

<p>Institution: University of Cambridge</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UoA29</p>
<p>Title of case study: Ruskin at Walkley: Reconstructing the St George's Museum</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Marcus Waithe has carried out research that has resulted in a web-based 'reconstruction' of the St George's Museum, a gallery and library for artisans founded in Sheffield in 1875 by the art and social critic, John Ruskin. Impact can be demonstrated in four areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Influence on the work of museum curators at Museums Sheffield. 2. Recognition as an original concept and practical model by institutions, educators and charities. 3. Influence on the methods of charity professionals working in the area of public engagement. 4. Connecting local people with local history, and raising awareness of Sheffield's Ruskin-related heritage among national and international audiences.
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Marcus Waithe has been a Lecturer in the Faculty of English since October 2009. The project was conceived prior to this at the University of Sheffield, which provided 'seed-corn' funding to get it started. The main research was conducted after his arrival in Cambridge, when the content for the web-site was written, the web-site itself was launched and further developed. The main output [1] is an online reconstruction of the St George's Museum, undertaken in partnership with the Guild of St George (an educational charity which owns the Ruskin Collection) and Museums Sheffield (Sheffield's municipal museums authority). The website has three key features: (i) it links objects visible in photographs of a Victorian museum interior (paintings, plaster casts, the Museum furniture) to modern museum-quality images of the objects as they exist today; (ii) it reconstructs a lost museum interior in relation to the original built environment of its local setting, not solely its displays; (iii) it connects this process of reconstruction to a modern exhibition space, by means of a computer terminal on the gallery floor of the Ruskin Collection.</p> <p>Waithe's research involved: (i) an unprecedented physical investigation of the original building and exhibition spaces, including measurements of rooms, photographs of original features, and analysis of structural changes before and after Ruskin's time; (ii) synthesising existing visual evidence (historic photographs, etc.) to reveal previously undocumented connections between art works in the modern Ruskin Collection and their original physical and cultural context (e.g. the identification of volumes in the book cases, to reveal that Francis's Bacon's works were exhibited above a Turner engraving, both of whom Ruskin considered pioneers in the discovery of 'material nature') (iii) combining digital evidence with physical contexts (both past and present) in novel ways, notably through the inclusion of photographs showing the views from windows that caused Ruskin to applaud the Collection's 'mountain home', and the inclusion, alongside the Museum's plaster cast bosses and painted facades, of modern photographs showing Venetian architectural detail, now analysed to test the preservative effect of Ruskin's 'memorial studies'. The main content was written and uploaded in Cambridge (Sept-Dec. 2009); the project is ongoing as updates respond to new findings (most recently, the rediscovery of William Small's watercolour, <i>The Shipwreck</i>).</p> <p>Another output of this body of research is the essay which complements the web-site, 'Ruskin and the Idea of a Museum' (2013). [2] It uses the example of Ruskin's St George's Museum to challenge modern assumptions about Victorian museum practice, notably those derived from Peter Vergo's influential edited collection, <i>The New Museology</i> (1989). Waithe focuses on Charles Saumarez Smith's contribution, 'Museums, Artefacts, and Meanings', which argued that museums have been haunted by 'the idea that artefacts can be, and should be, divorced from their original context of ownership and use, and redisplayed in a different context of meaning, which is regarded as having a superior authority'. While accepting that Ruskin's Museum is unlike the metropolitan foundations of the period, Waithe argues that its combination of universalist ideals and 'sensitivity' to context unsettles the usefulness of Vergo's distinction between old methods and modern</p>

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purposes. Waithe contends that scholars will gain a clearer understanding of such topical conceptions as 'outreach' and 'impact' through an understanding of their roots in late Victorian thinking about museums. These roots are especially apparent in the current emphasis on measuring transfers of influence between institutions and communities. The essay also reflects on methodological problems of 'reconstruction', using the online museum's photographic visualisation as a premise for considering the reconstructive methods of the original Museum. Waithe argues that the Museum's 'Memorial Studies' of Venice (copies of paintings, architectural facades and plaster casts) acquired individual value, or 'aura', when the originals were degraded or destroyed. His essay constitutes an original attempt to establish a longer view on the visual methods employed by the digital humanities, and in this particular case to scrutinise the relationship between objects of study and the digital medium.

Further original research is embodied in the article on 'The St George's Museum', commissioned by *Victorian Review* (2013) for a Special Forum on 'Built Victorians'. [3] Waithe's discussion of the area's freehold land societies, and of the Rivelin Valley's poetic and industrial history, throws light on the Museum's built-environment, and the history of the building itself. The picture emerges of an extra-mural institution, responsive to its environment, and semantically dependent on it.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1 Marcus Waithe (Project Leader), *Ruskin at Walkley: Reconstructing the St George's Museum* (www.ruskinatwalkley.org)

The project has received peer review accreditation from NINES (Nineteenth-Century Scholarship Online) (<http://www.nines.org/>). It was widely praised at the 2012 British Association of Victorian Studies Conference: Prof. Dinah Birch (PVC at Liverpool) referred to it as a 'brilliant digitalisation of the building' in her plenary lecture; Prof. Francis O'Gorman (Leeds) recommended the project, and used a slide from it, in his plenary lecture; Prof. David Sorensen (editor of the Carlyle Letters Online project) called the project 'remarkable' during his paper. The site is cited approvingly in recent print scholarship on Ruskin: see Sarah Atwood, *Ruskin's Educational Ideals* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 162, 190; John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. xxx.

2 Marcus Waithe, 'John Ruskin and the Idea of a Museum', in *Persistent Ruskin: Studies in Influence, Assimilation and Effect*, ed. by Keith Hanley and Brian Maidment (Ashgate, 2013), pp. 33-52.

[An invited contribution from two leading Ruskin scholars that passed the peer review process]

3 Marcus Waithe, 'The St George's Museum', Special Forum: 'Built Victorians', *Victorian Review* (Spring, 2013).

[An invited contribution to an international journal (published in Canada)].

Funding: Faculty of English, Cambridge: £852 (2013); Newton Trust, Cambridge: £991.40 (2012); University of Sheffield: £8994 (2009).

All outputs can be supplied by the University of Cambridge on request.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The project has had impact on the work of museum curators at Museums Sheffield, especially on changes in the emphasis of new gallery space, and the provision of digital resources to the general public. The project was devised to address the limited reference in the Ruskin Gallery's displays to the Collection's origins in the St George's Museum, Walkley. The installation of the project website on a computer terminal as part of a gallery refurbishment, funded by the Wolfson Foundation, is one mark of its success in achieving this aim. Through ongoing correspondence with the Museums Sheffield curator, the project has improved our knowledge of gaps in the Collection (e.g. the rediscovery of William Small's *The Shipwreck*). The project has facilitated the digital display of the Museum's experimental furniture, thereby restoring a key element of Ruskin's holistic approach to Museum design. The furniture can no longer be displayed physically, due to modern museum preservation rules, and dispersal. Its use of virtual methods has helped curators communicate the idea of a past museum in a way that would not be possible in the limited physical space of the Ruskin Collection.

The Curator at Museums Sheffield testifies that the website's launch was 'exceedingly well timed' in the influence it had on re-development of the gallery space 'with accessibility to an eclectic but general audience remaining of the foremost importance'. She declares that the project 'helped direct and validate the path of my own priorities, particularly in key areas of Collections' Management (provenance, collection losses, conservation priorities etc.)' The provision of a permanent computer terminal for the website was of 'huge importance' in its implementation of 'an interpretative strategy that targets diverse audiences'. She emphasises the impact of the web-site both locally — the visitor's books with its many Sheffield signatories bear witness to its 'raising awareness of the City's history' — and more extensively, in so far as it is 'raising awareness of the museum at an international level and providing a fertile topic for greater debate and research in the future' [1].

The originality of the concept has been recognized by institutions, educators and charities wishing to employ digital images in material contexts. The website was used for a public teaching session at the V&A, 26 May 2010, for example, and was held up as a model by a speaker at the 'Lost Museums Study Day' at the Hunterian Museum, Royal College of Surgeons, 21 May 2011 [2]. Inspired by a talk given by Waithe at the Ruskin Seminar at Lancaster University, a colleague at Manchester Metropolitan University used the site in her introductory lecture to a group of second year students [3]. 'Ruskin at Walkley' is featured on the web-site for Ruskin's *Praeterita* supporting a second-year option module at the University of Sheffield on Victorian Life-Writing [4]. And an independent Ruskin scholar writes that 'you've given us a new sort of access to Ruskin's museum and brought us closer than we have ever been to experiencing the museum as he envisioned it' [5].

The project has influenced the methods of charity professionals working in the area of public engagement, including 42nd Street (a Manchester-based Charity working with young people, They used the project as a model for their successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund 'to create a contemporary iteration of the Ancoats Museum in Ancoats'. Waithe has agreed to provide consultancy work as part of this venture [6]. The Guild of St George, now an educational charity, formally acknowledged its appreciation of the project's work in encouraging knowledge and awareness of the Ruskin Collection. They commissioned Waithe to write a pamphlet, for sale in the Museums Sheffield Millennium Gallery shop, with a link on the Guild's website: *Ruskin at Walkley: An Illustrated Guide to the Online Museum* (Bembridge, Isle of Wight: Guild of St George, 2011; a second edition is in preparation) [7].

There is also evidence of the website's indirect impact on book sales in that an academic publisher, writing in praise of the website as a 'very intriguing as a way of reconstructing a vanished environment', has sought permission to advertise on it a series of reprints that includes the standard edition of Ruskin's *Works* [8].

Finally, the project has connected local people with local history, and raised awareness of Sheffield's Ruskin-related heritage among a national and international audience. The presence of the website terminal on the public gallery floor of the Ruskin Collection allows non-paying visitors who pass through this city-centre museum to connect the objects on display with their earlier museum context, raising awareness of the Collection's origins in a suburban and semi-domestic museum. Local people may not have imagined that an institution holding such valuable objects ever existed in Walkley. The site's comparison of modern architectural views with Victorian views fosters an awareness of how this apparently 'local history' is embedded in debates about class and the preservation of culture. An 'electronic visitors' book' has been incorporated into the online museum, together with a set of survey questions addressed to signatories. In the twelve months between August 2012 and July 2013 the site received over 42,000 visits and over 237,000 hits [9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] Letter from person 1 (Curator, Ruskin Collection)

[2]<http://www.rcseng.ac.uk/museums/hunterian/documents/Lost%20Museums%20prg%20and%20abstracts.pdf>; <http://www.mghq.org/events/docs/LostMuseumsStudyDayProgramme.pdf>; <http://steveslack.co.uk/2011/05/24/how-do-you-lose-a-museum/>

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[3] E-mail from person 2 (Lecturer, Manchester Metropolitan University)

[4] <http://ruskinpraeterita.wordpress.com/>

[5] E-mail from person 3 (independent scholar).

[6] E-mails from person 4 (Cultural Producer, 42nd Street)

[7] *The Newsletter of the Guild of St George*, 11 (2011), p.2;
<http://www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk/>

[8] E-mail from person 5 (Publisher, Cambridge University Press)

[9] www.ruskinatwalkley.org