



SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

Issue 81 October 2018



Being Brunel

A new museum at SS
Great Britain

Also inside this edition:

SHCG Conference 2018

Review

Fighting for Our Rights

Kingston's disability
rights movements

Welcome to Issue 81 of SHCG News



It's a cliché to look at autumn as a new start, but when years of school and academic life have drummed that into you, it's hard to shake off.

Autumn is often the time of blockbuster exhibitions, a chance to reset (slightly) after a busy summer programme, or the moment to dig out jumpers and fingerless gloves as the off-site stores cool down again (depending on the quality of the environmental controls).

But as institutions, museums never really 'restart'. Yes, there might be a brand new permanent exhibition

such as Being Brunel at SS Great Britain (pages 11 and 12), or a new way of working, such as co-curation of the Bristol Music exhibition (pages 5 and 6), or introducing students to a new way of understanding their communities, as at the Kingston Centre for Independent Living (pages 9 and 10).

However, museums and such institutions work with the weight of their history behind them - a history that can be confused, complex, exclusive and difficult to come to terms with. Such issues were implicit in the discussions held at the SHCG Conference back in June (reviewed on pages 13 and 14), where many speakers highlighted what they were doing to attempt to redress imbalances in power, representation and whose voices were heard. The overarching themes in response were collaboration, curiosity and a willingness to take risks.

The title 'curator' also carries a weight of meaning, one that is increasingly being questioned. This is inherent in our desire in the SHCG to show

that we represent all practitioners of social history, not curators alone (as highlighted in our new logo described on page 4). Curation is, ultimately, a collaboration and I am glad to say that all the articles in the current issue highlight and celebrate this.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and happy new (school) year!

 **Jessie Petheram**

Editor, SHCG News

E: jessie.petheram@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk



Front cover image

Being Brunel Museum at the SS Great Britain Trust, page 11.



Musical Instruments Unwrapped: Telling Social Histories Through Musical Instruments

**A joint seminar from SHCG and
Musical Instruments Resource Network**

Monday 12 November 2018

St. Cecilia's Hall, Niddry Street, Cowgate,
Edinburgh EH1 1NQ

Spaces are still available for museum and heritage professionals seeking new ways to interpret, display and engage with musical instruments in their collections.

Visit www.shcg.org.uk to book your place.

 **Social History
Curators Group**
Transforming social history in museums

 **Musical Instruments
Resource Network**
UK

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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:

Niti Acharya

Membership Secretary

Museum Manager

Hackney Museum, 1 Reading Lane,

London E8 1GQ

T: 020 8356 3500

E: membershipshcg@gmail.com

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: Friday 1st March 2019

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 contact the News editor to discuss your ideas.

Send all contributions to:

Jessie Petheram

Assistant Curator

Walker Art Gallery

William Brown Street

Liverpool, L3 8EL

E: jessie.petheram@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk



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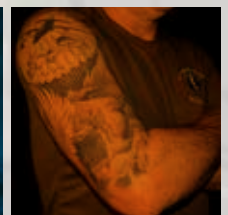
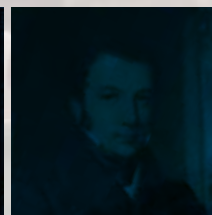
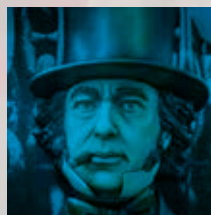
COMMITTEE

15 Committee

Correction to Social History in Museums, Volume 42 (2018)

Leonora Cohen Suffragette collection: breaking out of the display case, by Kitty Ross and Nicola Pullan, should have read: "Leonora Cohen died in 1978 (aged 105) and was a complex character" (rather than Leonora Cohen died in 1976 (aged 103) and was a complex character).

We apologise for the error.



Can you help Collections Trust with their terminology resource?

Using consistent terms is crucial for retrieving information about your collection quickly and accurately. To help you do this, Collections Trust have drawn up a list of the published term sources they know about, mapped to relevant Spectrum units of information.

However, this is still a working document. They need your help to fill in the gaps, by identifying any published term sources they have missed, or by sharing any additional in-house sources you use with them (eg a wordlist or thesaurus). You can find the draft list and the feedback form here: <http://bit.ly/2upxFt0> Further information on the Collections Trust website.



SHCG Sophie Lealan

Communications Officer, Collections Trust

New look for SHCG

The Social History Curators Group is proud to launch its new logo, including the strapline: Transforming social history in museums.

We felt it was important to do this due to concerns that the group name was coming off as exclusive. SHCG chair, Helen McConnell Simpson, says: 'The main idea was to move away from using the full name of the organisation to just SHCG, in order to be more welcoming & attractive to people who do not hold the job title of social history curator. This stemmed from responses to our member survey and a sense gained in recent years at conference, that fewer of our existing and potential members actually have that title than previously. Our aim is to be welcoming and useful to anyone who works with social history in museums, rather than to be exclusively curatorial.'

With budgets and other resources increasingly stretched, it is not new to say that professionals in museums are taking on more varied tasks than ever before. 'Curation' therefore is a collaboration between many different people with many different job titles and we wish SHCG to be a broad church for all these people. As a subject specialist network and advocates for the importance of social history in museums, we need to show that we are championing the needs of both our members and the wider workforce.

Many thanks to Nick Drew who designed the new logo (and this newsletter!).

SHCG Jessie Petheram

SHCG Trustee and News Editor



Would you like to advertise in SHCG NEWS?

Please contact SHCG Marketing & Partnership Officer Leah Mellors to discuss options and prices:

T: 01799510645 E: leah.mellors@riponmuseums.co.uk



Bristol Music: Seven Decades of Sound

A curatorial perspective

Readers of this newsletter might be interested to hear about the Bristol Music exhibition at M Shed (19 May – 30 September 2018) particularly in terms of the curatorial process, which was by no means straightforward but ultimately reaped rewards, both in terms of visitor engagement and user-generated collecting.

Bristol Music: Seven Decades of Sound was a co-produced project created with the public to facilitate discussion and expression around music: about what it means to them in terms of feeling connected to community, and its contribution, as they see it, to the city's heritage.

I like to think the exhibition was fully co-created, but it could have been even more democratic. For starters, the original proposal ('let's do an exhibition about music') came from our senior exhibition officer, who submitted it to staff for comments. At Bristol, we use Basecamp project-management software to propose exhibitions – an effective way of enabling all staff to contribute to the exhibitions programme. The decision was almost unanimous that, yes, we should go ahead. I was invited to be the curatorial lead, and have to say, was hesitant at first. My knowledge of popular music – specifically

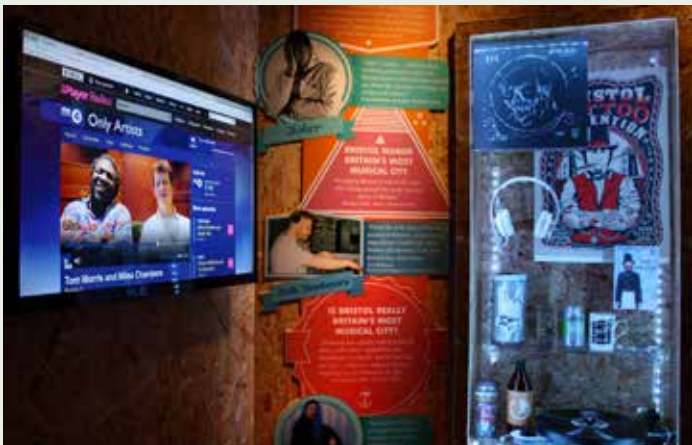
Bristol music – is scant, and with such an emotive topic I was conscious of the pitfalls – get the branding wrong, misconstrue the interpretation, fail to include what's popularly held to be significant, and the exhibition could flop. Nonetheless, I took the challenge as an opportunity to experiment with participatory practice.

From my point of view, my lack of music specialism combined with Bristol Museums' negligible music collection meant there was only one viable approach to take – co-curation. Members of the public were invited to be part of an advisory group, and those who took part came from diverse backgrounds, representing both majority and minority ethnic groups, with a broad age range and strong connections to the local music scene – from the jazz, beat and folk scenes of the 1960s, through to 1970s/80s reggae, punk and pop (and of course Scrumpy 'n' Western!), 1990s trip-hop, jungle, and more recently, D&B, dubstep and grime.

In collaboration with myself, Becky Peters (senior exhibition officer) and Simon Fenn (designer), this group (initially consisting of 10 people, including Dr Rehan Hyder, senior lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of the West of England) generated ideas that fed directly into the design process. Using an empathy-mapping format used to great effect at Derby Museums, we asked the group what they would like to see, hear, think, feel and do in an exhibition about music. Their



responses were charted by the designer, and themes and sub-themes emerged organically. These were then explored in further detail. What soon became apparent was that visitor experience and emotions were at the core of the concept – taking priority over physical materials (3D objects) and logical intellect (curator's insights). Discovery and self-learning would be all-important – the feeling was very much that the visitor should be the author of their own experience – a commentator and contributor rather than passive user. Some of the exhibition's most popular exhibits came out of this process – the car karaoke, which evolved into 'caraoke', the mini club, the DJ area, the listening booths (a decade-by-decade audio-visual experience), the 'record shop' for browsing band biographies, the club 'toilet', which actively encouraged visitor graffiti, the cyber-bot, which intelligently collected and responded to comments, and the final Basquiat-style mapping room, which sought to gather visitors' thoughts on the "Bristol Sound" in an artistically engaging way.



The vision, all agreed, was dynamic and exciting. Making it a reality, was, without question, the most formidable and rewarding part of the project.

While the decision had been made that the exhibition would be experience-led, the lack of objects was a concern (especially for those who believe that what sets a museum apart from, for example, a visitor centre, is a physical-object-based collection). A call for music material went out on social media and the response, initially at least, was lacklustre. It became apparent that collectors of music memorabilia are often reluctant to loan, let alone donate, items. Consequently, a lot of props had to be bought – mostly via eBay. And ironically, some of the most exciting object offers we had stemmed from word-of-mouth – leading to a 'snowballing' of offers towards the end of the development phase, by which time it was too late for objects to be factored into the design and conserved in time for opening.

In terms of exhibition content, we wanted to include as many people as possible – and in no way be exclusive. This meant covering as many genres of music as we possibly could and allowing contributions to continue over the course of the exhibition. Through the advisory group we contacted as many music lovers as we could to invite them to submit stories, band bios and interviews, both in audio and occasionally video format. Without exaggeration, the final contributor count was in excess



of 200 – a huge amount of work went into collating their material. But, to my mind, it's precisely because of that – the degree of public participation – that the exhibition is as compelling and innovative as it is. There's no doubt that it's been a hit with visitors, judging by their comments (69% "very satisfied" at time of writing – a record for M Shed) and there's no doubt that it's attracted new audiences, particularly from younger age groups (16-24) and people from working-class backgrounds, though the data is still being collected.



What would I do differently if we could do it all over again? As with so many museum projects, we would have benefited from a more realistic estimate of timescales and costs involved. Had we had a better grasp of those, we could have allocated more resources to fully fulfil the vision, including greater community inclusion, more extensive copyright research, evaluation and post-project legacy. In a genuinely co-produced project (and one which requires contemporary collecting) everything takes longer – the process of recruiting and liaising with partners, of sourcing and collecting objects, of interviewing, of gathering, reviewing and proofing text, and of course the design process itself – all of these impact significantly on curators', conservators' and learning and engagement teams' workloads. For this reason, I believe co-curated exhibitions would benefit from longer lead times. In this particular instance, a three- rather than two-year lead-in times would have been ideal.

 **Lee Hutchinson**

Curator (History), Bristol Culture

Military Ink Exhibition, REME Museum

Tattoos are more visible than ever within the military, and a new exhibition at the REME Museum looks at the designs and stories behind some of those worn by Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, both serving and former.

Following almost a year of research, Exhibitions Curator Jennifer Allison has brought together photographs which show the range of styles and meanings, some with close military connections such as remembrance.

The images of the poppies and soldiers' silhouettes have increased over the years, especially since the Iraq conflict. Although the nature of tattoos means that they can be very visible, the meaning to the individual is often very personal:

'This is just the way that I've remembered my friends who have died on tour.'

'The remembrance tattoo, it is what it is, remembering all of the fallen, heroes, comrades, past wars, Afghanistan, Iraq, and having served 23 years, I've known people that have unfortunately lost their lives on operations, so it's also for them.'

Attitudes have changed considerably over the years when it comes to tattoos. Some of those which took part spoke about the strong reactions which had come from their family:

'My stepmum and dad hated tattoos, and they always used to say 'if you ever get a tattoo we'll disown you', and they were quite religious people. So I got a tattoo. I wrote him a letter explaining that I'd got these tattoos, and I got a letter back saying 'we said we'd disown you, we want nothing at all to do with you.' And that's how it was for about two years. Never heard or spoke to them for about two years.'



But now, tattoos have become much more acceptable, so much so that in 2014 regulations were relaxed allowing soldiers to bear non-offensive tattoos on their hands and the back of their necks, which was previously not permitted.

Another key theme which came through from the interviews and style of the tattoos is that they were very much an individual choice:

‘With the military, you have to abide by certain rules on how you look and how you dress. So when you go on Physical Training, you have to wear the same green top, the same black shorts. Tattoos let you keep your individuality within uniformity.’

And those that came forward to be part of the exhibition had a genuine love for the art rather than having one to be part of the crowd or to copy a celebrity:

‘Some people hang art on walls, I do it on my skin.’



Despite being more acceptable, tattoos are still a controversial subject and guaranteed to elicit an opinion. But for a museum keen to engage new audiences and to represent the REME Corps, tattoos have provided a great conversation starter.

Reactions to the exhibitions have been very positive. The military have been enthusiastic in sharing their stories



and seeing what others have had done, and visitors have enjoyed seeing the photographs and finding out about the stories behind them.

A highlight of the exhibition was the live tattooing. Working with an ex-REME Recovery Mechanic who now works as a tattooist and a current REME Recovery Mechanic who wanted a memorial tattoo, the Museum arranged for it to happen within the exhibition space. We think that this might be a first for a military museum!

The exhibition runs until 8th December 2018.

 **Jennifer Allison**
Exhibitions Curator





Fighting for our Rights

Image: Ali Kashmiri and Jane Lawrence campaigning in Kingston, 1991

Documenting the history of Kingston's disability rights movement

Contemporary collecting and oral history projects provide rich opportunities for documenting untold and hidden social histories from our communities, and can also have a powerful impact on the people we engage to participate.

In 2016, Kingston Centre for Independent Living (KCIL), a disability charity in southwest London, embarked on a collecting and engagement programme to give voice to the pioneers and campaigners who had shaped policy change for disabled people in the borough. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, I was appointed as Oral History Project Manager and oversaw the project's delivery until completion in April 2018.

Disabled people from Kingston-upon-Thames were at the forefront of the Disability Rights Movement in the UK from the 1960s to the 1990s; from closure of the large institutions to the creation of independent living; the formation of user-led organisations and the introduction of direct payments and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. A user-led group was formed in Kingston in 1967 with the objective of lobbying for change, eventually becoming Kingston Centre for Independent Living in 2001. They demanded more choice and control, and the chance to live independently in their local community. They campaigned for equal rights and acceptance. At the heart of this campaigning was a network of disabled people and their supporters who fought for a more equal society to both local and national government. KCIL's 'Fighting for our Rights' project collected these stories, creating a permanent record through Kingston History Centre's archive, and an education resource and website to inspire a new generation.

Oral history interviews were conducted with 23 individuals, some disabled campaigners and some who work for services that support disabled people. To support the project, and through a close partnership with Kingston University, student nurse volunteers were trained in oral history best practice, and their time spent conducting interviews was counted towards their community practice hours for their course. This meant that the students were fully invested in giving their time to the project and were keen to learn as much as they could from the experience.

The impact on the students was perhaps the most powerful outcome of the project. The stories and histories collected through the interviews were often upsetting and shocking, and involved healthcare professionals similar to the students themselves.

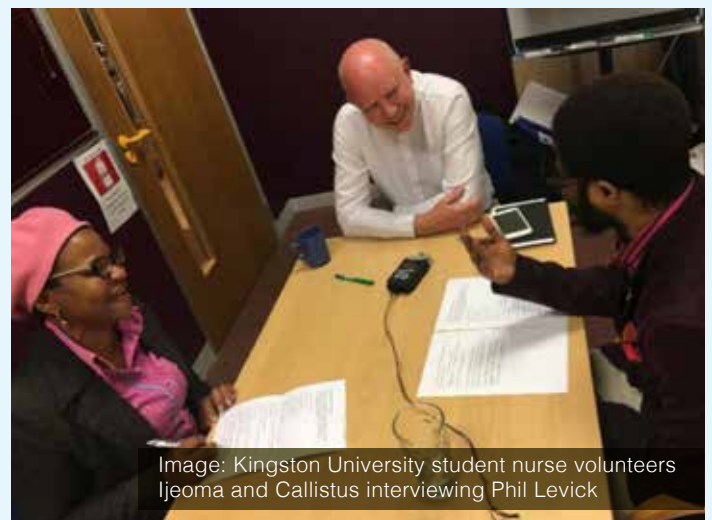


Image: Kingston University student nurse volunteers Ijeoma and Callistus interviewing Phil Levick

One of the student interviewers commented:

“One lady that we interviewed, her son is disabled and the effect of that on the entire family really shocked me, because that lady, I sensed that she is a very high flyer, very well educated. But the minute this problem, issue, came up, it’s like everything just disappeared, thrown off the window. And that had somehow left her feeling, even though it happened many years ago, she’s still bitter about it. She gets easily emotional about it. I remember when I asked her if she could explain a typical day for us and she completely turned that recorder off for few minutes and then gathered herself up again and then told us what actually happened. And for me it really affected me simply because all the turmoil she has been through is the result of what the healthcare professional did. So, and I said to myself, ‘Oh my God’. I really need to be very, very careful when I’m giving care.”

Another student was very impressed with the people he met during the interviews and was humbled by their outlook and approach to everyday living. The personal stories documented during the oral history process were diverse in their content, but the determination of the individuals involved to make a positive change and live full lives was a common theme. At the end of the project, the volunteer said:

“I felt honoured to be part of the project, to interview such living legends, really. They’ve changed the face of Kingston in that respect, you know. And like I say, these people took initiative and they went for what they want. They went for it and look at where we are today. So I was honoured.”

As a grassroots community project, it was important that full collaboration was undertaken at every stage, ensuring the outcomes positively and authentically represented those who participated. Alongside the oral history interviews, which were deposited with Kingston’s Heritage Service, the project also involved the creation of three small exhibitions, a school resource, a drama project with local disabled students, an events series, and a new project website. At every stage, I consulted with the interviewees and contributors, checking exhibition and website text, having images approved, and agreeing on event content, to ensure they all felt the project was doing their history justice. This process was essential, as like with many of the contemporary and community collecting projects I undertake, this wasn’t my story to tell. Effective engagement was key.

The project concluded in spring 2018, but content from the interviews continues to be used to advocate for positive change in the borough, with KCIL playing extracts at meetings and events with Council officials. In addition, all of the content is available to access via the new website and I encourage anyone with an interest in disability history to take a listen.

www.kingstonfightingforourrights.co.uk

 Jen Kavanagh

Freelance curator and oral historian

Images: ‘Fighting for Disability Rights in Kingston’ display at Kingston Museum



Being Brunel Museum at the SS Great Britain Trust

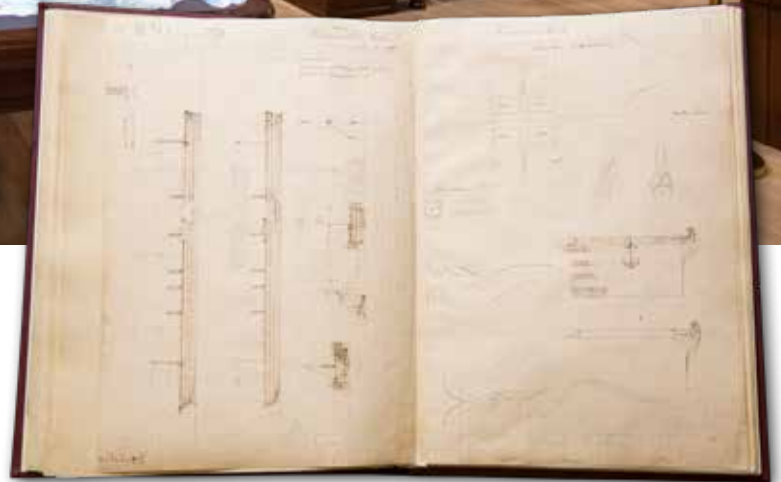
Background and planning

Brunel's SS Great Britain is a museum and visitor attraction on the harbourside in Bristol, which in 2017 welcomed 205,000 visitors. The site is centred around the SS Great Britain, Isambard Kingdom Brunel's second ship, which sits in the drydock where she was built.

In March 2018 the SS Great Britain Trust opened a new museum – 'Being Brunel' – which looks at IK Brunel's life, works, family and wider place in society.

The idea for the museum originated with a page in one of Brunel's sketchbooks, which is on long term loan to the Trust from the University of Bristol Brunel Collection. This page shows a wealth of drawings, calculations, details and figures, which provides a glimpse into the workings of Brunel's mind. Being Brunel was further inspired by the film 'Being John Malkovich', and the idea of providing visitors with a door into the mind of Brunel, allowing them to see his story through his own eyes.

From the outset, the Trust has sought to collect for display – this developed the collections already present (including the University of Bristol Collection) and also led to the acquisition of the Clive Richards Brunel Collection, a large private collection of Brunel material (including iconic objects such as his cigar case) which in 2017 was transferred to the Trust by HM Government as part of the inheritance in lieu scheme.



Early in the project a scoping document was drawn up which surveyed the different collections which held Brunel material, and led to loans from the Science Museum, the National Railway Museum, The National Museum of Wales / Amgueddfa Cymru, Leicester Museums, The National Maritime Museum, Ironbridge Gorge Museum and Bristol Museums and Archives.

Being Brunel

The museum is organised thematically across five different zones, each of which explores an aspect of Brunel's life and personality. They are the Victorian, the Engineer, the Entrepreneur, the Celebrity and the Artist and Designer.

At the entrance to the museum is a large set of chains, representing those of the SS Great Eastern, with stovepipe hats nearby, which the visitor can use to recreate the famous photograph of Brunel standing in front of chains, by Robert Howlet. From this visitors walk into a reconstruction of the dining room in Brunel's house in Duke Street, London, in 1840. Later in the museum Brunel's office is also reconstructed, as is the Grade II*

listed Dock Office, built for the construction of the SS Great Britain. This is the first time this part of the site has been open to the public.

The display cases in the main hall are designed to look like those made for the Great Exhibition in 1851 (Brunel was on the committee), and decorative details in the main hall are taken from his sketchbooks and designs for Paddington Station.



The main part of the museum is split over two floors, with the zones marked by different colours and featuring interactive displays, which relate to the theme. The museum also features an immersive cinema experience inside an eight-meter-tall head of Brunel, built by Pinewood Studios, which is designed to allow the visitor to see the world through Brunel's eyes.

Installation

The installation of Being Brunel was carried out by the Trust's Collections and Interpretation teams, with the cases provided by GlassHaus, fit out work carried out by WorkHaus and mounts provided by Colin Lindley.

At the start of the installation process all cases and surfaces were deep cleaned to ensure any construction debris is removed before objects were moved from the collections store. Before objects were brought into the museum the team modelled the display layout; by using masking tape cut to the measurements of each object any changes to object positions could be considered.

When the cases were ready and the object positions finalised, objects were brought into the museum for each of the zones, box by box, ready to be mounted and then installed into display cases. The install team were trained on how to pin collection objects into display drawers, using hat pins, and how to install the purpose made mounts so that the objects were installed safely and securely.

For installation in the table top and sideboard drawers each pin had to be carefully marked out and then gently tapped into place. Once the pins were installed the object was placed into the drawer to make sure the fit was perfect and the objects were secure and safely viewable, but would not move around with the opening and closing of the drawers. The use of hat pins ensures that once in position they become almost invisible to the naked eye.


The most challenging collection object to install features in one of the large sideboard display cases, in the Victorian zone, and consisted of a small number of loose diary pages written by Sophia Hawes, Brunel's sister. In order to display all the pages safely a total of 16 pins were used to ensure no movement from any of the individual folios.

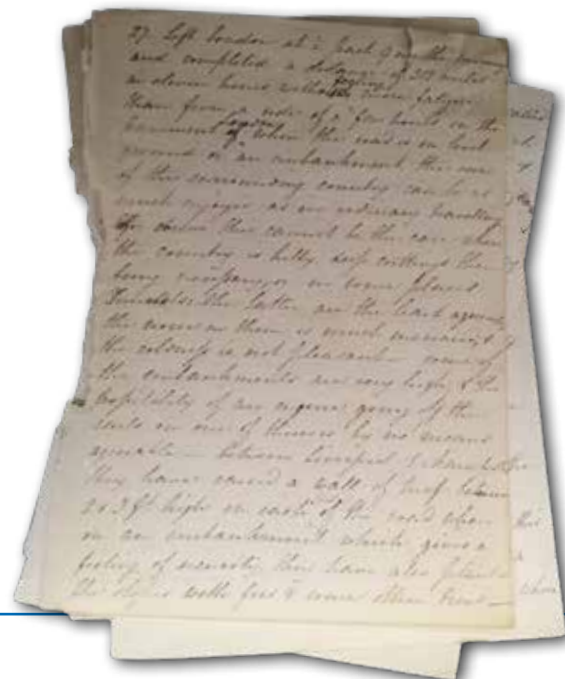
Any 3D objects installed into the drawer displays needed to be held in place with brass pins cut to size and covered with a small piece of rubber tubing to act as a protector between the pin and the object. These were primarily used for objects such as porcelain plates or large books, but also included a set of beautiful miniature portraits of Brunel's sister Sophia and her husband Benjamin Hawes. The pins were cut and then bent to a ninety-degree angle to hold these fragile objects in place securely

whilst exerting no pressure on the object itself.

Objects were installed over the course of four weeks, although the last object wasn't installed until a few hours before opening. The installation period was a wonderfully exciting time and being a part of the team that made it happen was an absolute privilege.

 **Natalie Fey**
Interpretation Assistant

 **Nick Booth**
Head of Collections, SS Great Britain Trust





SHCG Conference 2018

Beamish and Great North Museum Hancock, 19th and 20th July 2018

Day One: Beamish

Day One saw excitement even before reaching the conference room, thanks to a ride on a reconstructed tram – an enduringly memorable event for children and curators alike!

In his welcome, Simon Woolley (Beamish Museum Head of Learning) described some young people's responses to immersive education activities – memorably, “museums are big awkward walruses!” Simon, and subsequent speakers, proceeded to reassure us that through engaging, innovative and representative programming, activities and exhibitions, museums can ensure that “we're not walruses!”

Jenny Mabbott's (People's History Museum Head of Collections and Engagement) keynote discussed successful recent and forthcoming exhibitions – many incorporating input from community members in their curation. Jenny described how PHM don't have any staff members whose job title is 'curator' – with the functions of curatorial roles being distributed across staff and, at points, community co-curators. She challenged us to consider how the role of curators may require re-definition to address shifts in curatorial practice, increasing relationships with community-groups, and the question of

determining what museums (such as PHM) who seek to be campaigning museums should be campaigning about. Starting small and being brave were key pieces of advice from Jenny's experience.

Thanh Sinden (Museum Detox) discussed how the transformational times being faced by museums, which are under pressure to change and increase audience diversity. The lack of diversity within our own workforces, and a fixed mindset which sees museums as neutral often contribute to issues encountered by many institutions. In order to allow us to be more representative, Thanh's advice was to seek out diverse voices and multivocality.

Several interesting sessions followed exploring examples of how this engagement with community voices can play out. The Science Museum's Isabelle Lawrence talked about the representation of individual experiences of faith in the forthcoming 'Faith, Hope and Fear' exhibition; Kay Jones (National Museums Liverpool) shared her reflections of working with a complex range of community members and audiences on 'Tales from the City' which explored LGBT+ stories from Liverpool's past. A workshop discussing how museums can engage effectively with social media, run by Rachel Cooper (creator of @MuseumHashtag), inspired thought and a few smiles as we considered how museums represent themselves in the public sphere.

The all-important lunch break brought a chance to visit the extensive stores at Beamish, and enjoy the experience of the Museum's Edwardian Town – complete with in-the-flesh Police Officer!

After lunch Islington Museum's Roz Currie shared some of the challenges and joys of working in a small museum with smaller budgets – her top-tip being that clarity

of vision, creativity and working well with a variety of stakeholders and communities can give great results. The day's talks were finished off by Kevin Kerrigan (The Open Museum – Glasgow Museums) telling of a recent project on Glasgow boxer Benny Lynch, which took an under-told story and worked, with fantastic success, across the boundaries between exhibition curation and community engagement.

The afternoon gave way to a glorious evening of sunshine along the Newcastle-Gateshead Quayside – what better way to enjoy the food and drink of a city rightly renowned for its warm welcome!

SHC Alison Grange

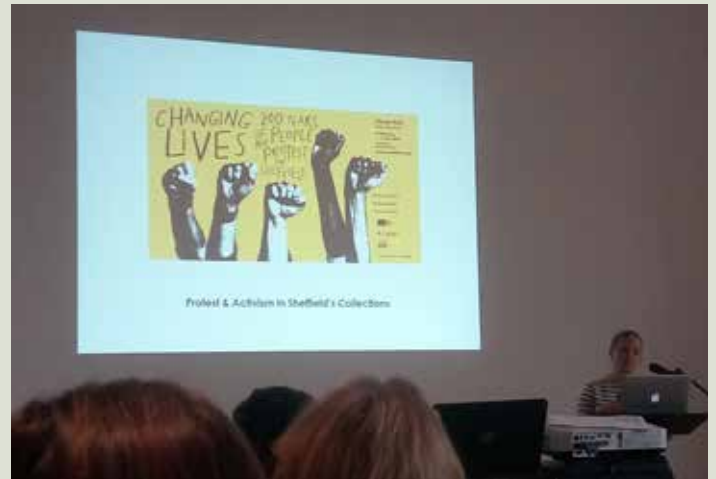
Collections & Learning Assistant,
Darlington Railway Museum

Day Two: Great North Museum: Hancock

The second day of the conference was hosted by the Great North Museum in Newcastle, a hub for the Great Exhibition of the North. The exhibition was the starting point of the day when Caroline McDonald delivered an honest and engaging presentation on the project. Caroline highlighted the lack of diversity recorded in documentation and asked if perhaps we need to reveal ourselves as curators.

Claire Simmons from Bristol Culture and Simon Brown from Newstead Abbey both spoke about projects dealing with the legacy of the slave trade. Claire highlighted the importance of being flexible when working with young people and surprise at their often conventional responses to projects. Simon showed that inspiration can come from anywhere when a community group created poetry based on an epitaph for Lord Byron's dog Boatswain.

Next up were three projects from Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM) using collections to tell new stories. Sarah Cotton discussed how a cut-out of Muhammed Ali could provoke discussions on masculinity, disability and race. Gemma Ashby spoke about the Women in Tyneside project which is reinterpreting existing collections and informing future acquisitions. Michael McHugh made sure the audience was awake before lunch with a fascinating presentation on an 'occult data collection event' at the Shipley Art Gallery.



During the lunch break there was time for a quick look around the Which Way North exhibition which highlighted design and innovations from the North and included a mad dash by some delegates to find Dr Who's sonic screwdriver!

After lunch, Adele Patrick and Rachel Thain-Gray from Glasgow Women's Library discussed the results from Equality in Progress research highlighting the need for diversity at the highest level in order for inequality to be recognised below.

Ian Smith from the Waterfront Museum highlighted how a young volunteer with autism led to increased awareness of autism and the development of a new 'chill-out' space used by various groups.

Catherine Goddard discussed her PhD findings and revealed how visitors to historic houses often preferred traditional text panels and bypassed displays using technology.

Kitty Ross gave an entertaining talk on 'A Woman's Place' exhibition in Leeds and highlighted the new forms of interpretation that come from working closely with an artist on a social history project.

Steve Ford spoke on inclusivity and how we can make collections accessible to those who are visually impaired through conversational audio guides.

Louisa Briggs gave a fascinating talk on how Museums Sheffield created an audience driven exhibition on protest by opening a 'protest room' and the issues around displaying overtly political material.

Emma Harper finished the day with a presentation on how the Postal Museum was redeveloped from a small specialist archive into a family friendly museum complete with a mail rail experience.

The conference provided an excellent insight into the ways museums are working with communities through co-curation and the honesty from speakers was refreshing. Thank you to the organisers for an inspiring two days.

SHC John Castling

Community Archivist, The Auckland Project

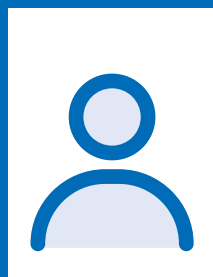
SHCG Committee 2017-2018



CHAIR

Helen McConnell-Simpson

Curator
Scott House
WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre
T: 01453 891223
E: helen.mcconnellsimpson@wwt.org.uk



CONFERENCE ORGANISER

Lauren Ryall-Waite

PhD candidate
E: ryallstl@roehampton.ac.uk



SECRETARY & CHAIR ELECT

Verity Smith

Freelance Curator
E: veritys10@gmail.com



SEMINAR ORGANISER

Holly Trubshawe

Curatorial Assistant
Kingsbridge Cookworthy Museum
T: 07910 109353
E: hk_trubshawe@hotmail.co.uk



MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Niti Acharya

Museum Manager
Hackney Museum
T: 020 8356 3500
E: Niti.Acharya@Hackney.gov.uk



SEMINAR ORGANISER

Rebecca Lucas

Project Curator: Abington,
Northampton Museum and Art Gallery,
T: 01604 838626
E: rlucas@northampton.gov.uk



TREASURER

Jenny Noble

Social History Curator
Culture NL Museums & Heritage
Summerlee Museum
T: 01236 856374
E: NobleJ@culturenl.co.uk



NEWS EDITOR

Jessie Petheram

Assistant Curator of Fine Art
National Museums Liverpool
T: 151 478 4845
E: jessie.petheram@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk



JOURNAL EDITOR

Amy Rowbottom

Curatorial Assistant
Brontë Society & Brontë Parsonage Museum
T: 01535 640199
E: amy.rowbottom@bronte.org.uk



WEB EDITOR

Diana Morton

Outreach & Access Manager
Museums & Galleries Edinburgh
City of Edinburgh Council
T: 0131 529 6365
E: diana.morton@edinburgh.gov.uk



CONFERENCE ORGANISER

Alison Grange

Collections & Learning Assistant
Head of Steam
Darlington Railway Museum
T: 01325 405542
E: alison.grange@darlington.gov.uk



MARKETING & FUNDRAISING OFFICER

Leah Mellors

Curator,
Ripon Museums
T: 01799510645
E: leah.mellors@riponmuseums.co.uk



**Social History
Curators Group**

enquiry@shcg.org.uk
www.shcg.org.uk



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Registered address:
c/o Hackney Museum
Technology & Learning Centre
1 Reading Lane, London E8 1GQ