



the road to 2009

The National Burns Collection:
a touchstone for Scotland's National Poet
and inspiration for her people

This document sets out recommendations to ensure that the National Burns Collection fulfils its potential at the heart of Robert Burns's 250th anniversary in 2009. It identifies priorities for partnership to ensure the long-term survival of the National Burns Collection, not just as a unique part of Scotland's heritage, but also as a source of inspiration for future generations.

To preserve this unique treasure, commitment is needed, both from the museums, libraries and archives that care for Burns's legacy and also from national agencies and government.

The commitment needed from museums, galleries, libraries and archives:

- Effective joint-working, to share resources, raise standards and extend public access
- Collaborative capital projects to improve conservation and access
- Joint education and audience development initiatives
- A framework to support nation-wide events

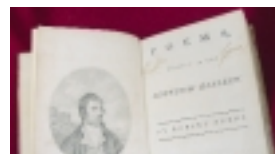
The commitment needed from Scotland:

- Long-term funding for the preservation of Scotland's Burns heritage
- Resources to develop curatorial and conservation capacity
- Resources to develop and sustain education, audience development and marketing of Scotland's Burns heritage

An International Treasure

The year 2009 marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of Scotland's National Bard, Robert Burns, and is a year of homecoming for Scots worldwide. Burns is an iconic figure. His 250th anniversary is a unique opportunity to celebrate the Poet's contribution to Scotland and Scotland's contribution to the world.

The Bard's distinctive gift to the world is nowhere more real than in the surviving manuscripts, books, art and artefacts that testify to the poet's life and preserve his spirit. These items, held by museums, galleries, libraries and archives across Scotland, together form the distributed National Burns Collection.



a foundation for partnership

Launched in October 2003, with funding from the Strategic Change Fund, the Distributed National Burns Collections Project has drawn together an unprecedented partnership of independent, local authority and national museums, galleries, libraries and archives to find ways of working together to preserve and improve access to the National Burns Collection.

Thanks to this partnership, the project has:

- Carried out a survey of over 36,000 Burns objects held in 38 different sites, mapping the extent and capacity of the distributed collection
- Created a shared online database of the most important Burns treasures
- Organised training in preservation and created networks for sharing conservation and curatorial expertise
- Launched a new, content-rich website, www.burnsscotland.com
- Created an education pack, using the distributed collection to support the 5-14 curriculum
- Published a guidebook to Burns Collections in Scotland and a promotional tourist brochure covering all the main National Burns Collection sites
- Published a 7-volume illustrated anthology of Burns Manuscripts for project partners and research libraries
- Generated in-kind support to match and exceed project funding
- Identified priorities for action

(left to right)

Set of excise scales used by Robert Burns. Ellisland Farm Trust
 Robert Burns' writing desk. Writers' Museum
 Stock-and-horn. National Museums of Scotland
 Forbidden Fruit: collection of tales. Dunfermline Carnegie Library
 Plaster cast of the skull of Robert Burns. Writers' Museum
 Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect. Dublin 1787. Dunfermline Carnegie Library

(opposite page, left to right)

Burns and Highland Mary by Thomas Faed. Glasgow Museums Service
 Uniform jacket Royal Dumfriesshire Volunteers. Dumfries and Galloway Museums Service
 Masonic Maul. The Grand Lodge of Antient Free and Accepted Masons of Scotland
 Tam o'Shanter illustrated by John Faed (1855). National Library of Scotland, Acc.7083

a national challenge

While much has been achieved during a relatively short period, the project has identified key challenges to ensure the long-term survival of the National Burns Collection and to maximise the benefits of public access.

The National Burns Collection is widely distributed, with over 70% of items held by non-national organisations. Independent sector organisations care for over 50% of the most significant part of the collection. The collection is housed in a variety of buildings, many of which are themselves part of Burns's heritage. The project has identified excellent examples of creative re-interpretation of the collection to support learning and build new audiences. At the same time, however, there is a lack of consistency, reflecting the distributed nature of the collection and a general lack of regular access to expertise in critical areas of collections care, education, access and marketing.

priorities for action are:

Preservation. A national preservation strategy is required to prioritise investment in areas of greatest need, to ensure standards of preservation across the collection and to rationalise collections management to the benefit of all partners and secure the future of historic buildings.

Capacity. Access to curatorial support is a prerequisite for developing and sustaining the collection. Consistent, reliable and inter-operable collections information is critical to realising the full potential of the collection to support learning and access. Joint initiatives, such as the shared collections database, need to be sustained beyond the life of the current project.

Learning. The national collection can be a highly effective inspiration for learning. Access to professional education staff is needed to develop and deliver a programme of high quality learning opportunities to suit a wide range of people. The collection's connection to the spoken word



and music make it particularly suited to multimedia and e-learning applications. A framework for learning across the collection should be developed to provide the main educational focus and structure for the 2009 celebrations.

Public Access. Consistent standards need to be established across the collection. Initiatives such as the website need to be sustained to facilitate remote access. Investment is required to ensure that buildings meet modern access requirements. An access strategy needs to be developed within the wider context of local infrastructure and integrated planning.

Marketing. Joint marketing of the collection needs to be sustained. Access to expertise is required to maximise opportunities for revenue generation. Joined-up planning of events is required, with a view to fulfilling the Burns Collection's potential to be at the heart of the 2009 celebrations. Effective communication with VisitScotland and other agencies is needed to better coordinate the development of Burns heritage as part of Scotland's tourist product.

meeting the challenge

What can the National Burns Collection partners do?

The National Burns Collection project partners have established a foundation for working together. It is important that the momentum generated by the project is sustained.

The project partners are committed to working collaboratively to:

Preservation.

- Share conservation expertise wherever limited resources allow, prioritising available conservation advice and assistance to reflect the needs of the most significant items, facing the greatest risk
- Develop a disaster-planning network to ensure the survival of critical parts of the collection

Capacity.

- Work together to raise standards across the collection; encouraging and advising non-registered museums to achieve accredited museum standards.
- Co-operate and collaborate on the preparation of capital bids to preserve collections, buildings and to improve access
- Plan and deliver joint training activities; encourage shared places on courses for project partners; deliver tailored training activities and provide familiarisation visits

Learning.

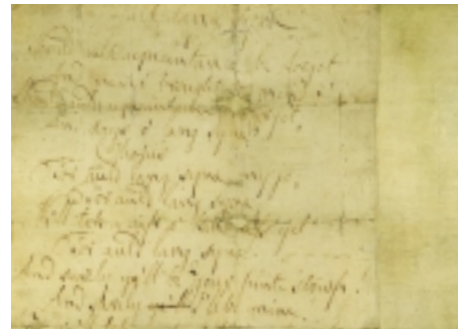
- Jointly promote the *Discover Burns* schools resources across Scotland and share examples of best practice in learning
- Share education expertise, where resources allow, and work collaboratively to involve communities in learning

Public Access.

- Draw up a concordat for collecting, exhibiting and lending Burns material to open up the widest public access
- Collaborate to share digital resources to extend public access and support e-learning projects
- Draw up a shared access statement setting out the citizen's entitlement to high quality access to the National Burns Collection

Marketing.

- To maintain up to date information on the National Burns Collection website
- To meet regularly to discuss shared audience development and marketing issues – including joint marketing initiatives on regional and local levels
- To work in partnership to develop Burns-themed exhibitions and events



meeting the challenge

What can Scotland do?

While the future of the National Burns Collection can only be secured through the commitment of those organisations and individuals with a duty of stewardship to it, there remains a need for national support – to match the national significance of the collection. There is a lot that can be achieved through the support of the Scottish Executive, National Organisations and Non-Departmental Public Bodies, not least in helping to develop the structures that can sustain the progress made by the project and provide a firm base for future work.

In particular these agencies have the strategic overview, expertise and funding to help:

- Provide long-term funding to sustain the National Burns Collection
- Formally recognise the distributed National Burns Collection (within the context of a broader scheme for designation of Scottish collections) and create a structure for its continuing co-ordination
- Identify resources to provide access to professional curatorial, conservation and education expertise for the National Burns Collection
- Support the development of capital bids to address priority areas
- Broker learning opportunities with Education Authorities, Cultural Co-ordinators and Community Learning Agencies to extend their impact
- Identify sources of revenue funding for joint marketing and development of the National Burns Collection website

meeting the challenge together

Combining national investment with the commitment and creativity of the diverse organisations who care for the National Burns Collection can ensure that, when the eyes of the world are on Scotland, on the Bard's 250th birthday in 2009, Scotland has a truly international treasure of which to be proud.

(above, left to right) 'In hell they'll roast thee like a herring' by Alexander Goudie.
Rozelle House Art Gallery and Museum
Auld Lang Syne - Robert Burns. Glasgow Libraries, Information and Learning Mitchell Library

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The DNBC Project is a 16 month Strategic Change Fund (SCF) initiative to encourage organisations holding artefacts associated with Robert Burns to work together to improve stewardship of, and access to, a significant distributed national collection. The SCF is funded by the Scottish Executive and managed by the Scottish Museums Council.

