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The Journal for  
Edinburgh History



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*Book of the Old Edinburgh Club*, New Series, 4 (1997), pp. 69–84

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# PUBLIC AND PRIVILEGED ACCESS: A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF ADMISSION CHARGES AND VISITOR FIGURES FOR PART OF THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL COLLECTIONS

GEOFFREY N. SWINNEY AND DAVID HEPPELL

ON 7 OCTOBER 1997 the National Museums of Scotland (NMS) announced that, with effect from January 1998, a charge would be made for admission to the Royal Museum of Scotland. The rationale for the introduction of this charge had previously been outlined in a leaflet issued to museum visitors:<sup>1</sup>

We believe that our collections should, ideally, be freely available to everyone. However we cannot maintain an adequate level of service without more funding. So, if restrictions on public expenditure make it impossible for the Government to offer more support, an admission charge will be introduced in late 1997 or 1998.

This announcement, and the extensive deliberations which preceded it, prompted the authors to review the history of charging for access to this popular museum, 'one of the top visitor attractions in Scotland'.

Large museums are rarely self-financing. Generally they have always had to rely upon the patronage of other bodies, either learned societies or, more typically in modern times, upon local or national government for the major part of their funding. In Scotland, there is a statutory obligation upon those local authorities which operate museums and galleries to provide free admission.<sup>2</sup> There is no equivalent stipulation for authorities in England and Wales, nor is central government under any such obligation in relation to national museums and galleries: nonetheless there has been a long-standing tradition of free access to the great national

collections throughout the UK. Over the last decade, however, financial pressures, largely resulting from government policy towards funding of the public sector, have forced many of the national institutions to introduce admission charges. Now the NMS is about to follow suit.

The question of funding of museums has always been intimately associated with the perceived function of collections; in particular, whether museums are primarily part of the leisure industry or whether their principal function is to serve an academic purpose appreciated only by the intelligentsia or the cognoscenti. This dilemma has existed for well over a century: Robert Jameson, Professor of Natural History in the University of Edinburgh from 1804 to 1854, recognised it and came down firmly on one side of the argument in 1826, describing the University Natural History Museum as 'being *Academical*, and not intended for the purpose of mere popular exhibition'.<sup>3</sup> It is perceived that even today some museum authorities see their role as serving an elite, e.g. the recent *Scotsman* comment:<sup>4</sup>

Had [the NMS Trustees] echoed some of their elitist southern colleagues in preferring a reduced number of 'quality' paying visitors to the great mass of ordinary public they would have deserved no sympathy. But the National Museums of Scotland is innocent of such nonsense.

This paper reviews the history of public access to the collections exhibited in the Royal Museum of



Fig. 1. The Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street. Captain Francis Fowke's design, published in 1861 when the first phase of the building was under construction. (*National Museums of Scotland*; Neg. no. 0633.)

Scotland (a constituent part of the NMS) and the ways in which admission charges have been used both as an instrument to deter casual visitors and foster elitism and as a means of gaining revenue.<sup>5</sup> Factors influencing museum attendance are complex and include opening hours, admission charges and the facilities and exhibitions offered by the museum.<sup>6</sup> Those relating to the Royal Museum of Scotland were summarised in 1973.<sup>7</sup> During much of the history of the Museum, admission charges were levied, but primarily as an instrument to regulate access and deter overcrowding and only secondarily as a means of gaining revenue.

The Royal Museum of Scotland building, which faces on to Chambers Street in the south side of Edinburgh, is the headquarters of the NMS (fig. 1). The building first opened to the public in May 1866 as the government-funded Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art. In 1901 its name was changed to the Royal Scottish Museum, and in 1985, when it ceased to be under direct government control and became part

of the NMS, its name was again changed to the Royal Museum of Scotland.

The Chambers Street building had been erected to house two principal components, established by legislation in 1854. One was the Industrial Museum of Scotland, the collections of which included raw materials from the 1851 Great Exhibition, agricultural models from the collections of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland, and the collection of early chemistry instruments of the University of Edinburgh. The other was formerly the Natural History Museum of the University of Edinburgh, which had been transferred into government ownership.<sup>8</sup> The history of this latter collection may be traced back to the middle of the seventeenth century, although the majority of the collections which were transferred had been amassed since the appointment of Robert Jameson to the post of Regius Professor of Natural History in 1804.

The University's Natural History Collections, splendidly rehoused by W. H. Playfair in the new



## ADMISSION CHARGES FOR THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

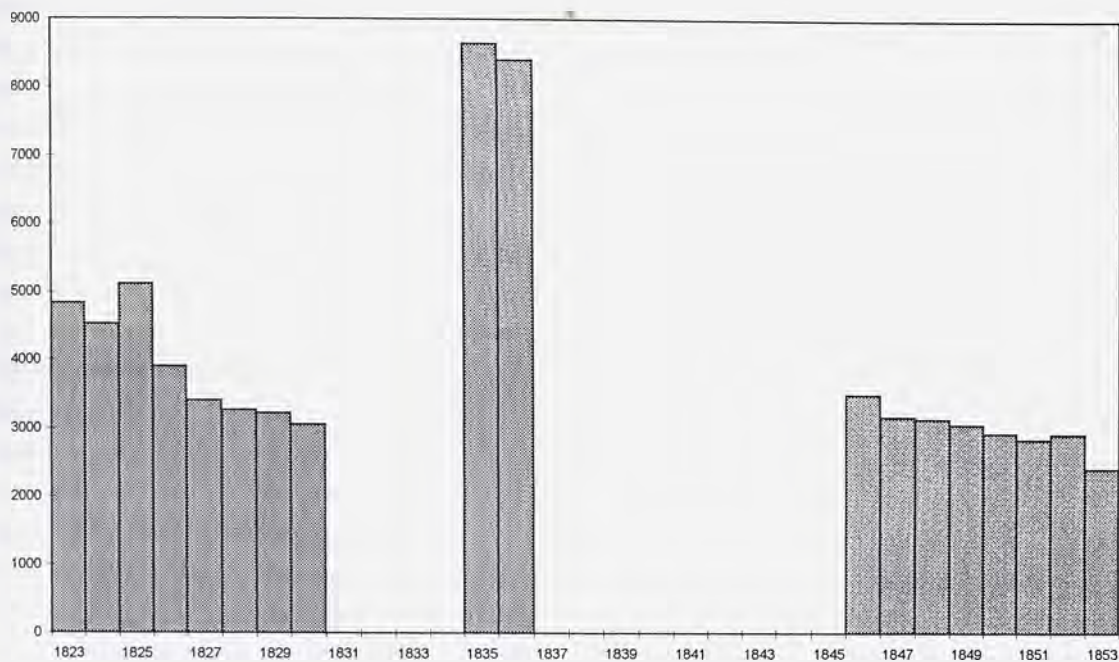


Fig. 2. Annual attendance figures for the Natural History Museum of the University of Edinburgh (only years for which there are data for the entire year have been included).

University building, opened to the public for the first time in 1820.<sup>9</sup> The annual number of visitors paying for access, as recorded in the Daily and Weekly Report Books, is shown in fig. 2.<sup>10</sup> Between 1804 and 1812 funding of the Museum had been from the professor's own pocket with occasional assistance from the Town Council, as Patrons of the University. In 1812 the Museum secured regular funding from government in the form of an annual payment of £100 from His Majesty's Exchequer in Scotland. By 1820, however, this grant was inadequate and the Museum had accumulated substantial debts. These were exacerbated by interest payments due on the bank loan taken out by Jameson and certain other professors to pay for the purchase, in 1819, of the collection of Louis Dufresne.<sup>11</sup> At a meeting held in the Museum, at which the Court of Exchequer, the University Senate, the Court of Session and the Town Council were all represented, it was decided to defray the Museum's

running expenses by opening it to the public. Accordingly Jameson 'was ordered to open the Museum to the public, and to see that each visitor paid 2s. 6d. of admission-money'.<sup>12</sup> It seems that Jameson himself was ambivalent about charging admission. In evidence given in October 1826 before the Commissioners of the Universities of Scotland he argued for a free museum:<sup>13</sup>

*Commissioners:* Do you think it would have promoted the study [of Natural History] to have rendered the Museum accessible to the public, on certain conditions?

*Jameson:* Yes; it has been advantageous to a certain extent, but probably it would have been more beneficial had the public been allowed to enter the Museum without paying a fee of admission, somewhat according to the practice of the British Museum. It might be opened to the public one or two days in the week, that is, to those individuals or parties who had previously procured cards of admission from the professor of Natural History, as is the practice in the Botanic Garden. This arrangement would afford

every facility the public could desire, and at the same time would prevent the halls and galleries of the Museum becoming a lounging place for idlers from the street.

In giving additional evidence before the same Commission the following year, however, Jameson argued strongly for retention of an entrance fee of 2s 6d, as it constituted an essential element of the Museum's funding. He felt that this level of charge was the optimum to generate income in a way consistent with the function of the Museum.<sup>14</sup>

If not initially, then certainly by 1826, annual tickets at the very high price of £4. 7. 0 were available as an alternative to daily admission. A ladies' ticket, priced at £1. 1. 0, was also available, with a discount for groups enabling ladies from the same family to buy an annual ticket for 10 shillings each. Gentlemen who had attended the Natural History class could purchase an annual ticket at the discount price of 10s 6d. Annual tickets were not popular and few were sold. Both daily and annual tickets could be purchased not only from the Museum but also from MacLachlan & Stewart, booksellers and binders, 64 South Bridge. From late 1829 onwards the Report Books of the Museum made a distinction between tickets sold at the door of the Museum and those which had been purchased 'from the shop', although those sold other than at the Museum did not feature regularly in the weekly accounts.<sup>15</sup>

Natural History students were admitted free, although other students were likely to be charged unless they could demonstrate an inability to pay. The Daily Report Books show that, until 1827, students were generally admitted only on Wednesday and Saturday. Jameson in his evidence given in 1826 stated that his teaching consisted of lectures, demonstrations, informal tutorials (usually held before the lectures) and more formal sessions in the Museum. Exercises, based on describing specimens,

were set in the Museum. He asserted that these museum study sessions usually took place three times a week and occasionally as often as six times a week, although the records suggest that twice weekly was more common. Six sessions per week seem to have been rare although between 1 July and 4 August 1828 Jameson admitted students Monday to Saturday (possibly to justify exaggerated claims regarding the importance of the Museum to his teaching in his evidence given in May 1827).<sup>16</sup> From 1830, an additional student day, usually Monday, was added.<sup>17</sup>

In 1831 the government's grant to the Museum was doubled to £200 and in July 1834 the cost of admission was reduced to one shilling. The annual ticket price was possibly reduced at the same time to 10s 6d, although this is not recorded in the Daily Report Book until the late 1840s.<sup>18</sup> A further reduction to 6d was proposed in 1839 by a special committee set up to examine the Museum's affairs, but their recommendation was rejected by the Town Council.<sup>19</sup> By 1844 another Town Council Committee had been established to look into Museum charges.<sup>20</sup> By now there was a growing demand from the middle and working classes for access to collections – museums were no longer the preserve of the elite. The enormous success of the Great Exhibition further increased the demand for public exhibitions, and in 1851 Joseph Hume MP proposed free admission to the University Museum.<sup>21</sup> The Daily Report Book entries for 1846 onwards record that students of Natural History were allowed in the Museum to study any day, Monday to Saturday. Other students of the University were admitted free on the first Saturday of the month.

Jameson's was one of the influential voices lobbying for a new government-funded Museum.<sup>22</sup> His motive, in part, was to find space to display the Natural History collections which had by this time far outgrown the accommodation allocated within the

University.<sup>23</sup> In January 1852 Jameson listed all the collections currently not on display for want of display space (he even gave box lists and dimensions) and submitted a note to the Committee on Free Admission to Museums.<sup>24</sup> In it he argued that he would envisage that the museum could be free only once it had been provided with the requisite premises.<sup>25</sup>

Lawrence Jameson, in his deferential memorial of his uncle Robert Jameson, made considerable play of the fact that from time to time the Museum was opened to the public, or to special interest groups, free of charge.<sup>26</sup> Perusal of the Daily and Weekly Report Books, however, largely fails to support this assertion. Apart from occasional instances of small numbers of 'young people' being granted free admission (see June–July 1827 for example) and forty young girls from the Merchant Taylors' School (admitted May 1835) there is little evidence of free access being granted. But, on New Year's Day 1852, the Museum was opened, experimentally, to 'the working classes'. They were admitted in groups of about 100 and could stay only 30 minutes, a bell being rung after 25 minutes as a signal for them to leave and make way for the next party. Admission was free, but was by ticket only – a measure designed to ensure that 'improper individuals' were not admitted. It was initially proposed that 1200 people would be allowed to visit between the hours of 9 am and 3 pm. Numbers were counted carefully (an initial head-count showed 1766 people had been in, but a later count of tickets put the number at 1760). Later, in trying to counter an argument that the collections could not be freely open, Robert Jameson exaggerated the figures: 'Only a few months ago between two and three thousand of the working classes were admitted to the Museum in one day – at the close of the day the Rooms were minutely examined and the specimens found uninjured'.<sup>27</sup>

In building up the University Natural History collections Jameson established what has recently been described as 'the outstanding museum of the Scottish Enlightenment',<sup>28</sup> but he had made some powerful enemies in the course of his half-century tenure of the joint post of Regius Professor of Natural History and Regius Keeper of the Natural History Museum. In his later years he had exercised a proprietorial control over the collections, denying access to those he felt were incapable of studying or drawing specimens in a manner which would reflect credit on the University. In particular he came into conflict with the Royal Society of Edinburgh, whose first charter had required them to deposit collections in the University Museum but who subsequently felt that their fellows were not being given reasonable access to the Society's own specimens.<sup>29</sup>

In February 1852 the Crown Office requested Jameson to supply the House of Commons with separate paying and non-paying visitor figures for the Museum covering the last ten years. He sent returns giving the annual income of the Museum as £220. 12. 0, of which £160 was from admission charges (the difference coming from the University Matriculation Fund).<sup>30</sup> This sum was additional to the £200 still received annually from the Treasury for specimen purchase and for which he said he accounted directly to the Exchequer; clearly at this time the income from admission charges was a substantial proportion of the Museum's revenue. The Crown Office's request was no doubt part of the protracted deliberations which eventually, in 1854, resulted in Parliament resolving to establish a government-funded public museum in Edinburgh. Thus the Natural History collections passed out of University ownership into the control of the government's Council for the Committee on Education. At the same time an Industrial collection was founded. Sadly, Jameson did not live to see the



establishment of the government museum for which he had campaigned so long; he died on 19 April 1854.

The proposal to transfer the Natural History collections out of University ownership was presented to the University Senate on 4 April 1854. This proposal, recognising the potential demand from the Edinburgh public, recommended that admission be free except that 'two or three days in each week may probably be reserved, on which a small fee for admission may be charged, in order to enable students and Men of Science to study the collections without the inconvenience of crowded assemblages of persons'.<sup>31</sup> On 8 October 1855 the Natural History Museum opened under the management of the Department of Science and Art, part of the Board of Trade,<sup>32</sup> although the Regius Professor of Natural History, by this time George Allman, retained the title Keeper and continued to have responsibility for the museum. At about the same time as the Natural History collections passed into public ownership, the government established the Industrial Museum of Scotland, and appointed George Wilson as its Director. The intention was to combine these two museums within a new museum building immediately to the west of the University.

While a new purpose-built museum was being planned and constructed, the natural history collections remained in their old premises in the University. Admission was 6d on weekdays, free on Saturday and on public holidays.<sup>33</sup> The Board of Trade allowed bona fide students of natural history free admission for purposes of study; other Edinburgh University students and students of the Free Church College were admitted free 'on one close day [i.e. charging day] in each month'. Town Council members and professors of the University, together with their families, were admitted free at all times and this privilege was soon extended to include guests of professors. In 1856 similar rights of access

to those of Free Church College students were granted to students of the United Presbyterian College. In the same year, at the request of the Town Council, Saturday opening hours were extended so that working people had an opportunity of visiting after work, the working day generally finishing earlier on a Saturday than on weekdays.

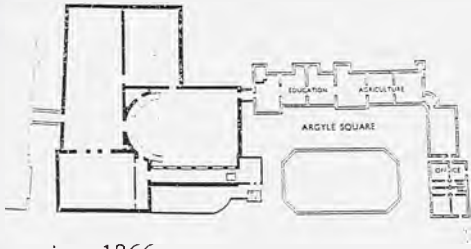
Meanwhile the new Industrial Museum was developing its collections in temporary accommodation around Argyle Square towards the west of the site allocated to the new museum building. These collections were shown by invitation to various bodies during April 1862 and were opened to the public for the first time the following month. Initially public opening was restricted to Saturday only, as the collection was being arranged, but by the beginning of July the museum was sufficiently organised that it could be opened on both Wednesday and Saturday, and the opening hours were extended into Saturday evening. Admission to the Industrial Museum was free. On those days when the Museum was closed to the public, students, researchers and other invited guests were admitted.

On 1 July 1865 the Natural History Museum in the University closed in preparation for transfer of the collections into the new museum building, the first part of which was nearing completion. This first phase (fig. 3), which was designed to accommodate the natural history collections, was opened in May 1866. The admission fees charged and the opening hours of the Chambers Street building are shown in the table below.

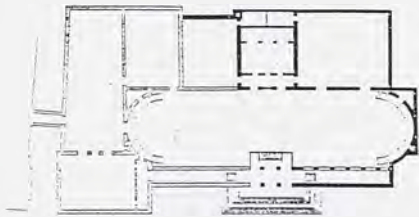
The numbers of visitors to the Natural History Museum and the Industrial Museum of Scotland and, from 1866 onwards, to the Chambers Street building, are shown in fig. 4, relative to the population of the City of Edinburgh. It will be noted from fig. 5 that during those years when admission was charged on certain days, the vast majority of people visited on



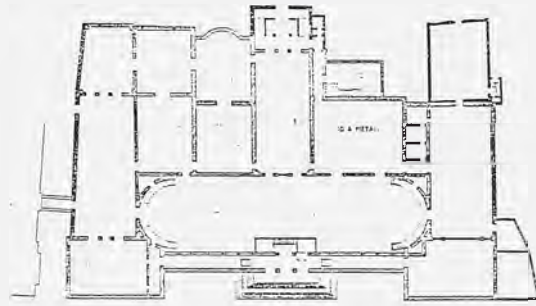
ADMISSION CHARGES FOR THE NATIONAL MUSEUM



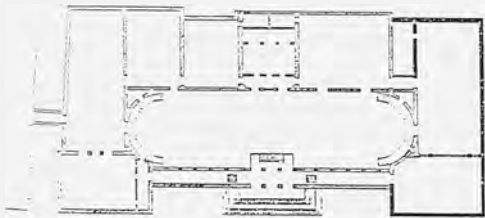
circa 1866



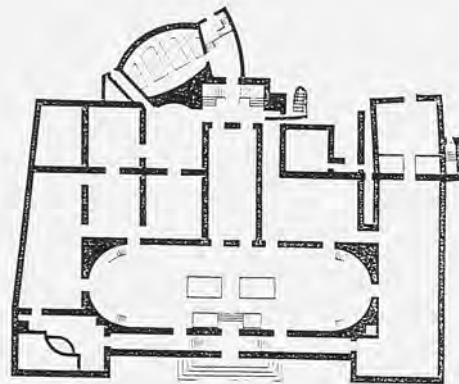
circa 1875



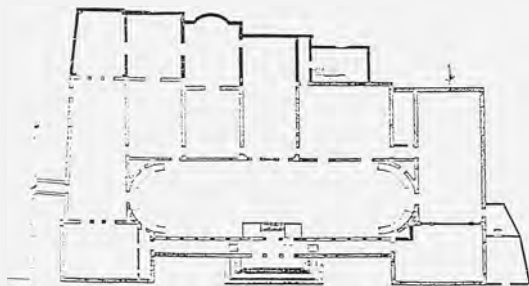
circa 1954



circa 1889



circa 1965



circa 1932

Fig. 3. The development of the National Museum building in Chambers Street (ground plans).

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Table: Summary of Opening Times and Admission Charges.

Date	Opening Times	Charge	Source <sup>1</sup>
<b>Natural History Museum</b>			
Pre-1820	Museum open only to students of Natural History and others at the invitation of the Professor		Jameson, 'Biographical Memoir' (see note 26)
1820	<b>Admission charges introduced</b> Weekdays and Saturday, 11 am-4 pm (5 pm in summer)	2s 6d	<i>Directory of the Industrial Museum of Scotland, and of the Natural History Museum, Edinburgh</i> (1858)
July 1834	Presumed unchanged	1s	Jameson, 'Biographical Memoir' (see note 26)
October 1855	Weekdays Saturday and public holidays	6d free	<i>Directory of the Industrial Museum of Scotland, and of the Natural History Museum, Edinburgh</i> (1858)
July 1865	Museum closed		<i>Museum Annual Report, 1865</i>
<b>Industrial Museum of Scotland</b>			
May-June 1862	Saturday and public holidays, 10 am-4 pm	free	<i>Museum Annual Report, 1862</i>
July 1862	Wednesday, 10 am-4 pm Saturday, 10 am-10 pm Public holidays	free free free	<i>Museum Annual Report, 1862</i>
July 1865	Museum closed		
<b>Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art<sup>2</sup></b>			
May 1866 <sup>3</sup>	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, 10 am-4 pm Wednesday, 10 am-4 pm Friday, Saturday, 10 am-4 pm; 6 pm-9 pm Public holidays	6d free free free	<i>Catalogue of the Industrial Department, Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art</i> (1867)
c. 1877	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, 10 am-4 pm Wednesday, 10 am-4 pm Friday, Saturday, 10 am-9 pm (summer) Public holidays	6d free free free	<i>Scotsman</i> , 8 June 1877
May 1898	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, 10 am-4 pm Wednesday, 10 am-4 pm Friday (times not stated) Saturday, 10 am-10 pm Public holidays	6d free free free free	<i>Museum Annual Report, 1898</i>
April 1901	<b>Admission charges abolished</b> Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, 10 am-4 pm Wednesday, 10 am-4 pm; 6 pm-10 pm Saturday, 10 am-10 pm Sunday, 2 pm-5 pm		<i>Museum Annual Report, 1901</i>
July 1907	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, 10 am-5 pm Wednesday, Saturday, 10 am-10 pm Sunday, 2 pm-5 pm		<i>Museum Annual Report, 1907</i>
Late 1919	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, 10 am-5 pm Wednesday, Saturday, 10 am-9 pm Sunday, 2 pm-5 pm		<i>Royal Scottish Museum, Guide to the Collection of Egyptian Antiquities</i> (1919)
1931 (briefly)	Weekdays and Saturday, 10 am-5 pm Sunday, 2 pm-5 pm		<i>Museum Annual Report, 1931</i>
1931	Weekdays, 10 am-5 pm Saturday, 10 am-9 pm Sunday, 2 pm-5 pm		<i>Museum Annual Report, 1931</i>
September 1939	Museum closed		
1943	Weekdays and Saturday, 10 am-5 pm Sunday, 2 pm-5 pm		<i>Scotsman</i> , 24 December 1943
January 1974	<b>Admission charges introduced</b> Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 10 am-5 pm Tuesday, 10 am-8 pm Sunday, 2 pm-5 pm	10p 10p free	<i>Instructions to Staff</i> (see note 46)
April 1974	<b>Admission charges abolished</b> Weekdays and Saturday, 10 am-5 pm Sunday, 2 pm-5 pm		
August 1992	Weekdays and Saturday, 10 am-5 pm Sunday, noon-5 pm		Barbara Buchan, NMS (personal communication)
June 1995	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 10 am-5 pm Tuesday, 10 am-8 pm (Tuesday late opening suspended from 28 August to 1 November 1996) Sunday, noon-5 pm		Duncan Isles, NMS (personal communication)

<sup>1</sup> From 1855 until the report for the year 1900 the Museum's *Annual Report* was published as an Appendix to the annual *Report of the Science and Art Department*. From 1901 the Museum published its own *Annual Report* (or, for the period 1971-84, *Triennial Report*).

<sup>2</sup> Subsequently Royal Scottish Museum (1901-85), Royal Museum of Scotland (1985 to date).

<sup>3</sup> The *Annual Report* notes that for one evening each week, from May 1866 until the end of that year, an admission charge was levied but that, as in the 8-month period only 662 attended on pay-evenings, this was abolished.

ADMISSION CHARGES FOR THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

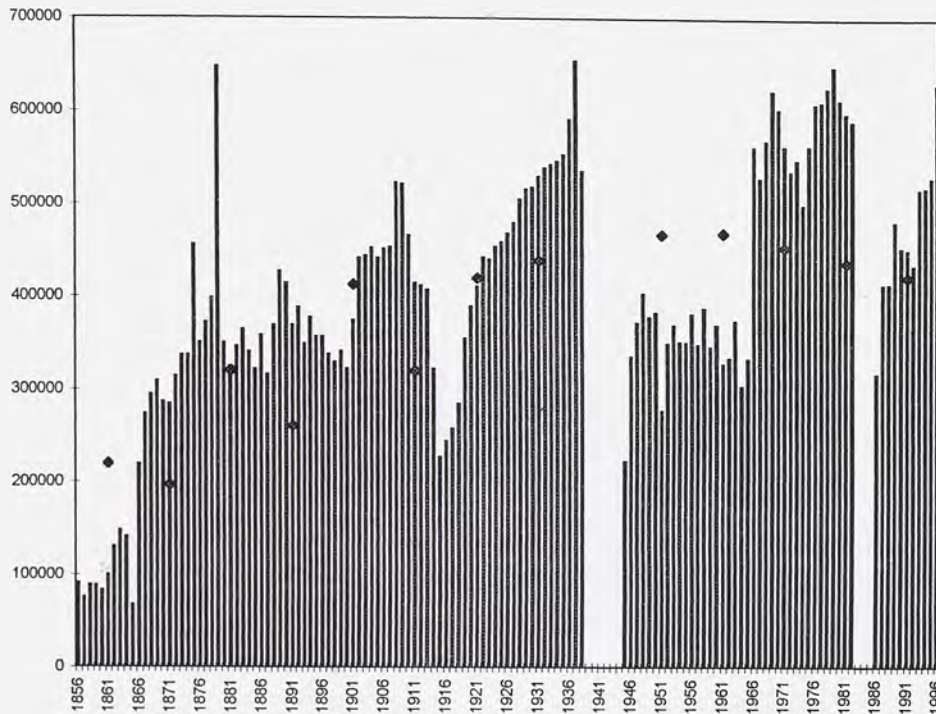


Fig. 4. Combined annual attendance figures for the Industrial Museum of Scotland and the Natural History Museum (1856-65) and, from 1866, for the Chambers Street building (data from the Museum's *Annual Reports*; Museum closed during much of World War II; data not published for 1983-85). The population of Edinburgh derived from census records is also shown (◆).

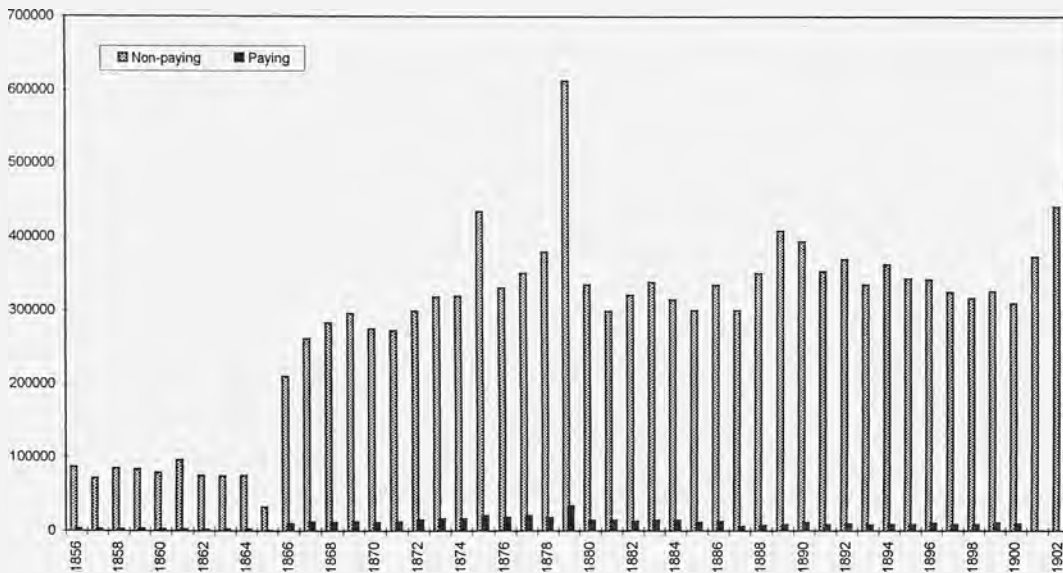


Fig. 5. Annual attendance figures for paying and non-paying visitors to the Natural History Museum and later to the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art during which an entrance fee of 6d was levied on certain days of each week (6d in 1856 is equivalent to approximately £2.40 at 1997 values).



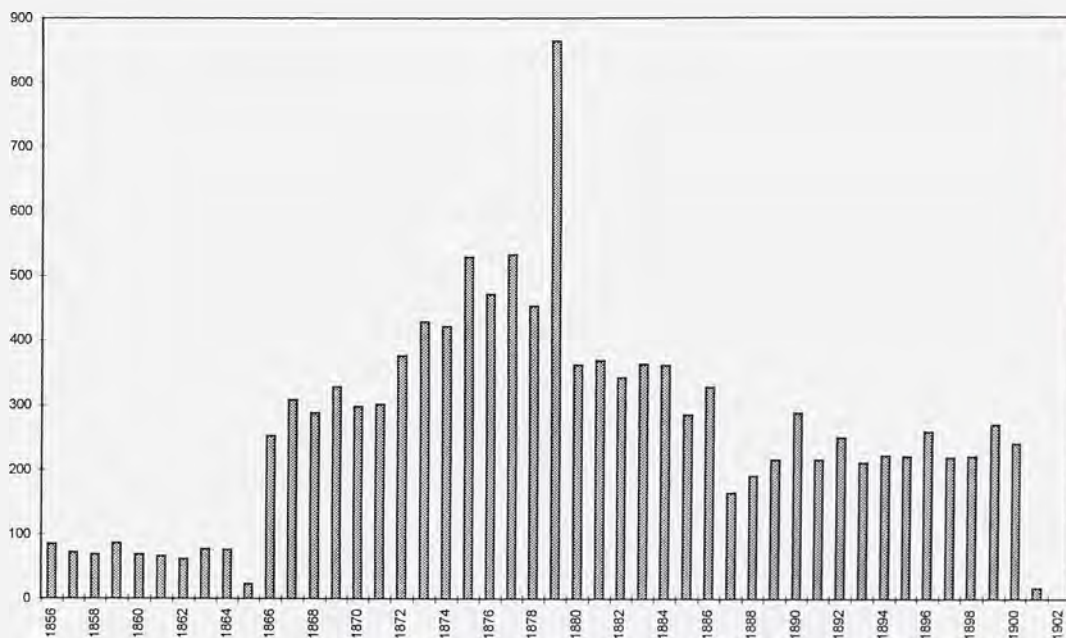


Fig. 6. Annual income (£) from admission charges, 1856–1901.

non-charging days. The revenue gained from admission charges is shown in fig. 6. Evening opening proved particularly popular on free days, often attracting over 50% of the total number of visitors for the year.<sup>34</sup> On 14 January 1875, a new section of the Museum was formally opened, and in 1877 visitor facilities were increased by the provision of a licensed refreshment room, although the serving of alcohol attracted some protests.<sup>35</sup> A third section of the Museum, the final portion of the original design for the building, was opened in 1889. Further additions to the building incorporating additional public display space were added in the twentieth century (see fig. 3).

Student use of the collections increased greatly in the 1870s, although the sparsity of data prevents identification of the exact timing of this increase (fig. 7). The increased student utilisation seemed to reflect the changing emphasis within the industrial collections away from raw materials and processes to the finished products and associated decorative arts,

thereby attracting students of the arts in addition to the previous student clientele.<sup>36</sup>

On 4 May 1897 the then Director, Sir Robert Murdoch Smith, gave evidence before a Select Committee on Museums of the Science and Art Department. He explained the rationale for the selection of free days: Wednesday was Edinburgh's market day, and Friday and Saturday were days on which school pupils were likely to have free time. The two hours early evening closed time on Friday and Saturday allowed a rest period for the staff and was considered essential because of shortage of staff. When the Committee enquired whether the annual door receipts on charging days, which by then totalled only £250–300 per year, justified the expense and inconvenience of its collection, Smith admitted that it did not but that the primary purpose of imposing a fee was to deter the public from visiting, so that the collections could be studied by students. He admitted that charges had been the subject of

ADMISSION CHARGES FOR THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

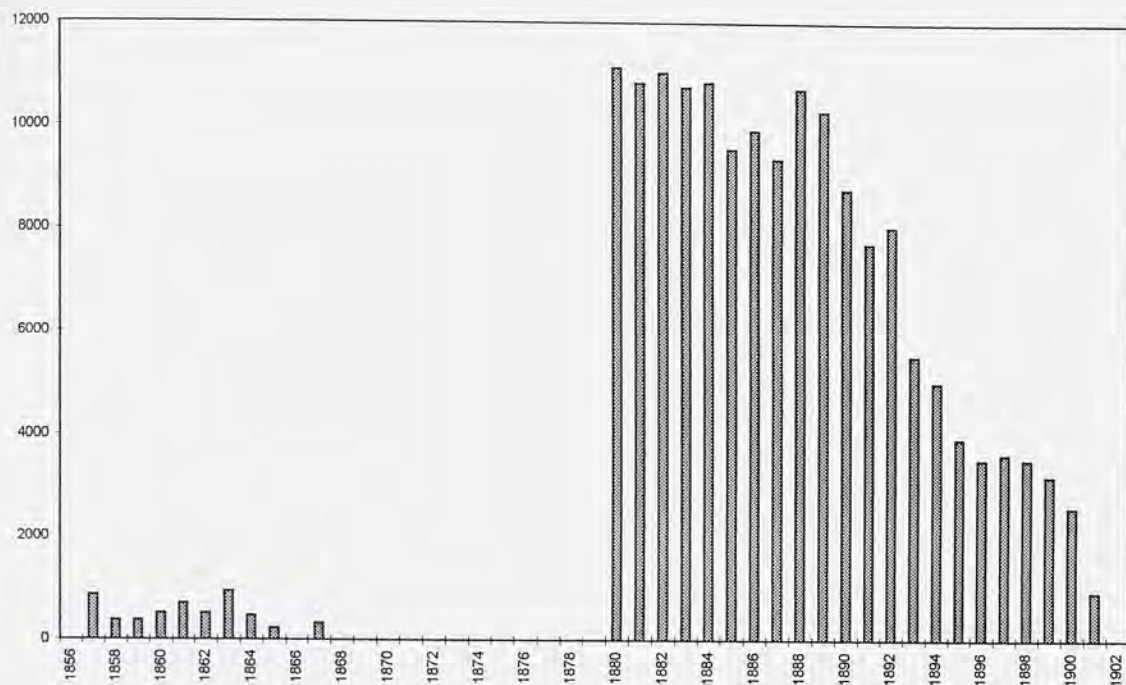


Fig. 7. Number of student visits each year (no data available for 1868–79, and no separate record of student visits kept after abolition of admission charges in 1901).

adverse press comment and thought that it would actually inconvenience students little if the Museum were made entirely free to the public.<sup>37</sup> In fact, as can be seen from fig. 7, by the 1890s the number of students using the collections had been reducing year on year, possibly because changes in university teaching made museum specimens less relevant. Smith also noted that he had recently taken the decision to close the refreshment rooms, as the licensing issue was 'always a troublesome one in Edinburgh' and he saw no need for the Museum to provide refreshments, alcoholic or otherwise. The Select Committee seemed keen to recommend Sunday opening, to bring the Edinburgh Museum in line with practice in London – Parliament having voted in favour of Sunday opening in March 1896. However, Smith felt that there was likely to be considerable opposition to such a move in Edinburgh. In its Second Report the Select

Committee concluded that it saw no reason why the public should have to pay for admission on three days in the week.<sup>38</sup> The Select Committee's questioning of Smith had indicated that they were somewhat critical of the early evening closed time. On 28 May 1898, even before the Select Committee's report was published, the Museum's opening hours were changed so that it remained open continuously on a Saturday from 10 am to 10 pm.

There was a growing press campaign for free entry to the Museum. For example, under the title 'The Industrial Museum' the *Evening Dispatch* of 27 April 1899 carried a letter signed Scrutator: 'The weekly returns of attendance at this great public institution furnish food for grave reflection as to the wisdom (or otherwise) of making Monday, Tuesday and Thursday pay days'. Scrutator reviewed the attendance figures for two weeks, one at the end of February and the other in mid April. In the first of

these weeks there were 163 paying and 5978 non-paying visitors, and in the second 94 and 7127 respectively. He observed that:

During eighteen pay hours the visitors averaged nine and five respectively; while the eighteen free hours showed that the average was 124 and 209 during the same space of time. This proves plainly enough that the charge of 6d acts as a deterrent to public use of this noble building and its valuable collections.

About this same time the question of Sunday opening of museums also became a topic of public debate. It had proved popular in England and organisations such as the Edinburgh Sunday Society lobbied for its introduction in Edinburgh.<sup>39</sup> Their views were opposed by various church organisations, notably the Sabbath Alliance in Scotland.

On 1 April 1901 administration of the Museum passed to the Scottish Education Department. It implemented the recommendations of the Select Committee and abolished admission charges. It also opened the Museum on Sunday afternoons, and late evening opening was moved from Friday to Wednesday.<sup>40</sup> Sunday opening gave rise to a formal protest from the General Committee of the Sabbath Alliance in Scotland; but despite this, and a lively correspondence in the local press, it was retained.<sup>41</sup> In July 1907, Museum opening hours were extended to 5 pm on weekdays to allow school teachers and pupils to visit the Museum after their classes.<sup>42</sup> Following the Great War, opening hours were again revised. With the deteriorating economic climate of the 1930s, the Treasury demanded the abandonment of the late evening opening for a brief period in 1931. Shortly afterwards, however, Saturday evening opening was reintroduced (see fig. 8). Efforts to increase attendance on Saturday evenings included fortnightly illustrated lectures.

Although there was no general entrance charge to the Museum, a charge was made for certain

temporary exhibitions. The exhibition of Coronation Robes held between August and October 1937 seems to have been the first for which there was an entrance charge. Admission to the exhibition was 2s 6d on Tuesdays, 1s on all other days. A special rate of 6d was available on Saturday evenings and this evening opening proved so popular that, for the last week of its showing, the exhibition was open each evening until 10 pm. The imposition of different charges on different days and times was a mechanism for managing attendance by deterring large crowds on certain days, so that those prepared to pay a higher fee could enjoy the exhibition in relative peace. Proceeds from the exhibition and from the sale of catalogues and souvenirs, over £4000, were donated to the King George V Memorial Trust for Playing Fields in Scotland.

With the outbreak of war, the Museum closed to the public on 2 September 1939 and much of the collection was evacuated. Throughout hostilities the building was used by the Department of Health for Scotland, but even before the war had ended parts of the building were opened for exhibitions. The first of these was an American exhibition, organised by the Office of Information and the War Office, which opened in August 1943. In 1945 the Department of Health vacated the building and it was returned to Museum use. As the Museum staff came back from military service they gradually set about returning the collections to display. Much work was needed to convert the building back to museum use and in re-designing and installing the permanent displays. During this period of refurbishment and redecoration a number of other temporary exhibitions were mounted, mostly organised by external agencies. Gradually, over the next few years, the permanent collections were returned and exhibited in newly designed displays, but the programme of temporary exhibitions also continued. One of these temporary





**ROYAL SCOTTISH  
MUSEUM**  
CHAMBERS ST. EDINBURGH.

OPEN DAILY, free of charge, from 10-0 a.m. to 5-0 p.m.  
on Wednesdays & Saturdays to 9-0 p.m. Sundays, 2-0 to 5-0 p.m.  
Lectures daily, (except on Sundays) from 3-30 to 4-30 p.m.  
on Wednesdays & Saturdays also from 7-30 to 8-30 p.m.

\* ART \*

Egyptian & Assyrian Antiquities; Ceramics & Glass of all ages;  
Furniture, Plate, Ironwork, Woodwork, Textiles, Arms and Armour;  
Coins, Medals, and Ethnographical Collections.

\* NATURAL HISTORY \*

Beasts, Birds, Reptiles, Fishes, Insects, Shell-fish & other creatures  
of the seas. Life-groups; Fossils; Models of Extinct Monsters, &  
special collections of British Fauna.

\* TECHNOLOGY \*

Working models of Engines, Turbines & Locomotives; Models of  
Aeroplanes, Ships, Mines, Lighthouses, Bridges, and Waterworks;  
Telegraphs, Telephones & Radio; Clocks and Watches.

\* GEOLOGY \*

Scottish Minerals, Rocks, Fossils & Agates. Collections of H.M.  
Geological Survey, Gemstones; Geological Maps, and Models.

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Fig. 8. Advertising poster for the Royal Scottish Museum in the 1930s. (National Museums of Scotland; Neg. no. 20806).

exhibitions, Mediaeval Yugoslav Frescoes, staged to coincide with the Edinburgh Festival of 1953, was co-sponsored by the Edinburgh Festival Society. It was the first of the post-war temporary exhibitions for which an entrance charge was made. Another Festival-sponsored exhibition, Byzantine Art, took place in 1958. Although admission cost 2s 6d, it attracted such large numbers of visitors that opening hours had to be extended temporarily to 9 pm each evening with the exhibition remaining open until 11 pm on Thursdays.

In August 1965 new refreshment facilities were added in the form of a Tea Room.<sup>43</sup> In its first full year of operation it had over 185,000 customers and by the following year over a quarter of a million were served. As the Tea Room had its own entrance from the street, visitors to the Tea Room may or may not have also visited the Museum, but they no doubt contributed to the boost in recorded visitor numbers from 1966 onwards (see fig. 4). Not until 1974 was there another charging exhibition. In August and September of that year the wedding dress of HRH Princess Anne was displayed and, at her request, proceeds from admission charges, amounting to more than £3500, were donated to charity. A second more extensive exhibition of royal bridal wear, HRH The Bride, was staged in 1979 and again a charge was made for entry, proceeds this time being donated to the Save the Children Fund. It is perhaps of interest to note (see fig. 4) that the three major peak attendance figures corresponded to years in which the Museum held temporary exhibitions of material associated with the British royal family: 1879 – Gifts received by the future King Edward VII during his visit to India; 1937 – Coronation Robes; 1979 – Royal Bridal Gowns.

In line with government policy, a general admission charge to the Museum, along with all other national museums and galleries in the UK, was

imposed in January 1974.<sup>44</sup> This national charge was 10p (to be increased to 20p during July and August) and was introduced as a revenue earning measure.<sup>45</sup> Children under three years of age were admitted free, certain other categories of visitor were admitted at the concessionary rate of 5p and students could apply to the Museum for a free pass. Admission on Sunday was free, but it was proposed to extend charging to Sundays from mid-June to mid-September.<sup>46</sup> An annual ticket, priced at £1 (50p concession), allowed admission to all 18 national institutions in the UK. The charges were identified as the cause of the reduction in visitor numbers in 1974,<sup>47</sup> but no analysis of visitor figures or of revenue generated from the sale of tickets seems to have been published.<sup>48</sup> With the change of government, however, the admission charge was abolished at the end of March 1974. Since then entry to the Museum has been free, although an admission charge has been levied for entry to some temporary exhibitions, particularly those featuring material borrowed from other institutions. In recent years, admission figures for the Chambers Street building have climbed steadily to approach historical peak attendances.

One consequence of the abolition of charges in 1974 was that national museums ceased to be traders in terms of their status regarding value added tax (VAT). Although the objective of the current proposal to charge for entry to the Royal Museum is to gain revenue, the principal issue is not the additional income from sale of tickets but the very substantial financial gain from the consequent entitlement to reclaim VAT. This tax forms a significant part of a museum's outlay which, under present legislation, those museums that maintain free admission are unable to reclaim. Hence this financial advantage requires the imposition of only a modest charge, allowing the collections to remain accessible to as wide an audience as possible.



Although the current financial and cultural climate is very different from that of last century, or even from that of the mid 1970s, it is nonetheless salutary to reflect on the aims and objectives of past charging policies and their effects on the pattern of usage of the Museum's displays. At the present time, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport is undertaking a review of museum and gallery charging policies in general and the role of VAT in particular, and a spokesperson for the NMS explained that 'our hope is that Government will give us the concession on VAT that we need, but if not then we will have no choice but to introduce charges'.<sup>49</sup>

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- 1 *Admission Charges*, a double-sided leaflet issued to museum visitors by the Department of Public Affairs, National Museums of Scotland, September 1997.
- 2 The obligation to provide free admission applies to all museums established under the provisions of the Public Libraries Consolidation (Scotland) Act 1887.
- 3 Robert Jameson, in *Evidence, Oral and Documentary, taken and received by the Commissioners ... for Visiting the Universities of Scotland*, vol. I, *University of Edinburgh* (London 1837), p. 616.
- 4 Editorial, 'Museums and the National Interest', *Scotsman*, 30 August 1997.
- 5 This paper concerns only fees charged for access to the collections of specimens and does not cover fees such as the 3d charged about the turn of the century for admission to the library, or such other fees as may have been charged for access to other parts of the Museum or for specialist services (see [*Royal Scottish Museum*], *General Instructions [to staff]*, c. 1910, NMS Library Archive).
- 6 See, for example, D. F. Cameron and D. S. Abbey, 'Museum Audience Research: The Effects of an Admission Fee', *Museum News*, 41, no. 3 (1962), pp. 25–28; M. O'Hare, 'Why do People go to Museums? The Effect of Prices and Hours on Museum Utilization', *Museum*, 27, no. 3 (1975), pp. 134–146.
- 7 See R. G. W. Anderson, 'Attendances', in *Royal Scottish Museum Triennial Report, 1971–1973* (1973).
- 8 *Calendar and General Directory, Supplement to the Report of the Science and Art Department, 1884*.
- 9 For an account of the building of the Natural History Museum at the west end of the new University building in 1817–20 see Andrew G. Fraser, *The Building of Old College: Adam, Playfair and the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1989), pp. 191–209.
- 10 NMS Library Archive, MSS Daily and Weekly Report Books of the Natural History Museum of the University of Edinburgh.
- 11 J. M. Sweet, 'The Collection of Louis Dufresne (1752–1832)', *Annals of Science*, 26 (1970), pp. 33–71.
- 12 Jameson, *Evidence*, p. 490. At 1997 values 2s 6d is equivalent to approximately £5.20. Conversions to May 1997 prices are based on data from National Statistics, Consumer Prices and General Inflation Division (personal communication, Denis McDevitt). These conversions are approximations and should be treated with caution, especially those for last century, as the basis for calculating Retail Price Index (and predecessor values) has changed over the years.
- 13 Jameson, *Evidence*, p. 145.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 490.
- 15 NMS Library Archive, Daily Report Book, June 1829 – July 1830.



- 16 Jameson. *Evidence*, p. 141.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 631.
- 18 NMS Library Archive, Account received from Messrs MacLachlan, Stewart & Co. in Daily Report Book, June 1848 – November 1848.
- 19 Edinburgh City Archives, Town Council Minutes, 231, August–December 1839, pp. 212, 452.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 242, May–November 1844, p. 325.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 256, April–November 1851, p. 385.
- 22 For a detailed history of the campaign for a public museum see C. D. Waterston, *Collections in Context: The Museum of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Inception of a National Museum for Scotland* (National Museums of Scotland. Edinburgh, in press).
- 23 The development of extra museum space in attic accommodation above the east entrance to the University building is recorded in Fraser, *Old College*, p. 223; for the transfer of the University collections to the new national museum see pp. 281–285.
- 24 NMS Library Archive, Daily Report Book, 31 January 1852.
- 25 Elsewhere Jameson argued that additional funding of £500 per year would be required to meet the running costs and in the form of curatorial assistance and the extra security staff required to supervise the anticipated increase in visitor numbers (NMS Library Archive, Daily Report Book, 24 February 1852).
- 26 L. Jameson, 'Biographical Memoir of the late Professor Jameson, Regius Professor of Natural History, Lecturer in Mineralogy, and Keeper of the Museum of the University of Edinburgh', *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal*, 57 (1854), pp. 1–49.
- 27 NMS Library Archive, Daily Report Book, April 1852.
- 28 A. C. Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment – A Social History* (London 1976), p. 226.
- 29 See Waterston, *Collections in Context*.
- 30 NMS Library Archive, Daily Report Book, 19 February 1852. The figures themselves are not included in the report.
- 31 Edinburgh University Library, Senate Minutes, 4 April 1854.
- 32 In 1857 the Department of Science and Art was transferred from the Board of Trade to the Committee on Education.
- 33 *Directory of the Industrial Museum of Scotland, and of the Natural History Museum, Edinburgh* (London undated): 6d in 1855 is equivalent to approximately £2.40 at 1997 values.
- 34 See visitor figures published in the *Annual* (and *Triennial Reports* of the Museum.
- 35 For example, see *Scotsman*, 8 June 1877.
- 36 See *Scotsman*, 17 February 1881.
- 37 *Minutes of Evidence, First Report from the Select Committee on Museums of the Science and Art Department, 1897*.
- 38 *Second Report from the Select Committee on Museums of the Science and Art Department, 1898*.
- 39 For example, see *Scotsman*, 27 April 1899.
- 40 With the abolition of charges, attendance rose from 23,923 (of whom only 187 paid) in March, to 40,522 in April.
- 41 For example, see *Scotsman*, 8 March 1901.
- 42 *Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh: Guide to the Mineral Collection* (Edinburgh 1910).
- 43 A liquor licence was granted in January 1996 (Alastair Rome, personal communication.).
- 44 Under powers granted by Museums and Galleries Admission Charges Act 1972 as modified by The Museums and Galleries (Variation of Instruments) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 1973.
- 45 The rationale for charging in relation to government policy towards Arts and Heritage was discussed by A. Peacock and C. Godfrey, 'The Economics of Museums and Galleries', *Lloyds Bank Review*, no. 111 (January 1974), pp. 17–28: 10p in 1974 is equivalent to approximately 62p at 1997 values.
- 46 See *Royal Scottish Museum, Instructions to Staff on Introduction of Admission Charges*, double-sided leaflet, December 1973, NMS Library.
- 47 N. Tebble, 'Attendances over 100 years', in *Royal Scottish Museum Triennial Report 1974–1976* (1976).
- 48 The Director estimated that the period of charging had resulted in a reduction in visitor figures of 100,000 (NMS Directorate archive, letter, Tebble to Kidd, 20 August 1974, Director's file 3.0.4, Attendances).
- 49 Quoted in *Scotsman*, 30 August 1997.