


TRAVEL

Arkansas Democrat  Gazette

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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER



Gleaming in Glasgow

Kelvingrove, the people's museum, reopens after a massive cleanup to remove the grime of the Industrial Revolution

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TRAVEL ARTS SYNDICATE

GLASGOW, Scotland — Some things have to be seen. The photos of Glasgow's Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum couldn't convey its scale. It was more imposing than I had imagined — a sandstone behemoth crowned with spikes and towers, ornamented with statues: the exotic, swan song of an empire.

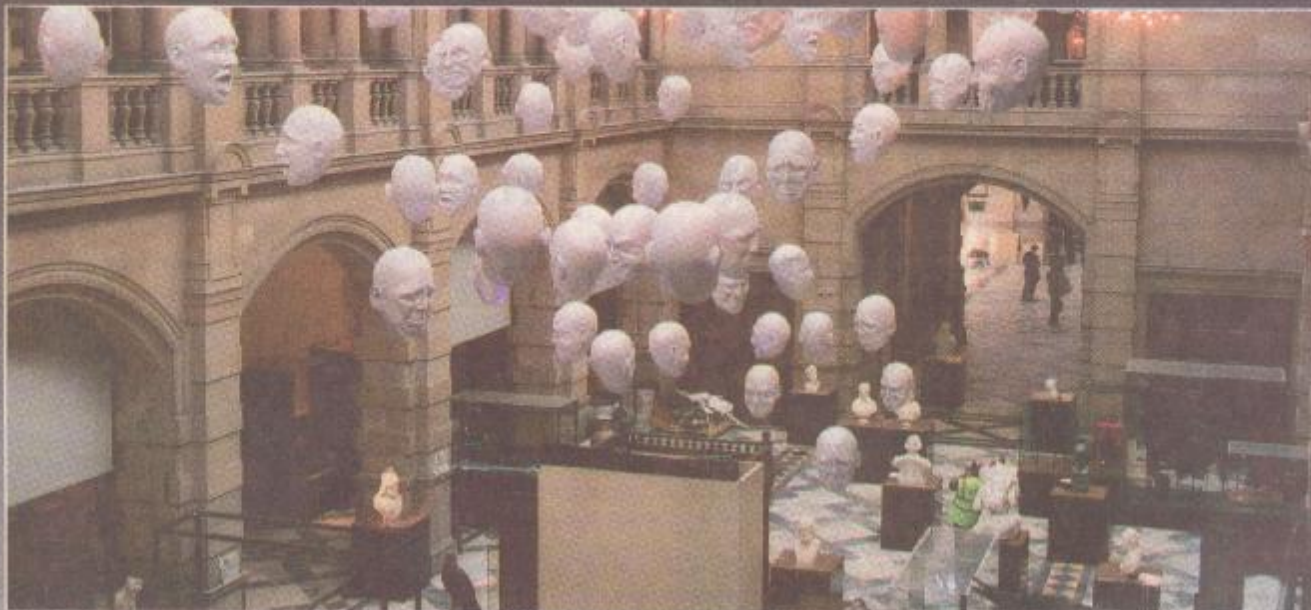
It opened in May 1901, just a few months after Queen Victoria's death, with a temporary International Exhibition. Its permanent art and natural history collections were installed in 1902. By the time it closed for a 27.9 million-pound [about \$52.9 million

See **GLASGOW**, Page 6H

In 1974, the Kelvingrove bought Vincent van Gogh's portrait of Alexander Reid from the sitter's grandson. Reid was a Glasgow art dealer who knew Theo van Gogh and briefly lived with Vincent. The Kelvingrove's strong holdings of 19th-century French paintings can be attributed, in part, to Reid's influence.



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The Kelvingrove Museum, a palatial structure of sandstone that expressed the pride, optimism and prosperity of Glasgow, opened in 1901.



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The 602 (City of Glasgow) Squadron Spitfire, a plane used in World War II, now hangs in the West Wing of the Kelvingrove. It was a huge undertaking to move the plane into the building and figure out how to suspend it safely.



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Kelvingrove's organ was built by Lewis and Co., London, in 1901. Sunday concerts at the Kelvingrove loved tradition, were resumed in mid-August.

Glasgow

• Continued from Page 1H today] restoration in June 2003, it had become the most visited museum in Scotland.

When the Kelvingrove reopened July 11, almost 16,000 people turned out to see what had been done to their beloved museum. The first visitors began lining up at 7 a.m., three hours before the doors opened.

I can think of few museums that tell as much about a city as this one. First, there's the building itself, constructed of Scottish sandstone. Its confidence and grandeur bespeak Glasgow's 18th- and 19th-century industrial prosperity. But coal-burning Glasgow once had some of the most polluted air in Europe and Kelvingrove entered the 21st century coated with grime from the very industries that helped build it.

The exterior was cleaned in 1993. The soot has now been stripped from the interior as well. Its light-toned marble gleams again under its original brass lighting fixtures, among the first electric lights in technology-savvy Glasgow.

The collections, also, speak volumes about Glasgow. They include prehistoric Scotland, ancient Egypt, Dutch and Italian Old Masters, 19th- and early-20th-century French painters, armor, a stuffed elephant known as Sir Roger, and more. What's revelatory is that most were acquired and donated not by aristocrats but by Glasgow's industrialists — perhaps out of civic pride, perhaps to shore up their reputations.

FREE FOR ALL

Then, there's the fact that Kelvingrove, like all of Glasgow's public museums, is and always has been free.

Glasgow historically was politically left-leaning city with a big working class population. When Kelvingrove was built, the city had some of the worst slums in Europe. (To see how the working people lived, visit the People's Palace on Glasgow Green, another free, city-run museum. In one small corner is a replica of a dark, one-room apartment without running water that might have housed a dozen people.) For people living in these conditions, a visit to Kelvingrove with its marble floors, electric lights, Sunday afternoon organ concerts and artwork must have seemed like putting one foot in paradise. It had to be free. Many visitors would have been unable to afford even a modest admission fee.

Glasgow still has pockets of dire poverty and free access is still important. So is education, of adults and children.

"Access is something we feel very strongly about," said Vivien Hamilton, who curates the 19th-century French painting collection, "not just physical access but intellectual access. I think the perception has been for so long that only certain people go to museums and are welcome in museums. We don't feel that — and our [Glasgow City] Council doesn't feel that. They feel that anything that's done in Glasgow is for everybody."

LOOKING AT ART

The new Kelvingrove is designed, above all, to be accessible. The 8,000 items on exhibit have been divided into an east wing organized around the theme of "Expression" and a west wing organized around the theme of "Life." Standing in the central court, it's easy to tell which is which.

A sculpture of neon-lighted faces has been suspended from

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the ceiling of the Expression section of the museum. "Part of the aim is that you know where you are in the building, and that makes you feel a bit more comfortable," Hamilton said.

On the main floor is an exhibit called "Looking at Art" that juxtaposes paintings and objects so as to stimulate observation and curiosity.

"Not everyone does feel comfortable looking at art," Hamilton said. "They don't know what they're supposed to know, what they're supposed to be looking at. So this gallery is an introduction."

Explanatory signs throughout the museum have been limited to 30 words and exhibits have been configured to tell stories.

The armor collection, donated in 1933 by Glasgow shipbuilder Robert Lyons Scott, is one of the best in the world. It includes the earliest surviving nearly complete suit of armor (made in Milan around 1440) and the garniture (armor for man and horse) of Sir William Herbert, 1st Earl of Pembroke. The garniture was made at the Royal Armouries in Greenwich around 1557 and is the only

complete example of its type to survive. The earl was a friend of King Henry VIII and led the English army against France. In the display, he's surrounded by armored foot soldiers carrying Pembroke's spare helmet and breastplate.

But the armor room contains more than armor. On one side of Pembroke is an exhibit of



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animal forms showing how armor sometimes reflects similar physical principles or is a specific copy of something that works well for defense and offense in the animal world.

On Pembroke's other side are photos of Anne Frank and Bosnian refugees plus a comment from a Glasgow schoolteacher named Linda Climie: "The Nazis were democratically elected by the German people in 1933," she said. "This was a time of great hardship and the Nazi party exploited people's fears. We must ensure that young people are vigilant whenever groups or individuals are used as scapegoats to explain away problems."

Liberal, socially conscious Glasgow is everywhere in this museum. A few hours at Kelvingrove can tell you almost as much about this city as a tour in a sightseeing bus.

With three universities, little heavy industry and an abundance of music, art, theater and dance, Glasgow is now a very different city from what it was

when the Kelvingrove was built. What was once an outlet for Glaswegians gasping for light and air now dazzles as an example of Victorian craftsmanship.

Another example of Victorian craftsmanship occupies a central position at Kelvingrove. It's a rare musical instrument called an "orchestration" — a small, mechanical organ invented in Dresden in 1851. There are few of them left in the world, and even fewer that work. Kelvingrove's works. It sounds like carousel music or the haunting music of a fair — simultaneously gay and sad.

At Kelvingrove and the People's Palace, visitors can clearly hear the gay-sad song of the past.



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