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Post-Fordist issue  
(Acid House remix)

## THE PASTIME OF PAST TIME ? Chairpersons thoughts for 1989.

It has been the custom of this organ to allow the new Chairperson a few lines to outline how they see the future of Social History in Museums and how SHCG fits into that picture. I am very pleased to be SHCG's chairperson at this time ; it is a very interesting period for museums of all kinds and one where the activities of a specialist group can play an important role.

The museum world is presently undergoing a period of rapid change in both attitude and organisation. Some of these changes are from within the profession and are long overdue. Many Local Authority museum curators are now realising that they are public servants operating as part of a wider organization and no longer adopting the 'oh but we're so different' elitism of the past. I suspect that this attitude was a key element in the marginalization of so many services in the 1960s and 70s.

It is a peculiar paradox that at the same time new attitudes and organisational structures are being presented from the 'outside', courtesy of H.M. Government. We are now involved in the dismantling of local government in order to make room for the thrusting private sector. We are urged to 'manage change and grasp new opportunities'. Such glib euphemisms are only a smokescreen for the continuing programme of privatization and contractorization. To be fair, there are many aspects of Local Authority procedure that museums could be well rid of, but let's not kid ourselves that these changes will give us the much needed conservators, improved stores, extra staff and increased budgets that we need. Sponsorship cannot provide all these for everyone.

It is quite obvious that museums cannot all be run as charitable trusts or private companies. Most cannot become money-makers without seriously compromising their curatorial and public service functions. It is equally obvious that there are few truly 'independent' museums in Britain ; just look at the vast sums of public money invested in Ironbridge and Beamish, look at the problems caused by the demise of the old MSC criteria. Britain has to decide what sort of museums it wants, and then if it wants to pay for them.

The money is there and could easily be mis-spent. It seems incredible to me that the Government was prepared to spend £150 million on housing the Thyssen Collection but is unable to give the Area Museum Councils an extra £2 million which would have aided provincial museums throughout the country.

Enough of this moaning, I hear you say. Let us be positive. It is high time we were. By now most of you will have heard of the Museums Association's proposals for 1989 - Museums Year. Whatever you may feel about its late arrival and organisation, I would urge all Social History Curators to make their museums become involved in it. If nothing else, Museums Year gives us the opportunity to say, 'This is what we do, this is why we do it, and look how much better we could be if properly funded'. It is a splendid opportunity to demystify museums. This lack of understanding is one of our biggest problems, as witnessed by the press reaction to the scrappy National Audit report on the Nationals.

So far I have taken a general view, in order to show that Social History, like museums, cannot be seen in isolation, certainly not from the world of economic and cultural politics. I will conclude by outlining what SHCG Committee proposes for 1989.

Firstly, SHCG will be doing what it has always set out to do, to act as an exchange for information and ideas, via seminars, study weekends and by publication. Our training seminar programme will be extensive, covering both theory and practice. The Annual Study Weekend will cover the subject of 'Popular Culture' and will hopefully include Brass Bands and Broadsheets, Music Hall and Methodists, Folk Art and Funfairs : We intend to examine how these themes can be developed in museums, using museum collections.

We will continue campaigning on behalf of Social History museums and collections under threat. Unfortunately these do not go away and a group such as this has to get involved. It has a professional duty to do so.

We are also hoping to take an active role in the Centenary Conference at York. This conference will have greater public involvement than ever before and its theme will be linked with the needs of the public. Social History museums have been leaders in the field of de-mystifying and humanising the museum world and we feel that we should be telling the rest of the profession (especially Directors, Elected Members and Trustees) how good we are at it. If they respond then we can hopefully give the public a better service.

To conclude, 1989 will be a good year to promote what we know is good about museums, not what others think should be done with them. If we continue to improve and promote ourselves, then the act of visiting and using museums will continue to be more than a trip to History's toy cupboard, the pastime of past time.

Mark Suggitt (Yorkshire and Humberside Area  
Museums Council).



## TODDLERS INVADE MUSEUM !

An 'Open House' for carers and the under-fives at Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery

10 am, Friday 25 March at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. The doors swung open. Up the stone steps and into the marble hall flooded toddlers, babies, buggies, mums, aunties, grandads and playleaders. For the next six hours its galleries were alive with the chattering and laughing of over two thousand children, who came with their carers to this memorable event. They watched puppet shows, listened to story-tellers, painted paper plates, made pottery, played with reproduction historical toys and delved into an 'archaeological' sandpit. In a 'discovery room' small fingers could feel the spines of a real hedgehog or the swirling form of a fossil. Toddler trails through many galleries revealed hidden delights, like the zoo of tiny animals inhabiting pottery in the ceramics gallery, or mysteriously glowing bright blue crystals in the minerals section, as well as visiting old friends like Alfred the Gorilla.

'Open House' was designed to give a special welcome to small children, to make the museum theirs for the day. Like many public buildings, museums can be unwelcoming places for people under three foot high - and, therefore, for the larger ones who look after them. Grand staircases defeat small legs and exhaust buggy-pushers. Uniformed security staff, concerned for the safety of the objects and the peace of 'serious' visitors sometimes see toddlers as hand grenades on legs and treat them accordingly. (*Don't I just know it. Ed.*) Many curators believe museum displays cannot be appreciated by anyone under seven years old and so make no provision for them when planning exhibits. Even education departments devote little time to pre-school children and their carers.

The South West branch of Women Heritage and Museums organised this event because they felt that women, as principal carers for the under-fives, are often discouraged by the real and perceived difficulties involved in visiting museums. They aimed to demonstrate through 'Open House' that the museum is a friendly place with many attractions for the under-fives, even without all the extra activities laid on for 25 March. Through the 'Toddler Trails', designed to show carer and child imaginative ways to use displays, children are encouraged to enjoy the museum and perhaps establish a habit of museum visiting.

From the museum's point of view, 'Open House' was intended to make staff think about their attitudes towards, and provision for, the under-fives. It has already brought about some changes. Sponsorship for the day has enabled the baby care room to be upgraded so that it now has a sink and worktop, a nappy disposal unit and a comfortable rocking chair for nursing mothers. Sets of toddler steps can now be borrowed at the main museum and several branches to help small children get a better view into cases. The 'Toddler Trails' will continue to be available from the museum shop, in English and five Asian languages (for a nominal charge). One branch museum, Blaise Castle House, now has a handling box of reproduction toys which can be borrowed by booking in advance. Visits from pre-school groups are always welcome, provided that they book in advance. Groups of not more than 30 children are preferred, with at least one adult to every five children. Further activities for the under-fives may be arranged by the museum in the future; in the meantime groups are welcome to bring their own storytellers and use the carpet in the Victorian English paintings gallery as a 'base'.

'Open House' identified a section of the community which responded with great enthusiasm to a museum event. Following short articles in the local press, bookings poured in from interested groups throughout Bristol. These ranged from nurseries and play-groups to a 'Young Mums' group and single parent

projects. In addition, discount vouchers for 'City Line' buses enabled individuals to bring children to the event, which was attended by over 4000 people. A recent survey showed that the 20-40 year old age group was poorly represented among Bristol Museum's visitors; by showing that we welcome small children perhaps this important section of our community, who often have young families, will be encouraged to visit the museum - and come back for more!

Sarah Levitt (City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery)



## THE TWENTIETH CENTURY FOLK MUSEUM Ironbridge Institute 20 April 1988

The collection and interpretation of museum objects in the twentieth century is a major and ongoing topic. It has already received much attention in the pages of museum journals and at previous seminars. At Ironbridge, at the Twentieth Century Folk Museum seminar, the subject reared its head again.

The seminar was based on two major themes; the collection and interpretation of objects in museums in the twentieth century, particularly the late twentieth century. What should curators preserve of twentieth century Britain from around 1950 onwards, and how should they set about interpreting this in the light of recent developments and changes in lifestyles and attitudes?

These themes were investigated in the context of the folk museum. Dr Barrie Trinder set the scene by outlining plans for a hypothetical twentieth century folk museum. He suggested various aspects of life that such a museum would have to incorporate. Above all, it would have to include important changes in leisure and places of work; in modes of transport and housework. It would also have to include the great institutions of the century, such as the YMCA and the YHA, and aspects such as the holiday phenomenon.

To many people these represent a far cry from the traditional folk museum, which conjures up images of nineteenth century farmhouses and cottages filled with items of recognisable age. In the light of this, suggested Tim Putnam, the concept of the folk museum must be reconsidered, along with the technique by which curators collected, recorded and interpreted the late twentieth century. In doing so, they could benefit from the changes that have taken place since the 1950s in methods of advertising and consumerism. Late twentieth century lifestyles are dictated more and more by the cultural media and by producers and advertisers. Images are now equally as important as tangible objects in relation to human life. It was suggested that there might even come a time when objects in a museum take a secondary role in favour of a different strategy and method of interpretation. This role could be filled by contemporary documentation.

Contemporary documentation has already proved a successful method of recording and collecting information about the lives of people within the last 20 years. Several projects were outlined which have successfully drawn on oral history, documentary sources and modern aides such as advertising. These included one on which Putnam is currently working in conjunction with the Victoria and Albert Museum. Entitled 'Household Choices', its theme is the home in the twentieth century, how people have chosen to arrange their homes, and how this has changed in the last fifty years.

The message of all this was that museum curators nowadays have resources to hand which can change the way they interpret a particular aspect of twentieth century life, with more relevance to the culture of today.

At this point it looked as if the poor old museum object was about to become obsolete. But Mark Suggitt came to its rescue with a paper addressing the problems of object collections. He asked whether existing museum collections presented us with an inescapable 'albatross' or an opportunity for reassessment and improvement. Many museums have the problem of 'irrelevant' items in their collections, a situation inherited from a period of 'passive' collecting in the early 1900s. But opportunities exist to collect the late twentieth century without making the same mistakes, providing a properly co-ordinated collecting policy is worked out.

Museum curators must therefore keep in step with the times and be aware of technological developments and new avenues of collecting open to them. But there is no reason why objects should not remain an integral part of museum collections in conjunction with these new techniques. After all, we still invest much time and money in amassing objects for our own homes. Smaller and better collections of objects, supported by informative documentary evidence, including photographs and recorded interviews, will ensure more relevant and accurate interpretation.

The final two speakers outlined successful projects at their respective museums which concerned particular areas of people's experience and lives, utilising both contemporary documentation and objects.

Sam Mullins described his work at Market Harborough Museum, where, since 1983, two projects have resulted in publications and an exhibition, while a third was in preparation. The projects have successfully combined the new with the more traditional methods of collecting. Topics have included the history of two burgage plots near the current market place from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries; domestic service in and around the town up to the 1930s; and the town's retail trade. Researchers found that collecting objects for the exhibitions was far easier when all the relevant documentary evidence was at hand, rather than collecting blindly and without direction.

Michael Thomas described the installation of the prefab at Avoncroft in 1980. A previous occupant came forward to talk about life in the prefab during the 1930s. Her account was used as a model for redisplaying the building. Offshoots from the project have included a study of utility furniture and the production of a schools study folder. The comments of visitors have also been interesting. There are those for whom it brings memories of home life as well as wartime, while those who have never seen a prefab before are surprised by its size.

The seminar was both useful and interesting. It is important that we address these problems for they concern all museum curators. With the twentieth century drawing to a close we have to take stock of our present methods of collection and what remains to be recorded. It is good to know however, that one is not alone when faced with a backlog of accessioning and many items that we don't know what to do with and wish we hadn't got.

The seminar offered an air of optimism. Museum curators of today have far more choice about what they collect and how they collect, and a chance to learn from the mistakes of the past.

Jane Holmes (Kirklees Museums).

## HERITAGE INTERPRETATION or THE DODO STRIKES BACK

St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, 30 April 1988

This one day conference was organised with two intentions. First, to give the 'Heritage Industry' a chance to defend itself against the recent polemic of Robert Hewison's, and secondly, to reiterate this defence by launching the new diploma in Heritage Interpretation, which will take its first students in Autumn 1988. The 'Heritage Industry' is precisely what this event drew, judging by the proportion of men in grey suits. Note to organisers: how many younger curatorial staff could justify £30 for a day conference with little practical training involved?

Robert Hewison opened the day with a confident re-assertion of his book, now familiar to most readers (?). Deriding the notion that conference delegates could possibly work 'in heritage' as the programme claimed, Hewison identified a spectrum of presentation of the past ranging from the preserved, through the replica to the completely bogus. Whilst acknowledging that myths serve contemporary purposes, he analysed two versions of the past currently at work. One, the Georgian Pastoral, embodied in the country house ilk, and the other, the Victorian Industrial, embodied in his much reviled Wigan Pier. This willingness at the moment to sell ourselves as slaves to such myths leaves the whole operation open to commercial exploitation, which, as Robert Hewison perceptively notes, is all the more attractive in a de-industrialising economy where it costs £33,000 to create one new job in manufacturing but only £4,000 to create a job in tourism. With 'heritage' the factories, machines and clients are all available cost free and in abundant quantities.

Polemicists by their nature do not always stand up to face-to-face confrontations outside the pages of their books (?) and Robert Hewison had little to say about what the so-called 'Heritage Industry' should be doing to redress this 'weakening of history' symbolised by the fizz and bang of the Armada celebrations. In any case, this event was not about offering alternatives, but rather about colliding head-on with the whole Hewison analysis. Opening a convincing defence, Peter Lewis, bete noir of 'The Heritage Industry' took time to explain how some parts of Wigan Pier for which he had been criticized had not been down to him at all but were part of a necessary compromise with private capital. Seeing the growth of the Heritage sector as a positive rather than a negative cultural sign, Heritage for Lewis is quite simply 'that which is passed on from one age to the next'. And if we're going to pass it on, then why not do it in a way which tells honest stories, transforms inner cities and doesn't lose money at the same time. Lewis aligns himself firmly with Hewison's dodo, not least because it was 'Clubbed to death by those it thought and ought to be its friends'.

For Merlin Waterson, East Anglian Director of the National Trust, Heritage has a very capital 'H'. It is about historical truth, scholarship and stewardship. However, Waterson's experience of interpretation in country houses is that the Heritage Industry need not necessarily tell the stories of the ruling class but can show how treasures and houses were funded and staffed, the often dubious economies on which they were based and the harsher realities of life for the lower ranks, on which this existence depended. However, Merlin is doubtful whether visitors to H.M.S. Victory at Portsmouth really want to hear about sodomy in Nelson's navy rather than hear reassertions about where the great man fell. Personally, I know which I would prefer to see.



David Sekers of Quarry Bank Mill made a timely bid to rescue the public, who in the 'Heritage' analysis are sometimes regarded as dumb animals, not least from those critics for whom any activity which is both enjoyable and 'cultural' is sinful. Instead, he made a plea that museums should not be confused with things that they are not, such as theme parks or adventure sites where the public undergo a 'willing suspension of disbelief'. For Sekers, the Heritage Industry analysis is a redundant one, and we should actually be looking ahead to the next wave of heritage sites, the science experience sites such as Eureka at Halifax, as the next wave of competition.

Peter Rumble is the Chief Executive of English Heritage and not unexpectedly he sees Heritage Centres as presenting just a picture of the past which should be regarded with the same critical view we reserve for any other picture. Again, although defending the critical powers of the public, Rumble sees the arguments about how the Armada should be celebrated as a sign of a critically active culture.

After various group sessions with 'interpretation' specialists, a highly charged plenary session tried to resolve many of the different viewpoints expressed during the day, but was disappointingly too short for any fuller discussion of issues of race and gender which had been barely mentioned by the day's speakers. Lucinda Lambton completed the day with a brisk tour (on slide) of what for some will be the next wave of Heritage Centres, 'Beastly Buildings'.

What was that about dumb animals ?

Rory O'Connell

#### THE MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT UNIT

The Museum Development Unit, an initiative of the Charities Advisory Trust, aims to help museums attract a new and wider audience and gain a higher public profile. The Director of the Unit, Helen Carpenter, invites the involvement of museums in developing a national network of museum based vents around the theme of the Battle of Britain, covering all aspects of life in the summer of 1940.

This would take place in 1990, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Britain. Although the subject has been covered before, there will doubtless be a flurry of commemorative attention in the national press and media. It is therefore an ideal time for new exhibitions, educational programmes and other events to be mounted, and for those museums with permanent displays related to the subjects to promote themselves.

The Museum Development Unit would coordinate the activities initiated by individual museums and other organisations, encourage the use of museum premises for relevant musical theatrical and other events, and endeavour to tie in the overall programme with television coverage. We would also envisage finding sponsorship to complement the efforts made by participating organisations at local level and to pay for publicising the entire programme.

In the first instance the Director would like to hear from readers who are already planning an exhibition or event related to this subject and from those whose programme for 1990 is not yet fixed, but would like to be kept informed. It would also be helpful if museums which have already organised relevant exhibitions in the recent past could send details to the unit. We will be keeping everyone informed on the provisional programme in the coming months and shall be writing to many of you directly shortly. If there is any other way you feel the unit can be of assistance by all means get in touch with the Director at Museum Development Unit, Radius Works, Back Lane, London. NW3 1HL (Tel. 01 794 9835).

#### "SCHOOL-DAYS : AN EXHIBITION ON SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLING IN HULL" : A REVIEW

"School-days" is the first exhibition to be held in Hull Museums Service's newly restored "Old Grammar School". Built in 1583-5, the building was used by Hull Grammar School from that date until 1878. In 1883 it was restored, and many of the original features were lost or modified. The timber fluted columns of the late 1660s, for example, were removed from their central position in the main hall and relocated along the side walls. The recent restoration has protected such features as remain but also, out of necessity, secured the future of the buildings by renewing the fabric and the services.

This reviewer visited the exhibition on a Saturday afternoon, accompanied by two school children. As we approached the Old Grammar School (which at least looks like a brick Elizabethan building from the exterior) we were chastised by a cheery Attendant for being late for school. Novel, I thought. We entered through the original porch where a rather inadequate sales point is located. The exhibition is in the former main hall of the school which has a raised stage at the east end upon which used to be placed the Master's chair.

The exhibition is displayed on a series of panels (and occasionally cases) hung on a tubular framework. Clearly the panels can be removed and the next exhibition hung on the framework relatively easily. This seems to be a very practical way of investing the museum service's resources (the system cost £18,000 and the exhibition £30,000), though it has obvious limitations with regard to the style of exhibitions to be seen here over the next few years.

Although the reasoning behind the choice of subject for this first exhibition is self-explanatory, it should be noted that this indeed is intended to be the first in a series of exhibitions about the city's history. Additionally further parts of the building will be opened to "allow more permanent displays about the story of Hull and its people". This is therefore the first stage in creating a new social history museum.

The exhibition is divided up into four unequal sections, accounting for over thirty panels or cases. The first section is the "Hull Grammar School Story". This is treated conventionally, mainly through narrative text though there are some very interesting sixteenth and seventeenth century paintings and objects. The story is enlivened by reference to well-known "old-boys" such as Andrew Marvell and William Wilberforce. The second section deals with schools and schooling in Hull. The larger part of this is the "official" viewpoint of the development of education in Victorian and Edwardian Hull.

The raised stage at the end of the room is furnished vaguely in the manner of an Edwardian schoolroom and includes models of a teacher and a child. This scenario is dated to May 16th, 1907. I understand that this is intended to be not simply for schools to come and use but for anyone to come and sit and look at. Under the stage there is an opportunity to view the original cellar area of the Grammar School, though this is probably really only of interest to the most dedicated architectural enthusiast.

The third section is "School Life Past and Present". This allows the introduction of a range of objects and documents associated with school life, as well as oral material. So, here can be found the usual impedimenture : school attendance books, registers, punishment books, attendance medals, school uniforms, badges, text books and other miscellanea relating to school-days in the twentieth century. These are

accompanied by an excellent selection of photographs. All the time you are aware that there is a taped commentary going on in the background, which includes school songs, street games and the like. Finally, there is a "language lab" where you are able to listen to a tape of people talking about their school-days in Hull from 1900 to 1945. This is clearly quite a popular feature of the exhibition and is an effective use of oral history material collected during the course of this project.

Finally, one comes to "Images of School Days". Subtitled, "The Best Years of Your Life this is certainly the most original section in the whole exhibition. It looks at the popular entertainment view of school-days and then poses some basic questions. "Many of the characters like Billy Butler, the girls from St. Trinians and Tucker from Grange Hill are created by adults and not children. Is this interest in school life by adults as well children a form of nostalgia?" Unfortunately any exhibition will constrain the detail of debate and so naturally suggest that nostalgia is indeed the most important force at work.

The exhibition ends with a small video area. A compilation video was showing, on a small screen, from "Please Sir", "Bottoms Up", "Inchoate Nickel", "From Sir with Love" and "St. Trinians". Although a notice tells you what is available, and invites you to "stay and watch for as long as you wish ... the sequence lasts for approximately 30 minutes", each individual piece of film is not identified and there is no interpretation of what you are looking at. On the afternoon I visited it was difficult to hear what was being said, though a local drunk found it all suitably relaxing. There is clearly a real danger that this part of the exhibition could degenerate into a meaningless piece of nostalgia, in much the same manner as parts of the Television galleries at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television at Bradford.

There is little that might be honestly described at "controversial" in this exhibition, with one possible exception. The exhibition actually opens with an "Acknowledgements" panel. This is not unusual except that detailed and quite precise credits are given to individual curators, including for writing and editing. Indeed, one might wryly observe, all that seems to be missing is a credit for Dr. Fleming's wardrobe. (*This is understandable. Ed*) Further comment is perhaps unnecessary.

The exhibition is accompanied by an excellent publication. School-days, written by Elizabeth Frostick (who was responsible for the exhibition) is an attractive 30-page booklet, profusely illustrated, full of information and drawing heavily on oral material. This will be a lasting contribution to social history in Hull, long after the exhibition has been dismantled. Indeed, one might be forgiven for assuming that the exhibition is really there to promote the book. This would, of course, be unfair. The issues and subjects covered in the exhibition are actually explored in greater depth (and to good effect) in the publication, which is certainly not simply a catalogue of the exhibition. It deserves to be widely read and admired.

Generally speaking the exhibition represents a high standard of research, presentation and production. There can be very few curators who would not be happy to be associated with this exhibition. The panels are attractively designed (by Hall Redman Associates), the text is restrained, and the content well thought out. Objects are used wherever appropriate, though the two-dimensional inevitably dominates.

The main criticism to be made of the exhibition is perhaps as much a reflection of its design and chosen subject as anything else. Put simply, it lacks excitement. A number of factors conspire to draw out this conclusion. The exhibition design itself is partly responsible. The furniture is a very practical solution to

overcoming the problem of creating a series of exhibitions planned over a number of years. However, it does not allow for much "variation in pace" which means that the creativity of both curator and designer are unfortunately constrained. To this must be added the predictability of the subject. There is not enough which is remarkable about school-days in Hull to raise the tempo of the exhibition.

Nevertheless, the choice of exhibition subject has brought in plenty of visitors which must be the most important result. This is a sound beginning to what should develop into an important social history museum for one of England's interesting ports.

"School-days : An Exhibition on Schools and Schooling in Hull" is open until February 1989 at the Old Grammar School, Hull.

The publication School-days (30pp, £1.25) is available from Town Docks Museum, Hull.

Stuart Davies  
Kirklees Museums



#### APPEALS FOR INFORMATION

##### ANTI-SUFFRAGE EPHEMERA

Felicity Premro, the Co-ordinator of the Spitalfields Heritage Centre, is currently researching for a dissertation on anti-Suffragist ephemera. Because of the nature of the movement, there is far less material preserved than for the Suffragists. In many cases the Antis tended merely to react to Suffragist/Suffragette action and initiatives and to a certain extent imitated their (non-militant) publicity methods. Felicity is looking at journals, newspapers and pamphlets and is interested to learn what else survives in the way of other printed materials, postcards, calendars (such as the Anti-Suffrage League's 'Ideal Woman' calendar), toys, dolls, and other relevant items. If SHCG members have any material in their collections relating to methods of persuasion/propaganda, both for, but more particularly against the enfranchisement of women, please contact Felicity at The Heritage Centre, Spitalfields, 19 Princelet Street, London, E1 6HQ (tel. 01 3776901) or at 9 Carlingford Road, London NW3 1RY (01 7945474).

##### PHOTOGRAPHS OF CURATORIAL ACTIVITIES

Gaynor Kavanagh is looking for photographs of the following :  
Curators conducting fieldwork - including oral history or reminiscence therapy work ; using archive offices ; looking at material in situ ; recording sites or activities ; and using cameras.  
History Galleries - especially photographs of exhibitions and displays pre-1965.  
Conservation and restoration - good and/or bad examples, before and after photographs.  
Black and white photographs and slides, if suitable, can be copied at the University and returned promptly. They would be used in teaching and for student reference. No material submitted would be published without the prior approval and acknowledgement of the museum concerned. If possible photographs should be accompanied by a covering note explaining the content and giving its date. All contributions will be gratefully received by Gaynor Kavanagh at the Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 105 Princess Road East, Leicester.



### Introduction

Kirklees is a Metropolitan District in Yorkshire which includes the towns of Huddersfield, Dewsbury, Batley and Cleckheaton, as well as the wooded Holme Valley ('Last of the Summer Wine' country), the Colne Valley and moorland. The Museums Service includes four museums, four art galleries, two historic houses, a Country Park and an Iron Age Hillfort. Eighty staff, a £0.75 million budget and 250,000 visitors per year complete the profile of what is a large metropolitan museums service.

### Oakwell Hall

Oakwell Hall is a stone-built Elizabethan manor house, erected in 1583 by John Batt. In 1928 it was acquired by the local authority and used as a museum for furniture and other decorative arts collections of many different periods.

In the 1970s an 87 acre Country Park was created around it. From 1983 onwards the Museums Service developed its recreational and educational facilities. Cottages adjacent to the Hall were converted into Tea Rooms while the nearby old farm buildings became a Visitor Centre. The Barn, built in the 1840s, is used for a variety of events, including recitals, folk evenings, barn dances, drama and lectures. Other buildings contain a shop, craft workshops, exhibition areas and educational facilities.

Out in the Country Park there are nature trails, a Wildlife Garden, footpaths, bridleways, an equestrian arena and an adventure playground. Each year Oakwell hosts a number of events and activities, including a Country Fair, Historic Vehicles Rally and Craft Weekend. The heart of the medieval manor is now again a focal point for community interest.

In the 1980s the Hall began to be used more intensively by schools, especially for 'costume visits' in the style of those developed at Clarke Hall in Wakefield. From 1984 a programme of research was embarked upon and a series of experimental educational activities carried out in order to explore the potential of the Hall. This planning phase proved to be vital preparation for when the opportunity occurred to implement radical changes.

In 1986, serious structural problems were discovered and in December of that year the Hall was closed to allow remedial work to be carried out. The whole of the Hall's contents were removed, most into storage but some items on loan were recalled or returned. There was, however, a tremendous opportunity to plan a 'new' look for the Hall when it eventually re-opened (in June 1988).

In the course of the building works some new information came to light. A very rare example of seventeenth century painted panelling was already known to exist in the "Painted Chamber", an upstairs room which had been closed to the public for some years. Using a technique called "scumbling" paint was applied to flat panels to make them look three-dimensional. This could turn a very ordinary room into quite a grand one. This room was completely restored as part of the refurbishment programme. However, when the Great Parlour, the principal living room in the seventeenth century house, was stripped of modern paint layers it too was found to have been decorated in the same way, but including a landscape painting over the fireplace.

Catherine Hall (now of Preston Museums Service) had already carried out detailed research into the history of the Hall and its contents. The examination of an inventory of 1611, household accounts and letters had all yielded new information. The study of similar houses and families in the region also helped to build up a picture of what life was like at Oakwell in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Using this research and a general knowledge of gentry house interiors, we were able to decide that Oakwell Hall should be re-displayed broadly in the style of the 1690s. Catherine was now able to draw up room lists which were (and continue to be) the blueprint for collection, display and interpretation in the Hall. Jane Glaister, the Senior Curator based at Oakwell Hall, was responsible for putting this blueprint into practical effect.

Many of the items known to be suitable for our aim were of course already in the collections. Others, however, were purchased at auction or by private treaty over a number of months. In this

way important regional pieces of furniture have been added to our collections, including a long ('refectory') table, glass cupboard, court cupboard, oval gateleg table, chest of drawers and an ark.

Other items of furniture were especially made for the 'new' Hall. One room, the "Painted Chamber", was selected for display of reproduction furniture only, to both allow greater scope for educational work and to show the general visitor how oak furniture might have looked when it was new and not blackened by 400 years of dirt and polish.

Many smaller items and all the textile furnishings, so important in the seventeenth century for making a house comfortable, could not be found in their original condition. It was therefore decided to commission reproduction ceramics, glass and textiles from a variety of sources. All the reproduction items are based on the results of very careful research. Much of the pottery, for example, was made by a local slipware potter guided by fragments of pottery actually archaeologically excavated at Oakwell. Other items were made according to contemporary illustrations or descriptions.

In the case of table carpets and rugs nineteenth or twentieth century 'Turkey' carpets have been used because the designs are so little changed from the seventeenth century equivalents that were so popular in English houses at that time. Every aspect of the house has been looked at, including floor coverings (stitched rush matting is laid in some rooms), wall hangings, cushions, lighting, mirrors and bed hangings. The overall result of blending original artefacts with reproduction items is to give the visitor a good overall impression of what Oakwell would have been like at the end of the seventeenth century. The work is not finished for refinements will need to be made as new information and new items become available.

### Heritage Unit

In June 1988 a new "Heritage Unit" was established by Kirklees Museums Service. It has been created to specifically deal with a number of important recent developments and initiatives which complement both museum and library mainstream activities. It is headed by a Manager whose duties include the commercial management of all the museums shops, sales points and other trading activities. These have been considerably expanded over the last two years, the turnover having been increased from about £2,000 to £30,000. The unit therefore combine both public "academic" services and commercial services.

Supporting the Manager and providing the main social history input is a Photographic Librarian and a Sound Archivist. The combined photographic collections of the new services remained virtually unknown and certainly hardly used from 1974 until 1983. In that year a CP Scheme (The Photographic Preservation Unit) was set up to clean, document and print from the Service's collection of over 65,000 glass plate negatives.

About one half of these represent collections deposited with museums and libraries over a long period of time. They include the collections of individual local photographers such as W H Sikes (active 1894-1933). J H Carter (1920-1930) and J J Stead (1883-1924). The negatives date from 1867-1965 and cover a wide range of topics. Even though the photographers were based locally, they did travel throughout this country and abroad. The catalogue, stored on a microcomputer, includes a subject and location index.

The other main part of the collections is the glass plate negative archive of the Huddersfield Daily Examiner for the period 1948-1962. About 35,000 negatives relate to all the events, places, people and subjects covered by the newspaper during that period. The Heritage Unit also has the photographers' original field and lab notebooks to assist in precise identification.

The CP scheme came to an end in 1987 but the post of Photographic Librarian was created to continue (unfinished) work and develop the service. The modern negative archive of the Huddersfield Daily Examiner is now to be added to the collection one year at a time, twenty-five years after each year (i.e. this year will see the acquisition of the 1963 archive). Considerable work has been put into creating a series of temporary exhibitions based on the collections, a book of photographs on Dewsbury shops (based on the Fred Hartley collection) is due to be published soon and the commercial potential of the collection has been assessed by the Economics and Marketing Department of Huddersfield Polytechnic. A commercial service is currently being established.

The new post of Sound Archivist has also "evolved" from a CP scheme, the Kirklees Sound Archive, established in 1985. Since then an archive of 400 tapes (produced on a Uher reel-to-reel recorder) has been created. Most of the recording has been done on a project basis, covering subjects such as the Afro-Caribbean, Asian and Polish communities, the Textile Industries, Folk Song and Dance, Cinema, Childhood and Wartime.

The first catalogue of the collection has just been published. It lists each recording under project headings, such as "Afro-Caribbean Community" and so on. Each entry includes the accession number, date of interview and very general biographical details of the interviewee (e.g. "Female born 1936, Kingston, Jamaica"). The rest of the entry is a brief summary (about 50-100 words) of the principal subject matter covered in the interview. The catalogue entries can therefore be used to gain access to more subject matter than just contained in the project title. The catalogue is available from the Sound Archivist, Tolson Museum, Ravensknowle Park, Wakefield Road, Huddersfield; price £2.00 (including p&p).

Access to the Sound Archive has been a key objective. The catalogue is part of this. Cassette copies can be listened to in the Local Studies section of Huddersfield Reference Library. From 1986 a number of exhibitions and activities utilising oral history material have been developed. An exhibition ("Community

Voices") explaining the work of the Sound Archive (and appealing for interviewees on specified subjects) has been touring libraries, museums and special events. A compilation tape from the archive was used to accompany the "Welcome to the Motherland?" exhibition which explored the history of Huddersfield's Afro-Caribbean community and began touring museums, libraries, community centres in March 1987. A small display relating to the Polish community projects was mounted at the Huddersfield Polish Club in October 1987. Finally, a larger exhibition, "Words on War", opened at Tolson Museum in July 1988 and will be touring various venues in Kirklees during 1988 and 1989.

Material from the Sound Archive has also been successfully used in educational activities at a number of the smaller branch libraries and an educational pack is currently being devised for wider distribution. Material from the archive has of course formed the basis for a number of talks given to various groups and societies in and around Kirklees. Substantial quotations from one person's life history are being used to annotate the book of Dewsbury photographers mentioned earlier. The Sound Archivist is also finding that she is now being approached by individuals, groups or schools wishing to utilise oral history as part of a desire to record their own past or as an educational exercise.

Two other, existing, activities are included in the Kirklees Heritage Unit. The Publications Officer, responsible for the production of in-house publications now reports to the Manager of the Heritage Unit. So too does the Microfilming Unit, a useful in-house service which apart from providing a means of storing information and marketing the photographic collection, also handles contract work for other Council departments.

#### Tolson Museum

The Heritage Unit is located at Tolson Museum in Huddersfield, which is itself in the middle of long-term redevelopment. In 1987 the entrance foyer was refurbished and a new gallery opened which introduces the visitor to the history of the house (built in the 1860s) and the collections, and what services the museum has to offer today. In July 1988 a new textile gallery was opened dealing with the rise of Huddersfield's most important industry in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This gallery is the first to be refurbished as part of a major re-direction in the museum's galleries. Conceived in the 1920s as a natural history museum with a little bit of archaeology and "bygones" to "Complete the story", Tolson Museum will have, by 1989, a complete suite of galleries on the upper floor comprehensively describing the history of Huddersfield from earliest times until the present day.

The next phase of this work will be to open a new Local History Gallery dealing with the history of the town from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the First World War. This will link in with the Textile Gallery and a small gallery displaying natural history specimens. This illustrates how the great interest in natural history sprang from rapid industrialization and urbanization in the nineteenth century. Finally, another gallery will be prepared (for opening in 1989) on the twentieth century, drawing on the photographic and sound archives.

Social history is also flourishing elsewhere in the museum. A large ground floor room is being rationalized and converted into a gallery dealing with the social and local history of transport. The emphasis is very much on interpretation of transport rather than an engineer's appreciation

of vehicles. In an adjacent outbuilding, the Coach House, an exhibition on the agricultural history of the area is due to open later this year.

These developments have been accompanied by a major reorganisation of storage provision. A new central store was opened in 1985, allowing rationalisation of the museum's stores. At the same time sections of the collections have had their documentation reviewed and catalogues of the textile and costume collections are in preparation.

By the summer of 1989 this major redevelopment of social history provision in Tolson Museum will have been completed. For the first time the people of Huddersfield will be able to find out about their own town in their own museum.

#### Dewsbury Museum

Dewsbury Museum was established in 1893 in Crow Nest Mansion, a seventeenth century house substantially remodelled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After a rather chequered career as a "general" museum, it closed in 1983 for major structural repairs. This offered the opportunity to not only completely refurbish it, but also to re-assess its future role and purpose.

It is situated less than a mile from the town centre in the middle of 42 acres of parkland. The museum clearly needed to include a local history element (though the collections were weak) but it also required some additional attraction to tempt families to come in out of the park and to make schools feel that it could offer something to them. The final decision was to make "Childhood" the principal theme of the museum.

When the museum re-opened in 1985 it consisted of galleries given over to "Children at Work" (covering work on the land, in the home, in the mills and down the mines) and "Children at Play" (including street games as well as playthings). In addition there is a children's reading area, a temporary exhibition gallery and a reconstructed 1940s classroom.

Dewsbury is a museum intended to be for children rather than a museum about children aimed at an adult audience. It tries to depict various aspects of the everyday life of children in the Dewsbury area since the seventeenth century. It is far from comprehensive, space alone preventing that. It does, however, attempt to portray the social history of children as being something more than middle-class Edwardian toys.

Work with schools forms a large part of the museum's work. Events and activities are held at the museum during the school holidays and half-term. There is also a Museum Activity Club in the summer holidays and later in the year a monthly Saturday Club will be established to provide activities for children using an historical theme.

In addition to the special events and activities, costume visits are held in the 1940s classroom. Children spend a half-day session investigating life in a wartime school. During their stay they are introduced to a variety of characters from "The Home Front", all of which are based on actual Dewsbury people, using reminiscences gathered from oral history work. They also experience an air raid warning, and visit the school's shelter. Afterwards they have the opportunity to take part in a variety of practical-based activities, handling sessions or investigative work using documentary evidence from the war. They also have the chance to get a very real taste of the 1940s in the shape of carrot cake! The initial response to those visits has come mainly from middle and primary

schools. However, bookings are being taken for GCSE pupils in September.

Dewsbury Museum can be seen as a prime educational resource and future developments are likely to reflect this. Teachers' resource packs are currently being produced. These will include reference material, documents, illustrative material and guidance on artefacts that can be used in conjunction with the various display areas. The first of these will be based on the 1940s and focus on the classroom. Later, there are plans to extend this to cover the Children at Work gallery, and will deal with working conditions in the nineteenth century.

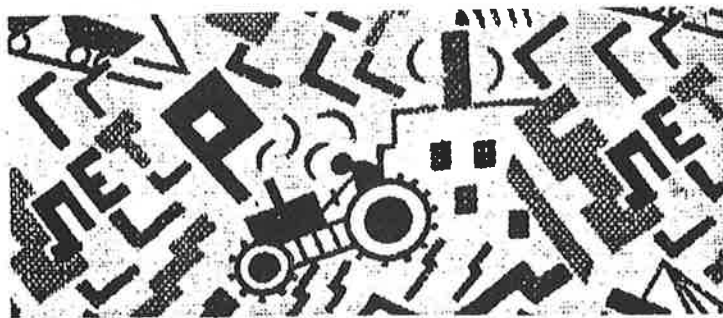
The decision to adopt childhood as a theme has been justified in terms of the considerably higher profile that the museum now enjoys in the local community and in its visitor figures. In the last full year before it closed, the museum had less than 5,000 visitors. In 1987/88 it attracted 32,450 visitors. The galleries are currently undergoing re-development with the addition of more display space and the exploration of new subjects (within the overall theme). The next stage will be to bring further rooms in the building into the museum, allowing an extension of the theme as well as further exploring the history of Dewsbury itself. The site itself is also developing with the creation of a Conservatory and an Urban Centre in adjacent buildings.

#### Summary

Although Kirklees Museums Service is not primarily organised on 'discipline' lines (there is no 'Department of Local/Social History') there are a number of curatorial staff contributing to social history provision, not all of them "social historians" in the accepted sense. There is no monolithic "history museum" interpreting the history of Kirklees. This would be totally inappropriate in a district created in 1974 and encompassing a wide variety of traditions and histories. Rather the approach is to interpret history in whatever manner seems most effective for the museum or historic house concerned, concentrating on both breadth of approach and quality of provision.

Jane Glaister (Senior Curator, East Kirklees)

Stuart Davies (Principal Officer, Museums and Galleries)



#### RUSSIAN STUDY VISIT

Group for Costume and Textile Staff in Museums

The Group will be travelling to the USSR between 6 - 16 March 1989. Visits will be made to museums in Moscow, Leningrad and Suzdal. Access has been arranged to stored collections in Moscow and Leningrad. The cost for the trip will be around £900 inclusive. A few places are still available. If anyone is interested in joining the party please contact the organisers as soon as possible.

Further information is available from Avril Hart, Department of Textiles and Dress, Victoria and Albert Museum (01 9388415) or Joanna Marschner, State Apartments, Kensington Palace (01 9379561).



THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY -  
ITS AIMS AND ITS ORIGINS

Since the First World War, but particularly since 1946, interest in local history among amateurs and professional academics has increased enormously. This has led to the establishment of many flourishing local history societies up and down the land, as well as to the establishing of university, extra-mural and Workers' Educational Association degree, diploma and other courses.

In 1977 a committee was set up under the chairmanship of Lord Blake "To make an assessment of the pattern of interest, activity and study in local history...and to make recommendations for meeting any needs revealed by amateur and professional local historians for support and services". This committee reported in 1979 and one of its main recommendations was that a strong, independent national organisation was needed to champion the cause of local history and its adherents.

Acting on the Blake committee's advice a meeting was held in London in March, 1982 to consider establishing The British Association for Local History. At that meeting a Steering Council was appointed ready for the Association to come in to being on 1st April, 1982. That council was superseded by a nationally elected council in April, 1983 of which a third retired in 1984 when fresh elections took place to fill the vacancies. - this has been the annual pattern ever since.

Briefly, the purpose of the Association is "to promote the advancement of public education through the study of Local History". Just how it does this depends entirely on the support, ideas and initiative it receives from its membership. Its administrative headquarters are in Chichester but Council and its committees meet mainly in London. The current chairman of Council is Miss Kate Thompson, Leicester's County Archivist. The Association's first President was Lord Briggs (Asa Briggs) and he, after a three-year term, was succeeded by Dr. Joan Thirsk.

Since its inception the Association has done much in either arranging, or encouraging local organisations to promote, courses and conferences for both adults and children. Some of these have been for local organisations on a regional basis, in an attempt to break down county boundaries or any other local barriers to the easy flow of ideas and co-operation.

"The Local Historian", for which B.A.L.H. took over responsibility, began life many years ago as "The Amateur Historian" and the current editor, Dr. Kate Tiller, is a member of the Association's Council. The Association is also responsible for other publications aiming to help local historians. Among these is the popular, re-printed, "Writing Local History" by David Dymond - also a member of Council and a previous editor of "The Local Historian". Two new series have just been introduced, with the publication of the first two booklets in each - Learning Local History ("Tudor and Stuart Handwriting" by Lionel Munby) and The Local Historian at Work ("Running a Local History Society" by Mary Paget) - one of which was helped with money out of the grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation towards the publication of work on local history of educational value in schools.

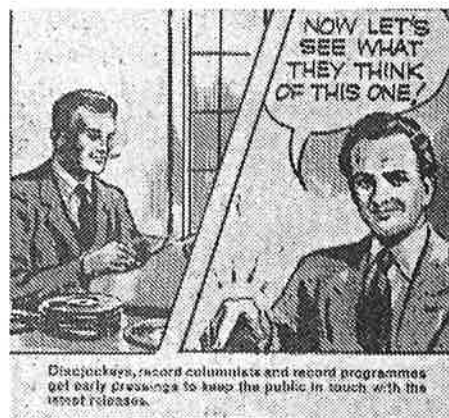
The programme of events organised by the Association varies from year to year but a reasonably typical year included introductory days at the Public Record Office (both at Kew and Chancery Lane), a series of day schools on local history topics (including the use of computers in local history, nonconformist local history sources, probate inventories, writing local history and oral history), regional conferences, area meetings for local history societies and courses for young people (aged 13-16) in Saffron Walden, Matlock and Portsmouth.

Currently running is a series on ports : Ports I was Grimsby, in 1986, Ports II was London's Docks, in 1987 and Ports III is Bristol, in 1988. This is planned to continue as are also the "days" in either towns (e.g. Salisbury, Chichester) or archives/libraries (e.g. The Borthwick Institute, York, The Bodleian, Oxford, Cambridge University Library and Trinity College Library, Cambridge, as well as The British Library and The College of Arms.

Further information about the Association, details of its publications and activities and forms of application for membership may be obtained from:-

The Administrator, The British Association for Local History, Shopwyke Hall, CHICHESTER, Sussex. PO20 6BQ

John Bynoe  
British Association for Local History.



#### TEEN DREAMS

Do your collections contain any copies of 1960s youth magazines? Honey, New Musical Express, Petticoat, True Romance, Fab 208, Melody Maker, Elvis, Boyfriend, Hit Parade, Mad, you know the sort of thing.

If you do, or if you have any tucked away at home (go on, own up) then Naomi Garrett, a 4th year honours student at Edinburgh University would love to hear from you. She needs to see as many magazines as possible for her dissertation research.

Contact Naomi Garrett, 130 Marchmont Road, Edinburgh, EH9 1AQ (tel: 031 4471724).



## SOCIAL HISTORY IN WONDERLAND

This year's Annual Study Weekend in Cardiff dealt with an area of which everyone has had personal experience, namely Childhood. Working in a Museum totally devoted to the subject I am well aware of this oft idealised period of life. People of all ages love the idea of "Childhood". The conference title "Social History in Wonderland" pinpointed both the way people regard childhood as a fantastic, imaginative adventure of delight and the trap curators can fall into by portraying only this wonderland element of childhood. Two main threads ran through the week-end - childhood as a subject for interpretation and museum display; and children as museum visitors.

The venue for the weekend was Aberdare Hall, a pleasant University Hall set in leafy surroundings. It did take some time to work why if you lived on the ground floor you had to go up one (or was it two?) flights of stairs, along a long corridor, and then down some more stairs...! The food was certainly palatable, though there were a few groans at the end of the weekend when yet another banquet of quiche and salad appeared. Any jet-lag incurred by the day's travelling to Wales was soon forgotten after the revitalising spread put on at the Industrial and Maritime Museum. Later, the locals in the nearby "Packet" pub weren't quite sure what had hit them when 70 Social History Curators arrived en masse! On Friday morning, after a wide choice of breakfast delicacies, the lecture programme started. Liz Frostick, programme organiser, introduced the subject, questioning what we actually mean by the word childhood. She drew attention to the dangers of "nostalgia posing as social history. The Victorian schoolroom and the Edwardian nursery sets were mentioned again and again throughout the weekend as a distorted cliché of childhood in the past. Can an adult's perception of childhood be accurate anyway? (This problem wasn't really addressed apart from in Mark O'Neill's member's paper with reference to his teenage exhibition.) Curators are often no less guilty than the public of having a nostalgic interest in childhood. The social historian in approaching the subject must be aware of the changing perceptions of childhood. Liz detailed the areas to be covered over the next few days as "Childhood", "Children" and "Curatorship".

The first two speakers of the morning had very contrasting approaches to the subject of childhood. Anthony Burton from Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood has a large collection of artefacts to make use of. Peter Jenkinson of the Grange Museum in Brent set out to challenge existing perceptions of childhood. Already we were presented with the problem that childhood cannot be represented as a common experience. Anthony Burton admitted that existing displays at Bethnal Green are "elitist and academic", representing the lives of middle and upper class people, and he aims to set up social history of childhood displays. He rejected intellectually suspect "heritage fakery" and a linear approach, preferring to offer displays which can be dipped in and out of and are more appropriate to available gallery space. His emphasis is on "the real and the round" and he hopes to communicate through the arrangement and juxtaposition of objects. He sets himself a challenging task, to present objects in such a manner as to portray their symbolic meaning. Will this be a way of reaching "non-literate" people? At the very least people should indeed be stimulated to exclaim "How different from us!". General concern amongst delegates was that lacking much interpretative supporting media, messages might go unread. We were given a useful reference sheet with a wide-ranging bibliography of books on childhood.

Peter Jenkinson's, "Beyond Enid Blyton and the Famous Five: the Changing Meaning of Childhood" challenged the narrow "Tinkerbell" version of childhood, all too often found in museums. Childhood cannot be seen as a static concept. Even today childhood is not always that period of sheltered innocence and Peter showed us a picture of a half-starved little girl, used by an N.S.P.C.C. appeal. It would be wrong to regard childhood in the past as a cosy Edwardian nursery. We are all, after all, familiar with Oliver Twist tales of child exploitation, children in mines and up chimneys. The major division between child and adult is really a Victorian invention. Laws for the protection of children have only come into force in the last 100 years. Peter regarded most of the Educational initiatives of the Victorian period as being motivated by a desire for social control. Organisations such as the Boy Scouts were a means to control the anti-social behaviour of the working classes. Peter questioned the plethora of nice Edwardian nursery museum displays - even such a place could be cruel and frightening. Though the unpleasantness of the history of childhood may be difficult to portray it should not be avoided.

The two papers stimulated much discussion. Anthony Burton has to work within the confines of his collection. Material artefacts are difficult to find to illustrate Peter's points. What clearly emerged was that childhood is a very complex area and it is necessary to look beyond the elitist and academic and beyond Enid Blytonesque fantasy.

Anna Davin's paper dealt with play, an area in which there is a particular lack of material evidence. She quoted Dickens in support of the idea that to play is to be normal for a child. For working class children play and work and childcare were inextricably tied up. Older children, particularly girls, had to look after younger siblings, often carrying babies in shawls while playing. The street was, and still is, very much a playground, offering opportunity for games with walls, chalk, stones, cherry pips and skipping ropes. Expensive toys survive much longer than the playthings of the poor. However a seemingly simple object of the street such as an orange box could double up as cradle and imaginary boat. Perhaps our lack of artefacts is not a totally insurmountable problem? Anna mentioned the child as a worker, particularly the irony of the child toy seller. She reinforced Peter's point that much Victorian philanthropy was about social control, not about education.

The afternoon was spent in the rural idyll of St. Fagans Welsh Folk Museum. Here we were able to wander at our leisure through cottages of different periods, St. Fagans Castle with its formal gardens and the museum galleries. The high spot of the trip was our visit to the schoolroom. Even as adults (?) we were intimidated by our strict schoolmaster, Walter Jones. Though some dubiety had been cast over the schoolroom set, the schoolroom experience seems a valuable way of stimulating children to think about the past.

The titles of the discussion groups all looked tempting - Design for Children, Multiculturalism and Children, and Activities for Children. It was a pity that the groups were rather large and time was too limited for productive discussion. (Having said that, it is amazing what we did manage to cram into the all too brief two and a half days of the study weekend!) After a reception in the museum we returned to Hall for the A.G.M.

Saturday morning was taken up with more lectures. Michael Glasson told us about his work in the

Birmingham "Change in the Inner City" programme, using oral testimony as an important source for studying childhood. We were reminded that toys are not the only artefacts of childhood. Working class childhood might have included street vending and child employment badges were a means of regulating this. Buttons were mounted on card by children. Anyone who has done oral history will be familiar with the strong memories the elderly have of childhood experiences. Mike drew our attention to photographs as another valuable source. Children often appear in photos for other purposes.

Clare Rose gave a paper concentrating on young boys clothing over the last two hundred years. She talked about clothing rituals e.g. breeching, clothing as a means of parental control and the design of children's clothing, based on adult figures such as sailors. Fantasy in children's clothing was also mentioned, using the "Rambo" tee-shirt as an example.

Nick Winterbotham's paper "Why bother with children" gave us an education officer's view of the child as a museum visitor. He emphasised the importance of the child led visit. Children are the adults of the future, the museum visitors of the future. Parents will come to the museum to occupy their children. Children who have a good experience through a school visit will take their parents back to the museum. Nick pointed out the way in which the museum can, with an object based approach, complement the very academic school education. The museum can stimulate enquiry which is basic to learning, through the handling of objects. It also helps if the teachers, who will have made the complicated arrangements to get the children to the museum, take an active part in the activities and realise why they have brought their classes!

The theme of children was carried on by Stephen Feber talking about his "Eureka" project, the new children's museum to be opened in Halifax in 1990. Children's museums are motivated by education while childhood museums are motivated by collections. Stephen showed us slides of American Children's museums which emphasised learning, by touch and enquiry, facilitated by accessible design (including step ladders for small children) and curator's behind glass doors. "Eureka" is described as a "discovery sheet in three dimensions". Interactive displays will allow for learning about things in context. Children will go around the museum's supermarket, learning about, for example, food. "Eureka" might not be social history as such - what it will do is to impart learning through pleasure. It is certainly an exciting project.

Any fears that "Big Pit" might be Heritage Centre-y were soon dispelled as we donned our hard hats with lights and our self-rescuers and crushed into the lift with our ex-miner guides. Interpretation was very much oral and our guides were more than willing to answer any enquiries. This was not a trip for the claustrophobic. We could easily imagine the horrors of being a child trapper when we switched off our lights and stood in the dark for minutes. Apart from the mine itself social history was well represented by the preserved colliery buildings and exhibition. We ended the afternoon travelling back through the valleys to Cardiff.

The evening commenced with a meal at Gibbs Jazz Restaurant. A little research was later done for next year's study weekend on "Popular Culture". A real "white stilettoes, dancing round your handbag" (is that a generic term?) disco was found. Fortunately we missed the Miss Wet T-Shirt evening. We were treated to a sword swallower cum fire-eater, who lay on a bed of nails as a sideline. The question still remains - who did in fact steal his sword...?

The last session on Sunday morning was devoted to member's papers, a great opportunity for members to tell us about their own projects. Though not a prerequisite, many papers did discuss work concerning childhood. Steph Mastoris told us about his cache of seventeenth century toys, found in a local church. Liz Frostick's "Schooldays" exhibition has a very appropriate setting, namely the Old Grammar School, otherwise known as Hull's new social history museum. The exhibition is wide ranging, covering not only the grammar school but education throughout the city. Design features such as the use of comic characters, the Bash Street Kids tie in the humorous with the serious academic. Yes - there is a schoolroom set, but one which can be walked into not just admired from behind a glass case. Stuart Davies of Kirklees talked about the problems of refurbishing Oakwell Hall to get rid of a vaguely seventeenth century effect and to make an accurate portrayal of the period. Sue Kirby told us about children's activities which were organised as part of an annual garden party event. Mike Glasson described developments in the Leather Centre at Walsall. He avoids the purely objects in show cases approach and combines it with demonstrations by leather workers. Mark O'Neill told us about his work with young people in Springburn. For his teenage exhibition he managed to get some wonderful pictures of teenagers being teenagers by lending a local school a camera and getting pupils to take their own photos. The photos combined with oral quotes were a good solution to a problem not addressed elsewhere. Our perceptions of childhood and youth are very much adult based. As curators and oral historians we don't often ask children what they think about being children.

The study weekend was a great success. Many questions were raised and lots of answers were offered. If anyone came to Cardiff in the belief that childhood was simply a Victorian schoolroom they certainly left with a much wider view! As a first time delegate I found the weekend valuable not only as a focus for the subject of childhood, but also as a forum for discussion between social history curators in a wide range of museums. I don't think we stopped talking museums all weekend!

Thanks must go to Liz Frostick for organising a stimulating programme and to John Williams-Davies and team who made us very welcome in Cardiff. Next year's study weekend will be in Glasgow, on the subject of popular culture.

Susan Jeffrey  
(Edinburgh District Council Museums)

#### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1988

The A.G.M. of the Group was held at Aberdare Hall, University of Cardiff, on Friday 8 July 1988, and was attended by a record number of members. Among the items dealt with in reports and discussion were the following :-

##### 1. Chairperson's Report

During the past year SHCG had issued a response to the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art, a detailed response to the Hale Report, and letters in support of three museums under threat.

##### 2. Training Needs Analysis

Among the important matters dealt with had been SHCG's response to the Museums Association's Training Needs Analysis. A more equitable balance between curatorial and managerial/marketing elements was recommended. It was stated that social history training required a sound academic basis.

### 3. Social History in Museums

HMSO intend to publish SHIM (Manual of Social History Curatorship) next summer. The manual will include entries from 76 authors.

### 4. 1989 Museums Association Conference

A working party has been set up to co-ordinate the Group's involvement in Museums Year and to liaise with the M.A. It is essential that the Group maintains a high profile during 1989.

### 5. Finances

The Group still has a healthy surplus. Possible uses of the Group's funds include promotion and publicity during Museums Year, advertising next year's ambitious programme of seminars, and maintaining the subsidy to seminars.

### 6. Elections

Mark Suggitt was elected to the post of Chairperson, and Steph Mastoris re-elected as Journal Editor. Three new members were elected to Committee.

### 7. Membership fees

A proposal that 'the subscription rate be altered to include an unwaged rate of £2' was amended to read that 'the subscription rates be altered to include an unwaged rate of £2 for existing members who find themselves unwaged'. This amendment was carried on a vote.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

As a member of both SHCG and SFLS I was disappointed by the disservice done to the Society for Folk Life Studies by Peter Brears (SHCG News 17). As the Society's Secretary he might have been expected to present his views 'in a disinterested manner'; regrettably, however, his opening paragraph is heavily tainted by his personal animosity towards SHCG. The suggestion that there has been a breakdown in relations between SHCG and SFLS is at best questionable: as Peter Brears later indicates 'quite a number' of curators are members of both. His inference that changes in SHCG are part of a Marxist plot verges on the paranoid.

In assuming this jaundiced view, Peter Brears fails to take account of more probable reasons for a divergence of approach. During the 1970s the Group was, as he admits, little more than a sub-set of the Society. However varied the content of the Society's conference, its published output then, as now, dealt primarily with rural, non-industrial communities. In the early 1980s SHCG began to take more account of urban and industrial social history, a move which brought about a corresponding shift in identity, reinforced (and vindicated) by a massive increase in membership.

The nature of the Group's and the Society's respective membership accounts for a second, no less crucial difference. Besides curators, the membership of SFLS is greatly enriched by the presence of academics and a good proportion of ordinary human beings. SHCG, as its name indicates, has a membership largely drawn from the museums profession. Aspects of curatorship and developments in social history museum provision are key concerns for SHCG but are of limited interest to SFLS, whose main concern lies in ethnological research.

Inevitably, there is no longer a cosy coincidence between membership of SHCG and curatorial membership of SFLS, yet this does not indicate a fundamental incompatibility. If, however, there has been a conscious effort to alienate one group from the other, as Peter Brears implies, his contribution to SHCG News provides further testimony of his own part in bringing this about, to the detriment of both organisations.

John Shaw  
(National Museums of Scotland)

P.S. For those who may still be wondering, the annual subscription to SFLS is £10, payable to Christine Stevens, Treasurer SFLS, Welsh Folk Museum, St Fagans, Cardiff CF5 6XB.

Dear Editor,

I am baffled by the decision at SHCG's AGM not to introduce an unemployed members' subscription rate. This was voted only a short time after members were invited to suggest how the group's surplus cash could be spent.

The vote was followed by an invitation for members to call upon SHCG for help in view of the predicted hard times we face from local government changes. The previous vote did not instill confidence in the Committee's ability to respond.

The next day we toured the South Wales valleys and Big Pit Mining Museum. Were no connections made? The vigour of Big Pit left me wondering if museum professionals elsewhere will ever dare to engage with the issues of the present?

Yours sincerely

Myna Trustram  
Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston.

The Chairperson replies.

Thank you for your letter concerning SHCG's subscription rates and the decision taken at the AGM not to introduce an unwaged rate. As you will remember the idea came from the floor and was debated at some length. The proposal of an unwaged rate came from the floor, as did the amendment. This did not totally reject an unwaged rate but "that the subscription rates be altered to include an unwaged rate of £2.00 for existing members who find themselves unwaged". This reflected the debate where members expressed concern over a potentially larger membership paying less for publications that are largely produced for members at cost.

The fact that the group has a healthy balance is due to prudent financial management by previous Committees and the profits of seminars which have produced some capital above normal revenue income and expenditure. The appeal was to look at sensible ways of spending this for the benefit of the membership.

Finally, I do not think you should link a vote by the members at the AGM with the ability of Committee to respond to Social History curators and collections under threat. Committee is there to respond to members needs. As a result our subscription rate is still very low (£7.00) as are our training seminars (£2.00) and theme seminars (£4.00). This group has been campaigning for threatened museums for the last five years; Trafford, Cogges Farm Museum, Ere-wash Museum and Monks Hall Museum have all been supported by us. There are two more 'on the books' at present. The group has also done much to promote curatorial engagement with the issues of the present, from how to collect and record it to trying to influence it; the SHCG report to the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art. Check out your old copies of the News and the Journal.

At present Committee is looking at the projected costings of an increased membership of unwaged people, something it could not do at the A.G.M. A proposal will be on the agenda for the 1989 A.G.M.

