

# MUSEUM news



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## Designing Dundee's future



Simon Tait

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Dundee's paths to prosperity were, according to legend, jute, jam and journalism which glibly covered a huge range of industry. They have pretty much all gone now, and in 2015 can accurately be replaced by design, design and design.

Next month work is expected to start on the great waterside V&A Dundee design museum, an £80m development which the city, the nation and the country expect will give Scotland's fourth largest city a place on the world's cultural map. It will also give the Victoria

& Albert Museum a permanent place outside London for the first time in its 163 year history.

And before a spade has been deployed, Dundee has been designated the UNESCO city of design, embodied at a launch of the title last month by fashion designer Hayley Scanlan, game designers Guerilla Tea and jeweller Jane Gowans. "It not only recognises the design innovation that Dundee has contributed to the world but also the hard work of the people and organisations behind Dundee's creative and design excellence" said Janet Archer, chief executive of Creative Scotland. "This accolade firmly positions Dundee on an international stage".

The accolade was applied for by the city, to be voted on by other cities represented in UNESCO, and a weighty part of the application was the V&A

Dundee plan, says its chief executive, Philip Long. It was, he says, the final confirmation that an extraordinarily ambitious concept would become a reality.

It has been a difficult process, strewn by doubts and criticisms, delays – it should have opened last year – and beset by funding crises, the last of which almost killed it. Yet it is now on course for an opening in June 2018.

The V&A, the national museum of decorative and fine arts where the Design Museum – shortly to reopen in Kensington – was born in the early 1980s - had long had a vision of bringing its collections to a wider public. The former V&A director Sir Mark Jones was invited to Dundee and was convinced of the potential of Craig Harbour on the Tayside waterfront, where once ships had been built. "I think this will become a major destination and



will give us an internationally recognised building”, he said on seeing the designs by the Japanese architect Kengo Kuma who won the commission. “It will reward repeat visits and attract attention from around the world.”

That was seven years ago, and was the culmination of a search by Dundee to find post-industrial salvation. After the second world war it lost its traditional industries and for 40 years tried to find replacements, mostly unsuccessfully. Then, around the turn of the millennium, it began to see itself as a creative city, a centre for design; the new Dundee and Angus College saw design as a key to entrepreneurial progress, its core mission; Dundee has two universities in which design courses figure large, and it had the world’s first BA and computer games design; its arts school, renamed the Duncan and Jordanstone College of Art & Design in 1975, has developed a wide curriculum devoted to contemporary design and art; Captain Scott’s ship *The Discovery* was brought back from London to where it was built (it is moored alongside the site for the new museum); Dundee’s art gallery and museum, *The McManus*, underwent a £12m remake and reopened in 2010; design businesses began to be formed in the city often by its art and design graduates.

When Kengo Kuma won the competition to design the new museum the choice was criticised for being over-ambitious and for not being by a Scottish practice, and when his scheme went out to tender a year ago those criticisms were redoubled. The project had been funded at £49m: as tenders came in it was clear that this was a gross underestimate and that the realistic price was going to be

£80.11m. Planning permission was given in 2012, and the proposal was amended to save some costs - the building should have been sitting in the river itself, but instead has a prow projecting over the water, reminiscent of the rethink to *Turner Contemporary* in Margate although this time the architect was not changed.

An enquiry has been ordered by Dundee Council but, says Long – who was brought from the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in 2011 to lead the scheme – there is little mystery: the building industry had been through the worst recession in living memory and consequently it was under-skilled and under-resourced and it was being asked to make perhaps the most ambitious public building modern Scotland has seen. “The tender returns were a shock, and it is a complex building, but Dundee wanted to develop it for Dundee and the V&A and we kept it together. There were doubts at that point but the scheme has never really been in danger”. Long says.

More money was pledged. The Heritage Lottery Fund had already committed £9.4m and added another £4.5m; the UK Treasury has added £500,000 as part of its coastal communities fund (courtesy of another Scot, chief secretary Danny Alexander); the Scottish Government had added another £10m to make its total contribution £25m). Dundee City Council has put £6.5m into the pot, money is being contributed by Creative Scotland and £15m is coming from private investors. The £80.11 will be got, Long says with assurance – “We’re on track sufficiently that the city council was able to approve construction costs at the end of January” Long says.

V&A Dundee’s purpose is to present Scottish design, historical

and contemporary, and it expects to attract 270,000 visitors a year to what is the centrepiece of a £1 billion waterfront development.

Meanwhile, last week *Design in Motion* too to the road. This is V&A Dundee taking over the *Travelling Gallery* contemporary gallery in a custom-built bus to sell itself to 78 venues over 17 weeks, with its last stop outside the V&A in South Kensington in June. It’s showcasing leading contemporary Scottish designers, “an incredibly ambitious project” says Sarah Saunders, V&A Dundee’s head of learning and engagement, “but one that we feel underlines the scope and scale of the new museum, and really allows us to set out our stall as a new national institution”.

The museum will also have a large educational mission, very much linked to the colleges and schools on Tayside, but also to encouraging creative entrepreneurialism and to connecting with the community (last year it launched its first off-site project *Living Room* for the City which emphasised that we are all designers in the way we arrange our domestic lives). There will be residency studios where independent designers will be able to interact with the public as they work. “For the majority of its life this has been a very successful city”, Phil Long says, “But it’s developed a new ambition as a creative city and that’s what V&A Dundee will be presenting to the world.”

And even the large bronze sculpture of *Desperate Dan*, born in Dundee in the city’s previous hey-day as the hero of the comic *Dandy*, seems to have a broader grin.

[This article first appeared in Arts Industry magazine in February 2015](#)

# Calm and collected

A new Museum of the Mind has been created at Bethlem Royal Hospital, using art as well as objects to tell its stories

Little is known about James Norris, but 200 years ago he was a cause celebre that changed mental health treatment for ever. Even the news stories that brought his plight to public notice got his name wrong, calling him “William”.

He had been an American sailor who had had some kind of terrible head injury which made him violent. He was committed to Bethlem Royal Hospital, Bedlam

as it was universally known, and was chained there to an iron bar with his arms strapped to his sides for ten years. He was found there by one of the many Bedlam visitors – sometimes ghoulish sightseers but mostly charitable gentry who wanted to help – and this drawing of him by George Cruikshank, taken from the life, was published: “Riveted alive in iron, & for many years confined, in that state, by chains 12 inches

long to an upright massive bar in a cell in Bethlem”.

Norris was released in 1814 but died a few weeks later, probably from pneumonia, yet the case led to a complete revision of the approach to psychiatric patients and eventually resulted in the Mad House Act and the abolition of manacles, handcuffs and other restraints.

His story is a key one in the new Museum of the Mind, and



alongside it are some of the manacles, handcuffs and body braces from Bethlem's collection, none of which have ever been on public display before. There are also a "strong dress" and a strait jacket, introduced later to allow unpredictable patients to be released from their cells so that they could mix with others.

The treatment of mental patients – now called "service users" – has a long and chequered history, a history made hard to chart by the lack of reliable records until relatively recently. This new museum which has opened in the heart of Bethlem attempts to tell the story in as accessible a manner as possible.

Bethlem, Bedlam, is the oldest psychiatric hospital in the country, possibly in the world, having been founded in 1247 as the Priory of the New Order of St Mary of Bethlem primarily to raise funds for the Crusades. Bedlam was in Bishopsgate at first and during the 14th century graduated from being a general hospital to one that specialised in the confinement of the insane. In the late 17th century it was rebuilt at Moorfields just north of the City, and became part of the tourist circuit. Visitors were encouraged to make donations in ornate pillar boxes which bore the legend "Pray Remember the Poor Lunaticks and Put Your Charity into this Box With Your Own Hand" – attendants were not to be trusted with alms.

In 1930 Bethlem Royal Hospital moved out of its stiflingly congested Old Street premises and decamped to a brand new, purpose built estate on the elysian greensward where Surrey and Kent meet London's southernmost suburbs. It is here, in Monks Orchard Road, that the Museum of the Mind and Bethlem Gallery

opened last month, in the former administrative block designed in restrained art deco.

Converted at a cost of £4m, the new museum is the first of its kind in the UK, and has with it the large collection of patients' art, which was first collected by a Victorian resident physician, Dr Theophilus Hyslop.

Art has long been a source of comfort and healing for those with disorders of the mind, the most celebrated of whom was Richard Dadd. Committed to Bethlem in 1843 after killing his father under a schizophrenic delusion, he spent the rest of his life in psychiatric institutions, painting the whole time. He died in Broadmoor in 1886.

Another was Louis Wain, a commercial artist best known for anthropomorphic cats who was committed with apparent schizophrenia in 1924, and died in 1939. His cat paintings have been used by psychiatrists to explain his disorder, but without any verifiable conclusions.

And the Canadian painter William Kuralek spent some years at Bethlem in the 1950s where he made one of his most famous paintings, *The Maze*, which was his diagram of the state of his own mind, and this is on display in the museum – along with another Kuralek painting of a picnic scene in a broad green meadow, signifying his recovery and given with thanks to the hospital's staff after his discharge.

"We were keen not to do a straight-forward chronology" says the museum's director, Victoria Northwood. "We've chosen themes that broadly reflect a journey through the mental health system, and there are historical pieces by Dadd and Wain but also contemporary art."

The importance of art both

as therapy and as an aid to diagnosis was recognised in the 1930s by two Maudsley Hospital psychiatrists, Eric Guttman and Walter Maclay, and their collection is now held by the museum.

Clinical descriptions were not kept until 1815 but in the last two centuries there has been an increase in recorded patient information, and patients themselves now contribute to their own records. "The artworks by service users relate to diagnosis, of everything from psychosis to eating disorders" Northwood says. There are also computer sites showing ledgers – often with woefully inadequate entries – and text book descriptions of various types of disorders. "But we did not want this to be a museum of psychiatry" she adds, "it needs to be readable by ordinary visitors."

So on the grand desk once used by Dr Hyslop is a survey of the various slang terms used for brain disorders – crazy, crackers, loony, gaga, bonkers, barmy, and so on – and visitors are invited to add their own and leave their offerings on Dr Hyslop's desk – "lost the plot", "sandwich short of a picnic" and "kangaroo loose in the top paddock" are in the pile.

A panel examines phrenology, the study of cranial bumps, and considers to what extent diagnosis can be got from physical appearance and concludes, through a series of photographs of patients, staff, visitors and volunteers that the answer is effectively none.

The exhibition uses artwork, again, to denote the successor to physical restraint, chemicals, and another case looks at the controversial method of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) – electric shock treatment – which is still sometimes used. In the display case is a china cup and

saucer which seem to flop out of shape: it was made by an ECT-treated patient who was afterwards given a cup of tea which she was terrified of dropping because it appeared to be made of rubber.

One piece of wall is decorated with intriguing wallpaper – the pattern made from inkblots which once were used in diagnosis.

And in the centre is a tranquil seated area, surrounded by paintings by service users.

“There are areas we know we are missing – such as Alzheimers and dementia – which we will look at through temporary exhibitions” Northwood says. “But we want people to come and enjoy the art, and if they come away thinking a bit, that’s lovely”. Admission is free.

**Simon Tait**

Bethlem Museum of the Mind  
Bethlem Royal Hospital  
Monks Orchard Road  
Beckenham  
Kent BR3 3BX  
<http://museumofthemind.org.uk>

## Denmark’s Maritime Museum



If you find yourself in Denmark, take time out to visit M/S Museet for Søfart, Maritime Museum of Denmark. Built in the dry dock below Hamlet’s Kronborg Castle in Elsinore, designed by the architectural firm Bjarke Ingels Group, the glassy structure is built into a U-shaped dry dock and filled with slanted floors and zigzag passageways that evoke ships’ decks. Maritime relics, from torpedoes to Lego pirate ships, mixed with electronic maps and films explore the romance of the sea, shipboard existence

and trade, both centuries ago and today. Interactive exhibits allow you to run your own trade company, navigate by the stars and ink a sailor’s tattoo. Visitors are advised to allow at least a day plus to tour the Castle and Museum.

M/S Museet for Søfart  
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**Ray Sutcliffe**

