

Session 1

Introduction to Museums and Collections

HPHE7009 Skills in the Museum

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Key exploratory points:

- ☐ What are museums?
- ☐ What are their purpose?
- ☐ What are collections?
- ☐ Who are they for?

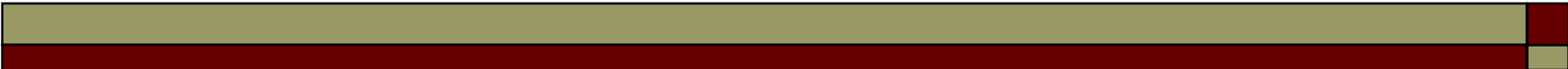
Theoretical Perspectives

- It is currently thought that museums in their present context are primarily informative and educative in their function, as well as providing a service to the heritage industry as a whole whether that be to professionals, students or the general public (Lumley 1988:16).
- The formation of the museum has been the outcome of “...practices of historical restoration...” which have aspired to the “...production of a site – a building” (Bennett 1995:128)
- “...principal function as repositories of objects” and that they exist to “conserve and display objects” (Vergo 1989:41) .

What are the purpose of museums?

- ❑ Collect, preserve and care for collections
- ❑ Provide interpretations of the past
- ❑ Educate and Inspire
- ❑ Centre for research
- ❑ Anything else?

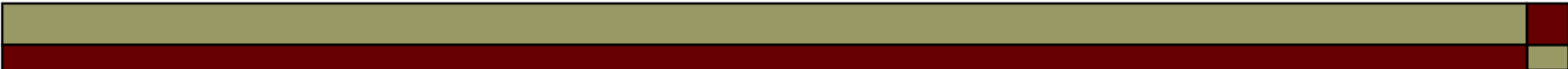




What are museums?

“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”

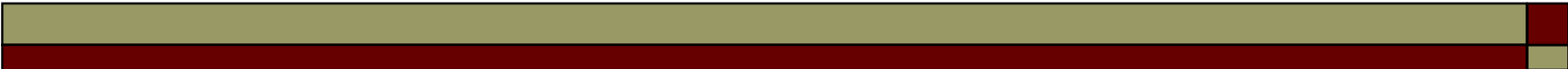
24 August 2022, the Extraordinary General Assembly of ICOM



Definitions

- ❑ **The International Council of Museums definition:**

- ❑ A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment.

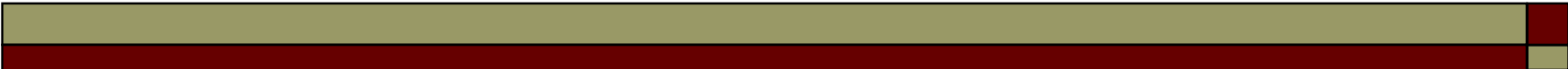


Definitions

- ❑ **The Museums Association (United Kingdom) definition:**
- ❑ A museum is an institution which collects, documents, preserves, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit.

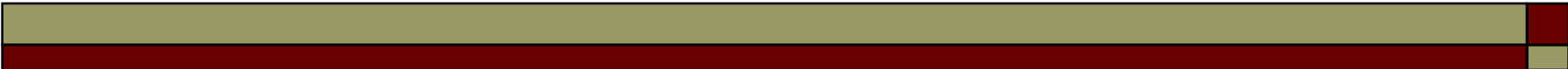
Museums and Collections





A museum is an institution which collects, documents, preserves, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit.

- ❑ ‘Institution’ implies formalised establishment, = long-term purpose
- ❑ ‘Collects’ = all means of acquisition
- ❑ ‘Documents’ emphasises need to maintain records
- ❑ ‘Preserves’ = all aspects of conservation and security
- ❑ ‘Exhibits’ stands for expectation of visitors that they will be able to see at least a representative selection of the objects in the collections
- ❑ ‘Interprets’ covers display, education, research and publication



A museum is an institution which collects, documents, preserves, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit.

- ❑ ‘Material’ indicates something that is tangible
- ❑ ‘Evidence’ guarantees its authenticity (‘real thing’)
- ❑ ‘Associated information’
 - represents the knowledge which prevents a museum object being merely a curio
 - ❑ strange and interesting object which evokes curiosity
 - includes all records relating to its past history, acquisition and subsequent usage
- ❑ ‘for the public benefit’ = deliberately open ended; is intended to reflect current thinking “museums are the servants of society”, both within + outside profession

Isles of Scilly, Museum on the Move



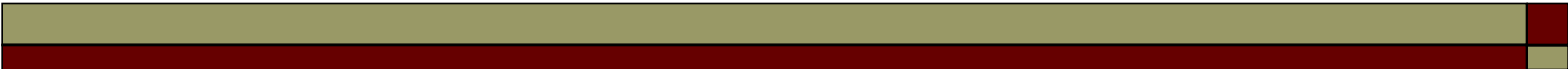


Durham University Museum of Archaeology and Oriental Museum



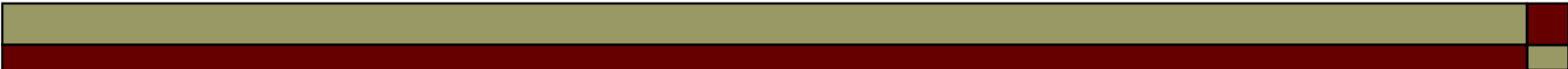
Ryedale Folk Museum





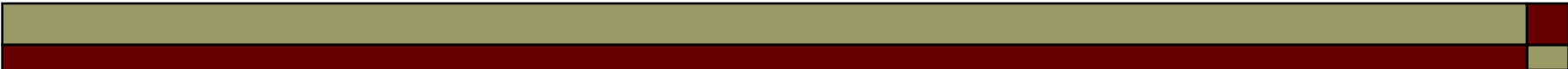
Definitions

- **The American Association of Museums definition:**
- A non-profit permanent, established institution, not existing primarily for the purpose of conducting temporary exhibitions, exempt from federal and state income taxes, 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 (whether animate or inanimate), 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.



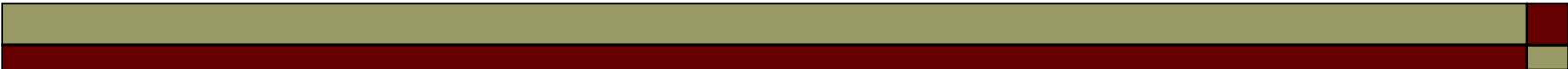
Museums and the shaping of knowledge

- = shaping knowledge over last 600 years: structures of knowledge and rules for the production of truth (especially during period of the Renaissance *episteme*, the classical age, and the modern age)
- accumulation of material things (natural + artificial) → one of the ways to know the world
- cabinets, *studioli*, *Theatrum sapientiae*, *repositories*, and ‘museums’ = constituted according to the prevailing epistemological context → enabled different ways of knowing → always according to the rules and structures in place at the time



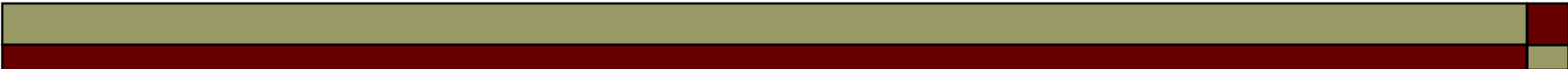
There is no essential museum!

- ❑ museum is not a pre-constituted entity which is produced in the same way at all times ('direct ancestors' or 'fundamental role' identified)
- ❑ identities, targets, functions, subject positions = variable + discontinuous
- ❑ no essential identity for museums
- ❑ constituted identities = subject to constant change (due to shifts, new relations of advantage and disadvantage)
- ❑ 'Truth is of the world: it is produced by virtue of multiple constraints' (Foucault, 1977b:13).



Museums as part of “Cultural Theory”

- ❑ Argument: we inhabit culture in the sense that we share a certain amount of knowledge and understanding about our environment → share “cultural maps,” of shared cultural maps involves making judgments about cultural practices or products + their value, status, and legitimacy
- ❑ applicable to work within museums and galleries where the act of display = of definition and attribution of value: “this is art” or “this is culture.”
- ❑ Controversies: arise over such acts of value definition



Museums as part of “Cultural Theory”

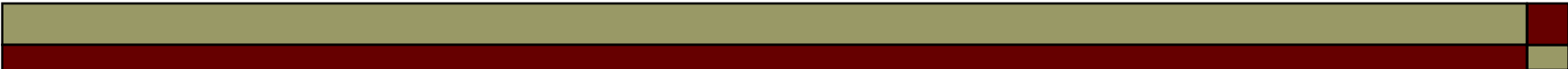
- ❑ Museums = public spaces in which definitions of cultures and their values = actively contested and debated
- ❑ Museums materialize values + supports processes of meaning-making into sharp relief
- ❑ = reason that museums are of such interest to cultural theoreticians and museum studies researchers alike

Who are museums for?



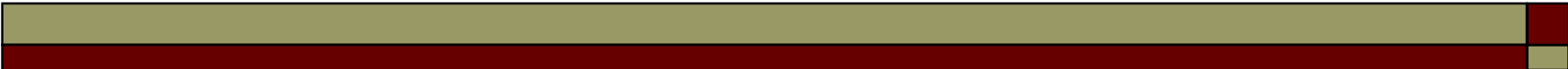
Museums as contact zone

- = interactive nature of the relationships between various communities, stakeholders, and museums.
- As “contact zone,” museum = space of transcultural encounter (more than being a tightly bounded institution disseminating knowledge to its visitors) → heritage: museum as a space where different cultures and communities intersect, interact, and are mutually influenced by the encounter
- museum itself is a community with its own conventions and cultural values



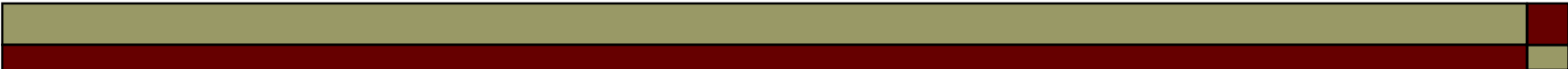
Museums as contact zone

- museums are changing continually in response to their own changing contexts – colonial, postcolonial, modern, postmodern, public, commercial, ...
- → “museum” is understood as a **flexible and expansive way of describing a whole range of relations and activities** which surround the valuation, collection, and display of cultures and histories → beware the visitors and their needs!!!!



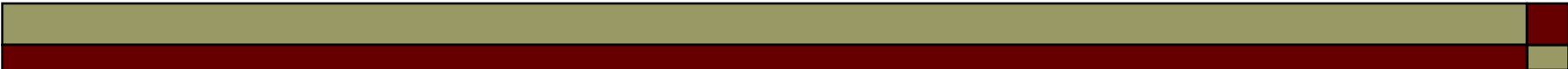
Museums as Heritage Centres

- ❑ **Heritage centre**
- ❑ a term widely used to describe a facility interpreting the natural and/or cultural heritage of a place or an area
- ❑ in many cases, heritage centres are collections-based and are thus functionally museums,
- ❑ ‘heritage centre’ is thought to sound more attractive to visitors



SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BENEFITS

- ❑ preserves and conserves community's cultural and natural heritage;
- ❑ cultural focus + place of shared 'memory' for community;
- ❑ engagement with educational organisations, learn through contact with original material;
- ❑ providing accessible cultural facilities, (exhibition spaces, meeting rooms, lecture theatres);
- ❑ representing the history and culture of minority groups;
- ❑ organising accessible cultural events and activities;
- ❑ acting as a centre of objective professional expertise;



SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BENEFITS

- ❑ providing opportunities for community involvement through volunteer programmes, Friends' groups or training programmes;
- ❑ working in partnership with other cultural bodies, e.g. libraries, archives, theatres, arts centres to develop joint programmes and projects

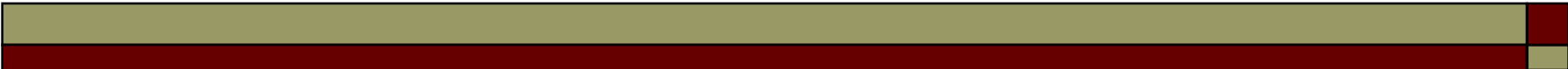


Classifications – Types of museums

1. Classified by collections
2. Classified by who runs them
3. Classified by the audience they serve
4. Classified by the way they exhibit their collections

Museum Typology





1. Types of museums – Classified by collections

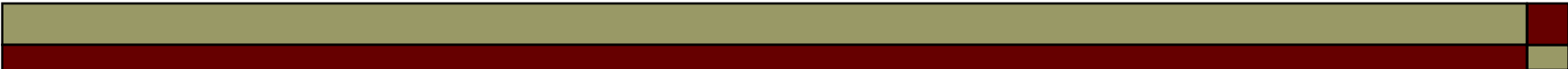
- ❑ general museums
- ❑ archaeology museums
- ❑ art museums
- ❑ history museums
- ❑ ethnography museums
- ❑ natural history museums
- ❑ science museums
- ❑ geology museums
- ❑ industrial museums
- ❑ military museums

2. Types of museums – Classified by who runs them

- ❑ • government museums
- ❑ • municipal museums
- ❑ • university museums
- ❑ • independent (charitable trust) museums
- ❑ • army museums
- ❑ • commercial company museums
- ❑ • private museums

3. Types of museums - Classified by the area they serve

- ❑ national museums
- ❑ regional museums
- ❑ city museums
- ❑ local museums



4. Types of museums - Classified by the way they exhibit their collections

- ❑ traditional museums
- ❑ historic house museums
- ❑ open-air museums
- ❑ interactive museums