

the **GRAUNIAD** *gets it wrong*

This issue of SHCG News appears in the wake of the Audit Commission report on local authority museums, 'The Road to Wigan Pier'. The report has much to recommend it, particularly its acknowledgement of the importance of local authority collections and the diversity of services provided. It identifies many of the problems facing museums and stresses the need for clear aims and objectives within every service. Although the report is inevitably critical of some aspects of museum provision, it makes a series of positive recommendations respecting both the care of collections and the need for improved public access. It is a pity, therefore, that the Guardian's pithy summary ('Boring' Museums advised to charge) was so misleading. Typographical errors are one thing; sloppy journalism is something else.

The report also reveals that more than 25% of Shire Districts, County Councils and London boroughs spend nothing at all on museums or galleries. Should councils have a statutory obligation to provide museums for their local populations? That is one of the questions we ask Mark Fisher, M.P. the Shadow Minister for the Arts, in an exclusive SHCG News interview. As we are approaching a general election, Mark Fisher's comments will have a particular urgency for everyone working in museums.

FOOLING SOME OF THE PEOPLE ALL OF THE TIME

The last few years have seen a massive surge in interest in local and social history as our increasingly under-employed/leisured nation becomes more switched on to the importance of its own 'heritage'. The days of school children being force-fed the campaigns of Alexander the Great and Disraeli climbing to the top of his greasy pole are not over, but people's conception of history (once synonymous with "boring") has changed. It will be interesting to watch the effects of the Thatcherite attitude to what children should be taught, and how, in the next few years.

This year SHCG has two opportunities to assess how social history museums fit into this context. Firstly at the MA Conference in Newcastle at which SHCG has again been successful in organising a session - so important because of the rare opportunity to address people - elected members, trustees, colleagues from other disciplines, governmental funding bodies - about our work. Our theme is 'Fooling Some of the People All of the Time? History vs. Heritage'. The speakers are Robert Lumley, author of *The Museum A Time Machine*, David Fleming and Stuart Davies. These three will address issues such as fakery, the

'heritage industry', recent influential museum developments, and winning support for real social history. The date of the SHCG session is Wednesday 24th July.

The second opportunity is our Annual Study Weekend in Oxford (5-8th September), entitled 'Everything in its Place? : Social History Museums and The Environment'. Here we shall address how the discipline of social history (in museums) can cope with and respond to the variety of social, economic and geographical environments in which curators find themselves: when there is a strong military presence in the locality; when tourism is a powerful factor; when there is a local sense of isolation; in the inner cities, when a society is distorted by unemployment or gentrification; when industries - rural or industrial - have been 'replaced by other forms of employment.'

Meanwhile the Audit Commission has published its report on local authority museums, and close scrutiny of social history collections is imminent. Anyone who does not yet have a workable disposals policy would be well advised to drop everything else for a while and produce one quickly!!

Sue Underwood, SHCG Chair

STOP PRESS

Chichester District Council has decided not to implement a proposal which would have cut jobs and closed the District Museum on Saturdays. This followed a highly effective campaign by the Chichester Museum Society, who lobbied tirelessly right up until the council meeting on 5th March. Jobs at Littlehampton have also been saved, although the museum is to be relocated and the existing premises sold.

As SHCG goes to press it seems certain that Derbyshire County Council will impose a cut of £275,000 on its museum service. This will entail the closure of the Sudbury Hall Museum of Childhood, John Turner House at Darley Dale, and the Museum Loan Service Resource Centre. The Council's grant towards Derby's City Museum's Education Service will also be cut. School meals will remain at 45p, just as they were in 1981.

ONE DAY CONFERENCE ON ASPECTS OF GUIDING/LIVE INTERPRETATION & COSTUMED GUIDING : 27th April 1991
Further Details from : JOHN IDDON,
St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill,
Twickenham Tel 081 892 0051

OLD YARNS RESPUN

Preston and the Cotton Industry 1719-1991

Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston

2. February '91 - 18. January '92

"Old-Timers' Yarns Bring Anniversary to Life" was how one local paper viewed the latest exhibition to open at the Harris Museum, Preston. The anniversary referred to is the bicentenary of the foundation of the Horrockses cotton empire in Preston, a firm internationally renowned in its heyday for its quality household textiles. In celebration, the Harris Museum is staging an exhibition about Preston and the cotton industry. Shuttles, bobbins and clogs are not central to this exhibition however; its focus is the social history of the industry and particularly the people who spent their lives working in the town's mills. 'Old-timers' yarns' refers to the oral history project run by the museum and the reporter was right about that at least; it did bring the exhibition to life! Local people were involved in the project from the beginning. In November 1989 the museum held a reunion for operatives from one of Horrocks largest mills, which had closed in 1962. Tea, cakes and film relating to the firm compiled by the North West Film Archive ensured that the get-together was well attended. Guests were invited to fill in simple questionnaires about their working lives and from these about ten people were identified for possible interviews. Most of those chosen had worked in two or more of Preston's mills and on this basis the museum was able to get a fairly representative group that reflected both the hierarchy and variety of jobs in the industry. Other interviewees came into the museum as a result of further publicity or word of mouth. In total about twenty people were interviewed from a wide range of mills. Interviews were conducted by staff from the North West Sound Archive, the Keeper of Social History, students and volunteers. A training afternoon had been organised with Lancashire Polytechnic Community History Department before recordings were made to ensure all those taking part were well prepared. Interviews were transcribed at the museum on a specially converted word processor by a visually impaired typist on a work placement from Preston Employment Rehabilitation Centre. The museum managed to extend her employment with a temporary contract so that the project could be completed and it would have been impossible to find a more enthusiastic transcriber! Material gathered from the oral history project was incorporated into the exhibition panels and accompanying catalogue. The museum also installed a handset in the gallery so that visitors can listen to former mill workers recalling their recollections of their working lives. The exhibition itself is divided into sections. The first looks at why 1991 has been chosen for an exhibition about the cotton industry and how the project has involved local people. One of the prized exhibits in this area is the date stone from Horrockses Yellow Factory built in 1791. This came into the museum's collection in 1989 after the closure of the last of Horrockses factories in Preston. A couple of employees managed to persuade the management to transfer some of its more historic items to the museum before the company was taken over. Without their help the museum might never have been able to save these important remnants of Preston's Industrial past. "From Boll to Bolt", the second section in the exhibition, looks briefly at how raw cotton was converted into cloth. The constraints imposed by the gallery space meant that photographs and small objects were used in the interpretation in place of looms and carding engines! Atmosphere was created by relaying the sounds of a weaving shed across the space. Of particular interest here is the handling table which, although intended primarily for the visually impaired and children, has proved popular with all visitors. Jacquard cards, shuttles and printing blocks are amongst items available to be touched. This section also examines how people were trained for various jobs, the hazards of working in the industry and the effect the Second World War had on production. Oral history extracts proved particularly useful and include part of an interview with a gentleman who had trained at the Technical School which had an important role in training managers and overlookers for Preston's mills. "The Finest People" looks at the various jobs in the industry and the life for

operatives outside the mills. Particular attention is paid to the role of women and children, housing, the role of the family in the workplace, getting a job and hours of work. One panel is devoted to the memories of a lady who had spent her early years in Horrockses Nursery whilst her mother worked in the weaving shed. The panels also incorporate the recollections of those who had worked half-time in the mills as children, dividing their day between school and mill. One lady recalled her first day in the weaving shed as a young girl describing how frightening she had found her new environment.

A theme which continually came out of the oral history work was the great sense of camaraderie enjoyed by the operatives. "Happy Days" looks at this aspect of mill life as well as how workers spent their leisure time and the events organised for them by their employers. Oral history proved invaluable when looking at Wakes Weeks holidays, sports and social events. "Trouble at t'mill" is a phrase which always seems to crop up when you mention Lancashire's cotton trade. Well, we felt it was about time people knew exactly what it meant! "Hard Times" examine union activity, strikes, lockouts and riots. One woman interviewed described a demonstration she had seen during the General Strike. Another recalled how her father's union activity had kept him from progressing in the industry. The section which looks at the great mill owning families is entitled "The Pioneers" and examines their influence on the town and its political life. It also demonstrates how the industry eventually moved away from family run firms to limited companies. The products manufactured by various Preston mills are displayed here, the centrepiece of which is a beautifully reconstructed trade display of Horrockses sheets based on a photograph of their London showroom in the 1960s. The museum managed to trace the display designer who had worked for the firm in the 1960s. He offered not only to advise on its reconstruction but also to set the whole thing up himself. "A Certain Sadness", the section which looks at the demise of the cotton trade in Lancashire, seems to epitomise the feelings of most of those interviewed about the closure of Preston's mills. It seemed too negative to end the exhibition on this theme so "A Lasting Presence", the last panel, demonstrates how many of former mill buildings have found new leases of life as gymnasiums, mail order business, bowling alleys and so on. As part of the project a photographer was commissioned to record all the remaining mill buildings in the town. Objects used in the displays came mainly from members of the public following appeals in local newspapers. The majority of items brought in were generously offered as donations and not loans. Amongst the most striking is a model mill engine, a replica of one of the first to be used by the Preston firm of Horrocks, Miller and Co. The engine lay rusting in a scrap merchant's yard after the closure of one of the firm's mills and was rescued and restored by a local electrical engineer. A display of Horrockses dresses from the 50s and 60s also makes an interesting feature in the gallery. A video monitor showing a compilation of old films relating to Preston mills has proved very popular with visitors, or perhaps it's just a chance to rest weary limbs! The exhibition has been sponsored by Plumbs Heritage Covers Ltd. who made stretch covers for furniture and are based in one of Preston's former mill buildings. They were delighted to support the project, particularly in view of their obvious connection with the textile industry. They provided the gallery with a courtesy armchair both for publicity purposes and for public use. Marks & Spencers also provided £2,000 towards educational events relating to the exhibition which include a children's oral history project and drama workshops. The opening and press launch took place the day before the official public opening. All those who had taken part in the oral history project were invited to a special lunchtime preview, also attended by the local media. A buffet was provided and each guest presented with a copy of the catalogue. They were delighted to chat to reporters and photographers who were quick to brand them "the stars of the show"

On Wednesday 6th February, members of the SHIC Working Party met in Leeds to discuss the future of the Social History and Industrial Classification. As you will probably be aware, SHIC is being used as a basis for the Yorks and Humberside Industrial & Social History Collection survey, and following a recent MDA survey, the Classification emerged as the most widely used museum system. However, as the percentage of museums using anything was so small, this information is rather academic. Therefore, the Working Party have agreed to approach the MDA to circulate a simple questionnaire to all those people and institutions they have supplied SHIC to. This questionnaire will also be included in the next edition of SHCG News. The results of this survey will be used as part of a business plan, with the particular aim of securing future funding. The production of the original Classification was of course privately financed from within the Working Party. At the same time various museum curators who have already been interested in the Classification for a number of years, and made suggestions to the Working Party, will be invited to form a new group to monitor and generate additions to the Classification. It is hoped that this will invigorate things, and help foster new links with relevant curators with special expertise. The original Working Party want to take the opportunity to upgrade SHIC and improve the index, and perhaps make a computer version before reprinting. Modifications, as you will be aware, have already been made to SHIC. Despite the Working Party's request that these should be sent to them for comments, many alterations have been made, some for internal museum use, others more widely published through the museum press, and these are not always compatible with the existing Classification. Some extensions are excellent, others need only minor numerical modifications to be compatible, while others are really classifications in their own right and can, and should stand alone without assumed SHIC support. The Working Party welcomes all attempts to expand the Classification, and at the moment have a number of additions which they hope can be circulated in due course, perhaps via the MDA.

Until then, please, please do not be afraid to send your ideas to either Stuart Holm at the MDA, or Michael Vanns at the Ironbridge Gorge Museum.

M. A. Vanns
SHIC Working Party

DIGGING DEEPER

A unique example of working class art has been installed in the Social History gallery of the City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent. Commissioned by the North Staffordshire Miners Wives Action Group, the '84/85 Strike Memorial Coal Sculpture was unveiled by Peter Heathfield on Friday 8th March, International Womens Day. The occasion was marked by a programme of events, performances and activities, 'Digging Deeper', also organised by the Miners Wives. The Coal Sculpture is the work of artist Frank Casey, assisted by students from the Brickwork Department of Stoke's Caudon College (including one Edward Heath) and a variety of other local people who provided their help and talents. It is carved out of Staffordshire coal, and incorporates Portland stone, limestone and Staffordshire blue brick. It depicts a miner, carved from blocks of coal, flanked by portrait heads of Joe Green and David Gareth Jones, the two men who were killed on the picket lines. Coal has always been central to the economy of North Staffordshire, but the Sculpture has a significance which goes beyond the immediate locality. In the words of Frank Casey, it commemorates the deaths of two men "killed for upholding a universally recognised basic human right: the right of working people to withdraw their labour". The sculpture is nine feet high and seven feet wide.



operatives at Tulketh Mill, circa 1917
© Harris Museum

and "V I P"s! The mayor formerly opened the exhibition in the afternoon to a large audience which included those who had provided objects used in the displays. All those who had taken part in the oral history project were called up to the mayor's platform and individually thanked, ensuring that their important contribution was fully recognised by the assembled audience. As one woman remarked, "I felt like royalty!". The exhibition has proved very successful with the public. Over 900 visitors descended on the gallery on the first Saturday. Many of those who contributed to the exhibition are regular visitors. One man claims to have made six visits and had read the catalogue almost as many times before circulating it amongst his friends! "Old Yarns Respun" has brought many lasting benefits to the museum, including better collections of items relating to the cotton industry, an invaluable oral history archive and a new audience. Other institutions are also making use of the material from the project. Exhibition catalogues have been bought by local libraries, homes for the elderly and reminiscence workers and, at the suggestion of our transcriber, oral history tapes can now be borrowed by the visually impaired from Preston central library. Let's hope too that the exhibition has proved that "King Cotton" is not all bobbins, shuttles, shawls and clogs!

Sally Coleman, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston.

Clarke Hall, a modest gentleman's house, probably built between 1677 and 1680, was purchased by the West Riding Education Authority in 1971 to be used as an 'educational museum', using experimental methods. The advisory group that monitored its initial progress consisted mainly of professionals from the educational world. Peter Brears was appointed to research, restore and refurbish the near derelict house to recreate a house of the late 17th century. Although educational activities were envisaged, 'Living History' was still in its infancy and the need to create a true replica of the original house was not considered necessary. Fire regulations, security considerations and environmental health restrictions had to be met. Some items of furniture were purchased, others were loaned from private and public bodies. These were supplemented by high quality reproductions including metal ware, furniture, pottery and treen, commissioned after careful research, made by skilled craftsmen, submissive to the demands of the original in every aspect. The collection, although in part accepted as dispensable, needs particular care in the 'Living History' situation. There is a place for, indeed a need for, both original and reproduction. It is possible to have a 20th century experience by handling a 17th century object and a 17th century experience using a reproduction item or process. A mixture of large and small items has been collected, unique and everyday, worthless and priceless, attractive and repellent, organic and inorganic etc. Scraps of evidence carefully prepared are important. A house completely furnished with 17th century objects would be unusable as a home. A totally reproduced collection would have no tangible link with the past. By 1975 the Hall was restored and refurbished towards a 17th century condition though with certain anomalies that would, in hindsight and if time and money allowed, be better removed. A significant decision was made when the curator was succeeded by an experienced senior teacher on a suitable salary. The temptation to accept all gifts was resisted and a stop date of 1700 was made. The matter of security in an open house situation had to be discussed. Later the advantages and disadvantages of being linked to a host museum became apparent. At first it was assumed that the users would be mainly upper junior and secondary children and that the method of use would be experimental, a mixture of activities with programmes offered for certain age groups or subject areas. A fully equipped middle school classroom was sited adjacent to the Hall. Bookings were made by 'phone and could be for short sessions or up to a day in length. Teachers were invited to visit the Warden before hand if willing and a range of written resource material was made available. In 1976 several decisions were made following a policy appraisal. It was decided that bookings would be made in writing in advance and that all teachers would be expected to attend an induction session, following which they would submit a copy of their programme for discussion before the visit. Significantly, it was agreed that the Clarke Hall teacher would act as a consultant and enabler but the class teacher would be responsible for devising the programme and putting it into effect. The Hall would be available for use for a whole day by teachers with children of any age or ability, with as few restrictions as possible, but limited to a maximum of 40 with a minimum adult child ratio of 1:5. Whereas previously the daily programme might have consisted of a guided tour of the house followed by a limited range of activities with costume used on occasion, teachers were now encouraged to develop their own programmes suited to the diverse needs of their children and to participate as fully as possible. Through the preparation sessions, the monitoring of programmes and the judicious provision of written resource material it became possible to affect the quality and range of visits. Experiments with the use of a 17th century language, related to the house and its contents, led to a significant decision to be made that the Clarke Hall staff take on the roles of Benjamin Clarke and Pricilla Clarke, the man and woman who lived in the Hall between 1677 and 1688. This decision sparked off a great deal of research. It was like magic : not only did the house come alive, history came alive. The house became a home, with the result that objects became possessions, imbued with significance and were not viewed in isolation but within a human and meaningful context. Historical facts became

present concerns and could be brought to life : personal relationships could be made within the house and with visitors. The staff, even the caretaker and visiting children started to use role play to varying degrees. The wearing of costume, a significant act, became almost a necessity, and varies from the symbolic to the near authentic. The methods of working were strongly promoted during preparation sessions, at first in a restricted way and then more liberally. Inherent dangers lie in the strong promotion of any activity, especially drama, when serious dangers can occur. There is a line to be drawn between the teacher planning for him/herself and the teacher submitting to the suggestions of the staff. Ideally you should aim towards children and other adults being persons of worth within the situation not just onlookers. The use of drama has developed along four often interrelated main lines: role play used by the staff and perhaps some visitor to bring the Hall to life; a historical framework devised by the teacher in consultation with the staff, that encompasses the actions and activities within a whole day; incidents planned to occur during the day and modern dramatic frameworks devised by the teacher to give purpose to the work of the group. Although no two days are ever alike there are similarities. On most days role play will be used to involve children whether it be in household tasks, including the preparation of a meal, in investigations, or in the personal life of the occupants. A simple theme draws the whole day together. The Hall is used for between 200/210 days a year, 99% of the groups costume. On average groups number 30 children with between 10 and 20 accompanying adults, working with one professional member of the Clarke Hall staff. Each group stays for about five hours. The various forms of drama used as teaching methods can be very effective and the past can certainly be approached more meaningfully. It is important, however, to beware of the dangers. The experiences offered should be as true to historical fact as possible and based on real evidence. Where anomalies occur they should be admitted. Sensory experiences can help children to develop concepts of the past but they are not in themselves sufficient, they need to be set in a wider context. Children will, in carefully organised situations, suspend disbelief to varying degrees. They should not be told that they are going back into the past rather that they are going to try to make the past come to life. Dramatic incidents must be planned and controlled to guard against physical or emotional danger for the child, and to protect the Hall and its contents. The educational purposes of the venture must be made clear, at the preparation stage, to everyone involved. In the past many teachers have stated historical objectives in their applications for visits. However, research (Beaumont 1985) showed that teachers' evaluations showed the most outstanding benefits to be in language development. The historical experience should be significant in itself but it can also provide a vehicle for other disciplines. It will be necessary to use Clarke Hall and many other sites, as a lateral resource for the National Curriculum, in as economical way as possible. Much excellent work is being done in Science, indeed one teacher is carrying out assessment tasks during a class visit. As the demands of the National Curriculum are developed into practice only those resources offering experiences that are relevant will be used. Clarke Hall is now run as an independent unit. There are practical problems. Constant intensive use has an effect on the house and its contents. There are hygiene and safety factors, especially with food. A curatorial colleague would be of great benefit not only to maintain and conserve, but to aid us with research, to add to the provision of high quality material for teachers, and to monitor the use of the Hall. The potential of the Hall would be more fully exploited if the half day preparation sessions could be extended and if Clarke Hall staff worked in schools alongside the teacher before and after the visit. There has been a recent demand for Training Days, and requests for evening preparation sessions for all the adult helpers. Since 1975 the work has been considered experimental and the use of the Hall changes continuously as the staff, with their various skills and interests, try to satisfy the demands of the teachers and children of the region. Evaluations received persuade us that we are successful in creating very special learning situations. We are convinced that the use of



On average groups number 30 children with between 10 and 20 accompanying adults, working with one professional member of the Clarke Hall staff. Photograph © Barry Wilkinson Photography, Bradford.

support from the members of that Governing Body as well as an awareness of the interdependence needed to support central services. At present in each authority, the funding of Clarke Hall comes from the centrally excepted 10% of the education budget. Last year one member of the consortium, in an exercise undertaken to keep down the community charge, asked schools to pay for enrichment services from their own budgets, following implementation of Local Financial Management. This would have meant paying the full economic cost on a daily basis, with some services more equitable than others. The loss of that contribution, that could not have been underwritten by the other five partners in the present financial situation, would have reduced the Clarke Hall budget by 25%. Following representations from schools parents and professional bodies the decision was reversed. The Secretary of State for Education in a recent draft circular has indicated that he expects the Local Education Authorities to reduce their central expenditure even further, to 7% of a total budget and perhaps beyond. This will, of course, put added pressure on centrally funded services, especially Museum Education Services, at a time when the support they offer to teachers has never been of such high quality and as the National Curriculum is implemented.

Tony Stevens,
Clarke Hall.

WHAT IS HISTORY?

This temporary exhibition staged at Derby Museum and Art Gallery between 2nd February and 3rd March explores some of the issues relating to the definition of History, particularly the ways evidence can be interpreted and the way views and perceptions change over time. The exhibition starts with various definitions including "Happy is the country which has no history" (anon.), a thought which must pass wistfully through many a curator's mind from time to time! It then goes on to examine three different levels of historical information,

Family, Local and National, with objects ranging from family photographs through commemorative china and legal documents to HP sauce bottles (put on display, I might add, before John Major's impromptu stop at 'The Happy Eater'), stamps and Beatles' record covers. While this overview of historical evidence is useful, I felt some interpretation as to the local museum's role in all this might be useful, perhaps outlining the local collecting policy, plus a brief assessment of the difficulty of collecting for the future and how do we do it? Other subject areas covered include the portrayals of truth, using examples of the way photographs can be cropped to achieve particular political or emotional ends; the portrayal of events in the Anglo Saxon Chronicle and the myth surrounding Dracula. The display also shows how misconceptions of history arise through popularisation, with reference to simplification as seen in children's history books, and how humour misinterprets history. The well known caveman/dinosaur cartoon is used to illustrate this. A section entitled 'Today's News: Tomorrow's History' consists of cuttings from contemporary newspapers on the Gulf War. One of the organisers of the exhibition admitted to me his own bias in collecting newspaper cuttings, many of which will go into the regimental collections for which he is responsible. He said there was a great temptation to collect outrageous tabloid articles, for example the notorious Daily Star headline for the 17th January "WHERE THE **** ARE THE FRENCH",

while ignoring the more considered views of the 'heavies'. Appropriately enough the sections next to this deals with censorship and propaganda. Alongside is a section dealing with the changing meaning of the swastika from a symbol of good luck through to the negative associations of the Nazi era. It appears as a symbol of good luck on an Edwardian Birthday card, and in a photograph of a British Army officer and his wife dating from 1916; the woman wears a small metal swastika on a chain around her neck as a piece of jewellery. The swastika image appears on Anglo Saxon pots, a fairly well known use; more unfamiliar is its appearance on a British National Savings badge, c.1920.

The space allotted to this exhibition is small, and I understand it was put together at very short notice on a shoestring budget to fill a gap in the exhibition programme. Obviously such a subject is extremely wide-ranging, and some of the subject areas chosen are rather disparate, with 'History Sells' side by side with a very interesting section on the carving up of Africa in the 19th Century by western Colonialists. Attempts are made to show the way in which the indigenous populations were stereotyped by the West and I would like to have seen more on this theme, particularly some assessment of the way objects distort views of peoples' culture and history. To visitors who are not familiar with a concept like historiography the exhibition could merely seem like a collection of museum objects in show-cases. Although the definitions at the beginning of the exhibition were useful, some statement of the purpose and intent of the exhibition and a clear introduction to the various themes and points being made would have been valuable. I believe that this exhibition has shown that it is possible to tackle such a broad subject area, but it deserves a lot more time and thought. Perhaps this exhibition will serve as a pilot project for a more ambitious exhibition in the future?

Diane Moss

MUSEUMS IN THE 1990s

As we approach a general election, Ian Lawley interviews Mark Fisher M.P., Shadow Minister for the Arts, in an S.H.C.G. News exclusive.

- **Q** The introduction of the Poll Tax and the imposition of spending limits on local authorities is having a devastating effect on some museums. A recent National Campaign for the Arts survey revealed that nearly a third of 30 local authorities examined had imposed cuts of their arts services budgets. Several councils have already closed branch museums, imposed shorter opening hours or frozen posts. More cuts are imminent. Will Labour's alternative to the Poll Tax offer any sustenance to these beleaguered services?
- **A** Yes, the Labour Party is not only committed to abolishing the poll tax, it is also committed to returning autonomy to local authorities. It is not solely the poll tax, and the threat of poll tax capping, which has leant heavily on local authorities during the recent period of Tory government. Poll tax leans on individual members of the public. For local authorities, what has been so damaging is that the government has not only restricted their contribution to local government through the revenue support grant (which the previous Labour government was beginning to do in the late 1970s and is a reasonable, if regrettable, thing to do), but it has also prevented local authorities either spending their own money if they have it in capital or raising any other money, whether from the rate payer through appealing at election time for an increased rate, or even from the banking system. The thing that has most damaged cultural services such as museums has been the government's refusal to allow local authorities to appeal to their own electorate for the needs that they have and it is that which will be the most significant change under a Labour government. We will abolish the poll tax, but the change to a greater degree of self determination at local authority level will also make an enormous difference financially to local authorities.
- **Q** At the moment, over a quarter of all district and county councils make no museum provision whatsoever. Such provision is of course discretionary. Are you saying that under a Labour Government it will become a mandatory function of local government?
- **A** It will become a statutory function, which is rather different, but it will have legal status and expenditure will therefore be eligible for revenue support grant. A mandatory requirement would mean that local authorities would have to establish museums whether they want to or not, and that certainly isn't the intention. The whole purpose of devolving responsibility to local authorities is that they should be able to develop policies in response to their own needs. If a particular area has no need or particular stimulus for a museum service, it would be foolish to force the local authority to look around to create one. Where they have, where they wish to develop, this policy will give encouragement to them.
- **Q** Perhaps it will also lead, because of the financial incentives, to museum provision being taken more seriously.
- **A** I think museum services are taken extremely seriously by local authorities, by the public and by schools, who show very clearly by their use of those services how much museums are valued. They are taken very seriously by everybody except the present government.
- **Q** Funding for museums, the arts and cultural activities in general in the U.K. is now almost the lowest in the European Community. Do you foresee provision for the arts rising in line with other European countries following the election of a Labour government?
- **A** Certainly rising, and rising towards those other countries, but we have a long way to go. Only Ireland of all EC countries spends less as a proportion of their G.D.P. than we do. France and West Germany spend almost three times as much. France very nearly spends 1%. We spend around 0.3%. We have a long way to go. That is a target for us and it will take us some time to come up to the level of expenditure of those other countries. I think that we will begin to catch up that ground during the 1990s because we have such pressing needs both on the capital side, with the fabric and maintenance of museums, and, indeed, in the development of services such as outreach and education. In doing so I think that we should keep our eye not so much on the financial figures but on what our needs are and the quality of policy and provision needed to meet those needs.
- **Q** Many of the recommendations contained in the Audit Commission report on local authority museums relate to quality of provision and ways of monitoring quality. The report also stresses the need for policies to determine exactly what museums are for and how they set about achieving their objectives. Yet it misses one big problem, which is that the tax base for some local authorities is in some cases too low to adequately support the collections that they hold. It's quite possible, for instance, for a small borough to have a very important archaeological collection or a significant fine art bequest, yet it may be unable to generate the level of revenue required to provide the necessary support. And, as the report points out, in some museums standards of storage may be inadequate or the fabric of the building poor. Is there not a danger that some local authorities might use the report to provide entirely the wrong answer to their problems, to say, 'let's reduce the service to what we can afford and sell off the collections'?
- **A** If present policies are continued by this government, both of neglect of museum services nationally and really sustained hostility to any form of local authority expenditure through poll-tax capping, then I think that is a very real fear. Already there are signs in areas like Derbyshire that this is a policy which is on the table, and, indeed, other local authorities are looking at it as an extremely undesirable option they may be forced to go to. But I don't think that the danger comes from an interpretation of the Audit Commission report or from any willingness on the part of local authorities. I believe that local authorities value their services and will seek to maintain them. The only pressure which could possibly lead them to break up collections and sell them off would be sustained financial hostility from central government.
- **Q** Still on the subject of finances, the Audit Commission report does raise the issue of entry charges. As usual, the Guardian manages to get the wrong end of the stick with its headline 'Boring museums advised to charge'. But the report merely suggests that museums should consider charging if the circumstances are right, and, obviously, reject it if not. Charging is not a universal panacea and it can have a devastating effect on access, as the report points out. In Southend, for instance, visitor figures fell by half. What exactly is the Labour Party's position on this perennial issue?
- **A** The Labour Party position on charging is quite clear. We are wholly opposed to charging for national museums. We laid out the case in evidence to the Select Committee last year and I think it was agreed to be an overwhelming and well documented case. But you can't both devolve responsibility to local authorities and then forbid them either to charge or not to charge. If you are devolving responsibility to local authorities you must allow them to determine their own fate. I think that almost all local authorities, for their main collections which relate to the local community, will not want to charge and will usually have a long tradition of not charging. But we have to recognise that some local authorities have gone into museums which tend towards leisure provision, which tend to be less scholarly, curatorial and collections-based, and more entertainment and interpretation based. They may feel that those

sort of exhibitions, which may well call themselves museums, are appropriate for charging. I think that the word 'museum' now has such a wide range of interpretations that quite a number of bodies which call themselves 'museums' are actually part of straightforward leisure provision competing with other leisure attractions. There is no reason why they shouldn't charge. For the core collections, whether national or local, we believe that these should be open to the public with as wide an access as possible. That is why the Labour Party will return the funding of National Museums to a level at which they will no longer want to charge.

Q You mention this new type of hybrid museum, part museum, part entertainment complex. During the past fifteen years there has been a great boom in museums and "heritage centres". More people now visit museums than go to football matches. Yet some critics argue that museums are courting popularity at the expense of their principles. Do you think that there is necessarily a conflict between the perceived 'academic' functions of a museum and the wish to make collections accessible to as wide an audience as possible?

A There can be a clash between these two objectives but there needn't be, and, indeed, there shouldn't be. In the best museums there is no such clash because they understand that though their viability depends on their scholarship and care for their collections, the purpose of having that collection is to interpret it and to excite other people. That interpretation should be as interesting and attractive as possible to communicate directly with the non-expert. Whether presenting a piece of ceramics, a water colour or a piece of archaeology, the best and most exciting interpretation should flow, and does flow, from the highest levels of scholarship. The person who most understands the true context from which a piece of work arises is the most likely to be able to communicate that to the lay public. Communication to the widest possible audience grows naturally out of scholarship and understanding.

Q Social and industrial history museums are among the most popular with the visiting public. Open air museums in particular provide the visitor with a reconstructed environment replete with the sights, sounds and smells of the past. In seeking so literally to portray the lives of "ordinary" people, do you feel that such museums tend merely to sentimentalise and sanitise what was often a squalid and unpleasant past?

A In the most literal sense, that is almost inevitable, because the industries from which many of those museums arise were extremely dangerous and unhealthy working environments. It would be illegal, not to say undesirable, to recreate the dangers of the cutlery industry in Sheffield at Kelham, or of mining. You can't do that, so by opening it to the public and making it accessible you are sentimentalising it but I think that most members of the public understand that inevitable form of cultural censorship and make allowances for it. I think that industrial museums are very important. Even if they are to some extent necessarily sanitised for our safety as an audience, it is extremely important that we develop these museums. It is only by going to Styal and actually seeing the buildings in the context of the landscape, and the machinery in the context of the buildings, that you even begin to get an impression of what it must have been like working in the textile industry in the 19th century. So there are dangers but the public, if properly guided and communicated with, will make allowances for that.

Q Is there also perhaps a danger of presenting a rather managerial view of the past in industrial museums, a heroic and technological view, which ignores the impact of technology on the lives of the people who were actually working the machines?

A It is a danger, but one which the best industrial museums try to address, and try to compensate for. The best museums attempt to give as multi-faceted a context, of the social and economic setting of their collections, as possible. There is always a danger that one side will dominate, either the point of view of the workers, or the

managers, or the industry as a whole, but the best museums try hard to give a rounded picture. As in all forms of museum, where you are interpreting the past through physical objects, it is very important that those objects are real, preferably that they do work, so that we can perceive the power of those machines, which should work as authentically as they can and so demonstrate the skills. One of the problems which industrial museums are experiencing increasingly, and will have in the future, is that the people with those individual skills are dying out and not transferring them. Styal have one particular operative whose skills he has not been able to transfer to anybody else. When that person is no longer able to work, that machine will not be usable. That's worrying, as it is the use of the machine and indeed the sound of the machine that conveys an awful lot of the history of that industry.

Q Do you think that museums can ever function as a medium for serious historical debate? Must they inevitably present a biased and partial view of the past because of the way in which material is selected and presented for display?

A All forms of history are to some extent partial and biased, whether physical history in museums or academic or popular history on the page. Every view is subjective; it is the view of the historian, the broadcaster or the museum curator. But museums have a key role in helping us to understand the past. They can provide elements of historical understanding that nothing else can. The written page cannot give a real sense of the buildings or the objects or the environment in which our ancestors worked. Even film material can't. It is seeing the actual objects with which our great-grandfathers and grand-mothers earned their livings, that is what actually conveys something. No other medium can possibly give us that sense of real history.

Q It is the immediacy of shared experience....

A Yes. A particular thing that is fresh in my mind is this. In the Passmore Edwards Museum in Newham, they have a small phial, about two inches long, of green glass, which is one of the earliest pieces of glass made in this country. It is only by seeing it there, actually seeing the size of it, the delicacy of it and the colour of it, that you can actually understand the process of making it. There is no way that the greatest writer could convey that to you or indeed a photograph. Museums have a unique contribution to make in enabling us to understand an industry and the products of that industry.

Q During your period as Shadow Minister for the Arts you have visited many museums and spoken to many museum workers. Have any recent developments within museums particularly excited and impressed you?

A A lot of things have stood out. Despite the financial pressures, museums have gone forward with huge strides during the past ten years. The quality of interpretation and the level of commitment, particularly among younger museum workers, commitment to outreach work and widening the audience for museums, makes the museum world an extremely exciting and urgent one. There are examples of good practice in many local authority museums at the moment and the best of the independent museums have improved out of all recognition. To pick out individual museums is a bit invidious, but I think that the work being done in Glasgow towards the idea of an 'open' museum that goes out into the community and allows people to work with collections and interpret their own lives through those collections, that is a very exciting development. That's just a particularly noteworthy example of a trend that runs through the whole of museum work at the moment. That is what makes it so frustrating - the converse of the excitement generated by these developments is my anger at the threats to the school museum service and indeed the whole relationship between museums and education. To get the full benefit in the future, we have got to

excite children while they are at school. The Education Reform Act, with its brake on out-of-school visits, and Local Management of Schools, with its threat to the school museums service, seem to be running counter to the very good trend in the new GCSE syllabus of encouraging children to work with primary resources and to get out of the classroom to see objects and experience things for themselves. That is a development which is wholly to the credit of the government and it is most perverse that, at the same time as they were introducing it, another arm of the D.E.S. was introducing the E.R.A. and now L.M.S., which makes that aim difficult to realise.

■ **Q** Finally, what sort of developments do you expect to see in museums in the 1990s?

■ **A** I think one of the biggest challenges for the 1990s will be to move towards a much greater integration and co-operation in the museum world, between the national collections and local collections. At the moment the museum world is too divided and disparate, both as a career structure, but more particularly in the sharing of skills and the interpretation of collections.

■ **Q** And do you also foresee a greater integration between public and private sector museums, given that many independent museums are subsidised by local authorities?

■ **A** Yes, and I think that Stoke-on-Trent is a good and encouraging example of a local authority that is both investing in its own public collections and working very closely as an enabler with the private sector. I think that's a trend which will become more and more pronounced during the 1990s. I also hope that we will see a revival of the national museums' circulating departments, but with additional co-operation with the regions. I hope to see the national collections being used more rationally, with more targeting of specific museums and audiences, with exhibitions being devised in partnership with the provincial museum. The key word for the 1990s will be partnership.

"ARE YOU REALLY DEAD?"

or

"It's those Beavers Again!"

Beavers Arts have been commissioned twice by the social history section of the City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent.

In 1988 we devised an interactive play for junior school groups using songs puppets and music. The play was based on and performed in the exhibition *Potters Holidays*, and followed a fairground family of travellers, making the most of every leisure opportunity from wakes to packaged trips to the *Costas*. Last November *High Hopes* animated the social history gallery, a reconstructed early 20th century chip shop, pub and house. We investigated the limitations of objects as historical evidence while entertaining 9 to 13 year olds. An old lady had died and relations pieced together her life and experiences from the things in her house, watched by the old lady. History fascinates us. Our work is about making connections and encouraging people to locate themselves in time and place. The first stage of each of these projects was our research. The audience must believe what they are seeing and simultaneously question that belief. It is a play after all. We read around the central themes of each show and gather visual stimuli. The set, props and costumes must give off the correct signals. In *Potters Holidays* we were working partly against the visually fussy background

of museum exhibits so Hilary Hughes' costumes had to work overtime. They also had to read as "old fashioned", which in this show was anything from mid-nineteenth century to 1970's. We played a range of people from fairground operators, pot bank workers, children, Sunday school teachers and modern tour guides with few additions and no costume changes. In props as well as costume that genuine article is not always necessary; what we use are artfully constructed fakes. During the run of *High Hopes* class after class of children convinced themselves that the ninety year old woman whose life they had seen reconstructed not only existed, but sat before them now, because of the beautifully forged, and artistically flawed, birth certificate, created by Jo Kelly, a company member with graphic skills and a suspected former life as a member of the French Resistance. Music underscores our lives and these shows. For both projects the musical director was Greg Stephens and with him the company blended appropriate selections of popular songs, folk music, hymns or music in the public domain with specially written pieces. Music is a useful vehicle for a difficult idea..." Now write a song about the implications of the absence of objects"... "You mean nothing?"... and an atmosphere maker or breaker. *Potters Holidays* had the Funeral March followed closely by a rough and ready brass version of "I Do Like to Be Beside the Seaside" and so the sway of travelling fairs and wakes was broken by the arrival of trains and the increasing accessibility of coastal resorts. *Sybil's Flea Circus* would have been a flop without this technique. Stage pictures rely not only on high quality design and music but also on a knowledge of place. Each scene and each action within each scene has a location and the performers must know what that is. It could be May Day in a public park in 1910, a terraced house sitting room three miles from here, five minutes from now or a trench in Flanders. The actor and the theatrical experience are human overhead projectors, and can fill a room with a different location, another experience. Often we trade in received notions, composite pictures or stereotypes. None of us have fought in a war, yet, or worked under the same conditions as potters in the early part of this century but it is our business to open that experience to the audience and put them in that place. The specifics of emotional experience must be there too. We try to avoid mawkish sentiment but in *High Hopes* Janes loses her brother to a German sniper in World War I, in *Potters Holidays* bulls, dogs, bears and birds are tortured for human sport. If the audience can feel then they can think. Think about joining up, their future work and living conditions, how they treat their fellow beings and their planet. Feel the horror and think about it. This sounds as if our work is an endless trudge through our sludgy "ee it's grim up North" heritage. Well, by 'eck, it's not. When asked, children invariably describe the funniest bits of the show as being the most memorable. Those or the parts where they had to do something; anything from run hobby horse races for chocolate money, recreate the sounds of a steam fairground, or answer quizzes. Still we meet children who will compete to tell us that the colour of the collar on the dog who is baiting the bull is blue. Children will not forget the physical sensation of fishing about in the claggy Christmas pudding mixture for our *deus ex machina*, the chip shop key. We trade directly with an audience, face to face, make eye contact, make them laugh and just talk to them. They buy into our experience, sometimes literally. *Potters Holidays* opened with *Smiler*, the fairground entrepreneur offering for sale a one pound coin in return for a penny. Children gasped with disbelief and then went for it with an unfettered display of greed. It's a trusty educational technique, not bribery, but direct involvement. The audience need to participate in unlocking the mystery that is their past. We also need to make sure they are awake by keeping them jumping up and down. The company finds great satisfaction in creating these artistic alternative realities. Our work, however, resists the world populated by Georgette Heyer, *The Robin Hood Experience* and *Black Prince Country*. We observe these new realities from a distance. For us the focus of our work is to question what you are presented with; critical observation not unironic consumerism. The realities we deal in are access points to a clearer understanding of people, and people in the then, the here and the what now *Trampers of grammar*, tinkers of *tat*, pedlars of dreams I hear you cry! And so we are... and why not. Let us admit people to the peep show that is an investigation of our past, including the last five minutes. Let us carry on debunking the starch

filled institutions, both physical and intellectual. Let us ask, in ironic naivety, the director of the museum to speak Spanish to a matchbox of performing fleas. Let us end our shows with The Birdie Song so the last word that rings in the audience's ears is bum.

Susan Clarke (Beavers Arts)

Beavers Arts is a co-operative of six freelance workers with skills in art, performance, music, design, project development and project management. The focus of our work is on skill sharing and devising and carrying our events specific to time and place. We are currently researching a performance project for Etruria Industrial Museum Stoke-on-Trent called Rattling Bones. The research is funded by West Midlands Arts and is intended to inform a show for secondary school children.

Any queries about the company's work should be directed to Beavers Arts, 16 Barracks Square, Barracks Road, Newcastle, Staffs. ST5 1LG, 0782 717326.

WINNING GOOD WILL

The National Museum of Labour History

The museum has come a long way since the dark but hopeful days of autumn 1989 when the new Director, two curatorial staff and an administrator stood beneath the daunting stack of 800 tea-chests and boxes which contained the collections transferred from the museum's former Limehouse home. The collection, which included 200 banners, stood in what is now the gallery and banner conservation studio. We have since had donated a further 35 banners. Storage, conservation and documentation are now underway, with banner conservation representing a major aspect of the museum's work. The gallery opened on May Day 1990. Negotiations are now taking place for a further building in Manchester to provide a major gallery space. We now have staff, the most recent additions being assistant textile conservator (from Denmark) and a display officer; and soon a researcher will be joining us to work towards the major displays for the second building. We run a schedule of three-month temporary exhibitions. The present one, entitled Labour Behind the Label, looks at the garment and textile industry and women's position in it, both historically and in its international, current aspect. This year USDAW celebrates its centenary and we will be doing an exhibition on the history of shopworkers. Both exhibitions are collaborative ventures. To mark the bi-centenary of Tom Paine's Rights of Man we are hosting a lecture by Michael Foot, accompanied by a small display. (Perhaps one of the greatest icons in the collection is the table on which Paine wrote volume two of the Rights of Man). A racking system for storing the banners has been designed and installed, but we will soon run out of storage space. Computerised cataloguing is now underway, using slightly modified versions of the MDA Museum object and pictorial representation data standards; software is dbase IV ver 1.1, on a 40 mb hard disk. We have inherited a collection with no items accessioned; this will be accessioned and catalogued. The MDA system of control forms and labelling is employed; although they require some attention they earn their keep. All this, and more, represents considerable progress and dedication. However much remains to be done. The museum needs to collect a great deal more; collecting at the moment is in the main passive. An advisory panel has been established to assist towards the achievement of such goals. We are keen to develop fruitful relationships with other museums and organisations, and to lend as well as borrow material. Banners and other draped textiles are perhaps the most demanding of museums items to manage and lend. As we are not a local museum, but one ultimately with a 'national' role, our public (and colleagues) reside in virtually any city or town. We therefore wish to administer to labour

history enthusiasm elsewhere, be it Bradford, Stoke-on-Trent, West Ham, Isle of Dogs, or Glasgow. Equally when offered local material we always refer first offer to the relevant local museum. Running a fully operational museum with a collection not fully organised and accessioned can be difficult. However that is to propose an ideal that perhaps few of us in museums actually know. A museum's history, however, need not mean inability to change and improve. Out of the closing of the former museum has grown a new organisation, assisted greatly by the funding from Manchester City Council and the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities. There is the prospect of modest on-going trade union funding following our recently launched trade union sponsorship appeal. We are winning good will at many turns. This is what bodes well for the museum's future.

Philip Dunn, National Museum of Labour History.

NEWS FROM NORTH WALES

Lloyd George is safe! Well at least some of the honourable member's ephemera has an assured future. His childhood home and his cobbler uncle's workshop at Llanystumdwy near Criccieth have benefited from major investment and refurbishment carried out by Gwynedd County Museum Service. The venue will open to the public in the Spring. For the Museums at Bangor and Bodelwyddan the future is far less certain. Both have been threatened with closure during the past months. The Museum of Welsh Antiquities, owned by the University of North Wales, Bangor, has recently won a stay of execution in the form of an annual contribution of £30,000 from Gwynedd County Council and the possibility of further funding from Arfon Borough Council. However, considering the poor conditions in which the collections are housed and the lack of full-time curator to care for them, it seems that the grant offered is more of a sop than a serious commitment to the museum's future. Bodelwyddan Castle is an outpost of the National Portrait Gallery and was declared Museum of the Year in 1989. Despite this plaudit Clwyd County Council recommended that responsibility for the castle and the 250 acres estate should be transferred to the private sector: "The Labour Group will be proposing a sale of the site in order to maximise its full capital value". Details of how such a "maximisation" was to be achieved were not included - Degas goes Disney perhaps? As in the case of Bangor, a sell off has been avoided but one wonders for how long. If only Lloyd George were here. As one of the Friends of Bangor Museum suggested, "Perhaps he could help by slipping us some peerages to sell". If only!

Kath Davies
Anglesey Borough Council

SOCIAL HISTORICALS FROM THE SOUTH WALES VALLEYS

New Social History Galleries at the Pontypridd Cultural & Historic Centre

After approximately 5 years of relative inactivity, the Pontypridd Cultural and Historic Centre has finally seen a sizeable investment from the local Community Council and the employment of a full time curator and assistant. In what is probably the first instance of a Community Council being awarded museum status in Wales and possibly Britain, a major social history display is currently being created, with a projected February opening date. Further details of this very welcome development and its aims and objectives as outlined by the curator, Brian Davies, will follow in due course.

continues overleaf

"Spectacle" Theatre Group Education Project at Cyfarthfa Castle.

During the autumn/winter term, 1990, the "Spectacle" theatre company who specialise in educational theatre events, ran an exciting interactive workshop for school children in Mid Glamorgan.

Creating a small "museum" installation in the temporary exhibition room, the Company introduced the children to some of the techniques and philosophies behind museum practice, sending them on a detective search to learn the hidden history of a fictional character, whose life story was discovered through the "reading" and interpreting of the selected objects. The story that evolved through successive classes and a total of over 800 children rivalled "Twin Peaks" in complexity, inventiveness and peculiarity! The children seemed to thoroughly enjoy the experience and positive reports have come back from teachers and the Theatre Group. An exhibition of the work produced by the children was displayed at the Museum during February 1991, and is currently on tour around the schools of Mid Glamorgan. Spectacle Theatre are funded jointly by Mid Glamorgan Education Authority, Welsh Arts Council, & South East Wales Arts.

New Museum and Curator for the Cynon Valley.

The Cynon Valley is to have a museum service and as the first stage in this welcome initiative, Ms. Fiona Davison, a social historian, and former assistant curator at Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery has been appointed as curator. So far this is a "museum without a museum", but does have the benefit of a friendly dog, an excellent cafe and a building site! The first stage of the museum provision is to be an extension of the existing visitor centre in the Dare Valley Country Park, on the edge of Aberdare. The Park has been developed since 1971 on a redundant colliery site, and the new facility will hopefully include a sizable display area for the museum as well as a youth hostel and other facilities. Promising much for the future your intrepid regional reporter can report; "damn fine coffee". Developments under discussion include the possibility of a museum building located within Aberdare itself.

The Social History of Travel in the Three Valleys

A publication jointly funded and researched by Kevin Littlewood, (a history researcher and author) Pontypridd Cultural and Historic Centre, Cyfarthfa Castle Museum, Cynon Valley Museum and Library service, Merthyr Groundwork Trust and with assistance from the Welsh Industrial & Maritime Museum is currently in progress. Timed to be on sale by April this year, its publication will coincide with the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the Taff Vale Railway. ("TVR 150"). Taking the limits of the Taff Vale Railway as its catchment area as a stylistic and limiting device, the book aims to provide a series of chapters discussing the changing trends in transport in the area, including social and economic influences, technological changes and the resulting effects that these changes have created on the communities served. There will also be a section devoted to walking and exploring some of the routes of former industrial tramroads. The book will be targeted at specific sections of the National Curriculum History Committee for Wales, Final Report, with the intention that it will become a useful source book for children and teachers to start investigative work and discussion on the issues raised. It will also, hopefully, be of popular interest to a wider and not just educational audience. Out of economic necessity the book will be short, but well illustrated, and aims to avoid falling into the trap of being an "enthusiasts" book on transport! The History Advisor for Mid Glamorgan, Mr. David Maddox, is part of the "T.V.R. Research & Development Committee" creating the book and will help ensure that it will fulfil its educational aims, and it is planned that copies of the book will be distributed amongst Mid Glamorgan schools. Good ideas for a pithy title on a postcard please!

Stephen Done, SHCG Regional Correspondent for South Wales

LIVING IN A BOX

Lifebox is a series of bimonthly displays at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry. Each display focuses on an individual's life story and day-to-day experience of the city. The usual format is one display case flanked by three graphic panels which carry text, pictures and objects chosen by the individual in consultation with the curator. One of the first Lifeboxes was of a young man called James Turner whose learning difficulties are being overcome with help from the Rathbone Society, a local charity. Other Lifeboxes have featured the leader of a Palm String Quartet, a GPO worker formerly in the Chindits, an industrial nurse, a housewife who runs an amateur dramatic society and an Indian classical dancer. Lifeboxes in the pipeline include a retired stoker who builds matchstick models of the ships he's served on and a Polish emigre. The Lifebox series is an attempt to get behind the stereotypes we all hold, to see how individuals really lead their lives and what they consider important. It is important therefore for the commissioning curator to leave behind such notions as "class" or "community" or "ethnic origin" and allow people to define themselves. It is also important to allow people to volunteer themselves to be "Lifeboxed" to prevent a curator concentrating on his or her favourite groups. This danger of favouritism towards certain groups is further guarded against by having responsibility for Lifebox rotate amongst the museum's departments. We hope this combination of self-selection and commissioning will prevent blind spots as far as is humanly possible. Lifebox is not an easy display series to run. Firstly, there is the problem of being dependent upon an outside source, the Lifebox candidate, for information and material. This makes the project very time consuming, although time can be saved by farming out Lifebox projects to well-briefed volunteers and Leicester students on attachment. Another problem is that of causing offence. The whole point of Lifebox is to allow people to break free from any definitions we may impose on them and this sometimes leads to statements about their beliefs which, when displayed, may upset some museum visitors. It is a fine balancing act between freedom of speech and keeping the museum a welcoming place for all. I have had to censor a racist comment and this in order to protect the person concerned from the anger of his black friends and tutor. A final problem to note is that some lives do not generate interesting objects, pictures or anecdotes and the resulting displays are boring. So there is a bias towards the unusual and visually stimulating. Despite the problems, Lifebox is worth persevering with. It provides visitors and professional staff with fresh insights into the locality. It allows professional staff to build up contacts in the city. It allows those individuals who lie beyond the narrow confines of professional concerns to be heard. And, perhaps most importantly, the public like it.

Nial Adams
Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry.

MY BABY WORKS FROM NINE TO FIVE

Hertfordshire Curators have co-operated to set up a touring exhibition on the theme of commuting and its impact on the county, socially and environmentally. This is an attempt to give an impetus towards recording and collecting on a twentieth century theme of importance to our area. Harriet Purkiss, employed on a temporary contract to do the research, has produced some extremely useful work in recording collections, resources, display material and some oral history recording. She has also worked out the skeleton for the exhibition and booklet to go with it. Eastern Arts are providing a grant for a photographer to work on the subject, to provide not only material towards the exhibition, but also as a permanent archive! The exhibition should help to fill gaps in our collections and, being part of a co-operative effort, should enable us to collect without too much duplication while ensuring that local specialisations can be honoured.

The booklet and design work will be undertaken by St. Albans Museums and the exhibition will start in October.

WARWICKSHIRE WEDDINGS

Like many Social History Departments throughout the country, we have been reviewing our current collecting policy. We can no longer claim to be able to collect enough artefacts to represent the every day working and domestic life of the people of the County - if we ever could! Whatever we choose is bound to colour the way that Museum visitors of the future view their past. While continuing to collect what we think is 'important', we have been contacting different groups in the community to ask them what they feel needs recording or collecting from their lives, for the future.

The second exhibition under this new policy was prepared in 1989, for display in 1990-1991. We wanted to choose a common theme which could be viewed in a variety of ways by different groups in the community. Several themes were considered but weddings were chosen; as both celebratory - and therefore the sort of thing that people would enjoy talking about - and also composed of artefacts that might have been kept for sentimental reasons. An added bonus was the existence of photographs and videos. Our criteria were that the wedding had happened during the last 10 years; that either, one from each couple came from Warwickshire, or that the wedding was held in Warwickshire. Our aims were to illustrate the cultural richness and diversity of the community, underlining similarities and differences between the different ceremonies to inform our own collecting. At the beginning we tried to look at each of the six major faiths - Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh, but our cultural ignorance became apparent at once. Where we had looked at these faiths as monolithic, they were of course culturally based, diverse and interconnected. For example, although we have a Buddhist centre in the county, they do not hold weddings; a 'blessing' ceremony could be held but couples are expected to marry according to their culture or the custom of the country. We moved from the general to the particular, looking at individuals rather than groups, making our contacts through the different religious and social centres in the county. Gradually six couples 'emerged' as willing to give or lend wedding costume, photographs, videos and religious artefacts and after this 'core' group was established, many others came forward anxious to help and take part. We were touched by the generosity and tolerance of all who helped. Our ignorance caused us to make errors which were corrected with patience and humour. Dealing with very personal and religious belongings, and precious memories, meant that we had to be more sensitive than usual about how they were handled and displayed. We found the best approach was to be frank about our lack of knowledge and to ask for advice. Two cases hold the religious artefacts which are central to each of the wedding ceremonies and the Holy Books are displayed as directed by the donors. For example, the Sikh Holy Book is kept covered in the Temple when it is not actually being read, so our display is of a covered book. Warwickshire has a large population of people whose families originally came from the Indian sub-continent, some directly and some via Kenya and Uganda. Their common cultural heritage made it nonsensical to separate some parts of the ceremonial, while dress owed more to fashion and local culture than to religion. Although we looked at Muslim, Sikh and Hindu weddings, we have displayed four rather than three wedding dresses, to make sure that we had one of each type. Some ceremonies, such as the Mehndi are common to all three weddings, so we have only described this the once.

Lack of funds sent us to our local college to have the videos edited as a student project, into one film with commentary. This plays in the Gallery and underlines the differences and similarities between the six weddings, it also conveys something of the colour and excitement of the day. As with any cost-cutting exercise the result is not very satisfactory. Two extra problems were added to the always vexed question of labelling. One was the religious content which might make it offensive to introduce labels onto what was in effect an 'altar'; the other was whether or not to translate all of the information into all of the appropriate languages. The second problem was solved by cost; almost of the translations could be done free by local people, but

typesetting all of the scripts was too expensive to contemplate. We compromised by having one explanatory panel reproduced in each language, using the scripts for the publicity leaflets as well. An idea to have the video repeated six times in a cycle, with a different language 'voice-over' each time, also foundered on the rock of costs. 'Labelling' is limited to panels illustrated by wedding photographs, with quotes from the couples about how they felt, or what different parts of the ceremonies meant to them. The panels also explain the significance of the artefacts on display and the meaning behind the more important parts of the ceremonial. As a learning experience for Museum Staff, 'Warwickshire Weddings' has been valuable and enriching. Whether the same can be said for visitors to the exhibition remains to be seen. The exhibition is at St. John's House, Warwick and runs until the end of October 1991.

Eileen Measey, & Maggie Wood,
Warwickshire Museum Service.

MORE THAN A GAME : THE RAMS IN FOCUS

Within the wide field of social history, there is a hierarchy of disciplines ranging from the profound to the perfunctory. The consideration of sport and its potential for museum display seems to come towards the latter end of the scale. In particular, football with all its apparent chauvinist, rowdy connotations and its raucous press coverage is too often disregarded by all but the most objective curators. This attitude is unfair to a phenomenon which traces its origins towards prehistory and which has developed in the past 100 years from a life-threatening riot to a more civilised activity. The apparent male domination of this sport is challenged by the long association of women in the game, both as players and spectators. Football can play a dominant role in people's lives becoming an all-consuming fanaticism which, in my area, even encouraged one young man to change his name to that of the club. Children are occasionally baptised in the names of all the members of a club's first team and highlights of the club's history are remembered as major milestones in the life of the supporter. Can such enthusiasm for the game be tapped by a museum hoping to improve its visitor figures and role in the community? A number of museums have succeeded with such exhibitions, the best probably being the '100-Nil' exhibition organised by the North West Museum and Art Gallery Service to celebrate the centenary of the Football League in 1988. The realisation that football appeals to such a wide range of people encouraged me to propose a similar exhibition at Derby Museum. There is no social limitation on your potential audience when the game holds the same fascination for a company director and a cleaner. Curatorial colleagues tend to look down their noses at this type of exhibition, but I make no apologies for a 'bums on seats' exhibition, especially when it will probably draw many visitors into the museum for their first visit. These visitors may well look at other areas of the museum while they are here and "hopefully peruse the museum shop." Is it possible to raise the exhibition from the limitations of rows of team photographs and dusty memorabilia? An exhibition on football can include a range of aspects which underline the importance of the game as a social event and part of the identity of a community. At Derby, we have had access to the local newspaper's photographic archive to produce a series of panels illustrating the roles of players, spectators, media personalities and events. Other panels cover the 1946 Cup Final which Derby won, the role of women in local football, and the role of the club in the community. A video, supplied by the BBC, features the history of Derby County Football Club. This is a great improvement on 'boring text' on 'boring panels'. An additional video, based on newsreels of the 1946 Cup Final will also be used, with permission from Visnews. Two Subbuteo tables for visitors to use at the exhibition will emphasise the concept of competition. Club trophies and awards will all be on public display for the first time. A full-size collage of spectators, made by students at the local college of further education, will add to the scene. The historical perspective of football will be

covered by looking at Shrovetide football in Derby up to 1846 when it was banned, and in Ashbourne where it is still an annual event. Aspects of football in Derbyshire will also be included with help from Derbyshire County Football Association. Part of one gallery will be taken over by Derby County's souvenir shop. Details of an art competition on the theme of football have been circulated to all local schools. It is hoped that both girls and boys will enter. Activities during the exhibition will include a national Subbuteo championship, a trophy handling sessions for sight-impaired people, and events which club personalities will participate in. A British Sign Language commentary of the videos will be run in tandem with the videos for deaf people. The local radio station will produce a live broadcast from the exhibition and press coverage will include a special colour feature. Television coverage is anticipated but not counted on. The object of the exhibition is to present the local football scene, past and present, and to attract a wide audience to the museum. Derby County Football Club and Derbyshire County Council are working together on a Joint Community Venture Programme which aims to give opportunities in sport to a wider range of people than has been the case in the past. The exhibition should help in this valuable exercise. Derby City Council is also actively involved with the club, the leader of the city council recently stating that, 'the heart of Derby County Football Club is within the City itself and the council will do whatever they can to develop sporting and social links with Derby County'. Hopefully, the exhibition will also be beneficial to the museum, but as is always the case, we shall have to wait and see.

Richard Halliwell, Derby Museum and Art Gallery.
The Rams in Focus exhibition runs from 27th April until 26th May.



Photograph © Shirley Baker, Mirabel Street 1965

HERE YESTERDAY & GONE TODAY STREET PHOTOGRAPHS by SHIRLEY BAKER

Shirley Baker was born in Salford and grew up in Manchester. Her photographs of the area, taken during the 1960s and early 1970s have the compelling intimacy that only personal involvement can bring. Taken against the backdrop of a decaying nineteenth century urban environment, they show a way of life which was also beginning to disappear. Women talk on the doorstep, children play on the pavement, and lines of washing hang between the rows of terraced houses. Above all, people are living their lives, publicly, in the streets.

The photographs remind us just how strong the sense of community was in traditional working class areas before the 'clearances'. But Shirley Baker cautions against nostalgia for the 'good old days'. The way of life her photographs record also included leaking roofs, mould on the walls, a lack of hot water, outside lavatories and many other manifestations of poverty. As the urban planners and demolition workers moved in, the environment underwent an eerie transformation. When Hulme was cleared for redevelopment in 1965, the whole area came to represent a great bomb site. A strangely silent and waterlogged wasteland appeared where there had once been homes. Only the occasional, solitary shop or pub was left standing, "in grand isolation, like odd last skittles after most in the row had been bowled over". Squatters and vagrants took shelter in the semi-derelict houses, tinkers parked their caravans on the waste sites and old men with battered prams and carts picked their way through the rubble in search of abandoned materials that could be recycled. To children, however, the transformation was magical. The demolition sites were a glorious adventure playground, providing untold opportunities for improvisation. Shirley Baker's black and white and colour photographs provide a remarkable record of this period of social dislocation. She did not consciously set out to create a documentary photographic archive. Her photographs merely say, this is what it was like, in this particular place, at this particular time. Yet they focus on the specific in a way that also suggests the general, showing ordinary people coping with adverse circumstances. The people shown in the photographs retain their individuality and dignity. They are never reduced to the level of laboratory specimens for the social scientist. They are neither posed nor self-conscious in front of the camera, although, inevitably, many of the children depicted are posing like mad. The result is a memorable and compassionate record of the effects of social and cultural change on the life of a working class community that has now been dispersed.

Ian Lawley

The exhibition, Here Yesterday and Gone Today, can be hired from Documentary Photography Archive, c/o Cavendish Building, Cavendish Street, Manchester M15 6BG

Street Photographs, by Shirley Baker, is published by Bloodaxe Books at 7.95.

REGIONAL

CORRESPONDENTS

This is the first issue of SHCG to have been compiled with the help of our new regional correspondents. If you are involved in creating a new project or any other activity that you would like other SHCG members to know about, contact your regional correspondent. Photographs and illustrations are also welcome.

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