

AV DESIGN PROJECT PROFILE

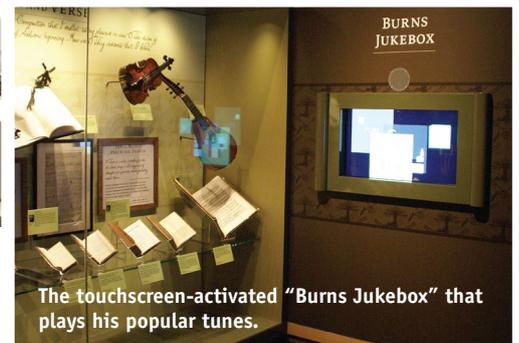


Robert Burns Birthplace Museum

AV Technology Design Enhances the Lifeworks of a Poet

The National Trust for Scotland recently completed a major development bringing all the Robert Burns related sites in Alloway, Scotland, together. Principal among these sites is the Burns Cottage, which for many years has represented the nucleus of the museum, and a brand new museum building; together they represent the new Robert Burns Birthplace Museum. Event Communications designed the museum exhibition, and Electrosonic's Design Consulting team began the project as their audio-visual systems designer. After a tender process, Electrosonic was also appointed as the AV systems integrator, working directly for the National Trust for Scotland.

"During the design process, the Design Consulting team at Electrosonic studied the requirements for each exhibit planned by Event Communications," says Rob Ferguson, Electrosonic's Design Manager. "We then provided a technical brief detailing the equipment requirements and how each exhibit should operate."



The touchscreen-activated "Burns Jukebox" that plays his popular tunes.

The project was carried out in two phases, the first being the upgrade of the Burns Cottage. The first room in the cottage features a model of the cottage which depicts how the rooms were used in Burns' time. Electrosonic designed each room in the model to be fitted with an LCD panel in its floor showing a dramatisation of the room in use. The rooms themselves are equipped with low-level ambient audio that both enhance and help interpret the different spaces.

The second phase of the project involved equipping the new museum building. The 500-square metre exhibition space is divided into four distinct areas – Identity, Inspiration, Fame and Creative Work – that cover every aspect of Burns' life through an innovative and thought-provoking interpretation. The displayed collection includes more than 5,000 historical artefacts, original manuscripts and pieces of memorabilia.



A key driver of the project was to encourage visitors to actively participate in learning about Burns. Electrosonic designed 17 unique interactive exhibits to fire visitors' imaginations. Every hour, the lights in the museum dim and six projection screens located above the exhibits display images from a video server connected to six DLP projectors. These images accompany readings from Burns' works played throughout the museum through ceiling speakers.

One of the interactive displays is the 32-inch touchscreen-activated "Burns Jukebox" that plays his popular tunes. Dividing the music into "Floor Fillers", "Power Ballads", "Tear Jerkers" and "Punk", helps the museum to provide a modern twist to his music, appealing to young and old visitors alike. Electrosonic also designed audio systems featuring loudspeakers and listening stations with headsets for many other exhibits. One of the most amusing is the "Cutty Stool", evidently the Scots equivalent of the "Naughty Step". Visitors are subjected to a suitably fire and brimstone sermon from a pulpit, activated when visitors sit on the accompanying stool.

Electrosonic also designed a popular exhibit called the "Shadow Portraits". Controlled via a 32-inch touchscreen, visitors line themselves up with a camera set up to create a shadow portrait of their profile. This image is then e-mailed to the visitor's home or phone. The accompanying "Usual Suspect" interactive exhibit allows visitors to create their own design for a shortbread tin.

Electrosonic also provided the cable and power scheduling information and control room layouts during the design phase, and worked with the consultants and architects to integrate the equipment into the space. One challenge Electrosonic faced during the design involved a high ceiling structure that would have required more volume coming through the loudspeakers to provide even coverage. To overcome this, Electrosonic found a way to integrate the loudspeakers on a lower structure, enabling closer proximity between the loudspeakers and the visitors, lower volume levels and better coverage throughout the exhibit.

Electrosonic designed the system to be efficient and easy to operate. For example, a touch panel specified behind the reception desk controls power to all LCD screens and local standalone equipment on the main exhibit floor.

"While manual capabilities are available, the system is fully automatic, enabling power up in the morning and power down at night," says Rob Ferguson. "The power system is completely switched off at night instead of being put into stand by, reducing energy costs for the centre over a period of time."