

NEWS

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From Religious House to Home of Art

Archaeologists undertaking a 'watching brief' during the Aberdeen Art Gallery redevelopment have made some amazing discoveries, including over 90 burials.

It has long been known that the Art Gallery stands within the site of the Dominican Friary of the Black Monks, who occupied part of Aberdeen from the 13th to 16th centuries. The friary included a graveyard and as earlier construction work in the 19th and 20th centuries found burials, it was always likely that more would be uncovered during the current redevelopment.

At the back of the Art Gallery, where demolition work was taking place, around 40 disarticulated skeletons were discovered in three wooden coffins. These must have been dug up some time ago, possibly in the 19th century, and then re-buried in a underground brick-built chamber (known as a charnel house). Large amounts of coffin wood, fixtures, fittings and furniture, and textile were also found.

Inside and under part of the main gallery, another 52 skeletons were found in their original graves. Other finds included coins, bits of coffin, textiles, ceramics, stone artefacts, quantities of animal bone and shell, bricks and tiles.

All the skeletons and other finds have been carefully excavated, recorded and taken off-site where they will be cleaned and sorted. The plan is to undertake analysis of the remains, including DNA, to determine the approximate date of the finds, and then arrangements will be made to rebury the skeletons. A report on the excavations will be produced and ways of telling the story of these finds are being looked into.

Whilst archaeologists do not expect to find any more burials, another discovery might reflect a time when an extinct species roamed near Aberdeen. A large animal skull has been found in an underground culvert and it appears to be from a boar. The ancestors of modern pigs and fierce

creatures, boars roamed British woods until the 13th century when they were hunted to extinction. It is doubtful the boar died in the culvert, more likely the skull was dropped in as rubbish. We do not know the age of the culvert yet, if it is from the 13th century or earlier, then it may be the remains of an animal that was hunted locally. If the culvert is more recent then the boar must have been imported. In the 20th century boars were bought into the UK for zoos and farms, and some later escaped. There have not been any confirmed sightings in Aberdeenshire but perhaps one day some distant living relations of the skull may reappear nearby.



Construction update

Building work has been progressing at an impressive rate in the last few months. With the winter storms over the scaffolding on the outside of the Art Gallery allowed the demolition crew to dismantle and remove the old pitched roofs above the galleries. An ingenious waterproof membrane has been installed at ceiling height to protect the fabric of the building during this phase. The oval roof light will remain in place until the new roof-top extension is constructed, to give extra protection to the ceilings within the central court and balcony.

It's also been great to see the start of the new staircase at the rear of the centre court. This will give access to all the levels in the new gallery.

The circular balcony in the Remembrance Hall has been extended using large steel beams. This means that the balcony will become accessible to wheelchair users for the first time as well as being made wider to allow more people to use the space as a point to reflect and enjoy this quiet, contemplative space. The new balcony is

also designed to create an accessible link between the Cowdray Hall and the main galleries on the first floor.

Coming up

We expect to see the crane moving to the front of the building for a time. Don't worry if you see the crane swing over the road! When it is not in use it must be left to move freely, this reduces any risk of damage and is required by law.

Fundraising, founder patrons and grant awards

More and more people are getting involved with Inspiring Art and Music, as we get ever closer to our fundraising target - we've already raised almost £600,000 with people like you choosing to join our Founder Patrons, or make regular donations by Direct Debit. To find out more about both, visit www.aagm.co.uk/donate. Trusts and Foundations from around the country have also been showing their support of this exciting project - Garfield Weston Foundation have awarded a fantastic £250,000, and Museums Galleries Scotland have donated £60,000. The Turtleton Charitable Trust have also donated £25,000

towards the interactive digital displays in the new Craft Gallery, and we hope to be able to announce more in coming months!

As we get closer to the Grand reopening in Winter 2017, our Founder Patrons will enjoy a number of special opportunities and events, and there's still time to join them - find out more online.

Inspiring Art and Music is all about creating a place for everyone to enjoy and experience the very best in Art and Music - right in the heart of Aberdeen, so there are countless opportunities for you to get involved.



inspiringartandmusic

To find out how you can play your part in Inspiring Art and Music, or get your company involved, contact our Campaign Manager, Michael Hodgson, on 01224 523670 or email MHodgson@Aberdeencity.gov.uk



Aberdeen Art Gallery goes to . . .

Although the Art Gallery is currently closed, we have been busy with exhibitions and loans at other venues. In February, our courier travelled to The Netherlands to collect fourteen of our paintings, including *The Tennis Party* and *To Pastures New*. They featured in *The Glasgow Boys - Scottish Impressionism 1880-1900*, which was a huge success for Drents Museum and highlighted the close connections between Scottish and Dutch artists at the end of the 19th century.

We were also working at Drum Castle, taking down the exhibition, *Human Presence* and replacing it with *Northern Lights*, a show selected from Aberdeen's collections which was previously hosted by the Fleming Collection in Mayfair, London. Concentrating on works with a Scottish connection, *Northern Lights* showcases many of our iconic paintings and also a new addition to the collection: a watercolour by Elizabeth

Blackadder, bequeathed through the Art Fund. The unique rooms at Drum Castle provide an inspirational setting for a display where modern art mingles with 18th and 19th century paintings. Comments so far indicate that visitors are thoroughly enjoying this collaboration.

From 24 March, a new exhibition at the Stanley Spencer Gallery will focus on *Stanley Spencer: Visionary Painter of the Natural World*. This delightful, converted chapel in the village of Cookham, Berkshire continues to host our Spencer works while the Art Gallery is closed.

Paintings and sculpture from Aberdeen's collections are also on display in temporary exhibitions, both in the UK and further afield. *Annunciation* by Gwynneth Holt and *Anne Finlay* by Dorothy Johnstone may be seen in *Modern Scottish Women* at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern

Art, Edinburgh until 3 July. The Royal West of England Academy, Bristol is the venue for *Inquisitive Eyes: Slade Painters in Edwardian Wessex, 1900-1914* which includes *The Blue Pool* by Augustus John. The latter two paintings are the poster works for the respective exhibitions, indicating how highly our collections are regarded. *Torso* by Dame Barbara Hepworth features in *Barbara Hepworth: Sculpture for a Modern World* at the Kröller-Müller Museum, The Netherlands until 27 April. The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in Norwich continues to display *Pope I - Study after Pope Innocent X* by Velazquez by Francis Bacon and, at the end of June, this painting will travel to the Grimaldi Forum in Monaco for inclusion in *Francis Bacon, Monaco and French Culture*.

We also have several other works going out on loan over the course of the summer - check the next Newsletter for details.

WorldHost

Angela Scott, Chief Executive ACC (far right on image) visited the Maritime Museum to present the team with their WorldHost Destination Certificate and Plaque.

The team across the Front of House, the Shop and Cafe and Admin teams are in daily contact with the public, either face to face or by telephone and e-mail, and most have attended a one day interactive training programme, including how to make an

excellent first impression, making all our visitors feel welcome.

Angela had a tour of the Museum and met several of the team, witnessing first-hand the pride held in the building, its contents and the work carried out within. Our team are flexible and work across all our venues - so expect this welcome in the Tollbooth, and the soon to be accessible Treasure Hub in Northfield!



Look Out

Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums is delighted to be working with the Look Again Festival and the business community to highlight some of the public's favourite art works and those less often seen, while Aberdeen Art Gallery is closed for refurbishment.

LOOK OUT for a series of pop-up portraits from the city's magnificent collections as you walk the granite mile and rediscover

the architecture of the Silver City. Your journey will take you through four centuries of paintings including works by Breughal, Ramsay, Dyce, Phillip, Guthrie and Millais.

The Look Again Festival invites you to become a tourist in your own city from 28 April to 2 May.

www.lookagainfestival.co.uk



Nearly there! - Aberdeen Treasure Hub

The creation of our new museum storage centre in Northfield is progressing well and the site will be handed over to Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums staff in July 2016. The centre, called Aberdeen Treasure Hub, will feature several store rooms as well as archive and research spaces, an activities room and small exhibition space.



The name of the building was suggested by Northfield Academy and it was the popular winner in the public voting that we held last year. Expect to see treasure themes around the site!

We're very busy planning our move, which will be a gradual process, and we're looking forward to providing tours later on this year once we are established there. More updates will follow in the next issue.

Guided Tours

The Aberdeen Maritime Museum guided tours programme continues to go from strength to strength with 367 visitors having taken tours to date. The current staff guides are soon to be joined by four volunteers who are busy researching and preparing their own interpretation of the museum.

Interested in becoming a tour guide? Please contact Ethel Stewart - EtStewart@aberdeencity.gov.uk

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