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Teenage Mutant Hero
Turtle Free Zone

C O M M E N T

MUSEUMS ARE FOR PEOPLE ?

Museums are for people. This is a simple enough statement, and one that is made often enough, particularly by social history curators. But it is belied by much of the evidence. For too many people museums are a closed shop. Museums are places in which they feel uncomfortable, which make assumptions and use language in ways they cannot relate to. All too often displays seem to presuppose specialist knowledge. Exhibitions appear to be designed purely for the benefit of a self appointed cultural vanguard.

As social historians we would all claim that we are concerned primarily with people, their lives and experiences. Many of us are attempting to build up relationships within our local communities and to develop a more outgoing approach to our work. We would argue that our museums have a vital role to play in providing a focus for the expression of a local cultural identity. But how do we define that identity? How many of us have actually taken the trouble to ask local people what they think and what they expect of us? Rather, do we risk succumbing to the fatal delusion that we, somehow, are the sole custodians of the community's identity, that it is what we say it is? Hopefully, we will have the courage to listen to what people are saying and adapt our working methods to encourage their greater participation in the work of the museum.

Many of us work in multi-disciplinary museums. Changing the approach of one section alone within the museum will be of little benefit if the institution as a whole puts people off. If the museum seems to divide people up into those who have the cultural wherewithal to take part and those who do not, then we are not going to persuade the majority that the museum is for them. Museums as a whole need to rethink their relationship with the public, to find ways in which to highlight the imagination, insight and experience of local people. To achieve this we must enjoin all our colleagues in pulling down the cultural barricades. We must persuade them that the public consists not merely of, say, specialist porcelain collectors, but, potentially, everyone. This is the central issue we must address as we struggle to set an effective agenda for the 1990s.

Ian Lawley

PEOPLE ARE THE DRIVING FORCE

SHCG Annual Study Weekend 1990
Hull 20-23 September

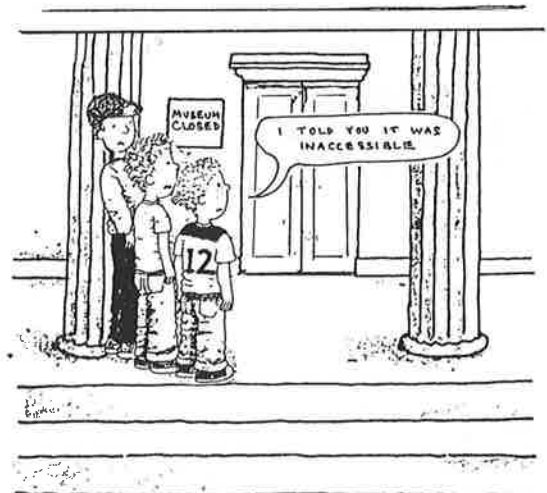
The programme of this year's Annual Study Weekend, subtitled 'Getting people involved in museums', has now been finalised. Booking forms are enclosed inside this edition of SHCG News.

The aim of the study weekend is to look at the population as a whole (not just museum visitors) and at how museums in general relate to people. As well as the keynote papers there will be a series of workshops and case studies aimed at showing ways in which people can become involved in museums that are of benefit to them and not merely to the institution. The emphasis is practical and participative, so that those attending can learn techniques as well as share ideas. It promises to be a vital and important conference, one that no member of SHCG will want to miss.

Two free places are available at the ASW for SHCG members who have not previously attended a study weekend and who have no funding provided by their museums. Further details are available from Dieter Hopkin, SHCG Secretary, at the National Railway Museum, Leeman Road, York, or from Susan Jeffrey, at Hull City Museums.

There is also an opportunity for members to give short papers (about 20 minutes in length) about recent projects they have been involved in. These will be presented on the Sunday morning (23 September). Papers from members who have never previously spoken at an ASW would be particularly welcome. If you would like to give a paper please contact Susan Jeffreys at Hull Museums (tel. 0482 222727).

Members are also advised that the SHCG Annual General Meeting will be held during the course of the study weekend. Papers will be distributed in due course.



TYPICAL ?

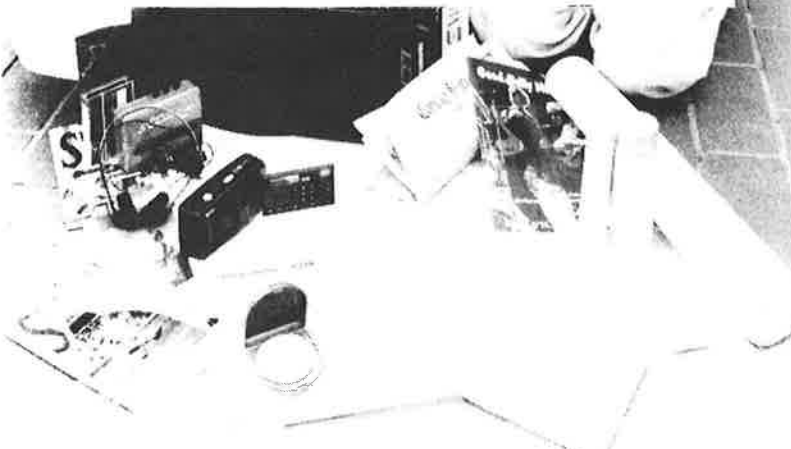
Heritage Projects have struck again, this time in Kiev. Having dealt with the 'average' Viking at Yorvik, they have now turned their hand to what is described as 'an honest and realistic account of the average British family'.

Their exhibition, depicting the daily lives of the typical (and fictional) Goodwin family, features in a month long trade and cultural fair. Bemused Soviet visitors to the 'British in Kiev' display will find a reconstruction of a 'typical' British high street, complete with Marks and Spencers, W.H. Smith and Our Price Records. A 'typical semi-detached three bedroom house' and three separate work places are also included in the layout.

SHCG News would be interested to learn how Heritage Projects came by their typical semi. We would also like to know exactly where the average family lives (but we can guess).



The winners of the Great Museum Time Capsule Competition with some of their chosen objects (and members of staff).



THERE'S NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

A credit card, a video of Neighbours, a McDonald's menu, a cordless phone, a CD of Tom Jones's Greatest Hits, a Rubik's Cube, a tin of Alphabetti Spaghetti, a Roald Dahl paperback, a Kwik Save plastic carrier bag, a biro and (groan) a filofax. These were just some of the many items suggested for burial in a time capsule by the thousands of local people who entered a recent competition organised by the Social History Section at Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery. Entrants to the **Great Museum Time Capsule Competition** were asked to list ten items reflecting life in the Potteries today, together with a self portrait and a message for the future. The aim of the competition was to encourage people to think of themselves and their own everyday experience as part of history.

A common concern expressed by many entrants was the present state of the environment. "Sorry about making the holes in the ozone layer", wrote one 11 year old boy. Another message read, "Hope you are living in a good environment as we seem to be destroying it". Several writers suggested that various types of seed might be included. As one girl put it : "The trees around me are being distroide. In your day there may be no trees. Please plant this seed if you wish". Another entrant suggested a lump of coal, "in case supplies are by then exhausted". Many entries betrayed economic and political concerns - a job application form, a wage slip, a community charge demand, a photograph of Margaret Thatcher, a video of "party parliticle broadcasts", for instance. The various artistic endeavours of the cast of Neighbours were also popular, particularly Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan tapes. Interestingly, although the competition was open to all age groups, the vast majority of entrants were aged under 16.

The competition was judged by a panel which included the TV astronomer Patrick Moore, Mark Fisher MP and Joyce Archer, who works at the museum as a cleaner. Eventually, two joint winners were chosen, Emma Goodwin and Carl Grattage, both aged 12. Emma's list included a local street map, a menu from a local restaurant, make-up ("with an explanation of use"), a Walkman, a school timetable and an Argos catalogue. An oatcake recipe, a Stoke City Football Club programme, a local bus timetable and a cassette "telling of a typical potter's life" were among the items chosen by Carl. The two winners were then invited to join members of museum staff for a shopping expedition to collect the items they had chosen. The objects were then displayed as part of the exhibition **Telling Tales**, prior to being sealed in a locally made black polyurethane time capsule ready for burial. The time capsule will be buried beneath the new Crown Courts, just across the road from the City Museum in Bethesda Street, Hanley, in mid-July.

HOAX SHEEP TRAIL HERITAGE HORROR

Among the more esoteric pieces of unsolicited mail dropping on the SHCG News doormat was a recent cutting from the Western Daily Press. It tells the disturbing tale of how residents of Widcombe and Wellsway, Bath, received letters purporting to come from Bath City Council asking them to make their keys available so that guided tours could be conducted through their homes. They were told that tourists, following in the footsteps of early sheepfarmers, would need to get in and out of their homes. The letters informed the residents that, 'having consulted an 18th century map, we find that their route, which is a public footpath, leads directly through your house'. Confronted by irate and anxious residents, council officials called in the police to investigate the hoax.

REVIEWS

BREAKING NEW GROUND

Department of Museum Studies
Leicester University
8 - 11 April 1990

For those, like us, who are relative newcomers to museum work, the profession appears plagued by a crisis of identity and purpose. In the social history field in particular, a lack of self-confidence and belief has meant that museums run the risk of surrendering the initiative to other agencies. The heritage industry continues more successfully to court the public; academic social historians are increasingly allowed to set an agenda for museum historians to follow. Museums are riddled with the uncertainties of our post-modern age, and their problems only reflect this wider cultural malaise. But this state of flux also offers the possibility of regeneration as much as of stagnation, providing the opportunity, in challenging old orthodoxies, to create a more vital and relevant service to the public.

In this context Breaking New Ground came as a welcome opportunity to seek new directions and fresh approaches. The second major conference organised by Leicester University's Department of Museum Studies, its aim was "to provide a showcase of advanced research in the field of museum studies... to open up new and challenging ideas to the museums profession and to all those with an interest in better and more effective museum provision", and by so doing, "provide opportunities for the reappraisal of many of the assumptions that underpin museum studies". The boldness of this intent attracted over 150 delegates from not only all parts of Britain, but also from over 20 different countries. The speakers selected were an equally diverse mix of museologists and also academics from other disciplines. The conference represented an important flexing of academic muscle by both the Department of Museum Studies at Leicester and the discipline as a whole. It was an attempt to display the need to develop theoretical ideas and concepts to inform our day-to-day practice.

While much of the success of the conference lay in the wide range and diversity of specialised studies, the most stimulating paper was an attempted overview of the future of museums and curatorship by Tomislav Sola of the University of Zagreb, Yugoslavia. In a consciously provocative paper, Sola forcefully challenged existing notions of the nature and function of museum studies.

Museums, he argued, needed to be integrated with all other agencies concerned with the past (e.g. libraries, archives etc.), a shift from a museocentric to a transdisciplinary, holistic approach. Museology should therefore be replaced by 'heritology', to reflect this change. Museology, in any case, cannot be considered an academic discipline, as these cannot be based around an institution (there's no such thing as 'librarology', only librarianship!). Sola is perhaps unaware of the highly perjorative connotations of 'heritage' to many British museum workers, but this is surely merely to quibble over semantics, and does not devalue the strength of his argument. Can curators respond to this, not fearing that such a shift might destroy their professional identity, but by grasping the opportunity to emerge as part of a broader, brave new

profession? Sola proceeded to criticise the current self-image of museums as guardians of cultural property, and therefore, by default, defenders of the political status quo. Could not museums be a transcending force, like the theatres of Vaclav Havel's revolution, the voice and conscience of the people, and not that of society?

Nima Smith, Keeper of Ethnic Arts at Bradford Art Galleries and Museums, gave a very well received paper, (after several heavy sessions of semiotics) on, 'ethnic arts and their audiences'. She investigated the change of policy in some museums in the 1980's towards devoting more time and space to exhibitions relating to the non-white population. She then looked at three recent exhibitions in particular, 'A Golden Treasury' (Bradford 1988), 'Traditional Arts of the Gujarat' (Leicester 1988), and 'The Other Story' (Hayward Gallery 1989). She focused on the tensions over editorial control between ethnic community groups and curators, and on how the media reacts with hostility towards exhibitions which challenge stereotypical representations of ethnic minorities.

Gaby Porter gave a strongly theoretical paper entitled, "Partial truths: the representation of women in history museums". Central to this was a clear setting out of how she had combined the two theoretical positions of feminism and post-structuralism. Feminism, it was stated, says basically that no thinking is objective and impartial, but that the dominant position from which knowledge "Speaks" is masculine; post-structuralism, that meanings are actually produced and are not naturally occurring. By bringing these together she looked at how masculine and feminine representations are constructed in museums. Through various examples, she demonstrated that women were "the other" in history museums; representations of women were marginalised somewhere at the side of the display area. Women were often absent from work place sets, whereas men could be found in an active state as the subjects of the display. Porter's contribution showed the importance of bringing theoretical rigour to the analysis and understanding of museums.

These two papers reflected crucial developments in the analysis of the largely unconscious racist and sexist character of traditional museum displays. What was largely missing from the conference was a similar consideration of the portrayal of social class. Do not museum representations of class need to be analysed in a similar way? Is class, given its current state of flux, too complex or too unfashionable a concept for us to consider? Beyond this, should we not be looking for the interrelationships as well as the specificities of forms of oppression, by gender, ethnicity and class, since these are ultimately connected by the dominant power relations of society? Should we not be moving, as Sheila Rowbotham has argued, Beyond the Fragments? The need for such an understanding was raised by Gaynor Kavanagh in her paper entitled, 'The museum profession and professional self-consciousness'. She considered the issues of the class, gender and ethnic background of museum professionals in relation to power within the museum, and ultimately the control of the museum as a medium of communication and interaction. We need to find more effective policies to alter the composition of the profession if we are to challenge dominant representations. Kavanagh's paper was equally valuable in considering the history and development of the museum profession, and the nature of professionalism itself.

Susan Pearce, of the Department of Museum Studies, Leicester University, in an invaluable contribution, introduced the notion of Collection Studies, the study of collections and collecting. She concentrated on the nature of collecting, stressing its significance as a popular cultural activity rather than simply something which museums do. The paper drew on Freudian, Marxist and Romantic perspectives (and the empirical evidence in 'Exchange and Mart'!) to develop a theory that there are three main types of collecting. These are: 'souvenir' collecting, where objects are used to personalise the past; 'fetishistic' collecting, the accumulation of large quantities of objects to satisfy emotional needs; and 'systemmatic' collecting, where objects are chosen as examples to convey an intellectual meaning. While museums, since Pitt Rivers, have increasingly moved towards 'systemmatic' collecting, all museums, particularly social history museums, are full of items donated by fetishists or souvenir collectors. Just think of your cigarette cards or samplers! Pearce's analysis is crucial to enable us to understand the nature of the collections we have inherited. We could all learn much by applying it.

Paulette McManus, a communications consultant, presented some results of her original, observational research into how groups of people visiting museums 'make sense of exhibits'. Her research shows that groups negotiate meanings, by sharing their understandings of an exhibit. Although individuals within the group may differ in their final, private, understanding of a display, that understanding is bound to be affected by the group consensus of what the exhibit is about. She then proceeded to look at what people actually do when trying to understand an exhibit. She observed that people hold 'conversations' with the label writer, out loud if in a group. She then presented the case for 'conversational' labels and texts. In practical terms, this means the curator must ask her/himself when writing a piece of text, not only, "What do I want to say?", but also, "Who do I want to say this to?". It means using 'You' in the text, as if the label writer is talking to the visitor. She forcefully argued that we need to more fully consider 'the character and ways' of our audiences in framing a communications strategy.

Helen Coxall investigated the intricacies of language in museum texts. She focussed on our unconscious use of language. While the curator can fully strive for objectivity, language can convey unintended meanings. Through this hidden power of language, the official policy of a museum and the curator's own ideological perspective can be transmitted through text and labels. If you think this is simply an intellectual game, with no relevance to your own 'ideologically sound' use of language, consider these examples which Coxall presented:

"Since over 4000 Jews were arriving every year in London, a large area of the East End was soon a clearly defined 'ghetto'."

"Numerous Russians and Germans also found lodgings in the courts and alleys of East London".

"Down in the Docks were colonies of Lascars, Malays and Chinese".

Who "defined" the "'ghetto'"? Why does the use of "4000" and "large" maximise the numbers of Jews, whereas the use of the words "found lodgings" makes the Russians and Germans seem to fit more naturally into the city? Why are the Lascars, etc. in "colonies" (a term used to describe groups of animals), and why "down" in the Docks, implying that these are at the bottom of society. There is little doubt that the curators writing these texts did not intend to convey these impressions.

Peter Johnson and Barry Thomas, economists from the University of Durham, began Tuesday's session with the paper, 'Assessing the impact of a museum on the local economy'. They presented a study of the North of England Open Air Museum at Beamish, in terms of its impact in generating employment, both directly and indirectly in the region. As well as jobs created at Beamish itself, there is a need to calculate the indirect and induced employment, i.e. the jobs generated by the goods and services (e.g. pies for the cafe) required by the museum. They then went on to analyse two further factors in employment generation, which were much harder to quantify. Can any employment generated outside the museum in the region (e.g. in hotels, shops, industries) be attributed to the museum's existence? How far had people diverted their spending to the museum from other goods and services, and hence contributed to job losses elsewhere in the North East? Their use of visitor surveys as the source of data for these analyses was a novel approach, asking such questions as, "What would you have done with the money had Beamish not existed?" Their surprising conclusion was that only 49 jobs had been generated in the region beyond those employed at Beamish itself. One was left to question the nature of the jobs created (skilled, part-time etc.), and how reliable statistics derived from visitors' answers to hypothetical questions can really be.

Neil Cossons's contribution, the closing lecture, 'Class, Culture and Consumers', was a predictably provocative paper. He drew up an imaginary hierarchy of museum collections, with fine art at the top, "social history somewhere near the bottom" (but apparently upwardly mobile!), and science below that, propped up only by industrial collections. Cossons attributed the low status of science to our society's lack of appreciation of the subject, perpetuated by a media 'stuffed full of arts graduates'. While it is valuable to appreciate that there is a hierarchy and consider its implications, it was impossible to agree that science and science museums get a worse press than social history. Unfortunately no time was given for comment after this paper. Indeed, it was a pity that there was not time for a plenary discussion on the conference as a whole.

Social history curators were perhaps surprisingly underrepresented among the speakers. It was fortunate that there was an unforeseen opportunity for Mark O'Neill to step in and give a paper he "had prepared earlier", in true Blue Peter style. While his work is now familiar to British curators, it seemed a good thing that an international audience was given an opportunity to hear his important contributions to the theory and practice of community museums.

We have not had the space to discuss all nineteen papers, so we have picked out the ones we considered most relevant to social history curators. The papers will be published in 1991 in two volumes. Conferences of this kind cannot avoid at times parodying David Lodge's Small World. One paper on museum semiotics (musemiotics!) was incomprehensible to those (like us) who are semiotically semi-illiterate. Breaking new ground? Some papers, particularly Tomislav Sola's, definitely did offer a theoretical underpinning for an agenda for the 1990's, something which SHCG is still struggling towards.

Kevin Moore and Harriet Purkis,
(Full-time M.A. Students)

Department of Museum Studies,
Leicester University.

LABOUR HISTORY IN MUSEUMS IN THE 1990s

Social History Curators Group and the Society for the Study of Labour History Seminar.

National Museum of Labour History, Manchester.
(26 April 1990)

I was asked, by the Editor, to write a piece reviewing the day's proceedings in Manchester. I agreed with some trepidation, expecting the task to be a difficult one - so many speakers (16 in all!) with so many views and experiences to absorb and report.

It was only half way through the day - brain buzzing with the information and ideas presented and wrist threatening scrawler's cramp - that I noticed Bob Perks was doing the right thing. True to form he was taping the proceedings. I suspect, therefore, that you will all have a chance to read about the day, more fully and accurately, in due course. I can only hope to outline the meeting and give some ideas of the views raised. So here goes.

The ball was set in motion with a welcome from Eddie Cass, Chair of the Trustees of the National Museum of Labour History. Dai Smith (UCW Cardiff) followed with a thoughtful discussion of the 'business' of heritage and its impact on the portrayal of history.

History must be concerned with relationships - of people, social groups and the economy of a society. The 'Heritage Industry' seems to produce a freeze frame of the real thing. Its portrayal of the past is often sentimental and, although perhaps unintentionally, it inevitably falsifies history because of its lack of discussion of those very relationships mentioned earlier. In providing for tourism, the Heritage Industry does not brook the challenge of historical truth and interpretation, rather it deals with echoes of the past.

However, Dai Smith stated, the reality of the situation is that the Heritage Industry will not go away. Museums should not merely ignore it or treat it with contempt. After all, we are all guilty - by degrees - of being selective in our interpretations of the past. The struggle is over the nature of interpretation. Museum staff and academic historians should, rather, become actively involved in the Heritage Industry in order to improve the situation from within. Dai Smith acts as a co-opted member of the Rhondda Valley Heritage Park project.

Ruth and Eddie Frow outlined the background and growth of the Working Class Movement Library in Salford. Realising how dispersed Labour Movement material was, it was the Frows' aim to gather together resources to improve accessibility and, therefore, promote the study and understanding of the working class struggle.

What had started as a hobby of collecting, in the 1950s, soon developed into a veritable disease. To protect the future of the library it was registered as a Charitable Trust. The library is now supported by Salford City Council and is located at Jubilee House - a nurses' home dating from the turn of the century. There are two trained Librarians and a Library Assistant. Periodicals, journals, pamphlets, microfilms, trade union archives and related theses form an invaluable resource in the North West.

Catherine Rew and Bill Williams discussed the ideals and realities faced at the Manchester Jewish Museum since its inception in the 1970s and opening in 1985. The primary aim of the museum was to preserve the local Jewish heritage in the light of slum clearance, neglect, apathy and the mobility of the population. It was to

re-educate both the Jewish and wider communities to understand the Jewish contribution to the local heritage. It was not to be a museum of Judaism nor about the elite in the Jewish community but rather about ordinary life.

The museum was to include material reflecting the importance of women's roles in society, secular aspects of Jewish life, oral history, personal and official documents, trade union and labour activity. Displays attempt to capture these objectives and are accompanied by an education programme aimed at helping to break down the stereo-type image of Jewish people.

The practicalities and difficulties were also dealt with - not least the financial insecurity of the establishment, the need to make sure the collections are safe and in good order and the need to consolidate the enthusiasm and achievements for the next phase of development.

The MGC Registration Scheme has helped the museum in formalising a collecting policy. It is not collecting as actively as it was although new acquisitions are sought for temporary exhibitions. In some cases objects are deposited elsewhere, such as Manchester Central Library or the local Record Office.

Joan Bellamy, on Trade Union banners in teaching, noted that labour historians were not always using the material culture available to them in their research. Her belief was that the imagery of the Trade Union Movement could be used as a cross-discipline source. She demonstrated this by showing how an Open University Arts Foundation Course had incorporated the study of banners and emblems.

Stella Butler spoke of the background to the Pankhurst Centre and the Health Authority's plan to demolish 62 Nelson Street for a carpark to the hospitals. The building was saved. It is not intended as a museum but rather as a Resource Centre for women. It rents out offices, has space for meetings and exhibitions and holds workshops. It also houses a 'room' as Mrs Pankhurst may have furnished it.

The Urban Aid Programme has provided for a Tourist Officer post at the Centre. Judi Hershon was appointed two days before the seminar. Members were able to meet Ms Hershon and hear of her broad plans for the Centre. The trust hopes to encourage more visitors to the house and to stage more exhibitions on relevant topics. Recognising its potential to assist groups with information, such as schools, volunteers provide information sheets and booklists on related subjects. Ms Hershon is keen to hear from museums and galleries that might wish to consider the Pankhurst Centre as another venue for travelling exhibitions (tel: 061-273 5673).

Pauline Webb provided a background to the Greater Manchester Museum of Science and Industry. She spoke of the 'Making of Manchester' galleries as one element in the museum's efforts to broaden the scope of its work. The lack of and need for a social history museum in Manchester combined with the Science and Industry Museum's commitment to look beyond the narrow industrial history of the city. Themes such as urban development, sanitation and housing are given gallery space. Efforts are made to 'humanise' the technology galleries and plans for the 1990s include galleries on printing, textiles, gas, housing and food to the city.

At this stage Jack Jones (who was unable to open the meeting as planned) was available to say a few words on the launching of the National Museum of Labour History. He noted the need for the respect and preservation of our labour

history and the use of that material as an important springboard for education, enjoyment and involvement of the public. He stressed the need to keep green our memory, to plan for the future based on what we know of the past, to eliminate mythology and get to the truth.

Lorraine Knowles would up a very full morning's session with information on the development of Merseyside's Labour History Museum. It took a broad remit, representing working class life on Merseyside 1840s-1980s. Strangely, the Social History Department took no part in its establishment.

Lorraine discussed the visitor surveys and evaluation studies undertaken. She mentioned implications of central reviews on collecting policies, departmental structures and research. In-house research and publication is to be extended and enhanced with research work by outside bodies. It is hoped that collaborative projects on such subjects as 'Black Presence in Liverpool' and 'Popular Music in 20th century Liverpool Life' will be launched shortly.

The new Regional History Dept. (including the Museum of Labour History) is facing relocation. Its brief is Liverpool history in its broadest sense and, it is hoped, the new site will include a Liverpool History Centre - building on the success of the Natural History Centre - sometime later in 1991.

After lunch, still punch-drunk from the morning's proceedings, we reconvened for another interesting session.

Glen Jordan spoke of the Butetown History and Arts Project at 'Tiger Bay' in south Cardiff. What had begun as part of a Phd. Thesis in Anthropology for the University of Chicago emerged as a project encouraging local residents to represent themselves and produce a people's archive of oral history and photography.

The Butetown Project has recently become involved with dockland regeneration schemes in Cardiff. Tiger Bay is in the centre of the area involved and is an important part of the 'tourist attraction' scheme. The group assumes that the scheme will, eventually, damage or destroy their community. They are, therefore, keen to ensure their history is preserved. Echoing Dia Smith's earlier point, the project feels that if they do not "do the tourism bit" someone else will - inaccurately. The group hopes a people's museum and community arts facility will be incorporated into the redevelopment scheme.

Geoff Wade of the Portsea Island Co-operative Museum was joined by Ken Lunn of Portsmouth Polytechnic, where a new degree has been launched. Geoff began by describing the background to the Portsea Co-operative and its museum. Its work includes the installation of small displays (in offices, shopping centres and superstores), archive storage and publication.

History in Portsmouth is characterised by the naval military heritage. Efforts to redress the balance led Ken Lunn to work with the Co-op Museum, developing courses for and presenting an important historical resource to his students. He is concerned that students should develop the skills to translate academic research into more popular products than essays and dissertations. The courses, recently approved, will involve his students in the production of educational packs, displays and exhibitions.

The day's papers were concluded by Myna Trustram of the National Museum of Labour History. She discussed some of the questions staff there had been facing in opening up the museum. Myna focussed on their role as a National Museum, its

implications for their collecting policy and means of interpreting labour history in the museum context.

Myna also dealt, in some depth, with the 'heritage centre' issue, in the light of the Upper Campfield Market site they are taking over in Castlefield - just a stone's throw from the Granada Studio tours. Here, for example, Coronation Street is recreated - although it never existed in the first place! Myna expressed concern that one of the potential dangers of Castlefield is that history is removed from our everyday lives to something consumed at weekends in a special place given over to its production. However, we do have to take on board the fact that heritage attractions are popular and examine our own practice in the light of their apparent success.

In its previous guise, in Limehouse, the National Museum of Labour History collections and displays were concerned with organised labour history. Without becoming the National Museum of Social History, the new museum is wanting to look more to working people, not just their 'labour activities'.

Museums have usually tried to create order out of chaos in interpreting history. Staff at the museum are aware that traditional interpretation and display methods, generally, do not reflect the complexity of life. Myna put forward the suggestion that perhaps artists could - with their vision and freedom of expression - contribute important statements about the past and its relationship with the present. Above all Myna believes it is the museum's task, in their displays, to encourage people to retain an open mind on the past. Heritage-based attractions tend to present visitors with one view of the past and risk seducing them into accepting that there is only one view of 'the way we were'.

I do feel that all those attending this seminar admired the thought and consideration going into the development of the National Museum of Labour History and wish them well with their progress.

Bill Jones, of the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum, had the unenviable task of summing up the day. He noted, with optimism, the many new initiatives underway and applauded the careful thought and questioning of our motives and methodologies. However, he also voiced the meeting's concern regarding the Heritage Industry. Lively questions followed and, eventually, we all reeled off wondering what the third joint meeting of the Social History Curators Group and the Society for the Study of Labour History would bring!

Sue Ashworth

Lancaster City Museums



Social History in Museums 1990-2001

This recent SHCG seminar held at the Yorkshire Museum raised many issues social history curators must confront during the coming decade. Unfortunately, the seminar did not meet its objective of setting an agenda for action, an oversight which did not go unacknowledged.

The importance of a collection was not disputed by the speakers. Collections featured strongly in many of the papers given during the day. It was suggested, however, that many collections are sadly lacking in their representation of significant sections of society. Indeed, the approach taken by social history museums towards a balanced interpretation of their area is under question.

Whilst the academic world has recently taken steps forward to include women's history and black and ethnic minority history, museums have done little to match this advance. Dr. Roy Porter's paper was illuminating in showing the extent to which contemporary academics have turned to new sources of information which cast a new light on social history, and, indeed, question our assumptions about the past. One of Dr. Porter's contributions has been his research into the growth of consumerism since the industrial revolution, particularly the processes by which objects acquire a status value which in turn influences their market value. Grave social consequences ensued as people began to live beyond their means and an anti-materialist reaction set in.

Rosie Crook developed in detail some themes touched upon by Dr. Porter. Women's history has been hugely neglected by museums. The museum establishment, male dominated and with a professional body which has never had a female president, suffers from an acute lack of awareness of the issues of women's history. Whilst collections need to be extended to develop women's history, a significant proportion of existing collections could be put to use immediately to interpret women's role in society both past and present. There is a lack of awareness of the significance of existing collections. Curators need training in order to realise this significance, in much the same way as they are trained in industrialisation or transportation.

Museums need to move to take women's history out of the realms of pure academic research. Material culture, as Roy Porter demonstrated, can complement research. We need to question objects again, shift our perspective. In being removed from the paid workforce, women assumed domestic roles which entailed certain skills. How were these skills transmitted to children, particularly daughters? How were achievements in domestic servicing measured? How was the importance of tasks measured? These questions could be answered by a greater appreciation of objects in our collections.

Working with groups outside the museum also removes social history from the ivory towers and breaks down the elitism associated with history in museums. Groups such as industrial historians, steam enthusiasts and family historians, are extremely active in their field, often covering subjects museums, through lack of resources or will, cannot cover. This is particularly apparent with black and ethnic groups. Again, much contemporary museum representation of these minorities is mere tokenism.

Each Museum needs to establish a rigorous collecting policy to reflect the social make up of its community. Stuart Davies spoke of

neighbourhood management, a concept in which existing collections are taken to the community and the community is encouraged to form its own collections. This is the facilitating role which social history curators must adopt in their relationship with community leaders to enable groups to collect and preserve their own material culture, and display it according to their own self-perceptions, not those of the museum worker who is more than likely male, white and middle class.

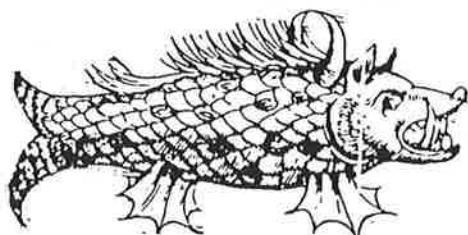
It is clear that documentation will remain a major issue during the 1990s. A reappraisal of existing collections to take account of women's history or ethnic history would entail changes in documentation procedure. Classification systems such as SHIC are inappropriate for ethnic material culture. There would need to be an equivalent system. Again, representatives of the groups involved need to be included in the process to ensure that the full significance of an object is recorded. Hand in hand with documentation should be the dissemination of information between curators, museums and their communities. Christine Johnstone saw the way forward in computerised catalogues of collections, Rosie Crook argued for more articles in both the Museums Journal and in SHCG Journal.

The papers delivered by David Fleming and Lesley Colsell looked in some detail at current trends in urban history and rural and regional history, respectively. David Fleming had an armoury of facts at his disposal to illustrate the failure of museums to instruct the public on urban history. His illustrations indicated the need to record our environment in such a way that themes and perspectives can be drawn out. He even hinted that aspects of our current urban history could be associated with specific cities. Lesley Colsell drew many parallels with this. She was however the only speaker to mention 1992 and its possible consequences. We are already accustomed to a loss of regional identity due to mass production, cross-migration between rural communities and urban areas and so on. The prospect of greater standardisation of living patterns and material culture is a daunting one. This has implications for museum collecting policies. If we accept a regional variation in a hand tool which is otherwise merely another standard, mass-produced object, what criteria can we employ in selecting objects for our collections?

Val Bott and Stuart Davies threw a different perspective on the proceedings. The former was concerned with increasing audiences for museums. Using statistics from the 1989 Touche Ross Survey, and cultural findings from the work of Nick Merriman, she drew a cameo picture of current museum audiences. Coupled with this were expressions of fears and doubts about the position of museums in society. In order to survive, museum professionals must constantly evaluate their work (a point also raised by Stuart Davies) and ensure that their public service does not become ephemeral and lost. Museums are in competition with a highly organised heritage industry and must justify their place in the community. Work outside the museum is one aspect of this and museum professionals must be aware of whom they are responding to and who they must seek out. This is where the work of Merriman is important: museums are failing to attract younger audiences and yet their current audience is ageing; significant minority groups feel alienated and so on. This is not just because of traditional perceptions of museums as elitist, but also because these groups are not represented in the collections. Stuart Davies placed some of these issues into a professional context and introduced other external pressures, not least of which are financial, likely to play on museums over the next ten years.

The papers given at this seminar illustrate that social history curators do have a vision of the future. That vision needs an agenda, which this conference failed to produce. To maximise credibility both within and outside the profession, that agenda is essential. Without it the questions raised at this seminar may never be answered satisfactorily. The call for greater dissemination of information which was common to all speakers may fall on deaf ears, as may the calls for greater awareness amongst all museum staff of different perspectives on social history; for equal opportunity; for greater resources; for greater involvement with local groups and for stronger justification of our place in the community in the face of a growing heritage industry.

Alan Taylor
Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery



CATERING FOR WOOPIES?

The 1990 AIM Conference
Dundee. 18-19 May

This year's AIM Conference was held for the first time in Scotland. Dundee was an appropriate venue as the city's independent museums and arts provision highlight both the potential and the dilemmas which face heritage projects throughout the UK. This was the theme of the conference and the first day's programme was divided between 'principles' and 'projects'.

The first speaker was Ian Lang, Minister for Education in Scotland. His contribution was fairly routine, outlining the reasons for the growth of independent museums in the last 30 years. He applauded independent museums for being at the forefront of the museum business and for contributing to the social and economic regeneration of de-industrialised communities. He highlighted the positive approach to collaborative funding, mentioning Ross and Cromarty and Dundee as good examples of successful plural funding. It was encouraging to hear him make the distinction between 'heritage' and 'museums' - the former he described as monolithic and too general in its approach to complex issues, while the latter maintained authenticity by struggling with historical evidence. He concluded by highlighting three areas of importance for the future:- registration, conservation and plural funding. Lord Morris followed with his paper "Setting the Scene". He reiterated much of what had already been said by the Minister. However, the main thrust of his talk was that museums are about collections and that collections are forever. Long term commitment and responsibility was, therefore, essential.

Criticising ill-thought-out schemes conceived simply to obtain grants he argued that the result has been too many museums, too few resources, universally poor collections' care and that some museums will have to close.

Criticising "the plastic heritage industry", he argued that the real value of museums is that they have the real thing and speak about the truth.

After a series of questions on the role of reconstructions and replicas the next speaker, and most entertaining of this day, was Mark O'Neill. Taking us through the developments at Springburn, Mark posed many questions, not least of which was 'What is a museum anyway?' Many will be familiar with Mark's work at Springburn. He said that museum professionals are too handbound by collections. By encouraging the participation by people in recording their own history, a museum can become a place where people can actively contribute to the understanding of their own life and the life of their community.

The third paper of the morning, 'A Case for Cultural Identity' by J Geraint Jenkins, described the destructiveness of the heritage epidemic in Wales. He felt that the provision of tourist facilities had now reached saturation point, and bitterly criticised the wallowing in nostalgia which has provided the main impetus for the heritage boom. He agreed that preservation is important but feared there is a danger that only the romantic, idyllic life will be preserved and the harsh realities of the industrial life will be lost.

Much of what was said was valid (and many will be familiar with it) but what was disappointing was his failure to offer any solution to the problem. The current explosion in heritage can only be shortlived and can't possibly continue at such a pace.

The afternoon's session was chaired by Dr Nigel Horne and the theme was 'Prospects'. The most original and thought-provoking contribution of the day was Victor Middleton's 'New Visions for Independent Museums', a summary of a report to be published later this year. The report attempts to answer three basic questions: What changes will influence future visitors? How will this affect independent museums? and how can independent museums respond to meet new curatorial objectives?

The main influences were identified as financial stringency, the community charge, compulsory competitive tendering and the MGC Registration Scheme. He pointed out that the growth in museums over the past twenty years has not been matched by a growth in visitors. Competition for visitors is becoming more intense with increasingly sophisticated in-house entertainment.

He then analysed the number of independent museums, their size and income, and concluded that the majority were not economically viable. However, he did highlight the strengths of independents, citing authenticity, management creativity and flexibility, plural funding and customer awareness. The weaknesses were in many cases financial frailty, management incompetence and pre-occupation with collections.

The most interesting part of his talk was the section on future trends. The 1990's will be an age of consolidation, curatorial objectives will have to be redefined in response to market forces and management techniques will have to alter to meet these new objectives. Museums will have to respond to and cater for the biggest growth sector of the population - WOOPIES - Well Off Old People.

In summing up he said there were too many museums and too few resources. As a result amalgamations will be essential and inevitable. Museums will have to collaborate on conservation, storage, exhibitions and documentation, as well as marketing and management.

Neil Cossons was the last speaker of the day and he took the opportunity to urge museums to change in response to the new environment. The heritage boom, he said, was over and backlash was discernable. The demand was for low volume, high quality experience. He stressed that independents must take the lead but can only do so if they change their trustees. Independents still have the same trustees as they did ten years ago and energy and enthusiasm, in many cases, has been replaced by bad management, waste and inefficiency. Training would, he concluded, be essential for the future success of independent museums.

The ensuing discussion centred around the need to replace trustees and train new ones. A speaker from the floor suggested that rather than change trustees it was curators that needed to change.

The following day consisted of a study tour around the museums in North East Fife including the soon to be opened Golf Museum in St Andrews.

Carol Haddow
Frank Little

Summerlee Heritage Trust



THE PEOPLE'S SHOW

Exhibitors, with a small selection of their collections, at the People's Show, a recent exhibition at Walsall's Museum and Art Gallery. Bringing together over fifty personal collections, created by people in the Walsall area, the show included everything from fruit machines to football shirts, airline sick bags to Madonna posters, Dr. Who memorabilia to buddhas. Particularly outstanding was what may lay good claim to be the world's most stunning collection of garish neckties. A second show is being planned for 1992 and Walsall's Museum Manager, Peter Jenkinson, hopes that other Museums in the West Midlands will stage similar events.

ELSIE, FRANCES, THE FAIRIES AND A FURRY TROUT

The British Museum's exhibition 'Fake?' had all the potential of a blockbuster. Not only does it carry with it all those important museological resonances questioning truth, authenticity and troubled expertise, it also has that important quality of being all things to all people.

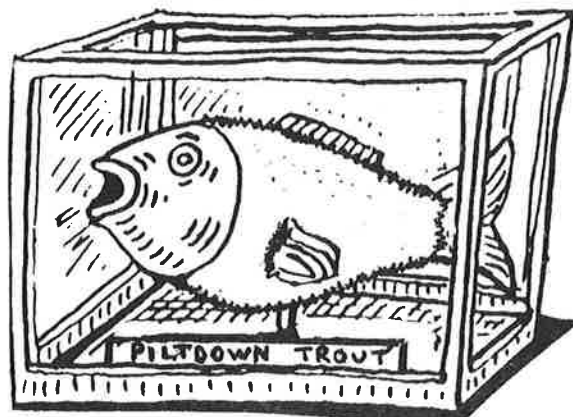
To many of the visitors it was an expose of a hallowed institution. A sneak look into a shadowy world where the curator plays gamekeeper to the fakers' poacher. To others it is an array of the most famous practical jokes of all time, - though I don't suppose the Bishop of Turin will be seen guffawing in the gallery. It is lurid and learned at the same time, self deprecating and smug. Perhaps most importantly for the B.M. the exhibition reaffirms the importance of the museum as an authenticator while salvaging the intellectual high ground simply by putting a questionmark in the title - Fake?

There were some fascinating objects, a hideous merman, a chastity belt and the piltdown man forgeries, as well as examples of modern fakes like the mock quicksilver beachwear that was so popular last year. Many are very cunning forgeries that have baffled leading scholars and collectors alike. Many were not questioned because, as Mark Jones, the exhibition organiser, points out, "perception is determined by the structure of expectation that underpins knowledge". This is probably very true but can it really explain how anyone could have believed the furry trout to be an entirely natural phenomenon.

The emphasis on the objects, understandable though it is, ultimately undermines the exhibition. It obscures any real analysis of the fakers' motives. Anyone who has read Jean Baptiste Rousseau's, "The Relics of Golgotha" will have obtained an understanding of fakes beyond the scope of this exhibition. Rousseau's book as everyone will know is an index of all the true relics, the bona fide bones if you like. It was completed in the 15th century after the fall of Constantinople. It shows, unlike this exhibition, that fakes go beyond a way of making money, achieving political aims, establishing scholarship or practical joking.

Fakes in some instances become articles of faith despite their suspect authenticity in a perverse universe. The Turin Shroud is just such an article, though such resonances are not alluded to in this exhibition despite a facsimile being displayed. The famous photographs of the Cottinghey fairies are similarly displayed without exploring Elsie and Frances' motives. For them the photographs were not simple fakes, but ways of correcting our impaired vision. After all they knew that there were fairies at the bottom of the garden.

Tim Corum
Stoke-on-Trent City Museum



I N P R I N T

Recent Publications

Punishing the Poor, by Kay Andrews and John Jacobs, Macmillan, £17.95

Women, Art and Society, by Whitney Chadwick, Thames and Hudson, £8.95

Sex, Death and Punishment: Attitudes to Sex and Sexuality in Britain since the Renaissance, by Richard Davenport-Hines, Collins, £20.00

On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word, by Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin, Routledge, £10.99

Future Tense: A new art for the 1990s, by Robert Hewison, Methven, £9.99

Mill Green Mill: A Short History and Guide, by Sue Kirby, Welwyn Hatfield Museum Service, £1.25

Scheming for Youth: YTS in the Enterprise Culture, by D. Lee, D. Marsden, P. Richman, J. Duncombe, Open University Press, £9.99

Sport in Britain: A Social History, ed. Tony Mason, Cambridge University Press, £19.50

Black Music in Britain, ed. by Paul Oliver, Open University Press, £8.99

Seeing and Believing: The Influence of Television, by Greg Philo, Routledge, £8.99

The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech, by Avital Ronell, University of Nebraska Press, £38.00

Wartime Women: A Mass Observation Anthology, ed. Dorothy Sheridan, Heinemann, £14.95

Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret MacMillan 1860-1936, by Carolyn Steedman, Virago, £16.99

Consumption, Identity and Style, by Alan Tomlinson, Routledge, £9.99

Common Culture, by Paul Willis, Open University Press, £7.99

EXPLETIVES REPEATED

Those who missed the popular '70s show, The Watergate Affair, the first time round are to get a second chance to see vintage performances by the veteran actor Richard Nixon. The small wooden house where Nixon was born has been restored to look exactly as it did when he was growing up. It is part of a 25 million dollar museum and library devoted to the ups and downs of the career of the only American President to be forced from office.

Replete with interactive video screens and a battery of audio-visual devices, the museum highlights crucial performances from Nixon's career, including the 1960 TV debates with Kennedy, his election in 1968 and the Watergate hearings. Visitors can even question the wily old liar on any topic they choose. A menu of questions appears on the TV screen and a computer selects an appropriate answer from over ten hours of specially recorded responses. What price, then, the Margaret Thatcher heritage park and birthplace museum in Grantham?

SCOTLAND'S NOISIEST MUSEUM

Summerlee Heritage Trust in Lanarkshire has been awarded first prize in the Scottish Museum of the Year Awards for 1990. Sited in Coatbridge, once known as the 'Iron Burgh', the Trust centres on the remains of the 1830s Summerlee Iron Works. The Trust was set up in 1984 with the aim of preserving and interpreting the history of the local iron, steel and engineering industries and the communities that depended on them for a living.

Known as 'Scotland's noisiest museum' (that's what it says in their press release), Summerlee includes a spade forge, brass finishers shop and a recreated Victorian trade exhibition with dozens of working machines. These are housed in a huge exhibition hall (the scene of lavish hospitality during last year's SHCG Annual Study Weekend). Outside is a working electric tramway and a tram depot, where visitors can see work under way on tram restoration. The latest development is a new building incorporating an Ironworks Gallery, a shop and conference room.

The prize was presented on behalf of National Heritage Scotland by Earl Haig at the Royal Museum of Scotland on 26 March. Congratulations go to Stephen Kay (Scotland's noisiest museum director?) and his staff.



Doing 'the washing' at Sumerlee. Getting stuck in just like Grandma used to.

SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP ANNUAL STUDY WEEKEND 20th - 23rd SEPTEMBER 1990
BOOKING FORM

PEOPLE ARE THE DRIVING FORCE! - GETTING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN MUSEUMS
FERENS HALL, UNIVERSITY OF HULL.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....

Tel No. (Work)..... (Home).....

Thursday 20th September Evening Reception, Transport Museum, Hull City Council Tick

Bed & Breakfast £16.85

Friday 21st September Coffee £ 0.78

Lunch £ 4.80

Tea £ .78

Dinner at 10½ £ 7.50

Bed & Breakfast £16.85

Saturday 22nd September Coffee £ 0.78

Lunch £ 4.80

Tea £ 0.78

Dinner at Jazzbo

Browns £10.00

Bed & Breakfast £16.85

Sunday 23rd September Coffee £ 0.78

Lunch £ 4.80

£86.35

Conference Fee (Non Returnable)

S.H.C.G. Members £32.00

Non Members £41.00

Membership applications at time of booking will entitle applicants to members rate.

Total Conference Cost S.H.C.G. Members £118.35

Non Members £127.35

Are you a vegetarian Yes/No

Do you need creche facilities Yes/No

If so, please state number and age of children.....

Do you wish to give a members paper Yes/No

If so what is your title ?

Please return by the 10th August with conference fee of £32 (Members) £41 (Non Members) to:

Susan Jeffrey,
Assistant Keeper of Social History,
Town Docks Museum,
Queen Victoria Square,
Hull, HU1 3DX

Cheques should be made payable to : Social History Curators Group.

Dear Editor

Have any other readers noticed the remarkable resemblance between former SHCG News Editor Mark Suggitt and TV's Chancer.

I wonder, can they be by any chance related? Perhaps one of your readers can enlighten me.

Yours sincerely

(Mrs) P. Beard



Mark Suggitt



TVs Chancer

TAXING THE IMAGINATION

In one London borough a poll tax demand was sent to a public lavatory. A widower in a West Midlands town was shocked to receive a letter demanding payment of poll tax for the last two days of his wife's life. Patients who die at a Yorkshire nursing home are sent official certificates cancelling their exemption from the tax because they are no longer permanent residents. There are similar tales to be told in every part of Britain.

Many people are refusing to pay the tax. It has many anomalies and is causing hardship for many families. Administering it is proving a bureaucratic nightmare. Although recent legislation obliges local authorities to increase their spending on education, community care and the environment, the poll tax actually forces cuts. As far as enhancing local accountability is concerned the Environment Secretary has given himself arbitrary powers to override the wishes of local voters who have given their views on a local council's spending plans via the ballot box. Voters in some areas may well come to the conclusion that they are being penalised simply for voting Labour. At the same time, 35,000 local government workers (including some senior museum workers) have been gagged by government decree, and barred from seeking political office. There has been hardly a squeak of complaint in the media.

The effects of the poll tax on local government are seismic. No museum can afford to ignore such a significant political development. Write to SHCG News and tell us what your museum is doing to record the impact of the poll tax on your community.

SHCG News relies on members throughout the country to provide information about their activities. Although we manage a fairly comprehensive coverage of events such as seminars and conferences, many innovative projects and interesting activities instigated by social history curators go unrecorded simply because nobody sends in any details to SHCG News. A recent appeal for regional correspondents, whose role it would be to persuade (or cajole) curators in their area to provide news of their activities received no response.

If SHCG News is to reflect the full range of working practice among social history curators, we need your help. It won't take a lot of effort. It will ensure a News that is livelier and more comprehensive in its coverage of the many projects, exhibitions, activities and displays that you are involved in. If you are doing something that excites you, let us all know about it. SHCG News needs you!

TOOLS YOU CAN TRUST

Carpenters, blacksmiths and other artisans in many Third World countries have great difficulty in getting good quality tools - hammers, saws, trowels, sewing machines and the like. The tools they do possess are often old, damaged or improvised out of soft metal which cannot be kept sharp. Tools are needed by young apprentices who have just finished their training, people setting up co-operatives, refugees rebuilding war-damaged homes and farmers and blacksmiths making and mending agricultural implements. For economic and social reasons many Third World countries do not want their 'development' to depend on imported technology or centre around a few large industries. Rather, they encourage the self reliant manufacture of goods - furniture, clothing, foodstuffs - in village communities where the majority of people live.

Simple hand tools have a universal quality about them. They can be put to thousands of different uses, to the immediate benefit of the local population. Most important, hand tools give the chance of employment, one of the basic human needs.

Tools for Self Reliance is a charitable company, established in 1979, which collects and cleans hand tools from the sheds, workshops and garages of Britain, shipping them to developing countries for use by working people. TFSR collaborates with a wide network of individuals, groups and organisations, some collecting redundant tools, others helping with renovation.

Would-be donors often offer hand tools to our museums which, for a variety of reasons, we may be obliged to decline. Perhaps we might publicise the work of TFSR in our museums and encourage the flow of redundant tools to the Third World, where they will be given a new lease of life.

For further information contact Tools for Self Reliance, Netley Marsh Workshops, Southampton, SO4 2GY.

SOCIETIES

THE SOCIAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The social History Society is a broadly-based organisation which acts as a focus in the United Kingdom for persons interested in social history. Our members include professional historians as well as those historians now working in other disciplines and indeed in other fields. We are committed to promoting greater contact between academic disciplines and a more multicultural (and international) approach to social history.

We publish a newsletter twice-yearly, in the spring and autumn. Our annual conference, usually held at the beginning of January, is theme-based. In past years we have held very successful conferences on "Life in Total Institutions", "War and Society", "Sex and Gender", "Property", "Death, Ritual and Bereavement", "The Arts, Literature and Society", "Migration and Social Change", and "Poverty, Self-Help and Welfare".

We will hold our next annual conference at Bishop Grosseteste College, Lincoln, on 3-5 January 1991. The theme is "Rumour, News and Propaganda", and the Society would like anyone wishing to give a paper to contact Dr. David Vincent, at the Department of History, University of Keele, Keele, Staffordshire ST5 5BG, telephone (0782) 621111. Booking details will be available in due course from Ms. Linda Persson, Centre for Social History, Lancaster University, Bailrigg, Lancaster LA1 4YG, telephone (0524) 65201 ext. 2812/2806.

We would very much welcome curators working in the field of social history - as members of the society and as speakers and delegates at future conferences.

For further information, please contact the Social History Society of the United Kingdom:

33 Queen Alexandra Mansions
Judd Street
London
WC1H 9DQ

UK telephone (01) 837-8735 or 251-2363

BROUGHT TO BOOK ?

The idea of a museum of librarianship has often been talked about, especially within the Library Association's Library History Group. Now serious efforts are being made to assess the feasibility of such a project. The Group has established a working party to examine the idea of a museum and seeks advice from librarians and curators respecting potential sources of funding and objects for possible acquisition. Offers of help to provide temporary storage for items likely to be acquired in the near future and, ultimately, a permanent home for a museum collection would be greatly appreciated.

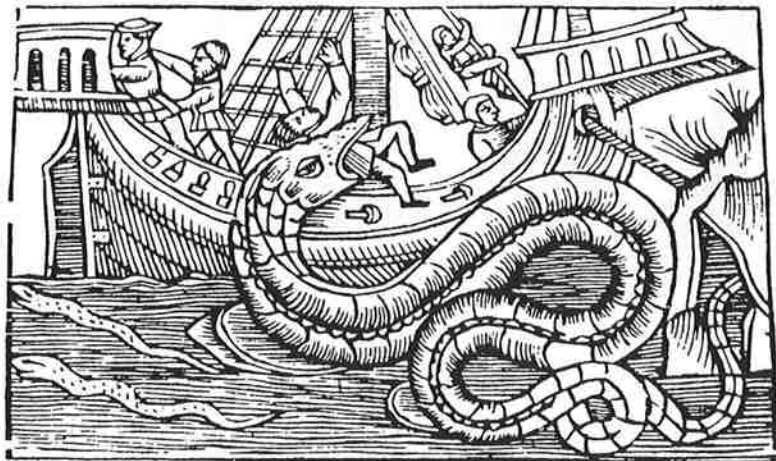
For further information please contact Paul Sturges, Library History Group, Department of Library and Information Studies, Loughborough University, Leicestershire LE11 3TU.

WAS SATAN A GIANT SQUID ?

What sounds like a promising Sunday Sport headline is in fact the title of one of the papers to be given at a forthcoming conference. Fabulous Beasts : Facts and Folklore, a joint conference of the Folklore Society and the International Society of Cryptozoology, will be held at the University of Surrey, Guildford, on 19-22 July, and promises to be both intriguing and thought-provoking.

Stories of dragons, werewolves, griffins, basilisks and wormlike lake monsters are found all over the world. Legends relating to fabulous beasts are so widespread and so well known and have so many similarities that it is sometimes difficult not to wonder whether there may be some truth in the tales. Other papers will include Real Dragons, The Origin of the Griffin, and The Metamorphosis of unknown animals into Fabulous Beasts and the metamorphosis of fabulous beasts into unknown animals.

For further details contact Roy Vickery, 12 Eastwood Street, London, SW16 6PX (Tel. 071 9388897).



NURSING COLLECTIONS GROUP

Do you have any nursing history material in your museum's collections? If so, you may be interested in the activities of the Nursing Collections Group. This has been established to provide a forum for curators and archivists to meet and discuss issues relevant to their nursing collections.

The group also arranges study visits. Further information is available from Alex Attewell, The Florence Nightingale Museum, Gassiot House, 2 Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 7EW.

