



## Museum Curating

Ok, well, I run the masters degree in museum studies at the Institute of Archaeology, but I've also worked for a long time actually in museums, particularly with museum collections, so this is something that has interested me for quite a long time. I'd just like to start, and this'll be some useful information for me, how many of you have ever been in a museum collection store? Has anybody? [...] So, who thinks that museums have a lot of collections apart from what they display? [...] Well this is very common actually, people have no idea that museums have collections other than what they display. But I'm going to show you that this is completely wrong, they have enormous collections apart from what they have on display. So, and the question is, since these collections aren't displayed, what should museums do with them, how can they use them? And it's surprising really, that even though they have had collections as the centre of their purpose for a very long time, museums haven't really come to terms with having large collections and what to do with the objects that aren't on display. So this is what I'm going to talk about this afternoon.

So, I'm going to start off in good academic fashion. This is a proposition which I'm going to talk about. Collections have grown. Museums have really become different organisations because their main focus is on exhibitions, but in fact they now have these huge collections as well, but they haven't come to terms with this nor begun think how to appropriately react. So,

Do you think we have to do anything about this bell that's going off? [... (fixing microphone)]

So, collections have grown enormously during the second part, particularly, of the last century. Housing and managing them to proper museum standards takes a very large proportion of museum finance. Yet, museums still see themselves primarily as places that have exhibitions. And the activities involving non-exhibited collections are an optional extra. It seems to me that through accumulating these very large resources they have actually become different organisations without realising this.

So, what's the issue? First of all, many collections are very very large. For instance, in the Australian museum - I've been to Australia lately - there are 1.1 million items in the cultural collections, 70,000 in the bird collection, 635,000 in the fish collection - no wonder we're short of fish - 5 million insects and so on. The National Maritime Museum in London has 2.6 million objects in its collection, and the Natural History Museum in London has got - wait for it - 70 million. And that's all the specimens such as birds, animals, insects, mineral collections, rocks - 70 million. On the other hand, some museums have a very small number of objects in their collections as we'll see in a minute. So what's all the fuss about? Museums have got these large collections but even more interesting is the rate at which the collections have grown. The amount of use of them is not very great, and there is a feeling that museums should be more about people than about objects.

So, what about the collections then? Okay, now because most of you haven't seen stored collections, here are some images of collection stores. And these are stores for some of the really large collections I was talking about. For example, in London, starting at the top right from where you are, there's the London Archaeology Archive of the Museum of London, and you can see that corridor goes right on down to the back of the picture so it's a huge number of objects, a huge amount of material, from London archaeological excavations. In Melbourne, in Australia, there's a huge store full of the ethnographic collections, absolutely crucial for the history of Australia, and for the indigenous people who live there. In Ottawa, in Canada, this is typical of a natural history museum collection, all these enormous covers that slide aside so you can get at the objects inside. And, the Science Museum in London, where I used to work - the national museum of science and industry - has got eight aircraft hangars, each the size of a football pitch, on an airfield outside London, where it stores the national memory of science, technology and invention. And there is one of the aircraft hangars, full of objects, full of memories.

Okay, here are some more stores, with rather more reasonable sized collections. For example, a collection of history objects, objects from the history of life in the countryside. Another natural history collection in Australia with the birds. This collection has recently been moved and you can see how beautifully the birds have been protected - there's that bird in a little white foam collar to protect it during the move and during storage. Down at the bottom there's a furniture collection from the National Museum of Ireland, and that cupboard that that furniture's stored on is one of those ones that moves back and forth. And there's some more from the Science Museum, part of the history of medicine collection stored on racks. So there are some sort-of medium sized collections just to give you an idea. And finally, many museums have also a great many very small precious objects. For example, jewelry, they often keep them in drawers like this, jewelry stored in a pull-out drawer. Little ethnographic objects, fans beautifully supported, kept in a drawer so they're kept free from humidity and also free from light which would cause them to fade. And a collection of shells, again stored in a pull-out drawer inside a

cupboard. So that's taken you from really huge collections down to – with enormous objects – down to really small precious objects. So that's the sort of range of things that are stored in museums.

Now, collections into museums, this is just to show you the rate at which collections have grown. These are the - a graph showing how the number of objects in the Museum of London collections have grown. And I used to work there for quite a long time, so I did this piece of work when I was there. And it just shows that they grew quite slowly from the time the museum was established in the early nineteenth century up to about 1950. But then, when the early twentieth century came along with all the consumer goods, massive amounts of paper, photographs and so on, then the collections began to increase at enormous rate. And we must ask ourselves can museums possibly continue storing collections that are growing at such a fast rate.

In the Science Museum, a similar picture. The collections grew quite slowly until 1970, when the museum acquired the Wellcome Collection of the history of medicine, so the collections took a sharp jump up. They still kept increasing at a steady pace, and of course many of the objects in the Science Museum are absolutely enormous – railway engines or even a printing press, really enormous objects. So although this is numbers of objects, some of these objects are huge. So that gives you an idea of the rate of growth of collections. So you can see it is an issue, especially when museums haven't worked out very well what to do with these big collections yet.

So how much do they get used? Well, actually, very little is known about this at the moment and some of my students are doing their dissertations over the summer and researching how collections are used in London museums. Here are a couple of museum stores just to remind you of the sort of thing. So in the Science Museum, for example, their small objects collection which are housed in this ex-Victorian office building – there are some of them you can see – have about 250 to 700 researchers or visitors a year. Well, that might sound like quite a lot, but when you think that the museum itself has about 1.7 million visitors a year to the exhibitions, you begin to see that people in the museum – when we told them we were very pleased we had 700 researchers this year they go, 'oh really? That's not very many is it?' Because beside the number of visitors it just doesn't seem very impressive. Similarly with the Victoria and Albert Museum, it has the national archive of art and design, and this is visited by researchers who are researching those subjects. And it counts just over 900 researchers in a year. Again, that's quite – probably not bad for an archive but, all the same, museums are used to thinking of such large numbers of visitors that it just gets nowhere. And a third museum, much smaller, the Pitt Rivers museum in Oxford – has anybody visited that museum? Well, I really recommend it, it's absolutely incredible, it has a wonderful display of ethnographic objects in particular, and they're arranged just as they always have been since the nineteenth century since those collections were first formed and displayed. Now this is one of the world's great ethnography collections, just over 200 research visits a year. Well, you know, it's really good, it's very praiseworthy, but it's just doesn't stack up beside the number of objects and the cost of those objects.

Well, more and more, I found when I was working in museums I used to get asked awkward questions. 'I suppose you use the objects to change the things in the exhibition?' Well, actually no, because exhibitions are very carefully planned these days, they're often sort-of thematic about energy or about transport, and you can't just change objects in the exhibitions, that's just not how it happens, every object is carefully picked to tell us a particular story and you can't just swap in another one. So we don't use the reserve collections to change the objects on display, that's not what they're for. So another question I would be asked, 'I suppose people come and work on the objects for research?' 'Well actually, oh yes', I used to say, 'absolutely, they're a marvelous resource for research', but in the back of my mind were those really low numbers of people who actually did visit, so I just thought, well, just don't ask me how many come and look at the - use the objects for research. And another question, 'well why do you have collections when you can't display them then?' 'Well' – museum people say – 'well, they're part of the museum, that's what the museum's all about.' But, you know, I just wonder these days, people are more and more questioning, 'but are they? So why don't you use them more? So why are they the heart of the museum? A museum's about people now.' So that's not a question we can answer very easily either. And finally, the really bold people say, 'okay, so if you've got these big collections and you can't use them, there are lots of people out there in the private sector who perhaps collect these things and would love to have them. So why don't you let some of the collections go out to private owners who might be able to appreciate them more.' Museums sort of – and if you're in a museum, you sort-of say, 'mm, well, they're the public collection, they were made using public money, and we have to keep them safe because they might be useful in the future. But, you know, if they're not that useful now, why are they going to be more useful in the future? So, these are some awkward questions that do get asked, and I used to be asked questions like that quite regularly. But does it matter, can't museums just go on saying, well, their collections are the heart of everything they do any so on? Well, more and more, this is getting noticed. So, for example, here's an article from one of our leading Sunday papers, by a well-known person who loves to stir up trouble and controversy, always good for the newspaper, Brian Appleyard. 'And they should have borders,' he says, 'they're full of bursting yet still collecting madly. Have our museums lost their way?' Why are they still collecting when they've got these huge collections? So people are beginning to notice this, to the extent that the Museums Association which is the professional organisation for museums in this country, launched an investigation and has just published a report on the future for collections, how can they be better used, how can museums work better together. And also, I've written a book about the uses of museum collections, more of that later. So, this is becoming a very publicly discussed subject. And the people in the government who fund museums have also noticed this. So it does matter.

But I've been going on about collections all the time. But are collections all the same, aren't they very different? Well, of course they are, they're extremely different. So for example – so really, you could say that there are 1,001 different kinds of collection – but just categorizing them very generally, there are of course art collections, like this painting by Paul Nash from the Tate collection. Art collections commonly just have really quite a few objects. So for example, I mentioned that the Natural History Museum in London has got 70 million objects. On the other hand, the National Gallery in London – who would like to guess how many paintings the National Gallery has in its collection? Come on, somebody have a go.

[audience] Twenty Thousand?

Any advance on 20,000, up or down?

[audience] Thirty thousand

Thirty thousand. Anybody else like to have a go? Well it hasn't, it's got two thousand objects. I mean, how difficult is it to look after that? We used to say when we worked with three dimensional collections, they've only got two thousand pictures and they're all flat – it seems an awful lot easier to us. And practically all of those pictures of course are on display, you can see them at the National Gallery, or maybe a few, just a few, are on loan to other exhibitions. So sometimes collections are to be appreciated and admired. And other collections like that are decorative arts collections, perhaps collections of beautiful Japanese objects, oriental objects, decorative arts collections from Britain, textiles, costumes, those sorts of things, they're primarily there to be visually appreciated and enjoyed. So, there's the aesthetic collections.

The next one is functional objects like this, one of the first motor cars on British roads. Can you imagine a time when there were only about four motor cars on British roads, it's quite unbelievable but here is one, in the collection of the Science Museum – [...], as a company, now sadly makes military equipment and tanks, but there you go, there's evolution for you. There is an expectation with functional objects such as vehicles, or trains, or agricultural machinery and so on, people kind of expect that those collections will – some objects will be seen to be working. So there's a sort of feeling that functional objects should be seen to work. At least they're there partly so you can understand how they work and what they were used for and so on.

Another kind of collection are archives for research and we saw the London archaeological archive store – there it is again – archives for research include those sorts of collections like archaeological collections which were often just sort-of bags of pottery and so on, and natural history collections, all those 70 million objects. About 7 or 8 years ago I was lucky enough to see the national aphid collection – does anyone know what an aphid is? It's a little greenfly, you find it on your lettuce if you're lucky, or on your roses – a little tiny greenfly, yes? Aphids. Anyway. Little tiny, tiny flies. Well, I saw the national aphid collection, there are about a million squashed aphids on scientific slides – it was great, all stored in cabinets. And so you can easily make up 70 million objects when you've got a few collections of aphids. Another thing I saw in that same year, I couldn't believe it, it was marvelous, was the national collection of stamps, the UK national stamp collection. Does anybody know somebody who collects stamps? I bet you do, some people. Anyway, imagine that happening on a national scale, it's absolutely incredible, the number of stamps we have in the national stamp collection. Though I think we've probably still got more aphids in the national aphid collection. Anyway, seriously though, these are archives for research, they're not obviously for aesthetic enjoyment – you can enjoy them when you see them, but not quite in the way that they're intended for. They are for researchers in the case of scientists or stamp people or whatever to come along and base research on.

Then there are other collections that are quite difficult to define, collections to do with places and people. And this Chinese gentleman is a little picture from the collection of the Chinese Museum in Melbourne, in Australia. So he's an example of an object that is very important because of people and places. The Chinese of course were some of the earliest people who moved into Australia, and they had a really bad time in the early days as well, so the Chinese Museum in Melbourne really celebrates, commemorates the way that Chinese people lived in the early days of Australia, and that's one of their – of the objects that they have. Any finally down in pink, the dangerous pink, with an image of some people – some early Australians dancing, there's this idea of the intangible heritage. I'm sure if you're learning English you probably haven't come across this word *intangible*, it means you can't touch it – it's not there – it's things like dancing or singing or music, or even cooking, telling stories, all the ways of life that people have, and there is now a move, particularly in response to western-style museumism that have many many – their focus on three dimensional solid objects – there's a move to say, well, the culture of many countries isn't – can't be shown through solid objects, it's intangible, it's all these other things and so we should start collecting that as well. Well, if you just try and think how on earth would you collect the intangible heritage then you can see it's going to be quite a challenge, and when you add it to all the ordinary collections that museums have, that they're still trying to cope with, I think there's going to be some difficult times ahead. Never mind, there's lots of scope for research by PhD students and academics like me into saying how can we cope with the intangible heritage. So there's an example of an intangible heritage dance going on, and the Australians, Aboriginal Australians. So all those different kinds of collections, you can't just say how can we use collections as a whole, you have to say how can we use this particular kind of collection.

So, what sort of uses are there? Well, we talked about some of them when we looked at different kinds of collections. But these – when I was researching and writing my book, I thought about five main ways in which collections can be used.

We'll have a look at these uses one by one in just a minute. But obviously there's research – if collections aren't there for research then really what are they there for? Museum collections should be the basis for research into all sorts of things – every possible aspect of the world that you can imagine.

For learning: at the moment museums have a big emphasis on schools and school parties, but it would be very nice if the collections were used much more in learning at a more adult level – ongoing learning, lifelong learning, it's a horrible politicians' phrase which I can't stand – but learning by people like you and – I'm not sure which courses you're going to be doing, but I'm sure that every single course could actually make use of a museum collection as part of the course. And you would love it, people absolutely love it when they do come into contact with museum collections. University College London, here, has about seventeen different collections and in fact they are quite well used in teaching undergraduates and graduates. So many of you will encounter some during your courses – I hope so – but they are much more used in learning.

Memory and identity. Well, we saw some of those ethnography collections, and thinking about those people dancing in the intangible heritage illustration, then many collections are absolutely central to people's memories and identities. And I found a surprising number of examples where individual people or families had gone along to visit collections because they represented something from their past. Very often, for example, military collections – people go to visit medals, or uniforms or equipment that belonged to their families who fought in wars. And they find this experience very moving very often. So memory and identity, it is – in an important way, museums are the sort-of stewards, the keepers of memory and identity things for society and for people.

Collections for creativity. Well, that was great fun, but I'm not going to spoil it 'cos I've got some stuff later about, but I really had no idea about the range of creative activities that get undertaken in connection with collections.

And finally, there's enjoyment. I loved going along to see the national aphid collection, and I've been telling stories about it ever since. And similarly with the national stamp collection. There are collections – some museums open their stores for visits or they take tours round their stores, so if you're in search of an unusual day out or something, then see if you can't find a store tour to go on and I think you'll be amazed. For example, the London Transport Museum, which is in Covent Garden, has a store in one of the London suburbs, and it does open it, I think once a month, for people to go and visit the store and see all sorts of amazing things from London transport, including a wonderful collection of posters they have, many designed by very famous artists. So see if you can't go to the London Transport Museum for its open store day. And another museum is the Wallace Collection of Decorative Arts which is quite close to Oxford Circus, and that has an open store which you can visit almost any time. Actually no, I think they do have opening hours so it would be wise to check, but they have an open store where many many of their collections' objects are just on display in glass-fronted cabinets. So you can just – people can just enjoy collections, museum people love working with collections and why shouldn't they share some of that enthusiasm?

So, we'll talk about some of these aspects of use. The first one is research. And, for example, here in UCL in the History of Art department somebody called Libby Sheldon who's – what is she? – a history of art scientist, I guess, recently identified a Vermeer, *Girl Seated – Young Lady Seated at the Virginals* I think it's called, which sold subsequently for many millions of pounds – 2.7, 3.7, something like that. Anyway, it was a very very valuable picture, but until Libby Sheldon had examined the pigments that it was painted with through tiny tiny samples and compared them to pigments from many many other paintings of much humbler origins but well-dated, in museum collections, it couldn't be proved that it was a Vermeer. Once it was proved, then the painting became much much more valuable than it had been before. That's another story, but the identification of that painting by Vermeer depended on the existence of many many many humbler paintings in museum collections that would never be considered so significant. So that's an example of the research use of collections.

Another use of collections, I mentioned collections in learning. Well, here are some examples of people using – learning using collections. So, for example, the archaeology M.A. class in the top-right corner, that's in the Institute of Archaeology, and I said that archaeology collections are often just sort-of bags of shirts, they're never there to be seen, they're not there to be exhibited; but they are there to be learnt from, and here are these students learning how they can use ceramics and pottery remains to interpret what they're finding on archaeological excavations. Here's another person who's studying anatomy, and he's using an object from the Grant Museum which is just upstairs – how many people knew that there's a museum just upstairs from here, in this very building? One... Okay, well, honestly, you just have to visit the grant museum, it is absolutely delightful, it really is. Now, that's a museum that really hasn't got very much of its collection in store because it's nearly all on display, and we'll see some more about that in a minute. But there's somebody using one of the Grant Museum objects to study anatomy. These people here working on the stored collections in a small history museum – I bet you they're learning, I bet that one's telling that one how shoe-making works, don't you think so? So that's an example where people are enjoying working with the collections, and I'm sure they're learning as they do so, looks to me as though they are. And finally, of course, schools do use collections, and here are some school children on a holiday activity doing some drawing again with the Grant Museum collection. So, ongoing learning.

I talked about the importance of collections to memory and identity. Well, here are some examples of that. In the war remnants museum in the place that used to be called Saigon here are some medals – these were actually sent by an American who said, 'I was wrong, I'm sorry, I really don't think that war was just and we shouldn't have treated Vietnam in that way.' So he wanted to record his feelings and his memory by sending his medals to that museum where they are

exhibited. Mind you, it's not all a matter of that particular museum taking the view that Americans are bad, because I have another wonderful picture which I don't think I've got in this presentation, of the war remnants museum shop, with lots of Mickey Mouse puppets, you know – the American icon really, Mickey Mouse – and right beside it there's an American fighter plane which was brought down in the war exhibited. So the picture of Mickey Mouse and a U.S. Army plane right beside it, so they have embraced the capitalist economy with some enthusiasm it seems. In the Chinese Museum in Melbourne again they've got a beautiful dragon, a Chinese dragon, from the dragon dance procession, and textiles and things of course that go with it. In Melbourne here's some of the Aboriginal objects. This is – presumably this is not a row of space-men who visited Australia in the early times, but they are very cute creatures I must say. And these collections are crucial to memory and identity in Australia. There's a lot of work going on to work with indigenous Australians about making better use of those collections, giving people access to them, in some particular cases returning parts of the collections to the people who are the descendants of the original owners. So, very important for memory and identity, they do mean a lot to people.

Creativity. Well, I mentioned creativity and the use of collections in creativity. For example literature, this is part of – a little bit of a wonderful poem about the Pitt Rivers museum in Oxford, and I'll just give you – and, here's this snatch of poem. "Beware, you're entering the climate of a foreign logic, accursed by the hair of a witch, earth from the grave of a man killed by a tiger." And it's got about ten or twelve verses of the amazing things you can see in the Pitt Rivers museum. So, people find collections inspiring for writing books and poems and so on. There's also a really good who-dunnit detective novel based in the Pitt Rivers museum, starring Inspector Morse. So, it's not all serious literature.

Art. Artists make really extensive use of museum collections and they have ever since the early days of the twentieth century. The idea of a museum collection really really appeals to artists. They love the idea that they can sort-of get hold of it and turn the collection inside-out, and make it into peculiar things and so on. But, not only that, for example this Italian art photographer Lanzardo [spelling?], he took a wonderfully striking series of photographs of a natural history collection in Milan – the collection was packed up to move, so you can see here are all these skeletons which are covered in plastic to protect them, in this artistic photograph. Back to the Grant Museum, and I'm sure it'll have more visitors than it's had in months after this lecture, but – you really should – but here is Miss Janet Nell who's an artist, she's been drawing natural history objects for many years and she goes along to the Grant Museum regularly to make drawings. Finally, [...] - ok, there's a really great sound installation in the Grant Museum, and for example if you read this description you might think it was a sort of art history analysis of a picture or something. It says, "these massless bodies have been made visible through the effective exploitation of their inherent flatness. Thin pentagonal shapes held in place with a fibrous background and glass foreground composed with both harmony and sobriety". So it this going to be perhaps a painting, a picture or a modern art installation? No, these artists have gone along, they've looked at the collection of objects in the Grant Museum and they've created descriptions of the objects such as that brittle star specimen there, which is what this is describing – they've created descriptions as though the objects were art objects, and it's in the sound guide. And if you see somebody borrow the sound guide and put it on, and they walk round and they find the sign which says, here your sound guide will work here, and they listen to it and you can see their faces looking simply amazed when this extraordinary text comes out because that's not what they're expecting at all – and that's what art's all about, of course. Some people get really annoyed, they hate it, but others like me, I go, 'that's amazing, I wasn't expecting that, how wonderful'. So it makes you look at objects in a completely different way and that's what artists do, of course. So artists use collections in lots of ways.

And you of course come across many examples of very expensive and cutting-edge new museum architecture. The museum in Bilbao is very famous, there's the Great Court in the British Museum here, and lots of other famous museum architecture. Well, what people don't realise is that museum collections also inspire architecture, and so for example there's the Darwin Centre of the Natural History Museum - actually if you'd like to see, get a glimpse of a collection the Darwin Centre at the Natural History Museum is good, because you can go inside it and press your nose to the glass and see the collections. And they do have tours actually, you have to book a place on the tour but they do have tours of the collections stored away. But the Darwin Centre is all about better storage for the collections. Similarly, this rather glamorous building, this is in Ottawa, in Canada, and this is the collections of the Canadian Museum of Civilization: two buildings side by side, one the museum and one for the collections. And what I like about the Darwin Centre and this one, is that they're built right in the centre of these big cities so it's a big statement that we believe that these collections are really important and we're going to take some of the most valuable real estate in the world to build a centre for the collections. Other museums, I have to say, don't see their collections as quite so valuable. But still, these do. And here's another building, this amazing sort-of wavy building is made out of a lattice of green wood, so it's quite flexible, and it moves. And this is in Sussex in a beautiful open-air museum where they've collected historic houses and moved them onto the site so you can visit the historic houses and there is this [...] building, a new building, for storing their collections and teaching in. So, [...] building. So there are some examples of how architects are inspired by museum collections, it doesn't just have to be exhibitions.

And finally, enjoyment. Okay, well there are all these different kinds of ways that people can enjoy the collections. Stores can be opened so they can walk in and out, visitable, they can be taken on tours of the stores, there are object-focussed events though perhaps not enough of them, art based on the collections we saw, and research. All these things are ways that people enjoy the collections. But the most important one – whoops, didn't mean to do that, go back, go back, okay. That's better – but the most important thing is when people are actually occasionally invited by museums to be the curators, to work with the collections as though they were museum professionals, to make their own exhibitions outside in their communities, in community centres or whatever, perhaps to help with conservation – that's really quite commonplace. So

it's when people are actually allowed to work with the collections and trusted to be similar to museum professionals, that I think they really begin to enjoy the collections most. And you remember those two people who were working with the collection with the shoe-making equipment: that was an example of some people who were really enjoying working with the collections as volunteers. So there ought perhaps to be much more of that.

Okay, well we can't ever forget these days the effects of digitization and the internet. And here's where this could make a big difference, I think, to the use of museum collections. After all, if museums want people to use their collections more, the first fundamental thing is to make it possible for people to know what they've got in the collections. And how better than to list them and put the catalogue on the internet, which some museums are doing. So, for example, this is a catalogue developed by quite a few museums working together, of historic scientific instruments. This one is online, it is of the Museum of London, some of their archaeology and decorative arts collections surrounded in glass. And the wonderfully named Sea Slug Forum is an Australian – from the Australian Museum in Sydney, and this was a very – actually seriously, is a very very popular forum where people who are studying or interested in sea slugs can communicate and post messages and so on. And I bet you never thought that sea slugs looked like that, I certainly didn't I must say, makes me quite enthusiastic about them as many people clearly are. So those are some ways the internet and digitization could be used to expand the use of collections.

Okay, now, we've talked about all these different uses, but I also was interested when I was doing my research in what is the values of collections? Is there a value to collections? I wasn't quite sure when I started out. It's easy enough to say that there are values to museums, if they're in a place in – if a new museum is built, it can help to regenerate the city. Museums, they provide jobs, they provide reasons for people to visit, they service the needs of cultural tourism and tourists and so on. So museums obviously are valued for collections. We've just been saying that nobody knows quite what to do with them or what's in them. Well, some economists fortunately have come to our rescue. They have actually worked out that a way of looking at collections is to say that they are the cultural capital. So a museum – museums as a whole look after some very important cultural capital for communities and for countries. Just as you might have some money which you've saved up and you've invested, that's your financial capital, so these collections are cultural capital which is held safe. But – and that's how museums are used to looking at their collections, but what they haven't got around to thinking is, well how can we generate value from that capital. Because if you have some money, it's no good just keeping the money locked up in a little chest like that – that's no use at all – how are you going to make the money useful? Generally, you expect the money to generate interest in some way, dividends that you can take out and spend today without damaging your capital for tomorrow. So that's a really good way of thinking about museum collections. And indeed, two or three years ago the Dutch minister for culture actually said almost exactly this: museums are responsible for generating value from the capital that they hold, and he went on to say that the people and the government trusted museum professionals to generate value from the collections, but at that time he didn't think they were doing it enough, which is certainly true. So that's a way of looking at the value of collections. There are different aspects of value, but I really like this sign from India, the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute: 'It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite cultures'. And this is one of the fundamental duties from – fundamental duty number 51a of the constitution of India, which I think is very nice, I like that.

There are different kinds of value: aesthetic value we talked about, spiritual value – objects can have a real spiritual significance as I'm sure you know. Symbolic value – objects are symbols of various things. Historical value, many objects embody history – historical evidence and so on. And finally, authenticity value, if – when it was discovered that that painting really was a Vermeer, then it acquired a value of authenticity which it didn't have before. So there are those different aspects of value and it's interesting to explore those.

But, what to do? We've been through and we've seen all these wonderful things about collections, but it remains the truth that they aren't much used at the moment. So, should museums actually get rid of some of their collections, should they dispose of some stuff? Should they loan and exhibit objects? Well, you can't use very many objects like that. Should they export the problem, should there be collection centres – I've put in brackets or salt mines, because we have some very fine salt mines in this country in Cheshire, and in fact some museums and the National Archive do store material in the salt mines. But, you know, you have to say, well, it may be kept safe, it may be well-looked-after cultural capital, but where's the value being generated from? What use is it? So, should we rather investigate more uses of collections and more use – which is what I think would be better. Well, this would mean a really new organisational psychology for museums, because they're not used to thinking of their collections like that at all – the collection's a lot safer just stored; they're there to guard them. But they wouldn't be able to do that any more. They'd move from being guardians of collections to being facilitators of engagement with them. So, facilitating people using them and engaging them. They'd move from storing static collections to seeing the collections as a service, so the collections were a resource for other organisations to use and they don't like to think like that at all at the moment. Different and separate from other institutions is how they think of themselves at the moment – well, we can't do those things, we're different. Museums are such awkward – they're really different – well, they could be some of the – just some of the players in networks for research learning and those other things in which other organisations took the lead. We have a well-known saying in this country, I don't know if you've come across it yet, 'not invented here'. Maybe you have it in your country too. Where ideas that come from outside an institution, the organisation says, hmm, well, great, but I see all sorts of problems there and it's not invented here so we're not going to do it. So maybe this is quite a familiar idea all over the world, it certainly is here. And this is often how museums think.

So, I would like to call on the artists to help us, I think they could play a very valuable part. So for example, there's an artist called Mark Deon, who makes installations, and this is what he said: 'A museum needs to be turned inside out, put the backrooms on display and the displays in storage'. Well, you know, that's perhaps putting it a bit strongly but I think that's the right way to think about it. Because of all the ways you can enjoy collections in store. If they used the imagination, resources and priority that they put into exhibitions, I don't think there would be a problem. Which returns us to my initial proposition, that collections have grown, museums have become different organisations, but how should they think about themselves in the future? Because at the moment their business model, the value that they deliver, is so much dependent on the number of people who come to see exhibitions. But clearly they would have to find new ways of measuring success if they were to make more use of the collections.

There are some encouraging signs, so for example the Museums Association has just published its report on collections for the future, which says many of the things that I just said. And in August my book's going to be published, called 'Fragments of the World', which I think is a nice title I managed to find about, because they are little fragments of the world, they can only ever be fragments, but they are and the uses are museum collections. So, thank you very much. And I would really like to know what you think now. So there's time for some questions or for people to say what they think.

[audience] [...] a new object, a new collection, who decides to [...]

Ah, good question. If a museum – no, it's usually the curator or the people inside the museum. This question was, if a museum decides to buy a new collection, who should decide? It is usually the people in the museum. The thing is, it's seen as a very high-profile thing to do to add to your collection, so many people in museums want to add to their collections without thinking how can we use them.

[audience] [...]

What organisations give museums financial support? They're usually, public funding, so either the central government or else local government at local levels.

[audience] What about donations?

Yes, it's fairly minimal, frankly. Museums are supposed to raise money through doing things as well, but by far the most important source of finance is government, national or regional.

Who's going to go and visit the Grant Museum then? It's just upstairs... [...] some good resolutions here. It is lovely. Do museums in your countries have visits to their stored collections? No... Okay, I've convinced everybody obviously that museum collections ought to be much better used. So, I hope that you'll – while you're in England, you will try and find some ways in which you can visit museum collections or come into contact with them. Thankyou.