The previous chapter, ‘Football and heritage’, considered the growing interest in, and interpretation of, Association football’s heritage, by enthusiasts and collectors, and more recently among academics. This chapter considers the relationship between football and museums. How and why have museums reflected the game? How far has this interest in football by museums been connected with the wider growing interest in the history and heritage of the game? What has been the interaction between football museums and academia? What has resulted from these interactions?

‘Museum’ is a perhaps surprisingly complex term to define. It is not a protected term in the UK, so anyone can call any collection of material culture a ‘museum’. The definition of museum by professional museums organisations varies internationally (Moore, 1997: 13–14). The most widely accepted definition is that of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which is ‘A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment’. This excludes many so-called football museums, such as the club museums, which though they in some cases employ professionally qualified museum staff, are profit-making ventures. The implications of this are considered further below.

This chapter is concerned with Association football, but there are a growing number of museums for the other football codes, and the wider museum sector is increasingly reflecting the other codes. This chapter does not consider the football games which preceded Association football, for the two reasons given in the previous chapter on heritage. First, these earlier games are as much the roots of some of the other codes, such as rugby, as of soccer, if indeed there is any connection between the earlier and modern games. Second, relatively little of the material and visual culture of these earlier football games has survived. Of the few items which exist, it is a problem for the museums as to where these items should best be held. For example, in the UK there is a National Football Museum for Association football in England and a Scottish Football Museum, but there is also the World Rugby Museum at Twickenham, and plans for a National Rugby League Museum. If we consider the painting Football by Thomas George Webster, held by the National Football Museum (NFM), as this dates from 1839 it is neither a portrayal of Association football, Rugby Union, or Rugby League. It shows a group of young
boys playing with a ball. Which of the museums has the best claim to hold this item – if indeed any of them, as it is not a representation of their sport – is unclear. It is in the NFM simply because Harry Langton acquired it for his collection, which became the FIFA Collection, and which subsequently was the basis of the creation of the NFM.

How has the collection, preservation, and interpretation of Association football developed in museums? How far has the heritage of Association football been valued by museums and how has this changed through time? The global development of soccer museums remains to be written, but there were few club and national museums before the 1990s. As I have explored elsewhere, the development of sports museums is a class issue, at least in the UK, museums of sports popular with the higher social classes being developed prior to those of more working-class sports (Moore, 2012a: 100–2). The MCC Cricket Museum dates from 1953, the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum from 1977, the national football museums for Scotland and England from 2000 and 2001 respectively. The development of Association football museums needs to be understood in this context, as a much more working-class game for much of its history. At present there is no museum in the UK for the largely working-class sports of boxing and rugby league. Of course this is culturally relative, in the sense that in the USA the idea of museums of popular culture has long been much more acceptable than in the UK and Europe – the US Soccer Hall of Fame and Museum opened in 1999.

Taking the UK as an example, the roots of Association football in museums are, however, longer than is appreciated. In 1953 the FA created a ‘Football and the Fine Arts’ touring exhibition in partnership with the Arts Council (Physick, 2012). According to Sir Walter Winterbottom, the coach of the England team at the time, he and Sir Stanley Rous, the then Secretary of the FA, thought this should lead to a national football museum, in London, but ‘the time wasn’t right’ (interview with the author). In the 1950s a collector of football memorabilia in Hitchin created his own museum at Hitchin Town Football Club, but this was not sustainable and the collection is now held by the local authority Hitchin Museum and Art Gallery. In the 1970s there was a Football Hall of Fame in London, but this did not last. At the same time Harry Langton, the creator of the FIFA Collection, was seeking to create a national sports museum, of which football would be a key part. Merseyside County Museums held a major football exhibition in 1984, called ‘Football Crazy’.

FC Barcelona opened a museum in 1984 and this inspired Manchester United to open a museum and visitor centre in 1986, allied, as at Barcelona, to tours of the stadium. A significant number of club museums have followed in the UK, across Europe, and increasingly around the world, especially in Brazil, although some are little more than glorified trophy rooms. National football museums are slower to develop than club museums, as football associations soon realise museums cost rather than make money. A Brazil football museum opened in 2008, funded by a private foundation, rather than the Brazilian Football Confederation. A German national football museum was planned prior to Germany hosting the World Cup in 2006, but this was rescheduled to open in Dortmund in 2015. National football museums are an aspiration in many countries, but the lack of financial support from the football bodies or governments means that they will largely remain just an aspiration (see on South Africa, Alegi, 2006). In no country is a national football museum seen as central enough to its culture and heritage for it to receive state funding. The NFM for England received funding from the UK government from 2003 to 2010, but only at the level of £100,000 p.a., out of a budget for museums of over £400 million p.a. The case still needs to be made, in the words of Germaine Greer, which can be seen by all visitors to the NFM, that ‘Football counts as culture just as much as opera does’ (Greer, 2008).
While there were very few dedicated football museums – national or club – prior to the 1990s, football has long been collected by museums – almost without this being realised. As a report commissioned in 2005 by the UK’s organisation of sports museums, the Sports Heritage Network, demonstrated, from a survey of the UK’s public museums, almost all had significant collections relating to sport, and many to football. But this material culture of the game had been collected – and catalogued – as, for example, fine or decorative arts, or toys and games, rather than necessarily because it related to football. Of the museums which responded, which was one-third of public museums, 31 had major collections and 90 minor collections relating to football, and 94 archives had holdings, mostly relating to local football clubs (Hood, 2006).

As the respondents were a typical sample of public museums and archives, the true figures are likely to be three times as great as these. Almost all UK museums have at least some football items. For example, the British Museum holds 206 items (that have so far been included in its online catalogue) relating to football, and the V&A 302 items. A blog piece by David Francis, Interpretation Officer at the British Museum, states that:

The Museum does not specifically set out to collect football-related objects; that remit falls to the National Football Museum in Manchester. However, the prevalence of objects related to football in the collection reflects the popularity of the sport, both in our current time and as part of our cultural heritage.

(Francis, 2014)

But this begs the question of which organisation the British Museum thought was collecting football prior to the opening of the NFM in Preston in 2001, and ignores the issue of the Scottish Football Museum. It is doubtful whether the British Museum knew it had these football items until Francis (‘a dependable, if unspectacular, right-back for the British Museum football team’) wrote this piece.

These football items remained largely hidden in public museums in the UK until a new kind of social history curator, with an interest in working-class culture, came into museums from the 1990s onwards. This resulted in many museums holding football exhibitions on their local clubs and wider football culture, often with a display of Stuart Roy Clarke’s ‘The Homes of Football’ photographs, which appeared at over 80 museums in the UK from 1991 to 2004. After 2001, these exhibitions were often supported by material from the collections of the NFM. In the past decade many local museums in the UK have held exhibitions on their local Football League or Premier League team, or on football more generally in their community. In addition, many local and city history museums now have permanent displays on football, as, for example, at the Museum of Liverpool. With some contemporary artists becoming interested in the game, there have also been a few art exhibitions, perhaps the most notable at Manchester Art Gallery in 1996 (Gill et al., 1996).

In the first piece to consider football museums and football in museums, I explored how top English clubs, such as Manchester United, had begun to develop museums, partly because the likes of Barcelona and Real Madrid had one, and therefore a museum was a status symbol, but more as part of the commercialisation of the stadium on non-match days, linked to ground tours (Moore, 1997: 130–1). The embourgeoisement of the game in England in the 1990s – the Fever Pitch effect – gave the impetus towards the creation of a national football museum, and the creation of the National Lottery in 1994, with some of the proceeds to go to the Millennium Commission and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), gave the opportunity to apply for the substantial capital funding required. At the time I considered that the bid to establish the NFM for England in Preston was the best of several potential projects, but was still...
concerned that it could simply be a celebration of the game and not a ‘proper’ museum: ‘Will the museum have the courage to present football “warts and all” and display the weapons and “calling cards” of the football hooligans?’ (Moore, 1997: 132). By becoming the founding director of the NFM project in Preston in 1997, I ensured it did. I have also considered the early development of the museum and reflected on the ability of football museums, and the NFM in particular, to attract audiences which do not usually visit museums, especially working-class people (Moore, 2001, 2005, 2009).

Following the opening of the NFM in 2001, there were a number of academic papers on and reviews of the museum and its approach to the integration of the game and its culture. Unlike earlier reviews of sports museums, which failed to understand the difference between academic history and public history, Johnes and Mason reviewed the NFM as a museum (Johnes and Mason, 2003). Brabazon’s review also fully understood the difference between museum history and academic history (2006a: 41–74). With Mallinder, Brabazon contrasted the critical acclaim for the NFM in Preston with the failure of the National Centre for Popular Music in Sheffield (Brabazon and Mallinder, 2006). She also reviewed the book Museums and Popular Culture nine years after its publication, and how far this had informed the development of the NFM (Brabazon 2006b). There has also been a populist piece by Hunter Davies (2010: 105–18) and an insightful analysis by Appel (Appel, 2015: 3–5).

Brabazon and Johnes and Mason understood the difference between public history in the museum and academic history. Previously some academics did not. One of the key criticisms that academics had of sports museums was that they tended to present an uncritical and celebratory history. For example, Vamplew commented that ‘sports museums cater to the nostalgia market and have, almost without exception, institutionalized the concept of a “golden age” in virtually every sport. Errors of fact and interpretation persist and myths are perpetuated despite historical research to the contrary’ (1998: 270). I have argued that while some sports (including football) museums can be criticised as little more than commercial adjuncts of their clubs or governing bodies, and public relations vehicles, presenting a biased, promotional version of history, academics had tended to tar all sports museums with the same brush, ignoring the increasing number of sports (including football) museums which buck this trend (Moore, 2012a: 97). Academics have also criticised sports museums for wallowing in the fantasy world of nostalgia, rather than ‘real’ history, but Snyder (1991) has drawn upon academic research on the positive aspects of nostalgia in relation to sport, which has led me to conclude that ‘all museums, and especially sports museums, should not entirely eschew nostalgia, but should find a way to harness its positive aspects’ (Moore, 2012a: 103–4).

Some sport historians struggle even with the history in the non-commercial sports museums, as they see the presentation of information as too simplistic and argue that it fails to demonstrate the subtleties of historical argument. In response I have argued that museum history is a different kind of history, in a very different form, for a different audience, with almost no limits of age or educational attainment. When some academics have been involved in creating exhibitions, their experiences have often been quite negative, because they have not understood these differences (see for example, Vamplew, 2004). The historian wants to put a book on the wall, does not want to be limited to just 200 words on a topic, and wishes to qualify each statement. I have considered how museums offer a very distinctive form of public history, which requires a very different and specific set of skills to written history (Moore, 2013: 407–10; see also Moore, 2012b). But football museums do need to engage with scholarly history, they must be informed by the work of academics, to avoid a clichéd, outdated, hackneyed, fact-driven history, based on a limited scholarly knowledge of the subject, and no appreciation of the subtleties of the argument. I have emphasised that a further step would be for academics to be
actively engaged in exhibitions. Sports museums are not just institutions for academics to analyse as a research topic, valuable though this is for both academia and museums. Sports museums are an exciting location for potential collaboration in the exploration of sport history, in new ways (Moore, 2013: 410). For example, as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded Ph.D. project, Jackson (2009) led the creation of an exhibition at the NFM on his research. However, in coming to museum history, sports academics need to understand the particular challenges of interpreting artefacts. They need to get away from an approach based on written sources, and explore the models for artefact analysis discussed in Chapter 7 of this volume (in particular that in Moore, 1997).

I explored in more detail the development of football museums, and the NFM in particular, in a paper which also considered the economic and social impact of the museum in the city of Preston (Moore, 2008). The development of the NFM in Preston from 2001 was not easy, despite its popularity with the public, given limited financial support from the football bodies, but the museum had significant economic and social impact in the city, and I considered its role in urban regeneration. This paper emphasised the growing success of the museum, attracting over 100,000 visitors a year. It did not anticipate that due to a lack of support from both government and the football bodies, within a year the museum would be threatened with closure.

Despite its success, in terms of media, academic, and above all public reaction, and despite having the world’s best collection relating to football, the NFM faced a crisis that challenged its existence. In 2009 the principal funder of the NFM, the Football Foundation, announced that it was no longer able to provide revenue funding to the museum of £300,000 p.a. A number of crisis meetings were held between the museum, the Rt Hon. Andy Burnham MP, the then Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the major football bodies. However, the secretary of state was not able to convince the football bodies to take on the revenue support of the museum, or to undertake that the DCMS would increase its own contribution to the museum of just over £100,000 p.a. At one point in the negotiations, the FA stated that they would like to move the museum from Preston to the new ‘home of football’, namely Wembley Stadium. The Secretary of State stated that he was opposed to losing national museums in the north and moving them to London, but could not commit funds to prevent this. As a result, the museum faced closure, or potentially a move to Wembley, if the FA could commit the capital and revenue funding for this to happen. Once it became clear the FA did not have the funding or the commitment to do this, the North West Regional Development Agency, shortly before its abolition by the new coalition government, brokered a deal in which the NFM would move to Manchester. Manchester City Council offered the NFM the Urbis building in the centre of Manchester rent free for ten years, to underwrite the £8 million capital funding required to convert the building into the NFM, and to provide revenue funding of £2 million p.a. for a minimum of ten years. Manchester City Council recognised the economic benefit of having the museum in the city, in terms of tourism. The new NFM opened in Manchester in July 2012 and has been a great success, attracting over 500,000 visitors p.a. in Manchester, compared with 100,000 p.a. in Preston.

The UK government had been prepared to let the NFM close. Part of this lack of support from football and government was because the museum was in Preston, not in a more major city. But much more this reflected that both the government and football saw the museum as expendable. For the government, despite the ‘footballisation’ of culture under New Labour, with everyone from the Prime Minister downwards claiming to be a lifelong football fan in order to appeal to the voters, the NFM was not important enough to change the established order of museums which were nationally funded. The NFM could not break into the elite
circle of national museums. Thatcherism impacted on most aspects of life, and in the 1980s and early 1990s even the national museums were to an extent pushed into the marketplace, having to charge for admission and chasing sponsorship. But under New Labour museums were seen as a vehicle to promote education and social inclusion, free admission was reintroduced, and in terms of funding, especially for the national museums, this will be looked back upon as a golden age. However, within New Labour policy for museums, the establishment was able to ensure that the public funding remained restricted to the long-established museums, the bastions of high culture. Football, as part of popular culture, remained ‘other’. Reilly’s (2014) research considers this in the broader context of sports museums and sport in museums. With the exception of one or two individuals – such as Lord Triesman, who as Chairman of the FA, wanted to move the museum to Wembley – few people at the top of the game had an interest in football’s heritage. Football embraced neo-liberalism with alacrity. After the Premier League’s Hall of Fame had failed so spectacularly in 2000 (discussed below), and the costs of creating and running a museum at Wembley were fully considered, any appetite for displaying football’s history largely evaporated. If the NFM for England has faced such difficulties, then we must be cautious about the long-term support for all football museums. The National Soccer Hall of Fame Museum in the USA closed in 2010.

The recent history of the NFM and the development of football museums, and football in museums, both in England and globally, has yet to be studied in depth. There are a growing number of club museums, especially in Europe and South America. All of this and more awaits further detailed analysis. Football clubs have increasingly recognised the value in commercial and public relations terms of creating museums, as with those at Arsenal, Chelsea, and Wolverhampton Wanderers. But equally club museums have closed, such as those at West Ham and Manchester City, or museum projects have been abandoned, such as those at Aston Villa and Leeds United. The development of national football museums has been very slow, with many plans but few projects seen through to opening. A Ph.D., from a social anthropological perspective, has the NFM, and specifically the development of the new museum in Manchester, as a major case study (Yang, 2015). But much remains to be written on football club museums, national football museums, and how other museums collect and interpret football.

Phillips (2012) has developed a useful typology for sports museums, which can be applied to football museums, which explains why many so-called football museums sit outside the ICOM definition. Phillips’s typology of sports museums is fundamentally as follows:

- academic: the formal, usually publicly funded museums (conforming to the ICOM definition of a museum);
- corporate: those run by sporting clubs and governing bodies, with some better termed halls of fame;
- community: the local, largely volunteer-run; and
- vernacular: sporting artefacts in other settings, such as shops, bars, and restaurants, including equivalents to the Hard Rock Café.

Phillips’s classification embraces not just what we might term the ‘formal’ museum – academic and corporate – but also includes the ‘informal’ – community and vernacular. A key weakness, as Reilly (2104) has explained, is that it fails to include the substantial interpretation of sport by non-sports museums, such as science museums and art galleries.

Historically there has been a relative absence of, in Phillips’s terms, ‘academic’ football museums. There were clearly issues of social class and cultural value at work here. Museums
were traditionally temples of high culture; football, as part of popular culture, was ‘other’. The NFM and the Scottish Football Museum are arguably the only football museums in the UK which can be considered ‘Academic’. ‘Corporate’ museums, including halls of fame, established by sports governing bodies or clubs, have a much longer history, particularly in the USA, and are also increasingly popular globally. They are criticised by academics for tending to pander to the nostalgic desires of their audience, for being largely public-relations vehicles for sport governing bodies or clubs and for being prone to bias in favour of sponsors. In terms of football, these are the football club museums. Many employ professionally qualified curatorial staff and operate in a manner very close to that of the ‘academic’ sports museums. However, it is clear that the club museums do tend to offer an uncritical view of their clubs and fans. This is not so much in terms of what they include in their displays, but in terms of what they choose to exclude. Appel offers a very convincing analysis of this (Appel, 2015; see also his blog, https://footballandmaterialculture). Corporate, commercial sports museums can be a spectacular failure, and football is no exception. In June 1999 the FA Premier League Hall of Fame opened in the former County Hall building in London. With five themed areas, the attraction was very ‘museum-like’, covering the history of the game and displaying memorabilia:

The Hall of Legends is a journey from football’s medieval origins to the Premier League. The FA Premier League Hall of Fame is the living history that will grow and develop whilst the Hall of Fans is an attempt to capture the passion and devotion of the football supporter. The climax is a special Hope and Glory film shown in a 120 seat auditorium and the Virtual Stadium where visitors can test computer and football skills.

(FA Premier League Hall of Fame, 1999)

Failing to attract the projected but extremely ambitious target of 800,000 paying visitors p.a., the attraction closed in fewer than nine months.

Community is a particularly interesting category in football museums, potentially embracing every local football club in the world, as all tend to display in some form the club’s history and achievements. In one sense every football team’s club building has a ‘museum’ display in it, in the form of photographs and other mementos of the club’s history. In some cases, groups of enthusiasts have gone one stage further and established an organisation, or an existing fans’ organisation has developed a heritage role akin to a museum. For example, Derby County Supporters Trust collects artefacts on behalf of the club and the fans and produces small displays. Durham Amateur Football Trust is a non-for-profit organisation that seeks to celebrate the rich football heritage of the north-east of England and promote interest in grass-roots sport by curating exhibitions, which has a permanent base at Locomotion, the branch of the National Railway Museum in Shildon. While such organisations do excellent work, a concern with some is the long-term legal ownership and hence security of the collections, if the organisation were to be wound up, or fail to attract sufficient resources, both financial and human.

The heritage of the club in this form of a ‘community museum’ can be very powerful and symbolic. When the new owner of Wimbledon FC decided in 2002 to move the club, with the approval of the Football League, to Milton Keynes, over 50 miles from Wimbledon, and renamed it MK Dons, many Wimbledon fans refused to follow, which immediately led them to create a new club, AFC Wimbledon, which to most of the fans was the true continuation of Wimbledon FC. The Wimbledon Independent Supporters Association founded the Wimbledon Old Players Association in 2005 as part of its drive to ‘reclaim the history of Wimbledon Football Club for AFC Wimbledon and/or the community of Wimbledon’. In 2006 the
Football Supporters’ Federation (FSF) negotiated an agreement in which in return for the FSF rescinding its boycott of the fans of MK Dons, MK Dons would ‘recognise and genuinely regret the hurt which was caused to supporters of the former Wimbledon FC by the move to Milton Keynes’, renounce any claim to Wimbledon FC’s history up to 2004 and transfer the club’s historical artefacts back to Merton Borough. The Wimbledon FC trophies were put on display at Morden Library in Merton in April 2008. The Chairman of the FSF, Malcolm Clarke, said: ‘We never want to see another club uprooted and moved in this manner, and returning the Wimbledon cups, medals and general memorabilia to Merton, the community from which they were won, is certainly the right thing to do’ (Football Supporters’ Federation, 2007).

‘Vernacular’ is still limited in football, restaurants in London and elsewhere which had memorabilia on display did not prove to be successful. There is no football equivalent of the Hard Rock Café chain, but there are now a few football-themed hotels, such as the Shankly Hotel in Liverpool. The NFM has held displays in non-museum settings, such as in the Harvey Nichols department store in Dubai, in partnership with Visit Britain, in 2014.

Given the need for further research on football museums and football in museums, Professor John Hughson and I secured funding from the AHRC for a Ph.D. studentship on the wider topic of ‘Sports, Museums and Cultural Policy’. This research found that while sports museums and sport in museums were developing, as aspects of popular culture, they were still to an extent marginalised by the wider museum sector (Reilly, 2014). Sport has a particular problem within popular culture – sport is regarded by many as not part of culture. In the anthropological sense of the word, sport is self-evidently part of culture. But it is effectively defined as not part of culture by the UK government department which is responsible for it, the DCMS. As Greer states, ‘To list media and sport as co-equal with culture is like referring to food, eggs and chips as separate categories’ (2008). Reilly’s work firmly positions sport as part of culture and explores the development of sport in museums from 1997 to 2012. It also develops very effectively the typology of sports museums proposed by Phillips, emphasising that along with sport-specific museums, many other types of museum reflect sport, from local and city history museums, to art galleries and science museums. Indeed, there are very few museums which do not reflect an aspect of sport (Reilly, 2014).

Museums have come to football relatively recently. In contrast, enthusiasts and private collectors have been collecting and studying this heritage for decades, and have detailed knowledge that both museums and academics lack. As discussed in Chapter 7 in this volume, part of the issue here is that enthusiasts and collectors, even those of ‘high’ culture, have tended to be patronised by museums and academics. The museum and academia know best. At best, collectors are viewed as antiquarians. Yet the collectors have a great deal of detailed knowledge about their collections. More fundamentally, without the collectors of football’s material culture, this could have been lost for ever, discarded as rubbish. Many of the major football museums are based on private collections put together by one or more individuals. The NFM was founded by securing £9.3 million from the HLF to provide a permanent home for the FIFA Collection. This collection has been put together over a period of 30 years by one Englishman, Harry Langton (Langton, 1996). The NFM would not have secured funding from HLF without the FIFA Collection, and so the museum might not yet have come into existence. HLF was not prepared to provide the funding to create the museum without the FIFA Collection.

In reflecting football, as a key part of popular culture, museums need to work in partnership with academics from a range of disciplines. But, equally, they need to work with private collectors, the enthusiasts, the ‘amateur’ researchers, who have long played, and should continue to play, a key role in recording and preserving football’s heritage, inside and outside the
museum. All three groups can learn a great deal from each other; and in doing so, together they can enrich our museums, academic scholarship, and the wider preservation and interpretation of football’s heritage.

References

[all publications are London, unless otherwise stated]

FA Premier League Hall of Fame (1999) *FA Premier League Hall of Fame souvenir programme*.