



# SHCG NEWS

SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

Issue 75 October 2015

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**SHCG Conference**  
News & reviews

**Uttlesford**

A community of collectors

**From Pants to Puddings**

Reminiscence and the  
M&S company archive



## Who Cares?

**Being new to the role of News Editor, I wasn't quite sure what, if anything, to expect when I sent out a call for articles.**

Given the many questions and discussions that daily bounce around SHCG's email list I was quietly confident that my inbox wouldn't stay quiet for long. I was not mistaken, and many thanks to all those who have contributed.

What did surprise me was that many of the articles shared similar themes and concerns. In the Bulletin Board you will see calls for information about those collections which are, as Rebecca Nelson puts it, 'hidden in plain sight', collections that are under-used because the subjects they deal with are often challenging and involve the voices of many different communities.

In Theory and Practise, Bianca Harrisskitt uses case studies to explore how museums can tackle these contested histories whilst considering a range of viewpoints. In November, SHCG's FirstBASE team will be speaking about the Tools of the Trade films project at the 'Who Cares?' conference at the Science Museum. This conference aims to explore the historical trajectories of stored, 'unloved' and overlooked collections and examine the role that the study of emotion can play in understanding their significance.

This last point was one of the main themes to come out of this year's SHCG conference as well and seems to be at the heart of what many of us believe social history is all about. For those of you who weren't able

to make the conference this year, our reviews will hopefully give you an idea of the many discussions that were held around new ways of engaging and, in particular, the use of emotion. Many of us came away with the aim of making our audience cry... in a good way.

Museums and social history should not just be fixated with the realms of the past however. Mari Lowe brings our attention to the plight of refugees in camps in Calais and elsewhere and highlights how museums can have a beneficial impact and give people the opportunity to tell their, often contested, histories in their own words.

I was recently reading Raphael Samuel's article in History Today online about 'What Is Social History?' and the following line caught my attention 'Social history does not only reflect public interest, it also prefigures and perhaps helps to create it'. We have a responsibility to make sure that someone cares about and for the histories of today and the past.

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## Would you like to advertise in SHCG news?

Please contact SHCG Fundraising and Marketing Officer Jude Holland to discuss options and prices:  
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### Front cover image

Sally Newton, one of the Uttlesford Collectors with an object from her collections © Saffron Walden Museum.



## Would you like to join firstBASE?

The firstBASE Editorial Committee are looking for more members, if

you would be interested in joining our team or to find out more please contact:

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### Join SHCG?

If you're reading this and you're not a member of SHCG but would like to join please contact:

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### Write an article for SHCG News?

You can write an article for the News on any subject that you feel would be interesting to the museum community. Project write ups, book reviews, object studies, papers given and so on. We welcome a wide variety of articles relating to social history and museums.

### DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE: 24 January 2015

SHCG NEWS will encourage and publish a wide range of views from those connected with history and museums.

The News aims to act as a channel for the exchange of information and opinions about current practice and theory in museums.

The views expressed in the News are wide ranging and do not necessarily express the views of the SHCG committee or SHCG, unless otherwise stated.

The suggested word count for submissions is:

Bulletin Board 100-300 words,  
Theory & Practice 900-1,000 words,  
Reviews and Object Focus 400- 500 words (one page) or 900-1,000 words (two pages).

Please submit your article by e-mail, saved as a Word file (Arial 12 point). Images can be e-mailed or, if high resolution, submitted on a CD (high resolution preferred). Images should be accompanied by a brief caption and credit details. Alternative formats: Electronic copies and alternative formats are available on request.

Send all contributions to:

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## Do you remember Women, Heritage and Museums! (WHAM!)?

As a PhD student researching representations of Victorian women in museums, I've attempted to trace WHAM's history for my research.

A SHCG Working Party organised an event about 'Women in Museums' in April, 1984 at Manchester. After this, a group, independent to SHCG, formally set up WHAM! to promote women through museum collections and exhibitions, to provide a platform to exchange ideas about women's heritage and to combat discrimination within the industry. The Yorkshire Post described its members as "a gentle group of academics and museum workers" (1985).

From the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, WHAM! ran a series of study days, such as 'Oral History and Women' (June, 1985), 'Interpreting Women's Heritage' (April, 1990) and 'Working Wear for Women' (October, 1996).

The book *Women in Industry and Technology from Prehistory to the Present Day: Current Research and the Museum Experience* (1996), a collection of papers delivered at the 1994 WHAM! conference, has been a useful source. Alas my findings end there as I have not found any references to WHAM! beyond 1996.

After an appeal late last year to SHCG members through the email list, some respondents thought that



Frederick William Elwell, *The Curiosity Shop*, oil on canvas, 1929, © Bridgeman. From the Harris Museum and Art Gallery.

WHAM! disbanded in the late 1990s or the early 2000s, with a variety of reasons why suggested.

I am keen to interview WHAM! founders and members, and anyone else willing to share information or their thoughts about WHAM, as well as representations of women in museums more generally, for my research. I will also be visiting museum sites in

the Yorkshire and Humber region to observe their representations of Victorian women and would welcome any suggestions.

If you would like to contribute to my research project or have any information, please contact (a most grateful):

 **Lauren Padgett**

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## A Family in Wartime

As part of Imperial War Museums' events marking seventy years since the end of the Second World War, a recently-opened permanent exhibition examines family life during a time of great uncertainty. IWM London introduces the Allpresses of Lambeth who, along with millions of others, were

forced to adapt when their lives were turned upside down. *A Family in Wartime* aims to bring home the reality of the Blitz, evacuation, rationing, 'make-do and mend' and the horror of warfare on such an enormous scale. A fascinating assortment of objects, sound recordings, film clips and interactives



A Family in Wartime Exhibition © Imperial War Museum.

tell the people's story through the eyes of the Allpresses, from the outbreak of war to VE Day. The displays feature a scale model of the house and full-size recreations of the family's living room and scullery. Touch screens enable further exploration of the house in greater detail. Visitors can also go inside a replica Anderson Shelter and hear audio clips of family members recalling the air raids. An enlarged map covering an entire wall shows the extent of the damage caused to South London, highlights the street where the family lived and pinpoints where the terrifying V1 and V2 bombs landed.

Mr and Mrs Allpress and their offspring were actively involved in the fight back, with two of the women volunteering for Air

Raid Precautions and the two eldest sons serving with the RAF and British Expeditionary Force. They both survived the war and Harry Allpress was awarded the Military Medal.

Potato Pete, Dr Carrot and Firebomb Fritz all appear but perhaps the most unusual and unexpected addition is a 'Squander Bug Air Rifle Target'. Created by illustrator Phillip Boydell, this bizarre creature was designed to look like Hitler and discourage people from idly spending money, making it ideal for target practice.

You can visit the exhibition every day from 10am-6pm except 24-26 December.

 **Jack Ord**

Imperial War Museum, London.

## Is the Orange Order in your collection?

In October this year I will be undertaking a PhD at the University of Liverpool that explores the material culture of the Orange Order. The study will combine the disciplines Irish Studies, History and Museum Studies. I would like to make an appeal among SHCG members to locate orange material held in museum collections throughout the UK, Ireland and North America.

In 2013 I curated a temporary exhibition at Tullie House Museum titled 'Into the Light' which worked in partnership with London's National Library and Museum of Freemasonry and 14 Carlisle Masonic Lodges. During the displays planning I located an unidentified sash in the museum collection (CALMG:1978.95.5). After consultation with LMF and the Grand Lodge of England the sash was identified as a Royal Black Institution Sash. I found that the museum also owns a rare Edwardian image of a Carlisle Orange march led by a costumed 'King Billy.'

These finds prompted me to establish that during the 1830s two Orange lodges were present in the city and that Orange traditions in Carlisle only disappeared in 1980. A hidden history had been discovered and I was inspired to look deeper. It soon became clear that there was a case to study the Orange Order through the legacy of material culture found in British, Irish and North American museum collections. Material culture can reveal much about Irish Protestant community, identity and tradition in differing geographic areas.

The Orange Order is seen as a controversial movement due to its promotion of the Protestant Ascendancy and anti-Roman Catholic doctrine. Yet the movement is part of British and Irish history and was exported throughout the British Empire. As a Curator it is important to examine how museums reflect



An Edwardian image of an Orange March in Carlisle.  
© Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery Trust Carlisle.

their communities and these often 'unloved' and 'unknown' collections can throw new light on hidden social history.

If you have any more information that

you think could be included in this PhD please contact:



**Edwin Rutherford**

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Top photo: Collector Lowenna and mum, bottom photo: Collector Keith. © Saffron Walden Museum.

## Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors

Saffron Walden Museum recently embarked on a special collaborative project to explore the collections of individuals in the local community. 12 collectors from the Uttlesford district took part in workshops with Collections Officer, Leah Mellors, to learn how to care for, display and interpret their collections, before co-curating their own exhibition.

One of the main aims of the project was to engage new people with the museum and to break down some of the preconceptions that local people might have about the museum, in particular that it is too academic or simply "not for them". In order to achieve this, museum staff worked


hard to emphasise the similarities between the museum and individuals who have collections. Information sheets in the exhibition highlight the parallels between the types of objects the museum collects, especially in the social history collection, and the types of objects people collect at home. A section of the exhibition is devoted to some of the earliest objects donated to the museum (by a private collector), emphasising that the museum began as a group of collections belonging to private individuals, many of them local.

The project has been very well-received, especially amongst the participants, who have taken away



valuable advice on how to care for their collections at home. Many of the collectors were pleasantly surprised to meet and bond with people (both participants and museum staff) who share their passion for collecting. The legacy of the project will

be an on-going rotating community display featuring, amongst other things, more collections from our local community.

 **Leah Mellors**  
Collections Officer (Human History), Saffron Walden Museum.

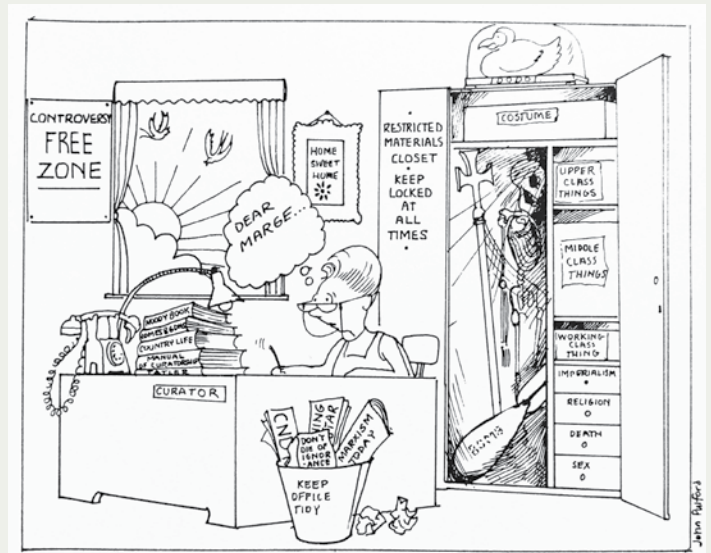
## Hidden in Plain Sight: Histories of the British Empire in English Museums

During a recent research project, it was striking to note the degree to which histories of the British Empire are absent from narrative displays within museums of local and national history. Having identified a gap in contemporary museological research regarding the interpretation of imperial histories within history museums in the UK, surveys were sent out to a sample of English city museums. The aim of these was to establish that these collections do hold objects with an imperial provenance.

Exhibition observations and some interviews with institutional professionals were also conducted in an effort to see first-hand, and understand the reasons why museums find it so difficult to engage with

these histories.

All of the institutions which responded to the surveys confirmed that they did have, within their collections, objects which matched the criteria of being imperial, as above. They also all agreed, however, that displaying and interpreting these histories of Empire is important. However, only 37% reported that these objects are currently featuring in permanent displays concerning their original context. Perhaps even more worrying was the discovery that a majority of the institutions, although confident they were in possession of such items, were uncertain where to locate them. The biggest concern that institutions emphasised in their responses was the lack of relevance of this



"Problems of interpretation in Social History Museums", a cartoon by John Pulford.

topic to the audience.

The British Empire, however, has been a key part of both Britain's national history and the evolution of British museums themselves. Due to the polyvocal nature of histories of Empire there are many ways displays of such material could be made relevant to audiences. There is a definite need to review

how these objects are documented and 'tagged' within collections in order to fully engage with the histories on offer.

If you have any information which might be useful please contact:



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## What Is It? A short guide to basic artefact identification on firstBASE

Although the firstBASE database is very rich in information about collections, so far there

has been no guide to how these artefacts can be identified. At last, thanks to funding from the Museums

Association Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, help is now at hand for those not really knowing where to start along the long and winding road to identification.

Since the beginning of 2015 Steph Mastoris and Victoria Rogers have been working on a suite of nine short films on how to identify artefacts. These will be available soon on the firstBASE website.

Starting very much from first principles, the films begin with discussing the inter-relationship between an artefact's form, function and materials, followed by sections on identifying some common woods, metals and ceramics. Three further films then deal with dating using design style and marks and inscriptions as well as the role that signs

of use (and re-use) can play in aiding identification.

The films were directed, produced and shot by Sarah Hayes and Luke Unsworth, who made the wonderful Tools of the Trade films for SHCG last year, and feature Steph Mastoris' own teaching collection of artefacts.

Steph and Victoria are now working with our web designers, Surface Impression, to integrate these films into the firstBASE website, along with an accompanying text. It is hoped that this new resource will be available online by early 2016.



**Steph Mastoris**

Head of National Waterfront Museum, Swansea and SHCG firstBASE Editorial Chair.



## Project Oasis

By now you will have heard about the camps of Calais. It seems that the situation there and the associated media coverage has fuelled negative feelings towards refugees and revealed a lack of understanding about why people are leaving their countries in the first place. For the few who do make it past the Channel, they have the option to claim asylum and they will then be 'dispersed' to a city in the UK for initial accommodation, usually in a hostel. Wales has four such cities, including Cardiff.

Oasis Cardiff is an independent charity which runs a drop-in centre supporting refugees and asylum seekers. The centre is open five days a week and offers English classes,

arts activities, sports, a free lunch and a very well-used café where people can chill out and make a cuppa whenever they want. For people who have recently arrived in the UK without contacts and without access to funds, this free social space is invaluable.

Thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Oasis is working on a project which will challenge stereotypes about refugees and give people the opportunity to tell their story in their own words. The charity is collecting stories from refugees and asylum seekers in Wales in the form of oral histories as well as using creative forms such as digital storytelling. The stories will be shared online and as a touring exhibition (June-Nov 2016), as well



Photo of Simplice who attended a digital storytelling course at Project Oasis. Photo courtesy of Mari Lowe.

as being archived with our partners, National Museum Wales.

This is a great opportunity to develop practice in community engagement and partnership-working with the Third Sector. Given the current media coverage surrounding Calais, refugees and immigration it's also a chance for us to

show that curators continue to engage with current socio-political issues.

 **Mari Lowe**  
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Object Handling Session at M&S Company Archive. Image courtesy of M&S Company Archive.

## From Pants to Puddings: Reminiscence and the M&S Company Archive

The M&S Company Archive in Leeds contains over 70,000 objects telling the story of M&S, from the first stall on Kirkgate Market to one of the UK's leading retailers. The collection is full of treasures that can evoke memories and encourage conversations. We're using original merchandise and advertisements to develop reminiscence resources as part of our community programme.

One in three people in the UK over 65 will develop dementia, and over 800,000 people in the UK are currently living with dementia. There is evidence that reminiscence therapy using objects and images to recall memories and stimulate conversation can improve mood, wellbeing and memory in people with dementia. M&S works closely with the Alzheimer's Society and has committed to

empowering every one of its 80,000 colleagues to become a Dementia Friend. After members of the archive team became Dementia Friends, we realised we could use the collection to support our Dementia Friendly status.

Our community programme has been running since the archive opened in 2012. Groups can visit the exhibition, have a cup of tea, and enjoy a handling session with items from the collection. By its nature this has limited reach, so in order to reach older people and those with dementia on a wider geographical scale, we began to compile reminiscence loan boxes. Dementia Awareness

training run by Voluntary Action Leeds and ARA training on Archives for Reminiscence proved invaluable when thinking about the types of objects to put in the boxes, and how we might make the boxes as useful and engaging as possible. We planned to develop two boxes – one themed around men's and women's clothing and accessories, the other around childhood, which we thought would be most effective for those in later stage dementia.

The archive initially had a small handling collection of objects, mainly packaging and catalogues. We supplemented this by adding duplicate items that had been donated to the

archive, and purchasing items from various vintage websites.

The challenge was to find a mix of objects that would appeal to both men and women. For example, whilst relatively straightforward to find a typically 1950s or 1960s dress or skirt, a man's shirt from the 1940s looks very similar to one from the 1980s or now, so wouldn't perhaps provoke a memory. We worked around this by looking for men's accessories – the box now contains a wide kipper tie, 1950s brogues, a 1940s razor, and a 1970s smoking jacket.

Each reminiscence box is housed in a 1960s M&S suitcase, meaning the reminiscence begins before it's even opened. The boxes are free to borrow, and we arrange collection and delivery. Each box contains a list of the contents with dates, and an introduction to running a reminiscence session, with links to useful information on communication skills on the Alzheimer's Society website. The contents are checked whenever a box comes back from a group, before it is sent out again. We send out evaluation forms to find out how people used the box, and any improvements they would recommend.

We trialled the first complete box with an older people's group in Leeds and had a fantastic response. The gents enjoyed trying on the smoking jacket, whilst many of the ladies delighted in comparing the stitch-work on garments to their own handiwork. Surprisingly a 1970s M&S paper bag was the object that drew most attention, as people

recalled what they used to buy from Marks & Spencer, and remembered shopping and the high street more generally. The power of these objects was demonstrated clearly when one of the ladies told the group she used to work in a factory making garments for M&S, though she couldn't recall what she used to make. As soon as the case was opened she took hold of a 1960s lace slip and started talking about how she sewed the straps on – the physical object unlocked this

at a recent 'Remember Research' event run by the NHS and the University of Leeds, allowing us to meet healthcare professionals, care home workers, people with dementia and their carers. Following the event we were flooded with bookings from across the country, and have made valuable contacts with organisations working with older people.

We now have three packs in total, two to loan out and one which we've used to improve our outreach



M&S Childhood Reminiscence Box. Image courtesy of M&S Company Archive.

memory for her. We promoted our community programme, including the reminiscence boxes, initially by contacting community groups on our mailing list. We also held a stand

programme - we can now offer outreach reminiscence sessions with community groups and care homes in and around Leeds. The boxes have proved incredibly popular, and are now booked

out until the end of the year. Outreach session bookings are building too as more people find out about what we offer. To complement the physical reminiscence boxes, we've also developed themed image packs, available to download for free on our website and useful for groups if the physical packs are booked out. They contain large colourful images, and corresponding information to help the group leader start the conversation.

The archive lends itself particularly well to reminiscence – the collection tells the story of everyday life in Britain. Even for people who didn't shop at M&S, the products and packaging are so evocative of an era that they still have the power to conjure up memories and encourage lively conversation. We're delighted to be able to offer these resources and services to older people and those with dementia. We know that even a brief reminiscence session can have a huge impact on an older person, and at the M&S Company Archive we are proud to be making a positive difference.



**Kate Entwistle,**

Archive and Outreach Officer, M&S Company Archive.

For more information please see:

[www.marksintime.marksandspencer.com/community](http://www.marksintime.marksandspencer.com/community)

or contact: [company.archive@marksandspencer.com](mailto:company.archive@marksandspencer.com)

# The Use of Emotion in Exhibiting Contested Histories

The 70th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki has led me to think about how contested histories can be approached by museums. These are understood here as subjects where there are 'fundamental conflicts over the interpretation of history and its representation in the public arena'; in other words, where there are obviously differing views of 'what actually

happened'. The 'Enola Gay controversy' in 1995, where the U.S. National Air and Space Museum cancelled an exhibit that would have interpreted objects from the war in the Pacific, including the fuselage of the aircraft that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, proves that public pressure arising from competing viewpoints can influence museums' attempts to engage with these topics. The exhibition was criticised

heavily by the US Air Force Association for portraying the dropping of the atomic bomb through the lens of an anti-nuclear viewpoint, by containing material showing the damaging effects of the bomb to the Japanese people and overlooking the bomb as a 'necessity' to end the war. After heated debates the original exhibit was ultimately cancelled.

This situation could be enough to warn museums off addressing emotionally charged, 'politicised' topics, but as David Fleming has perceptively stated, 'most museums are political, and it is naïve

or dishonest to pretend otherwise'. Decisions are ultimately made by someone about what to collect, what to exhibit and what to ignore, highlighting the need for museums to represent and engage with their various communities. In order to do this, contested histories need to be confronted; but how can this be done in a way that considers a range of viewpoints? Furthermore, is it ever possible to reconcile these views?

The rest of this article will use two case studies to address these questions.

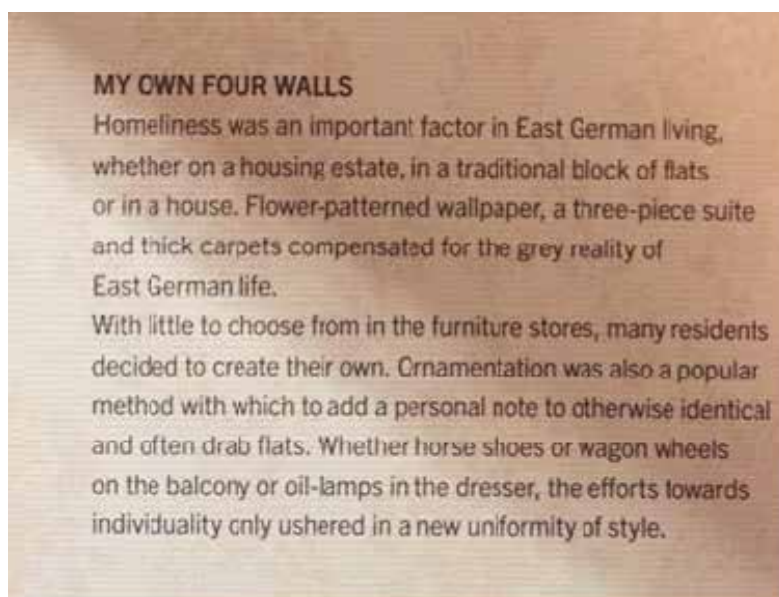
## Case Study 1: The DDR Museum, Berlin

The DDR Museum does an excellent job of exhibiting different aspects of life in former East Germany or the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR). This particular part of German history is highly contested, with some people focussing on the government's instruments of terror such as the Stasi (secret police),

others taking a more revisionist approach that concentrates on everyday resistance and 'making do' and finally a small, but growing number of people who look at the communist past through rose-tinted glasses, known colloquially as Ostalgie.

The museum aims to eschew a narrative of victimhood by taking a largely revisionist approach, but does contain elements of all three viewpoints. More importantly, however, it actively seeks to change

opinions and open up a dialogue. One way it does this is through technology, advocating a 'hands-on experience' of history where visitors can drive a simulated Trabant and listen to authentic music, amongst other activities. These interactives have the potential to make visitors who may have understood the DDR as a drab, oppressed place see its more colourful side, through experiencing a reconstruction of it. Additionally, those who understand or remember the DDR solely through the lens of Ostalgie may



This recreated East German living room, shown here with its accompanying display panel, is just one of the DDR Museum's interactives that aims to challenge perceptions through activity. Images are author's own.

*Continued from page 11*

have their beliefs shaken when they enter the museum's chillingly recreated Stasi interrogation room. Thus interactives allow visitors to imagine (or remember) 'what it was like', but can also be used in the hope that 'they might, in their very apparentness, reframe or represent the museum as a forum'.

Narrative is also used by the museum in a way that can allow the reconciliation of different views. For

example, various critical questions are asked during the exhibition, providing space for reflection. However, where the DDR Museum seems to fall short is on emotional engagement. Jodie Kidd, Alex Drago and David Fleming have asserted that feeling emotion implies empathy and this can help people more fully understand topics, particularly through a focus on personal stories. Whilst the interactives discussed at the DDR Museum incite some emotion as they can make visitors feel like they

are experiencing life in the DDR, the museum has next to no focus on individuals, making it seem impersonal at times. David Fleming has written that in the National Maritime Museum in Liverpool, the inclusion of a young girl's undelivered letter to her father who worked on the Titanic, 'breathes life' into the historical narrative of the Titanic's tragic voyage, helping visitors to relate more deeply to the topic. Unfortunately, the DDR Museum falls short in providing such opportunities.

## Case Study 2: 'Unseen Women: Stories from Armagh Gaol', Armagh, Northern Ireland

An exhibition that demonstrates the role that emotion can play in representation and reconciliation is 'Unseen Women: Stories from Armagh Gaol', a 2011 audio-visual display made up of interviews recorded about Armagh Gaol, a Northern Irish female prison for political and non-political prisoners that was open during 'The Troubles'. Jolene Mairs Dyer, an artist involved in the project, has written up her findings. She draws attention to the exhibition's contemporary significance as the country is still trying to deal with the aftermath of conflict, with opposing groups commemorating their own trauma, making it difficult for them to understand the other 'side's' experience.

The project recorded various women's memories from Armagh Gaol, including former Loyalist and Republican prisoners as well as prison staff. Mairs Dyer has highlighted that the co-ordinators chose recordings that would 'reduce the practice

of Othering' and the exhibition can be said to have had some success in achieving this. For instance, a community worker from one of the Protestant areas of the country used to believe that Republican women deserved to be strip searched. However, after seeing the exhibition, she was able to empathise with these prisoners 'as a woman' showing that emotional displays focussing on the individual can incite people to transcend preconceived notions and empathise with others' experiences. But, Mairs Dyer also reports that some visitors, usually those who had direct negative experiences of the conflict, were unable to empathise with the women in the videos.

So, this shows us that it is not always possible to change opinion. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Museums are unlikely to be able to completely reconcile viewpoints, but the 'Unseen Women' exhibition led



A recent picture of Armagh Gaol. Image in the public domain.

people, many for the first time, to engage in an open dialogue about the past. Thus, what is more important is that emotional displays, often through a focus on individuals, can help museums in that important goal of opening up discussion by creating a space for people to confront emotionally charged viewpoints.

Of course, there are various ethical questions that must be considered; is it irresponsible to try and get visitors to empathise with certain viewpoints? Furthermore, at what point will people switch off due to emotional overload? Unfortunately, there are no comprehensive studies

on this topic and it would be beneficial if studies charting visitor reactions to emotional displays in various museums were carried out and compared. Nevertheless, all in all, by inciting emotion in a way that is carefully considered and justified, alongside the use of other techniques, museums can play a role in opening up the space for dialogue, potentially reconciling differences in opinion, although further research on the topic is needed.

 **Bianca Harriskitt**

MA Museum Studies student at the University of Leicester.

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## 'A toast to the future – new ways of engaging'

'A toast to the future- new ways of engaging' seemed a bold and optimistic theme to cover for the SHCG 2015 conference- happily, the speakers succeeded in delivering on this title and led fantastic discussions throughout the conference.

The conference kicked off with contemporary collections and social media, including examples of how organisations are presently pushing boundaries with standard engagement techniques and perfecting the art of communication. David Flemming opened the conference with a discussion about emotive engagement, and the use of emotions to connect with our visitors. David made the excellent point that museums have always been emotional places, but that visitors don't always expect it.

Advocacy and how to express the impact of our work was a practical session which proved to demonstrate that engagement starts with the museum team itself, and that another way of engaging with our audiences, especially those providing funding, is to actually tell them how much museums actually do!

Digital engagement was a constant undertone throughout the conference, but refreshingly it was good to hear practical examples of how this is bringing stories to life as well as the limitations it can have. The York example of tweeting dead people by Natalie McCaul was a great example of a wonderful project needing

more technological help (and cash!) to get it off the ground.

The second day discussion on 3D printing led to a lively debate on the integrity of museum collections, and how it could change the game in object handling. Whether you were for or against 3D printed objects,



the opportunity to discuss the engagement potential fitted into the conference theme wonderfully. The practical activity looking at surrealism left me buzzing with ideas about spaces where audiences can tell the story themselves, and the activity was so engaging that I would not hesitate to run it in my own museum.

The trip to Derby Silk Mill was a great example of

using social enterprise principles to manage a museum site. Curator Dan and staff on site at the Mill are passing on practical skills to members of the community, as well as supporting the work of the museum by building showcases and stands. After the participant dedicates some time, they


can also use the tools to work on their own projects. This is a fantastic way to engage audiences, as well as fostering expertise and made a very real difference in the lives of visitors. The innovative display methods combined with a relaxed approach to interpretation made the venue a fantastic place to visit in the context of the conference.

All the speakers who brought case studies

to discuss how they communicate with audiences demonstrated just how varied museums are when it comes to engagement, and how each approach is unique to that space and audience's needs. I would have liked to have heard more about the impact the engagement techniques had on audiences; it was touched upon in some presentations but would have been good to go into more detail. This one tiny point aside, the speakers were all very relevant to the topic and it was great to hear so many examples of engagement.

Kim Streets, opening the conference on day two, made the excellent point that everything is social history, and that the stories behind these objects are the keys to engagement. What I took from this when reflecting on the conference theme is that curators have always told stories, but now we have many more ways that we can do so, and not to be afraid of trying non-standard ways of communication.

The conference was a fantastic space for discussion and all the speakers shared a genuine enthusiasm for the topic. Speakers filled the criteria well, reflecting on what curators do well and what we can use in the future to do even more. I thoroughly enjoyed the conference, it was really informative and I look forward to the next.

 **Lauren Ryall-Stockton**  
Curator, Thackray Medical Museum.



## SHCG Conference Review – Day 1

### “The heart of a museum is emotions”

This seems to have become the catch phrase of this year's SHCG conference held in the wonderful cities of Derby and Sheffield.

David Fleming's Keynote started things off with a retrospective of the impact social history curators have had in fundamentally changing museum practice. Fleming pointed out that museums now strive to 'engage' with individuals, groups and communities, and that all stems from social history. He highlighted that the National Museum of Liverpool is effectively a national museum of social history, and cited examples such as the exhibition about the life of April Ashley and their work commemorating

Hillsborough. Fleming also talked about a girl's first letter to her father that was never delivered, a tragic story that has added historic interest when it becomes clear that her father died on the Titanic. Fleming was at his most animated when highlighting the Museums Association's Museums Change Lives vision as being the current peak of social history in museums and his concerns about the current political situation. The presentation provided lots of discussion throughout both days of conference, as any keynote should.

The first session on new ways of engaging, I Tweet Dead People, was a very interesting project working with social media and the remains of a Roman Female in York, known as Ivory Bangle Lady. People tweeted answers to questions in the museum and then the Ivory Bangle

Lady would appear in a hologram with the answer and more information. It was an interesting and successful pilot project but they are unable to continue it due to funding issues; something which is not uncommon in the sector and raises a common issue about the sustainability of project funding.

The third session continued to focus on the role of social media in engagement by showcasing The Secret Lives of Objects blog at Leeds Museums and Galleries. The blog enables the museum to share objects and stories as they come to life, but also can tie into topical events and is an ideal opportunity to encourage everyone in the museum to contribute including volunteers, work experience students and curators from all departments. I think that a behind the scenes blog might work well at my museum and is something for me to explore in further detail.

The afternoon began

with Doctor Who and Me: 50 Years of Doctor Who Fans. As an enthusiastic Doctor Who fan, it was this session I was most looking forward to. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of TV show Doctor Who, the National Media Museum (NMeM) in Bradford hosted a look at the history of the programme, by displaying objects lent by Doctor Who fans and superfans for the exhibition.

The museum was able to gather oral histories as well as engaging communities by contemporary collecting (although the museum didn't accession a single object from the exhibition). Michael Terwey, Head of Collections and Exhibitions at NMeM, spoke about the importance of a genuine connection to the museum, by visitors, and not just the Doctor Who brand. While blockbuster exhibitions lead to a spike in visitor numbers, museums need to encourage visitors to the public to make return visits to be sustainable, which comes from an emotional attachment.



The next session was led by Alistair Brown from the Museums Association. This provided a focus on effective advocacy, in particular campaigning. Key points from the session included the importance of everyone taking responsibility, finding allies, agreeing a message and sticking to it and working out who to target. As well as the theoretical approach, we also heard from May Redfern, Learning Manager at Barnsley Museums, who produced an advocacy document, This Is What

We Do, to explain to key stakeholders and the local council the value of their work. It was then our turn to create an advocacy poster. It was especially revealing that in a group of fellow social history curators, we struggled to define and prove our relevance to each other in a catchy poster.


By mid afternoon, it was time for us to stretch our legs with an excellent tour of the Silk Mill, by Daniel Martin, Curator of Making. Everything in the main space, from the bar & seats

to cases, were made in the building as part of the project. The mill has open workshop spaces that visitors can go into and they work with jobseekers to provide them with skills. The thing I loved was that you could touch objects, though it was a bit unnerving not having labels everywhere! It is a gorgeous space, and offers sustainability and revenue as a corporate hire space. Hearing all about their ambitious plan for the rest of the building, it made me wish I had an 'empty' silk mill at my museum!

please do drop me an email.

After a fascinating day, we returned to Sheffield, and to a lovely evening reception at Made North Gallery, featuring an interesting exhibition about 50 years of the road sign. Did you know they had to design a suitable font to be read clearly at speed!? It was finally time for dinner at a lovely restaurant, Silversmiths, which has its own interesting history that the owner is looking into. Full of good food and drink we finally headed back to the accommodation where the traditional SHCG gin party was in full flow. For a first day of SHCG conference, it didn't disappoint giving me plenty to think about and to implement at my museum.

*Bring on day two!*

 **Holly Trubshawe**  
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Curator Daniel Martin shows delegates around the Silk Mill. Image courtesy of Emma Harper

Afternoon tea and scones were a very welcome refreshment and should become a SHCG requirement for future conferences, much like the gin party. Following the delicious scones, it was on to the AGM. I had a particular interest in the AGM as I was standing for SHCG committee, and I was delighted to be elected! If you have ideas or suggestions about SHCG seminars, in terms of content and/or location,

## SHCG Conference - Review Day 2

As a first time delegate to the conference I was delighted to have been offered a free place sponsored by the Yorkshire and Humberside Federation of Museums and Galleries and I was asked to review the second day by the group. The second day was held in my hometown of Sheffield in the wonderful city centre venue of the Millennium Galleries, a site I am very familiar with having been previously employed by Museums Sheffield for a number of years.

The day opened with a powerful keynote delivered by Museums Sheffield Chief Executive Kim Streets. She delivered an inspirational talk on what social history collections have meant to her throughout her career. She spoke with passion on how museums hold memories of the past and dreams of the future and challenged us to step outside of the walls of the museum, to make connections with communities and find new ways of engaging. Her speech was delivered with sincerity and an obvious deep knowledge of social history which she remains an advocate of from her early career as Social History Curator at Museums Sheffield.

Katherine Lynch and Stuart Irwin then told us about the challenges they face at the unique Port Sunlight museum and how they have gone about engaging local support and involvement from those living in the historical village. It is a unique venue and they face many challenges being only one of several visitor attractions in the village. Nazia Ali from Birmingham Museums spoke on

representing the city's audience which has an increasingly wide demographic. They are using the MA's Collecting Culture's Project to make new additions to the museums arts collections that better engage new audiences and they are rethinking the role of curator in the museum.

In the afternoon we heard about 2 very different Yorkshire based projects. Firstly Rachael Drew from Scarborough Museums told us of their "Real Life Retold" project which used theatre within the museum setting to educate new audiences about the town's role in the First World War. Many local residents were not aware of the German Bombardment that took place there in 1914. The museum used a series of short plays to tell the tale of how different residents experienced this fateful night. Paintings from the collection became backdrops to these plays and community involvement was key to delivering the project.

Next Elinor Camille-Wood of the Laurence Sterne Trust at Shandy Hall and Dr Helen Williams of Northumbria University shared the work they have been doing using humour in the interpretation of the collections. They based their project around a volume found within the archives which revealed a "Good Humour Club" where Gentlemen met between 1724-1800 to share jokes and fun. As well as an exhibition the project delivered some lively education sessions to schools which were original and engaging. There was also a series of events, a recorded dramatisation of extracts of



the volume and trail around York was produced. This was a far reaching project which used many different elements to reach different audiences.

Following the speakers was an informative tour of the new Metalwork Gallery by Curator Clare Starkey. The gallery showcasing the city's designated metalwork collection has been redisplayed in part funded by the DCMS Wolfson Fund and it looked really beautiful. The museum houses a designated metalwork collection of 13,000 objects and the gallery managed to display over 800 of these without feeling too crowded or repetitive.

There were 2 participatory sessions at the end of the day. Amelia Knowlson asked us how 3D printing might benefit social history collections in museums and there was a chance to handle a variety of 3d printed objects. In my session the question posed by Amelia started a lot of discussion around the feel of objects – 3D printing allows objects to be touched but then this does not deliver the same tactile experience at the genuine objects so we questioned the value in this.

Alex Woodall showed us her Object Dialogue box which contained "made-



up" objects that she asked us to interpret in imaginative ways using the collections on display in the Ruskin Gallery. It was a very different approach to the way many social history curators are used to thinking. Alex's object had no story and we were challenged to create the story for ourselves. It was a thoroughly inspirational session which I can see would engage audiences in an entirely new way and deliver a truly original and entertaining experience.

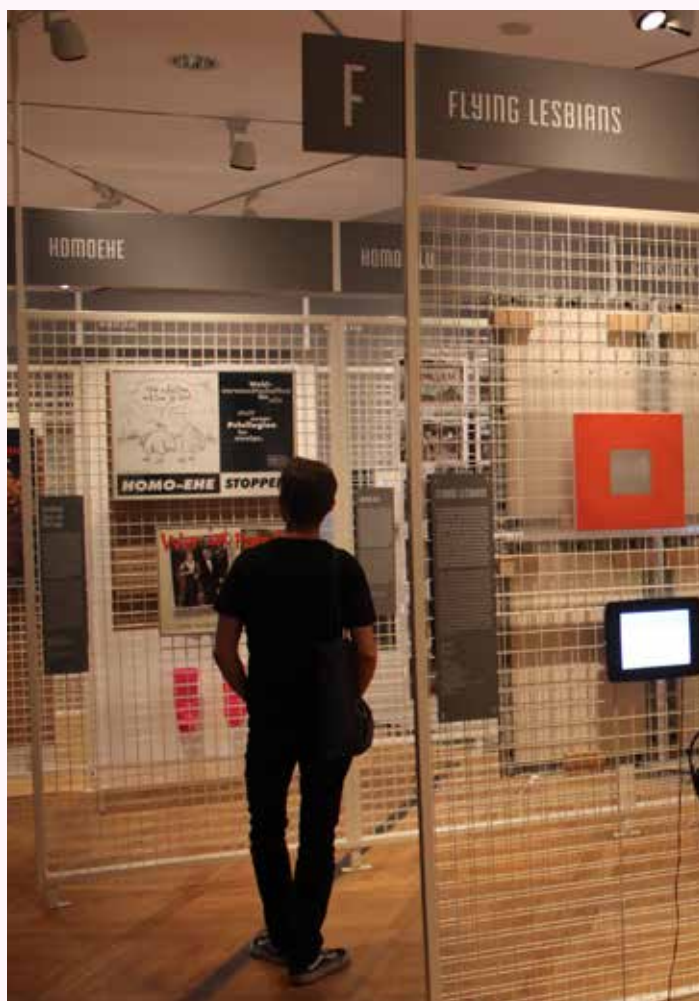
Overall the conference was jam-packed with information and I will have a lot to think about over the coming months. It was particularly wonderful to see so much going on in the Yorkshire region. I now can't wait to see what next year's conference will offer.



**Sarah Briggs**

Freelance and part time at  
Barnsley Museums.





Photographs courtesy of Andrea Rottman.

## Homosexuality\_ies Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin

(26 June to 1 December 2015)

An article in September's Museums Journal focussed on the representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people in museums.

The author noted that the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales falls in 2017, providing an opportunity for museums to reflect on how LGBTQ experience is represented in their collections, displays and interpretation.

Understandably, the Museums Journal tends to focus on exhibitions in the UK, but anyone interested in the curation of LGBTQ histories should also look at the current Homosexuality\_ies exhibition at the Deutsches Historisches Museum and the Schwules Museum in Berlin. The show is large, ambitious and impressive.

At the Deutsches Historisches Museum the exhibition begins with The First Time, a section with displays incorporating

short films of people taking about their experiences of coming out, and personal objects that relate to those stories. The displays are object rich, drawing on material from 'activist' archives, as well as museum collections. It explores history from the 19th century onwards, with the latter sections highlighting the ways in which traditional categories and ideas about gender and sexuality have been challenged, debated and reconfigured more recently.

The smaller exhibition at the Schwules Museum displays contemporary art, but the last section features interviews with people responding to questions about the future. It is an effective way of encouraging the visitor

to reflect on and actively consider their own views. The exhibition's text is presented in both German and English. A booklet of the main panel texts in English, along with short contextual introductions is also available in the Deutsches Historisches Museum's shop along with a catalogue.

*Find Out More:*

**Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin**

[www.dhm.de/en.html](http://www.dhm.de/en.html)

**Schwules Museum, Berlin**

[www.schwulesmuseum.de/en/exhibitions/view/homosexuality-ies/](http://www.schwulesmuseum.de/en/exhibitions/view/homosexuality-ies/)



**Stuart Frost,**  
Head of Interpretation &  
Volunteers, British Museum.

# Henry Wellcome and the Tabloid Chest

With the cold season upon us we have started reaching for paracetamol, lozenges and other medicines in our medicine cabinets or boxes. Very rarely, I am sure, we think of the man we need to thank for that. Sir Henri Salomon Wellcome was an American born in Wisconsin. After training as a pharmacist in Chicago and Philadelphia he moved to London with friend and fellow student Silas Burroughs. Together they started the Burroughs Wellcome & co. company.

The company was the only one to manufacture product in the UK, ensuring the gentlemen a strong commercial success. To maintain its reputation as pioneer in medicine, Henry Wellcome soon decided to specialise his company in the production and sale of compressed pills, or tabloid, a word patented by Wellcome in 1884. The company was promising a unique level of purity and accuracy for product and dosage

Henry Wellcome, who was a little bit of a perfectionist, took great care in the manufacture of his tabloids. According to the British Medical Journal they were so beautiful that 'they could have been mistaken for sweets!' But no matter how great the product is, marketing is essential. And it might be where Wellcome displayed his best skills. To promote his pharmaceutical products he had the idea of sending medical chests containing Burroughs Wellcome & Co. products

to the elite of his time such as aristocrats (King Edward VII), politicians (Theodore Roosevelt) and explorers amongst whom Henry Morton Stanley and Ernest Shackleton, therefore associating his name to the ones of great scientific achievements and discoveries.

Later on, he perfected his chests to the point of inventing the smallest medical chest in the world. It was no bigger than a sugar cube and contained twelve tiny bottles, the equivalent of 300 doses of medicine. It was quite a performance for a company which had already built its success compressed pills. The smallest medicine chest in the world was a huge marketing success showing the chest balancing on the top of a finger, using the hand for scale.



The smallest medicine chest in the world.  
© Wellcome Library, London.

In the early 1920s a replica chest was produced in fifteen carat gold and offered to Queen Mary for her dolls' house, a fact that Burroughs Wellcome were quick to publicize with the

implication that thanks to their hard work, good health had become child's play.

**SHC Muriel Bailly**  
Visitor Experience Assistant,  
Wellcome Collection.



Burroughs Wellcome and Company product: Tabloid First Aid Box showing contents - Quinine Sulphate blue bottle, Aromatic Ammonia tin and a selection of various tablets, thirst quenchers and soda's.  
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