

THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Fact Sheet



Greek Influences On The Museum

In the Hellenistic period (323 - 30 B.C.) a Greek centre of learning developed at Alexandria. The building that housed this institution was dedicated to the nine muses, the deities thought to inspire man's creative and intellectual pursuits. This, the first museum, became a centre for research and attracted scholars of many disciplines from all over the Greek world.

It is from this classical base that the concept of the modern museum has developed. Museums, which are usually public buildings, often echo the classical root of civic pride. The Fitzwilliam Museum's building can therefore be seen as an example of Ancient Greek values carried through into modern society.

The origins of the collections which were eventually bequeathed to the Museum are also relevant to children who are learning about ancient classical cultures. The collections often began as groups of objects acquired by young gentlemen on 'The Grand Tour', which was an integral part of a 17th or 18th century classical education. Young men, who would have had a working knowledge of Greek, Latin and the history, philosophy, mathematics and literature of the ancient world, visited classical sites to complete their education.

Some began collections of ancient objects whilst on tour which were then continued and expanded at home, long beyond their youth. In the case of the Fitzwilliam, as with many other museums, the collection began with one major bequest. In 1816, Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam - whose portrait can be seen in Gallery 3 - donated his fine art collection, library and £90,000 to Cambridge University.

The objects that children come to see are evidence of an original ancient culture, but also clarify the very reason they are learning about it: namely that classical cultures have had a lasting influence on learning, discovery and society through the ages.

The Museum Building

The main entrance to the Fitzwilliam Museum is a fine example of the Neo-classical style of architecture. Inspired by the buildings of Ancient Greece and Rome, the architect George Basevi designed 'a temple' of the arts to house the collection of Viscount Fitzwilliam. The building was begun in 1837 and opened to the public in 1848.

Typical elements of classical architecture can be seen on the outside of the main entrance. Greek temples were built with pitched roofs which left a triangular gable, a *pediment*. As at the

Fitzwilliam, pediments were often decorated with groups of statues, Those that can be seen here represent the nine Muses, the daughters of Zeus and Memory.

The Muses are:

Calliope	muse of heroic epic poetry
Clio	muse of history
Euterpe	muse of flutes
Melpomene	muse of tragedy
Terpsichore	muse of choral dance and song
Erato	muse of lyric poetry
Polyhymnia	muse of mimic art
Urania	muse of astronomy
Thalia	muse of comedy and pastoral poetry

The columns supporting the pediment are in the Corinthian style, as can be seen from the capital of acanthus leaves that tops each column. Greek temples were originally built of mud bricks on a stone foundation but were later constructed entirely of stone. The columns were made from drum shaped sections and held together with wooden pins. Greek technology enabled the builders to make use of pulley systems to raise large blocks of stone.

The interior of the entrance hall is also classically inspired. The statues are all from the 18th and 19th centuries and depict various characters from classical mythology including Psyche, Venus and Bacchus. At the top of the stairs the columns framing the entrance to Gallery 3 are female in shape and are known as *caryatids*. Inside Gallery 3, at ceiling height, is a plaster cast of the Parthenon frieze at Athens showing a procession in honour of the goddess Athena, to whom that temple was dedicated.

The following selection of buildings near the Museum also show classical influences:

Fitzwilliam House, Trumpington Street
Browns Restaurant, Trumpington Street
Peterhouse Chapel, Trumpington Street
Pembroke College, Trumpington Street
The Senate House, Kings Parade
Holiday Inn Hotel, Downing Street
Downing College, St. Andrew's Street