Great North Museum opens to the public

28/05/2009

The new museum will house internationally-important collections from the original Hancock Museum, Newcastle University's Museum of Antiquities and the Shefton Museum. The University's Hatton Gallery is also part of the Great North Museum but remains in its existing building.

Steve McLean, Great North Museum Senior Manager, explains: "We are looking forward to welcoming the first visitors through the doors of the Museum on 23 May!

"People will be able to explore 350 million years of natural history and human evolution, and see breath-taking displays of world-class treasures which have been brought together under one roof."

The new museum is situated in the former Hancock Museum, which closed its doors three years ago to undergo its transformation into the new museum thanks to a £8.75 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Professor Paul Younger, Newcastle University Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Engagement, and chair of the Great North Museum board, says: "The collections which have been brought together for the first time in this stunning redevelopment of the Hancock Museum are nothing short of astounding. From more than half a million items, 3,500 are on display in our new galleries, combining the fruits of the labours of Victorian scholars from the North East of England with the very latest graphic technology. Not only is the result jaw-droppingly impressive, it also unlocks the research potential of this world class collection for generations to come."

The project has been led by Newcastle University in partnership with Tyne & Wear Museums, Newcastle City Council, the Natural History Society of Northumbria and the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Highlights of the new museum include a planetarium, a unique bio-wall displaying the diversity of life on Earth, a life-size replica T. rex skeleton, mummies from Ancient Egypt, a large scale model of Hadrian's Wall and a display of many of its treasures, and a superb collection of ancient Greek art and archaeology. Animals from around the world, make up a spectacular display of life on earth, past and present, and highlight the diversity of the animal kingdom.

The Great North Museum: Hancock will also serve as a gateway to the environment and landscape of the North East of England. The Hadrian's Wall Gallery displays exhibits from the entire length of the Wall in the single greatest collection of artefacts from the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site.

Ivor Crowther, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the North East, says: "We're delighted that the new Great North Museum: Hancock, with an investment of nearly £9million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, is now ready to welcome a whole new generation of visitors. Once the doors are open, this wonderful new museum will be brought back into the heart of the North East and will provide amazing new collections for everyone to enjoy."

A stunning new temporary exhibition space is capable of housing some of the largest touring exhibitions whilst a comprehensive library houses the North East's most important collections of works on natural history and archaeology.

The creation of the Great North Museum: Hancock has been made possible by funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), in addition to generous funding from a wide range of supporters including the European Regional Development Fund, One North East, Newcastle University, Newcastle City Council, TyneWear Partnership, Northern Rock Foundation, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Garfield Weston Foundation, Clore Duffield Foundation and the DCMS/Wolfson Museums & Galleries Improvement Fund.

The creation of the Great North Museum: Hancock is part of the wider Great North Museum project involving the redevelopment of the magnificent Hancock Museum, the management of the Hatton Gallery and the development of The Great North Museum Resource Centre.

The Great North Museum: Hancock has been designed by Sir Terry Farrell. Sir Terry grew up in Newcastle and the Museum is the latest in a long series of designs for Newcastle including the International Centre for Life and master plans for the Quayside and Newcastle University.

Admission to the Museum will be free.