

The Kids Report: Getting in touch with the past

An exhibition mounted for Museums and Galleries month is a uniquely interactive experience deserving a bigger scale.

Young journalists from Children's Express tell us what they thought of Museums and Galleries Month events around the country.

The Ulster Museum, Belfast

It took me quite a while to overcome normal museum etiquette and actually pick up an item.

Museums are all about looking and learning and not about touching and experiencing, at least that was my impression before attending the Getting In Touch With The Past exhibition in the Ulster Museum Belfast.

Exhibition might be over stating it a bit as this was minimalist in its approach. Just a room with a series of wooden tables adorned with various artefacts, clothes actually, that you were encouraged to lift and explore for yourself.

It was strange at first not to see these artefacts hidden away inside a glass box or cordoned off by a velvet rope. It took me quite a while to overcome normal museum etiquette to actually pick up an item and, in the case of a certain hat, put it on!

It was something of a change of culture for the Ulster museum, which is normally all darkened rooms and specially lit cabinets that educe reverential silence. Instead, this was a full-on interactive experience that allowed everyone a unique opportunity, in a small way, to live in the past.

The most impressive aspect of the display was how it managed to capture the attention of the young people who were there. There was a lot of laughter, larking about and generally pretending to be historical figures the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The kids fought with each other to get to wear the various garments and pose for classmates' photographs.

Museum attendants were noticeable by their absence.

The success of the "Getting in touch with the past" exhibition highlighted the need for a more interactive approach from the Ulster museum and it is unfortunate that this exhibition was both minimalist and a one off.

As I left the museum I could only dream of one day handling the Spanish treasure from the wreck of the Armada or waving a cutlass above my head.

About the team

This story was produced by Drew Mikhael, 18, a member of Children's Express Belfast Bureau. It was published in the Museums Journal. For more reviews, see column, left.

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