



Museums in contemporary society

NMS: Reflecting Scotland

The new National Museum of Scotland building opened in 1998 in Edinburgh, incorporating collections from the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland and the adjacent Royal Museum. The building was opened during the same year as the passing of the Scotland Act, which established a devolved Scottish Parliament. The building's design was controversial, as it juxtaposed a very modern, geometric form with the adjacent Victorian Royal Museum, causing Prince Charles to resign as patron of the museum prior to its opening. The design incorporates various references to Scottish history and iconography, including the design of brochs, the Iron Age drystone-walled residential towers found only in Scotland. The basement gallery houses a number of sculptures by the famous Scottish sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi.

You might like to take a look at the website of the National Museum of Scotland (www.nms.ac.uk/) to get a feel for its displays and activities.

If you haven't already done so, listen to the audio documentary and its associated academic perspective, which explore

- the relationship between museum display and Scottish nationalism
- the manner in which 'Scottishness' is conveyed within both the *Early Peoples* and *Scotland: A Changing Nation* exhibitions.

So, what do you think about the following questions?

- **How do you think the idea of 'Scottishness' is conveyed within the *Early Peoples* and *Scotland: A Changing Nation* exhibitions?**
 - **In what ways are they similar and in what ways are they different?**
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Feedback

The *Early Peoples* gallery contains sculptures by the well-known Scottish sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi. The figures, representing Scottish ancestors, are made to be 'bigger' than human size. These striking sculptures invoke a sense of nationalism through the connection with a famous sculptor, as well as in the sense that they show the people of the past as 'larger than life' (metaphorically as well as physically) – and hence important to understanding Scottish identity in the present. Within the text accompanying the displays in the *Early Peoples* gallery, Scots are defined as 'us', while the invaders are defined as 'them' or aliens, people from outside. The sense in which this display is now involved in an active process of creating a sense of 'Scottishness' or Scottish identity is commented on by the curator. The idea that there is a separate 'Scottish' history – as opposed to a 'British' one – seems important to the curator.

Scotland: A Changing Nation uses different media – film, audio, photographs – to tell the story of who Scots 'are', and their role in the history of the modern world. It is interactive and immersive, and intended to not only be informative, but generate a sense of pride. The gallery contains artefacts and uses materials and symbols associated with the Scottish Parliament, which evokes the importance of political and social debates within Scotland around Scottish nationalism, and various aspirations within Scotland for Scottish independence. Comment is also made within the audio piece on the various references within the building itself to (what was at the time the museum was built) the new Scottish Parliament.