new display on the theme of evolution, plus the introduction of a number of touchable specimens. Presenting science to a diverse audience has many challenges, and the project has needed to balance advice from a wide range of specialists.

Oxford University Museum of Natural History is a listed Victorian architectural treasure, in which we display and present twenty-first century science. We are a university museum open to the general public with free entrance, and attract more than 300,000 visitors annually. The museum is divided into four 'collections'. The first and largest of these is Entomology, with over 5 million specimens, including the world's first pinned insect. Zoological collections have over 300,000 specimens, including the only body parts of the Dodo. Geological collections contain over 350,000 specimens of fossils, including the first dinosaur ever to be described. Mineralogical collections contain over 30,000 minerals and 100,000 rocks.

The mission statement of the museum is 'to assemble, preserve and exhibit the University's natural history collections and to promote research, teaching and public education in the natural sciences based on the university's collections'. Much of the emphasis in the twentieth century was on research and teaching within the university, but this century there is an increased focus on public education, which was the main reason the museum was opened in 1860.

A redisplay programme commenced in 1997, and is due to be completed by 2008. The main phase of this was during 2004 and 2005, funded by a £780,000 Millennium Commission/Wolfson grant. The purpose of redisplay was to modernise the displays while retaining the style and grandeur that the Victorian architecture demands; and also to attract new audiences to the museum. This main phase is now complete after fourteen month's work. It has seen a new approach to our fossil galleries, and an entirely new display on the theme of evolution, plus the introduction of a number of touchable specimens. Presenting science to a di-