**MANNERS, POSITION AND HISTORY: DEFINING THE MUSEUM AND ITS ROLE IN LEARNING**

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**Abstract:**

*From its earliest incarnation in Alexandria to its modern, twenty-first century counterpart, museums of all types, shapes and sizes share a common purpose – learning. Whilst the type of learning, the reason behind the latter or the way in which the visitor learns might be different the value of the museum in encouraging and supporting both formal and informal learning opportunities across a range of subjects remains. This article will provide an overview of the development of the museum as a place of learning before making specific links to the modern school curriculum and in particular to the use of the museum in the study of history. It provides a background which will be built upon through further research into how schools today employ museums in the learning of history and the article will end with suggestions for this.*

**Keywords**

Museums, Museum education, Museum - definition of, Learning, Heterotopia, National pride, Enjoyment, History Education.

**Defining the Museum**

Such is the range of interpretations as to what a ‘museum’ might be that even the International Council of Museums (ICOM) had difficulty in providing a firm definition which would satisfy the international community ‘ICOM itself has not helped very much to produce an answer to a question that is heard more and more . . . Is it a museum?’ (Hudson, 1998, p.45) being forced to amend their definition from the following in 1946:

A non-profit- making, permanent institution in the service of society and it’s development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for the purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment.’ (Ambrose and Paine, 1993, p.8)

to:

a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of e

ducation, study and enjoyment. (21st General Conference, Vienna, 2007)

(<http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/>)

The change in emphasis from museums displaying physical evidence to displaying both ‘tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment’ (ibid) would suggest that the idea of a ‘museum’ is greater than the physical items which it displays and that it can be adapted to meet the ever changing nature of society.

The Museums Association for the United Kingdom suggested in 1998 that: ‘Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.’ (<http://www.museumsassociation.org/about/frequently-asked-questions>)

The equivalent American association goes so far as to suggest some examples of the types of places which might be considered as ‘museums’

A non-profit, permanent, established institution, not existing primarily for the purpose of conducting temporary exhibitions…open to the public and administered in the public interest, for the purpose of conserving and preserving, studying, interpreting, assembling, and exhibiting to the public for its instruction and enjoyment objects and specimens of educational and cultural value, including artistic, scientific…historical and technological material. Museums thus defined shall include botanical gardens, zoological parks, aquaria, planetaria, historical societies, and historic houses and sites which meet the requirements set forth in the preceding sentence. (Ambrose and Paine, 1993, p.8)

In containing references to learning or education, such definitions link the modern museum to the earliest Greek example, at Alexandria. The American exemplification of its definition provides yet further links between the present and past through its inclusion of ‘zoological parks’ and ‘gardens’, features commented upon by Chadwick and in the work of Falk and Dierking (2000). Such definitions alert us to a commonality of features informed by the overarching definition provided by the ICOM - being open to the public; the acquisition, conservation and preservation of objects for the purposes of studying, interpreting and enjoyment. A closer consideration of the most basic and original definition of the term ‘museum’ further illustrates the importance of learning.

An etymological definition of ‘museum’ provides us with the following:

[museum (n.)](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=museum&allowed_in_frame=0)  1610s, ‘the university building in Alexandria,’ from Latin museum ‘ibrary, study,’ from Greek mouseion ‘place of study, library or museum, school of art or poetry,’ originally ‘a seat or shrine of the Muses,’ from Mousa ‘Muse’ (see [muse](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=muse&allowed_in_frame=0) (n.)).

(<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=museum>).

Again, the feature linking both modern and classical definitions is that of study or, taken in its broadest sense, learning. The etymological definition provides links to classical Greek and Latin, attributing a specific learning purpose to the buildings described – study; indeed through association with the idea of a shrine dedicated to the ‘protectors of the fine arts’, a certain ‘gravitas’ is added to the idea of study which took place in such buildings. The Musaeum of Alexandria focused on providing the perfect atmosphere and surroundings for those who lived there, to study: ‘Begun in the third century B.C.E the celebrated Musaeum of Alexandria was a group of literary and scientific scholars supported by the Ptolomies, who provided them with palatial housing and a now legendary library.’ (Lee, 1997, p.385) Although the mention of the library at Alexandria can be regarded as supporting the idea of ‘book learning’, the library and its books were second to the idea of learning and study, the books helping to promote learning through thought. Whilst such a description provides a chronological and historical context for the idea of learning, it also clearly indicates that the focus of the musaeum in Alexandria was not on items and buildings but on the ‘musaeum’ as a group of people engaged in learning, a point further supported by Murphy (2003).

The derivation of the French term ‘museum’ enlarges on this idea:

In 1708…Pierre Danet identified *museum* as the Latin form of the French term *musee*, which could refer to an academic assembly or to a cabinet; likewise … Antoine Court de Gebelin (1725-1784) located the origins of the French term muse in the Greco-Latin terms musaeum, museum, which first meant an ‘Academy, a place where Men of Letters assemble.’ and which subsequently became associated with a private study or “cabinet for men of letters” (Lee, 1997, p. 388)

That a ‘cabinet’, at this time, was little more than a room in a building is emphasised through the ‘cabinets of curiosities’ which preceded the formal museum building. The emphasis is not on a building or room to store items of interest but rather the room or building is secondary to and in the service of learning. It is also suggestive of learning not as a solitary activity but rather as a social endeavour, predating social learning theory (Vygotsky 1962) by over two hundred years.

Antiquity however did not limit learning to a building: ‘As Pliny and Varro remind us, nature was the primary haunt of the Muses, and therefore a ‘museum’ in the most literal sense.’ (Findlen, 2007, p.25), Learning taking place in the ‘surrounding world’ (ibid). Indeed Socrates was renowned for taking his question and discussion based approach to learning out into the countryside whilst Pliny in his *Natural History* continued in this vein, assigning learning to taking place in a pastoral setting, suitable for reflective thought, quiet contemplation and discussion. Such a definition is important today. It reminds us that learning can take place anywhere, even amongst ‘nature’ and not only within a building.

The emergence of a specific building as part of a definition for the museum can be traced back to the ‘Cabinets of Curiosities’ characteristic of the wealthy classes before the nineteenth century. Yet even in considering these ‘Wunderkabinett’ (Murphy 2003, Hooper-Greenhill 1992, Bennett 1995) the emphasis is not on a particular building but rather on a room within a building used for private collections for ‘ Most museums were not originally planned for public use; more often they were private individual collections which were in time opened to the public.’ (Schools Council, 1972, p.11) That such private collections were little more than a dusty, unordered, mixed bag of items which might be regarded as having taken the interest of the collector could be one way of describing them. Yet there were examples of museums that would be recognisable today.

Opened in 1683, the Ashmolean Museum is by its own admission ‘the oldest public museum in Britain, and the first-purpose built public museum in the world’. (<http://www.ashmolean.org>). Whilst the Ashmolean was purpose built and did allow the general public entrance, if they could afford the fee, it was to be through the categorisation of the items on display that the museum had the greatest impact on the development of the modern museum, providing a sense of order and structure which the cabinets of curiosities did not. John Tradescant (1656) in describing his categorisation of the items within the Ashmolean suggests a more formal, ordered way of learning, enabling visitors to recognise change and continuity, similarity and difference and the significance of items – key concepts in the study of history today (DfES 1990, QCA 2007, DfE 2013).

**The Museum as a Specific Building**

A move to a more widespread recognition of a museum as a specific architectural construct, built with a specific purpose in mind, was not to occur until the nineteenth century, with the French architectural competitions ensuring links to the classical past through the stipulation of certain features reminiscent of the classical ‘museum’ (Lee 1997). It was to be the collectors of this period, the wealthy emerging middle classes, industrialists, explorers whose ability to collect can be directly related to their business prowess, who were far more likely to have a specific building or gallery constructed for their collections.

The move to the development of a specific building to house items of interest from across the natural history spectrum as well as examples of manmade objects which would appear to support Marcel Foucault’s description of a museum as an example of a heterotopia ‘ . . . of indefinitely accumulating time’ (1984, p7). Yet Foucault’s very choice of words in declaring that ‘The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible’ (1984, p.6) does the museum, especially in its modern incarnation, a disservice relegating it to little more than a store house. Whilst many museums of the twentieth and twenty-first century do contain a range of different spaces often divided into different time periods (Roman gallery, Egyptian Gallery, Greek gallery), a sense of unity is provided by the focus on the human experience which can be regarded as being common to all and contradicts Foucault’s belief that they are incompatible. Indeed it is this unifying factor which makes a museum of particular use in the study of history at all educational levels.

Even the natural history museums and galleries provide an insight into the human story, providing an insight into the elements of nature that have helped to shape our lives. Foucault’s definition may just as easily be applied to many homes across the country and world today for an ‘accumulation of time’ could be used to describe the personal collections of mementoes, memorabilia or just general personal items collected and added to across the years by most members of society and only limited in time. Such a definition also detracts from the deeper purpose of the museum, suggesting that it is only a place for storing and displaying items. Whilst this may be applicable to the cabinets of curiosities, antecedents of the museum as we know and experience it today, the changes which took place in the nineteenth century recognise a far closer relationship between the idea of a store house of items and the original Greek idea of a place of learning.

**The Museum: An education in political power**

Even in the earliest incarnation of the museum, political power was central to the existence of the latter. Sponsored and supported as they were by the Ptolomies, the establishment of the library at Alexandria and the scholars who studied within this rarefied setting provided a living example of the power of one of history’s oldest political families and was also suggestive of a link between those with power and the promotion of learning. Wealth and power were synonymous and as such the earliest incarnation of the museum had a lot in common with the practices of collecting of the royal families both within Britain and across Europe from the sixteenth century.

Collectors were often royal, rich individuals and later, members of the new middle class, able to sponsor expeditions or purchase the items brought back from them which added to their personal collections. Such collections whilst being for private enjoyment also provided an education in where power lay, wealth and power being synonymous. The audience for such items was most definitely from the higher social orders, more often than not friends or those individuals whom the collector wanted to impress, for whatever reason. Such a use of collections was not unique to Britain. In 1584 the collection of Francesco I de Medici had been transferred to the Ufizi Gallery ‘ . . .in response to the need for public legitimisation of the Medici dynasty’ (Bennett, 1995, p.27). That the public could be allowed access to the country’s treasures purely for enjoyment or education was still a long way off in Britain at the turn of the nineteenth century.

It was to be the tumultuous events which took place in France in the late eighteenth century which marked a turning point in the development of the museum into a place for public visiting (Schubert 2009, McDonald 2003). The decision of the revolutionary government in France in 1789 to make public the royal collections of art through the formation of the Louvre Museum marked a clear move to providing the proletariat or working classes with access to the riches which had been symbols of royal power. Yet even this act might be regarded as another example of using the museum to exert power, the difference being that the power had shifted from royalty to the governing Republic. Again this was not an attempt at providing a formal learning environment but rather the intention was that visitors would learn through their own experiences and choices of exhibits to visit, an example of the free choice learning and learning environment considered by Falk and Dierking (2000), Bamberger and Tal (2006).

The public protests, riots and social unrest in response to economic, political and social conditions (Evans 1983, Stevenson 1992, Gilmour 1992, Plowright 1996) across Britain and Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries led to a ruling class which ‘feared for their safety’ (Evans, 1983, p.276). Museums were considered by the ruling conservative class to be a way of distracting the more educated, politically aware and interested middle classes, from the often violent social change taking place across Europe (Bennett 1995). Edwin Chadwick provided an example of such a use of ‘museums’ when he noted the successful distraction of people away from a Chartist meeting by the timely opening of the zoo, botanical gardens and museums in Bradford, leading to the meeting being a complete failure (cited in Bennett 1995).

The museum was used by the ruling classes in the nineteenth century to help to bring about social change and social cohesion. In encouraging the working classes to visit museums in whatever form, it was hoped that they would learn the manners and morals from their bourgeois visitor counterparts, bringing about a change in the behaviour of the working masses. Rather than a focus on the acquisition of knowledge or an increased understanding of different cultures and peoples, museums were regarded as providing an education in social sensibilities and practices, in providing ‘public culturing’ (McDonald, 2003, p.2). In 1888 Greenwood (cited in Bennett 1995) attributed even greater powers to the museum in declaring that ‘. . . a Museum and Free Library are as necessary for the mental and moral health of the citizens as good sanitary arrangements . . .are for their physical health and comfort.’ (Greenwood, 1888, p.389) It would appear that what had once been the provider of time for thought and reflection was very much, in the nineteenth century, regarded as a panacea for the ills of society. Such a use of the museum expanded it whilst maintaining the informal nature of learning, providing a clear example of Lave’s theory of situated learning (1990) over a hundred years prior to its inception.

Foremost in the mind of the government in encouraging the creation of museums via The Public Museums Act 1845, was a different type of education. The museum in the second half of the nineteenth century was to be used to create a sense of national pride, a shared identity, an idea echoed in more recent years with Gordon Brown’s (2007) championing, if unsuccessfully, of the creation of a Museum of British History. The opening of the French royal collections via the Louvre can be seen within this context (Davis 1976, Meijer-Van Mensch and Van Mensch 2010) as can The Great Exhibition (1851) (Bennett 1988, 1995). The ordered nature of the displays and the way in which the visiting public was able to move through the exhibition reinforced ideas of societal order and supported the ruling classes in winning the ‘hearts and minds’ (Bennett 1988: 76) of the masses.

 By the mid nineteenth century a general, if rather slow, movement away from a museum as a private collection of items had begun to take place. The construction of purpose built museums for the edification of the general public, funded not only by private individuals but by the state and local councils marked a definite attempt to educate society. The museum provided an informal learning opportunity, in which the visitor chose the displays to focus upon, taking from them the knowledge that they chose whilst being unaware of the controlling, clandestine influence of government through the promotion of such venues. That the public response to this exertion of power was largely positive may be seen through the media reports of the time (Flanders 1995). The opening of the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool in 1877 led the Daily Courier to declare ‘ … there can be no question that a multitude of visitors will throng the Art Gallery to drink in the inspiration of genius and to be imbued with the lessons the paintings and marbles silently teach.’ (1877, p.4, quoted in Flanders 1995). In adopting the language of sustenance the Courier predated the views and thoughts of Greenwood (1888), imbuing the museums with an importance similar to that of food and drink for survival while the use of the term ‘lessons’ firmly establishes the museum as a place of learning.

**The Museum and The Promotion of Learning**

The idea of learning through the museum was not that envisaged in Ancient Greece, but rather the British Museum and similar venues were to provide knowledge, a suggestion which continues to be recognised today (Hughes 2014). A questioning approach as advocated by Socrates was not encouraged; observation was. Any reflection and deeper thought was not the overt intention although it may have taken place. The ordinary public provided with such access for the first time were meant to marvel at the objects which had been collected and displayed as examples of the achievements of ‘great’ Britain and Britons. Sunday afternoons could be spent in visiting the museum as well as on walks, the government thereby providing for the intellectual health of society as well as physical welfare.

That the changes which have become recognised as characteristic of the nineteenth century also included the introduction of a formal education system, which was to have a profound effect on the growth and development of museums and of public perceptions as to their purpose. Whilst private education had existed in a variety of forms for centuries (Cathedral and Church Schools, private tutors and grammar schools) a form of education for the masses regulated by the government and local authorities grew throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A plethora of educational reforms including The Elementary Education Act (1870), The Elementary Education (School Attendance Act) 1893, The Balfour Act (1902) and The Fisher Act of 1918 effectively paved the way for the state education system as we know and recognise it today, providing a platform for the Education Act of 1944 (The ‘Butler’ Act) and the developments of the twenty-first century. Yet in providing a clear, unequivocal, formal education system for all such acts also instigated a change in purpose for museums. Whilst they retained an informal education element (Rowlands, 2012), the focus of museums became much more concentrated on the collection, preservation and conservation of items of significance. The informal learning aspect of the museum in the twentieth century moved away from that of social education and manners, to one of learning facts, details and also the promotion of questioning, a pre-requisite to reflection and thought, features of modern educational theory and pedagogy in general (Vygotsky 1962, Kagan 1994, Fisher 2000) and the pedagogy of history in particular. Cossons (1992) in exhorting museums to send ‘ …people out of those museums provoked to ask questions.’ (1992, p.77) not only established a link between the classical ideas of learning as practised by Socrates but suggested a link to more reflective, analytical learning through museums. Indeed the distinct educational purpose of the twenty-first century museum is clearly evident in the range of literature which specifically features ‘learning’ or ‘education’ as an aspect of the museum experience (Falk and Dierking 2000, Lord 2007, Davis 1976, Hooper-Greenhill 1994).

The twenty-first century museum has recognised the need to provide a more diverse range of learning experiences for its visitors, reaffirming the role of education as a key aspect of the role of the museum today. The number of museums of all types which now have both a physical presence and an on-line presence providing virtual, intangible tours is increasing (Bouck et al 2009, Grincheva 2012, Hou et al 2014) and provides clear exemplification of the ‘intangible’ as mentioned in the ICOM’s 2007 definition of a museum. Yet in attempting to ‘keep up with the times’ and employ modern technology to enhance visitor participation and enjoyment museums have been accused of compromising the integrity of the museum purpose (McPherson 2006). Providing a virtual museum, virtual tour or on-line exhibits whilst opening the museum to a much wider audience, not limited to being able to physically visit a place, removes the experiential nature of learning in the museum. Hands on learning, exploring and unintentional learning through stumbling across items in a physical context is not possible in a virtual environment yet it is such experiences which are of importance in the promotion of learning about the past.

**The Museum: Learning, Enjoyment and History**

Such modern approaches to the provision of access to museums not only broadens the range of learning opportunities but can also be linked to the ‘enjoyment’ factor, mentioned in definitions. The employment of ‘inspiration’ in the British definition is clearly reminiscent of the purpose of the earliest museums to create a sense of awe in the visitor, a ‘wow’ factor as suggested by the term ‘Wunderkammer’. The inclusion of ‘enjoyment’ in all definitions is also significant in providing another link back to the earliest museums, in the form of the ‘cabinets of curiosities’, originally formed for the enjoyment, amusement and perusal of the collector and his associates. It is also significant to note that enjoyment is clearly associated with the learning process in history (Cooper 1991) and across the modern curriculum in general (Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status 2012).

The role of the museum as a specific venue through which we can learn about the past is an element of its role which clearly links both past and present incarnations of this establishment. Whilst the visiting public of the early nineteenth century were subconsciously developing their manners they were also developing their awareness of change and continuity, similarity and difference and significance, historical concepts which form a part of the twenty-first century History curriculum. Visitors to the Great Exhibition (1851) caught in the awe and wonder of the occasion and exhibits were also learning about the development of the British Empire and the role that Britain played in the wider world. That museums are considered to be an important aspect of the modern educational landscape, valued as contributing to formal and informal learning alike, is clearly evident through the work of Hooper-Greenhill (1992, 1994), Weier (2004), Schools Council (1972), Hein (1998), Hughes (2014).

Yet even those museums with an on-line, virtual presence continue to promote learning through more traditional methods of displaying information about exhibits from which it is hoped that the visitor will gain knowledge. Small cards, with close writing display what the curator considers to be key information relevant to each item whilst a larger display board may provide context to the period as a whole. Children and adult visitors alike are required to read in order to learn in this context. Yet such an approach to learning can be limiting, particularly for children who may not have the vocabulary, attention span or reading ability needed to learn from such textual sources. Observation and comparison of those items on display with similar items today, encountered in their own everyday life, enables the observer to reach a conclusion as to how items may have changed or remained the same, imbuing the item with a value due to its longevity. In this context learning takes place not through any formal, structured process but rather through general skills and individual thought. If conversation with an additional person or people is added to the combination of observation and reading to collect information then the possibilities for reaching broader conclusions is greatly enhanced. The collection of information and subsequent personal reflection on this enables the individual to build their own views and understanding not only of the item on display but also of the context from which it was taken. Such learning about the past is not limited to school activity.

**The Museum and Learning History**

The value of the museum, in whatever form that may take, to learning History as part of the formal school curriculum is clearly acknowledged. The various incarnations of the National Curriculum for History since 1988 have all included references to the use and value of museums in the study of the past. In 2004 National Curriculum guidance on supporting inclusion across all subjects included covering the practical elements of learning through ‘visits to museums, historic buildings and sites’ (2004, p.37) whilst for history, pupils were encouraged to use ‘museum displays’ (2004, p.95) when considering the concept of interpretation and for the purposes of historical enquiry. The most recent version of the National Curriculum in 2014, however, whilst encouraging the use of ‘other experiences’ (DfE 2014, p4) in the study of all subjects does not make reference to the use of museums in learning, not even for history. Such on omission whether deliberate or accidental might encourage schools to remain focussed on classroom based, knowledge acquisition following suggestions from government that knowledge is all important yet previous reports and research clearly indicate a place for museums in learning about the past.

OFSTED (2008) clearly recognised the value of the ‘school visit’ as part of the history curriculum at both primary and secondary level, whilst making suggestions for improvements in the use of the visit across both phases. Inspectors felt that as an aspect of primary education in history the school visit lacked clear historical learning objectives and was not prepared for or followed up in sufficient depth in school sessions. For secondary schools the issue was not the preparation, learning and follow up experiences but rather the lack of such visits taking place at all. The commitment to the use of museums, art galleries and the school visit in general to provide an enhanced learning experience can be seen from the initial National Curriculum documentation of 1988, through the ‘Curriculum Opportunities’ statements of the 2007 incarnation of the curriculum and the establishment of the Learning Outside the Classroom initiative of the Labour Government (2008).

Museums provide pupils with a real life context for the development of a range of skills and concepts linked to the pedagogy of the subject. The collection of information as part of research, already alluded to above, is perhaps the most basic use of a museum for the purposes of learning about the past. The nature of the museum in providing objects to consider taps into the most basic of learning approaches, clearly visible with even young children, and transcending the need to read and write – the need to question. Questioning is widely recognised as being at the heart of good teaching and learning, with teachers being required to encourage pupils to answer and ask questions (The Standards for Qualified Teacher Status 2012) for all subjects. The use of questioning for the purpose of learning about the past transforms History from being a passive, received subject as experienced in the 1960s and 1970s (Sheldon 2011), to being one of active participation and pupil engagement in their own learning. Through the promotion of thought and reflection in order to answer the questions posed and through the need to present those answers in an accessible form, whether that be through writing, verbal communication or visual representation the use of questioning in a museum context can have a dramatic impact on pupils learning about the past.

A range of formal learning activities through which pupils, whilst on a school visit, can learn about the past have been recognised, developed and written about for over forty years (Cooper 2000, West 1990). Museums with a specific history focus such as The Eden Camp Museum (Yorkshire), Styal Mill (Cheshire), Speke Hall (Liverpool), Hampton Court (London), Stewart Mill (Perth, Scotland) and even the Lawnmower Museum (Southport) not only illustrate the development across the twentieth and early twenty-first century of a range of different types of museum but also provide pupils with an alternative, often more revealing window on the past than can be provided by the normal school building. Having been encouraged to question the evidence on display, pupils can then attempt to find the answers to their questions through the use of the accompanying signs and displays or can use their questions as a basis for further research back in the classroom, library or even through another museum. Museums also offer the children of today an opportunity to investigate such historical concepts as change and continuity, significance and interpretation, forming their own conclusions as to the usefulness of displays and items on display for a particular historical enquiry.

**The Museum and History in Primary School**

In terms of learning about History the role of the museum, in its broadest form, is clear. Cooper (1991) in her thesis entitled ‘Young Children’s Thinking In History’ identifies a clear role for museums in providing a ‘meaningful experience’ (1991, p.85) to promote thinking in primary school children often through ‘open-ended discussion’ (1991, p.233). The Historical Association (2000) suggests that museums may be used to help primary school pupils develop their understanding of the concept of interpretation:

Draw children’s attention to the objects in a museum display — how did the curator choose the objects for the display? Children might contrast this with the selection which they make of objects and pictures to place in their own classroom displays. (2000, p.10)

Such an example of how to use a museum has clear links to the work of West (1990) and Burridge and West (1992). The works of Husbands (1996), Nichol and Dean (1997), Hoodless (2008) and Cooper and Chapman (2009) illustrates the value of the use of museums and working with museum services to promote pupil learning about History. The value to the primary school pupil of learning through a museum can be clearly seen through the words of pupils themselves. Through a consideration of old toys during a visit to a toy museum Gemma was able to recognise the concept of change: ‘We found out that old toys were made from wood and our new toys are made from plastic. (Cooper, 2000, p.63) In the 2007 revision of the National Curriculum, the role of museums in history education was made clear, with schools and teachers being urged to help children ‘appreciate and evaluate, through visits where possible, the role of museums, galleries, archives and historic sites in preserving, presenting and influencing people’s attitudes towards the past’ (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2007, p.117). Indicative of the Labour Government’s overall approach to learning and their recognition of the value of learning outside the classroom as evidenced through OFSTED’s report ‘Learning Outside the Classroom’ (2008), by the earlier Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom (Department for Education 2006) and through the establishment of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom in 2008, the Labour government continued to illustrate their commitment to such learning through the parliamentary report by the Children, Schools and Families Committee of the House of Commons ‘Transforming Education Outside the Classroom’ (April 2010).

**Conclusion**

The museums of the twenty-first century remain true to the original purpose of the museum in its earliest incarnations: as places of learning. Whilst they offer the student of History an opportunity to gain knowledge of the past– a key priority for the present government – museums also provide the prospect for learning through questioning, through reflection and sharing ideas with classmates and teachers. The ways in which schools choose to employ the variety of venues which can be classed as a museum in the delivery of the 2014 history curriculum is an area for further investigation. Whilst OFSTED (2008) recognised deficiencies in both primary and secondary approaches to the use of the school visit, in this article taken to mean visits to museums in their broadest definition, how schools have moved on since 2008 needs to be ascertained. It is the intention that having established the long and illustrious history of museums in educating the British public, attention will now turn to a closer examination of how primary and secondary schools employ the school visit to the museum in teaching about the past. The aim is not only to establish how schools use such venues but also to build upon previous research as to how children learn history in such an environment, and whether or not the use of museums, both physical and virtual, continue to provide an effective learning experience for pupils.

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