# £21m Robert Burns Birthplace Museum unveiled

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The Robert Burns Birthplace Museum (RBBM) is the first major museum to open in Scotland in three years and the bench mark against which all future Trust properties will be set. The highly anticipated opening is the culmination of years of planning and includes a 55m2 exhibition space which has four distinct areas - 'Identify', 'Inspiration', 'Fame' and 'Creative Works' - addressing every aspect of Burns' life through an innovative and thought-provoking interpretation.

Highlights from a collection of over 5,000 historical artifacts, original manuscripts and pieces of memorabilia are presented in a fresh and novel way while engaging interactive multimedia features and newly commissioned works from leading Scottish artists including Kenny Hunter, Timorous Beasties and Sue Blackwell, which are interspersed throughout the site, will engage visitors of all ages.

Kate Mavor, Chief Executive of the National Trust for Scotland, said: "We are extremely proud of what we have achieved with the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum - it is a world class visitor destination that will draw Burns enthusiasts from around the globe and it has set the standard for Trust properties for the future. We are looking forward to welcoming our first visitors and hope that they will take away an enriched learning of Burns and his work."

The Robert Burns Birthplace Museum replaces what was formerly known as the Burns National Heritage Park to bring together all of the Alloway sites with a connection to Burns including the new 1,600m2 museum, the Burns Monument, Alloway Auld Kirk, Burns Cottage, an education pavilion and Auld Brig O' Doon. A new footbridge will also be created to link key sites to the new museum to make accessibility as easy as possible for visitors.

Nat Edwards, Director of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, said: "This has been a real labour of love for all involved and we're absolutely delighted to open the doors to the new museum today. Our aim is to provide a modern and relevant interpretation of Burns that will intrigue visitors of all ages, whether they are lifelong Burns enthusiasts or completely new to his work.

"Here you will not just be able to read the manuscript of Tam O' Shanter, you can see the fireplace round which Burns first heard the stories that he turned into that poem and you can look out the window and see that landscape, places like the Kirk Alloway and Brig O' Doon where the poem takes place. It gives you every facet of the man and his work."

The museum, which is the largest, most ambitious project the National Trust for Scotland has ever undertaken, is generously supported by the Scottish Government, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Scottish Enterprise and South Ayrshire Council in addition to thousands of donors who have generously contributed to the creation of a lasting and fitting legacy for the bard.

Colin McLean, Head of the HLF in Scotland, said: "This is truly a day to celebrate Scotland's cultural history. We can now offer the world a captivating insight into the life and works of one of our national heroes through a state-of-the-art museum which we can all be proud of.

"The words and works of Burns touched, and continue to touch, ordinary lives with their humanity. They have now been given a home which keeps them safe while bringing them to life for generations to come. The Heritage Lottery Fund

congratulates the National Trust for Scotland in making this happen."

From the initial planning stages of RBBM, the Trust was keen to ensure the Scots language would feature predominantly throughout the museum; aiming to position it as the leading museum destination for those looking to learn about the 'mither tongue'. From Scots words engraved on the wall of the museum exterior to the descriptions of artefacts which are given in Scots in the exhibition - RBBM is the first museum to feature the language in this way.

Hundreds of contractors have been involved in the museum's build including lead designers Events Communication and builders Border Construction. From an architectural perspective, Arnaud Schwartz's, of Simpson and Brown's, main aim with the modern design of the new Robert Burns Birthplace Museum was to create an ecologically responsible and sustainable building that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability to adapt to fit the needs of future generations and the museum. As such, the museum has a unique sedum roof that naturally insulates the building while heating and cooling is provided by 12 earth energy ground-source heat pumps.

Upon entering the exhibition area, visitors see a timeline of important dates in Burns' life and events taking place on Scotland that would have affected his work; but that's where the traditional music experience ends.

A theatrically lit corridor serves as the entrance to the main exhibition area and sets the scene as voices of gossips talking about Burns quietly echo through the hall while words such as 'exciseman', 'lover', 'poet', 'ploughman', 'icon' inscribed on the floor open the visitor's minds to the idea of Burns as a man through the different stages of his life.

London based company Spiral Productions has created 17 interactive features for the new museum and has worked closely with interpretation manager Mary Stones to create unique interactive elements that complement the artifacts on show and encourage visitors to actively participate in learning about Burns.

Celebrities including Bill Paterson, Brian Cox and Eddi Reader have lent their support to the museum by recording vocals for audio visual interpretations of 'To a Mouse', 'Red, Red Rose' and 'Tam O'Shanter' which are accompanied by stunning imagery to ignite imaginations and bring the pieces to life.

Upon entering the main exhibition space, visitors go through the identity section which will present Burns' family and relationships and how these had an influence on his life and works. The section is split to focus on Burns as a brother, a friend, a lover, a husband and a father with relevant artifacts featured in each display including a fragment of his wife Jean Armours wedding dress, Highland Mary's Bible and a letter to his brother William.

Burns influences are then explored in the 'Inspiration' section which is segmented into the five key areas 'nature', 'books and music', 'politics', 'love' and 'belief'. One of the highlights in this section is a tongue-in-cheek interactive news programme called 'The Burning Issues' presented by anchorman 'Jeremy Waxman' which looks at topical issues of Burns' time. Visitors will later move onto explore Burns the songwriter with a jukebox that categorises his songs into modern day genres such as 'floorfillers', 'tearjerkers' and 'power ballads' which aims to show that Burns was as much an accomplished songwriter as he was a poet.

This area also features an Auld Lang Syne interactive element which allows visitors to listen to different versions of the iconic song which have been recorded by Burns enthusiasts from around the world and uploaded to a special RBBM Facebook page before the museum opened. Visitors can then go home and upload their own renditions which will be considered for inclusion on the jukebox. It's these modern touches that make RBBM unlike anything that has ever been

done before and present Burns' work and significance in a way that will appeal to visitors of all ages and from all walks of life.

Burns status as a global icon is explored in the 'Fame' section which looks at the 'cult of Burns' and how the fascination with Burns grew after he died. This area includes an interactive Burns Supper which encourages museum visitors to engage with each other as hey learn about the way in which the bard's birthday is celebrated around the world each January 25.

Finally, in the 'Creative' section, Burns works are enclosed in listening pods where visitors can listen to his poems while many original manuscripts, including 'Scots Wha Hae' and 'Auld Lang Syne' will be on display for visual purposes.

Part of the museum space will play host to series of temporary interpretations with the inaugural exhibition being a major new showcase by Scottish artist Peter Howson. The exhibition, 'Howson Burns: Revealed', features 15 new portraits of robert Burns which are on display and available to purchase from December 2010 - June 2011. The exhibition includes 12 pastel paintings and 3 new oil paintings of the bard which are guaranteed to spark the interest of fans and Burns and Howson alike.

**Notes to editors**

The Trusts Robert Burns Birthplace Museum project is the largest, most ambitious project the charity has ever undertaken. It will cost in the region of £21m and this includes generous contributions from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire and South ayrshire Council.

The National Trust for Scotland is currently involved in a range of fundraising activities to support the project. Find out more about the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum.

**Further information**

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