



# SHCG NEWS

SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

Issue 77 October 2016

## SHCG Conference

The Only Way is Ethics:  
*Social History and the  
21st Century Museum*

*Also inside this edition:*

### **Autopsy of a Sunken House**

Anglo Saxon Village

### **Stormont House**

Centenary Project

### **Fearless Foxes**

Civic Pride in Leicester



## Welcome – and keep on building

Welcome to the autumn edition of SHCG News.

A lot has changed since the last issue, not least in the wake of the EU referendum results which some of us at SHCG experienced together as it coincided with our annual conference. The conference also saw our own elections of a new committee (see back page for more details). Whatever your own personal view on the referendum there is no doubting that there will be an impact

on the museum and heritage world, particularly in terms of funding streams available. But also I believe that many of the themes we explored at this year's conference 'The Only Way is Ethics' will become more and more relevant. One major theme of the conference was around ethical and responsible collecting and disposal. We debated the importance of contemporary collecting – how long before an object's significance becomes evident, if ever? Should this influence how we collect and accession objects into our collection?

In terms of 'Brexit' how should we collect such a step change in our country's history especially one that has divided opinions and even families? In many ways this has always been the challenge facing social history curators and, I suspect, the appeal to many of us who join their ranks. Nonetheless it will be interesting to see the impact 'Brexit' and the associated changes have on collections and interpretation over the coming years.

In any case, I think we have a responsibility to engage with these challenging topics and support each other as we do so – much as many of the speakers at this year's conference have been doing. In this issue we

have a whole section dedicated to the conference where you can read about these projects from Mari Lowe's work at Refugee Wales at Cardiff Oasis through to Tyne and Wear's exhibition about 'Four Meals Away' focussing on food poverty in the region. Victoria Roger's words of resilience may be extra useful over the coming years - "What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight...but build anyway". Sarah Murray from Canterbury Museum in New Zealand can find particular resonance with this on a practical level as she talked to us about the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 and their effect on the museum and its interpretation.

As ever, this edition also contains reports of some great projects being carried out across the country – in particular showing how we are engaging children with our collections. There are also reviews of excellent partnerships and exhibitions as well as our Object Focus on a particularly revealing document from a regional collection.



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### Front cover image

Pupils from Stormont House School getting involved with the history of their school in the First World War.

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Why didn't T Rex play football...



...he couldn't pick the ball up!



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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: 24th January 2017

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 must be high resolution and can be submitted via an online transfer site, email or, if necessary, USB.

Send all contributions to:

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## Object Lessons

As a volunteer working with largely industrial and social history collections, I regularly wished that I had a better understanding of different metals. While completing entry forms or auditing collections, I was often embarrassed to describe an object as simply 'metal' or I wondered why something containing two different metals was corroding so quickly. My web searches provided quick answers at best, but not a broad understanding of how to identify and care for different materials.

I felt I had struck gold (one of the few metals I could previously identify!) when I discovered SHCG's Object Lessons boxes, as this is exactly what they provide. There are three boxes, each offering an introduction to different materials (metals, woods, and plastics) and they are designed to work well in self-led learning sessions. The boxes contain handling objects and come with a comprehensive guide to identifying what they are made of and how to care for them. The resources are free – you only need to cover the transport and insurance.

Last year, during my excellent traineeship with Norfolk Museum Service's Teaching Museum, I organised a study day for the trainees using Object Lessons. We borrowed the metals and plastics boxes and went through them in small groups. My team looked at metals. As you would hope for in a resource created by museum professionals,

the written material was pitched at a good level – easy to understand but not simplistic. The guide led us through an interactive session, asking us to handle the objects as we answered questions about their properties to deduce what kind of metal they were. It was both enjoyable and informative. Helpfully, the written resources can be downloaded from the SHCG website for future reference too.

I am now a lot more confident identifying and caring for metal objects of all types. I was able to put the new knowledge into practice immediately while working on a collections audit and it will be helpful in all collections projects. I will definitely be recommending these boxes to future colleagues, as I think the sessions are instructive not just for those starting their museum careers, but for anyone who would like a better understanding of metals, woods, or plastics.

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Find out more about how to borrow  
SHCG Object Lessons by visiting:  
<http://www.shcg.org.uk/object-lessons>





## Autopsy of a Sunken House

West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village is one of the UK's great archaeological sites. It has extensive indoor galleries and a stunning recreation of an Anglo-Saxon village surrounded by 125 acres of unspoilt countryside.

May 2016 saw the completion of a ground-breaking engagement project entitled "Autopsy of a Sunken House". Funding from the HLF Young Roots programme allowed a team of 17 young people to work to record and deconstruct a forty year old Anglo-Saxon sunken house. The group of 11–17 year-olds learnt a range of new skills throughout the project, such as photography, recording techniques, archaeological excavation, museum interpretation, guidebook production, filmmaking and film production. They took part in an excavation of the house's footprint and subsequently developed a programme of community engagement and interpretation. A film was created by the young people to help West Stow make a link between original finds from the site and the reconstructed village that can be seen today.

A key aim of the project was to reach and engage with young people who may be less inclined to visit a museum or historic site. It was important to use this project to show them that museums value their lives, stories and ideas. The commitment, enjoyment and output from the young people involved provides evidence of the impact museums and heritage can



have on young people's lives. One parent stated that, "the project with you has done so much for his confidence even my husband noticed it!"

It is too early to say what longer term impact taking part in this project will have on the young people but it is clear that it has had an impact in the short term. Two families have joined as 'Friends of West Stow' as a direct result of the project so will be forming a longer term relationship with the site. All of the Young Roots Team have been given a year's free membership of the Museum and Archaeology Club and it is hoped that they will continue their involvement with the site and other museums in the future.

*More information about this exciting project can be found at:*

<http://handlingthepast.co.uk/about-me/west-stow-blog/>



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## Cromwell and the Civil War Day

Museums, galleries and battlefield sites have all contributed to our understanding of Cromwell and the civil wars. The Cromwell Association is running a study day – Interpreting Cromwell and the Civil War on 12 November 2016 in Bury Theatre at the Royal Armouries in Leeds. This Study Day will examine how different methods of interpretation have developed and consider

the challenges faced now and in the future. It will be of interest to all fascinated by Cromwell and the civil wars; together with those more broadly interested in the development of museums and site interpretation. To find out more about the study day and to book a place please visit [www.olivercromwell.org.uk](http://www.olivercromwell.org.uk) All bookings must be received by Wednesday 2nd November 2016

### Call for Papers – *ARCHIVES AND RECORDS* *JOURNAL, SPRING 2018*

The traditional boundaries of the archival and curatorial professions are today beginning to crumble as archivists and curators increasingly become responsible for all aspects of heritage, be it textual, visual, cultural, built or material heritage. Both professions are currently debating how their traditional roles are now evolving and being challenged in the ever-changing heritage landscape. The need for cross-domain understanding and collaboration becomes more apparent, as the defining lines between archive and museum collections become more blurred.

These and other recent trends pose numerous questions about the intersection of archives and museums. For example:

- What are the commonalities and divergences between archival theory and material culture theory, and how can these inform professional practice on both sides?
- What is the professional impact of the recent divergence of government strategy and funding for archives and museums?
- How have archivists and curators developed historically as two different professions?
- How are the traditional roles and skillsets of the archivist/curator and their areas of expertise being challenged into the 21st century?
- How is digital technology changing the way that archive and museum professionals interact with archive and object collections and with each other?
- How can archive and museum 'best practice' in collections management, cataloguing, accessibility and interpretation be shared, rethought and improved?

This special issue of Archives and Records seeks to explore approaches to archives and museums taken

from a wide range of disciplines. The issue aims to provide a space for encounters between researcher and practitioner discourses, and to encourage the fertile cross-pollination of ideas from archivists, curators, educators, users and scholars.

We invite papers on any aspect of archives and museums. Contributions might consider, but need not be confined to, the following themes:

- The archivist and the museum professional
- Training and CPD
- Collections management, standards and best practice
- Definitions of objects, archives and ephemera
- Material culture and archival theory
- Cross-sectoral and cross-domain working in the culture and heritage industries
- The impact of the digital world on archives and museums

### Further details

The full Call For Papers is available at the homepage of the journal:

<http://explore.tandfonline.com/cfp/ah/archives-and-records-special-issue-archives-and-museums>

### Submissions

Prospective authors are invited to contact the Guest Editor, in order to discuss proposed articles for a special issue of Archives and Records which will appear in spring 2018.



**Dr Charlotte Berry**

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***The deadline for expressions of interest is 31 December 2016. All submissions will be double blind peer-reviewed and should be presented in line with the Archives and Records style guidelines. The final deadline for article submissions is 30 June 2017.***





Some patients and staff in the garden of Stormont House during the First World War.

## Stormont House Centenary Project

When volunteers were doing research for a project in 2013 called Hackney Remembers, they stumbled upon a little booklet in Hackney Archives named 'Great War 1914–1918: record of the Hackney and Stoke Newington Division of the British Red Cross Society'.

It describes how the Red Cross rented Stormont House situated in Hackney Downs Park for use as an auxiliary convalescent hospital during the First World War. Although it had been a school for several years already, the building was converted for use as a military hospital and was officially opened on 29th January 1916. It was run by a few professional nurses and so-called VADs (volunteer aid detachments) from the area, who gave their time and energy freely to help and support soldiers returning injured from the front.

This document then became the seed from which the Stormont House Centenary Project came to life with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project was set up by Fifth Word, a theatre company in

origin which works together with art organisations on projects within local communities. Here they collaborated with Hackney Museum to involve the pupils of the current Stormont House School for children with special educational needs in creating an exhibition to commemorate the opening of the Hospital. 'Together with two volunteers I was initially hired to do the research, but eventually became manager of this inspiring project. This in practice meant liaising between the active partners at the museum, the supporting partners at Hackney Archives and Hackney Downs Park, the School, the various designers and a group of volunteers to ensure the success of the endeavour.'

### The project

The aim of the project was to get the pupils of the present day Stormont House School involved with the history of their school in the First World War and get them to design an exhibition for Hackney Museum. Fifth Word worked closely with the

school using the 'Mantle of the Expert' methodology, which is a dramatic-inquiry approach to teaching and learning. This aims to empower pupils by making them 'experts' in a particular field. Using drama children are able to become masters of their own learning which encourages them to take responsibilities similar to those of 'real experts'. In practice this meant that the pupils of Year 7 became the Stormont House Team with their classroom as the office from which they worked.



Photo © Film City

Pupils from Stormont House School getting involved with the history of their school in the Hackney Archives.

The children spent a week pretending to be nurses, patients and soldiers and exploring the difficulties in each of these contexts. They learned about what went on in the hospital, from bandaging wounds to finding ways of raising money for a new wooden leg for a patient (who they immediately named Joey). On another day, they were soldiers writing home from the front about the terrible effects of constant shelling. Records show that soldiers from the 1st South African Infantry Brigade ended up at the Hospital after the Battle of Delville Wood in July 1916. Although the records of the soldiers have not survived, we used the example of a real South African soldier to describe the journey wounded men would have taken from the front line all the way to military hospitals in the UK and eventually to convalescent hospitals such as Stormont House Hospital.

### Visits to the Museum and Archives

Having learned about the history, the pupils of Stormont House School were asked to design an exhibition on the subject so that others could discover it too. In order for the children to become 'experts' as exhibition designers, they went on visits to Hackney Museum and Hackney Archives. At the former they were welcomed by the Museum's educational team and asked to walk round the museum noting things they liked and disliked in the displays. After presenting their preferences of using oral histories and interactive displays they could touch, they were shown the space in which their exhibition would be held.

The visit to the Archives was also a great success. Although 'it smelled weird' in the strong rooms full of old books, they asked many questions about the things stored there. Many different types of historical documents were explored, from newspaper records on microfiche machines to old photographs and oral histories from actual VAD nurses. They looked at how you can date photographs, finding out which ones were older



and which were more recent. At the end of the session I overheard one of the children say to a friend that they definitely wanted to come here again!

Back at school the pupils set to work gathering their ideas to present them to the museum. Using what they had learned together with photographs from the booklet, they made up four panels. As Emma Winch, Educational Officer, said, 'The presentations were strong. They had clearly thought about how you navigate around an exhibition; the different spaces and the different themes that people might be interested in. So much work had gone into that.'

### The result


Together with a group of designers we tried to make an exhibition that was faithful to the original idea. The text on the panels was taken largely from the children themselves, with only a few additional words as explanation. Items on display were those used by the children in their drama sessions, and we even, though with some difficulty, had a mannequin of 'Joey' with only one leg sitting in a wheelchair from the museum collection.

All the pupils came to the launch and were asked to write invitations for their friends and families to come and see all their hard work. As Kevin McDonnell, the head of Stormont House School put it, 'The immersion in the experience is what has made it real for us; actually trying to feel what

The finished display complete with mannequin of 'Joey' in the wheelchair. Photo © Film City

is was like to be in the trenches, to be lonely, to be frightened. Their work is on the wall, their names are on the wall, their voices are on the phone. It is fantastic to see what they have made of it.' The project reached an audience within the local community that would perhaps otherwise not have heard of, or thought to visit, a museum. It also showed a bit of local history previously unknown to many that made the experience of the First World War more tangible and real.

There were certain difficulties which we had to overcome during the project, especially with so many different partners involved. Communication was key, particularly when dealing with the variety of professional backgrounds of those working with us. Trying to make a historically accurate and multifaceted exhibition, which was at the same time accessible to children with special educational needs, required some compromises. The same applied to dealing with the expectations of the designers within the limitations of the spaces at the museum and at the Pavilion, when the exhibition moved to Hackney Downs Park for ten days. In many ways it took a lot of work to make it all happen, but the enthusiasm of the children ensured that everyone was keen for us to succeed.

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# The Only Way is Ethics: Social History and the 21st Century Museum

Guided tour of Lincoln Cathedral

## Social History Curators Group Annual Conference, Lincoln, 23 – 24 June 2016

This year's SHCG Annual Conference took place in the beautiful cathedral city of Lincoln, which I also have the good fortune to call my home town. As a first time delegate I was very much looking forward to meeting colleagues from the sector and debating issues around this year's conference theme – museum ethics. Two months earlier the Museums Association had published its revised Code of Ethics for Museums and the opportunity to take time to study, discuss and reflect on the changes with colleagues from the sector was too good to miss.

On the eve of the conference I hosted a tour of the galleries and stores at the Museum of Lincolnshire Life; this was a great opportunity to meet some of the delegates and to showcase some of the treasures from the collection. A SHCG photography competition was running via Twitter for the duration of the conference and I noticed the group taking every opportunity to try and capture that dramatic winning shot!

Living locally I had no need of accommodation so did not meet any delegates again until the start of the first day, which began in the stunning setting of the Cathedral Centre with fine views of the cathedral towers. Delegates had travelled from all over Britain and one from as far away as New Zealand. The keynote speech 'Everyday Ethics: from Evolution to Practice' was by Rowan Brown, Chair of the MA Ethics Committee and Director

of the Alfred Gillett Trust. Rowan began by pointing out how fitting it was to be discussing ethics in a Magna Carta city and highlighting how the Code of Ethics is a tool for developing and maintaining public trust in museums – it does not provide all the answers to any ethical issues, but is a starting point. The revised code adopts three main principles – public engagement and benefit; stewardship of collections and individual and institutional integrity; Rowan guided us through the Code, which reflects the new developments and challenges now facing the sector since the last update in 2007.

This is most noticeable in the Code's language; negative words such as 'avoid' have been replaced with the more empathetic, e.g. 'discuss', 'engage' and 'respect'. Rowan's presentation was followed by Mari Lowe's moving talk on 'Refugee Wales'

at Cardiff Oasis, a refugee hub. Mari is the project's coordinator and she shared her experience of working with refugees to create oral history recordings and a touring exhibition. The ethical dilemmas faced by Mari included working with vulnerable people to collect material and stories (two poignant extracts from the oral histories created were played during the presentation), dealing with the media and making sensitive personal information publicly available. Sarah Cotton, Keeper of Contemporary Collecting at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, also worked with a difficult social subject – poverty – and the ethics of contemporary collecting. 'Four Meals Away' (according to MI5 Britain is only four meals away from anarchy) was an exhibition which focussed on the use of food banks. Through the use of simple – yet effective – visuals, the exhibition aimed to provoke empathy and challenge misconceptions. I found the image of a display in the exhibition – a typical kitchen filled only with the contents of one food parcel which would feed a family for three days – shocking. It demonstrated simply and effectively how little some people have to live on.

Funding cuts, new ways of working and uncertainty are all aspects of working in publicly funded museums today and are issues which currently



Victoria Roger's presentation 'Building Resilient Museums and Museum Workers through Values'.

affect many of us at conference, so I was particularly looking forward to Victoria Roger's presentation 'Building Resilient Museums and Museum Workers through Values'. As Manager of the Cardiff Story Museum, Victoria reflected on her personal experience of coping with change over the last two years through her 'Top Ten Tips'. I found the guidance on building personal resilience particularly beneficial, especially the advice to 'get your head straight' (something I often struggle to do) illustrated by a quote from Jimi Hendrix: "In order to change the world, you need to get your head together first". I was also surprised (and relieved!) by the statistic that 60% of your success is dependent on how visible you are, not how good you are at your job.

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*"In order to change the world, you need to get your head together first"*

---

After a tasty lunch and an opportunity to discuss some of the issues raised with colleagues, we began the afternoon with the 'Ethics Quick Fire Round'. Six curators gave a three minute presentation (timing controlled by a car horn!) on a genuine ethical dilemma they had tackled. We then broke away into six groups, each facilitated by one of the speakers, to discuss and hopefully advise. Due to the sensitivity of some of the case studies I am unable to go into too much detail here, but the session did highlight how varied and complex some of the issues are that confront social history curators on a regular basis. A guided tour of Lincoln Cathedral followed. Despite living locally and visiting the cathedral on many occasions, I had never taken a guided tour – sometimes we never notice what is on our doorstep until a visitor (or conference) opens our eyes!

The first day concluded, following the AGM, with a trip to view the touring 'Poppies: Wave' installation at Lincoln Castle and dinner at Brown's Pie Shop, which can be summed up with

this quote from Twitter by Jemma Conway : "40 curators, 40 pies, 40 puddings. Lovely to catch up with old and new @SHCG1 members tonight #SHCG1Night".

The second day of conference began, on the morning of the EU Referendum results, with a change of venue to The Collection Museum. The keynote speech 'The Right Stuff?' was by Kevin Gosling, Chief Executive of the Collections Trust. Kevin considered the changing attitudes to collections development procedures and asked whether, as museums now struggle to resource and manage the collections they already hold, society can expect museums to keep material, often at public expense, forever? Arguing that the greatest threat to collections is irrelevance, perhaps, when collecting contemporary items for the future, we should take a 'cooling off' period to better understand an object's significance.

The second presentation of the day was by Louise Doughty, Major Exhibitions Manager at the Museum of London. Louise used The Crime Museum Uncovered exhibition as a case study of how museums can explore difficult subjects within ethical boundaries. By drawing on the collections of the Crime Museum, Louise was exhibiting very sensitive material which had been collected from crime scenes since the 1870s. The material, which is normally used as a teaching aid by the Police, was to be on public display for the first time. Confronting ethical issues surrounding the selection of objects was paramount, for example a bomb was tweaked to ensure it could not be copied later – but was it ethical to display an object which had been so altered that it no longer reflected reality?





Louise was followed by Rebecca Nelson, PhD student at Hull University. Rebecca spoke on the topic of her doctoral thesis, researching how museums use their historic collections to engage with contemporary issues such as antislavery. I was not surprised that her study – ‘The Antislavery Usable Past’ – has revealed that the people of Hull would like to see the return of the reconstruction of a slave ship to the Wilberforce House Museum (an installation which stays in my mind from a visit many years ago) as they feel the present interpretation does not fully portray the horrors of the 18th century slave trade.

After a short break Lucy Harris, Learning Officer, presented her case study of a family Christmas activity held at the Imperial War Museum in December 2015. The activity, which focused on faith and symbolism, resulted in the creation of a wreath made from lucky charms and love tokens. Lucy’s challenge was how to develop an engaging and fun family activity which dealt sensitively with the realities of war. Continuing with the theme of war Roz Currie, of the Jewish Museum in London, shared her experiences of curating ‘For King and Country?’ the story of the Jewish First World War. Roz explained how she dealt with the emergence of several stories, for example Jewish non-service or perceptions of new immigrants and finally decided to tell them all.

Lunch was held at The Collection Museum, with plenty of time to take a leisurely stroll up Steep Hill to return to the Cathedral Centre for the final leg of the conference.

Sarah Murray, as Curatorial Manager at Canterbury Museum, travelled all the way from New Zealand to speak about Canterbury Quakes, an exhibition which told the story of the earthquakes which devastated New Zealand in 2010 and 2011. Sarah’s challenge was in collecting objects from the earthquakes to represent such an emotive story – how should they be displayed and interpreted and how would this be done in a city which was still struggling to come to terms with these recent and devastating events?



Guided tour of Lincoln Cathedral

Sarah spoke movingly of the dilemmas she faced when considering collecting and exhibiting objects which had been left as tributes – could they just be taken from the sites where they had been left by mourning families and friends? At the same time Sarah and her team were working within a museum building and with a collection which required remedial work.

In ‘Stories of our Stations – Centrally Planned, Community Led’, Katie Ann Smith, Heritage Engagement Manager for the RNLI, introduced us to the charity’s new model for collecting, display and interpretation. Through the Volunteer Community Curator’s Programme the RNLI encourages the community to lead on projects while retaining curatorial authority.

As a social history curator I found Beverly Cook’s presentation, in which she shared her learning and experience of working on a major collections review, particularly resonant. As Curator of Social History at the Museum of London Beverley reviewed approximately 100,000 objects, resulting in a collection which is better understood, managed and stored. The project was funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and employed two project workers, although it was Beverley who made the final decision as to what to keep and what to disperse. I was impressed by Beverley’s positivity and willingness to share her learning, believing that although the process was difficult the outcomes are worth it. It was also pleasing to hear that many objects had been rehoused at other museums, mainly in handling collections.

The final presentation of conference was by Simon Brown, Artefact Loans Officer for Nottingham City Museums and Galleries. Simon’s workshop introduced us to ‘Access Artefacts’, an unaccessioned collection of 11,000 objects suitable for handling and available for loan. Stored and managed to Accreditation standards, the service includes themed resource boxes or a visit from ‘Professor Clutter’ who will bring objects to the classroom – I think a few of us felt a twinge of envy of such a fantastic resource. To demonstrate one of the activities on offer Simon handed around objects in feely bags, we then had to guess what was inside. Fortunately I found my object quite easy as we hold 27 cobblers’ lasts in the Museum of Lincolnshire Life collection – an area ripe for rationalisation I think!

The SHCG Conference 2016 was very enjoyable, thought provoking and a wonderful opportunity to listen to and discuss the ethical issues regularly faced by social history curators. As Simon Brown summed up on Twitter: “Really enjoyed my first @SHCG1 conference this week. We have so much to learn from each other. I look forward to more in the future! #SHCG16”.

I would like to thank Museum Development East Midlands and SHCG for giving me the opportunity to attend.



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## The Only Way is Ethics – A new perspective

### Day 1

The 2016 Conference, The Only Way is Ethics, was the first time I have attended a SHCG conference, but it will not be my last! The theme of “ethics” was wide-ranging, which made for a stimulating day. I was honoured with a free placement as I am an MA student and have been tasked to write a review. I hope that this brief glimpse articulates the success of the day in such few words.

The first presentation was by Rowan Brown, Director of Alfred Gillett Trust and Chair of Museum Association Ethics Committee. She presented “Everyday Ethics: from Evolution to Practice” which discussed the evolution of museum ethics in relation to the Museum Association’s new Code. She discussed how museums are changing and how with those changes institutions have the opportunity to change lives. She asked the audience what their organisations were doing to contribute to the modern world. How can museums build relationships with their public? She said that forming meaningful links creates an ethical duty in museum practice. Brown’s presentation focussed on what curators ethically can and should do. It was a great introduction to the conference as it provoked the room to think about how we could incorporate her ideas into our own organisations and processes to

make meaningful connections with the community and public.

It led nicely to Mari Lowe, Co-ordinator for Refugee Wales, whose presentation was called “Refugee Wales at Oasis Cardiff”. She discussed how she was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and partnered with National Museum Wales to create an oral history project and exhibition about people who were seeking sanctuary in Wales. Lowe’s presentation showed exactly what her organisation is doing for the community. Oasis provides English classes, lunches and provides a social space for refugees. However, working with the community causes ethical concerns. Lowe was tasked with creating an exhibition about the refugees, but how can she ask people to share their story with her? Her work also led her to take on some of the role of a social worker, something she was not trained for. Lowe provoked discussion about how we can provide staff with the training and support they need when processing some of the tragic stories such as Mari was collecting.

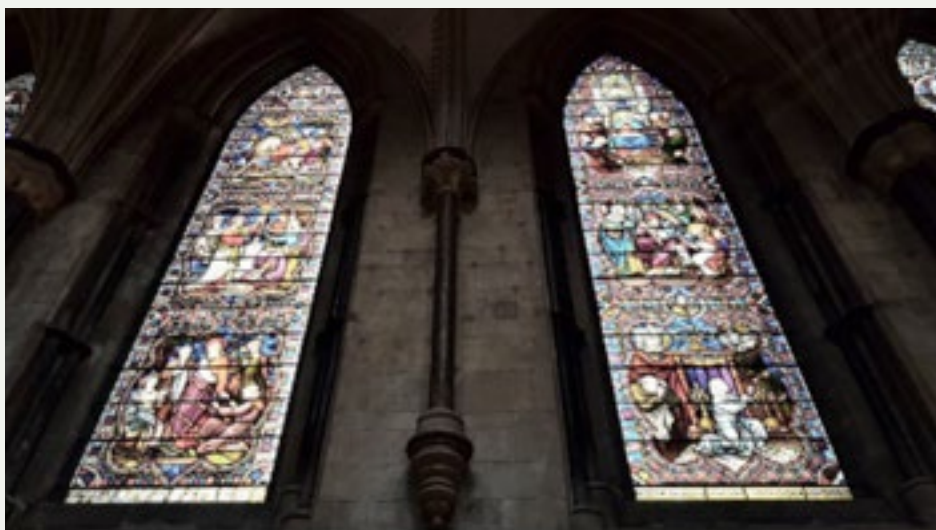
The institution was a source of hope to the local community, but created many ethical concerns that are hard to answer. Ethics is debatable, but it is important to continue with your work and discuss these challenging questions. In the end, Mari did not

have a clear answer on what could and could not have been done differently, but by sharing her unique situation as curator and social worker she was able to highlight circumstances that are becoming more frequent as social history curators.

The next speaker was Sarah Cotton, Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, who presented her experience working with Newcastle Museums and how they wanted to use their collections to stimulate discussions with the public about poverty and equality. The presentation was called “Four Meals Away”. Newcastle has extremely poor areas and there is a growing socio-economic divide. The museum worked with a food bank in order to display a food parcel to the public. The reaction from the public was astonishing. Most people wanted to know how someone qualified to obtain free food. There was no empathy and the feedback was very discriminatory. The reality was that the people in the food banks were embarrassed that they had to ask for help and that most of them came from working families. The museum wanted to change the stereotype after the surprising feedback from the food package exhibition. The museum collaborated with an artist with the hopes that the artist could evoke sympathy from the visitors. The installation was called “4 meals away” and it was a display of a kitchen with the food parcel placed in its shelves. Seeing the food inside the space of a kitchen made the visitor aware of how little food was actually given to a family.

The outcome of the second exhibition met the museum’s goal of changing attitudes. What stood out to me the most was the museum sticking to its objective. They aimed to change the public’s perception of food banks and when the museum received horrendous feedback from the first exhibition, they carried on with their goal to change the incorrect perception. They saw it as ethically important to succeed in their task. Of course there were ethical issues when it comes to working with the public and the food bank, but the fact that the museum did not give up and strived to do another exhibition shows that they used their role of having a moral duty to change values exceptionally.





Stained glass window in Lincoln Cathedral

Victoria Rogers discussed her experience of “building resilient museums and museum workers through values... (or things I’ve learnt safeguarding the Cardiff Story)”. Her story was about how an individual curator can ethically deal with a problem that arises. The aim of the Cardiff Story Museum was to work with the community, but in 2014 Rogers lost half of her budget and in 2015 also lost most of her space for the museum. How was she to overcome this devastation? It was inspiring to hear her say, “what you spend years building may be destroyed overnight, but BUILD ANYWAY”. She was hired to create this museum and then her resources were taken away. Rogers is an inspiration on how to handle the situation in the correct way. She shared what she learned, such as: being able to always find the positive in a situation, be brave and challenge decisions from above if you don’t agree with them, fight for change (but pick the battles correctly), and ground yourself. She suggested grounding yourself in the museums mission statement and in your own set of values. In an industry where funding can be cut at any time, it is essential to handle the situations with as much self-respect as you can.

All four presenters were inspiring and left me proud to have chosen a profession as a social history curator. Each woman shared something knowledgeable and useful. Ethics is quite an intense subject, so it was nice that there was a quick fire round at the end of the afternoon. There were 6 members who only had a short

amount of time to explain an ethical issue that has happened to them in their profession. The subjects were tough, but after a few minutes a horn was blown and it was on to the next situation which was quite fun! After each person presented, the room was split into groups so we could discuss further each situation with one of the quick fire presenters.



Our fantastic tour guide pointed out hidden stories within the sculptures of the Cathedral.

To end the day we had a lovely tour of the Lincoln Cathedral. The tour guides were great and we learned so much. It was nice to take a break from discussions and enjoy the city. Day one of the conference was very inspiring, educational and fun. It was nice being in a room filled with like-minded people, having meaningful discussions and traversing the ethically important issues that museums face.

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## Day 2

The second day of the SHCG conference saw nine different talks.

We started the day in The Collection, Lincoln’s archaeology museum. The first talk was about the changes to SPECTRUM and disposals, an area that wasn’t included in the original iteration of SPECTRUM. Much of this is about making us, as a sector, less risk averse when it comes to disposal and giving us the confidence to dispose of items that are irrelevant which will, in the long term, actually make our organisations more relevant and sustainable.

This also prompted discussion about contemporary collecting. Should we loan rather than accession objects until we better understand their potential significance, thus safeguarding against later disposal. If it isn’t possible to fully interpret something now do we still collect it and spend time and resources looking after it for potentially little value? Ultimately this whole talk was about how we need to ensure our collections are relevant, become less risk averse and ultimately ensure our survival.

The second talk was from the Museum of London on the Crime Museum. This I found particularly interesting as the subject matter is one that would be very easy to avoid due to its horrendous nature. It was clear though that this was anything but a glorification of criminals – in fact it was a look at the methods used by the police and authorities to catch those that carried out such acts. The objects were picked from the Met’s archive and linked to crimes where they’d be part of the story, and not just used as an object to get a reaction. It was decided early on in the exhibition process that the cases used were to be those that led to major developments and changes in policing to stop such crimes happening again.

The museum used a set of focus groups to gauge what the public would be willing to see without it becoming too much. Having established the public tolerance,

the entire project was put through an ethics committee chaired by an ethics professor and the Met would talk to victims' families to get their view and ensure they were comfortable with the inclusion of the case. The consultation process ensured that as much as possible had been discussed and debated with appropriate groups and showed how committed the museum was not only to the exhibition but also to ensuring that this was not an exhibition to glorify the criminals.

The last talk at the Collection was on how we display anti-slavery in museums. I had never thought of it before and although I've seen several slavery exhibitions the debate and ethics of anti-slavery is something I'd never really noticed.

A comparison between the UK and US approach to these stories was discussed as well as how the interpretation of these contested histories is developing and can be described in a three stage process. Initially, displays would include using personal effects of white male national heroes and local connections to them in museums.

In the second phase the stories of the slaves and a more diverse approach was used with white heroes vanishing for black support groups and a bigger focus on diversity which is given a higher position. The third phase is permanent exhibitions such as Liverpool's where interpretation makes it all more relevant. However none fully engage with the possible chance of discussing modern day slavery and the fight that's ongoing now in order to eliminate slavery, perhaps it is unethical to not be discussing such an important movement in more detail.

Having left The Collection we made our way back to Lincoln Cathedral centre where we had been on the Thursday. Following lunch (and networking) the talks resumed, the first being about the Imperial War Museum (IWM) and the ethics of education in a museum that is predominantly concerned with war.

The first question posted was, 'Is IWM a place of commemoration or

learning?' The answer given was that today it isn't a memorial and shouldn't be viewed as one and the First World War Centenary Partnership was set up to engage the public with the stories from the First World War.

The education sessions at the IWM are more focused not on war but on people. IWM recognises that objects and stories can mean different things to different people – the ethics of portraying conflict in educational activities can be complex and difficult.

The next talk also focussed on war – King and Country, an exhibition by the Jewish Museum about Jewish involvement in WW1. Under discussion was the ethics of portraying accurate history and remembrance to counter issues presented by untruths and tendencies to focus on small areas of that history.

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### *"Is IWM a place of commemoration or learning?"*

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Following this was the talk about Quake City, the earthquake museum in Christchurch, New Zealand. This was a museum venture based on the emotional pull of the impact of the devastating earthquakes that did so much damage to Christchurch. Many objects were lent to the museum purely due to their involvement in the earthquake and the ethics of displaying this natural disaster was epitomised by the raw display of memorials to those who had died that had been selected for display. The museum seems to have also been very well received with only some negative feedback relating to the representation of the Maori god of earthquakes.

A presentation on the heritage of the RNLI followed. Firstly this isn't a museum, but an emergency service that has six museums for telling the RNLI's story and preventing incidents from happening at sea in the first instance. The community engagement

involved in the RNLI's heritage operation is a huge aspect in its own right with each station cataloguing and recording its own artefacts. Ethically however the RNLI are now stopping contacting people for money without warning which will see a large fall in their money and the impact this will have on heritage is already being braced for by the processes introduced.

There were now only two sessions left, the first being on collections and the ethics of rationalisation by disposal. Why are we not disposing of irrelevant objects? Might they suddenly become important? Do we have responsibilities to previous curators or donors?

These are all questions that have been asked of the Museum of London's social history collection – and they are now being answered in the form of a thorough review of the collection. In their first year they've reviewed 100,000 social history objects and declared 6000 surplus to requirement, often due to duplication. These were then disposed of through ethical means to those museums and other groups who had shown an interest in wanting them for their own collections due to little material of this nature or a desire to have such objects for community work. As a curator I found this a really interesting example of a modern look at disposal and dispersal of unwanted items to those who do want them, as well as freeing up a lot of space at the same time.

Finally we learnt about Nottingham's loan collection. Almost an entire museum collection across a range of subjects designed for handling and sending out to schools and other groups across the East Midlands. These could be selected by users around a theme, to meet teachers in the classroom or to give a chance to gain confidence in handling objects. This was fantastic and the chance to look at how you can use items in such a way made a welcome change.



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# Fearless Foxes at New Walk Museum, Leicester

What a time to be from Leicester. Only a couple of years ago the city found itself at the centre of a global news story with the discovery of the bones of King Richard III under a city centre car park. Leicester was given almost unprecedented worldwide publicity, and the city's reaction was admirably swift with the opening of the excellent visitor centre on the site.

The attention that came with this discovery is tiny though, when compared with the huge reaction that has come with Leicester City's remarkable Premier League title win this year. This title was as unlikely as it was phenomenal, and the impact it has had on the city is huge.

Sport can engender civic pride in a way little else can. Good museums are always finding new ways of being relevant to their audiences, and Leicester Museums Service knew they simply had to have a role in this huge moment. The city's main civic museum, New Walk, would be an ideal space for a celebratory exhibition.

This admirable approach does of course bring its problems. The decision was made to go ahead with the exhibition in March, with the final

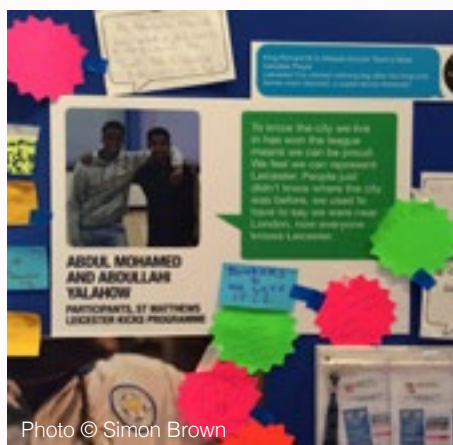


Photo © Simon Brown



Photo © New Walk Museum

result of the season by no means assured. In any case this also meant' so the sentence reads 'In any case this also meant only a little over two months to plan, design and install the exhibition in New Walk's grand temporary exhibition gallery.



Photo © Simon Brown

The service had support, however. The local authority and Leicester Mercury were eager for the exhibition to happen. And, most crucially, the club themselves were keen to support it.

The resulting exhibition is a triumph, and a fitting focal point for the city's celebrations over the summer.

It is notoriously difficult to recreate the atmosphere of sporting occasions, but the museum has come close to achieving this by combining crowd noise from the closing home games of the season with a large wall space allocated for visitors to share their messages about the achievement.

This gives the space a real public voice. Many messages are wonderfully articulate, one calling the title an 'absolute monolith', and another saying 'we can be proud, we feel we can represent Leicester'.

These messages are displayed alongside large portrait photographs of individual players. Seeing these familiar images in close proximity to such personal reflections really does illustrate the impact of their achievements.

A huge file of newspapers from around the world also comes close to portraying the global reach of the Premier League, and the sharp focus this has brought on the city.

Considering that this exhibition was conceived and installed in such a short space of time, the curation and flow of the space is fantastic. Bringing the huge world of Premier League football together with individual stories is a difficult task, but New Walk Museum has achieved this with aplomb. The exhibition has already been extended to late October as a result of the demand, and is a fitting celebration of a still scarcely believable achievement.



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Performers in Shakespeare: staging the world at the British Museum.

## Theatrically Re-imagining Collections (UCL), 26th April – Seminar Review

The relationship between museums and performance seems to be becoming increasingly intimate, and there have been numerous examples of imaginative and inspiring programming in the sector recently. The Theatrically Re-imagining Collections seminar at University College London (26 April 2016) threw a spotlight on examples of recent best practice.

The event was chaired by David Pearl, Artistic Director of Impropera, an improvising opera company that has been working since around 2000. The day began with a discussion focussed on what the sector was doing well in terms of creative programming and partnerships, and what it could do better. The session highlighted the different perspectives of museum staff and creative practitioners. Performers from Impropera improvised responses to the discussions throughout the day and here they memorably had museum staff singing 'We prefer our artists dead', with the creative practitioners responding 'Trust us, trust us.'

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A series of practitioners' tales formed the heart of the seminar, with the presenters sharing their experiences of working collaboratively. A session delivered by Ipswich Museums and the Katie Green Company focussed on Dancing in Museums, a promenade performance project designed to inspire children and families to think differently about museums, heritage sites and collections.

Punchdrunk Enrichment and the National Maritime Museum presented an overview of the recent schools and families only special exhibition, Against Captain's Orders. Punchdrunk created an immersive actor-led theatrical experience in the Maritime Museum's special exhibition gallery, breaking away from the usual object-focussed approach to focus on creating an inspirational experience.

Nick Oram from improve comedy troupe Do Not Adjust Your Stage spoke about The Wunderkammer, an improvised comedy show that has taken place at the Natural History Museum since January 2015. Each performance of The Wunderkammer is inspired by two expert speakers who provide the stimulus and ideas for the comedians and audience, linking the performance back to the collections.

The final case study of the morning was Shakespeare: Staging the World – a collaboration between the British Museum and the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). The RSC contributed to the design of the exhibition and RSC actors were filmed performing short play extracts that were then integrated throughout the show. A series of specially commissioned theatre pieces were also performed in the exhibition itself.

The delegates were led through a short dance session to help shake over any post-lunch lethargy before the presentations continued. The Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales (AC-NMW) and Theatr na nÓg focussed on programming based on the life of biologist Alfred Russell Wallace. Together they co-create a bilingual production, video of which was incorporated into an exhibition at the Amgueddfa Cymru– National Museum Wales the following year. A touring play that drew on this work has subsequently toured both nationally and internationally.

Finally, independent consultant Gaby Porter and Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) spoke about Creative Museum, a programme designed to improve the resilience of six UK museums. The session highlighted the BAC's 'scratch' process as tool for becoming more collaborative in programming, community engagement and management

Theatrically Re-imagining Collections provided an invaluable opportunity for museum practitioners to meet with performers, and to brainstorm ideas for new collaborations and programmes. Appropriately it was one of the most idiosyncratic, entertaining, and stimulating seminars I've attended. The case studies demonstrated



Shakespeare Staging the World Theatre Puppet.

that working with a creative partner can often be difficult, but equally that there is a great deal to be gained by being challenged to think differently about public engagement.

## Find out more

### Battersea Arts Centre – Creative Museums

<https://www.bac.org.uk/creativemuseums>

### Do Not Adjust Your Stage – The Wunderkammer

<http://www.dnays.com/>

### Impropera

[www.impropera.co.uk](http://www.impropera.co.uk)

### Made by Katie Green – Dancing in Museums

<http://madebykatiegreen.co.uk/>

[#MuseumsReimagined](https://twitter.com/MuseumsReimagined)



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# Slavery Indenture, 1815

From a year-old baby named Saturday, to a 51-year-old field hand named Matilda, the sale of 52 enslaved people are listed in this 1815 contract.

This document from Tunbridge Wells Museum exposes the terrible human cost of slavery. It is also a part of the legacy of British slave ownership, to be found in social history collections beyond London and the major port cities.

The contract is between a failing bank (Boldero & Lushington) calling in the debts of William Lushington of London, and later, Tunbridge Wells. William Lushington was a West India merchant and slave owner, financed by his brother's bank. The 52 slaves were to be sold along with his Trinidadian plantation to settle his debt. The 'future progeny' of the slave women – their children – are also detailed as a financial asset and squabbled over by Lushington and the bank.

Very little was recorded about the lives of slaves and here we can only glimpse their ascribed names, ages and work. On this plantation the majority of the slaves were field hands, with a few working as cook, watchman, foreman, sick nurse and mule boy. Four 'runaways' were also



noted, as fugitive slaves remained the legal property of their owners, and if caught were subject to violent punishments or death.

The contract also exposes the cruel custom of attributing slaves with high status, or classical names; one man is called King, another Plato and one woman is named Cleopatra.

Perhaps some of these enslaved people survived the high mortality rates to see abolition in 1834. Yet, with abolition, it was the slave-owners who were awarded compensation by the British government to the estimated sum of £20 million.

Between 1835–1836 the daughters of William Lushington – Charlotte and

Augusta of Tunbridge Wells – claimed over £7000 compensation for the freeing of their remaining 218 slaves in Grenada and Trinidad.

The history of towns like Tunbridge Wells are perhaps not traditionally associated with the slave trade. However this document reveals a history of slavery that spanned the nation and yet remains comparatively unexplored within regional collections.

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*Printed and signed respectively for the purpose of authenticating and proving the same after any date a copy of which is to be kept in the office of the Clerk of the Peace for the County of Kent. In witness whereof the said parties to these presents have hereunto set their hands and seals the day and year first above written.*

**The Schedule referred to by the foregoing Indenture**

No.	Name	Age	Occupation	No.	Name	Age	Occupation	No.	Name	Age	Occupation
1	Friday	35	House and Cook	33	Joseph	25	Field	37	Friday	30	House
2	Friday	35	Field and Cook	34	John	25	Field	38	Friday	30	House
3	Friday	35	House and Cook	35	John	25	Field	39	Friday	30	House
4	Friday	35	Field	36	John	25	Field	40	Friday	30	House
5	Friday	35	Field and Cook	37	John	25	Field	41	Friday	30	House
6	Friday	35	Field and Cook	38	John	25	Field	42	Friday	30	House
7	Friday	35	Field and Cook	39	John	25	Field	43	Friday	30	House
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9	Friday	35	Field and Cook	41	John	25	Field	45	Friday	30	House
10	Friday	35	Field and Cook	42	John	25	Field	46	Friday	30	House
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46	Friday	35	Field and Cook	78	John	25	Field	82	Friday	30	House
47	Friday	35	Field and Cook	79	John	25	Field	83	Friday	30	House
48	Friday	35	Field and Cook	80	John	25	Field	84	Friday	30	House
49	Friday	35	Field and Cook	81	John	25	Field	85	Friday	30	House
50	Friday	35	Field and Cook	82	John	25	Field	86	Friday	30	House
51	Friday	35	Field and Cook	83	John	25	Field	87	Friday	30	House
52	Friday	35	Field and Cook	84	John	25	Field	88	Friday	30	House



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