

Lost Museums Study Day, Saturday 21 May 2011, 10.00–17.00

Discover a lost world of cabinets of curiosity and grand exhibitions as experts speak about historical museums and collections that have been dispersed or destroyed. The Study Day includes a chance to engage with the material and manuscript remnants of forgotten collections, and a tour of the Hunterian Museum's special exhibition *London's Lost Museums*. In conjunction with the Museums and Galleries History Group (www.mghg.org).

£45/£35 concessions. Includes refreshments and lunch.

Bookings: **020 7869 6560**.

10.00 Registration

10.30 Keynote: Sam Alberti (Royal College of Surgeons)
'Morbid Museums: Lost medical collections'

11.00 Alan Bates (University College London)
'London's Lost Anatomy Shows'

11.30 Frances Larson (Durham University)
'The Phantom Museum: Sir Henry Wellcome and his collection'

12.00 Discussion

12.30 Lunch / exhibition and archive tours

1.30 Chris Plumb (University of Manchester)
'Lost in the Urban Jungle: Menageries and museums in Georgian London'

2.00 Caroline Cornish (Royal Holloway)
"'Useful and curious"? Making meaning of the Kew Museums of Economic Botany'

2.30 Discussion

2.45 Coffee/tea

3.15 Stuart Eagles
"'Artistic Benevolence": Thomas Horsfall's Art Museum in Manchester'

3.45 Keynote: Tim Knox (Sir John Soane's Museum)
'Cottingham's Museum of Medieval Art'

4.15 Questions/discussion

4.30 Exhibition and archive tours

Dr Sam Alberti***Morbid Museums: Lost medical collections***

Victorian medical education and research relied on medical collections, and any nineteenth-century hospital, medical school or university worth its salt had a large museum of anatomy and pathology. Most had extensive catalogues and many boasted tens of thousands of specimens. And yet few collections now remain beyond the royal colleges in London and Edinburgh. Where did these collections come from? How were they preserved, displayed and used? Where did they go? In this talk Sam Alberti details the rise and fall (and rise again) of the medical museum in Britain.

Dr Alan Bates***London's Lost Anatomy Museums***

In the mid-nineteenth century, public anatomy museums featured prominently among London's places of popular entertainment and education. They were at first tolerated, and even encouraged, by medical professionals who later opposed them after they became linked with unorthodox practitioners. Though advertised as a means of learning something of anatomy without the unpleasantness of dissection, by the 1850s anatomy museums were also dispensing medical advice and treatments for venereal disease. The museum setting gave the vendor an air of medical authority, and horrifying models alarmed patients and entertained casual visitors.

The 1857 Obscene Publications Act allowed qualified medical men to launch private prosecutions against museum proprietors on the grounds that their shows' explicit content was liable to corrupt the public. Since professionals, by virtue of their education, social background and character, were deemed impervious to such demoralizing influences, medical practitioners were able to acquire a monopoly of anatomy teaching, which in some quarters they continue to defend. In the long term, the association of anatomy with obscenity would create particular difficulties for public engagement with the subject. For the Victorian public, it put a stop to a good day out.

Dr Frances Larson***The Phantom Museum: Sir Henry Wellcome and his collection***

Comprising more than one million objects, weighing hundreds of tons and filling acres of storage space, Henry Wellcome's collection might seem too big to lose. Particularly as Wellcome himself was determined that every little object mattered and nothing must be overlooked. But the Wellcome Collection was never displayed en masse. It spent much of its life hidden in storage and after Wellcome's death in 1936 it was dispersed around the world. Wellcome's Museum was always more of a fantasy than a reality: it was a 'phantom museum'. But perhaps all museums are a little bit lost, and perhaps, counter-intuitively, the bigger they get the harder they are to 'find'.

Dr Christopher Plumb***Lost in the Urban Jungle: menageries and museums in Georgian London***

Georgian London teemed with exotic animals, many of them living. The Strand and Piccadilly were lined with animal merchants, menageries, and animal exhibitions. West London was populated with a wealthy elite eager to see and able to buy a diverse range of living exotica. London's museums also offered the sight of exotic specimens to visitors – many of which had been once living on display in the city's menageries and animal merchants. Other London premises too brought animals into the heart of urban life; barbers, apothecaries, and turtle-warehouses. This talk will map out the history and geography of the lost Georgian urban jungle, exploring the exhibitionary relationship between living and dead exotic animals. These animals emerge as a significant and highly visible part of London life in the eighteenth century.

Caroline Cornish***“Useful and curious”? Making meaning of the Kew Museums of Economic Botany***

The first Kew Museum of Economic Botany was established in 1847 by Kew Gardens director, Sir William Jackson Hooker, as ‘a deposit for all kinds of useful and curious Vegetable Products’. Hooker initially defined audiences for the Museum as, ‘not only...the scientific botanist, but...the merchant, the manufacturer, the physician, the chemist, the druggist, the dyer, the carpenter and cabinet-maker, and artisans of every description’. The collections grew exponentially and by 1910 there were four separate museums in the grounds of the Gardens. However, from the start there were apparent contradictions at the heart of the museums’ collecting and display strategies, producing awkward juxtapositions of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’. This paper examines the heterogeneity of the museums’ audiences and acquisitional networks, in an attempt to provide a rationale for this hybridity of approach. Caroline Cornish argues that the Kew Museums partook of an epistemology of nineteenth-century imperial science, which was manifest in a unique set of museological conventions and preoccupations.

Dr Stuart Eagles***“Artistic Benevolence”: Thomas Horsfall's Art Museum in Ancoats, Manchester***

Stuart Eagles explores the lost Art Museum at Ancoats, established by the carding (cotton) manufacturer and philanthropist Thomas Coglean Horsfall, for the edification of workers and their children living in Manchester's East End. Inspired by the example of John Ruskin's St George's Museum in Walkley, Sheffield, Horsfall sought to share art with, and encourage a sense of the ennobling and enabling qualities of beauty among, an industrial class which he sought to save from the corruptions of squalor and the temptations of vice. Collaborating with Manchester University Settlement, the Art Museum and its volunteers provided education and entertainment for a generation of poor people before its priorities and objectives were both over-taken and taken over by local government.

Dr Tim Knox***Cottingham's Museum of Medieval Art***

As an architectural treasure-house, the Soane Museum has no rival. However, Regency London was home to another great architectural collection, Lewis Nockalls Cottingham’s ‘Museum of Mediaeval Art’, in the Waterloo Bridge Road. Cottingham’s collection, sold up in 1851, was rich in specimens of Gothic and early English architecture, and included perhaps the earliest sequence of ‘period rooms’ in any museum. In this keynote, Tim Knox reconstructs Cottingham’s amazing Museum.