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Contents

Editor's foreword

This year has been a year of anticipated cuts, nervous expectation and extra resourcefulness for everyone in the arts. The fortunate thing is that Museums are always resourceful often working with the smallest budgets, trying to make a big impact for visitors and communities. After the Government's interim budget in October 2010 everyone in social history museums are faced with doing just as much with even less. This year's conference reflected this with its theme: *More for Less: Big Impacts with Small Resources*.

This edition of the journal delivers conference papers from museums and galleries who refurbished displays and confronted the challenges. Anthony Kimber PhD of Rye Art Gallery also had the challenge of listed building status to contend with, and Rachael Lovering of Newport Museums redeveloped their Chartist display using in-house expertise. Kitty Ross gives us an insight into working in partnership with Higher Education institutions, giving design students the chance to design a temporary exhibition on a theme chosen by Abbey House Museum, Leeds. Jim Garretts uses his experiences at the Thackray Museum in Leeds for some financial first aid.

Steph Mastoris shares with us his experience of surviving tough times in the museum. Some sage advice which threw the theme into the future and touches on next year's conference theme around Subject Specialism and Generalism.

Stuart Frost gives us a retrospective of The British Museum's *Hands On* programme after its first 10 years. The British Museum have invested in volunteer training and have used volunteers to attend hands-on stations around the museum. Stuart discusses how the programme has grown and evolved and its affect on both volunteers and visitors.

For some light relief from cuts and how to survive them, Cath Stanton treats us to an analysis of Gustave Doré's socially inspired paintings from the Museum of London and Geoff Swinney considers the origins of the National Museum of Scotland from the unusual angle of the natural history collection and how Victorians chose to invite the masses into the museum after a long days' graft.

As the new editor of the Journal, I would be delighted to hear any comments or suggestions for future journals. If you would like to submit an article, please contact me at the address below.

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Enhancing heritage buildings on a budget: "More for Less"

Anthony Kimber PhD, Chair of Rye Art Gallery Trustees, writes about his experience of setting up an art gallery in a historic building with limited funds.

In the heart of a small medieval town, Rye Art Gallery[1] is a registered charity governed by a trust deed dating from 1957. It comprises two heritage buildings linked through a new glass structure and entered from Rye High Street. The Easton Rooms provides the main entrance and showcases the best of contemporary paintings, prints, ceramics, crafts and textiles, sold on commission by paid staff to provide the main income for the Trust. The Stormont Studio is an MLA[2] Registered museum showing selections from its permanent collection by renowned artists such as Duncan Grant, John Piper, Paul Nash, Edward Burra, Ivon Hitchens, Jacob Epstein and Lowry. Occasionally there are exhibitions of borrowed artworks, organised by guest curators, or by one of our partners, such as Rye College. The Stormont Studio is manned four days per week by volunteers and provides the home for the activities of around 380 Friends of Rye Gallery. They organise monthly events such as art related lectures, visits and fund-raising events. Entry to the Gallery is free for an average 5000 visitors per quarter.

Although property rich, in 2004 the Gallery was cash poor and struggling with a range of financial and infrastructure issues. There was no viable strategic plan to tackle the challenges, including some to meet government legislation. There was even talk of partial closure. This paper examines the way that the Trustees set about turning matters around.

The Vision

The Trustees saw a much improved independent regional gallery with six linked spaces to allow a wide variety of art exhibitions and other activities, including those organised by the supportive Friends.

The wide range of issues demanded a holistic view to transform the gallery into one that would be easier to manage, have reduced overheads and increased visitor figures. As the aim and objectives were clarified, a plan emerged to achieve integration of the buildings, as well as to tackle issues such as poor fire and security protection, old heating and lighting, limited IT, inadequate storage and other facilities with hygiene, Health and Safety and access problems. A top priority was to improve the

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1   Rye Art Gallery is a registered title, with website as www.ryeartgallery.co.uk

2   MLA = Museums Libraries and Archives

environment of the valuable Permanent Collection, for which it was decided to incorporate the SPECTRUM[3] documentation system to meet the demands of MLA Accreditation[4].

Embracing Change

Similar plans had been considered at other times during the last 40 years but had floundered. In 2004, there was a will and capability to succeed. It took until early 2005 to reach agreement about the details. This required an extended debate with all those with an interest, such as Friends, staff, volunteers, local arts bodies, the Rye Conservation Society, planning officials and potential building contractors. To support this process, to save money, it was necessary to produce "in-house" material such as floor-plans and visionary drawings. For many, change was just too much to contemplate, with some opposition driven by emotion rather than substance. However, with the initial plans refined, consensus was eventually achieved, but there were other challenges. As the Gallery sits in a conservation area, any development had to be carefully balanced with the need for conservation, particularly as the Rother District Council Historical Officer imposed strict constraints.

Money, Money Money!

Rough order costs for the work were calculated using judgement - several trustees had managed projects to renovate houses in Rye - and advice from local contractors. Some money could be taken from investments but this would not be enough to fund the proposals and leave significant reserves; more had to be found. The Chair of the Friends initiated a fundraising programme with the target of £50k, but clearly this would take time. By 2009, an opportunity bid for a community grant to Local Authorities was successful, but initially bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council had failed. To get the project started, the only option was through some downsizing (the sale of part of the garden and an upper part of one building which was less accessible). Even with this, it was clear that resources would be scarce and that the project would have to show value for money. Throughout the project the Trustees intended to apply the Audit Commission principles of:

- *Effectiveness* of spend against objectives;

- *Efficiency* of output against input, requiring careful monitoring;

- *Economy* through efficient process costs.

How to Manage?

Concurrent with the financial planning, a management structure was agreed, with the Chair of the Trust Board as Project Director. He was also the Gallery Financial Director, a qualified risk manager and would manage the project funds separately, supported by the Gallery Treasurer. The first plans were drawn by a trustee with building experience, who sadly had to leave suddenly on health grounds. Fortunately, a new trustee, a retired architect, agreed to take on the role, which he did with great commitment and imagination. Conveniently, both the Project Director and Architect had all the necessary skills, including previous experience in project management. A third trustee provided interior design skills. By using volunteers in these roles, major savings accrued. To provide professional indemnity, a local architectural technician made the detailed drawings, acted as Project Manager and dealt with the Local Authorities. With all the

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3   SPECTRUM is an approved archival system for museums and galleries

4   Rye Art Gallery was re-accredited with the MLA in July 2010

key individuals in place, a project steering board was formed of trustees, the Gallery Manager and Chair of the Friends, to advise on customer requirements. For week to week project management, the Project Director chaired a group comprising Project Manager, Architect and lead contractors.

Risky Business!

As the Charity had limited funds, the Trustees were keen to reduce risk. One measure was to divide the work into three distinct phases, each sub-divided into multiple tranches (15 in all) to provide manageable and separate mini projects. These separate mini projects would be tackled sequentially, each with its plan, drawings and costs, but fully integrated into the whole. For each tranche, the Architect produced numerous high quality drawings to reflect the adjustments required for technical or planning reasons. By using this incremental approach, build time was extended, but failure of any one mini project would not jeopardise the subsequent ones. Another measure was to directly employ small local contractors and employ those who might be keen to protect their reputations within the town as well as providing good after-service. Although adding significant commitment to the project direction team, the Trust would be seen to support local companies at what was a difficult period for the construction industry.

Getting Started

The planning permissions were secured from Local Authorities in mid 2005. Some preliminary work, as Phase1, the improvements to services and preparation of spaces, started in mid 2006 (see picture), but firm estimates for the bulk of the work could not be sought until mid 2007, because of delays to the downsizing plan, caused by the uncertainties in the run up to the eventual collapse of the property market. A Quantity Surveyor was employed to validate the estimated costs and identify any scope for potential savings. Phase 2, a two storey extension for stores, kitchen and accessible WC, ran on through 2007.
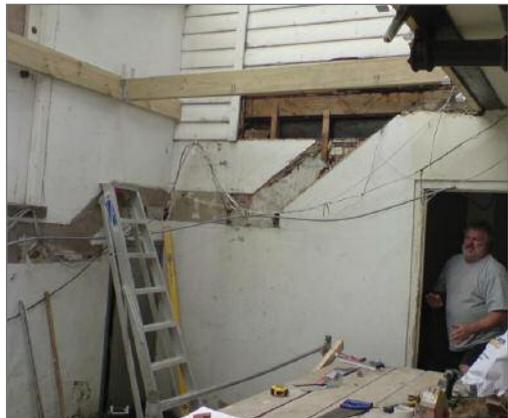
By April 2008, the downsizing was completed and the project fund was sufficient to press on with the largest amount of work, Phase 3, the main extension and link, but the global financial crisis was not anticipated!

The Risk Increases!

During 2008, contractors were working through the main tranches of work, but as the financial situation worsened, it was clear that this was not a good time for building projects. Many small contractors faced insolvency; building suppliers reduced stocks resulting in extended lead times for specialist materials; the price of some materials such as copper pipe and lead were affected by global shortages, adversely impacting on estimates. Despite these increasing risks, work continued under tight project control, with each milestone being photographed and recorded to enable communication to continue with all interested parties.

Extending old buildings invariably produces problems. These arose in many ways: the ground-works exposed adjacent building foundations which required structural surveys

and reinforcement; old buried drainage pipes crumbled when exposed, requiring extensive replacement; openings in medieval walls proved structurally problematic; party wall issues dictated imaginative design solutions, including the use of steel load bearing frames (see picture) and block and beam roof supports; historical requirements constrained the plans. Logistics and some heavy work pushed relationships with close neighbours to the limits. To cope with all this, the detailed plan had to be flexible, with the Project Board meeting regularly to review and make adjustments, requiring revised drawings from the Architect. Unexpected challenges meant that it was necessary to draw on the 10% contingency reserves, but as a small offset, some savings were made by using recycled materials: some surplus doors and other fittings were located on another site; a temporary glazed panel was used twice in separate locations, to provide a viewing window to enable visitors to see project developments; some oak, displaced in the early phase, was re-used in a subsequent one.

Throughout the programme, "snaggings" (work to be corrected) were recorded and handled as part of subsequent work. Longer term maintenance issues were considered by combining the routes of key services; improving insulation; building in low energy lighting and heating; improving IT and introducing ways to reduce consumption and waste. This demanded continual analysis and refinements of the plan.

Business Continuity

For some peak building periods, closing the gallery for the work was desirable but not an option as the art-sales had to continue to provide income to offset the gallery's routine running costs. This meant careful coordination between the staff and contractors, with at times, the temporary screening of building work spaces to preserve security, reduce dust invasion and allow both building and business to run concurrently.

Getting there!

By May 2010, the key part of Phase 3, the extension and link, was complete, leaving a list of aspirations, such as an internal lift; further improvements to lighting and a bio flat roof, to be recorded in the forward plan. As and when funds become available this work will be tackled along the lines of earlier phases. At the end of some 4 years of building, in May 2010, with the paint still drying, there was a preliminary opening ceremony by the local MP and Rye Mayor.

The Future?

Trustees are now focused on developing the business to ensure financial sustainability. As a recently Accredited MLA museum, they have secured a business development consultancy from the MLA (Southeast). Preparation has involved a thorough consideration of principles, such as: being more creative; taking tough decisions; recognising the impact of increasing competition; not taking anything for granted; abandoning business-as-usual and focusing on core business. The study is expected to be a driver for further change.

Lessons Identified?

After some 6 years of planning and execution, what were the key lessons?

- Have a vision; set and maintain clear aims and objectives. Avoid any "creep" of the customer requirement, which increases risk.

- Ensure that all interested parties "buy in" to the plan and are kept fully informed of developments.

- Make a holistic plan and consider the balance between conservation and development.

- Exploit all available voluntary skills to keep down costs.

- Apply risk management processes.

- Maintain a contingency resource to cover the unforeseen as any work on heritage projects will throw up regular challenges.

- As part of the project design, build in efficiencies and consider long term sustainability.

Judging the Outcome!

Early in 2010, the Trustees learnt that Rye Conservation Society had made its annual townscape award to the project, testifying to the quality and innovation of the reconfigured building. Comments around Rye and in the visitors' book acclaim the changes, bringing considerable satisfaction to those volunteers and staff, who have had a hand its completion. Breaking down the work into multiple tranches, directly employing contractors and exploiting volunteer project direction, increased control and reduced risks, enabling the building work to be real value for money, in short achieving "More for Less".

Ecology of the Dead and the Un-dead *or* Afterlives, Booze, and the Museum: An alternative (and additional) view of Natural Science Collections

Geoffrey N. Swinney of the Department of Natural Sciences, National Museums Scotland and Institute of Geography, University of Edinburgh presents here his research into the nature of objects and reflects upon their use in Scotland 's national museum.

This paper had its origins as an outline for a research talk to my colleagues in National Museums Scotland (NMS). It developed into an account of my personal odyssey in researching the social nature of representations of Nature. Although it was not my initial intention, nonetheless, and rather to my surprise, the very process of writing of this brief paper revealed an integrated structure to what I had previously considered largely separate (even disparate) strands of research. Given this, and with the Editor's kind indulgence, I have forsaken the usual conventions of a paper to present this personal perspective in a somewhat 'conversational' style. In line with this, rather than supplying a full bibliography, I highlight the personal nature of the process by listing some of the outcomes of the research. Those interested in following up the sources mentioned in the text will find the necessary resources in the publications listed.

On 11 October 1887 *The Scotsman* carried an obituary of "the pioneer of the new movement in popular education". According to the obituary, its subject had been instrumental in eliciting the educational potential of the craze for domestic aquaria which had swept Britain, a craze which the historian of science, Graeme Gooday, recently described as "an educational leisure, constantly directing the working classes back to a readily disciplined home environment and inculcating them to moral and orderly appreciation of 'Nature'." The obituary signalled not only to the educational (the social) agency of aquaria but also confirmed and enhanced the celebrity status of its subject. It was all the more remarkable because that subject, "Granny", had for 66 years been a resident of an aquarium tank. There, it (the complexities of its sexual behaviour are such that, despite its given name of Granny, 'she' may not be entirely appropriate) had been visited by, amongst others, European knights, Lord High Commissioners and a profusion of "distinguished professors and travellers". "Granny" was a sea-anemone, and to the best of my knowledge was, until the recent demise of 'Paul' the octopus that predicted results in the 2010 World Cup, the only invertebrate animal to have been deemed deserving of an obituary in a national newspaper.

Sadly, Granny enacted agency only as a captive animal, not as a museum-piece. The carcase was not preserved. Yet Granny's case points to animals as specimens, either captive or dead, being engaged in a sort of "social ecology" with humans – sociologists have their own name for it, Actor Network Theory (ANT). As the eminent scholar of museum studies at Leicester University, Susan Pearce, noted "specimens from the natural world work within human society in exactly the same ways as human artefactual material, whatever they may do in nature." By this she meant that natural specimens, like other processions, can be owned, loaned, traded, gifted, bequeathed, treasured or neglected, and, importantly in the context of this journal, they may be displayed in museums. The distinguished palaeontologist, the late Stephen Jay Gould conceptualised this cultural role of biological specimens in museums as a form of 'life after death':

We have devised peculiar rites for these creatures in natural history museums – inscriptions in ink on bone, chemical baths to render them translucent, systematic placement on shelves, often in the dark, often in shrouds of dust or moth crystals. I think of these treatments as forms of burial, but I think of the animals as expressing, in various ways, life after death.

Granny's material remains were not kept, in part, because of the challenges of preserving squidgy, soft-bodied animals in a form which is considered to reasonably represent their appearance in life. One way of overcoming this challenge is modelling. In the winter of 2006 I found myself at the Dublin Blaschka Congress where the primary topic of debate centred on whether or not the glass models of sea-anemones and other invertebrates and plants, made by the father and son team of Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka over an 80 year period beginning in the 1860s, qualified as "art". Three years later, at a conference in Manchester, found myself presenting the afterword addressing the question: do Blaschka's models enact and embody a different sort of vitality, an afterlife? The Manchester conference, which has resulted in a book on the afterlives of animals, mainly considered taxidermy. But, unlike "traditional" taxidermy Blaschkas' models, of which NMS has extensive collections (Figure 1), are not (what James Griesemer termed) "remnant models". That is, they contain none of the material (the materiality) of the animal that they (re)present. The models are made primarily of low-melting-point glass, fashioned in a flame – a process called "lamp-work".

Therefore they differ from taxidermy representations. Importantly, because they contain none of the material of the animal they represent, they are not necessarily based on a single individual specimen. Unlike remnant models, they may be composites, based on the "best" (however defined) features of two or more individuals. In other words, to play on words, there may be multiple living models for each glass model. Also, since the glass models contain none of the original animal, each could be (and was) produced in multiple versions (although, since they were hand-crafted and assembled these were not exact copies).

Figure 1. Models, primarily glass, of the sea-anemones and other invertebrates made and supplied to Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art (as *Sagartia parasitica*) by Leopold Blaschka (1822-1895). *Calliactis parasitica* (Couch, 1842), NMSZ.1866.12.52, is in the top right. © National Museums Scotland.]

This then begs the question – do these models, like the remnant models produced by the practices of taxidermists and the specimens discussed by Stephen Gould, enjoy an afterlife? Or, in other words, can entities which have never enjoyed a life, and endured a death – abiotic materials (or more poetically "the undead") – have an afterlife? Do

both the dead and the undead have the right of passage to the rites of passage into afterlife. I contend that they do.

I chose as my example the Blaschka models, but my discussion could equally have been centred on other collections of biological models in NMS: Emile Deyrolle and Sons anatomical models, Flatters and Garnett's or Wenzel Fric's enlarged models, of microscopic organisms, Guy Wilkins wax models of molluscs, Paul Osterloh's gelatine models of cnidaria, or a whole variety of other representations of organism in model form. Indeed, it could also be centred on present-day practices of natural history modelling and casting. Had NMS had an appropriate specimen, which sadly it does not, I might have focused my discussion on one of Louis Auzoux's 19th century papier-mâché models of insects. With child-like (or perhaps childish) glee I thought how fun it would be to use a *paper* model of an *ant* as the subject for a paper which draws substantially on ANT. Sadly, this wordplay doesn't work with a beetle (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Papier-mâché model of a cockchafer beetle. Melolontha sp., by Dr. Auzoux, Paris. © National Museums Scotland.

Nonetheless, the insect model example signals a further nuance. Since paper is primarily of organic origin, is the afterlife enacted by the papier-mâché model that of the insect or insects which modelled for Dr Auzoux or that of the tree(s) which provided the material for the model? I answer my own question – it is both. In other words, single items may enact multiple afterlives. This, of course, should come as no surprise. It is merely another example of "actors" being involved in multiple networks – familiar to all museum professionals who know that objects speak with many voices and engage in multiple dialogues. For, as my colleague Chantal Knowles wrote in the 2000 collection of essays *Hunting the Gatherers:* "collections, and their constituent artefacts, became entangled in unexpected sets of social relations". The concept of objects having a career path or a biography (that word itself signalling a life and/or afterlife), which is embodied in such views, is one which has been remarkably influential in museum studies over the last two decades.

ANT is a methodological framework which considers the various components of inter-relational processes, each an "actor", as coalescing in a "performance". So for example, sand, the sand-pit from which it was extracted, glass-makers, kilns, blow lamps, lamp-workers' tools, pigments, and Mr Blaschka himself, are amongst the actors in the "performance" which is the model of the sea-anemone *Calliactis parasitica*. Similarly Mr Blaschka, a shipping agent, wagons, a ship, a museum curator and a museum, a stationer and the bound register he (or she) produced, a pen, ink, and a glass representation of *C. parasitica* are all actors in the performance which is NMSZ.1866.12.52 (the number at which the model was registered under the name by which the species was known art the time, *Sagartia parasitica*). Thinking of ANT in this

way considers objects *as* performances and so foregrounds their capacity for active agency. In this respect, note ANT's similarity to ecology – lives exist *only* as part of an ecosystem (that is in and because of their relationship with other organisms and other entities) so too afterlives exists *only* as a performance within a network.

Performances are, by definition, sites of engagement with audiences, and of course each member of an audience is him/herself an "actor" (in the sense in which that term is used in ANT). Therefore, actor networks allow an (almost) infinite potential for afterlives. Within the Museum objects do their work, and meanings are constructed, along the boundaries where the intentionality of a "team of communicators" (the museum's planners, designers, curators, Learning & Programmes professionals, etc.) confront and engage with the visitors' prior knowledges, experiences, interests and motivations. The architectural sociologist Sophie Forgan calls this a "fugitive moment of encounter".

It is to illustrate the work natural history specimens do, or are thought to be able to do, that I wish to turn in concluding this short essay. I choose one example from the mid-19th century, one which was influential not only on the design of the natural history displays in the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art (as the former Royal Museum building, now part of NMS, was then called) but more generally on its operation.

The mid-nineteenth century was a period of rapid industrialisation and of globalisation of trade. Success in the competition for markets for finished goods relied upon (what in present-day parlance is termed) "up-skilling the workforce", or in the terms of the time: "Competition in industry must become a competition in intellect; and the nation which most quickly promotes the intellectual development of its artisans must, by an inevitable law of nature, advance." Museums were seen as an important technology to be applied to the "upskilling" task.

But along with the opportunities of industrial expansion came a perceived threat. A consequence of rapid industrialisation was equally rapid urbanisation. Large numbers of people flocked into the cities and other industrialising centres. In so doing they abandoned not only the land but also the mechanisms and interactions which maintained society. This newly urbanised population was, for some, "without tradition and largely unsupervised by squire or Church". In a Britain only too mindful of recent revolutionary upheavals in Europe, especially in France, the vast labouring-class population of the cities was perceived, by some, as a threat to the stability of the existing social order.

Like others of his time, Edward Forbes (1815–1854), a member of staff of the Museum of Practical Geology and later Professor of Natural History in Edinburgh University and Keeper of the Natural History Museum, Edinburgh, recognised the potency of museums in conveying social messages. For him collections and their arrangements in displays had a role in the training of the next generation of natural historians. But they also had another set of lessons in displaying, establishing and reinforcing the "natural" order. As systematic

Figure 3. Engraving by Lizars of the upper room of the Natural History Museum, Edinburgh c. 1825. This is the space over which Edward Forbes, in 1854, succeeded Robert Jameson as Professor and Keeper. © National Museums Scotland.

arrangements they represented the natural world, not as chaotic and brutal but as ordered – everything had its natural place. For Forbes, the very arrangement and systematics of display was a lesson in civics.

Viewing displays in the Museum was a form of "civic seeing", calculated to engender in working-people a "reverential sense of the extent of knowledge possessed by his fellow man". As Forbes elaborated, this was not a function of the individual specimens, rather one for their juxtaposition: "It is not the objects themselves that he [the working-man] sees there and wonders at, that make this impression, so much as the order and evident science which he cannot but recognise in the manner in which they are grouped and arranged". Forbes, therefore, envisaged two target audiences and different lessons for each. For the student and educated classes these lessons were in the objects themselves as well as in their arrangement; for the working classes the lesson was to be seen in the arrangement of specimens one to another. In other words, the latter lesson was in the spaces between the specimens. The social lesson to be learned was that everything, the viewer included, had its given proper place in the system. This lesson reinforced the status-quo and the established social order, thereby countering radicalism and revolution.

It was generally considered that the threat of social upheaval was exacerbated by the easy availability of relatively cheap alcohol. Forbes himself had declared that his visual lessons would foster a "thirst for natural knowledge, one which promised to quench the thirst for beer and vicious excitement". For him, museums promoted (and constructed) the interests of the public rather than those of the publican. This reference to booze brings me to my final point: the paradox that, given that the educational role of museums was intimately associated with temperance and abstinence, how come the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art (which had incorporated the natural history collections of the University of Edinburgh), from 1875, operated a public bar? I contend that this was because the perils of a radical challenge to the social order were seen as far more devastating than the evils of drink. If the social messages of ordered objects were to get through to working people then working people had to be able to view those lessons. This meant that they had to be encouraged into the Museum. The Museum's operation was therefore organised to attract working people. Indeed, the very location chosen for the Museum, in the working-class Old Town of Edinburgh, was a part of that process (and placed it close to the University). Gas lighting was installed, despite elsewhere it being considered (rightly) to be damaging to specimens through the heat, soot and chemicals it generated. This technology allowed the Museum to remain open beyond the working day. Free entry on certain days of the week was a further inducement to attract the working population. And the Museum's drinks licence was another incentive to encourage visitors through it doors – the Refreshment Room sold beers and wine (but not spirits) and part of the basement was allocated as a "beer cellar". The sale of alcoholic beverages inevitably brought the Museum into conflict with the temperance and abstinence movements. One indignant campaigner observed that the granting of a licence to the Museum effectively made Her Majesty the Queen "the proprietress of the largest public house in the nation". But if the sale of alcohol was necessary to ensure social stability then so be it.

I have attempted in this essay to pull together several strands of my research on the NMS collections (as opposed to items in the NMS collections). I have packed a lot of ideas into a very short essay – hopefully not so densely as to make them impenetrable. In their pre-Museum lives animals and plants, together with abiotic entities, rocks and minerals, are components in an ecology. The Museum through its collections and displays has much to say about these ecological relationships and how they constructed the diversity of life on Earth. I hope that I have shown also that in their *afterlives*, enacted within and through the museum, specimens are engaged (in perhaps surprisingly diverse ways) in a different sort of ecology. In this "cultural ecosystem", or suit of actor networks, they enact cultural relationships. I apologise if my examples have been drawn mainly from the zoological collections. However, I hope that, without too much stretch of the image, you can see that the concept of afterlife

applies not solely to these dead organisms but also to the un-dead – those items which have never had a life.

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The London Lodging House: *A Poor-House* by Gustave Doré, c.1869

Cath Stanton, former Curator of Images at the Museum of London examines the social art of Gustave Dore, whose engravings of London slums are used as primary sources in many history text books.

When the French artist Gustave Doré made his first visit to London in May 1868, he witnessed the living conditions of some of the city's poorest residents first-hand. Shortly afterwards, Doré produced his only known large-scale, group oil painting of a London scene, *A Poor-House* (figure. 1). Acquired by the Museum of London during the 1980s, the artist's portrayal of life inside the city's most deprived lodging houses is currently on display in the Galleries of Modern London.

In this article I will focus on *A Poor-House* by Doré, which has received significantly little scholarly attention, and place it in the context of temporary rented accommodation in nineteenth-century London. Doré's painting will be compared with accounts of lodging houses by contemporary writers, including Charles Dickens, and looked at in the chronology of the artist's career, with particular reference to his illustrations for the publication *London: A Pilgrimage* and his ambitions as a painter. The painting, along with other depictions by Doré of poverty in the capital, will be contrasted with works by nineteenth-century artists to demonstrate how the artist depicted an uncensored view of London's poor. Finally, close attention will be paid to primary and secondary literature on Doré and the absence of any in-depth study, or even acknowledgement, of *A Poor-House*.

A Poor-House depicts men, women and children crowded together in the dark basement of a common lodging house. It is poorly lit by a candle on the table in the centre, resulting in a dramatic contrast between light and dark. The occupants have assembled around two tables and are shown smoking and playing cards, while another group can be seen huddled together near the wooden staircase on the left. Several men in the centre and a man descending the stairs, partly obscured by shadows, stare out of the picture towards the viewer who has interrupted them. Although the presence of an audience is acknowledged, it is not welcomed and a tension exists where the viewer is transported into an unsettling situation, while being kept at a safe distance from it. From the perspective of a voyeur, the viewer of Doré's painting is confronted with a scene of absolute poverty and, moreover, encouraged to engage in it. The foreground opens up, offering space for the viewer to fill and potentially enter the abject lodging house to take their place among its inhabitants. As I will go on to discuss, this was the viewpoint taken by the artist himself during his visits to poor houses in the capital.

Although lodging houses were common in Victorian London, their standards varied greatly depending on the cost of rent. Rented houses at the lowest end of the spectrum were the last resort for people seeking shelter in an over-crowded city. Despite the endeavours of social reformers and philanthropists, such as the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, who was committed to improving housing in the capital, accommodation for London's poor at the end of the 1860s was perhaps as bad as it had ever been. Shaftesbury was instrumental in the passing of the Lodging House Act of 1851 which was designed to regulate and improve living conditions in temporary accommodation in the city. As one contemporary noted, however, 'provisions were enforced, or not enforced, according to the energy and conscientiousness of the local inspectors' (Hollingshead, 1861, p.199).

The plight of lodgers in London was highlighted during the 1850s by the writer Henry Mayhew who interviewed tenants of lodging houses and published their frank accounts

in *London Labour and the London Poor*. Towards the end of the 1860s, Doré, an acclaimed illustrator in both France and England, turned his attention to the lowly lodging house, frequented primarily by the city's destitute, including prostitutes, beggars and thieves. The artist's visual record of a poor house shares some similarities with a written account of the 'Slums of Westminster' by an American visitor to London in 1870:

> 'in a room about fifty feet long by thirty in width, at least sixty persons were sleeping, or sitting up on their coarse, common flock beds, some smoking, others eating and drinking, and a few were playing cards … Of this class of lodging houses, there are, in London … about seventy-five capable of accommodating any number of lodgers that the proprietors may see fit to stow away in their dens' (Kirwan, 1870, pp. 200-205).

The scene portrayed in Doré's painting of c.1869 mirrors not only Daniel Joseph Kirwan's contemporary description of over-subscribed, unsanitary accommodation in the city but also the account of a cheap lodging house in Whitechapel in *London: A Pilgrimage*, a publication which was illustrated by Doré and heralded as 'the most artistic illustrated work on the metropolis of England that has ever been produced' (*The Examiner*, 1872).

London: A Pilgrimage, with engravings by Doré and text by Blanchard Jerrold, was collaborated on between 1869 and 1871. Published the following year in instalments at a cost of five shillings each, *London: A Pilgrimage* was later sold as a book edition and translated into French, such was its widespread appeal. 'M. Dore's "London"' (*The Examiner*, 1872), as it came to be known, was viewed increasingly as a collectible item and special reading cases were sold to accompany the series. The publication was advertised widely in British newspapers, including *The Daily Graphic* and *The Pall Mall Gazette*, throughout 1872 and notice was given when the next instalment was due. For *London: A Pilgrimage*, Doré produced one hundred and eighty images which were described by one nineteenth-century newspaper as being 'drawn on the spot and engraved under the Artist's careful supervision' (*The Daily News*, 1872). Contrary to this assertion is Jerrold's claim that the artist was shy and reluctant to draw attention to himself by making sketches directly from life. As opposed to pulling out his sketchbook there and then, Doré's 'habit was to pause awhile and take in a scene' and later to 'fill a sketchbook with the day's observations' (Jerrold, 1891, p.196). In a similar way to how Doré's illustrations to *London: A Pilgrimage* were executed, it is likely that A Poor-House derived from on the spot observations which were later worked up into a detailed composition in the artist's studio.

The wood engravings Doré produced for *London: A Pilgrimage* focused on different areas of the capital and consequently highlighted the gulf between the affluent and the poverty-stricken districts. Although its exact date is unknown, *A Poor-House* was painted during the same time that *London: A Pilgrimage* was being planned and researched. In order to research the project, Doré and Jerrold went undercover. Acting as voyeurs, they visited sites in London which ranged from affluent parties to opium dens and slums, where they adopted 'rough clothes' to blend in (Blanchard & Doré, 1872, p.142). In some of the less salubrious areas in London's East End, where the pair entered a lodging house, they were accompanied by a policeman for protection:

> 'We advance into a low, long dark room parted into boxes, in which are packed the most rascally company any great city could show. They stare, leer, dig each other in the ribs – fold their black hands over their cards – and grunt and growl' (Blanchard & Doré, 1872, p.145).

This extract from *London: A Pilgrimage* parallels the scene portrayed in *A Poor-House*, where occupants of the lodging house – some of whom are playing cards – stare out

towards the viewer of the painting who is forced to confront the realities of accommodation for the poor in London. According to Jerrold, Doré was 'deeply impressed with the groups of poor women and children we had seen' during their travels around the city (Jerrold & Doré, 1872, p.6). He sought to represent the squalor and the wretchedness of poverty in London and consequently resisted romanticising the subject, as nineteenth-century British artists both before and after him did.

Compared to paintings by William Macduff and Augustus E. Mulready, who both portrayed sentimental views of London's poor, Doré's representations of the lower classes were far from idealised. Both Macduff and Mulready depicted unkempt young street traders, who often doubled as beggars, in their paintings in the Museum of London's collection (figure. 2 and figure. 3). Whereas the former portrayed a street urchin and a shoe-black (also known as a shoe-cleaner), the latter painted the portraits of an angelic-looking flower girl and crossing sweep. In doing so, both artists focused on the public face of poverty and their paintings deliberately provoked a sympathetic response from the viewer. By contrast, Doré concentrated on London's underworld – a world written about but rarely seen by those who did not inhabit it. The light in *A Poor-House* is revelatory as it illuminates an aspect of London life usually hidden from view. Similarly, the French artist's illustrations to *London: A Pilgrimage*, coupled with Blanchard's text, exposed an alien area of the city: Whitechapel, 'that district of ill-repute, hardly more familiar to the West End Londoner than Bokhara' in Uzbekistan (*The Graphic*, 1872).

Contemporary reactions to Doré's illustrations to *London: A Pilgrimage* were mixed. While one critic praised him for producing 'a singularly graphic and faithful representation of life in the English capital' (*The Leeds Mercury*, 1872), another condemned the artist for being 'compelled to invent where his sole business was to copy' (*The Art Journal*, 1873, p.64). Criticisms of Doré's illustrations tended to centre on the artist's nationality and questions were raised in the press about the suitability of a foreigner depicting a subject as complex as London, with which he was not considered to be familiar. Despite accusations of inaccuracies – which were levelled at Jerrold's text, as well as the artist's engravings - Doré's prints and painting of accommodation for the poor are supported not only by written accounts of lodging houses in the capital but also by the literature of the nineteenth-century novelist Charles Dickens, which Doré's images would later be used to illustrate.

Dickens declared that 'In all my writings … I have taken every available opportunity of showing the want of sanitary improvements in the neglected dwellings of the poor' (Dickens, 1849, p.10). Nowhere is this more evident than in his 1851 publication *On Duty with Inspector Field*, which includes a description of a night-time raid on a lodging house during a tour of St. Giles in central London. Like Doré and Jerrold, Dickens visited dicey areas of the metropolis accompanied by a police escort and recorded what he saw. A lodging house in *On Duty with Inspector Field*, occupied chiefly by Irish migrants, is described incredulously by the narrator as containing 'Ten, twenty, thirty – who can count them! Men, women and children for the most part naked, heaped upon the floor like maggots in a cheese! Ho! In that dark corner yonder! Does anybody lie there?' (Dickens, 1851, p.309). Like the inhabitants of a cheap lodging house in Dickens's text, in *A Poor-House* lodgers are crammed together in wretched conditions and emerge as spectres out of the darkness.

Doré, like Dickens, Shaftesbury and Mayhew before him, was preoccupied with the poverty he encountered in the capital: according to his collaborator Jerrold, the artist was 'enchanted with ... the low lodging houses' and was both 'bewildered and horrified' by what he saw there (Jerrold, 1891, pp.184-190). In addition to his illustrations for *London: A Pilgrimage* and *A Poor-House*, the artist produced a number of drawings and engravings of London scenes which focused on the city's poor. Among

his depictions of London's homeless population, which reached 80,000 during the 1800s, are a chalk drawing and an etching (figure. 4) in the collection of the Museum of London. Both images portray weary young girls clad in rags and supporting babies. Incidentally, the sight of dishevelled women in London shocked both Doré and Jerrold and caused the latter to remark that 'A Frenchman has never seen a shawl draggling to the ground from the shoulders of the wearer' (Jerrold & Doré, 1872, p.36).

Compared to other works by Doré, which include drawings, paintings, engravings and sculptures, relatively little has been discovered about *A Poor-House*. Its exact location is up for debate, although it has been suggested that it could depict the interior of one of several poor houses in London's East End which Doré and Jerrold visited for their publication. The painting has not been linked to a specific poor house in the city and is likely to represent several different institutions, such as the one in Whitechapel which is described in some detail in *London: A Pilgrimage* (Galinou & Hayes, 1996, p.321). Furthermore, nothing is known about where Doré's painting was publicly displayed during his lifetime, if it ever was: it was not, for example, ever exhibited at The Doré Gallery which opened in London in the late 1860s – around the same time that *A Poor-House* was painted – and showcased paintings by the artist to the British public. While The Doré Gallery at 35 New Bond Street continued to exhibit works by Doré after his death in 1883, the 'great masterpieces on view' did not include *A Poor-House* (The Doré Gallery, 1913).

Without knowing how, when or even if *A Poor-House* was viewed by the public, it is difficult to grasp exactly what impact it would have had on a nineteenth-century London audience. Certainly *A Poor-House* would have provided a striking contrast with sentimental depictions of the poor such as *A London Crossing Sweeper and Flower Girl* and *Shaftesbury*, or *Lost and Found*, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1863. Conditioned to see a censored view of poverty in the capital, which was propagated by artists including Macduff, nineteenth-century gallery goers would surely have been shocked by the sight of *A Poor-House* on the wall of a public institution. This begs the obvious but so far unanswered questions of why Doré chose to paint the subject, considering he did not – as far as we know – exhibit it, and why he found it worthy of his ambitions as a painter. *A Poor-House* is particularly striking in relation to Doré's output as a painter because it marks a significant departure for the artist, whose large-scale oil paintings largely depict literary, biblical and mythological scenes.

From early in his artistic career, Doré's success as an illustrator overshadowed his profile as a painter and this, as Jerrold's biography makes explicitly clear, was a constant source of frustration for the artist. In his native France, there was on-going antipathy and criticism of Doré's output as a painter, both by the French art establishment and by the public, which the artist keenly felt. He is recorded by Jerrold has having angrily exclaimed "'They will not accept *Doré peintre*!"' (Jerrold, 1891, p.189). When Jerrold encouraged his friend to exhibit his paintings at the Royal Academy in London, Doré refused, probably because 'people smiled upon his drawings and tossed their heads at his canvases' (Jerrold, 1891, p.IV). History painting had long been championed as the highest and most prestigious of the artistic genres, notably by the first president of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds, during the eighteenth century. This perception continued well into the 1800s, with large-scale oil paintings being given prominence and publicity at major annual art exhibitions, notably those held at the Salon in Paris and at the Royal Academy in London. It is not surprising, therefore, that Doré sought the prestige associated with being a painter, as opposed to a draughtsman, no matter how accomplished.

A Poor-House, a rare painted view of life inside London's lowliest lodging houses, is notably absent from biographies of Doré and catalogues of his work, including one as recent as 2007. Far from being 'enchanted' by London's low life as Jerrold claimed,

Joanna Richardson has suggested that Doré was 'largely concerned with the dream world of the aristocracy' during his visits to London and subsequent illustrations for *London: A Pilgrimage* (Richardson, 1980, p.112). This statement is contradicted both by the presence of *A Poor-House* and by extracts from Jerrold's biography of the artist. According to the author of *Life of Gustave Doré* and Doré's companion during his pilgrimage, 'the parts of London that riveted Doré's attention – for they touched his charitable heart, and they are also the more picturesque – were the abiding places of the poor' (Jerrold, 1891, p.184). Even so, there is no reference to *A Poor-House* in Jerrold's *Life of Gustave Doré*, nor in biographies of the artist by Richardson or Blanche Roosevelt. This omission is surprising considering that *A Poor-House* is the only known occasion when Doré, an artist hungry for recognition as a painter, painted a scene of contemporary London on a large scale. The evidence suggests that *A Poor-House* was equally overlooked by Doré's contemporaries, at least by the date of *London: A Pilgrimage's* publication. In a review of Doré and Jerrold's publication in the winter of 1872, one critic remarked how:

> *'Those best acquainted with the talented French artist's productions could not point to any paintings or drawings from his hand that showed special aptitude for the treatment of such a subject as London' (*The Examiner*, 1872).

Clearly the reviewer had never seen *A Poor-House* which is thought to have been painted several years before.

This article has attempted to re-awaken interest in Doré's oil painting of a topical London subject and raise questions about both its conception and display, which have not been addressed in the literature on the artist thus far. By placing *A Poor-House* in the context of written descriptions of Victorian lodging houses and visual depictions of poverty in London, I have sought to demonstrate that Doré, in contrast to some of his contemporaries, painted an unflinching view of the city's poor. Had *A Poor-House* been displayed to the public, it would probably have shocked a middle-class Victorian audience, unaccustomed to seeing a large-scale painting faithfully and unsentimentally depicting the destitute in London. Affected by what he witnessed during his visits to lodging houses in the capital, particularly those in the city's most impoverished areas, Doré impressed upon the viewer of his painting – both in the nineteenth century and today - the harsh realities of life inside the London poor house.

A Poor-House by Gustave Doré is currently on display at the Museum of London and available to view online at **www.museumoflondon.org.uk.**

List of illustrations:

Figure 1: Doré, G., c.1869. *A Poor-House*. [Oil painting] (Museum of London collection). © Museum of London

Figure 2: Macduff, W., 1862. *Shaftesbury, or Lost and Found*. [Oil painting] (Museum of London collection). © Museum of London

Figure 3: Mulready, A., 1884. *A London Crossing Sweeper and Flower Girl*. [Oil painting] (Museum of London collection). © Museum of London
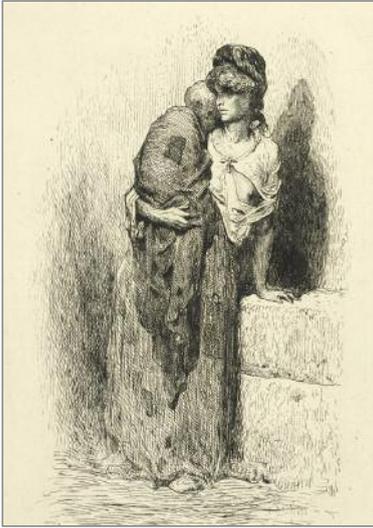
Figure 4: Doré, G., 1873. *Pauvresse à Londres*. [Etching] (Museum of London collection). © Museum of London

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In Touch with the Past: Hands On at the British Museum

Stuart Frost, Head of Interpretation at the British Museum, reflects on 10 years of the Museum's Hands On *desks and what that means for the visitor experience.*

> *'I can handle something that somebody made all those years ago. I learnt about that at school, and now I can touch it. It's unbelievable that I can touch.'*
> Visitor quote.

Introduction

The *Hands On* programme at the British Museum recently celebrated its tenth anniversary. The six *Hands On* desks are staffed by a team of ninety volunteers and are available for visitors seven days a week between the hours of 11am-4pm.[1] Each desk has its own handling collection of objects and the number of visitors who have stopped and used at least one of the desks recently passed the one million mark.

The recent passing of the two major milestones provides an ideal opportunity to review the origins, development and impact of the programme, and to share the British Museum's decade of experience with the wider museum community.[2] The *Hands On* signage alongside each desk, and the branding and marketing, all contribute to an impression of coherence and consistency that belies the long and iterative development to the programme.

Historical Perspective

The handling of objects by visitors at museums has a longer history than might be supposed. There is evidence that 18th century visitors to the British Museum were allowed to touch artefacts, a situation that is paralleled at other Enlightenment museums. However the ticketing system and opening times then in place meant that the opportunity to touch was restricted to those who did not have to work. For those able to visit, touch was recognised as a valid way of experiencing the collections.

As Enlightenment museums became accessible to the working classes during the 19th century, and as visiting numbers increased dramatically, touch was forbidden. The reason for this change seems to have been influenced partly by institutional attitudes to the newly admitted audiences rather than conservation concerns. It was felt that the uneducated working classes were unable to learn rationally through the collections. The lower social classes were seen as an audience for whom touch had no benefit: they were regarded as an unruly, dirty and destructive presence even when just looking.[3]

The larger number of visitors the British Museum began to attract during the nineteenth century meant that it was impossible to maintain a two-tiered system, where a privileged and leisured minority were allowed to touch, and where the working majority could not. Sight increasingly became the dominant sense in museums and the only means of engagement with the collections for all visitors.

Although it is still a widely held perception amongst the public that most museums are 'hands-off' environments, anyone who spends any time in a room with objects on open display will realise that substantial numbers of visitors are unable to resist the impulse to touch. It is understandable and natural that visitors want to explore the collections through touch. Humans have evolved over a vast period of time to make and use tools and taking pleasure in exploring the qualities of things through touch is hardwired into our make up. There are examples of early educational touch programmes in museums but these are probably exceptions rather than the norm. The value of hands-on

interpretation has arguably been recognised more widely and for longer in science centres and heritage contexts.[4] For most museums and galleries, hands on provision is a relatively recent phenomenon and it is only over the last decade that significant and substantial interdisciplinary literature on 'touch' in museums has appeared.[5]

The Access Agenda

The impact of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), an increasing focus on audiences and visitors' needs (including an awareness of theory related to learning styles and multiple intelligences) have been significant factors in driving the agenda for the inclusion of touch in museums.[6] The earliest of the recent touch initiatives at the British Museum reflected a desire to address the needs of visitors with visual impairments.

The Parthenon sculptures, for example, were interpreted for the visually impaired through a tactile model of the Parthenon, modern casts of reliefs that can be touched and raised drawings with Braille captions.[7] In addition a touch tour of Egyptian sculpture was developed for visitors with visual impairments and school students with special educational needs. The tour includes a colossal scarab beetle and ten other sculptures, each identified by a label with a large print title and a short Braille caption. Supporting information is provided currently in a large print booklet.[8] In both of these instances the provision was developed just over a decade ago.

More recently, the British Museum, like other institutions, has experimented with a variety of approaches to touch aimed at all visitors, including those who are visually impaired. The origins and evolution of the current *Hands On* programme needs to be considered against this background.[9]

Please Touch!

The origins of the *Hands On* desks lay in the redevelopment of *Room 68: The HSBC Money Gallery* which opened in 1997. This gallery focuses on the ways in which money has been used in different world cultures over a period of 5,000 years. Comprehensive summative evaluation of the gallery identified sensory and tactile access as areas which had not been addressed adequately.[10] The access consultant responsible for part of the evaluation offered suggestions for strategies to increase multi-sensory access and supervised handling was one of these. The Coins & Medals Department had been running successful coin handling sessions within the department for many years and the extension of this type of provision into the department's first permanent gallery was a logical step.[11] John Orna-Ornstein (then the HSBC Money Gallery Development Curator) and Kusuma Barnett (until recently Head of Volunteers) were central to the inception and realisation of the programme and have retained an active involvement in its development ever since.[12]

The initial handling programme known as *Please Touch* began in 2000 and was delivered in the gallery by trained volunteers three days a week. Handling collections of coins and related objects were assembled to reflect the stories told within the cased displays. There was no permanent furniture (or 'desk') in the gallery. Initially a trolley was collected from the department each day with the objects by the volunteers and then returned afterwards. An evaluation of *Please Touch* in July 2001 confirmed the popularity of the programme. Other departments adopted the model which then began to operate around the Museum in different locations, although initially none of these locations used permanent desks. The support of senior staff in the Museum has been central to the expansion of the programme and has enabled it to expand to its current configuration. The responsibility for the recruitment and day-to-day management of the volunteers lies with the Volunteers team but the curatorial departments have responsibility for the objects and also contribute to the training programme along with other staff.

Expansion of the Programme

The first permanent *Hands On* desk was developed as part of *Room 1: The Enlightenment – Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*, a major project which opened in 2003 to coincide with the 250th anniversary of the British Museum. This room was once the King's Library, the former home of the library of King George III, and one of the finest Greek revival interiors in London. It now features thousands of objects displayed in a way which evokes the academic disciplines and display aesthetic of the 18th century and reflects the ways in which intellectuals in Britain were striving to understand their world.

The Hands On Desk in Room 1 – Enlightenment (Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century) Credit: The British Museum

Visitors who stop at the desk, designed to harmonize with the overall architecture of the Library, are echoing the activities of Enlightenment antiquarians, collectors and travellers who sought to understand the world around through viewing and handling artefacts. There were obvious advantages from considering the desk from the start of planning of the exhibition. On a practical level, for example, the desk was designed with secure storage so that the handling collection could be kept within, rather than having to be returned to the curatorial department at the end of each day.

By early 2003 *Please Touch* activities were taking place in six locations and later that year these were all collectively rebranded as *Hands On*. The first comprehensive evaluation of the programme was undertaken in March 2004.[13] Whilst this established the popularity of the programme it also highlighted areas where improvements were desirable. The survey revealed, for example, limitations and inconsistencies in way finding and signage information, always a challenge in any large museum. The study also produced findings which informed and improved the design of future desks. The results of the evaluation, along with the wealth of experience that the Hands-on team had acquired, informed the strategic development of the programme over the next four years. By 2008 the Hands On desks were in the format and placement that they retain today, distributed across the Museum site.[14] The desks are integrated with the main visitor experience and although they are promoted as part of the Museum's access provision they are intended to be inclusive reflecting the value that all audiences place on touch.[15]

What types of objects do the desks contain?

The vast majority of the objects have either been acquired specifically for the purpose, or are part of the Museum's reserve collection. There are a small number of high quality replicas of objects of outstanding importance. All of the objects have been carefully selected by curatorial and conservation staff in conjunction with other members of the Hands On team. The objects remain the responsibility of the curatorial departments at all times and are monitored regularly by a conservator.

Individual objects in the desks are changed over time if necessary. The entire handling collection for the desk in Room 2 changes regularly to reflect the temporary exhibition programme for this space.[16]

There are clearly some very practical and pragmatic questions involved in selecting an object for touch. There is an obligation on the Museum to treat all historical artefacts in its care appropriately and not to expose objects to unnecessary risk, even if they have been acquired specifically for the purpose. The objects selected need to be robust enough to withstand repeated day-to-day contact. In addition to these custodial responsibilities, were an object to break during handing, the experience would be traumatic for the visitor, the volunteer and the curator. There are also interesting intellectual and interpretive issues involved in object selection. The object itself needs to offer an interesting handling experience, to foster curiosity in the

The Hands On Desk in Room 49 – Prehistoric and Roman Britain. The prehistoric component of the handling collection includes a replica section of the Mould gold cape, a replica gold beaker and a bronze ring from the harness of a chariot. Credit: The British Museum

visitor and to open up a wider dialogue. The handling collection for a desk as a whole needs, ideally, to relate broadly to the themes of the room in which the desk sits. The handling experience needs to be 'minds on' as well as 'hands on'.

The Handling Desk in the Enlightenment Gallery

There is insufficient space here to explore the contents of all of the desks in any great detail, but the Enlightenment Desk provides a reasonably representative example of the way in which the *Hands On* desks work. The volunteers who work at this desk are able to choose from a wider selection of objects stored within the desk itself, but in any one session only a small number of objects are placed on the desk surface in a purpose-built tray. The handling collection for this desk includes: two fossils (including an ammonite); a prehistoric hand-axe; a fragmentary piece of a Chinese porcelain bowl; a Roman Samian-ware dish; and part of a brick decorated with cuneiform. Each of the objects relates to at least one of the gallery's seven sections, and each therefore potentially opens up a wider debate that can help the visitor make sense of the gallery and the Enlightenment.

Both of the fossils fit comfortably within an adult visitor's hands and both have the potential to stimulate the visitor's curiosity without any mediation, based on sight alone. The fossils relate thematically and intellectually to the Natural World section of the Enlightenment displays. These reflect the original character of the Museum in 1753. At the time of its foundation the Museum's collections were split into 'Natural and Artificial Rarities', artificial objects being those made by people. The natural collections included botanical, mineral, animal and fossil remains, objects that subsequently became part of the Natural History Museum's collections. The relationship between the handling objects on the desk and the themed displays in the gallery gives the volunteer the opportunity to encourage the visitor to follow up their Hands On desk experience by exploring the displays in more detail.[17]

The fact that the Roman vessel is in good, but not perfect, condition is arguably actually beneficial and adds to its effectiveness. The object was recovered from a maritime context. Abrasion marks in the centre of the bowl were made by the foot of the upside down bowl on which it was stacked whilst in the ship's hold. The movement of the sea gently moved the column of stacked bowls after the ship was wrecked, leading to the

abrasion marks. Details like this offer the potential for the volunteers to pose questions for the visitors which encourage the visitor to look actively and to suggest answers. The antiquity of the object and its remarkable survival clearly adds to its appeal. For the vast majority of people who visit a *Hands On* desk this will be the first time they have been able to handle a Roman object, a complete bowl which fits comfortably into their hands in exactly the same way that a Roman would have held it. It seems likely that the fact the handling is mediated socially, rather than as a fixed touch object installation with a label in the gallery, imbues the experience with an extra dimension.

Evaluation of the Programme

Although a thorough evaluation had already been undertaken in 2004, there had been such significant changes to the format and placement of the six desks four years later, that a further study was necessary. This comprehensive evaluation, undertaken by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, focused primarily on exploring visitors' use of the desks through observation studies, short interviews and visitor-completed questionnaires.[18] A large sample size gave a rich cross-section of who used the desks.

Visitor Profile

The volunteers keep accurate records of the number of visitors who use the desks, and the *Hands On* desks do attract large numbers. In September 2010 the total number of visitors was 13,231. Of this total 2,400 were children. The overwhelming majority of *Hands On* users are UK based (62%), a much higher proportion than for the overall Museum profile (25%).[19] The desks currently attract a greater proportion of families (34%) than the Museum as a whole (12%). Further, 19% of the sample using the desks were under 16 (8% higher than the Museum as a whole) indicating that the *Hands On* desks have a strong appeal for younger visitors, something that was born out in interviews with visitors:

> *'We used one in the Living and Dying section that was really good as well. For us it makes it more for children. Otherwise you're just looking in the glass cabinets, and for them, they like things they can touch.'* Visitor quote

The Morris Hargreaves McIntyre evaluation of 2008 provided a comprehensive and illuminating snapshot of visitor use of the desks. The overwhelming majority of visits to a desk are incidental (94%) and with most people finding out about the desk on the day of their visits. The majority of visitors stayed at a desk for five minutes or less. This figure may seem low initially, but as the average dwell time for entire permanent galleries at the Museum is often less than 3 minutes, it is an indication that the desks do attract visitors and slow them down as they move through a room. The longest dwell time recorded at a desk was over 30 minutes.[20] In addition, 61% of visitors remained in the gallery after using the desk highlighting the potential value for the *Hands On* desks to increase engagement with the related displays.

The research confirmed that visitors use the desks in different ways. Whilst most visitors are keen to touch, and the majority do so, others are happy just to listen to the volunteer, to facilitate interactions or to watch others.

Do visitors value the programme?

The overall level of satisfaction with the *Hands On* desks was very high at 98%. In addition 96% of visitors felt that the *Hands On* programme had improved their overall experience of visiting the Museum. Almost everyone who was interviewed was happy with their engagement with the volunteer (98%), underlining the central importance of the volunteer in facilitating the *Hands On* experience.[21] Visitors are of course generally positive when asked to evaluate an exhibition or display but the particularly high figures undeniably reflect a genuine enthusiasm for the programme.

That 83% of users felt they gained new knowledge as result of their experience suggests that the desks facilitate intellectual outcomes. The qualitative data captured by interviews reveals overwhelmingly positive responses from visitors, often reflecting the emotional impact of the experience, or the value attached to the social dimension. For example:

> '…you can read as much as you like, it's always nice to have a personal one-to-one conversation and you can actually ask your own questions….. it's nice to talk.'
> Visitor quote

Interestingly for almost 60% of visitors, the *Hands On* desks were their first experience of being able to touch or handle an artefact in a museum. It is not surprising, therefore, that visitors value the *Hands On* programme so highly. Over a just over a quarter of those interviewed in 2004 stated that touching an object was their favourite aspect of the programme. Interestingly an almost equal proportion of visitors valued having somebody to tell them about the object which underlines the value visitors place on personal interaction. Almost all visitors to *Hands On* desks said that the experience increased the quality of their visit and brought it to life.

What makes a good object?

Anyone who has worked with handling collections and different audiences will understand that visitors do not find objects inherently interesting or engaging just because they are allowed to touch them. A combination of formal evaluation and anecdotal observation suggest four qualities that make a good *Hands On* object from the point of view of a sighted visitor. These can be summarised broadly as: aesthetic appeal, curiosity or strangeness, personal connection; and uniqueness. With most of these aspects the interpretation offered by the volunteer is essential in drawing out these elements and making them explicit to the visitors. These suggestions are reinforced by the results of wider evaluation elsewhere in the Museum and by existing literature on the use of handling objects for learning.

Objects which have an inherent aesthetic appeal are effective in attracting visitor's attention. An object with a strong aesthetic will probably draw visitors to it and visitors may overlook, initially, other less impressive objects. Sight plays an important role in touch.[22] The depth of the actual engagement with the object that follows is determined by other factors. If the object were to only have aesthetic qualities, the outcomes would probably be limited.

If the overall form of the object or its visual appearance stimulates curiosity then it can be effective in attracting visitor's attention. The success of the encounter will depend in part on the extent to which the object can be interrogated to reveal its secrets and on the interaction between visitor and volunteer.

> 'It's good to have a bit of mystery to it so you can say well Was it a child's toy? Was it a chess piece? Was it used to commemorate someone? … and you have to do the research yourself.' Visitor quote

Formal evaluation and practical experience suggests that objects which in some way establish a connection between the visitor and the person who made, owned or used the object originally can be particularly effective. The thumb print of the person who made an ancient pot for example can suddenly collapse the distance between past and present, or handling an object in exactly the same way as the original user.

> 'I like the hand axes. Very crude though they are. They talk about them being used by a Stone Age man 600,000 years ago. Just to handle one makes you feel more in touch with what they were actually doing.' Visitor quote

Objects which have facets that transcend visitors' experiences and expectations can be very powerful. The most obvious example is the great age of an object. Most visitors have never had the opportunity to handle a truly ancient artefact and this unique experience can create powerful and emotionally charged experiences.

> 'It's something to talk about. You've touched a 350,000 year old knife today.'
> Visitor quote

It seems reasonable to suggest that the more of these characteristics an individual object has the more likely it is to engage and excite visitors. Once a visitor approaches a desk and views the selection of objects on the table, the decision to select an object is based on a visual assessment or the actions of the volunteer who may prompt the initial dialogue.

Running the programme

The *Hands On* programme has always been delivered by volunteers. The current rota means that volunteers tend to work on a desk twice over a four week period.[23] The programme was initially managed by the HSBC Money Gallery Development Curator but the expansion of the programme led to the formal integration of the programme with the Education Department in 2004. This was to facilitate closer co-ordination with other elements of the public programme and other 'live' interpretation. The Volunteer Office manage the recruitment and security clearance of volunteers, they also co-ordinate the training programme and contribute to all aspects of the day-to-day running of the programme, a considerable amount of work.

The Hands On Desk in Room 68 –Money. The design of the desks has evolved over time. This desk has a recessed padded surface. Credit: The British Museum

A co-coordinating (or steering) group meets quarterly to address larger strategic issues and to guide the future development of the programme. The precise composition of the group has evolved over time but it includes the Head of Interpretation, Head of Learning, Volunteers and Audiences, a senior conservator, a representative for the *Hands On* volunteers team, and curatorial representation. Other staff attend the meetings when necessary. There needs to be clear guidance about what should happen when there is an emergency evacuation of a gallery, for example, and clear systems for dealing with concerns about the condition of any of the handling objects. The Steering Group and the Volunteers team have been central in shaping and introducing the policies and procedures which ensure the programme runs smoothly.

The Future

The programme has been successful in attracting and engaging large numbers of visitors and it is clear that visitors and volunteers both value the provision. Museums are not neutral spaces and the six *Hands On* desks are a powerful statement of commitment to providing meaningful opportunities for all visitors to learn through handling. Nevertheless it is clear that there are areas where improvements can be made.

Key areas for the Museum to address are to find ways of increasing the number of non-native English speakers (or overseas visitors) using the desks. Can this be addressed, for example, by including information on the *Hands On* signs in different languages or by providing a separate *Hands On* leaflet with multi-lingual information and an easy to follow map so that visitors can find the desks? Some volunteers already use supplementary visuals to help interpret the objects for non-English speakers. The

popularity of the desks with existing users demonstrates that the Museum has a resource which is worth publicising and promoting. There is arguably still scope for improving awareness of the *Hands On* desks for visitors pre-visit and when visitors first arrive at the Museum and are looking at how best to use their time.

Although the current scope of the *Hands On* desks is reasonably comprehensive given that the Museum has over ninety-six galleries there is clearly the potential for other desks to be introduced in new locations. The high proportion of visitors who come to the Museum to visit the ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman collections, for example, would suggest that there would be high demand for desk that related to ancient civilisations. Expanding the programme would undoubtedly be popular with visitors but it would pose challenges logistically in ensuring that all of the desks were staffed and open between 11am-4pm, seven days a week.

Conclusion

A conjunction of events made a review of the history of the *Hands On* programme apposite. The recent celebration of the tenth anniversary and the passing of the milestone of over one million participants are major landmarks and are testament to the impact and popularity of the programme. The number of visitors who have participated in the programme, the remarkably high level of visitor satisfaction, and the number of volunteers who have given so much of their time for so long are testament to the value and appeal of *Hands On*. Kusuma Barnett's recent decision to step down as Head of Volunteers in December 2010 makes another key moment in the history of the *Hands On* at the British Museum. The success of the programme is a reflection of the great contribution that she, and other volunteers and staff, have made over the last decade.

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www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_publications/online_research_publications/hsbc_money_gallery.aspx

Elizabeth Pye (ed), *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts* (Left Coast Press, California 2007)

Charles Spence, 'Making Sense of Touch: A Multisensory Approach', in Elizabeth Pye (ed), *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts* (Left Coast Press, California 2007), p45-62

Marcus Weisen,' How Accessible are Museums Today?', in H.J. Chaterjee, *Touch and Museums: Policy and Practice on Object Handling* (Berg Publishers, November 2008).

Online Resources

For DDA Legislation:

www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/1995050.htm

For useful guidelines on training volunteers (including object handling)

www.mla.gov.uk/what/programmes/renaissance/regions/london/News_and_Resources/volunteer_training_bank

www.britishmuseum.org/learning/schools_and_teachers/taught_sessions/hands_on_sessions.aspx

Footnotes

1   The current locations of the desks are Room 1 - *The Enlightenment Gallery*; Room 2 - *The Changing Museum*; Room 24 - *Living & Dying*; Room 33: *China, The Joseph E Hotung Gallery*; Room 49: *Roman Britain*; Room 68: *Money, The HSBC Gallery*.

2   I only joined the staff of the British Museum in 2009 and have played no role in the creation of the programme. My motivation in researching and writing about Hands On at the British Museum was to mark the achievement of reaching the two key milestones whilst familiarising myself with the Museum's live interpretation provision.

3   Fiona Candlin, *Museums, Modernity and The Class Politics of Touch*, p15.

4   Tim Caulton, *Hands-on Exhibitions: Managing Interactive Museums and Science Centres* (Routledge, 1998)

5   The most notable recent contributions are Elizabeth Pye (ed), *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts* (Left Coast Press, California 2007) and Helen Chaterjee, *Touch in Museums: Policy and Practice on Object Handling* (Berg Publishers, November 2008.

6   For DDA Legislation: www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/1995050.htm

7   Room 18a offers tactile interpretation of the Parthenon through touchable model of the restored Parthenon, casts of reliefs and raised drawings with Braille which offer interpretation. This provision was innovative when introduced and also included a remarkable book of raised drawings, Braille text and audio

narration. Advances in technology subsequently have allowed the Museum to develop multimedia guide tours with enhanced audio description for visually impaired. The current approach to raised drawings and Braille is to provide this interpretation in book format rather than as fixed panels in the gallery.

8   The Egyptian Touch Tour is located in Room 4.

9   The *Hands On* desks and Touch Tours in Room 4 and 18 are promoted as part of the Museum's access provision and as part of the provision for families: www.britishmuseum.org/visiting/access.aspx. Tailored handling sessions around a group-specific interest area are also offered on request.

10   Sue Picton, 'Appendix 2a: Discussion Document towards an Evaluation of the HSBC Money Gallery for Disabled Visitors' in John Orna-Ornstein (ed), *Development and evaluation of the HSBC Money Gallery at the British Museum*, Occasional Paper number 140, 2001, p28-35. Available online at http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_publications/online_research_publications/hsbc_money_gallery.aspx

11   Handling sessions are still offered today for booked school groups: www.britishmuseum.org/learning/schools_and_teachers/taught_sessions/hands_on_sessions.aspx

12   Kusuma Barnett stepped down as Head of Volunteers in December 2010. The Volunteers team are part of the Department of Learning, Volunteers and Audiences at the Museum. Susan Raikes is the current Head of Learning and Volunteers.

13   Francesca Monti, *Evaluation of the British Museum Hands On Programme* (Unpublished, March 2004).

14   The current locations of the desks are listed above in note i: Room 1; Room 2; Room 24; Room 33; Room 49; Room 68.

15   Weisen speaks of the need for museums to bring touch out of the 'ghetto' and to rethink themselves as inclusive multisensory spaces, Marcus Weisen,' How Accessible are Museums Today?', in H.J. Chaterjee, *Touch and Museums*, p244.

16   For example, the Yorkshire Museum kindly provided handling material for the desk from the duration of *Treasures from Medieval York: England's Other Capital* (12th February – 27th June 2010), a temporary exhibition of objects from that museum which took place in Room 2.

17   The Enlightenment desk has a particularly strong fit between the objects in the handling collections and the individual displays in the gallery.

18   Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, *Touching History: An evaluation of Hands On desks at the British Museum* (Unpublished, 2008)

19   Strategies for encouraging more non-English speaking visitors to use the desks have been explored in the past.

20   Dwell time is one way of assessing engagement but it needs to be considered alongside other measures of success.

21   Interestingly the majority of visitors were unaware that the desks are manned by volunteers (67%). Therefore most members of the public perceived the person behind the desk as a member of Museum staff.

22   The senses are interrelated. Psychology suggests that for sighted visitors sight dominates touch and shapes the experience.

23   The fact that volunteers are not on a desk all day every day helps maintain enthusiasm.

Riding the snake: Some thoughts on managing threatened museums

Steph Mastoris gave conference the benefit of his experience and his personal view on how to cope when your museum is threatened by cuts or closure.

The current economic crisis is something that no museum and its staff can ignore. Although we seem to be at only the very start of a long period of economic austerity, the effects are already becoming manifest within our profession, encompassing everything from pay freezes and reductions in operational budgets, to threats of closure of whole museums. It was with this in mind that the organisers of SHCG's 2010 Annual Study Weekend rightly sought to pool members' ideas on how best to try and survive in the coming storm. What follows is a summary of my thoughts on this, based upon the twenty-five-plus years I was lucky enough to spend working in a number of English local authority museums and mentoring colleagues from other institutions. My rather surreal title epitomises the mind-set that I feel it is best to develop when the threats start to arise, for the process is never linear and the timescales will fluctuate. Furthermore the target of the threat may frequently change, so eventually no part of the organisation seems safe and any attempt to keep on top of the situation can seem like trying to ride a massive snake as it threads its way through the jungle of bureaucracy and institutional finance.

"The cuts are coming!" is the cry we hear on all sides at the moment, and indeed things over the next few years are going to be very difficult. However, let us not forget that museums as a species have been rarely off the endangered list. Even during the "good times" of the last fifteen or so years hardly a season has passed without some institution in the UK having to make major changes to its staffing or operations because of financial problems. The reasons for this are not hard to find. First, museums are perceived by very many people as a luxury, and as there is no law to maintain most of those that currently exist, it is easy to reduce their current levels of funding. Second, museums are expensive places to run and their operational cost per visitor is considerable. This means that when public spending is under scrutiny museums can be easily identified as lacking value-for-money in basic accountancy terms. Third, there are many people (and more especially decision-makers) who just don't "get" what museums are about. These people are mostly NOT brutish philistines, they just have other priorities that they consider to be of greater and more immediate social (and political) benefit. Fourth (and this may be the most unpalatable thought for us), quite a few curators are just not good at communicating with decision makers or even the public. As a result are poor advocates for their collections or institutions even when they are not under threat of downsizing or closure. This can make long-term bureaucratic support for museums difficult to sustain.

Causes and conspirators

Although most threats to museums seem to begin and end with money, often this is just the most recent manifestation of longer, more structural or institutional problems. At its most extreme, there are instances of museums whose very foundation were in some way flawed through a poor funding base, or over-optimistic business planning. Alternatively, certain important objectives or agendas were not fulfilled or some key group within the community felt thwarted or excluded. In these cases all the weaknesses of the museum's establishment start to arise every time there is a financial, administrative, publicity or political hiccup and the place can lurch from one crisis to another.

Of course there are instances where a major change in political power results in the museum coming under attack for ideological reasons. In local authorities the move to

cabinet-style government a decade or so ago often increased the risk of this because of the associated demise of the more broadly-based committee structure. In these bodies the larger number of elected members from all parties were involved in policy and this led to a greater degree of consensus towards museum provision as contrasting political administrations came and went.

Frequently the reasons for cuts in funding are often explained away by some bland statement about changed corporate priorities or a failure by the museum to hit income targets. Sadly, the real motivations for these actions frequently revolve around personal animosities and institutional or political infighting that are far beyond the control of the head of the museum. However, some medium and long-term problems can arise from sustained bad management on the part of the director, or from the lack of political or social sensibilities that can sometimes arise from rather blinkered professional practice on the part of the curatorial staff. As one eminent museum consultant once commented, "Museum folk are like hedgehogs. They can be slow moving and very prickly, but usually forget that they are easily squashed by bigger things or people." Another colleague has observed that hedgehogs also like to roll themselves up into prickly balls, which is the worst thing to do in times of threat. What of course is needed is for all of us to be as open and engaging as possible in order to make our case heard.

The nightmare scenario is if a number of these factors combine. For publically-funded museums this can result in politicians and senior officers conspiring together to down-size or wind up the museum. In such cases the curator has little room for manoeuvre and often few friends of influence. The first task is to define accurately where and with whom the problem(s) lie and to attempt to neutralise the attacks by putting right the obvious difficulties and trying to win support within the bureaucracy. The second task is to develop one or more alternative plans to replace cuts. A colleague once described his preparations as, "Quite often the Forces of Darkness do not actually know what to do, other than to make cuts. If you can come up with a viable alternative that saves them thinking, they might just buy it, or at least buy you time."

It is at times like this that true friends of the museum show themselves in the most unlikely places. All of those family-fun activity days and the mundane talks to church or amenity groups that have been given over the previous few years will have resulted in there being lots of "sleeping" supporters within the local community and they will make themselves heard once the threat to the museum becomes obvious. Sadly, the supportive, local politicians or trustees who have been studiously cultivated by the museum during the same period will tend to "melt" away from view at the first sign of trouble –unless of course their party is in opposition and there is some political capital to be made from supporting a service threatened by the administration in power. Furthermore, although official Friends groups can provide good moral support in fighting a threat, their public campaigns are easily sidelined by politicians as the protestations of people with a vested interest in the museum and who are not representative of the community at large.

Timescales and threats

The amount of time between the beginning of the threat and its conclusion obviously varies greatly. In some cases it can run on for years. What frequently happens is that the original timetable changes (frequently being extended), with intermediate issues and situations arising to make the original problem more complex. As the threat to the museum rumbles on, these hitherto minor issues can develop into serious problems that will require amelioration. This requires a vast amount of flexibility, energy and emotion from the museum staff. Indeed, for the head of the institution dealing with all the meetings and paperwork, as well as briefing staff and generally keeping positive in public, it is more than a full-time job and utterly exhausting. The support of family and friends is obviously important in this, but perhaps of greater use is a professional

mentor or group of peers outside of the organisation, who can provide experienced, insightful and sometimes brutally-honest advice.

Extreme care is also required when working with the public, and especially the media. Every journalist is always on the look-out for a big story and even the hitherto most supportive reporter will seize on a few casual remarks from a member of staff and use them to develop frequently negative or at best politically-embarrassing news about the museum. More pernicious are the innocently-answered queries from the public that can be seized upon by hostile politicians or senior bureaucrats to be considered as unauthorised official statements that could (conveniently) justify a termination of contract. In this sort of environment, it is very easy to become paranoid and this in turn can easily impair one's judgement when working with others. With a prolonged threat, what tends to develop over time is one of two attitudes: either a desire to retreat and flee from the conflict, or a bloody-minded determination to fight to the last, regardless of personal consequences. For some, the long slog to try and preserve as much as possible in the face of what seems an un-ebbing tide of threats both financial and political can burn-out the spirit and force them to either leave the profession or become bitter and cynical. For others a rather existential mind-set can develop, where the battle against the threat becomes an energising end in itself. Here the greatest personal danger arises when the conflict is concluded and "normality" no longer has any excitement or fulfilment.

Maintaining morale

Regardless of the personal motivation of the head of the museum, s/he has a vital role to play in maintaining the morale of the rest of the staff. The key to this lies in the nature and extent of information about the threat that is circulated. Obviously all staff need to be included in its dissemination and the information must be both timely and accurate, with an honest analysis of the facts. However it is often very easy to confuse colleagues with too much detail or provide too much interpretation that will either scare them or breed complacency. One of the greatest problems in maintaining morale in situations like this is that the difficulties can seem unending, and where jobs are at stake, those under threat are unlikely to think rationally or for the greater organisational good. It is also easy to forget that colleagues lower down the hierarchy may feel very impotent within a big organisation and will tend to assume that the head of the museum has more power and influence than is actually the case. Remember too that for the majority of staff working in the museum it is just another job and that the threat to the institution is merely a threat to their employment and for them the cultural or intellectual losses from cuts in funding will be of little consequence.

The analogy of fighting a war can be applied to the task of managing morale when a museum is under threat. Rumour and surmise are two great enemies of morale and the head of the museum needs to be aware of what is being said and thought throughout the organisation. "Careless talk" needs to be discouraged, especially in public areas and a degree of news vetting and some "spin" are sometimes required. A "war cabinet" should be established to advise and assist, comprising the members of whatever management team already exists along with influential members of the workforce. These people will provide feedback on staff morale and help to counter pessimistic rumours by using the same gossip network. They will be crucial to help explain the changes that may occur as a result of the threat.

Tackling the threat

When the nature and extent of this threat to the museum becomes clear, often choices will need to be made on what resources will have to be lost or reduced. In this situation there will be many conflicting pressures to save one area of activity rather than another, and it is often simpler to suggest a "salami-slicing" approach, where savings are made by reducing every budget area. Although easy to do, this can damage the morale of all

of the museum's staff very rapidly. A harder, but often less-morale-sapping approach is to define the core business of the museum and then target activities that least contribute to this work. In this way the key objectives of the museum continue to be met. Accompanying this approach should be a review of all procedures, activities and expenditure to ascertain their necessity or whether there are smarter ways of working to deliver the same result. This is something that greatly benefits from the involvement of all staff and it is often surprising what radical suggestions will arise, if the alternative consequences of the threat are made clear.

Once the threat to the museum starts to take effect it is very hard to manage the feelings of frustration, confusion, sadness and loss amongst the staff. Although the total closure of a museum is a terrible act of institutional bereavement to deal with, more bitter and divisive still is the enforced redundancy of only a selection of the staff. Besides the obvious feelings of victimisation by those being made redundant, the remaining part of the team will often experience the feeling of guilt frequently suffered by survivors of disasters.

There are no easy solutions for such difficult situations, but overall it is less unsettling for those remaining if the people to be made redundant leave as quickly as possible to stop morale being lowered further. Sadly there will be little opportunity to say goodbye to these people in a way that celebrates their contribution to the museum, as most usually wish to slip away with little ceremony. For those remaining as well as those departing, the foundation of any motivational discussion has to be that we are ALL expendable compared to the irreplaceable collections in our care, and that what is paramount is the overall survival of the museum as a repository for these collections and as a means by which the public can gain access to them.

Some cynical and hard truths

And to conclude these brief thoughts, here are some even briefer statements that have been quoted to me by a number of managers of museums under threat. Although some are cynical or uncomfortable and some are contentious, they all possess a degree of truth that may help provide a perspective on our difficult work over the coming years.

- Museums are always short of money.
- For politicians and bureaucrats a museum's two most important performance indicators are meeting visitor targets and staying within budget.
- Organisational drag and bureaucratic inertia have saved more museums from closure than campaigning curators and their supporters.
- Don't rely on hitherto supportive politicians.
- Beware of casual remarks in public about the threat to the museum.
- Don't play politics yourself.
- Never trust the media to get the museum's point across accurately or fairly.
- Don't expect others to appreciate as much as us the impact of our museums on society.
- Practical arguments and solutions will win over threatening politicians and bureaucrats, not theories of cultural inheritance, or the sanctity of the artefact.
- Bad curatorship is probably a museum's most serious long-term threat.
- It is easier to close down a museum than to re-open one.
- Preserving the collections and maintaining public access to them is the bottom line in any definition of museum provision.
- Only our collections are irreplaceable.

Park Life: A Pioneering Partnership
Working with Design students to create an exhibition at Abbey House Museum, Leeds

Kitty Ross, Curator of Leeds/Social History at Leeds Museums and Galleries takes us through the process of setting up a partnership with Leeds Metropolitan University and how the project progressed.

Over the past few years, Leeds Museums and Galleries have been forging ever closer links with their University neighbours. As well as providing opportunities for work placement students and interns to gain valuable work experience, the museum service has also undertaken a number of joint projects with University partners.

In 2009 I was therefore encouraged to approach staff at Leeds Metropolitan University to see if they would be interested in working with us on the exhibition programme at Abbey House Museum. This was a plunge into the unknown, but fortunately we had a positive response from Juha Kaapa, Head of Design and Principal Lecturer at the Leeds School of Architecture, Landscape and Design. He suggested that the project could form a module for 2nd year BA design students and take the form of a competition. The museum would provide a detailed exhibition brief, object lists and exhibition text and the students (in small groups) would produce design proposals.

This was an exiting prospect. In my curatorial career I have been involved in two contrasting scales of display project. Leeds Museums have been the fortunate beneficiaries of large-scale capital investment over the past ten years. Abbey House Museum was totally refurbished in 2001 and the new Leeds City Museum opened in 2008. Both involved working with professional designers (Blue the Design Co. at Abbey House and Redman Design for the City Museum). In both cases, there were only a few tenders for the project, and lowly curators were not involved in the selection process. At the other extreme, I have also been guilty of throwing together exhibitions on a shoe-string budget with very little thought given to visual design.

Our proposed exhibition for 2010 was provisionally titled "Park Life" and aimed to explore the history of the parks and open spaces of Leeds through the museum's social history and natural science collections.

The students made their first site visit in September. We had been told to expect around 40 students, but nearly 100 turned up, as the project had also been offered as an optional project to 3rd years. This was very encouraging, if a little overwhelming for a small site. As well as gaining familiarisation with the exhibition space, the visit also gave the students an impression of the museum as a whole and the (family) audience that the museum caters for. In the end around 45 students took on the project (in 15 groups).

The museum provided a detailed brief, including plans and descriptions of the exhibition space. The temporary exhibition gallery in Abbey House Museum consists of 13 built-in display cases of assorted sizes, which cannot be moved, so the gallery layout was not something that the students could influence. The curatorial staff provided the themes and object selection for each case. Object details and images were made accessible to the students via a Flickr website. These included object dimensions, although not all students seemed to believe them, as I was told on several occasions that we couldn't possibly fit a brown bear specimen in the display – despite it being a juvenile, and thus not much bigger than a cat.

The budget for the exhibition was as follows (mostly from Renaissance Yorkshire Hub funding). Effectively the students were working to a budget of £2000 for their design proposals.

Mannequins	£1,050
Graphics	£130
Display materials	£2,300
Yorkshire Film Archive	£250
Conservation (costume)	£300
Conservation (natural history)	£400
Extra design (graphics)	£30
Extra design (invites)	£30
Professional photography	£250
Opening	£300
Total	**£5,040**
Grand Total	**£5,040**

Abbey House budget	
Invites	£135
Mounting materials	£128.55
Mounting equipment	£26.20
Digital screens	£264.13
Grand Total	**£418.88**

The students then had until 5th November to work on their design proposals, including drawings, computer graphics and 3-dimensional models. Although some students had been asking questions in the meantime, we had no idea what to expect. The museum judging panel consisted of the curator (myself), Camilla Nichol (Head of Collections), Samantha Flavin (Keeper of Abbey House) and Anna Robinson (Visitor Assistant).

We were faced with a bewildering choice of 15 very different visions for our exhibition. There were a few elements which cropped up frequently. Many students proposed mascot figures, including squirrels, foxes and a couple of park keepers. Silhouettes were another favourite (and formed part of the winning design). Leaves and seasonal change also featured heavily. There were a number of imaginative but impractical suggestions. These included blacking-out half of the display cases, growing grass in the gallery (with no natural light), dried leaves on the floor, free stickers for children to take away (and stick in inappropriate places) and vinyl obscuring the outside of the cases.

It was a difficult choice but the LMU teaching staff were also able to guide us as to which team had the practical skills and application to be able to undertake the project for real. The winning team of Jon Summerfield and Matt Wilson (plus a third student

who dropped out) had proposed a design scheme which was both imaginative and simple, and above all was sympathetic to the content of the exhibition without trying to impose an additional theme or storyline. Each case was given a stylised backdrop with blue sky, a green hill and a pastel-coloured silhouette of figures relating to the subject-matter of each case. The logo that they designed was simple but elegant. They showed that they had read the museum's brief and responded to it and above all had produced a design that we could not have come up with ourselves.

Jon and Matt then had from November to finalise their designs and begin to build the displays. Fortunately for us, they were able to use the workshop facilities at LMU and were ably guided and assisted by Robin Brinksworth, one of the lecturers. The exhibition change-over was scheduled for the first three weeks of January, during which we had temporary use of the education room, so the students were on site from the second week and had just a fortnight to complete everything before the exhibition opened on 26th.

Obviously, in such a tight schedule, there are hiccups. The exhibition gallery cannot be closed during exhibition construction as it forms the only lift access to the upstairs displays, but inevitably we found it impossible for the students not to block access. Also, the blizzard conditions of January 2010 nearly made it impossible for the van bringing the exhibits to get access to the museum, and it is not good planning to spend a night in casualty a week before your exhibition opens! However, despite all this, "Park Life" opened on time, on budget and to great acclaim.

This was our first experimental year and obviously we can now draw lessons to make the process smoother in the future. Many aspects of the partnership went very well. The competition meant that we had the luxury to select from 15 different designs. We were extremely lucky to work with two students who were so dedicated that they worked through their vacation (and were still trying to contact me on Christmas eve!). Unlike many professional designers, they were willing to listen and not always think that they knew best. We also benefited from the professional expertise of the LMU staff and from the use of their workshop facilities.

Inevitably there were problems. It is impossible to completely rely on students, which was highlighted for us when one of the team dropped out. 19-20 year olds are not experienced project managers. Some elements of the design never actually got completed once the exhibition opened, as the students then had to refocus on their exams and coursework. The project also involved more input and time from the University staff than they had envisaged (something that we have taken account of and budgeted for this year).

We have had very positive feedback from the students themselves:

> Matt Wilson wrote *"I think overall the project was a great learning experience for the future, especially time management through making and installing for opening day. When producing work for a client the quality must maintain a high standard and by putting in the hard work, the results paid off. This is something to be proud of and looks good in my portfolio for the future. Thank you for the opportunity to work with yourself and the museum on the project."*

> And Jon Summerfield wrote *"I thought the project was proposed to us, by yourselves at Abbey House, very well. It was clear from the start what you wanted in terms of theme and letting us know the exact contents of the case helped us alter our plans accordingly.*

> *The method of contact was very useful, allowing us to talk straight to you in a professional manner, I think this helped me and Matt a crucial amount, and made*

the project seem much more professional and client based. Which was very helpful to get an understanding of how such a project might run in a 'real world' job.

The collaboration with the Uni definitely helped us get a better understanding of how similar projects are run in a working environment and definitely gave me and Matt a better grasp of timeframes and costing.

I enjoyed the project and appreciated the offer of letting someone less experienced get a taste of a live project. And I think that seeing the museum and the corridor helped me and matt by showing us that, this is a real museum, its important to the people running it, and it should look a high quality, really gave us a boost into a more professional working environment than we were used to.

So overall I think it helped me and Matt a lot and helped us grow as students.

It was also very nice to work with such helpful and kind people, I think it would have made our job much harder if the people there at Abbey House weren't so willing to offer help and talk to us as adults rather than children (which can often be the case with places dealing with students), so this was greatly appreciated."

All in all, it has been a positive experience for both institutions and the individuals involved and we are now (Autumn 2010) well into our second year of partnership, working on the 2011 Abbey House exhibition "Taste", which will open on Saturday 22nd January.

Changing Chartism: redeveloping a gallery using internal funding

Rachael Lovering, formerly Social History Curator at Newport Museum and Art Gallery, explains her experience of remodelling a permanent exhibition on a tight budget.

As you can see from my not so snappy title, this article is about changing the Chartist displays at the museum, using internal funding. I will introduce Newport as a city and its museum service, covering the background to the chartist project, the funding source, the process; the design and build, and all the different elements of the display. I will evaluate some of the positives and the negatives of working in-house with internal funding for such a project. Finally I end on a high with the exhibition opening and our exciting celebrity guest!

Newport – the city

I assume lots of people will now have heard of Newport in South Wales after we hosted the Ryder Cup 2010 in October. Newport is a fairly new city (awarded city status by HM the Queen in her Golden Jubilee year of 2002). It is 10 miles from Cardiff and has a population of 137,000. Newport has always been a multicultural town with communities of different nationalities settling here. It really exploded as a town during the nineteenth century as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Alongside Cardiff, it became a thriving port; shipping coal, iron and steel across the world from the South Wales valleys. Since that 'Golden Age', Newport has seen some industrial decline, especially more recently with the shutdown of the steel manufacturing at Llanwern steelworks.

Over the last few years, there has been some regeneration and investment to develop the city, with new shopping centres and highways and a new river-front area, in time to be host city for this year's Ryder Cup. It is probably fair to say that Newport has in recent years suffered because it is so close to Cardiff and Bristol, larger cities which attract more investment. However the Ryder Cup coming to Newport is seen as a huge benefit to the city and area for future investment.

Newport Museum and Art Gallery

Newport Museum and Art Gallery was established in 1888, is a large city museum and art gallery, and is now part of a wider museums and heritage service which includes Tredegar House (a 17th century historic house), and the Newport Medieval Ship; a conservation project of a medieval ship found during construction of the Riverfront theatre and arts centre in 2002. The Museum and Art Gallery is located in the city centre, in John Frost Square, next to a newly-developed shopping centre. The building was purpose-built in 1968. The museums service in Newport is, I believe, the second largest and oldest in Wales after Swansea. The museum includes significant collections of social history, natural history, archaeology and decorative and fine arts.

The Social History Collections: Chartism

The social history collections are large and varied and include some key smaller collections including the archive for the design and construction of the Newport Transporter Bridge, local photographs and the Chartist collection; a selection of images, weapons, broadsheets, newspapers, silver and documents from the time of the Chartist protest in Newport in 1839, which have always been on permanent display in the museum.

Chartism was the first national political movement in the 19th century with widespread working-class support in Britain and it was very popular in South Wales. The Chartists took their name from their manifesto, which they called 'The People's Charter'. They caught the imagination of those ordinary people struggling with poor working and living conditions, of whom there were many in South Wales because of the boom of the Industrial Revolution in this area. The Chartists' main aim was to gain more political representation in order to fight for better working and living conditions.

On 4th November 1839, thousands of local Chartists marched into Newport to protest about the rights of the ordinary working people. Unfortunately the Mayor and troops were waiting for the chartists at the Westgate Hotel. When they got there, shots were fired and chaos broke out. Over 50 were seriously wounded and about 22 people killed – we do not know the exact number because they were buried in unmarked graves. The leaders were rounded up and arrested and put on trial in Monmouth.

Background to changing the Chartist displays

The old Chartist displays desperately needed a revamp. They were over 20 years old; complete with lovely hessian fabric in a beautiful, faded beige.

In 2005, I did an MA in Museum Studies by Distance Learning, generously funded by the museum. For my MA dissertation, I decided to look at the Chartist displays and how they could be improved in the context of how political protests are interpreted in museums. I was keen to do a dissertation which would have a practical outcome and which could benefit the museum. In the last few years, interest in Chartism in the community has grown. This has included the formation of an informal steering group on which I sit, marking the anniversary with a Chartist convention, and re-enactment of the Chartist protest by local schools. The museum also hosted an event about people who have discovered they have Chartist ancestors and there is now much interest in this family history topic, including a national website. Other heritage sites across South-east Wales, in particular in the South Wales valleys, have developed around the theme of Chartism; including a large HLF project to redevelop the Shire Hall, Monmouth, where the Chartist trials took place.

Funding

Chartism is clearly still a topic which inspires local people, so we decided to apply for funding to improve the displays from various organisations such as the Esme Fairbairn Foundation and NESTA, but unfortunately we failed to receive any external funding. November 2009 was the 170th anniversary of the protest; so we decided we were just going to go for it with the displays! We were very fortunate that over a period of some years, we had a reserve exhibition renewal fund which had gradually increased. We submitted a proposal to cabinet to use the money for the Chartist displays, which was approved. The money had built up over years and so totalled £30,000 which sounds a lot of money, but in relative terms of museum permanent display renewal, it is not that much. We had decided some time ago that we would organise this project internally, and use the skills of our team, as this would save money and ensure that we had control over the process.

Project Team

The project team included myself, our museum technician and our managers: Collections and Curatorial Services Officer and Access and Audience Development Officer. I led on the project but worked very closely with our technician, Tristram, on the design, layout, build and story. Our managers supervised us and approved all text and designs. We developed the story for the exhibition and the design and layout. The initial process of developing the story, design and layout for the exhibition took a long time and required lots of research – we got very excited about having our own mood board with magazine cut-outs for colours and the style and design we wanted. I must say that this is when the Museums Journal and Museums Practice and other such magazines became really useful! We were also inspired by other museums. In my dissertation, I had used the Peoples' History Museum and the Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum as case studies. The new surface displays at Big Pit were also an inspiration and their Curator, Ceri Thompson, was always very helpful and encouraging in advising us. We wanted to have new, vibrant, simple, people-focused displays which make Chartism relevant today and question peoples' beliefs about democracy and the vote.

Design

We worked on a brief for the design and layout of the exhibition.

The exhibition would include the following sections: What and Who Were the Chartists? How and why Chartism? The Protest, Chartism and Family, The Trial, Sentencing and Calls for Freedom, The Legacy, and The Truck Shop, which would be an interactive and a Coal mining section. Our original idea was to do some displays on industrialization and working and living conditions as background to the popularity of Chartism. In the end we had to stick solely to Chartism because of the lack of resources and time. The coal mining section stayed mainly for practical reasons -

because the older display featured a coal dram which was a large object we didn't want to move and we felt we could interpret the working and living conditions around the mines in South Wales, alongside the Truck Shop system[1] to give some kind of context for the popularity of Chartism in the area.

The construction

The demolition and the construction of the new displays was all done by our technician Tristram.

The old displays were half the size of the new displays, so it meant double the amount of space had to be gutted. Construction began early in September and lasted until a week before the opening in April this year. For six weeks of this, one of our museum assistants helped Tristram – this did however cost extra money, as he was paid overtime for this work.

We were also able to use in-house team skills as one of our front of house team is a sign-writer and very artistic. He painted and designed the pillars and porch montage for the Westgate Hotel which was part of our design. This is very effective and was a really positive part of the construction. We came across a lamp in our stores which had been bought as a prop but had never been used. As it wasn't accessioned into the collection, Tristram could repaint it and it became the lamp for the porch of the Westgate, depicted in so many of our drawings. Buying a replica lamp of this quality would have been very expensive, so we were very glad to find this to cut down cost, but enhance our displays.

The Truck Shop interactive became a thorn in our side – it was an idea from the start to make this an interactive; as it was seen as a good way to interpret this subject matter. The designers employed an illustrator to do a drawing of a Truck Shop which needed to go through many changes with much help and advice from National Museum Wales staff, as initially it was far too modern for 1839. We then had to work out an interactive that would bring some kind of learning experience while explaining the system. Eventually we decided there would be five spinning drums; the first would have choices of how many tokens per week you had to spend; the other four would have the products and their costs and the visitor has to choose the products to buy within their means. However trying to work out the cost of different products in 1839 and relate that to tokens was something that nearly drove me mad, but I am very pleased with the outcome!

The collection is not object-rich, but it is an exciting story of a nationally important event. This means there is quite a lot of text but the design, style and colour mean that it is broken up quite a bit and doesn't appear overwhelming to the visitor. It is also broken down into sections so you can read as much or as little as you want to. Of course in Wales everything has to be bilingual, which doubles the amount of text on the design. This is a real struggle and often means you cut down on content to cut down on the doubling of the text.

Our mood board inspired us with colours and design features and Tristram worked on a drawing and model of the space to design exactly what we wanted from the story and layout. Armed with a brief for the themes of the display and measurements, we sent this out to three graphic designers. We chose a Bristol firm who had worked with Bristol Museum and Art Gallery and our choice was based on value for money and the

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1   A system by which mine owners monopolized the purchasing power of their employees by paying them in tokens valid only in the mine "Truck Shop" where the owner could set the prices of food and other necessary commodities.

designs and styles they came up with. We also used suppliers for museum display cases, audio/visual work and flooring. Our electricians' department were able to take care of the lighting.

Cases

Unfortunately as we all know, museum display cases are very expensive. One very well-known company we contacted would have charged us our entire budget for the cases we needed! In the end, all we could afford was one large display case for the majority of objects linked to the Chartists. The best value for money for this was Armour Systems and we found it very easy and hassle-free to work with them. The other cases were made by a contractor through our carpentry department. We were able to specify the standards we needed for the cases and overall we are pleased with them and would go down this route again to save money.

Audio-visual elements

From the very beginning of my research, my aim had been to incorporate sound and film in the exhibition to make it as multi-sensory as possible, but in a simple, sustainable way, mainly because we didn't have enough funds to do anything all-singing and all-dancing, but also we lack the technical skills to be able to maintain such a display.

We contacted three audio-visual companies, and chose Blackbox AV in Port Talbot. They provided two listening posts, a sensor-activated system for the noise of the protest and a TV and DVD player for our film.

We were fortunate that some volunteers in the community had made a film with two local schools and a Chartist descendant. The school pupils had interviewed the descendant about her connection with the Chartists and were also filmed performing a re-enactment of the Chartist trial. The original film was seventeen minutes long; which is too long for a museum display. I worked alongside one of the volunteers, making all the editing decisions; spending one whole day locked up with the film, working out what could be cut. Blackbox AV did the actual editing for us, but because we were exact in what needed cutting, the actual studio time did not amount to much, which of course reduced the cost.

Our two sound stores are located within the displays. The first one is next to a room setting display which represents John Frost's home. A new graphic panel was fitted next to the room and you can now listen to John Frost talking about himself. John Frost was played by one of the tour guides at Tredegar House who also facilitates school visits there playing the butler. This again was a way of using skills we have in-house.

The second sound store is part of the Legacy section and the aim with this was to have six people talking about Chartism to try and make it relevant to visitors today. From the community interest in Chartism and family history, I already had the contacts for descendants and two of them were willing to be interviewed for the new display. In the interests of local authority partiality, I contacted all the local politicians; in Wales this also means the Assembly members; so we have two for Newport and five others who are regional members and two MPs. I interviewed those who responded. Fortunately this included a Lib Dem, a Labour and Conservative politician, so all three main parties were represented. Politicians do of course like to talk and however much you tell them they need to be impartial and not campaign, it is in their nature to do so. As they all talked for a minimum of twenty minutes; cutting them down to two minutes was not that hard and meant the interesting relevant bits were included.

I worked alongside colleagues and volunteers to transcribe the interviews, which is a time-consuming job. We edited all of the interviews using the software Audacity (which can be downloaded for free from the internet). It was very time-consuming, however

this substantially reduced the cost from Blackbox because we could send off the interviews already edited.

Our final piece of audio is activated by a sensor when you walk into the display and is the sound of the protest. I recorded a local amateur dramatic group being 'Chartists'. We have a contact at the local theatre – our retired Collections Manager is the President there and arranged for me attend their rehearsal to record them shouting and stamping and generally being noisy. I was also worried about the quality of the recording on our small digital recorder (M Audio microtracks), but it turned out fine. I simply sent this to Blackbox and they incorporated it into the displays. This was cheaper than getting Blackbox to do it with actors in their studio costing £500 a day!

Deadline

Our initial deadline was the 170th anniversary celebrations in November 2009 which kicked off on 31st October. By end of September, it became clear there was no way we were going to finish the whole display. We worked towards achieving what we thought was possible: all the graphics for the main part of the display were put in place, the main construction work for the layout was finished, and the main display case was in place. This meant that groups of visitors from the Newport Chartist Convention could be guided around the new exhibition space and we would market it as a sneak preview. It was an exciting moment to reach this stage, as the exhibition had begun to take shape, but disappointing we were not finished. Our absolute deadline had to be the end of March according to our service plan for the year. We finished completely on 1st April and opened the exhibition on 7th April.

Let us now look at some of the positives and negatives of renewing a permanent display in-house to fit a small budget.

Positives:

I was always really enthusiastic about using our in-house skills to create a brand new display. I felt we had the necessary skills and abilities to achieve a great display and this has proved true.

It was a real challenge –Tristram and I were on a really steep learning curve, but it was an exciting challenge.

It's all our own achievement and its there for the next 20 years.

We had complete control over the story and layout and design. We didn't have a design company telling us what to do.

We could change the layout and design easily along the way – there was a lot of flexibility.

The biggest advantage of all – it was cheaper. For £30,000 we got a brand new permanent exhibition, with audio, visual and interactive elements. It has completely transformed the space and breathed life and vibrancy into the most important event in Newport's history. With Tristram and I leading, we only employed suppliers for graphics, cases, audio-visual equipment, carpets, lighting etc. We did it within our normal jobs so it didn't cost extra. We were able to do lots of editing in-house of the sound, film and all the text. We employed a professional mount-maker for the display of the weapons, but the rest of the objects were mounted by our Art Curator, who used to be our display officer.

It was a dream of mine to change the Chartist displays at the museum – I still can't quite believe we've done it, but the idea started over a cocktail with museum friends and has now ended with this fantastic new display. I'd learnt about Chartism in school and at college and always been fascinated about it – I think that being local gave me more of a heart and passion for the subject which I longed to see interpreted in a more

accessible exciting way, so for me in terms of my professional career, it is a dream come true!

Negatives

Even though I laid out timescales for chunks of the project; it took longer than anticipated. We underestimated the time things took. We were very ambitious with our timeline, especially with areas like the initial design and layout and with the text and object labels and the length of time it took to organise things like interviews, editing etc. I had allocated a lot of time for writing, proofing, editing the text, but it still took longer than I thought. The object labels took a lot longer than anticipated. It seems small chunks of succinct text seem to take the longest to get right.

It was incredibly stressful! It was a huge workload for a few people. We are a small museum with not many members of staff. It means we organise everything, so it was an extra project on top of everyday work.

The designers would have liked to shape the design, layout and story more from the start, but saying that, I wouldn't change the design – I love it and right from the start, they came up with the kind of style I wanted.

Opening

I've decided to leave the best till last, to end on a high with the official opening. Before Christmas last year I came up with the inspired idea of asking a celebrity to open the Chartist exhibition, as I felt it needed a big opening event. Itis a very important event in Newport's history, its not often a museum gets to change a permanent display and while the effects of the recession rumbled along, it was important to get good publicity and a high profile for the museum. I aimed high and went for ultimate prestige – a Hollywood star - and I approached the actor Michael Sheen. His uncle was the director of the play whose actors we recorded being Chartists and I managed to get the details of his agent from the Theatre's President. The response from Michael Sheen was very positive. Although he is based in LA, he comes back regularly to Port Talbot where his family live. He was due to visit in April and we were able to negotiate a date with him to open the exhibition. Just to clarify, we're not talking about Charlie or Martin Sheen, but Michael Sheen, as in the actor who played Tony Blair in The Queen, David Frost in

Frost/Nixon. He was brought up in Port Talbot, but was actually born in Newport and spent the first five years of his life here. This was very exciting and a real coup for us!

Finally, after months of heartache and hard work, we had the grand opening of the Chartist displays on 7th April 2010 in the presence of an A-list Hollywood star! There were over 100 people at the opening, including the Leader of the Council, local Assembly Members, councillors and corporate directors. It was informal and relaxed but full of celebration and I think, showed the museum in a very positive light to many important people. We asked one of the Chartist descendants who we had interviewed to read a Chartist poem and got Michael to cut the ribbon which as you can see from the included image, made everyone smile…! We attracted lots of publicity for this – we were filmed for S4C and featured in the local paper. The news seemed to spread fast as we've had lots of visitors to the display and groups who've come in to visit.

We're very pleased with the way the display is being used. We have lots of visitors writing their thoughts on our legacy wall and the Truck shop interactive is used well. We're printing fliers to promote the new displays and the Museums Journal is going to do a review of the display.

A Review appeared in Museums Journal, March 2011, Issue 111/03 in the Exhibition Reviews Section

Financial paramedics – survival tactics in a recession

Jim Garretts, Senior Curator at Thackray Museum, Leeds, gives us some hints and tips on how to survive tough times.

> *I'm sure most of us would say we are in the tourism business.*
> Bill Ferris, Chairman, Association of Independent Museums (2009)

Tourism is big business; *Investing in Success: Heritage and the UK Tourism Economy*, published in 2010, estimated heritage tourism's gross domestic product contribution to be worth £20.6 billion. That's more than the advertising, car manufacturing or film industries! While Bill's comment was from the independent museums' standpoint, the 'business' to which he refers is one in which we all operate and virtually every business at the moment is affected by the recession. In the long term, the collapse of banks at home and abroad, a large national debt, a credit crunch and a rise in the standard rate of VAT (value added tax) to 20% from 4 January 2011 are all conspiring to make life difficult for museums, galleries, libraries and archives. Whether we work in national, independent, local authority or university institutions, the environment is tough and is not likely to ease for some time. What can we do?

The Thackray Museum, which opened in 1997, is the largest medical museum in the United Kingdom, unrivalled in the variety and size of its collections and public spaces. It is also the lead body for the United Kingdom Medical Collections Group, the Subject Specialist Network concerned with medicine and healthcare. The museum is based in the Leeds Union Workhouse which opened in 1861 and is adjacent to St James's University Hospital, the largest teaching hospital in Europe. It is an independent museum and receives no revenue public funding. It is funded through earned income and from an annual grant from the Thackray Medical Research Trust. It is therefore appropriate to couch "*Financial paramedics – survival tactics in a recession*" in medical terms; the museum is 'the hospital' and its resources are delivered by 'the ambulance' which is (literally) 'driven' by its 'paramedic workforce'.

Who are the 'paramedics'? These are the museum's human resources, be they staff (paid or voluntary), Friends or Trustees. In straitened times, it is important to make the optimum use of personnel and identify those on the establishment who are best suited to dealing with the prevailing financial issues. Others may have relevant skills that they don't normally use in their routine duties but which might become applicable. One particular individual may be capable of carrying out at least one of the functions attributed to one or more of the following 'paramedics'. Do you have them in your organisation?

The 'Ambulance Driver' is the one with the necessary experience in financial management who can push developments forward. S/he will have access to departmental budgets and

Ambulances at the Thackray Museum, Leeds, ready to survive the recession! Credit: Mike Kirk Photography

know where savings can be made that will not affect the general running of the museum. S/he will also be aware of outstanding commitments that still need to be honoured and (where allowed) can undertake the virement of sums between particular budget headings to redistribute resources according to need.

The 'Resuscitator' is in charge of the 'life-saving' equipment. S/he is the one who can respond to a problem calmly, having already considered a 'Plan B'. This can be exemplified by ensuring that grant applications have the optimum chance of success, particularly when more than one grant giving body is involved. Make sure that not only submission deadlines are met and that project outcomes link to funding agencies' priorities, but also that time is allowed for different grant giving bodies to announce their decisions in order that individual project milestones can be met within the timetable. Spread the financial load carefully among the potential funding agencies and know what their individual average and/or maximum grant levels are, so that the project does not become wholly reliant on the outcome of one particular application. If one of several applications does fail, have the flexibility to ensure the project doesn't become 'derailed' as a result. Consider incorporating 'full cost recovery' elements into your application, which means recovering the total costs of a project or activity, including the relevant proportion of all overhead costs. Each project or service not only has costs directly associated with it, such as the cost of staff or equipment, but will also draw upon the rest of an organisation's resources. For example, it might occupy some of a line manager's time and have some impact on functions such as finance and information technology. Although it is possible to identify direct costs and overhead costs separately, full cost recovery works on the premise that both direct costs and a relevant portion of overheads are integral to the delivery of a service or project. Full cost recovery is important for both those giving grants and those being funded. For third sector organisations, it is about establishing sustainable funding that covers the true costs of delivery, while for funding agencies, it is about developing greater clarity around funding decisions and improving relationships with funded organisations. The purpose of full cost recovery is to help third sector organisations have a better understanding of their costs. By calculating the full costs of each activity, organisations can make more informed decisions about both managing the costs and securing the funding to recover them. However, full cost recovery is a two-way process and can only work if funding agencies understand the principle and the rationale behind the funding bids and applications that are submitted to them. Be imaginative and bear in mind the adage "you don't ask, you don't get". You should however always be honest in your approaches; funding agencies do talk to one another and your sins will surely find you out!

The 'Emergency Helicopter Pilot' has a general overview and can 'look down' on the situation from above. S/he is able to 'think outside the box' and make full use of innovative opportunities. A particular example is a famous, well established charity which recently had an extremely successful drive to attract new volunteers, in particular from among young people. It felt that it had needed to take rather radical steps to achieve this, as it would have been easy to have been (wrongly) perceived as one that had a rather staid, traditional image by merely giving recruitment talks and presentations. It therefore chose to approach this particular sector of society *incognito* and encouraged young people to make films about issues that *they* were interested in and which impacted on *their* lives. Young persons' groups were given the necessary audio-visual equipment and were taught the necessary skills in film-making to produce exciting and imaginative work. A screening of the young people's films was organised and it was only at this point that the supporting charity revealed itself as the Lifeboat Institution. The film-making initiative convinced the target audience that this was a thriving 'go ahead' organisation that would be worth joining not only as it would teach members quite literally how to save people's lives, but would also introduce them to an environment of like-minded positive people who wanted to make a difference.

Another example of 'thinking outside the box' is the example of the Thackray Museum's success in attracting funding from the Transformation Fund, which maybe wasn't on every museum's 'radar', but proved very beneficial to those who did spot its potential. The £20 million Transformation Fund was launched in 2009/2010 to support informal adult learning - learning for pleasure, self-development and community development awarded money to a wide range of projects all with the objective of seeing creative learning flourish across the country. It was managed by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education which facilitated new partnerships between public, private and community organisations to create informal learning activities which:

- encouraged more and different people into informal learning, particularly people from disadvantaged groups.

- opened up access to learning in new places, in new ways and at more flexible times.

- supported people to set up self-organised groups and learning clubs.

- widened choice, by developing and sharing innovative content.

- built partnerships and strengthened the capacity of informal adult learning organisations.

- improved connections and progression between different kinds of learning; and made better use of broadcasting and technology to stimulate and support learning.

The Transformation Fund supported 314 local initiatives from public, private and voluntary sector organisations and partnerships, but of these only some 20 were from museums, libraries and archives. However, the Thackray Museum received two awards; one (£9,000) on behalf of itself for a project called *Thackray Remembered* and one (£92,500) as the lead body of the United Kingdom Medical Collections Group (UKMCG), the Subject Specialist Network concerned with medicine and healthcare (of which the Thackray Museum received a £20,000 share) for *Medicine at the Movies*.

Medicine at the Movies. Credit: Thackray Museum

The heritage theme of *Thackray Remembered* is the history of the medical supply industry in Leeds, in particular the history of the Charles F Thackray company, now operating as DePuy International Limited, and its workforce. *Thackray Remembered* is a partnership project between the Friends of Thackray Museum, Thackray Museum and DePuy, which will celebrate this history with a programme of activities leading to the development of a new exhibition at the Thackray Museum.

Similarly, *Medicine at the Movies* was an innovative approach to public engagement and partnership, whereby six members of the UKMCG each welcomed a different group of adult learners to their museum in order to explore the collections and learn how to make a short film of their choice. Groups included the deaf and hard of hearing, pensioners and adults with learning difficulties.

This combined award of over £100,000 exceeds the total that the Museums. Libraries and Archives Council would normally offer in a single year! The Thackray Museum's *Medicine at the Movies* work with its local deaf and hard of hearing community was covered by the BBC in its *See Hear*! television series, while some of the UKMCG groups' films were screened at shows in Hungary, Germany and the United States of America, bringing favourable publicity and kudos to both the projects and their participants.

The 'Consultant'. The term is much the same, whether applied to in the museum or medical environments! S/he should really only be brought in when the situation

becomes 'critical'. Although the Consultant will have the necessary knowledge and experience, s/he can be expensive to commission.

We therefore need to make the most of what we have. Survival tactics in a recession don't simply involve increasing income; spending less and making the budget spread further are of equal importance. Being creative and thinking of innovative ways to work can reap rewards. Some examples are:

- 'Tell your story' as well as you can. Rob Robinson (2009) points out how vital interpretation can be, particularly when money is tight. He observes: *Interpretation is a fundamental tool for conveying a site's 'unique selling points', differentiating one visit from another…used well, interpretation can be flexible enough to cater for different audiences simultaneously and is invaluable in encouraging repeat visits.*

- Take advantage of Gift Aid if at all possible. Gift Aid increases the value of donations to charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) by allowing them to reclaim basic rate tax on a gift. The Gift Aid scheme is for gifts of money by individuals who pay UK tax. Gift Aid donations are regarded as having basic rate tax deducted by the donor. Charities or CASCs take donations, which are sums upon which tax has already been paid, and reclaim the basic rate tax from HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) on its 'gross' equivalent, namely the amount before basic rate tax was deducted. Basic rate tax is 20%, so this means that if you give £10 using Gift Aid, it's worth £12.50 to the charity (£12.50 - 20% = £10.00). For donations between 6 April 2008 and 5 April 2011 the charity or CASC will also get a separate government supplement of three pence on every pound given. For further information, telephone the HMRC's Charities Helpline on 0845 302 0203 and/or visit **www.hmrc.gov.uk/individuals/giving/gift-aid.htm#1**

- Sell staff skills as consultancies. These can vary from giving talks and lectures to leading workshops centred around topics such as preventative conservation, handling objects, documentation procedures or curating exhibitions. If you have recently just taken down an exhibition at your museum, would another organisation be willing to hire it from you?

- Consolidate and develop your partnerships. Even if your organisation is not under local authority control, there can be benefits in maintaining links with them, such as providing conference facilities and rooms for hire. Although such investments may be hit by cuts in local authority spending at present, it's worth the effort to keep good relationships going in the long term.

- Are you an 'ace caff with quite a nice museum attached'? Café sales can rise and fall with museum visitor footfall, so maybe one that can open when the museum is closed and/or one that can attract customers who don't necessarily want to look round the museum can benefit. Generally, a good café performance measurement is the *Average Spend per Till Transaction*. £6.50 (excluding VAT) per till transaction is considered reasonable, which is linked to an average customer spend of £3.25 (excluding VAT). How does your café measure up?

- Make the most of your museum shop. Are there new lines that you could try, possibly linked to current exhibitions and/or activities that will generate income?

- Sell unwanted equipment. 'ebay' and similar websites have brought a wide array of purchasers of (for example) unwanted printers, fax machines, television monitors and catering equipment within easy reach. For instance, the Thackray Museum recently sold a quantity of projector light bulbs that it no longer needed. However, caution should be exercised, particularly outside the independent museum sector. Please ensure at the outset that you are entitled to sell what you propose to put on the market and that it's not marked down on an inventory somewhere. Furthermore, I do not advise selling collections!

Post-July 2010 postscript:

The government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) was published in October 2010. Its principal provisions included:

- Cutting support for the *Renaissance in the Regions* programme by 15% from 2011 until 2014
- Cutting support for national museums funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport by 15% from 2011 until 2014
- Cutting support for the National Heritage Memorial Fund by 50% from 2011 until 2014. It will receive £20 million over the period, compared with a current annual support level of £10 million
- Reducing local authority budgets by 28.4% from 2011 until 2014; 7.1% annually. Ominously, museums are expected to be affected whether they are run by local authorities or are in receipt of grants from them, as they are discretionary services for local authorities
- Cutting VisitEngland's funding by 34% from 2011 until 2014
- Cutting VisitBritain's funding by 34% from 2011 until 2014
- Cutting Arts Council England's budget by 29.6%
- Cutting English Heritage's funding by 32%

Sharon Heal (2010) made a very concise summation of the CSR:

> *Although the picture is mixed across the UK and across different types of museums and galleries, the one note of consensus from those that work in the sector is that the next four years are going to be very tough indeed.*

Send for the paramedics!

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Ferris, B (2009) *Association of Independent Museums*, December 2009, Comment, p 2.

Robinson, R (2009) The Battle for Survival. *Interpretation Journal*, **14** (2), pp 4-7.

Heal,S (2010) After CSR: tough times ahead. *Museums Journal*, December 2010, p 15.

Campaign! Make an Impact

Alison Bodley, Campaign! Make an Impact Programme Manager presents an evaluation of this project and the amazing outcomes that were achieved in schools across the country.

Campaign! Make an Impact offers an innovative approach to using social history collections. The programme focuses on active citizenship and history, getting young people involved in local democracy. It is based around a three-step model and a way of working that any museum can use in its own circumstances and target audiences, often with startling results. Historical campaigns are used as a catalyst to inspire young people to campaign about issues that affect them today. The model was developed by the British Library and funded through the DCMS and DCSF Strategic Commissioning programme and it originated in a project around the campaign for the abolition of the slave trade. Hull Museums, Harewood House and the Thackray Medical Museum were all close working partners and the resulting programme was initially rolled out in partnership with the MLA Council. A website is structured around the model and includes resources and a handbook on exactly how to run a project.
www.bl.uk/campaign

The Model

1.   Historical Campaigns

Study a historical campaign exploring citizenship issues and looking at how the campaign was organised.

2.   Make Yourself Heard

Focus on how campaigners got their message across, look at communication skills such as how to make a speech, design a logo, use an image etc. Link to modern day campaigning skills.

3.   Run Your Campaign

Allow young people to choose what they would like to campaign on and then campaign creatively.

Although based on campaigning the aim is not to radicalise young people into protest. Instead young people are encouraged to understand key issues from a variety of viewpoints, formulate cohesive arguments and learn how to communicate effectively. The end result is a rise in self-esteem and aspiration, whilst also developing young peoples "voices".

The results vary depending on the museum collection, the young people involved, local community issues and the creative media used. No two projects are the same. Young people can be very sensitive to what is happening in the media and it is not unusual for a campaign to reflect current media issues, such as fear of knife crime.

Young people have campaigned on:

- Bullying, child abuse, litter, somewhere to go after school, smoking, knife crime, the right to be heard, war, new sports facilities, school food, animal rights, traffic calming, diabetes awareness…

Using:

- Film, audio, digital art, poetry, drama, rap, art, exhibitions, posters, t-shirts, badges, graphic novels……

So how does it work?

Step 1
Historical Campaigns

Four curriculum-linked campaigns – abolition of the slave trade, suffragettes, chartists and public health are featured on the British Library *Campaign! Make an Impact* website **www.bl.uk/campaign** with downloadable source material, and these can be used and mixed with a museum's own collections. Alternatively a museum can use an entirely different subject from its own collection that is important to its local community. A campaign grid shows how to break down a campaign into 7 key components through enquiry-led learning and so guide museums on the kind of objects or documents they need to source. Not all objects need to link to the campaign, but can simply provide context. Schools visit the museum to get a background in the subject and explore the campaign. When developing the model it was discovered that historical campaigns are more creative than one may think. For instance poems, plays, art work, posters and pamphlets were all key communication tools and this forms an important part of the programme's approach.

Learning about the abolition of the slave trade

Step 2
Make Yourself Heard

This develops the idea of creative campaigning by further exploring historical communication techniques and linking them to modern techniques. Most museums have good examples of communication skills such as posters, branded objects, handbills, images, newspapers etc in their collection and inspiration can be taken from the *Make Yourself Heard* section of the website. Schools can either visit the museum or museums can run campaign skills sessions in the school.

Step 3
Run Your Campaign

Allowing young people to choose their own campaigns is a critical part of the process. In practical terms the museum can get involved with the modern-day campaign if they wish. It is an opportunity to make links with the wider community as the students research and run their campaigns. Most of the campaigning is delivered by the school.

Campaign! Make an Impact and the Curriculum

As the model is very flexible, the fit is very wide. It can be used for any level from key stage 2 upwards. The main focus is citizenship and history so access routes have been provided for these specific disciplines, but it can be used with RE whilst the communication skills can cover English, ICT or any arts based subject. It can link directly into the new GCSE in Citizenship which contains a unit on campaigning and also the Creative and Media Diploma. Its cross curricular nature makes it an idea vehicle for cross curricular work as introduced in the new key stage 3 curriculum and

some projects do this through enhanced curricular days, taking a whole year group off timetable to learn campaign skills. It can also be used to deliver Personal Learning and Thinking Skills as well as enterprise agendas. The government is currently reviewing the curriculum and the future of citizenship is not certain. It is unlikely that changes will take place before September 2013 and even with various changes it is anticipated that *Campaign! Make an Impact* will still have a role, linking to the new Government Agendas of "The Big Society".

Wider School Applications

Teachers are taking the model and using it for wider school applications for instance to teach Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), English as an additional language or to help build stronger communities, while some have used it to effect whole-school change by running campaigns out through school councils. This means that one museum project can impact on a whole school.

There is no doubt that there are wider applications such as in youth work, intergenerational projects and family learning.

The Impact

The emphasis on the model is process rather than in young people achieving the aims of their campaign, although many young people do fulfil these. Teachers are encouraged to ensure that all campaigns include awareness-raising as an aim, something that all campaigners should be able to achieve in some way. This is because a campaign may not succeed due to factors outside the students' control such as lack of time within the school timetable. Management of this point is important as raising aspiration and then blocking the way to achievement can have a disempowering effect.

Pre and post evaluation forms were used in the piloting of the model to try and track changes in self-esteem. This varies from project to project but in general there is a link to a bigger impact on self-esteem from young people in more deprived areas. Young people feel more able to change things:

> "If I really want to I can achieve anything."

> "People can make a difference and change things for the better."

Teachers also see a change in their pupils:

> "Students gained in confidence, developed a sense of achievement and realised they can change things." Sarah Sutcliffe, Teacher Immanuel College Bradford

> "It had a very positive effect on the school and the young people involved. Can we do it again?" Chris Straker, Head Teacher Endeavour High School

> "Phenomenal outcomes." Steven Liddle, Head Teacher Winifred Holtby School

The mix of history and modern day citizenship also provides interesting results. First is the impact that using history has on the campaigns. One direct link was shown when one participant stated that she was inspired by William Wilberforce as he had taken his bill to Parliament many times; if she kept going she could change things too. Young people who worked on a project that used the Holocaust as a focus developed the slogan "I've got the power to be a hero" based on the idea that one shouldn't stand by and let other people's rights be eroded. This strong response must be directly attributable to subject matter studied. For others it is likely that studying a historical campaign around which there are human rights issues enables them to make more sense of the rights of individuals in their own world. For instance bullying is a topic which many young people want to campaign about.

A further impact is in the increased interest in history as a result of doing a project. It is graphically shown by a recent project at Primrose High School, an inner city school in Leeds working with the Thackray Medical Museum, where the GCSE class swelled from 15 to 40, something that the teacher directly attributes to involvement in the programme. This bucks the trend of declining history classes.

The programme also sees development in teachers, and some have changed the way they work as a result of involvement. One teacher completely rewrote her curriculum as a result of working on a project.

Case Studies

East of England

School	Farlingaye School
Level	Gifted and Talented
Museum Partner	Colchester Museums
Subject studied	Abolition of the Slave Trade
Campaigns	Traffic Calming
Creative Medium	Radio

Gifted and talented young people studied the abolition of the slave trade. They were particularly inspired by Thomas Clarkson who was local to the area. They were concerned by the speed of traffic on a road near school. They decided to make a documentary for the local radio station and contacted the local police to discuss the problem. Police worked with the young people, letting them use their speed cameras to check the speed of the cars. A local councillor heard the broadcast and contacted the young people. A follow up programme was made, which included interviewing the councillor. The councillor has offered the young people traffic calming measures, including a traffic island and slow down sign. The young people are now working on the design with the local council.

> "It's really important to make your voice heard if you feel passionate about something ... you have to go out there and make a difference"

> "Thomas Clarkson campaigned for years and years - it takes time"

> "I find it easier to take what I have learnt & use it in real life"

School	Astley High School
Level	Years 9-13
Museum Partner	Woodhorn Museum
Subject Studied	Miners Strike
Campaigns	Local transport and amenities, fairness of Education Maintenance Allowance grants, bullying and anti-social behaviour
Creative Medium	Posters, screen saver, Facebook, advocacy

A group of 24 students from years 9 to 13 looked at the 1980s miners' strike through the collections at Woodhorn Museum. The group was concerned about a range of issues and split into smaller groups of 3-4 pupils and under the campaign name of Youth Intelligence (Y.I.), campaigned on the following issues; local transport and amenities, fairness of Education Maintenance Allowance grants, bullying and anti-social behaviour. All the topics fed into the larger Y.I. campaign which culminated in a shared exhibition at Woodhorn Museum. They had a Facebook page with over 180 members, designed a screensaver which is used over the entire school, developed posters and questionnaires to generate feedback from the school, written to the government and interviewed local MP, Ronnie Campbell. As part of the *Campaign! Make an Impact* project Y.I. also have four members on a local youth council and the local council was so impressed with their work that they were awarded £1000 to help them continue their campaign.

Campaigners from Astley High School with their MP

How to do a project and get involved

Delivery of a project is very cost effective and the main investment for a museum is time to research the collections as the approach is very cross-curricular and teachers are encouraged to involve their colleagues and deliver the creative element that way. There are handbooks for teachers and museum professionals on the website which give guidance on how to create a project **www.bl.uk/campaign.**

Anyone can get involved in the programme, which is supported by regional networks run by *Campaign! Make an Impact* Champions. Champions run regular CPD events to train museums in how to do a project. To find out what is happening in your area go to: **http://www.bl.uk/learning/citizenship/campaign/teachers/map/champions.html**

Signing up as a Project Partner will ensure you receive the programme newsletter and also give you access to the programme branding.

Queering the Museum

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

4th November 2010 - 30th January 2011

The question of whether museums are doing enough to address LGBT audiences has been raised on several occasions in Museums Journal and other publications. In October 2007 Jack Gilbert argued that most museums or galleries were not collecting, framing or interpreting the lives of LGBT people meaningfully. The Museum of London's *Pride Prejudice: Lesbian and Gay London* (1999) and *Queer is Here* (2006), along with *The Warren Cup: Sexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome* (2006) at the British Museum, were significant temporary exhibitions but for Gilbert they were exceptions.

There have been some notable museum displays, exhibitions and other initiatives since Gilbert's article. *Gay Icons* at the National Portrait Gallery (July – October 2009) was a particularly high profile exhibition and some significant literature has been published recently (see below). References to LGBT history and experience within exhibitions or collections-based interpretation have arguably continued to become more frequent. The recent British Museum and BBC Radio 4 series *A History of the World in 100 objects*, for example, included two programmes which addressed same-sex relationships in ancient and modern times. The question of whether museums are doing enough, however, remains pertinent and there is still plenty of scope for thoughtful critiques of the different approaches that have been adopted to date.

Queering the Museum at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (November 2010 – January 2011) is the latest addition to the growing corpus of exhibitions to explore LGBT experience and arguably one of the boldest and most innovative. Visitors arriving at the Museum encounter Jacob Epstein's (1880-1959) bronze statue of Lucifer, the head of which was modelled on a woman, the body on a man, creating a figure which suggests a merging of genders. The statue is a permanent feature at the Museum but for the duration of *Queering the Museum* the statue holds a green cape, a contemporary creation made by Matt Smith that is adorned with green silk carnations, a flower worn by men in the 19th and early 20th century as a symbol of gay identity. The transformed Lucifer acts as the introduction to *Queering the Museum*, an exhibition that features eighteen further displays distributed throughout the building and integrated with the permanent galleries. These displays are identified with a green carnation graphic and a distinctive label that reflects aspects of LGBT history and experience. Most visitors will encounter some of these displays serendipitously as they move through the Museum. On the other hand visitors who have come specifically to see the exhibition, or who have become aware of it on arriving at the Museum, will probably proactively seek out the displays, particularly if they have collected a *Queering the Museum* map from the holder next to Lucifer.

The nature of the displays is varied. In a *Tribute to Simeon*, works by the artists Simeon Solomon (1840-1905) and Lord Frederic Leighton (1830-1896) are displayed together in a freestanding case along with a new ceramic work by artist and exhibition curator Matt Smith. At first glance the display blends into the rest of gallery. It is only with a closer look that the distinctive carnation logo on the side of the case and the green strip on the label become apparent, revealing that there is something different about this case. The text explores the impact that Solomon's sexuality had on his work and career in contrast to that of Leighton. Solomon's same-sex encounters resulted in his arrest in London and later Paris, events that led to the collapse of his career whereas Leighton's

discretion meant that his career continued to prosper. Historically biographical references to same-sex encounters or relationships have usually been excluded from interpretation in museums and galleries: in contrast equivalent references related to the heterosexual experiences of artists and other figures are commonplace in many institutions.

Two male sculptures from the Museum's own collections, a statue of Ulysses and one of Adonis, have been paired together in the Medieval & Renaissance Room with a text that argues that curators have a tendency to unconsciously heterosexualise displays, for example by often 'pairing' unrelated male and female sculptures. Elsewhere a Civil Partnership Card from 2005 has been added to an existing display which explores celebrations. Both of these thought-provoking interventions, which utilise objects in the Museum's collection, underline the varied ways in which heteronormative assumptions have led to omissions in museum displays or subtle biases in interpretation.

The majority of the *Queering the Museum* displays feature new ceramic art works made by Matt Smith, and at first glance most of these look like as though they are 'antique' objects that have always been there. For example, it is only on closer inspection that Smith's *The Ladies of Llangollen* reveals itself to be a contemporary interloper amongst genuinely historic ceramics. The piece represents Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, two ladies who set up home together at Plas Newydd in rural Wales after running away from their aristocratic Irish homes. They received visitors as illustrious as the Duke of Wellington and William Wordsworth. The new piece creates an alternative narrative: the Ladies of Llangollen are included amongst the historic displays where they seem to be quite at home.

In other cases the new pieces are juxtaposed with objects from the Museum's own collections to create a stimulating dialogue between old objects and new artworks. Some of the displays are playful, others are more serious. Two half-man animal figures, titled *Contemplating Mr Buturo*, draw attention to the persecution that same-sex adults still face around the world. The title refers to James Nsaba Buturo, the Ugandan Minister of State for Ethics and Integrity who has campaigned for the death penalty for gay men. Other displays highlight issues such as the use of gay slang, stereotypes, the use of symbols and transgender experience.

The labels that support the displays in *Queering the Museum* are always close to the objects and in a clear visual relationship with them. The texts themselves are clear, concise, informative and thought provoking. However there is only one point for collecting the overall exhibition leaflet and plan, and this is discrete and easily missed. More leaflet holders elsewhere alongside other displays might have been helpful for visitors encountering *Queering the Museum* for the first time elsewhere in the Museum and in converting these chance encounters into a deeper interest.

The historian Robert Mills has argued that some recent LGBT themed exhibitions have offered an overly simplistic narrative and have run the risk of inadvertently reinforcing the idea that individuals are either completely heterosexual or homosexual, what Mills terms the "homo-hetero binary calculus". These are not criticisms that can be made of the interventions that form *Queering the Museum*. The integration of the displays throughout the Museum building with the main collection ensures that it is encountered by a large and diverse audience, including those who perhaps otherwise might not visit a self-contained exhibition with an LGBT focus. The exhibition's dispersed and subversive approach is likely to have posed challenges for some visitors but *Queering the Museum* succeeds on many levels, fulfilling the aims outlined in an essay in the online catalogue (available as a PDF). It is to the Museum's credit that it has embraced an alternative approach that will have elicited a wide range of responses from deep engagement to some bemused shrugs of the shoulders and confused glances.

Queering the Museum will close at the end of January 2011, just as LGBT history month is about to begin. By working with an artist Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery has been able to look at its collections with fresh eyes, to make new connections between objects, histories and audiences that have usually been overlooked. Collectively the displays in the exhibition capture the diversity of LGBT experiences in an imaginative and creative way, arguably more effectively than many previous approaches. Although *Queering the Museum* is a temporary exhibition it underlines the potential that exists for museums to reinterpret their existing collections in thought provoking ways and provides another case-study for the museum community to consider.

Stuart Frost is Head of Interpretation at The British Museum

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Online Resources

LGBT History Month
www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk

Queering the Museum at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
http://www.bmag.org.uk/events?id=1013

The Participatory Museum

by Nina Simon

My first encounter with Nina Simon and her philosophy on participatory museums came in the form of her blog *Museum 2.0*, in itself a fantastic resource for the current issues and debates surrounding the participatory experiences in museums and other public forums. Subsequently, I was present to hear Nina speak at a three day workshop given by The Museum of Science and Industry in London. Her smiling face was streamed live from California to discuss "The Three Things I Learned from Co-created Exhibition". This talk piqued my interest in Nina and her work. Most recently, as a third instalment of the *Nina factor*, I discovered on a colleague's desk a copy of Nina's book, *The Participatory Museum*.

Within two months of concentrated exposure I found myself truly indoctrinated into the mindset of co-creation and collaboration. I downloaded Nina's book onto my Kindle, inspired to both immerse myself deeper in this philosophy and share this mindset with others.

The book itself is laid out in a simple outline format and is broken down into two parts, with a total of eleven chapters. Each chapter begins with a question, or the presentation of a case study. At the end of each chapter she wraps up neatly with a concise summary before transitioning to the next topic and explaining the relationship between the two.

The case studies used in each chapter are inherently inspiring. If you only read these you will come away with some great ideas. Some are humorous, but all are thought-provoking and serve to illustrate Simon's fundamental concepts for each chapter. These studies are also referenced again later in the book to draw final conclusions. Not all are from the museum realm, but come also from libraries (in particular, a membership scheme), corporate bodies such as NIKE Plus, and a casino. They show that when creating participatory projects, inspiration doesn't just come from other museums and art galleries; we must break with tradition and think laterally for ideas.

In Part One, "Design for Participation", Simon explains the principles behind good participation and proceeds to transverse the different phases of participation. All of the important concepts are outlined with diagrams and case studies. I must admit I had to read this section a couple of times to grasp the "me to we" principles which Simon cites as the framework upon which all participatory projects are based. In her own words, from the first chapter:

> *"The goal of participatory techniques is both to meet visitors' expectations for active engagement and to do so in a way that furthers the mission and core values of the institution. Rather than delivering the same content to everyone, a participatory institution collects and shares diverse, personalized, and changing content co-produced with visitors."*

Part Two, "Participation in Practice" is comprised of seven chapters which form the nuts and bolts of how participation is actually implemented in a museum or project environment. It begins by looking at how to define participation within the context of your institution, moving on to analyse the institution and identify where and how

participation is already used and where it is not. This is all with a view to identifying and developing opportunities for participation. The next four chapters define in detail the different types of participatory projects: contributing to an institution, collaborating with visitors, co-creating with visitors and hosting participants. One example I was particularly fond of was the concept of hosted projects:

> *"Hosted projects, in which the institution turns over a gallery or a program to community partners, are common vehicles for visitor participation."*

This is something that already happens regularly in some museums, but is rarely considered as participation.

Chapters 10 and 11 cover evaluation, managing and sustaining participation. The context and content is very different to the other chapters and the main focus is on evaluation. These chapters also consider the role of management in participation. The general idea is to be supported by management and communication is key. When management decisions are made that affect projects these need to be communicated immediately. Evaluation is vital to monitoring the success of the project and these evaluations must be built in to the programme from the start. How is success defined? What are the actual deliverables of the project? How do we measure the response and experience of users? These questions need to be asked from the inception of a project, rather than retrospectively.

In conclusion, Nina Simon acts as a great proponent for the cause of increasing participation and interaction in museums, while managing not to get entangled in every implementational detail. Simon uses a very simple, understandable structure and conveys a very positive tone throughout. She provides inspiration and guidance in a pragmatic, accessible manner. One fundamental point she relates to the starting-points institutions provide to visitors:

> *"Visitors don't want a blank slate for participation. They need well-scaffolded experiences that put their contributions to meaningful use."*

The book is realistic and accepts that not every participatory scheme is a resounding success. Simon admits her own faults on past projects and where other participatory projects could have gone further. The book avoids unnecessary technical jargon and proceeds in a way which takes you on a journey, with the information you need to understand the difference between collaborative, co-creative, contributory and hosted participatory projects. At the end of the book, Simon acknowledges that this book is in many ways just part of a greater journey and encourages the reader to participate:

> *"I wrote this book using a participatory process in which hundreds of people contributed their opinions and professional experiences related to visitor participation. This discussion is not over. I hope you will share your own thoughts and questions at participatorymuseum.org so we can continue to build a community of practice around participation in cultural institutions."*

Sharon Scarmazzo is Exhibitions Organiser at the National Media Museum

Jellies & Their Moulds

Peter Brears

There is something about jelly, which can't help but make you smile, even if you don't like eating it!

Brears' pocket sized pocket history of jellies and their place on our table embraces this joie de vivre with gusto. The photograph on the back cover shows Brears next to a laden table at Petworth House, Sussex after a hard days jelly making immediately provides a tantalizing taste of the kinds of creations he might just inspire you to try.

Able to take on any flavour, colour and shape while displaying its unique party trick – the wobble factor (what Brears calls its dynamic movement) there is more to jelly than meets to eye.

Since our medieval ancestors, jelly has been an ultimate party food, a theatrical triumph of art and fantasy. However it has also been a comfort food sealing intensifying flavour and nutritious goodness into an easily eaten meal recommended for the young, old and infirm.

This book is packed with chronologically arranged recipes, which explore jelly's many-flavoured journey from decadent displays of wealth to everyday favourite.

The opening chapters celebrate the versatility of this foodstuff providing a canter through the origins of gelatine – the thing which holds the story of jelly together.

Brears describes the early days of making when cooks would labour long and hard to convert unpromising bits of animal into gloriously opulent crowd pleasers. The feet and ears of young pigs and calf's feet being the most favoured and best sources of gelatine. Medieval and Tudor cooks could produce a clear jelly made by straining through fine muslin, which was used as a basis for other jelly dishes.

The author then goes on to explain that by the 1500s a new product hit the market, isinglass, the swim bladder of a sturgeon made almost entirely of gelatine.

In the early 19th century fine ladies could buy their cooks a pre-prepared store cupboard Russian isinglass gelatine which could be dissolved in hot water. Nevertheless, the Victorian domestic goddesses of the Household manuals encouraged their readers to stick to traditional methods (being rightly wary of the adulteration of manufactured goods).

The age of the prepared gelatine and so jellies for everyone belonged to the late Victorian and Edwardian period when overstretched housewives, lacking the time, money and domestic skills took to the shelves. What struck me most about the story of gelatine was the lengthy list of substitutes, from alginates, arrowroot, biscuits, bread, ivory and semolina to name a few.

It is typical of Brears' style that historic information is interwoven in the text with practical tips, advice and recipes. Obviously this suits some readers more than others and does sometimes mean flicking backwards and forwards. This was particularly the case when tracking the history of jelly moulds, which rather than being a chapter on its own is distributed in chronological order amongst recipes. This narrative style makes it

less easy to use the book to help date jelly moulds in collections (although the line drawings and facsimiles from catalogues are very useful).

Experimenting

In a book, which is 75% recipes, it only seemed right to give some a try. Rather than going for a historical cross section I picked recipes which appealed on grounds of skill and the ingredients which I liked – or sounded interesting! Perhaps it would have been helpful to rate a number of recipes within the text with an easy to difficult score and I would have liked to see where recipes were sourced rather than picking though the footnotes.

Using the Kitchen Studio at York Castle Museum as an experimental base. I was joined by a colleague (and watched by the day's visitors) in making 4 jellies.

Georgian Jelly

A Georgian orange-flower jelly, a Victorian ginger cream, a 1918 black treacle jelly and carnations in jelly from 1937. We used a variety of moulds, tinplate, glass, ceramic and plastic. Like most recipes first time round there was a fair amount of trial and error, but instructions were clear enough to steer a path through (and perhaps our ad hoc approach was more amusing for visitors to watch!). What was most surprising was the quantity of gelatine used by the Victorian recipe, this jelly was not going to wobble, an interesting comment on Victorian sensibilities perhaps! Jellies were left to set overnight and unmoulding and tasting left for the following day.

Brears' tips on how to turn out a jelly were invaluable (and especially the warning that 'shaking vigorously' was not a good idea, even when your jelly will not budge!). If we had been more scientific in our approach I would be able to recommend which type of mould was easier to use, however I did find the plastic moulds which were more flexible to bend coaxed out a jelly better.

Our Georgian jelly, which amongst its ingredients included champagne was a gloriously wobbly success and as one visitor remarked 'those Georgians knew how to party!'.

Victorian Jelly

The Victorian Ginger Cream took an anxious number of kettles full of hot water to prize it out of its mould and sat very sedately but deliciously on its plate. The treacle recipe, using cornflower instead of gelatine was an acquired taste and did not set enough to be turned out (perhaps black is the one colour which jelly cannot carry off?). The carnation jelly was in fact a clear jelly with floating carnation petals; and to quote from the recipe was one of those 'gleaming transparencies wherein a flower of fruit lies imprisoned'.

Unfortunately I should have used more gelatine and been less artistic with my petals since when turning out the weight of the flowers made my jelly flop, nevertheless it was very satisfying to make and appealed to my inner Mrs Beeton. There is a great deal of showmanship to jellies and their making, the mixing of often luxury ingredients, the impressive moulds in all shapes and sizes, the great reveal of the turning out (the satisfying thump of the plate) and the gasps and giggles.

Culinary histories like Brears' colour the past in vibrant shades and *Jellies & their Moulds* is thoroughly researched and an enjoyable read. Brears manages to combine specialist information with easygoing practical advice in the way only an expert completely at home in the kitchen and his subject could.

With thanks to Martin Watts, for his help in the Kitchen!

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Notes for contributors

Social History in Museums is published annually, and the editor welcomes proposals for articles from museum professionals, researchers, academics and students. Please send an abstract of no more that 200 words to michelle.day@nationalmediamuseum.org.uk. Articles should be between 2,000, and 4,000 words long.