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Families and Young Patrons at the The Morgan Library & Museum and Kelvin Hall

The many differences held between The Morgan Library & Museum in midtown New York City and Kelvin Hall at the Glasgow branch of the National Library of Scotland—two institutions worlds apart in their size, scope, and audience—limit a fair and thorough comparison. The Morgan, a single-donor museum turned “public,” offers a niche experience for New York’s more high-brow arts connoisseurs. Kelvin Hall, on the other hand, houses a moving image archive and library, museum, and gymnasium all under one roof. The two sites were chosen primarily to understand how they present and mitigate their museum and library-like qualities—what makes The Morgan a library, and how neatly does a gymnasium fit into an already-mixed cultural institution such as Kelvin Hall? Despite some crucial differences, the following study will focus on their general treatment of guests with a special focus on families and children. To attempt towards a fair comparison, the sites were visited on separate wintry Saturday afternoons in March; a high-traffic time, especially for young families looking for an indoor (i.e. warm) weekend activity. As a first-time visit to both institutions, my approach was to experience the respective spaces without any premeditated path, and take notes on any first impressions about the guests there. Based on these observations, an attempt will be made to highlight how the youngest of patrons (children) are treated at both sites. How are the respective spaces designed for them (furniture, displays), and can an institution’s financial health be inferred by how well these young visitors are welcomed?

The Morgan Library & Museum was built in 1906 to house the private book collection of American financier John Pierpont Morgan. In accordance with his father's dying wishes, J.P. Morgan Jr. made the library public in 1924. Through the "Library" aspect of its name, one might expect a lending library or at least a study area for the public, but neither one is the case. Instead, it is a museum of a library and the many rare books collected by the Morgans throughout the years, all housed within a historic building of aesthetic and architectural significance. The Morgan is also home to the Thaw Conservation Center, a conservation laboratory for works on paper and parchment. Located on the third floor, apart from the two main floors dedicated to exhibitions and a cafe, the Thaw Conservation Center is accessible by appointment for specialized researchers.

Like most cultural institutions, The Morgan claims a not-for-profit status, yet its origins as a wealthy private collection are evident in the heightened sense of luxury one feels upon entering. There is a bright open space, the Morgan Cafe, impeded by an information desk attended by two eager employees, the admissions counter, and coat-check. As I finished my beverage in the reception area between the glass doors leading to the exteriors, I was able to observe the various patrons coming and going. A good majority of them were well-to-do middle to senior-aged white couples. A few of them were spotted holding shopping bags from The Met, indicating that they were tourists. Of note was a group of 20 to 30 elderly white women exiting the building to board a tour bus. In the few instances where a family was spotted the children were either young or in their late teens. For the younger families, there was almost always a third adult in the group—presumably a grandparent—accompanying the family.

Priced at twenty dollars for adults, admission to the Morgan was hefty enough to discourage a more casual audience. Children under the age of 12 are allowed in for free, but a museum sign clearly states that they must be accompanied by an adult. Because that is a given at almost any public space, this clear messaging signals towards a gentle tug, a policing of sorts, for this demographic and the parents who bring them along. This thought substantiated by an encounter I observed between a male security guard and a pair of young siblings, between the ages of three and six. As the children frolicked about the main library space, the security guard attending the area went as far as attempting to silence them and physically impede their running around. Unable to do so, he flagged a parent to seize control. Such behavior by museum staff is warranted given the heightened sense of preciousness at The Morgan; these are rare and unique items, after all. But it does add to the Museum's more uptight tone. Between the raised portraits, the large laminated pamphlets, and roped-off furniture—all within a dark interior space—one also gets a sense that the museum is not intended for children. The Goldsmith Education Center's placement on the lower basement level, a space that was not at all activated during my visit, is also indicative of this thought.

While there exists some real financial and physical barriers to entry at The Morgan, Kelvin Hall was immediately accessible to me, even as a non-library-card-holding foreigner. The entrance is made of a modern cafe populated by people across all demographics, though a good portion of them were middle-school-aged children evenly split between whites and East Asians. Because I was there to attend a film symposium, I went straight to the front desk to ask where this was being held. I was surprised to find that museum employees were all wearing athletic uniforms. I quickly realized that Kelvin Hall also doubles as an athletic facility via a unique

partnership between Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Life, the University of Glasgow, and the National Library of Scotland. In walking through the long hallway that connects the Moving Image Archive to the main lobby, I could spot athletic activities on one side (preteens playing badminton and younger children taking karate lessons) juxtaposed by a small exhibit of Kelvin Hall's museums holdings. As Scotland's largest reference library with a strong emphasis on Scottish history, the sample was representative of the over 24 million works held by the museum.

At the Moving Image Archive, a giant twelve-screen wall greets you as a place of discovery. The Archive serves as an introduction to the Library's many digital holdings, though a few moving image works are available exclusively on site due to copyright-related issues. A variety of viewing stations were available to use to discover these holdings. I noticed a few senior-aged visitors at more traditional computer-and-desk setups, while a boy who looked to be about ten-years-old was perusing through an interactive screen, one of many placed around a circular couch. The couches had a few step stools around to aid young children with seating.

After attending the symposium, I left the theater to find that a previously empty activity space had been filled with young children and their parents, birthday balloons, and a cake. This activity room is made rentable to library-goers, and certainly helped to activate the space as a place for young families wanting to nourish their bodies and minds on the weekend. Also worthy of note is that there were no security guards on site impeding the dozen or so children running up and down the hallways.

As two institutions that have undergone major buildings renovations, there are some keen similarities to observe between The Morgan and Kelvin Hall as they pertain to the focus of families and children. Out of these renovations came about dedicated spaces for children—the

Goldsmith Education Center at The Morgan and a more fully integrated approach at Kelvin Hall (gymnasium, special seating, bright colors). When thinking of a given institution's financial health and the need for non-profits to create programs in order to attract grants, these early educational activities are certainly a major draw for these grants-issuing organizations. For The Morgan, this feels more like a shallow attempt at fulfilling their duties as a not-for-profit, while at Kelvin Hall they do this in order to meet a real need that libraries fulfill in their local communities.