

National Museum of Rural Life & the Royal Highland Show

Each year the Museum of Rural Life (part of the National Museums Scotland) develops a temporary exhibition to be displayed at the Royal Highland Show. This 4-day event, which takes place in June, is Scotland's largest outdoor event and attracts approximately 150,000 visitors, so it's a great way to reach a huge audience.

Preparation: After a brainstorming session with our staff, a theme is selected which reflects the wide variety of topics covered by our museum. This year's exhibition is entitled '*The Eggs Factor!*' and with the aid of engaging text & images, museum objects, loaned artefacts & live hens - we're telling the story of egg production & retail in Scotland.

Previous displays have included a working steam traction engine and threshing mill; photographic exhibition; grannies washday; wartime food production & P.O.W.s & the good old petrol-paraffin grey Fergie. We've found that noise and movement is a great attraction that helps entice folk over to our marquee, so if you're thinking of doing such an event, a tractor for example, is a great draw. The steam traction engine was a huge hit with the visitors, but our near neighbours in their marquees were a little less than impressed with the amount of soot produced!

As you'd imagine there is quite a lot of preparation once the theme has been agreed: research; text writing; sourcing images & objects; arranging for loan insurance; 24 hr. security for the museum objects; hiring the stand and marquee; devising the staff rota; transporting of objects, staff and basic equipment i.e. chairs, tables, display boards, posters and other promotional material etc.

We always have a fun element to the display too, which includes competitions for the children and adults. This enables us to obtain names and addresses to help build our museum audiences & prizes always include a gift voucher for our museum shop and free museum event tickets, so we are encouraging more visitors. We also give away 'goody' bags for the children, this helps bring them over to our display and the bags contain lots of child-friendly give-aways plus promotional material, coded so we can see how many future visitors are efforts are bringing into the museum.

Such events are quite hard work, they tend to be long days with much chatting with the general public and those with specialists interests, but they are very enjoyable and worthwhile. Oh, one big lesson to learn, when I first started doing such shows (about 8 yrs ago) I used to write down all the public enquiries. Now I give out my business card so the onus is on them! I found that I was spending far too much time on enquiries that had just popped into folks' head as they looked around our displays and then just as quickly popped out again. So, not a good use of curatorial time!

Elaine Edwards,
Curator