

Museum of Childhood

PRESS RELEASE

140th Anniversary of the Museum
25 February – 8 July 2012

This February a selection of photographs and architectural drawings will be displayed at the V&A Museum of Childhood to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the Museum opening in Bethnal Green. A Museum of Art and Science was officially opened by the Prince of Wales on 24 June 1872.



Opening of the Museum (detail)
Illustrated London News 29 June 1872.

The framework of the Museum building was originally sited in west London where it had been the founding building of the Albertopolis of south Kensington. Dismantled section by section it was brought across the city by teams of horses and carts. A descendent of the 1851 Great Exhibition and constructed in the same way as the Crystal Palace, with iron columns and girders, it is one of the earliest surviving examples of a pre-fabricated iron-frame building.

In Bethnal Green the original corrugated iron cladding was replaced with red brick, following designs by architect James Wild. On the north and south façade, friezes of mosaic panels illustrating science, art and agriculture were designed by Frank Moody. Inside, the marble floor tiles made by women in Woking Prison were laid in a fish scale pattern. The ambitious plans for the entrance by Wild were never realised, however an elaborate Majolica fountain designed by John Thomas from Minton, previously part of the 1862 exhibition, was installed at the front entrance.

When the Museum opened, paintings from the Wallace Collection were exhibited in the top gallery and a visit by Vincent Van Gogh was documented. Other displays included an anthropological collection lent by Pitt Rivers and animal and food products (some of which came from the Great Exhibition). The Museum was a cultural focus for the people of the East End and proved a great success, with over 1.5 million visitors recorded in the first year of opening. The transition from Bethnal Green Museum to Museum of Childhood started with the curator Sir Arthur Sabin during the 1920s and was officially acknowledged in the change of name in 1974 while Sir Roy Strong was Director of the V&A.

ENDS

Note to Editors

Images are available to download from <http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk>

V&A Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9PA
Admission free. Open daily: 10.00 – 17.45, last admission 17.30
Nearest tube: Bethnal Green. 24 hour information: 020 8983 5235
Switchboard: 020 8983 5200 Website: www.museumofchildhood.org.uk