Manchester Museum Object Biography
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The Manchester Museum is an esteemed institution whose roots extend back to an early 1800s cabinet of curiosity, and through its life, it has developed to become the world-renowned establishment that it is today. In this essay, I plan to discuss the numerous social changes and interactions that have led to this development, and resulted in its international status. This is an important piece of work as all too often the focus of museums is on the objects held within, whilst the institutions and buildings themselves are left unconsidered. Therefore, with my study I am keen to display the intricate nature of the Manchester Museum's history, and the fascinating social interactions and ideologies that have gone into its creation and growth, and thus hopefully encourage further publicity of the ignored lives of such institutions which have become cemented parts of today's society.

To this end, I am going to utilise the method of an object biography to tell the story of the Manchester Museum, for reasons I shall explain at the start of my thesis. I will then begin by setting out the context that crucially facilitated the birth of the establishment. Following on from this, I will briefly show the early history of the Museum institution, as this is equally important in its expansion. I will then finally delve into the analysis of the many different elements that ultimately made the Museum what it is today, such as class struggles, differing ideas of its purpose and layout, as well as the impressive architecture of the Museum, as it is all too important to remember the materiality of the building. All of these aspects of the Museum's history are seemingly unconnected, however, they have become inextricably intertwined, and I aim to display this intricate linkage whilst allocating them individual areas in my thesis for means of legibility. In order to assist my analysis, I have consulted Sam Alberti's detailed work on the Manchester Museum, as well as Tony Bennett's Foucauldian study on museums in general. I have also trawled the archives of the Manchester Natural History Society and Manchester Museum, and interviewed the Manchester Museum's Curator of Community Exhibitions, Andrea Winn, in order to learn more about, and discuss the details of the Museum's history.

'As people and objects gather time, movement and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other' (Godson and Marshall, 1999: 169). This, according to Godson and Marshall, is the central idea of objects having lives, hence why they require biographies to be written about them. The use of an object biography is therefore vital in investigating a subject such as the Manchester Museum, as social interactions were, and still are crucial in its on-going development. Hoskins' (1998) work in Sumba, Indonesia with the Kodi found that she 'could not collect the histories of objects and life histories of persons separately' (Hoskins, 1998: 2), displaying the importance that objects and buildings play within our lives, so much so that they become inseparably intertwined. This is demonstrated by her study of the metaphor of a 'green bottle', which came to '[associate] a new form of mechanical violence with the absolute destructiveness of Western consumer objects' (Hoskins, 1998: 162), showing how objects can become laced with

meaning through social construction, and that such ideas can be used to represent whole societies. Again, this proves that an object biography is the most effective way to study the Museum, as the institution and building itself have come to represent the context within which it was facilitated; it draws together all the social and political circumstances surrounding its birth, as well as those of its development. These are integral to it, and it wouldn't be the same without them.

In the 19th Century, Manchester was at the centre of global cotton trade. '90 per cent of Britain's cotton industry was concentrated in the smoky Manchester region' (Mosley, 2001: 2), and consequently, the city amassed a great wealth and became a hugely industrial area, with the sobriquet 'Cottonopolis'. The industrial focus of the city led to a vast influx of people coming to work in the mills and warehouses, resulting in the renowned opinion of Manchester as 'the chimney of the world' (Mosley, 2001: 21). A large concentration of people living and working in crowded and unhygienic areas was the perfect backdrop for class struggle, proved by the fact that Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto here in 1847, with the expectation that a working class revolution was imminent. Not only was there a struggle with the lower classes, but also with the upper classes and landed gentry of England, who 'looked down on the new money of the industrialists, but very soon began to realise that actually, this … was a force to be reckoned with' (Winn, 2016). This resulted in the new middle class of Manchester striving to prove their sophistication through development, with a famous example being the Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857. In five months, this grandiose structure, opened by Queen Victoria and filled with thousands of statues and works of art, received 1.5 million visitors, and thus it achieved its aim – 'Manchester's place as a cultural centre was confirmed' (Kidd, 1993: 77). The Art Treasures Exhibition, however, was a very unique structure; 'Grecian and Gothic monuments alike emphasised the cultural sophistication of Manchester's elite' (Alberti, 2009: 13), as they contrasted with their industrial setting. This environment of class struggle and industrial revolution all fed into the birth of the Museum.

Figure 1: The Art Treasures Exhibition (Source: Manchester Archives Plus)

In 1814, a manufacturer in the cotton business named John Leigh Philips died, and his cabinet of curiosity was sold to Thomas Heywood Robinson. Along with nine other merchants, Robinson then used this collection to form the base of the Manchester Natural History Society. As their collections grew, the Society raised money to build their own premises, and 1835, they opened their own museum on Peter Street, an area that was 'giving way to institutions that would comprise the cultural counterpoint to the industrial city' (Alberti, 2009: 13). Even at this early stage, the positioning of the Museum clearly demonstrates the enriching nature intended for the institution, as it was clearly part of a plan to civilise the working class population. This was displayed by the Natural History Society's decision to change their rules of access to collections, now allowing children,

ladies and servants to enter at a price, explained by Alberti (2009: 17) as 'a national tendency to provide cultural and educational opportunities for the 'lower orders' of society'. However, the choice to demand payment proved fatal for the Museum on Peter Street, as it struggled to complete with the free Peel Park Museum in Salford, forcing them to sell on their collections to the nearby Owens College. Despite not managing to immediately take on the Museum's collections due to space restrictions, the College accepted them and immediately set out to build new premises, commissioning Alfred Waterhouse to design them in the Chorlton-on-Medlock suburb. In 1873, the new campus was completed and the collections were transported over to it. Nine years later, Alfred Waterhouse was hired once again to design what would soon become the current Manchester Museum, and in 1888, the building finally opened, free of charge, to the public. With just this brief history of the origins of the Manchester Museum and its historical setting, it is already clear that the context of its facilitation was crucial for its founding.

Figure 2: Original Manchester Museum Building (Source: Author)

Now that I have laid out the vital foundations to my study, I will commence with the analysis of the aspects that have a fundamental role in the Manchester Museum of the present day, which are rather more subjective. As I have already touched on it as being a key reason for the Museum's formation, I intend to begin with the culture and prestige element of the Museum, which will lucidly flow into the issue of class struggle. The Museum originated in a time of industry and enlightenment, and the wealth of Manchester's industry was the fuel for a quest for knowledge, improvement and cultural supremacy (Manchester Museum, 1998). As mentioned earlier, architectural styles were used to juxtapose with the warehouses and mills of the city, and this was no different for the Peter Street Museum; 'part of the Greek architectural revival in Manchester, echoing the original town hall on King Street' (Alberti, 2009: 13), the Museum had a pillared frontage. The similarity of the Museum's architecture to that of the town hall is significant, as it demonstrates the 'civic' (Alberti, 2009: 2) nature of the Museum. This is no coincidence, as the current Museum is also very similar to the current town hall, both with a gothic influence. This is partially due to their design by the same architect, but also a clear presentation of the Museum as civic monument, a flagship for the city.

Figure 3: Town Hall (Source: Manchester Evening News)

Figure 4: Peter Street Museum (Source: MNHS Archives)

Figure 5: Former Town Hall (Source: BBC)

Figure 6: Ceiling of the Grand Hall (Source: Manchester City Council)

The decision to design the Museum as a civic monument strongly links into Manchester's intent on displaying their cultural sophistication, influenced heavily by their feeling of superiority as a result of the city's supremacy in the cotton trade. Such a sense of cultural and global dominance is demonstrated by the design on the ceiling the Great Hall of the town hall, built at the height of the British Empire. On entering the grandiose room, the ceiling lists the names of four countries; Australia, Canada, India and West Indies. Moving through the room, this format continues, listing other countries from the British Empire, such as South Africa, New Zealand and America. On approaching the end of the Hall, the list addresses British cities, such as Leeds, London and Edinburgh, and then finally ends with Manchester and Salford at the end-most point of the room. This design is a clear presentation that Manchester considered itself as the top of this global hierarchy, and as the centre of the British Empire due to their presence as the industrial powerhouse of Britain. Yet again, this municipal feeling of dominance fed into the city's ambition to demonstrate their cultural value to Britain and the world.

The Museum was central to this aim, and it was used as a part of a game of cultural one-upmanship. In the time that building of the Museum began, just under a mile down the road, the Whitworth Institute, comprised of an art gallery and public park, was in development. The City Art Gallery had also just been assigned its civic status in the Town Centre, and Liverpool too showed off their newly built Walker Art Gallery (Alberti, 2009: 23). Keen to best these cultural competitors, Alfred Waterhouse was commissioned once more, and he more than succeeded. Outdoing even his own design of Owens College, '[the] museum was even more monumental, with dense tri-partite fenestration and full height buttresses… Steep red pyramidal roofs topped the façade, and a nine-storey tower provided the visual centre-point of the College' (Alberti, 2009: 23). Using the gothic style that was popular at this time, Waterhouse cemented the Museum as a facet of Manchester's growing cultural network, and with the addition of a tower, made the Museum visible from all around. The idea that the Museum was built in order to better these other cultural institutions shows the

Figure 7: Manchester Museum Tower (Source: Author)

ambitious nature of the middle class of Manchester, as well as the city's determination, always striving to be superior.

However, the museum was not just the result of a society eager to be culturally superior. It was also born in a time where 'owners and philanthropists wanted to actually educate the people of Manchester as well, which is where the museums and galleries come in' (Winn, 2016). This is reflected by the thinking of Thomas Coglan Horsfall who 'passionately believed in the redemptive power of art' (Eagles, 2009), and was keen to bring it to the poorest members of society, and use it for an enlightening purpose. This notion was not only related to the Manchester Art Gallery, but also linked to other public exhibitions, namely the Museum. On the exterior, the intention of these philanthropists was to better the lives of their workers, though strongly corresponding with this was also an aim to have an element of control over their work force - 'if they're spending time in the museum and getting educated, they're not spending their time in the pub getting drunk' (Winn, 2016). This was exactly the reason for the building of public parks and other cultural institutions, and was also the incentive for making entry to places like these free of charge. The current Manchester Museum has never had an entry charge, and this was likely a large motivating factor for that. These institutions were not only used to control what the workforce did in their leisure time, but also played to the Marxist theory of false consciousness, in that it served to distract the workers from their otherwise miserable lives, as they were exploited, living and working in poor, crowded conditions. This shows that the Museum was built not just as a part of a period of cultural improvement of this ambitious industrial city, but also served to keep the working population subdued, in a setting that was ripe for class disputes.

This seems a perfect point to segue my analysis into the topic of access to the Museum, which links into that of class struggle around the Museum setting. In the early days of the Manchester Natural History Society, entry was very exclusive; limited to paid gentlemen members, their guests and honorary members, such as scholarly gentlemen (Alberti, 2009: 17). This displays the notion that cultural institutions such as the Museum were originally intended just for higher members of society, and chiefly men. However, in the Society's rules of 1852, it was noted that '[the] Council is empowered to open the Museum and Rooms, to Ladies and Strangers, on payment of One Shilling for each admission' (MSftPoNH, 1852: 12), as well as schoolchildren, meaning that this was now to become a forum for the mixing of socio-economic groups. This was likely in an effort to reform the 'lower orders' of society through fraternising with the higher members of the social hierarchy, leading to the claim that '[museums] were … political instruments, machines for making meaning and imposing particular behaviours on their visitors' (Alberti, 2009: 1-2). Such an idea has been thoroughly studied by Bennett (1995: 6), who looks at the museum as place where 'cultural artefacts [can] be refashioned in ways that … aimed at reshaping general norms of social behaviour,' and it could be argued that this purpose was very much intended by the middle class creators of the Manchester Museum. Both of these claims are very focussed on the idea of the Museum being used as a stage for the control and modification of the working people of Manchester; a notion very influenced by Foucault, who argued that

power was omnipresent. This concept is reflected in both the early and contemporary Museum, as there is a heavy reliance on sight lines in the original building and the extensions, and there are also staff casually patrolling the galleries, acting as a reminder to regulate one's behaviour. This demonstrates that the ideas that were crucial in the formation of the Museum in 1888 are still prevalent in it today.

As mentioned earlier, the Museum was also very centred the education of people, particularly when the institution became linked to Owens College, which was to become the University of Manchester. This increasing focus is demonstrated by the following rule: '…on one day a week, except during vacations, the collections shall be closed to the public for more convenient use by students only' (Manchester City Council, 1865). This proves that they were intent on using the Museum for educational purposes, and not just as a form of control either, but for the actual furthering of disciplines, lending itself as a site of active research for the University as well as a place for the spread of information. This is a key area that highlights the changing ideas of the purpose of the Museum. Starting off as a random, jumbled assortment of curiosities, the initial purpose of the institution's early specimens was to surprise or shock its viewers. Whereas the Museum, on its opening, aimed to be more informative than amazing. As part of the wave of new museums, the Manchester institution tried to detach itself from the cabinets of curiosity where Thomas Greenwood advised that one would find ''dust and disorder reigning supreme'' (Bennett, 1995: 2). In adding order to its collections, the Manchester Museum felt that they could use their displays to transmit knowledge, with an emphasis on linear organisation, displaying chronologies or evolutions, potentially for the simplicity of understanding for even the youngest viewer. However, this concentration on a linear presentation of mainly paleontological artefacts soon gave way to a display of disciplines separately, assigned their own individual sections in the Museum, such as zoology, botany and archaeology (Alberti, 2009: 52), a practice that, again, is still incorporated in some form with in the Museum today. The new layout became cemented when the annual Museum Committee Reports were split into subsections of disciplines, namely 'Zoological Department', 'Ethnological Room', 'Geological Department', 'Botanical Department' and 'Egyptian Department' (Manchester Museum, 1912). This displays a modernised, knowledgeable organisation of the Museum, rather than just a random collection of objects, also demonstrating its aim to educate visitors.

Through study of these annual reports, one can truly see that the Museum's goal to educate has been realised, with numerous mentions through 1909-1915 of how '[a] visit to the Museum … forms a regular part of work in many classes in Manchester schools' (Manchester Museum, 1912: 15), which also led to the setting aside of a room for the use of school groups. This culminated in the Museum being used as a form of temporary school during the First World War, due to the 'several schools in the Manchester district [finding] themselves temporarily without homes' (Manchester Museum, 1915: 3), as a result of them being taken over for Military Hospitals. However, the Museum was not just limited to the bounds of the building's walls, as it 'was one of the first museums to develop schools outreach boxes … in the 1950s' (Winn, 2016). This displays

the determination and the lengths the Museum went to in order to teach younger generations. The educative purpose of the Museum was not short lived. In fact, it is still very much active today, with a 1979 Policy Review of the Museum (Manchester Museum, 1979: 5) counting their collections as being 'amongst the most important outside the London national museums', and highlighting their 'capacity to educate and interest the general public and visiting schoolchildren.' The

Figure 8: 'Resources' case in Living Worlds Gallery (Source: Author)

development of this programme of education within the Museum shows a progression from the original institution's sole intention to control the working population of the city to a genuine interest in teaching its visitors. Today, it contains around 6 million objects, displaying the wonders of natural history, life on Earth, cultures from around the globe, and also informing us about contemporary issues facing the planet, such as climate change (as shown, for example, by Figure 8), and how we can tackle this together (Manchester Museum, 1998). This proves that its educative function is up-to-date and still as effective as an institution as it was at the time of its formation.

Figure 9: Strangeways 'Panopticon' aerial view (Source: David Goddard)

The architecture and layout of the Manchester Museum is central to all of the issues I have tackled above, as if they were physically fabricated into the foundations of the building. The choice of Alfred Waterhouse as the architect of the Museum was significant, as it was arguably informed largely by his design of Strangeways prison. His idea for the jail was born out of the panopticon design, in which all areas of the prison can be seen from a central hub, encouraging self-regulation as a result of constant surveillance. This was important, as a similar design was desired in the Museum, so that all areas were visible at all times, thus 'regulating the conduct of their visitors, … in ways that [were] both unobstructive and self-perpetuating' (Bennett, 1995: 6). This

Figure 10: Strangeways Interior (Source: DBX

Figure 11: Manchester Museum Original Building (Source: Author)

resulted in the original building of the museum having architecture that was identical to that of Strangeways, as demonstrated by Figures 10 and 11, but also in the linear structure of the extensions and galleries, which enables one to see from one end of the museum to the other, in some cases. This displays the material manifestation of Foucault's idea that power and control are always present, which results in the practice of visitors wandering the galleries predominantly in silence, as we are aware of our constant surveillance and scrutiny.

The Museum's architecture is also vital in it's role of an educational hub. This is displayed in the opinion of W.A. Grimshaw, who believed that '"[the] most important feature of the visits to the museum is the "atmosphere". The entrance into the "hallowed halls" has an incalculable effect on the children' (Manchester Museum, 1939: 2). This demonstrates that the Museum building facilitated effective learning for schoolchildren, and therefore was even more effective in achieving its educative aim. Sketches by Thomas Huxley also displayed the aim to have 'public sections' and private 'curator sections', which would enable 'the accessibility of all objects contained in the museum to the curator and to scientific students, without interference with the public or by the public' (Huxley, 1896: 126). This displays the intention of incorporating the educative side of the institution into the architecture of the building; however, this did not seem to come to fruition, showing instead that the Manchester Museum and all of its displays should be equally open to all of its visitors. Such an idea, if anything, displays its educative intent even more so, as it suggests that there was a belief that all of its visitors deserved to be enlightened.

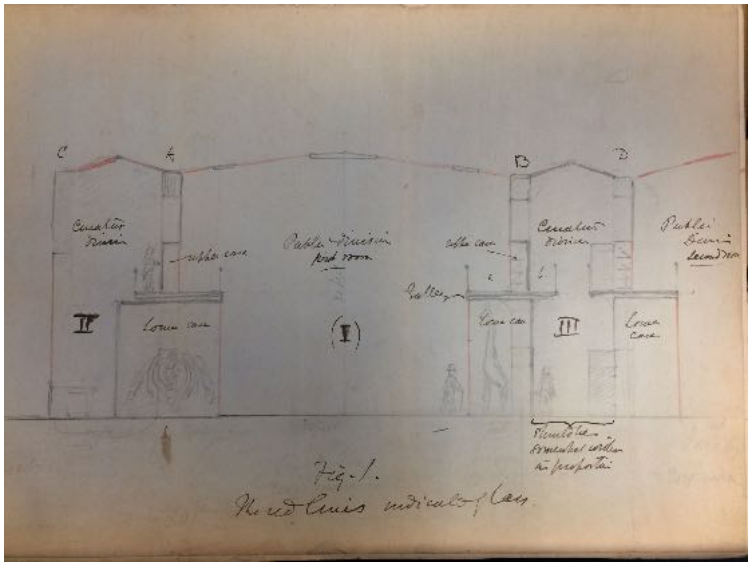

Figure 12: Huxley's sketch displaying public and curator divisions (Source: Manchester Museum Records)

The Museum has undergone many changes in display, and the present-day layout is remarkably different from that of its origin, both of which adhere to Bennett's (1995: 6) suggestion that 'their visitors' experiences are realized via their physical movement through an exhibitionary space', and therefore guided them architecturally through the gallery in a way that was intended by the Museum. In Dawkins' original design, '[the] visitors' journey began on the ground floor with mineralogy, which was presented as the bedrock, literally, of the Museum and therefore of life on earth' (Alberti, 2009: 32). From here, they were effectively guided chronologically through stratigraphical time on the ground and first floor, and then ran through the evolution of all sorts of creatures in separate areas of the Museum, such as mammals, reptiles and birds, with a small section designated to botany. However, the contemporary Museum relies

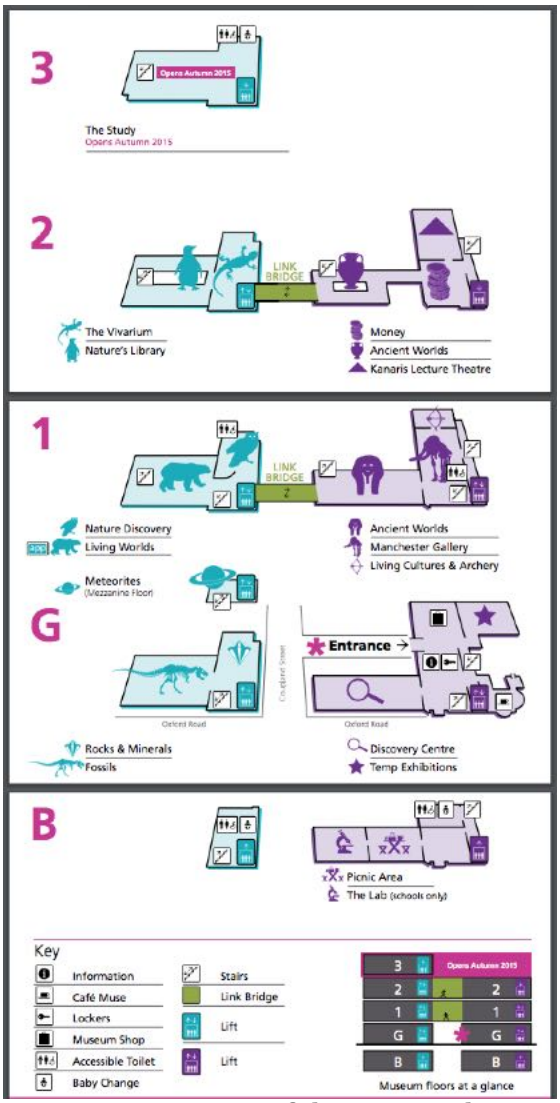

Figure 13: Map of the present day Museum (Source: Manchester Museum)

less on the chronological and evolutionary guidance of visitors. Instead, they are first led up a grand staircase and into the Manchester Gallery, harking back to the cultural power of that this Museum initially was founded in aid of. Central to this gallery is the skeleton of Maharaja, the elephant that walked all the way from Edinburgh to Belle Vue Zoo. This suggests that the Manchester Exhibit is the most awe-inspiring in the Museum, almost reverting back to the Museum's initial purpose of showing Manchester as a cultural hearth. Leading on from here is the Ancient Worlds exhibition, dominated by artefacts donated by the famous cotton manufacturer, Jesse Howarth, which again references the importance of the context that the Museum was founded in. Moving then into the original building, the visitor is confronted with the serene and unique Living Worlds Gallery, with the Fossils and Mineral Gallery below and the Vivarium above. This truly displays the variable nature of the Museum and its exhibits, with its mix of disciplines, as well as its incorporation of its past and context into it, displayed by part of the Nature's Library section being devoted to the topic of cabinets of curiosity.

As displayed in my extensive study of the Manchester Museum, it has a long and vibrant history, which has been thoroughly linked into the context in which it was facilitated. Such a background was centred on the issues of cultural supremacy of an ambitious, industrial powerhouse; class struggles between the bourgeoisie and the working classes, leading to former aiming to control the latter; and these powerful, complex issues were all incorporated into the development and of the Manchester Museum, in a way that makes this institution more significant than a public park, for example, which was another popular innovation of the time. This is because the Museum was used as a stage for these clashes, and this is reflected in the architecture of the institution, as well as its displays and purpose today. Manchester's is a museum with a civic purpose, serving to display a history of the city, not just in its opening gallery dedicated to that function, but also through the other displays of the Museum, which all, in one way or another, link into Manchester's diverse history. As I stated at the start of my thesis, this purpose could be much more effectively achieved if the captivating biography of this essentially living, breathing institution could be well publicised, alongside that of other cultural organisations, which are certain to be just as fascinating as this singular, intriguing specimen.

Word Count: 4178 words

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