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This is my last foreword after eight years as Chair and more than thirteen years on the Board of the V&A. The period has seen a remarkable transformation of the museum. We have completed more than 45 projects in our FuturePlan programme, including the creation of the Sackler Centre for arts education and spectacular renovations of galleries devoted to sculpture, jewellery, ceramics, furniture and art and design from the Medieval and Renaissance period, the Middle East and Britain.

Going forward, the museum is not slowing down. We are just a few years away from the opening of the first purpose-built museum for design in Scotland, V&A Museum of Design, Dundee, designed by architect Kengo Kuma. Construction work is well under way for a wonderful new courtyard entrance and exhibition space at the V&A in South Kensington, designed by Amanda Levete Architects. In 2017 we will open a dedicated gallery of design within the Shekou Design Museum in China, in partnership with the China Merchants Group. Looking further ahead, the V&A has ambitious plans for a new branch of the museum in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in east London. University College London, the University of the Arts, Sadler’s Wells and the Smithsonian will also have a presence in the Park, creating a cultural and academic hub to match that of South Kensington.

This year’s exhibition programme has yet again been exciting, stimulating and diverse. The V&A has shed new light on the work and influence of William Kent, John Constable and Horst P. Horst, delighted many with ‘Wedding Dresses 1775–2014’ and provoked debate with ‘Disobedient Objects’, an exhibition about design for grass-roots social protest. ‘Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty’ was an outstanding success, with visitors and critics alike. None of this would have been possible without the many dedicated world-class curators and museum staff that we are so lucky to have at the V&A, along with a senior management team under Martin Roth and his predecessor Sir Mark Jones, which has pursued the museum’s vision with determination and tenacity. Our donors have been a constant support and many of our projects would not have been possible without them. I want to pay a special thanks to the Board of Trustees, as well as to those retired trustees with whom I have served. They have given generously of their time and expertise — academic, financial and commercial — and provided vital support for the museum’s staff. I know that they will join me in thanking this talented group of people for all that they do.
Last year saw the highest number of visitors to the V&A in its 163-year history: 3.3 million — four times the level of fifteen years ago. The Museum of Childhood is also seeing record attendance with 450,000 visitors, three times the level of 2000. So while I am sad to be stepping down, I feel that the museum has rarely been stronger or more vibrant. My excellent successor in November 2015 will be Nicholas Coleridge CBE, current trustee of the V&A, and I know that he will take the museum on to new heights.

As you read through this year’s Annual Review, you will get a sense of how the V&A is becoming so much more than its South Kensington origins — that through some thrillingly ambitious projects it is growing into a truly global museum, fit for the modern age and the future, yet one whose thinking is very much in accordance with its founding principles. The publication makes clear that through bold and dynamic planning, world-class scholarship and unified effort an extraordinary future, matching and exceeding its extraordinary recent past, awaits the V&A — in London, in Dundee, online and around the world.

To close, let me thank again all at the museum and every one of our supporters and visitors for helping to make the V&A, without doubt, the world’s greatest museum of art and design.

Sir Paul Ruddock
Chairman, V&A
The year 2014–15 has seen significant and exciting departures for the V&A. We have broken new ground, in quite literal terms, with the construction of the V&A Museum of Design, Dundee, in Scotland and the Shekou Design Museum in Shenzhen, China. We have also committed to create a new branch of the museum in east London, which will give more people more access to more of our collections, both historic and contemporary. “V&A East” will be one of the most innovative museum building projects to take place in Europe in the twenty-first century. We are already working hard to make the most of this wonderful opportunity to design galleries and archives that meet the needs and desires of our visitors. Back at “home” in South Kensington, we are entering into the final stages of restoration of our Europe 1600–1815 Galleries, and we are making great progress towards the opening of our Exhibition Road development. The latter project, as many of you know, will provide the South Kensington building with a spectacular new exhibition space framed by a welcoming and beautiful new courtyard entrance. We have also continued to push the boundaries of contemporary exhibition-making this year with the innovative ‘Disobedient Objects’ and landmark retrospectives on Constable and Alexander McQueen.

It is perhaps a cliché to say that none of these advances would be possible without the support of our many visitors, donors and staff — but it is no less true for that. This issue of the Annual Review, entitled Who We Are, reflects on the achievements we have made collectively and which we will make together in the future. The V&A is fortunate to have a loyal and large group of supporters and an ever-growing audience. I am always conscious of the responsibility that comes with such support to maintain the high standards of scholarship, design, education and curatorial work for which the V&A is known and respected worldwide. Saying “thank you” is not the end of the story — in return for every contribution, we make a lasting commitment. On this occasion, I would like to say a particular, heartfelt “thank you” to our outgoing Chairman, Sir Paul Ruddock, and make a commitment to continue the wonderful transformation of the V&A that he has done so much to support over the past decade. I hope you enjoy reading the thought-provoking series of articles that follow, especially the interview with Sir Paul that opens this Annual Review.

Martin Roth
Director, Victoria and Albert Museum
Sir Paul’s philanthropic engagement started over a cup of tea. Earlier in his financial career, which has taken in two major banks and his own pioneering hedge fund firm, Lansdowne Partners, he had phoned the museum to ask if he could help, and “a nice lady called Victoria Timberlake” invited him in. He soon became one of the V&A’s few patrons (now called the Director’s Circle); indeed, they could all have come in for a cup of tea and not have used up a pint of milk. From the handful in the mid-1990s, the number of Director’s Circle members has grown to over 170.

Gifts from private individuals and trusts have allowed the refurbishment of 75 per cent of the South Kensington galleries in the past two decades under the two stages of FuturePlan, the ongoing development programme. FuturePlan has been vital, Sir Paul says, for conceptualising and crystallising what the V&A could and needed to be: “If you’re doing it on a completely ad hoc basis, who’s to define your scope of ambition?” As chairman, he has overseen (and supported) several acclaimed projects: the bright, generous Medieval & Renaissance Galleries; the innovative Furniture Gallery; and the Ceramics Galleries, with their towering glass cases of fragile masterworks. And he will just miss the opening of one further renovation, that of the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries.

As chairman, he has overseen (and supported) several acclaimed projects: the bright, generous Medieval & Renaissance Galleries; the innovative Furniture Gallery; and the Ceramics Galleries, with their towering glass cases of fragile masterworks. And he will just miss the opening of one further renovation, that of the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries.
In Shenzhen, the V&A is working with China Merchants Group, advising on the creation of the first major design museum in China. The V&A will have a named gallery within the complex — a space where it can show some outstanding examples of twentieth and twenty-first-century design from around the world, its curatorial approach predicated on research and discussion with the region’s creative communities. It is very important to gain a foothold in China, says Sir Paul — presumably because the country is emerging as a centre for progressive thinking in design.

Hardest work of all might be a new museum a mere nine miles from the original. Boris Johnson, unwilling to squander the potential of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and desirous of a new Albertopolis (the South Kensington complex with its museums and the Albert Hall), has enticed national and international institutions to E20. “Olympicopolis” could end up with a UCL campus, a University of the Arts campus, a Sadler’s Wells, the first Smithsonian outside America — and a V&A. It should follow, says Sir Paul, “the conurbation of intellectual, artistic and scientific expertise” that we see in South Kensington, leading to a “fantastic” regeneration.

But doesn’t this all seem like the museum — and its chairman — is biting off more than it can chew? Sir Paul rejects this confidently: “If we were failing, you could criticise us, but we’re not failing.” You could take it, instead, as a sign of confidence in the resilience of the museum’s budget, its brand, its governance. He points out that two of the projects consume curatorial and managerial capacity, but are well-funded, and that Olympicopolis won’t happen if the government doesn’t open its wallet. It wouldn’t even take much: “A relatively small amount of money can create something quite extraordinary.”
While doing background reading for our interview, I came across something that I found quite extraordinary — but not in a positive sense. I say to Sir Paul that a V&A report contains the ambition to raise the average visitor donation to £2.50, but a visiting family of four is donating 50p (to the V&A) in total. It’s a challenge: when something is free, people don’t expect to give.\(^1\)

Visitors to European museums may pay €10 to €15 (although their temporary exhibitions tend to include), which at least ensures a steady income. Sir Paul is “a great believer in free entry”. The V&A, then, must be more creative in how it gets visitors to donate. “If the average person gave 50p, we’d be getting £1.5 million extra a year — which would be very useful.”\(^2\)

He says, though, that his true skill lies elsewhere: “Fundamentally, a love of the art is the most important thing. The finances — and everything else — is just to facilitate an appreciation and a conservation of the amazing collections that we have.”

Towards the end of our conversation, I ask Sir Paul what he thinks his legacy as chairman will be. He talks about “a sound financial footing” and “the vibrancy and the fabric of the museum”, but then moves on to an unexpectedly detailed disquisition on the renovations he has seen undertaken. He pays tribute to Moira Gemmill, the V&A’s director of projects and design from 2002 to 2014, who was killed in a road accident in April 2015. He talks about the 30-year lifespan of galleries, and goes on to describe in learned, enthusiastic terms the glass technology used to house the Ardabil Carpet, the galleries’ pinpoint LED lights and the formatting of the labelling of individual items.

He takes a collector’s interest in these matters, as indeed he might: he grew up near fine National Trust houses in Warwickshire, acquiring a taste for the medieval, and bought his first item when he was about 30: “You could still buy quite a good medieval work of art for not much more than a painting from a Royal College of Art student.”

When I suggest Sir Paul takes me to some of his favourite galleries to conclude our interview, it doesn’t surprise me that we end up in the Medieval & Renaissance Galleries. The four Wolsey Angles, commissioned for Cardinal Thomas Wolsey’s tomb and commandeered by Henry VIII for his own uncompleted burial monument, are standing in the Paul and Jill Ruddock Gallery. He tells me how two came from a dealer and two from a golf club, and marvels at the other exhibits.

In the William and Eileen Ruddock Gallery, named for his parents, he takes a very specific joy in the objects on display. He points to what was formerly known as the Eltenberg Reliquary, a Romanesque tabernacle, and talks about its luxuriant enamelling and whalebone carved ivories, before trying to guess its year: “I would have said 1160.” The Gloucester Candlestick, tall and finely wrought with a fantastical array of apes, winged dragons and conjured creatures, is important, he says, because it shows how we have underestimated the relevance of the celtic tradition in medieval art, overrating the Roman. He takes particular pleasure in the St Nicholas Crozier, a shepherd’s ivory crook that has scenes from the gospels and the saint’s life cycle on its own curve, a medieval marriage of form and message. There is a delicacy of carving and subject — the baby Jesus in a bough, the Annunciation to the Shepherds, the woman reaching for Nicholas’s charitable money as he seems to slip away — that is moving.

Earlier, when we had been finishing our discussion, Sir Paul talked about “the guillotine” coming down — thirteen years in all — and how he’d miss being as involved as he has been. After such a tour of eager erudition as I’ve just received, I’d hardly be surprised if his next move is one that allows him to dedicate himself wholly and exclusively to the art that he loves.
So, here we are again, with a government “spending review” looming large, and the case to maintain levels of government funding needing to be restated with added vigour and vision. Was it really only five years ago that the tectonic plates of public funding for museums and other cultural organisations shifted so dramatically? Remember, these were cuts ranging from fifteen per cent for national museums to an extraordinary 34 per cent for English Heritage — a tipping point that led inexorably to a risky new venture as two separate organisations. As the Guardian put it: “The arts are a big loser in today’s spending review, facing a cut of 30 per cent, which will be seen as devastating to England’s cultural landscape.” Therefore, as we approach SR15 — for that is its catchy and unthreatening title — presumably we do so looking across that very desolate cultural landscape, making a perfectly compelling and straightforward case that further cuts cannot be countenanced.

Well, no. Museums have not just survived, they have thrived — however you choose to measure success. Record visitor numbers and revenues, fabulous and scholarly exhibitions, eye-catching acquisitions, vibrant research and learning programmes, new wings and buildings sprouting from the ground from London to Dundee, growing membership schemes, TripAdvisor ratings through the roof, and the engine of UK in-bound tourism driving London to be the “best city in the world”. So what’s going on here, and where is the pain? The picture is complex, and seems almost counter-intuitive.

First, there is, at least to some extent, a “lag effect” from the events of 2010 — the formation of a coalition government and the so-called age of austerity. The way museums work, along with other cultural and educational organisations, is well researched, carefully considered, methodical and requires lengthy lead times for key projects and programmes. It therefore seems reasonable to suppose that museums are making some of their hay on a momentum generated some time ago. So, if the pain is not visible now, it does not necessarily mean that it isn’t going to appear — and no one should be complacent about that, least of all the public funding decision-makers.

But I would prefer to look at the second, and more positive, effects. Let’s start by facing an inconvenient truth, which is that organisations such as ours do sometimes need to be pushed, quite firmly, towards a more efficient, effective, fleet-of-foot, modern and streamlined way of doing what we do. I don’t want to dwell on details, but those involved will concede that they were handed a copper-bottomed justification for implementing some difficult but necessary changes that they’d always wanted to realise. It turns out that most of us could take a little more pain than we had thought, and are undoubtedly more effective in some areas and activities as a consequence. We just don’t want to say it too loudly, lest government assumes we can take the same medicine again, and as we all know, medicine in large and repeated doses can lose its power to cure.
The most interesting (and I assume unintended) consequence of 2010, though, was the effect that it has begun to have on the funding model for museums, and the very positive cultural impact that should follow in due course. A tipping point has been reached, or is fast approaching, which sees the balance between public funding, revenue through fund-raising activities, income generated through museum activities and — in the case of the V&A — a growing endowment start to even out. This mixed economy of support — “troika” if you prefer — could be the model for sustainable and vibrant cultural institutions for decades to come if it can remain balanced.

First, in terms of the grant-in-aid leg of the tripod — this gives a level of ongoing public funding support that tells us we are custodians of valued and much-loved public cultural assets that are of great benefit to the UK economy, and the burgeoning creative economy, which has been the success story of recent years. Of equal importance is the support it gives to our way of life and our belief in the role of knowledge and its ability to inspire. This is the funding stream that should protect the assets — our staff, the collections themselves and the buildings in which they are so beautifully displayed.

The second strand is the one that seeks to grow our network of long-term supporters, from our Friends of the V&A through to corporate partners, trusts and foundations as well as individuals who support us annually or give to our major capital and endowment campaigns. This is about the long term. It is about expanding a V&A community who want to belong and who want to contribute, and the creation of a museum culture that is constantly seeking to understand a complex web of desires and interactions in dialogue with its support network, not just broadcasting to it.

The third and final strand invites us to become more creative, ambitious and entrepreneurial in how we generate our own income, and this should be a liberating and enticing prospect for any forward-thinking institution. Museum brands have been carefully nurtured over decades. They are imbued with a depth of knowledge, quality, style, authenticity — even glamour — which, if carefully developed, protected and deployed, can be so much more than chic shops and well-appointed restaurants (vital as those are as, among other things, leitmotifs of modern cultural experiences). This permission to take risks (and, by implication, be prepared to fail), and to see the value of what we have beyond our walls, is what led to the V&A’s collaboration with the China Merchants Group for a new design museum in Shenzhen, or to develop a new “learning academy” alongside our post-graduate programmes and free schools programmes, which will pull together an astounding range of paid-for courses and activities into an entity that will be comfortably more than the sum of its individual parts. Not everything will succeed, but the need to explore and innovate is giving rise to brilliant new ideas.

I’m not suggesting that these three areas of funding should be equal, but that all of them are necessary and should be fully integrated, understood and respected parts of the museum ecosystem, and, crucially, that no one aspect should become dominant if a “virtuous circle” is to be created. This cycle places great emphasis on an underpinning level of public support to safeguard, expand and understand the collections that we are tasked under statute to protect. This, in turn, gives us a platform supported by, and contributing to, our income-generating potential — to create the distinctive and authentic experiences and programmes that history and deep audience insight tell us our visitors crave.

This, finally, will create stronger, deeper relationships with our audiences, enabling us to develop long-term plans, to invest in the museum, its collections, its research, its programmes, its talent and expertise, its infrastructure, in order to deliver our mission: to be recognised as the world’s leading museum of art, design and performance, and to enrich people’s lives by promoting research, knowledge and enjoyment of the designed world to the widest possible audience.

Tim Reeve has been the V&A’s Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer since August 2013. He was previously Director of Historic Properties at English Heritage.
Rachel Potts tells the story of the saving of the Wolsey Angels and the Wedgwood Collection

Thomas Wolsey was Archbishop of York, a cardinal, chief adviser to Henry VIII and consequently vastly wealthy. In 1524 he commissioned the Florentine sculptor Benedetto da Rovezzano to make him a tomb that would humiliate anything in Europe. It was inspired by Henry VII’s Westminster memorial, but far outstripped it in grandiosity. Bronze angels were made to sit atop nine-foot columns surrounding Wolsey’s effigy.

Ultimately, the cardinal died on the way to a hearing for treason and was buried in a wooden coffin instead. Henry VIII made a plan for Benedetto to reconfigure elements of the tomb into an even more spectacular one for himself, but was also thwarted by fate: Henry died before its completion. Parts were later sold, and the angels were not seen again.

That is, not until the 1990s, when two angels were stolen from the gateposts of the entrance to Wellingborough Golf Club, Northamptonshire, which had come to own all four. Their significance was unknown at this point, as remained the case when the stolen pair resurfaced at Sotheby’s in 1994, catalogued as anonymous “Italian Renaissance-style” pieces. They journeyed to France, and a Parisian dealer showed them to art historian Francesco Caglioti, who recognised them as Benedetto’s work. Wolsey’s seized property records helped to join the dots, and the pair still at the golf club were identified in 2008. The V&A’s Keeper of Sculpture, Metalwork, Ceramics and Glass, Paul Williamson, describes the discovery and reunion of all four angels as “astonishing”. After a fund-raising target of £5 million was set, they were temporarily displayed in the Medieval & Renaissance Galleries at the V&A.

Significant funds from the Friends of the V&A (£200,000) and the Ruddock Foundation for the Arts (£100,000) provided essential momentum and were boosted by £2 million from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and £500,000 from the Art Fund, in addition to a gift in memory of Melvin R. Seiden and support from V&A Members, individuals and trusts. Wolsey had been in the public’s mind in 2014 — thanks largely to Hilary Mantel’s Man Booker Prize-winning novel Wolf Hall, which had been adapted for stage to great acclaim. Understanding Mantel’s potential influence, Jane Lawson, Director of Development at the V&A, involved the author in the Wolsey Angels campaign, and Mantel thus wrote and lectured on their importance.

On 10 July 2014 the actor portraying Wolsey in the RSC’s production of Wolf Hall, Paul Jesson, stepped in for a photocall to launch the appeal. The public responded to all of this activity with a collective contribution of over £60,000 through a public appeal, on-site donations and purchasing £1 “Save the Wolsey Angels” badges. And in February 2015 the angels were saved for the nation and became part of the V&A’s collections.
to sell the collection to the nation — providing £15.75 million was secured by 1 November 2014.

With the inclusion of a £1 million grant, the Art Fund raised more than £13 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund and private trusts and foundations. On 1 September 2014 it launched a public appeal for the last £2.74 million. With the campaign supplemented by significant press coverage, much of it emphasising that UNESCO lists the Wedgwood Collection on its Memory of the World Register, public donations to save it came in at record speed. On 3 October 2014 the appeal reached its target. The V&A has been gifted the collection thanks in part to its reputation as a centre of excellence in ceramics and related scholarship, and has loaned it to the Wedgwood Museum on a permanent basis.

“I don’t think we felt the need to exaggerate or to make the campaign sound more exciting than it already was,” explains Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund. “The quality of the collection, the historical importance of Wedgwood as a phenomenon, the very real fact of a clock ticking and the strong likelihood that if we missed the deadline, Christie’s would actually go to market [with the collection] — their auction catalogue had been prepared [for print] — was enough.”

DEUCHAR BELIEVES that fund-raising for the arts is in a new phase based on a “joyous process”, perhaps linked to the proliferation and popularity of the online crowd-funding model, which may have helped to encourage a culture of giving to cultural causes. He also feels that art and national collections increasingly “sit at the heart of British life”.

The recent growth in the number of V&A Members, from 57,000 to 61,000, supports this perspective. Their backing, alongside that of other important supporters, is key to acquisitions-related funding, Jane Lawson says, highlighting a magnificent Napoleonic medal cabinet saved from export with £534,000 raised between January and July 2014 — an important addition to the V&A’s new Europe 1600–1815 Galleries.

They are “undoubtedly among the most important items we’ve acquired in terms of the national heritage in a long time”, says Williamson — and now stand near a fountain also attributed to Benedetto. He points to their “beautiful faces” and, most importantly, their link to Wolsey and the best-known British monarch in history.

Surface analysis has been carried out and the cleaning and harmonisation of the figures is now underway. Once conservation is complete the angels will move from their current location in Room 50a to Room 63 of the Medieval & Renaissance Galleries, where they will help to articulate important international links between artists, patrons and the creative process in the sixteenth century.

THE RETAIL VISION of Josiah Wedgwood — world-famous ceramics manufacturer, social reformer and entrepreneur — thrilled and absorbed eighteenth-century London. The humble craftsman from Burslem, Staffordshire, achieved breakthroughs in the science and technology of his trade, mastered logistics to get his products out of Staffordshire and into the world, and went on to eclipse the great European ceramics producers of Meissen and Sèvres. An archive, begun in 1759, tracing his experiments, creations, letters, documents and works — along with the output of his company for the next 250 years — is now accessible to the public at the Wedgwood Museum on the firm’s “World of Wedgwood” complex in Barlaston, Stoke-on-Trent.

The archive was very nearly dispersed into the private market when Waterford Wedgwood plc collapsed in January 2009 and the Wedgwood Group Pension Plan inherited its £134m liability. The debt passed to its only solvent associated company, the Wedgwood Museum, via five employees’ pension plans. Several years of legal wrangling later, the estate’s administrator agreed

Rachel Potts is a London-based writer and deputy editor of V&A Magazine

© Art Fund. Photograph: Phl Sayer

Wedgewood teapots (front to back): Brewster shape teapot in white jasper with pale green dip, 1785–1790; Queens ware satsuma shape teapot with design by Colonel Crealock, 1875; Barlaston shape teapot and cover in “Summer Sky” pattern, 1955 © Art Fund. Photograph: Phl Sayer
HOW MANY PEOPLE DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE A FASHION EXHIBITION?

Claire Wilcox

In September 2000 American Vogue published a portfolio of images by Annie Leibovitz entitled How many people does it take to make a fashion? Various designers, including Alexander McQueen, were invited to select their indispensable others — the creative teams and confidants that helped nuance their particular style of fashion. Yves Saint Laurent chose Pierre Berge, Catherine Deneuve and his faithful studio assistant. Miuccia Prada asked to be photographed with a mirror. McQueen, to Leibovitz's dismay, invited 27 people along — plus two dogs that rampaged through the set. This notion was not a new one. From the early twentieth century, the pages of fashion and society magazines often showed couturiers at work in their ateliers, or among their models and muses. Poiret, known as the "Pasha of Paris", was depicted amid the Oriental splendour of his showrooms with his wife Denise, telling Vogue in 1913: "She is the expression of all my ideals." In the 1930s Chanel was snapped with the San Tropez set, and Schiaparelli among the Surrealists, while Christian Dior was shown conducting fittings in his studio while his directrice and vendeuses stood admiringly by. Such publicity pictures gave the impression of a privileged insight into the designers' creative practice, but were in fact as styled and controlled as fashion shoots.

Leibovitz's photograph of McQueen among his creative milieu in his Shoreditch studio gets rather deeper under the skin. It was taken at the cusp of the new century, midway through his twenty-year career and at a time when the designer was particularly involved with the V&A. The model Liberty Ross wore an embroidered hessian dress from his No. 13 collection (spring/summer 1999) for the shoot. Inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement (McQueen was particularly fond of the V&A's William Morris room), it was featured in one of the museum's first Fashion in Motion events in 1999. A coiled metal corset by the jeweller Shaun Leane, McQueen's close friend and collaborator, is semi-revealed by the edge of the camera's framing. Like many of McQueen's one-off creations and showpieces, the corset had multiple lives. It was first modelled with a grey wool skirt and skating shoes in The Overlook (autumn/winter 1999), a collection inspired by Stanley Kubrick’s The Shining, and took its place inside a glass cube, complete with snow and ice; it was then worn for Fashion in Motion in 2001 (the last to be staged as a walk-through in the museum). More recently, the corset took pride of place in the ‘Cabinet of Curiosities’, which formed the heart of Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty in its manifestations at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in 2011 and the V&A in 2015. The photograph included Sarah Burton, who started as an intern from Central Saint Martins in 1996 and became creative director on his death in 2010. She advised on ‘Savage Beauty’ as only someone who had helped to cut, pin and stitch many of the 250 pieces on display could. The late Isabella Blow, who bought McQueen's 1992 graduation collection in its entirety (it was delivered to her in black bin bags), wore an acid-yellow beaded and horsehair dress that was displayed in the "Primitivism" gallery in 'Savage Beauty', among skulls and bones. Katy England, McQueen’s stylist and aesthetic sounding board from his first collections to long after the Givenchy years, advised on the "London" gallery, a new addition specific to 'Savage Beauty' at the V&A. It was filled with her own clothes, which, like so many of the pieces in the exhibition, were given away by McQueen in lieu of payment. As she recalled of the early days: “We were never paid; it was really personal. He was brave and courageous, and said, 'we can do whatever we want'”. This fearlessness was evident in his guest editing of Dazed & Confused magazine’s “Fashion-able” issue in September 1998, which included the first fashion shoot (by Nick Knight) to feature people with disabilities. One of the models was Paralympic athlete Aimee Mullins, whose carved prosthetic legs, inspired by Grinling Gibbons carvings that McQueen had seen in the V&A, also found sanctuary in the ‘Cabinet of Curiosities’. Jefferson Hack, the founder of Dazed & Confused, recalled the photoshoot in his essay for the V&A’s publication, Alexander McQueen. Strangely, the book, like the photograph, also involved 27 contributors — but no dogs.

"Coded" Corset, The Overlook A/W 1999–2000; Shaun Leane for Alexander McQueen
In Leibovitz’s image McQueen paid tribute to his close working team, but also his wider artistic peer group, for his work is impossible to understand fully without being seen in the context of London’s Young British Artists movement of the 1990s. It is no surprise, therefore, that he should include the Chapman Brothers, whose studio was next to his in Hoxton, or to discover that he once made clothes for their mutant figurines. Sam Taylor-Johnson (née Taylor-Wood) is also present. Her time-lapse digital video of fruit decaying into a mass of rotting matter, Still Life (2001), inspired the flower-filled dresses of McQueen’s Sarabande collection (spring/summer 2007). As the catwalk show progressed, the blooms fell on to the catwalk, where they withered and died, a metaphor perhaps for fashion’s transience. Pieces from this collection were shown in the “Naturalism” gallery of ‘Savage Beauty’, displayed in mahogany cases like fragile specimens. We allowed the hastily attached silk flowers that fell from the dresses as they were being installed to also lie where they had fallen. During Taylor-Johnson’s visit to the exhibition, she silently contemplated the designer’s melancholy tribute to her work.

What McQueen really wanted to demonstrate with his Leibovitz grouping was that his singular vision was achievable because of his ability to recognise talent in others, whether artists, prosthetic makers, pattern cutters or milliners, and because of his charismatic powers of persuasion. Each individual in the photograph had a specific role to play in facilitating his shows, whether practical, technical, artistic or emotional. But it would not be right to suggest that he was a despot, for many of his peers in the photograph had highly successful careers beyond McQueen. However, the risk-taking artistry of his presentations clearly offered enough excitement — and enough time in-between to recover.

“McQueen paid tribute to his close working team, but also his wider artistic peer group”
— for his fellow creatives and compatriots to remain enthralled by being part of them, whatever the cost.

By extension, Leibovitz’s image acts as a leitmotif for ‘Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty’, for many of those in the photograph were involved in making the exhibition, either on a creative level, or as advisers and lenders. These included the exhibition’s creative director, Sam Gainsbury, McQueen’s show producer for many years; Guido Pauli, who created the chilling face masks for the mannequins; John Gisling, aka DJ Mekon, whose soundscape transformed the exhibition into something between a club and a ghost train ride; and Daniel Landin, the lighting director who transmuted what was already spectacular scenography, featuring Gothic mirrors, a baronial hall and a ghostly apparition of Kate Moss, into something akin to a film set. Indeed, during installation, as the lighting began to throw dark shadows and highlight the intricate details of McQueen’s extraordinary creations, and the layered sound began to infiltrate the galleries, the project team felt moved to pause, and consider what had been created. Like McQueen’s 27-strong team, we too had pulled out all the stops, for we felt we owed it to him to make it good.

In light of Leibovitz’s image, one might ask how many people it takes to make a fashion exhibition at the V&A. The staff group shot taken in the Medieval & Renaissance Galleries for last year’s Annual Review could well offer an approximation, for exhibitions on the scale of ‘Savage Beauty’ have enormous institutional ambition, as Deborah Landis asserted: “It has evolved to that of an artistic director. We seek to create kinetic production rather than a static exhibition, and an active engagement rather than passive spectatorship.”

It should not be surprising that fashion exhibitions at the V&A are so well-attended, given the Fashion Gallery has been enduringly popular since opening in 1962, shortly after ‘A Lady of Fashion’, an exhibition of Edwardian dress belonging to the socialite Heather Firbank, took the museum by surprise and had to be extended. Cecil Beaton’s 1971 show ‘Fashion: An Anthology’ was another landmark, its theatricality setting a new bar for exhibition design, and resulting in the acquisition of the most important collection of haute couture in the museum’s history. The plethora of fashion exhibitions since then has been matched by a growing appreciation of fashion’s social, historical and cultural significance and an increased respect for our shared sartorial history. Perhaps the only downside is that designers are less generous than they used to be — because they are busily building their own archives. Alexander McQueen’s, for example, has evolved from bin bags and rails in direct sunlight (I remember trying to wrestle a chewed-up shoe from one of his dogs) to a state-of-the-art archive more than capable of supporting shows such as ‘Savage Beauty’.

Deborah Orr observed in a recent Guardian column that “Alexander McQueen’s work is a strange and wonderful gift to human culture”. It was also a gift to the museum, for while his work was spellbinding on the catwalk, it also looked extraordinarily magical on display, with its virtuoso tailoring, breathtakingly inventive construction techniques and exquisite embroidery more than adequately rewarding close scrutiny. While the exhibition can be deconstructed into its constituent parts — objects, set, film, sound, graphics — the emotional impact ‘Savage Beauty’ had on the 493,043 visitors who saw it at the V&A (and the legions who saw it in New York) continues, on some level, to be inexplicable.

Why was the exhibition so powerful? Was it because those beautiful, extraordinary clothes were imbued with McQueen’s dark spirit? Was it the soaring imagination of his catwalk shows? Or was it, perhaps, simply a case of the teamwork of a creatively brilliant generation of British artists and designers that McQueen permitted to share his vision and gave licence to transgress. Tellingly, in Leibovitz’s image, he is not positioned at the centre like the couturiers of previous generations, but to the side, throwing a ball for his dog, Juice, whose muscular body is freeze-framed mid-air. McQueen is smiling, his outstretched arm like that of a ringmaster lobbing a grenade into the world of fashion.
"A book with its pages always open, and not shut" is how the V&A’s founder Sir Henry Cole envisaged his museum. A committed utilitarian, he was driven by a powerful ethical zeal to make the world a better and more beautiful place, and to be useful. His museum was to be a dynamic vehicle for social and material progress.

Cole’s vision appears to animate recent initiatives at the V&A — exhibitions such as ‘Disobedient Objects’ and ‘All of This Belongs to You’ and the increase in the Rapid Response Collecting of objects of contemporary significance. These represent not just a revivified emphasis on the political and the social at South Kensington, but also stress the importance of opening up the museum, its spaces and its procedural norms both to scrutiny and to previously marginalised communities. They tackle current issues through an examination of art and design objects, from the unique and spectacular to the cheap and banal, encouraging questions and debate.

Catherine Flood, co-curator of ‘Disobedient Objects’, an exhibition about art and design produced by grass-roots social movements, asserts that a key motivation was to introduce different narratives into the galleries, to give space to “history from below”, and, in doing so, encourage discussion. Conscious of the dangers of appropriating — and perhaps even distorting — the cultures and narratives of marginalised and resistant communities, the show’s organisers engaged in collaborative research with the individuals and organisations contributing the objects for display. Inspired by the principles of “participatory action research”, political activists were permitted and indeed encouraged to help to shape the content and form of the exhibition in a genuinely fundamental fashion; their contributions far exceeding the customary token inclusion of a few quotes on information panels. The curators took seriously their ethical responsibilities to the exhibitors — they should not be put at any risk, and complex ideas and associations should not be (over) simplified for ease of communication. Lazy associations likely to reinforce stereotypes (such as equating the Middle East with political and religious strife) were to be avoided as far as possible. Consideration had to be given also to diplomacy within the exhibition design, to who or what might be shown next to one another, and the effects that that proximity and juxtaposition might have on interpretation.

The curators’ intentions were to encourage critical thinking by introducing into the museum ideas and objects that were surprising and even shocking. Although the range of its holdings is dizzyingly diverse, the V&A’s collecting policy broadly tends to prioritise aesthetics and quality of craft production over political or social significance. In ‘Disobedient Objects’, the exhibits were characterised by the communal, pragmatic and sometimes rough nature of their manufacture as much as their political content. The challenge these types of objects pose to museum taxonomies is one element of the resistance they offer to prevailing political power structures both within and beyond the institution.
All of This Belongs to You’ encouraged visitors to engage with objects and collections that they might otherwise overlook, or take for granted. Scattered throughout the South Kensington site, a mixture of artistic commissions and politically resonant objects generated some surprising associations and, here and there, took people on a treasure hunt through a few of the less visited areas of the museum. The experimental nature of this type of curating reflects the novel thinking of the team behind it — although, as its co-curator Corinna Gardner observes, there is something very traditional, perhaps even conservative, about a mode of display that puts things in glass cases and places an emphasis on relationships between objects. That said, done with care and wit, as it was here, this approach can still produce radical outcomes.

Although an exhibition with a political edge, the curators assert that they are offering information about — rather than a reading of — objects. They are not telling the public what to think, but giving them the tools to think. Related events were designed to generate debate and an understanding of design in its broadest context, with a focus on issues such as the relationship between public and private. These are issues that do not map neatly on to the ideologies of particular political parties, or even broader categories of left and right. Vexed topics such as freedom of information or the right to privacy unite and divide people across the political spectrum.

Other established norms of museum exhibition policy were subject to critical scrutiny, and in some instances foregone, deemed inappropriate to the context. Reflecting the view of some of the lenders that “use is preservation”, visitors were allowed to take photos of the exhibits, and interact with some of them, making the gallery an active space. This unusual degree of licence was apparently appreciated and respected: nothing was damaged. Corporate sponsorship of the show was, understandably, problematical, and the exhibition’s marketing needed to be sensitive. After much discussion it was decided that a small selection of carefully chosen merchandise would be sold in the main museum shop.

All involved believed it important that this be an open and ongoing project for which the exhibition itself was merely the start. Exhibiting and collecting these dissident objects represents a step towards keeping them and the stories they represent part of “official” history, making it less easy for them to be erased. Displaying such political objects within a national museum can bring them to the attention of a much broader audience, and facilitate the circulation of radical ideas beyond their original, often very localised contexts. Actively encouraging this wider reach and an “afterlife” for the exhibition were the yellow “how to” guides given away free to visitors, containing instructions on constructing tear-gas masks, bucket pamphlet bombs, human blockades and other forms of D-I-Y protest technology. On a recent trip to Rio de Janeiro I visited Casa Nuvem, a communally run social space for local political groups. One of the walls had been papered with these yellow sheets — evidence of the exhibition’s success in these terms.
That said, the statement ‘All of This Belongs to You’ is unavoidably political, and, in the context of the recent general election, could arguably be interpreted as opposing the cutting of public services and increasing privatisation. These are sentiments that can also be discerned in some of the gallery interventions. The comfortable seating inserted by muf architecture/art into the Medieval & Renaissance Galleries, for example, created a different atmosphere in the museum and facilitated an experience neither monetised nor pressured. Visitors were free to sit for as long as they liked and watch the world go by, read, sketch, even sleep.

‘All of This Belongs to You’ is a deliberately ambiguous title, playful, yet prompting interrogation. It does beg the question of who the ‘you’ is in this context — particularly given that an estimated 50 per cent of visitors to the museum are from overseas. Just what does the ownership of ‘all of this’ mean in real terms? Does it promise access, and if so, how much? Does it imply an obligation of protection and conservation?

A perhaps anachronistic element of these exhibitions is the emphasis on the material in an era when the digital, and social media in particular, have become so ubiquitous. Although technology is on display, it is dead, empty hardware — quite literally in the case of Edward Snowden’s disembowelled laptop. The new V&A site in Stratford will ‘include the first dedicated museum space in the UK to document the full breadth of digital design and begin to write the design history of that fast moving field’. It will be interesting to observe how the V&A responds to the inevitable challenges of conservation and display that this will pose: how the virtual will be accommodated alongside the material.

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Dr Ruth Adams is a Senior Lecturer at King’s College London and Programme Director of the Masters in Cultural and Creative Industries. Her doctoral thesis was a social history of the V&A, and her current research examines various manifestations of English heritage, from stately homes to youth subcultures.
I undergone, and are continuing to undergo, major shifts which will accelerate and be compounded in the years immediately ahead. At the same time, the increasing economic and political strength of non-Western countries is altering the balance of power and influence.

The UK, like other nations, is directly affected by these new conditions. They create a demand for original approaches in the exercise and deployment of our influence. The UK finds itself with a tremendous range of institutions and relationships in politics, economics, science and culture, many amassed over generations, which give it a great deal of internationally recognised soft power.

It is within this new paradigm that the idea of the museum is changing, and with it its role in the world. While the India Museum in London no longer exists, the bulk of its collection is now part of the V&A, British Museum and National History Museum. These institutions attract millions of people a year from around the world to view their wonderful exhibits. Museums of the past were primarily focused on collections, preservation, cataloguing, scholarly research and education. Such aims are still valid and remain at the core of their work. However, museums of today, particularly international ones, are more attuned to the political landscape, are connected globally and operate effectively in the art of cultural relations.

In the modern museum the understanding of objects and their histories is incomplete without understanding what happened to similar objects at the same time in different parts of the world. The interpretation of contexts, in a very wide sense of the term, is assuming importance. This is where museums are increasingly playing a new role in cultural relations. They are also addressing the threats to cultural and natural assets worldwide and the development of international conservation standards.

In 2003 Jonathan Jones wrote a fascinating piece in the Guardian about the forgotten story of the India Museum, and how it went from a hugely popular London institution when it opened in 1803 to a “dusty failure” by 1879. He argued that an important reason for its demise was that the British public no longer found India fascinating.

More than 200 years later and Britain has many reasons to find India fascinating again — not least because it is among the countries that will shape the twenty-first century. The world’s largest democracy will have the world’s largest population by 2050, and Britain is looking to the nation, which has one of the fastest growing global economies, as a focus for economic growth and new export markets. As the UK prepares to welcome Narendra Modi in November — the first time an Indian prime minister has visited in more than ten years — now is an opportune moment to reflect on the influential role that museums such as the V&A can play in strengthening the relationship between the two countries through soft power and cultural relations.

It was Joseph Nye who coined the term “soft power”. All nations wish to communicate the attractive elements of their culture; this can also potentially aid political and economic discussions. John Holden from Demos, author of the British Council’s 2013 report Influence and Attraction: Culture and the Race for Soft Power in the 21st Century, argues that “cultural exchange helps us to innovate” and that “cultural co-operation supports social and economic development and political change”.

The significance of cultural relations and soft power was also highlighted in the House of Lords Select Committee report on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence: Persuasion and Power in the Modern World (published March 2014). This looked at the changes that are taking place in the international landscape. The conditions under which international relations are conducted have undergone, and are continuing to undergo, major shifts which will accelerate and be compounded in the years immediately ahead. At the same time, the increasing economic and political strength of non-Western countries is altering the balance of power and influence.

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There is a need for greater awareness of cultural Britain, while Britain has little idea of how the new India building upon this. India does not know contemporary neither country has seriously invested actively in could be. While they have a famous shared history, collaboration with the UK is highly appreciated in India, as one of the key “glues” needed to strengthen the systems of the UK, and vice versa, as this is seen as one of the key “glues” needed to strengthen the relationship between the two nations. Though cultural collaboration with the UK is highly appreciated in India, there is a perception that it is not as extensive as it could be. While they have a famous shared history, neither country has seriously invested actively in building upon this. India does not know contemporary Britain, while Britain has little idea of how the new India is emerging. Stereotypes exist and remain damaging. There is a need for greater awareness of cultural differences in the interests of tolerance and openness.

In research carried out recently by the British Council as part of the “Re-imagine: India UK Cultural Relations in the 21st Century” initiative, a number of key themes emerged. These include the importance of the relationship being an equal partnership; the relative lack of cultural engagement by the UK outside the four main metro cities; the potential for digital technologies to transform the cultural relationship; the valuable opportunities for both countries to learn from each other; and the importance of reciprocity and mutuality. Institutions such as the British Museum, Tate and the British Library are leading the way in addressing some of these issues by building partnerships in India and developing exciting mutually beneficial projects.

In recent years there have been some excellent collaborations. For example, in 2009 the V&A and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) in Mumbai presented “Indian Life and Landscape by Western Artists”, an exhibition of paintings and drawings from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century made complete with 252 drawings from both museums. In a way history was being stitched together through the joining of the collections. By offering glimpses of architectural and archaeological wonders, of temples, mosques, palaces, customs, ceremonies and villages, it also gave a sense of Western artists’ perception of India at the time.

There was another angle to it, as manifested in the exhibition’s run at the Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata. At very short notice, almost as a matter of urgency, the Victoria Memorial decided to display its own collection of life and landscape paintings in parallel with the show. This was not rivals, but rather the hosts subtly emphasising equality in partnership. The point was driven home in the 2011 exhibition “Kalighat Paintings”, where the Victoria Memorial Hall and the V&A collaborated from the beginning to present more than 100 paintings, including fifteen contemporary works created by artists currently working in rural Bengal, acquired by the V&A specifically for the show. This was the first time the two museums were partnered to put together a body of works held in parts by both.

In 2009, under the leadership of the then Secretary of the Ministry of Culture of India, Jawhar Sircar, the first formal cultural agreement between the UK and India in 63 years was signed. This has led to a number of positive outcomes, such as the Leadership Training Programme with the British Museum, which ran for three years, and a training programme for audience development with the V&A. Collaborating with other museums of any kind is a relatively new idea in India, and very few had hitherto looked at it seriously or even considered it relevant. Now there is a new beginning, led in part by the CSMVS in Mumbai, which published a special report on the subject entitled Bridging the Gap: CSMVS connects UK Institutes. The National Museum in New Delhi is also organising a large-scale exhibition titled ‘Everlasting Flame’ for 2016 with loans from several UK institutions, including the British Museum, the British Library, the V&A, the John Rylands Library and the Wellcome Collection

At the same time, smaller UK museums and galleries are forging new links in India. Since 2012, twenty have been able to visit the country, meet museum officials from Indian artists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition, it digitised its wonderful south Asian textiles collections. The potential of digital cultural engagement through museums is almost limitless.

The desire to re-create, reinvent and refresh the cultural relationships exists on both sides. The launch of the V&A’s India season in 2015, marking the 25th anniversary of the opening of the museum’s Nehru Gallery, is an important milestone to celebrate, and has already excited both the public and the media. The India Festival will include ‘The Fabric of India’, the first major exhibition to explore the world of handmade Indian textiles from the third to the twentieth century. We are unlikely to see any significant dramatic interventions that are going to transform the wider UK-India relationship in the short to medium term. However, long sustained partnerships will be the catalyst for creating new opportunities. At the moment, the 200-year connections that the V&A and British Museum have are in many ways unique, but our shared history should not be taken for granted. We need to continue to invest in the relationship.

What the V&A and other museums are doing today is pushing from the margins towards the centre of soft power and cultural relations, and helping to rekindle the fascination Britain had with India. When David Cameron visited India in 2013 he spoke of the importance of cultural exchange. When Narendra Modi visits London in the autumn I hope he and Cameron acknowledge the strength and depth of our cultural ties past and present, and how valuable they are for the future.
My favourite pieces in the V&A collections — by a selection of staff

1 Katie Stuckillo
Canadian Gallery Assistant

My family has a penchant for the strange and wonderful. Knowing that I love Hogarth, my parents made me aware of the BBC4 programme One Man and His Pug. In it this porcelain figure and the dog on which it is modelled are discussed. The programme aired shortly after I moved to the UK, and it is one of the first connections I had between the V&A and my family at home in Canada. Every time I visit Trump in the British Galleries, I think of them.

2 Christian Gastaldello
Kasan
Front of House Volunteer

Among my favourite V&A attractions are the cartoon panels by Raphael. The simplicity of the aperities and their humble work is transcended by the beauty of their rendition: The Miraculous Draught of Fishes is the one I really treasure. The passing of centuries may have faded some of the colours, but, to my mind, the panel retains a strong sense of architectural balance, classical proportion and spirituality in the modest but grandly set out figures.

3 Tim Reeve
British
Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer

I was always likely to choose something from the Cast Courts because they are majestic, the soul of the museum. They are a clear example of Victorian ambition — quite apart from the considerable skill that went into making the casts, it’s the part of the museum that feels most rooted in the heritage of the V&A, even though they are not the earliest galleries. I have seen the original of this cross many times; it is magical, in a magical location — a part of the world that I love, and from a period in which, if I have a specialism, I consider myself to have at least some expertise.

4 Lina Hakim
Lebanese
Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellow

This games box is at once a beautifully crafted piece of furniture, an ingeniously articulated set of board games and a cabinet of curiously revealing worlds of play. What draws me most to it, however, is what I imagine must be its sound when in play — the sound of sophisticated recreation in courtly interiors of early nineteenth-century southern India, but also a sound much more familiar to me, that of idle afternoons on the eastern coasts of the Mediterranean, the sound of outdoor pastimes from home.

5 Roxaneh Horswell
British-Iranian
Volunteer Guide

I feel a strong connection to the Persian tile panel, in part because I am half Iranian and have visited Esfahan, where it once hung in the Chehel Sotoun Palace. When I first set eyes on it, memories flooded back of my grandparents’ garden in Iran: the scent of roses and jasmine in the air, and mouth-watering platters of fruit piled high. Further, the vibrant colours and patterns remind me of luxurious Persian carpets. The image exudes romance and sensuality — embodied in the female figure at its heart — but also celebration: perhaps this is more than a mere flirtation.

6 Deborah Sutherland
Zimbabwean
Curator of Operations in the National Art Library

Joseph Muondo’s print represents, for me, the complexities of art made in Africa. The geometric patterning is essentially African. The forms echo typical Zimbabwean stone carving. But it is essentially of its maker: an artist celebrated for breaking with traditional Shona sculpture to create mixed material pieces, who studied textile design in Tanzania and who chooses here to print from a textured textile to convey the universal human experience of suffering.

7 Kate Quinan
Irish
Assistant Curator in Metalsmith, Ceramics and Glass

I am fascinated by Hans Stofer’s ability to manipulate objects in ways that reflect on their value and meaning. The original eighteenth-century cup and saucer was a favourite of his friend Jane. When the cup got broken it was given to Stofer to repair. His deliberate misalignment of the pieces suggests that its power as a momento does not rely on its aesthetic perfection, and attempts to preserve it only add new layers of meaning. Although not perfect, this cup and saucer is still a testimony to the value placed on these objects.
This year has seen an exceptional growth in the museum’s collections. In purely financial terms, objects valued at £24m came into our stewardship. The Wedgwood Collection at Stoke-on-Trent was transferred to the V&A in order to save it for the nation. The Wolsey Angels were purchased, thanks to staunch support from donors and supporters. The Heritage Lottery Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Art Fund, the Friends of the V&A, along with generous support from private trusts and individuals, has not only enabled the above but also a dizzying array of other examples of excellent and significant art and design to join our holdings. The V&A collections now number over 2.28 million. In the years ahead, we will make these collections more accessible, presenting them in the future V&A East in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, and researching them imaginatively and collaboratively under the auspices of the planned V&A Research Institute (VARI). Looking to the future, we are delighted that the Cultural Gifts Scheme offered through the Arts Council England will help more supporters to donate objects to the V&A. The following pages illustrate 22 of the 14,869 items that were added to the collection during the year.
The visit of Louis XIV to the Château de Juvisy
Pierre-Denis Martin, c.1700, oil painting. Purchased with the support of the Friends of the V&A, a gift in memory of Melvin R. Seiden, the Art Fund (with a contribution from The Wolfson Foundation), the John Webb Trust Fund, the Coral Samuel Charitable Trust and many other generous donors. H: 191cm, W: 287cm, D: 10cm

Cabinet
Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (designer), George Myers (maker), 1846, Birmingham, oak, carved, painted and gilded, with brass fittings. Purchase funded by the Barrie and Deedee Wigmore Foundation, the Art Fund and the Friends of the V&A. H: 229.5cm, W: 151.5cm, D: 60.5cm

Kimono
1870–1890, Japan, satin, embroidery, appliqué. L: 182cm, W: 134cm

Model of the Campanile Tower of Siena Cathedral

Vase
Christopher Dresser (designer), c.1880 (made), Linthorpe, moulded and modelled earthenware with green, brown, blue and semi-lustre glazes. Purchased with the support of the Decorative Arts Society and its Members. H: 37.5cm, W: 15.2cm

Donne Buck Archive of Play and Playgrounds

Ava as Frida from Forty Fridas
2012, a series of 40 woodcut and drypoint prints by Ellen Heck. Given by the artist. H: 38cm, W: 30cm

White Collar Black Man

Slow Motion
Teapot, Leif Stangeby-Nielsen, 2013, Oslo, Norway, silver raised, with a jacaranda handle and knop. Supported by the Friends of the V&A. H: 14cm, L: 18cm, W: 7cm

Giuditta Pasta as Norma
Marin Savi, c.1831, watercolour on ivory. Part of the Gasson Collection, purchased with the support of the Friends of the V&A. H: 12.7cm, W: 9.4cm

Photograph of Wabam eleven with slain issue
1855–1860, London, salt print photograph. H: 12cm, W: 9cm

Vivien Leigh award
1963, Central and North America, struck metal. Dia: 7.3cm, D: 8.4cm

Augustus Brooch of pearls, cement and silver, designed and made by Terhi Tolvanen, Netherlands, 2013. Purchase funded by the Friends of the V&A. H: 56mm, W: 67mm, D: 45mm

Donne Buck sisters with dolls' house
1855–1860, London, salt print photograph. H: 12cm, W: 9cm
Touring venues

- Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix
- Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin
- Hermitage-Hakon Exhibition Centre, Karasjok
- Bermondsey Art Gallery, Victoria
- Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
- Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, Los Angeles
- Moscow State Exhibition Hall ‘New Manege’, Moscow
- Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis
- A.A. Bakhshiish State Central Theatre Museum, Moscow
- Queensland Museum, Brisbane
- Multimedia Art Museum, Moscow
- Stadschouwburg, Amsterdam
- Portland Art Museum, Portland
- Stadsschouwburg, Amsterdam
- Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin
- Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix
- Portland Art Museum, Portland
- Victoria Art Gallery, Bath
- Maidstone Museum & Bentliff Art Gallery, Maidstone
- Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth
- Palace Green Library, Durham
- Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, Sunderland
- SeaCity Museum, Southampton
- Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff
- Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle
- The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent
- Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria
- Portland Art Museum, Portland
- Blythe House Archive
- Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington
- Museum of Childhood
- Manchester Art Gallery
- Royal Albert Dock
- Royal Design Centre
- Royal Victoria Dock
- V&A East
- V&A West
- Visitor Centre

Visitor figures

2014–15

- Total visits to V&A South Kensington: 3,736,300
- Total visits to V&A Touring Exhibitions: 1,476,000
- Total unique web visits: 15,365,400
- Total visits by pupils aged 18 and under: 480,200
- Total visits by students aged 18 and under: 118,900
- Percentage of BAME visitors to V&A sites: 22
- Percentage of visitors who would recommend: 98
- A visit to V&A sites

UK and INTERNATIONAL VISITORS 2014–15

- Greater London: 1,293,800
- South East England: 564,300
- Midlands: 286,500
- South West England: 285,400
- UK Visits: 2,075,200
- Europe: 902,200
- North America: 313,700
- South and Central America: 80,500
- Asia: 301,800
- Rest of World: 135,900
- Overseas Visits: 1,691,100

Overseas

- Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry
- Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, Inverness
- The McManus: Dundee’s Art Gallery and Museum, Dundee
- Victoria Art Gallery, Bath
- Maidstone Museum & Bentlif Art Gallery, Maidstone
- Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth
- Palace Green Library, Durham
- Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, Sunderland
- SeaCity Museum, Southampton
- Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff
- Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle
- The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent
- Portland Art Museum, Portland
- Stadsschouwburg, Amsterdam
- Multimedia Art Museum, Moscow
- Queensland Museum, Brisbane
- Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis
- Moscow State Exhibition Hall ‘New Manege’, Moscow
- Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, Los Angeles
- Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
- Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria
- Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin
- Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix
- Portland Art Museum, Portland
- Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington
- Museum of Childhood
- Manchester Art Gallery
- Royal Albert Dock
- Royal Design Centre
- Royal Victoria Dock
- V&A East
- V&A West
- Visitor Centre

Financial review

Summary

- Government grant in aid of £31.1m was received in the year and an additional £1.7m allocated for this year had been received in 2012–13. Overall this represents a fall of 2% against the baseline grant for 2013–14.
- Grant in Aid: £32.8m
- Fundraising: £25.5m

Funding

- £25.5 million was raised across all areas representing a 50% increase on the previous year.
- Grants and donations towards FuturePlan rose significantly with the Europe 1600–1815 Galleries and the Exhibition Road building project booked by major contributions.
- Just under £5 million was secured towards important acquisitions, including the four Wolsey Angels, the painting of the Château de Juvisy and a nineteenth-century Medal Cabinet. Further support for the collections came from the Photographie Acquisition Group and the Design Fund.
- The exhibition programme received strong corporate support from new and returning sponsors and income from museum hire and corporate membership reached unprecedented levels.
- Membership programmes were successful across the board. The number of Friends of the V&A continued to increase significantly to around 35,000 members generating income of over £2.5 million (additional to total given).
- Revenue from the Director’s Circle demonstrated both the loyalty of our patrons and growth.
- Efforts to secure the Museum’s long-term future progressed with gifts towards the V&A FutureFund endowment matched under the Heritage Lottery Fund/Department for Culture, Media and Sport Catalyst: Endowments Fund.

FuturePlan

- A total of £17.3m was raised on FuturePlan projects and other fixed assets.
- Major work on the Exhibition Road building (due for completion mid-2017) and Europe 1600–1815 Galleries (due for completion late 2015) took place, and the refurbished Great Court expanded in November 2014.
- Some of the funds used for these projects had been raised in previous years and designated for capital projects.

Acquisitions

- A total of £7.4m was spent on acquisitions for the collection, a significant increase on last year due to the acquisition of the Wolsey Angels for £4.6m.
- Acquisitions are largely funded by private donations, sometimes supported by the Art Fund or H.F. In addition, objects worth £1.6m were donated to the Museum in the year, including the Wedgwood collection with a total estimated value of £15m.

Visitors & Collections

- Across our three sites we have attracted our highest annual number of visitors, 3.7 million. We have maintained spending in core areas to ensure the collection is properly protected.

Exhibitions & Learning

- The strong exhibition programme, and the continuing success of our touring programme have supported income growth in the year.
- Demand for our learning courses remained strong but restrictions on capacity as a result of the Exhibition Road project slightly reduced activity in this area.

Trading

- This was the best ever year for V&A Enterprises, the trading arm of the Museum, supported by record visitor numbers and exhibition attendances.

Other Income

- This comprises fees charged to other organisations.

Total

Financial review

Essentials

2014–15

2013–14

£m

£m

-17.3

-25.5

-12.5

-37.5

-3.4

-5.6

-17.1

-35.5

-8.4

14.4

3.5

0.0

0.0

-13.3

-10.1

1.7

-5.6

1.4
The V&A would like to thank those who have made a contribution to contemporary acquisitions through the Design Fund.

France Sullivan (Chair) and David Gilt
Yves Peel (Founder)
Mr and Mrs William Salomon
Elaine Rowley and Tony Luckhurst
Simon Weil
Frederick and Kathryn Uhde
Mr and Mrs Anthony Renton
Mrs Virginia Shepherd and Mr J and Mrs HM Shafran
Mr Alireza Sarikhani
Noah and Avital Bulkin
Mr and Mrs Thomas Brenninkmeijer
Sonia Buchholz and Peter Kluthe
Deborah Loeb Brice Foundation
Mikael and Leonie Brantberg
Molly Lowell and David Borthwick
The Hon Mrs Nicholas Assheton
Gerald Levin
Tuan Lee
Photographs Acquisition Group
The V&A is indebted to those who have made generous gifts to support acquisitions, conservation, learning and other projects.

Acquisitions and Conservation
- American Friends of the V&A
- In memory of Hugh and Anne Bernard
- Women for the Arts Council England
- The Art Fund
- Audrey Low Charitable Foundation*
- Cosima and Jeff Bargert
- Giancarlo Bertetti
- The Bern Schwartz Family
- Audrey Love Charitable Foundation
- The Art Fund
- In memory of Hugh and Anne Bernard
- Anonymous donor in honour of Rainie Price*
- BMW (UK) Ltd
- Nestlé and John Bryan*
- Candreada thanks to Pictet & Co and Laturn Foundation
- Dulux
- William Finan
- The Thesan of the V&A
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Iron Heritage Foundation
- JSC "Multiregional Transport" Ltd
- Larson Champagne
- M.A.C Cosmetics
- The Maclean
- Allied & Springer
- John R. Padgett
- The Philip and Irene Toll Sagar Foundation*
- Sir Paul Roddick
- Seguso
- Jean S. and Paulson, A. Shoul*
- And others who wish to remain anonymous

The V&A Museum of Childhood is very grateful for the very generous support it has received from:
- The Equitable Charitable Trust
- The Friends of the V&A
- The Inmos Group Company
- J. B. Rimey & Co Ltd
- John Horniman’s Children’s Trust
- The Leche Trust
- London Borough of Tower Hamlets
- MDA Investments
- The Real Hot Trust
- Robert Freidus*

The V&A is most grateful to the Trustees of the American Friends of the V&A for their continuing commitment and support:
- Ms Diarea Quashia (Chair)
- Ms Tiffany Dulin
- Mrs Auduy Ganae
- Mr Richard Greenfield
- Mr Bernard Selz
- Lady Kaye
- Mr Christopher Thom
- Ms Dorothy Burnham
- Mr Thomas Quick

The V&A would like to pay tribute to all those who have left a legacy or bequest to the Museum this year:
- Madame Gilberte Breval
- Linda Margaret Bullock
- Dr John Sagar
- Miss Grace Patricia Hills
- Lady Kaye
- Dr Joan Stephen
- Hon. Hally Stoner
- Mrs Sheila Mary Streek

**These projects have been made possible with support from the Canadian Friends of the V&A
*Donations marked with an asterisk were made possible by the American Friends of the V&A
•• These projects have been made possible by the Friends of the V&A 2014–15

Board of Trustees of the V&A 2014–15

- Sir Paul Roddick
- Dr Paul Thompson
- Ivan Bateman
- Nicholas Colledge CBE (appointed Chair Designate 27 March 2015)
- Mark Damsaar CBE
- Professor Merjet Finn
- Andrew Hochhauser Qc
- Steve McGuckin
- Michelle Oguntona
- Dame Thomas Sackler
- Dr John Sagar
- Katrina Fryett
- Emirates Stewardship
- Edelman CBE
- Professor David Weinblit
- Mark Freedman
- Caroline Silver
- Samir Shah (term ended December 2014)
Our website audience is more than four times the size of our physical one, so we are working on ways to create compelling content and experiences for those who may never make it to the museum. We don’t want merely to replicate our galleries, exhibitions and events, however: we are seeking to tap into what digital media is uniquely able to deliver.

‘Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty’, for example, saw us work closely with curator Claire Wilcox and her team to create the Museum of Savage Beauty, a microsite that tells some of the stories behind the cabinet of curiosities section of the exhibition, and looks at objects in the V&A collection that might have inspired them. It uses a simple open source technology so one can zoom into images of the objects in incredible detail.

For ‘What is Luxury?’ we created Luxury Time, an online game that gives players an insight into the often arduous, painstaking process of the designer-maker (the final element of the game takes an exhausting nine hours to complete). Additionally, we developed the Definery, a playful online quiz that asks people to nominate objects in their lives to assess whether they are indeed luxury, or actually vulgar.

An experiential documentary, The London Recruits, saw us use interactive media to tell the story of the secret war against apartheid to support the exhibition ‘Disobedient Objects’. The interaction design deliberately creates a disruptive viewing experience using pop-ups as a motif to echo the exploding bucket bombs the London Recruits used to spread their anti-apartheid message.

Every generation has its distractions. For us, it might be Facebook, Snapchat, Minecraft, or a Netflix series. For the Victorians, it was the gin palace. Such was the allure of these establishments that founding V&A director Henry Cole believed a “powerful antidote” was needed — a museum that could be as attractive as the gin palace. To attract the widest possible audience, he decided to open the then South Kensington Museum in the evening, and this was made possible only because of a recent innovation — gas lighting. In fact, it became the first museum in the world to use gas lighting in its galleries.

Were Cole around today, one imagines he would be making the case for building-wide Wi-Fi — something we have recently invested in. Like gas lighting in its day, Wi-Fi has swiftly moved from being a desirable novelty to an essential utility. It allows us to deliver digital content and experiences to anyone with a mobile device. Visitors to the soon-to-reopen Europe 1600–1815 Galleries, for example, will be able to use our new mobile audio guide to listen to the seductions of Casanova, or hear Rabbi Jeff Berger talking about the Torah mantle.

Admittedly, Wi-Fi will still enable people to indulge in online distractions and, theoretically, our visitors might well be looking at Tinder or Snapchat while enjoying a coffee in our café. Our challenge is to be noticed amid the cacophony of other online as well as competing ‘real world’ experiences.

Museums are becoming places for increasing degrees of debate and discovery, witnessed (and catalysed) by a gradual blurring between the real and the digital. An ever-growing number of people start their journey to the V&A online, so it is vital that these encounters meet the same standards as a visit to our galleries. To this end, we will in the next year refresh our website and invest in our digital infrastructure.

Our website audience is more than four times the size of our physical one, so we are working on ways to create compelling content and experiences for those who may never make it to the museum. We don’t want merely to replicate our galleries, exhibitions and events, however: we are seeking to tap into what digital media is uniquely able to deliver.
As part of a new five-year strategy, we will do more to showcase the best of digital design. To that end, we are working with the V&A’s Design, Architecture and Digital Department to commission new online experiences that explore the role of design and architecture in defining civic identity and urban experience. This year we commissioned media artist Kyle McDonald to create Exhausting a Crowd. Based on Georges Perec’s An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris, the site allows visitors to annotate the comings and goings of people around Piccadilly Circus over a 24-hour period. We also commissioned designer Femke Herregraven, who created Liquid Citizenship, a site that enables people to explore the current opportunities for purchasing national citizenships, passports or visas.

We want — and need — to create more of these sorts of experiences. We know our audiences value them, and we know they’re helping us to better understand and explore the many ways digital media can give access to all the V&A does, and bring the museum’s stories to life. With new V&A galleries and technologies by contemporary designers working in fields from game design to lace-making, as were on show in their ‘Design in Motion’ travelling exhibition.

Museums of the future will be more collaborative, and more focused on engagement and developing online (as well as physical) experiences. In a hyper-connected, transparent world we need to embrace the multiplicity of voices that we as organisations can generate. We need to collaborate with our online audiences, listen to them, develop shared values and long-term relationships and conceive ideas and content together.

Data is the key to unlocking a deeper understanding of our audiences’ wants and needs. By using a data-informed approach to development, we can see exactly what works — and what doesn’t. We can test, we can refine and improve what we do, and create personalised experiences for our visitors. This thinking is at the heart of new products and services we’re developing, such as our award-winning Explorer map, which draws on our events and collections data to show in real time what is on, and what’s in the building.

We’re now looking at how we might use transmitters such as beacons to deliver content that is specific to certain galleries and exhibitions, and to provide tours for visually impaired visitors and exploration trails for children. We’re also exploring how wearable technologies, such as Google Cardboard and Oculus Rift, might introduce new layers of experience both inside the museum and remotely.

Back in 2008, the V&A was one of the first museums to open up our collections data through an API (an application programming interface which acts as a window on to our database). This means artists and developers can use our data to create their own applications and visualisations. For ‘All of this Belongs to You’, artist, writer and technologist James Bridle used our collections API to create Hyper–Stacks, a classification and connection engine that analyses more than one million object records to create networks of objects based on today’s headlines. Good, Form & Spectacle, a design firm, also used the API to create the V&A Spelunker, another tool that unveils the relationships between objects in our collection. The coming year we will see us improve the API, including new ways to search through our data.

As part of the new five-year strategy we will do more to showcase the best of digital design.
and idiosyncratic places of refuge and employment for the less affluent or least corporate minded. Iain Sinclair became the voice of those who felt themselves dispossessed by the Olympic adventure. He marshalled his misgivings into a book of essays, entitled *Ghost Milk*, which was published on the eve of the Olympics. The essays, reflecting two decades of familiarity with what Sinclair termed Stratford’s “edgelands”, were a bitter farewell to a part of east London where individuality and eccentricity had flourished in the shade of abandonment. The odd-ball and authentic was being replaced by the ersatz and the blandly universal, and these characteristics would characterise the true nature of the Olympic legacy. As he observed, legacy “is a two-edged sword, it cuts both ways through time”. The real legacy of the Olympics would not be a pleasant and regenerated piece of city, but forlorn and friendless wastes dotted with apartment blocks whose “gaudy shells, low-ceilinged, tight-balconied, are doomed to remain half-empty”.

The “legacy” of the London Olympics became an increasingly important — and fraught — topic during the months leading to the opening of the games in the summer of 2012. Their role in Londoners’ lives, and the remorseless process by which the Olympic Park was acquired, designed and constructed was increasingly questioned by a diverse band of doubters. The most robust defence mounted by the supporters and sponsors of the games was to focus on its promised legacy. They pointed out that a generally unkempt and partly destitute portion of east London, centred on Stratford, was to be left, when the games were over, with the 227-hectare Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park — the largest urban space created in Europe for 150 years — within and around which would be a stupendous array of sports buildings and housing. In addition, it was argued, regeneration projects had already spun-off from the Olympics, typified by the construction of the vast Westfield shopping mall. All of this would give east London a new and vibrant heart, would provide a much needed mix of housing stock and give a long run-down area a major economic boost. And the stadia, decommissioned from Olympic use, would also offer future generations of young Londoners a hugely enhanced opportunity to play sport and, in the process, grow healthy and perhaps realise their potential as world-class sportsmen and women.

The doubters — perhaps cynics or perhaps no more than hardened realists immune to the jargon of spin and promotion — offered an alternative, darker, vision. They insisted that the Olympics would do little good for London and Londoners and that much of the games initiative was little more than a gigantic, corporate marketing opportunity which aimed to make vast profits for a few sponsors and was set at seizing — certainly transforming — an area that for generations had been one of the capital’s most curious
V&A Annual Review 2014–15
Olympicopolis and the V&A

Even when the old world had been lost, the Olympic Park created and the games about to start there were still sceptics. Edwin Heathcote, writing in the summer 2012 issue of V&A Magazine, agreed with Sinclair that the site of the Olympics had formerly been “defined by its wild desolation and… history of neglect” and was “the kind of liminal edgeland that every metropolis needs in which to bury its secrets”. Ironically, of the biggest ‘secret’ that the metropolis has sought to bury in this once “desolate” place is the memory of the edgeland’s own past. Heathcote, when contemplating the new look of the transformed area, regretted this policy of forgetfulness: “The easiest solution for development has been to deny that past, to clean up and start again. But how much more interesting would it have to have… retained some of the fragments of that extraordinary past in a landscape of memory and place?” Instead, he pointed out, “there is a feeling of forgetting. The landscape has been replaced by an architecture of leisure and a landscape of memory and place?”

But the success of the games — almost universally admired for their style, wit and panache as well as for their sporting qualities — seemed to suggest that the concerns of doubters such as Sinclair and Heathcote would be soon forgotten. In fact, many of the key questions they raised have yet to be answered. But answers are on the way.

Broadly, the legacy is to take the form of a “twenty-first-century garden city” in and around the Olympic Park. And what will surely be its key component is a string of buildings now proposed for the long, narrow “Stratford waterfront” site set between the Olympic stadium and the John Lewis store in Westfield and next to the undulating form of the Aquatics Centre, designed by Zaha Hadid and streamlined since its use during the Olympics. The site might appear constrained, perhaps architecturally overpowered, but it is strategically placed within the park and only a few minutes walk from Stratford’s far-reaching transport hub. For the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) this makes it an ideal location for one of its pet projects — the creation of a “cultural and education quarter” that promises to be world class.

Inspired by the transformation of South Kensington into London’s museum quarter after the Great Exhibition of 1851, the LLDC has matured its plans to create what is currently referred to by the somewhat unwieldy name Olympicopolis (South Kensington was nicknamed Albertopolis because of the Prince Consort’s profound influence in the creation of its museums and cultural institutions) that will, in adjoining structures, house large-sized outposts of the V&A and Sadler’s Wells. There will also be the new home of the London College of Fashion, part of London’s University of the Arts, and — perhaps most surprising of all and potentially a huge boost to the enterprise — the only European annex of the hugely prestigious Smithsonian Institute, based in Washington. Founded in 1846 “for the increase and diffusion of knowledge”, the Smithsonian has nearly a score of museums and galleries throughout the United States and affiliations with many more, but its presence at Stratford would, if it happens, be pioneering. At the moment its involvement in Olympicopolis is under discussion. There will also be a new campus for University College London (UCL), plus 75,000 square metres of residential space.

This project would not only put Stratford well and truly on the cultural map and give it a new and admirable identity — and indeed confirm the shift to the east of many of London’s cultural institutions and activities — but also provide a huge boost to the local economy. At current estimates the cultural and education quarter would create 3,000 new jobs and attract an additional 1.5 million visitors and £2.8 million of income to the area. Some observers are even claiming that by 2030 the proposed development will generate £5 billion in “gross added value” by, as an LLDC press release claims, capitalising on, and enhancing, London’s “reputation as a creative capital and the world’s favourite visitor destination”.

To help to realise this the government has offered a £141 million investment, but this will have to be augmented in several ways, notably from the Greater London Authority (GLA) through the sale of residential properties on the park and philanthropic fund-raising. For example, as a charity part-funded by the DCMS, the V&A (like Sadler’s Wells) will have to raise money for its portion of the scheme, and this is being led by a separate and newly founded charitable body called the Foundation for FutureLondon.

While the complex financial machinery is being put in place, the architecture of Olympicopolis is currently taking shape. Architects were selected last May via competition and the practices now involved are very promising. They include Allies and Morrison, the initial master planners of the Olympic Park, working with RIBA Gold Medallists Sheila O’Donnell and John Tuomey. Other members of the winning team include Jaspal Camps/Olga Felip Arquitectura, Gustafson Porter, Buro Happold and Gardiner & Theobald. Works, if they start on schedule, should be completed by 2021 at the latest.

But what are the chances that some of the criticism levelled by Heathcote in 2012 against the Olympic Games-related buildings and planning can be avoided in the creation of Olympicopolis? This must be one of the most important architectural projects in London for decades. The uses are superb. If the design is right, then it could be a new quarter that Londoners as well as visitors will value.

Most of the “edge land” described by Sinclair and mourned by Heathcote has gone. But not all. And Stratford itself — despite its vast and often crude recent redevelopment that seems almost incomprehensible and placeless — does retain an architectural character, even grandeur, which reflects its distinct history.

Traditionally, it was an agricultural and market town that stood astride ancient routes of commerce and communication, now placed on two railways running more or less straight through the heart of Stratford: Romford Road, Broadway and the High Street. The road is busy because, to a degree, it still does what it started by doing around 2,000 years ago, it leads southwest to the River Lea, then across to connect to the Roman road at Bow and on, via Mile End and Whitechapel, to Aldgate and the City. The old buildings along its route near the town centre tell the tale of its historical importance.

The church of St John the Evangelist dates from the early 1830s and was designed by Edward Blore, who went on to design the entrance front of Buckingham Palace. Opposite, on Broadway, is a fine collection of buildings including a handsome 1830s terrace, a commanding commercial palazzo of 1867, built as a bank, and the King Edward VII pub. There are two eye-catching buildings on Romford Road: St John’s House, a satisfying Regency villa with a porch incorporating wonderfully gouty Greek Doric columns; and a timber-framed house clad with white-painted weatherboarding that dates from around 1700 and is a haunting reminder of long-lost rural Stratford.

Other characterful architectural delights linger — and in some cases languish — on the High Street. These include the splendid Ye Old Black Bull pub, an exuberant and exasperate gin palace, dated 1892, that...
incorporates a life-size image of a black bull placed against a vibrantly stripy brick and stone elevation and a third floor “Juliet balcony” set within an arch with the head of a luxuriantly bearded river god for a keystone. Equally moving, although for its ruthless industrial aesthetic rather than air of tipsy, fantasy leisure, is a head of a luxuriantly bearded river god for a keystone.

The museum also intends to make the most of its environs, many of which are considerable, even heroic. Its very diverse architectural character should be acknowledged — and even reinforced — by the new architecture in the area.“Stratford’s diverse character should be reinforced by the new architecture in the area”

Sketch elevations for the cultural and education quarter have been released. Those for the V&A, produced by O'Donnell + Tuomey, suggest a minimal, rationalist architecture characterised by cubic forms and brick cladding. Although the designs are as yet imprecise, it is clear that this building — now generally referred to as the “V&A East” — is potentially epoch-making in the history of the museum. As Kieran Long, Keeper of the Design, Architecture and Digital Department at the V&A, explains, the Stratford outpost is intended to contain 16,000 square metres of space — roughly half the size of Tate Modern. It will be designed to “allow us to do things we can’t do in our grade I listed South Kensington building”. It will present not the conventional circulation route through a “stack” of galleries, but will be a “gallery neighbourhood”. There will be studio galleries, the “largest temporary exhibition space in London”, places for children, outside spaces, all connecting with back-of-house functions — including research and conservation — visible to public view. This, says Long, represents the future of curatorial practice, with visitors encouraged to participate in the working of the museum.

The displays within the building are not yet resolved in detail, but will include the first museum space in the UK dedicated to digital design. And of course there is an opportunity to show more of the V&A’s permanent collection of around 2.5 million objects, only about fifteen per cent of which are visible to public view. This, says Long, represents the future of curatorial practice, with visitors encouraged to participate in the working of the museum.

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The museum also intends to make the most of being neighbours of the London College of Fashion and Sadler’s Wells, which plans to create a “middle-scale, flexible space for contemporary dance”. Consequently, the V&A will place a large proportion of its fashion, textile, theatre and performance collections in Stratford to serve as an immediate resource for the students who will be on site.

There can be little doubt that the cultural and education quarter will make a significant and positive contribution to the quality of life not only in Stratford but in London as a whole — and will do much to confirm the benign nature of the Olympic legacy. And it will be interesting to see how its architecture evolves during the coming year or so. Olympic buildings and the Westfield shopping mall provide the obvious and immediate architectural context for the site. But there is also a wider if more subtle context. Recognition of Stratford’s history as an “edgeland”, and of its own distinct architectural legacy, could add more cultural richness, relevance and complexity to the proposed buildings. Surely, to succeed fully as a piece of contemporary design — and to live up its name — the architecture of the new quarter must learn from its neighbourhood and respond to the area’s particular and peculiar historical context.

Olympicopolis and the V&A

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Olympicopolis and the V&A
Earlier in the day the group took part in an object-handling session with the real thing: an album of designs by James Leman, a master weaver, manufacturer and designer working in eighteenth-century Spitalfields. Drawn in pencil and ink and painted in watercolour, they form the world’s earliest surviving set of designs for woven silk. It was a rare opportunity to study the loose pages of the album, which has been unbound as it awaits vital conservation. Participants heard responses to the album from different perspectives — including those of curators of textiles and designers, weavers, historians, archivists, digital media professionals, paper and book conservators and conservation scientists — building a multi-faceted understanding of the object. In a series of panel presentations, pioneers in cross-disciplinary object-led research described initiatives and shared their experiences, locating the event’s proceedings in the context of the latest thinking on the subject. Behind-the-scenes visits to conservation studios and exhibition tours led to further discussions of methods, opportunities and resources.

This was the kind of experimental research project that a V&A Research Institute (VARI) is being created to deliver.

The gathering was part of a two-day workshop on “Unravelling — Methodologies & Historiographies”, one of several endeavours developed in the context of a VARI pilot project generously supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Launched in January 2014, this pilot took the V&A’s textile and fashion collections — and its newly opened Clothworkers’ Centre — as a testing ground to explore models and identify needs for a V&A Research Institute. The events organised were all collective projects involving shared spaces, a common agenda, a range of specialisms and a network of partners and stakeholders. These VARI experiments
sought to enable the sharing of tools, methodologies and approaches across disciplines in order to produce unexpected insights and suggest new models of research and practice.

A second two-day workshop, “Weaving — Making & Thinking” (April 2015), focused on links between making and thinking and stitched together textile collections, machinery, sample books and curatorial expertise across the Science Museum and the V&A. Happening at the fringe of regular operations and activities within each field of practice or academic discipline, VARI projects draw questions from these silos and ideally feed back into their protocols and inquiries.

Experiments are usually elaborated around a matter of concern, theory, method, or focal object, which is then investigated within specified parameters and with a suitable team of collaborators. They can be problem-making as well as problem-solving and have the distinct advantage of allowing for failure: they offer a “safe” environment for testing models to their limit, playing with things and playing them out. The ongoing “A history of an object in 100 worlds” project, for example, was sparked by wondering what would happen if the premise of the British Museum's landmark series "A History of the World in 100 Objects" were flipped on its head. Instead of 100 objects providing a history of thought, it proposes to present 100 different perspectives on a single object. In a series of five-minute “object pitches”, members of staff from across the world made a case for the object they would choose and explained their reasons.

Exploring ways of investigating things as bearers and producers of knowledge, VARI experiments foster engagements at the level of encounter, production, use, interpretation and (re-)appropriation. They can use practice-based methods to study abstract concepts, and can test the practical application of theoretical propositions. One typical activity, on the theme of “String Surfaces & Curve-Stitching”, examined ways of understanding surfaces through handling and construction. Beginning with a tour of the mathematics gallery at the Science Museum, it looked at the surface-oriented quality of string by engaging participants in curve-stitching, a children’s recreation pioneered by the sixteenth-century self-taught mathematician Mary Everest Boole. VARI investigations also trial innovative formats in an effort to put different kinds of research into conversation on equivalent terms. A good example is a long-term project, set up in collaboration with Professor Roger Kneebone (Imperial College; Wellcome Trust) and the Art Workers’ Guild. Structured as a series of “Encounters on the Shop Floor” between practitioners of different kinds, it draws comparisons between practice-based knowledge and theoretical thinking to interrogate distinctions and hierarchies.

All VARI experiments are generative: they can produce knowledge, offer a deeper understanding of processes, develop new methods and technologies, support expanded networks of collaboration and/or build cultural capital. Successful ones can be developed into curated platforms for research, collaboration and implementation, transforming the laboratory into a research and development setting. Unsuccessful experiments become practical exercises or analytical case studies and provide research toolboxes and tips for best practice. Documentation, assessment and dissemination are key to both kinds of output. Explorations extend research frameworks to include exhibitions, artefacts and related practices; and new channels and interfaces are developed to do justice to these different ways of working with material culture. One such platform is a series of “object lessons”, brief interviews and short presentations about projects, processes and practices that constitute research in the contexts of a museum collection. Published on the VARI pilot project’s website, these form object lessons both in the sense of their focus on artefacts and as practical examples of the various kinds of reflection and questioning that can be brought to bear on objects and on the range of practices articulated around them. Current VARI online resources include an archive of past events and related materials, links to parallel initiatives and projects by our partners, and a growing bibliography of key texts in object-based research (based on the reading list of an internal “Thinking Things Reading Group”).

VARI projects always operate in both a public register and one of knowledge production. This is not the type of research that involves withdrawing from the world to better attend to it: it is about creating new forms of knowledge that bridge the gap between specialised concerns, tools and skills on one hand and public understanding, interest and engagement on the other. Making public what happens behind the scenes (through display, demonstration and opportunities for participation) and sharing insights into the practice of research are key. Ultimately, VARI experiments demonstrate how museum-based research can inspire new ways of thinking, learning, training and making.
CURRENT AND FUTURE EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

What is Luxury?
until 27 September 2015
A V&A and Crafts Council Exhibition
Sponsored by Northacre

Shoes: Pleasure and Pain
until 31 January 2016
Sponsored by Clarks; supported by Agent Provocateur; with additional thanks to The Worshipful Company of Cordwainers

Captain Linnaeus Tripe:
Photographer of India and Burma, 1852–1860
until 11 October 2015
Organised by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum

The Fabric of India
3 October 2015 – 10 January 2016
Supported by Good Earth
With thanks to Experion and NIRAV MODI

Bejewelled Treasures:
The Al Thani Collection
Sponsored by Wartski

Julia Margaret Cameron
28 November 2015 – 21 February 2016
Supported by The Bern Schwartz Family Foundation. This donation was made possible by the American Friends of the V&A

Botticelli Reimagined
5 March – 3 July 2016
Sponsored by Societe Generale.
Exhibition organised by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and the Gemäldegalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Paul Strand: Photography and Film for the 20th century
19 March – 3 July 2016
Supported by American Friends of the V&A
The international tour is organised by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in collaboration with Fundación MAPFRE and made possible by the Terra Foundation for American Art