



Why Science at the Poly

We have a long history of leading scientific innovation

The Centre is owned and run by the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society. Our charitable purpose is the advancement of science and the arts, especially in relation to Cornwall. Whilst this link between the arts and sciences is a very contemporary theme, our track record in the field spans almost 175 years.

In 1833 the Fox family, a prominent Quaker shipping family of Falmouth, founded the Society to promote the ideas and inventions of the workers in their Perran Foundry. This was the first use of the word Polytechnic (meaning of many arts and techniques) in Britain. In 1835 King William IV bestowed Royal Patronage on the Society. Members included many prominent scientists, engineers and artists.

In the same year the Polytechnic Hall was built, being originally used for objects connected with the sciences, arts and literature, but not for theatrical purposes. This restriction was removed in 1889 to permit dramatic plays. The building has been known as the Poly - and more latterly "the Arts Centre" - for generations ever since

The Society played a prominent role in industrial development in the 19th century, being instrumental in the development of the man engine in mines, drilling machinery, mine ventilation, the health and welfare of fishermen and miners and explosives. In 1865 the Hall was damaged by a demonstration of Alfred Nobel's gun cotton and nitro-glycerine - the first demonstration anywhere in the world. ([See the Nobel Prize website](#)).

Today the Poly presents a lively and diverse programme embracing both the performing and the visual arts. Its cinema programme attracts significant audiences, as do a range of live events including theatre, music, dance and a variety of talks and lectures. Its two small street-front galleries and its large main gallery host a varied and busy programme of art exhibitions, attracting significant numbers of visitors.

As we enter a phase of renewal, considering our purpose in the 21st century, we will be re-establishing our role as an organisation that embraces scientific as well as artistic activity. Working with partners we will examine the overlaps in approach between the sciences and the arts, encouraging innovation and creativity as a result.

If that sounds very worthy, please do not be alarmed; we will continue to provide opportunities for entertaining, enjoyable and inspiring evenings out!

