

# A LOOK AT THE ROLE OF THE MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES OFFICE

*in the life of the University's instrument and other collections*

The museums, galleries and collections of the University of Edinburgh are going through a period of expansion and organisational change. It's an exciting time to be part of the University Collections Division, and its Museums & Galleries Office (MaGO), of which St Cecilia's Hall Museum of Instruments and Reid Concert Hall Museum of Instruments are a key part.

The collections of the University of Edinburgh are extremely diverse. A 1608 double manual harpsichord by Andreas Ruckers, an illuminated manuscript owned by Queen Margaret of Scotland, a 1930s Medical School blazer and a mummified crocodile - these are some of the objects that belong to the University. Many of these items are on display at different sites around the University; at the Talbot Rice Gallery, St Cecilia's Hall or the Natural History Museum at King's Buildings. Some are used daily as teaching aids, others are studied for their literary content, others for their DNA, while some glorify corporate spaces - all are part of the University's cultural riches. Despite this diversity, we all have at the heart of our business the object, the artwork or the specimen. We are all concerned with their preservation, promotion and study.



*The launch of Museums and Galleries Month, May 2004.*

Left: *Enjoying the Fine Art Collections at the Talbot Rice Gallery.*  
Below: *Making noise at the Reid Concert Hall Museum of Instruments.*



Regular readers of *Soundboard* will know that in 2001, after a period of review of the University's collections, these three cultural venues with their staff, collections, commonalities and idiosyncrasies, were brought together into the management structure of the Library. Specifically, they came into the University Collections Division under the Director of University Collections.

The other members of the family of University Collections Division are Special Collections, University Archives, Digital Projects, Collections Management, and Lothian Health Services Archive. The addition of the Museums & Galleries Office to the Library has changed it fundamentally, even its name - it is now called Libraries, Museums & Galleries or LMG!

This may sound rather bureaucratic or administrative, but the Museums & Galleries Office is an essential grouping that discusses a whole range of issues relating to the proper care, stewardship and promotion of the collections under their management. With already common problems and aspirations, there have always been collaborations and close working together among University Collections before the MaGO unit was created. However, a combination of formal monthly meetings and informal discussions enables MaGO to further the development of our collections, our staff and our activities through practical joint-working, pooling resources and the sheer fact that there is strength in numbers! There is creativity too, when those passionate about collections and education come together. For example, recent collaborations for Museums & Galleries Month on May Day and for Doors Open Day encouraged visitors traditionally interested in fine art to find out more about musical instruments, and *vice versa*.



Above: *A mummified crocodile from the Natural History Collection.*

Left: *Detail from St Catherine's Book of Hours - a treasure from Special Collections.*

Each collection is different from the other in terms of resources, premises, services, staff, infrastructure and location. Each are at different stages of development, accessibility and public profile. Given such diversity, how does such a large institution as the University organise such a group?

Along with the Talbot Rice Gallery and University Fine Art Collections, St Cecilia's Hall Museum of Instruments and Reid Concert Hall Museum of Instruments are part of the administrative unit called the Museums and Galleries Office, or MaGO to those of us concerned with its daily business. That business is joint-working in order to manage, preserve, utilise, promote and make available the University's cultural assets.

A key aspiration for MaGO in 2005 is to develop an Education Unit, with trained education staff who will work across the musical instrument collections, fine art collections and the Talbot Rice gallery contemporary exhibitions programme. Bringing together the historic and the contemporary not only creates exciting possibilities and juxtapositions, it also presents the opportunity to tap into unusual combinations of funding streams, all to our mutual benefit. Small initiatives include the creation of a map which leads visitors from St Cecilia's Hall to the Reid Concert Hall via the Talbot Rice Gallery. There are temporary projects such as the forthcoming exhibition on William Drummond of Hawthornden (1585-1649) using books from Edinburgh University Library, portraits from Scottish National Portrait Gallery and expertise and venue supplied by the Talbot Rice Gallery. One major development has been the appointment of a Libraries, Museums & Galleries Development Manager to facilitate fundraising. Members of MaGO also have access to support from the Library's accounting, staff management and estate staff, as well as the University Collections Office through John Scally, and Lynda Ardern, John's secretary and myself as Collections Support Officer.

So it can be seen that the Museums & Galleries Office works collaboratively across University Collections. The University Collections Office has a remit across the University's other collections, outwith the formal management structure of the Libraries, Museums & Galleries. These are College and School museums, teaching and research collections and 'historic' collections. The main collections form the Committee of Curators of University Collections (CCUC), a group consisting of curators from the School of Scottish Studies Archive, the Natural History Collections, the Anatomy Collections, Chemistry Collection, Classics Collection and Cockburn Museum of Geology, as well as our own members of the Museums & Galleries Office.



*Detail of the display of brass horns at the Reid Concert Hall Museum of Instruments.  
[Photograph: Raymond Parks]*

There isn't space here to tell you of the work of these collections, their history, importance to University teaching and research, unique holdings of sound archives, giant Australian earthworms, Burke's skeleton, or Hall's experiments. This is a diverse group, but, like the Museums & Galleries

Office, there are clear synergies, and we work together on stewardship issues such as museum accreditation, disaster planning and collections insurance, and also on more dynamic initiatives such as the *Object Lessons* exhibition and *Object Lessons Online*. Readers might like to know that the first steps towards a second University Collections exhibition were taken at a recent CCUC meeting!

In the first two years of MaGO, we have established common ground and joint goals and are developing action plans to achieve them. We liaise closely with other University departments such as Communications and Public Affairs (currently looking at publicity and signposting), with academic units (student placements, teaching and research) with the Office of Lifelong Learning (social inclusion), Development & Alumni and Estates & Buildings.

Over 2005 we in the Museums & Galleries Office will contribute to exhibitions and events worldwide; participate in conferences, publish, supervise, teach; mount at least 15 internal exhibitions; draw thousands of pounds in funding from SAC, SMC, HLF and others; support readers and researchers worldwide; host visits from primary and secondary schools, and lifelong learners, who will take away a positive experience of the University; maintain, develop and promote unique and world class musical instrument collections; take a major part in the University's contribution to the Edinburgh Festival; support our collections through Accreditation; host the 2004 conference of the University Museums in Scotland, the list seems endless.

A lot of this is done with minimal staff and even less funding. A very necessary role of the University Collections Office and the Museums & Galleries Office is to constantly advocate within and outwith the University for much-needed staff and financial support. Other priorities for MaGO are developing partnerships with other organisations, participating in city-wide initiatives such as the Blinky Palermo Project, and a European project to carry out "virtual restoration" of historic keyboard instruments and provide hands-on installations in collaborating museums for students and the general public, contributing to the University's return for the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, and continuing to work to the mutual benefit of all our collections.

Find out more about these collections at:  
[www.objectlessons.lib.ed.ac.uk](http://www.objectlessons.lib.ed.ac.uk)  
[www.music.ed.ac.uk/euchmi/uox.html](http://www.music.ed.ac.uk/euchmi/uox.html)

*Jacky MacBeath  
Collections Support Officer*