

## Period Rooms (Barnard Castle, 19–20 Sep 14)

The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, County Durham, Sep 19–20, 2014

Deadline: Mar 31, 2014

Mark Westgarth

Call for Papers for a conference at the Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, County Durham on 19th and 20th September 2014. The conference focuses on 'The Period Room' and we invite proposals for papers from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives.

The Period Room: Museum, Material, Experience

Since the late 19th century the Period Room has been a consistent presence in the public museum, and yet over the past 25 years the Period Room has become a contentious museum object, leading many museums to question the legitimacy of the Period Room as an effective and appropriate method of display and interpretation. As dislocated fragments, often remodelled to fit the spaces of the museum, the Period Room is, for some, a signifier for the inauthentic, an outmoded method of display and a representation of unfashionable museum interpretation. The problems associated with Period Rooms are exacerbated by the fact that they are large and bulky objects, difficult and expensive to redisplay or reinterpret. Many museums retain their Period Room displays, but the recent changes in the perspectives on Period Rooms have also led a number of museums in the UK, Europe and the USA to reconsider their continued relevance as museum objects, to dismantle and deaccession the displays, and in some cases to repatriate the Period Rooms to their places of origin (if that still exists of course).

This conference, held at the Bowes Museum, which redisplayed its own collection of Period Rooms in 2007-10, aims to consider the Period Room from a wide variety of perspectives in order to address some key questions about Period Rooms and the history of Period Rooms display in Museums: Should Period Rooms be considered objects in their own right, or merely 'contexts' for related material? How, and in what ways, did Period Rooms satisfy ideas of museum interpretation, and how and why did these attitudes change? What was the role of the evolving frameworks of national/local heritage in the appearance of Period Rooms in museums? What were/are the theoretical, technical and aesthetic frameworks for the display of Period Rooms in museums? How, and in what ways, is the

Period Room different from, or similar to, the Historic Interior?

We invite papers to explore these themes and relationships from a wide range of perspectives and from a wide range of organisations, institutions and disciplines, from academics (historians, art historians, literary and film historians), museum curators and professionals, exhibition designers, technicians and craft-workers):

Themes for consideration may include:

The processes of the circulation, display and redisplay of Period Rooms – the dealers, merchants, decorators, collectors, and museum curators and their roles in the changing taste for the Period Room.

Case Studies of Period Rooms – the history of specific displays in museums and other public institutions; their provenance, removal and reconstruction; display and interpretation.

The philosophical history of the Period Room as a particular mode of engagement with the past - as an historical space, as a space of historical empathy, and as an immersive environment.

The material and technical aspects of Period Room display; the challenges of redisplay in museum contexts, what the objects reveal about the history of their making and the history of museum interpretation.

The 'Period Room' in literature, film and visual culture; how was/is the Period Room/Historic Interior imagined, and what can these perspectives tell us about how we engage with the Period Room in the museum?

Please send abstracts of no more than 400 words to the conference organisers:

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Dr Howard Coutts (The Bowes Museum)[howard.coutts@thebowesmuseum.org.uk](mailto:howard.coutts@thebowesmuseum.org.uk)

Closing Date for Abstracts: 31st March 2014.

Reference:

CFP: Period Rooms (Barnard Castle, 19-20 Sep 14). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 21, 2014 (accessed Apr 5, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/6813>>.