

**SOCIAL HISTORY
CURATORS GROUP**

news

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ASW 1994 : THE OBJECT IS DEAD. . . ?

David Tucker's article in the last issue of SHCG NEWS has opened a debate on the nature of social history curating.

The following two articles by Helen White and Kathy Ross challenge Tucker's argument for the primacy of the object.

David Tucker's reaction to this summer's Annual Study Weekend at Tyne and Wear (A traditional view or radical re-think?, SHCG News, issue 32, summer 1993) raises a number of points fundamental to the role of social history in museums. His plea for the 'intimacy of the object', his suspicion of non-democratically controlled funding and his concern to avoid condescension and voyeurism are all issues about which any

active social history curator will have agonised at some point in her or his career. However, his disapproval of "exhibitions and projects driven from outwith", rather than within museums reveals a disturbingly introspective view of the role of

museums in society. The place of objects in a people-centred approach has been discussed many times in the pages of S.H.C.G. publications, and most recently in *Social History in Museums : A Handbook for Professionals*. Such discussions have ranged around the possibilities and limitations of objects as evidence, the importance of their unique emotional impact and the advantages of an enquiry-based historical approach in which the collecting of objects can play an integral part. While objects are arguably central to the function of a museum, they are not the only medium at its disposal and it is essential that we explore the potential of other means of communication. As nerve centres of cultural consciousness we must embrace the variety of ways in which that consciousness is now transmitted, or we will rightly be regarded as a quaint irrelevance. As a result of his visit to Newcastle, Tucker attacks initiatives that are 'poor in objects, but high on designer input, reconstructions and text'. However, no-one who has seen *Great City!*, Newcastle's new gallery of its 20th century history, could honestly complain of a dearth of objects. Artefacts from 1914

to last week are massed alongside **hard** information in what we believe to be a successful attempt to engage **the hearts and minds** of our audience. To restrict ourselves to 19th century display methods as we stand on the threshold of the 21st century would be ostrich-like in the extreme.

The dialogue between history and objects is one that will continue to torment and stimulate us. Tucker criticises the use of objects merely to illustrate social history themes. I would argue that we need equally to beware the kind of positivism which encourages us to use historical sources simply to illuminate the objects which have, for one reason or another, survived. We should be just as interested in what doesn't survive if

we hope to understand the physical and psychological context of the past. Moreover, to suggest that we should ignore large swathes of working class history

because we will never have the material relics on which to base a display is to perpetuate the elitist approach to cultural representation which has dogged museums until very recently.

It may well be that we need to go back to our objects, such as they are, and find new ways of 'reading' them. It may be time more of us tried to explore a visual language of everyday things in the light of modern critical theory. Thinking on the basic question 'what is a social history curator?' will continue to evolve as the conditions in which we work shift and change. I would argue that at present our primary role is to communicate aspects of social history through a variety of media, among which is material culture. It follows that the social history curator's primary concerns should be with people, past and present, with the opportunities they have and the choices they make, and that these concerns should direct our approach to objects.

The debate about the political correctness of bidding for City challenge funding, with its undemocratic and manipulative connotations, has given rise to considerable heart searching

"... the social history curator's primary concerns should be with people, past and present, with the opportunities they have and the choices they make, and that these concerns should direct our approach to objects."

among socialist politicians and party members up and down the country. The decision to take City Challenge money is a political one which has to be taken by elected members of local authorities, not by local government officers. Obviously this kind of money is no substitute for a coherent national economic and social policy, but many Labour councillors have understandably decided that it would be morally unjustified to eschew funding that, imaginatively used, can make a difference to the environment in which people live in a number of subtle if small scale ways. This may not be politically correct in David Tucker's eyes, but it is a genuine moral dilemma in which the alternative is to hold deprived areas to ransom in pursuit of political purity.

City Challenge money was awarded to Newcastle Discovery for the People's Gallery because the gallery was seen to have a potentially useful role in the life of the city, increasing opportunities for ordinary people to gain control of the way their past and present is portrayed, and thereby giving them a greater sense of their stake in the future. It is a new type of venture, feeling its way carefully on what is sometimes delicate ground. However, the People's Gallery will not evade negative aspects of life in Newcastle; responses to crime and racism have already appeared on its walls. In the United States, where the symptoms of social fracture are so much more visible, urban museums increasingly see themselves as having a crucial role 'as fulcrums of change' and as 'institutions that uniquely address the changing needs and priorities of all the people of their cities' (1). British museums have been slower to take on this kind of challenge, or to seek the partnerships that make such a role possible. I imagine the inclusion of the West End in the SHCG bus tour of Newcastle was an uncomfortable experience for most, if not all of us, but it was the only practical and responsible way of confronting delegates with the distinctive environment in which the People's Gallery (and Newcastle Discovery generally) is trying to deliver effective museum provision. We can never (nor should we) hope to operate in isolation from the political and economic context in which we exist, although we can (and should) aim to influence that context.

It would be naive to think that local authorities can afford to continue to fund us on the basis of our professionalism and our collections alone. If museums are to reposition themselves as a vital element in the range of services delivered by local government they must find a role that is more than an excuse to display old things in an interesting way, enjoyable though this may be. Of course museums don't have a direct impact on people's material welfare. But if museums can't make a difference to people's cultural, intellectual and emotional lives, then what on earth are they for?

(1) Robert H McNulty, President, Partners for Liveable Places, in Museums in the Life of a City: a report from the Philadelphia initiative for cultural pluralism (American Association of Museums, Philadelphia, 1992) p33

*Helen White
Keeper, Social History, Tyne & Wear Museums*

As one of the curators responsible for Newcastle's Great City! I thought the use of objects in the display was really interesting, but I would say that wouldn't I? There was the sheer quantity of objects on show: an interesting attempt to capture the promiscuous spirit of British post-war popular capitalism. There was the manner of display: an interesting attempt to revive the cabinet of curiosities - cunningly disguised in Great City!'s case as 'matchbox museums'. Yes, there was lots to interest the social history curator who likes objects, as I do. Imagine my surprise, therefore, to find Great City! described by David Tucker in the SHCG news as 'doomed to failure by the lack of material culture' and 'poor in objects'! So bewildering is this I can only conclude David Tucker suffers from some sort of curator's vision defect in which objects without labels fail to register: we hadn't time to put the labels in, he saw no labels and concluded the display had no objects. But let's get serious. What about his central argument that the social history curator's true vocation is to uphold the primacy of the object and that this purity of purpose should not be adulterated by exhibitions and displays driven by 'good ideas'. Leaving aside the

point that no other museum discipline, with the possible exception of art, behaves in this way these days, the big reply is that this definition of the social history curator's role denies everything that makes social history the strongest, most exciting and potentially powerful museum discipline of the 1990s. Lets get academic. Lets compare the development of social history in museums with the development of social history as an academic subject. Both were late developers. The social historian Harold Perkin wrote an essay in 1962 lamenting the Cinderella-like status of his subject in universities at that time - no chairs, no university departments, no learned journals and few if any text books (1). Perkin put this down in part to the agrarian metaphor which divided up historical knowledge into 'fields of study' in each of which historians grew their own separate crop of facts and conclusions. Viewed like this there was no room for social history because political and economic historians had already parcelled out the land between them. But, argued Perkin:

"... 'studies', 'subjects', disciplines' are not fields and facts are not crops to be privately harvested. Facts belong to that category of goods that can be shared without being diminished. All facts are grist to the student's mill, provided his mill will grind them. The outcome of his labours depends on his choice of facts and this depends on his interests, on the questions he wishes to ask. . . . The social historian differs from other historians only in the questions he asks and the answers he seeks. Finding a place for him does not entail a re-allocation of holdings. It merely involves allowing him access to the evidence."

Substitute 'museum objects' for 'facts' (and, if you like, 'she' for 'he') and you have a fair parallel with social history in museums. What makes us different is not the objects we have but the questions we ask. We do not require a separate 'patch' of objects, we can ask our questions about anything man-made, whether its traditional museum classification is art, science, costume or archaeology.

All this is not to say that objects, and the traditional museum tasks of identification and dating, are not important. They are. But it is to say that the relationship between the curator and the object is rather different for social history than for the other, older, museum disciplines, most of whom have their clearly defined 'patch' of objects and all the traditional apparatus of object-based scholarship - object typologies, connoisseurs' wisdom, an antiquarian pedigree. Social history has none of these: nor does it have a national museum that 'defines' what exactly a social history object is. So ill-suited is social history to the traditional, object-centric museum order that it is not surprising to find those typologically impossible objects that do end up in the social history bit of the museum being dismissed as nothing more than modern

" . . . Social history is in the right place at the right time and we, as curators, should make the most of this rather than worrying about our 'primacy of the object' credentials."

versions of that old antiquarian catch-all - 'curiosities'. And as we all know, this all helped to keep social history firmly at the bottom of the grand museum hierarchy

in the past. But now, the times they have a-changed and in the same way that academic social history now finds that all its past, perceived, weaknesses have become strengths, so museum social history now finds itself with all the trump cards. Social history is everything that museums are supposed to be in the 1990s: interdisciplinary, people-friendly, post modernist academically-friendly, flexible in its boundaries, outward looking, talkative and keen. It is not weighed down with typological baggage and can breath new life into old objects by looking at them in new ways. Above all, social history offers real potential for involving people, and real potential to recapture the socially useful role that museums once had. Social history is in the right place at the right time and we, as curators, should make the most of this rather than worrying about our 'primacy of the object' credentials.

In his article, David Tucker argued for the 'primacy of the object' and a social history approach that '*keeps the object centre-stage*'.

While I'm sure he was not arguing for a return to the days when a typical task for the social history curator was to arrange the trade tokens by date, size and type, but it struck me that his plea was really for design history. As another relatively new subject, design history has a lot in common with social history but the aim of its enquiry is fundamentally different: design history asks questions about the object, social history asks questions about the society, or indeed the city or person, that produced and used the object. Our questions are of course the really big ones: in 1962 Harold Perkin suggested that the broad aims of the social historian's enquiry was to explore 'what it felt like to be alive', how men and women in history 'lived and worked and thought and behaved towards each other'. David Tucker said 'we are not historians' but surely we are and we can and should go for the really big questions too. Social historians in museums can explore what it felt like to be alive just as eloquently as can academic social historians. Indeed we can be even more eloquent because we can use more than words alone, we can use words, objects, music, voices, images, dramatic presentation, colour, atmosphere and, of course, real people.

And now, lets get personal. I found David Tucker's suggestion that the social history curators involved in community-based projects such as Great City! and The People's Gallery were cynical, cowardly, condescending, self deluding and driven by career ambition, rather offensive. To tell the truth, I actually found it rather bewildering. Exactly how does a display like Great City! 'insult' social workers, police officers and teachers? Most bewildering of all is the role model he suggested we follow: "*would that we all possessed the courage and individualism of the average artist*". Help! His article reminded me of my own experience of some artists, particularly average artists, which is that it's all a matter of standards. One man's courageous individualism is another's self-indulgent silliness.

1. H.J Perkin, 'Social History' in Approaches to History ed. H.P.R. Findberg (1962)

Kathy Ross
Museum of London

THE OBJECT IS DEAD. LONG LIVE THE OBJECT

Annual Study Weekend 1994
Venue: Museum of London
Dates: 7 - 10 July

Material Culture specialists or jumped-up community worker? What is the future of the object in the hands of today's social history curator? This year's ASW looks at the use of objects in social history interpretation. In recent years many curators have been preoccupied with non-object based activities. Some say that we have lost our way - we have forsaken objects (our *raison d'être*) in favour of politically sexy community work. Others, that we must put objects in a broader framework of historical evidence if we are to survive as effective interpreters of the past. Have we got too tied up in oral history, video and community developments at the expense of object-based interpretation and brass-tacks curating?

We will also consider whether objects provide the best ways of communicating in museums - can objects in displays really provide a worthwhile or meaningful experience for our visitors? Can we use what we have more effectively? Should objects illustrate a story or should they form the basis for story telling in themselves? Do we need them at all? We are keen to draw on experiences and opinions of colleagues from across the country. If you feel strongly about any of these issues or any others which you think may relate to this theme and would like to propose a paper for the ASW then please ring or write to Lucy Harland at the address below by the end of February. We would be glad to hear from first timers as well as more regular contributors.

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Museum of Science & Industry
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ANNUAL STUDY WEEKEND QUESTIONNAIRES

I received 20 replies, 10 of which were from people who had not attended this year's ASW. They all made interesting reading. As you might expect, funding for attending an ASW is becoming increasingly difficult to secure - 65% of respondents said it was hard and, of these, 55% said it was harder than last year. The new date, early July suited most people but 30% had problems because of the holiday season.

The suggestions for future themes for ASW's reflected a broad range of interests, from the Tuckerite, object focused, professionally correct, to those who felt we still have to address the issue of sex (arguably just as professionally correct):-

- § More object based seminars (e.g. Salaman collection seminar at St Albans)
- § Social history and conservation
- § Reconciling commitment to displaying existing collections with commitment to community input
- § Social History of Science, technology, and medicine.
- § Collections and their importance/use/interpretation -
- § Themes raised by David Tucker's article
- § Taste/Clothes/The end of tradition (in conjunction with Folk Life Society)
- § Joint meeting with Folk Life Society to discuss similarities and differences of purpose
- § 'Sex and sexuality' - wasn't this supposed to have been the theme of last ASW?
- § Link between education and social history
- § Examples of good displays linking local museums with local people (on a low budget)
- § The 'borders' of social history - or lack of them! - in museums
- § Contemporary collecting/documentation
- § Social history of white ethnic minorities - Irish, Welsh, Poles, etc.
- § Sociological/ethnological research methods for history curators
- § The concept of history
- § Collaborative projects (inter-agency, e.g. museum - English Nature, museum - hospital, and international, especially EEC)

The respondents' good and bad comments on the 1993 ASW were quite contrary. Various individuals enjoyed the subject matter, the papers, the visits, the good accommodation, the excellent social atmosphere and the Saturday night drinks at the hall. On the other hand there were complaints about a failure to address the theme, too many papers, too many visits, the bleak accommodation, unfriendly cliques and the lack of a hall bar. Other complaints included the lack of introductory/plenary workshops and the dominance of Tyne and Wear Museums. One wretched individual had been kept awake until 4am on two successive nights by room parties (would all delegates please examine their consciences). Two people said they had particularly enjoyed the coach tour of Newcastle and one person had enjoyed IKEA ('seriously, it was useful and worthwhile'). The 'any other' comments seemed heartfelt, for example:

'I was horrified by the programme advertising ASW, it struck me as self indulgent and seemed far removed from the realities of curating a collection....I agree with David Tucker'.

'No papers on 'my exhibition'. Let's debate what we would like to do, are not allowed to do, our concepts, ideas. ASWs are for debate, not back slapping.'

One respondent commented, 'ASW works to develop theory and practice within 'Social History.' It cannot do that unless people are prepared to question what we do to analyse, criticise and discuss. As soon as we abandon ourselves to the day to day pressures of our jobs, without making time to take a wider view then the profession is doomed. Here's hoping we see more critical articles in future issues of the News and take part in some vigorous debates at next year's conference.

*Siobhan Kirrane
The Craven Museum
Skipton*

BIRTH AND BREEDING

The Politics of Reproduction in Modern Britain

Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine
October 1993 - February 1994

This exhibition and the associated booklet look at the history of childbirth in the 20th century. Birth control, sterilisation and abortion, 'natural' and controlled births, the interests and responsibilities of parents and state have been, and continue to be, hotly debated. By focusing on four influential organisations, The Eugenics Society, the National Birthday Trust Fund, the Family Planning Association and the Abortion Law Reform Association, and on two individual pioneers, Marie Stopes and Grantly Dick-Read, the exhibition attempts to put these issues in a historical context.

Children are at the core of any debate on reproduction and childbirth. The images which line the corridor approaching the exhibition space focus on children and the pleasures, worry and pain of motherhood and childcare. An X-ray photograph of a boy's skeleton is a stark reminder of the high infant mortality in the early part of the century. Another photograph of the same date (1908), of a nurse watching over a child inside the newly invented incubator, looks forward, to advances in neo-natal care.

Photographs and particularly film were used by the groups featured in the exhibition to promote their ideas. A key element in the display is an audio-visual unit which shows cuts from four films made by Marie Stopes (1923), The Eugenics Society (1935-8), Grantly Dick-Read (c.1956) and the FPA (1957). The clips are fascinating period pieces which reveal social attitudes and prejudices crucial to understanding the content of the exhibition. After this tantalising dose of 'living' history the exhibition itself is something of an anticlimax, rather akin to sitting in the doctor's waiting room. Immediacy and accessibility lose out to balance and objectivity.

Most of the material in the display is drawn from the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre in the Wellcome Institute Library and as one visitor noted in the exhibition comments book 'there is a lot of writing'. Documents and printed material - books, pamphlets, leaflets, posters - are used to describe the activities, message and campaign style of the subjects featured in the exhibition. Photographs and a few objects, including a daunting array of early contraceptives, vary in format.

One of the aims of the exhibition is to describe the 'campaigning efforts that enabled them (the individuals and organisations) so effectively to communicate their various messages'. A considerable amount of space in the exhibition is devoted to material used by the campaigners to promote their causes but the voices of the women and their partners at whom the campaigns were aimed are barely audible. Two anonymous letters addressed to Marie Stopes, one written in gratitude, the other in disagreement are there, and we learn from the Women's Sunday Mirror (1 September 1957) that Mrs Pat Wilkinson having 'trained' for a natural birth as advocated by Grantly Dick-Read decided instead for the 'modern way'. Sixteen year old Princess Ira Hohenlohe and the influential Princess Grace were both reported to have chosen natural methods for the births of their babies, the former under the heading '*Cripes! Now it's FUN to have a BABY*', but these and other responses are marginal to the exhibition.

Lesley Hall's essay *Questions of Control and Choice: Women and Reproduction in Britain since 1900*, published in the booklet, to a certain extent redresses the balance. Women and their lives are at the heart of the debate and Hall does not lose sight of them. She gives a clear view of the resources and options available to women throughout the period and discusses prevailing attitudes but neither the exhibition nor Hall's essay allow for any personal reminiscence. Its inclusion would have made the content of the exhibition more immediate and engaging, particularly for school visits.

Since the birth of Louise Brown, the world's first test-tube baby, in 1978, advances in reproductive technology have raised the stakes in any debate about reproduction and childbirth. IVF give opportunities for 'positive selection' and the adoption of the

Lesley Hall's essay provides historical background to the debate and Julia Shepard's introduction to the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre and the archives from which the exhibition is drawn is useful and informative. The booklet is available at no charge to exhibition visitors.



*Edwina Ehrman
Museum of London*

*(Opposite)
Family Planning Association Poster, 1950's*

UP THE ARSENAL

'Welcome to the Arsenal Museums' says the Official Arsenal Football Club Information Booklet, 'highlights include: the shirt worn by the legendary Alex James in the 1936 FA Cup Final, Herbert Chapman's famous bowler hat,...and the ball used in our 1979 FA Cup Final (victory) against Manchester United'. The key word in this self-description is the plural possessive pronoun 'our', signifying that the new Arsenal Museum is first and foremost a museum for the Arsenal faithful. This obvious fact is mentioned because as a shrine to Arsenal's glorious past and present it will inevitably have a different and richer meaning for the true believer than for the agnostic. This review is therefore written from the point of view of a Highbury outsider about 'their' rather than 'the' new Arsenal Museum.

The Arsenal Museum is a museum, as opposed to a trophy room writ large. It tells a good story well, of small time beginnings before the Boer War (f. 1886) followed by footballing greatness achieved between the wars, 'The Glory Years', and of greatness regained. Last season Arsenal achieved the rare 'Double' : winning FA and League Championships. In the Museum's entrance there is the open-top, red, double-decker bus (or at least the front three quarters of it) in which the victorious Arsenal team paraded through Islington. Supporters therefore, can be photographed besides a life size cut-out of Ian Wright holding aloft a life size cut-out of the FA Cup.

eugenic ideal of 'fitness'. Amniocentesis can be used to detect ill health or defects in the foetus, but who decides what a 'defect' is? The same technique used to detect foetal sex raises fears of a potential sex-ratio imbalance in cultures with a preference for male children. Lesley Hall's essay discusses recent developments in reproductive technology and looks at possible implications of the reorganisation of the National Health Service but unfortunately the exhibition does not chose to bring the debate up to date. A text panel reviewing recent developments and their ethical and social implications could have filled this gap.

The exhibition booklet is an essential companion to the exhibition. It gives information not found in the text panels and captions and tackles a broader brief. (The exhibition text is reproduced in full.)

EXHIBITION REVIEWS • EXHIBITION REVIEWS • EXHIBITION

As well as glittering prizes and great victories the Museum is a celebration of Arsenal's two greatest managers. Herbert Chapman (1925-34), in the form of another life-size cut-out, and George Graham (1986-), in the form a lifelike (?) mannequin, have a special display of their own. They stand against a mutually flattering wall of comparative FA, League and international achievements, and quotations, on the club, training, tactics and team motivation.

Great Arsenal players are featured in graphic panels called 'The Arsenal Album', the design metaphor appropriately being a cigarette card 'Panini' sticker album. Others such as Cliff 'Boy' Bastin, and Eddie Hapgood, are so legendary that they have her special honour of appearing as life-size cut-outs. Obviously money was no obstacle to the amount of photographic blowing up and cutting out necessary to perpetuate the cult of Arsenal personalities. Images of players in training and especially in mufti are as interesting as pictures of them emerging from stadium tunnels, kicking off or scoring crucial goals. There is definitely a rich visual history of twentieth century men's fashion and hairstyles yet to be researched from images of professional footballers.

A highlight of the museum is its short film called, 'The Story So Far', made by the people behind 'Football Italia' (Channel 4). George Graham narrates, sometimes on, other times off screen. He provides the authentic voice, the character and the enthusiasm that is almost always absent from made-for-museum audio visuals. The film lucidly recounts the Arsenal story. The club was born in 1886 when a group of homesick expat Scots working in the Woolwich Arsenal, teamed up on their Saturday half day off to play football. They first named themselves 'Dial Square FC' after the part of Arsenal where they worked. Soon they re-christened themselves the Royal Woolwich Arsenal FC after their base, the Royal Oak Pub, Plumstead. In the Museum the late Victorian and Edwardian era of the club is presented in a mock-up of the Royal Oak, with bar table tops providing novel space for images and text. In 1912 the club, professional since 1891, migrated north of the river to Highbury, near

central London, thus securing bigger crowds, and greater gate money. The move's unpopularity with fans and other London clubs is skirted over. As simply Arsenal FC the years from 1925 to W.W.II under Chapman were halcyon. There followed the long, cup less, 'boring, boring' years of the 1960s and 70s until the Gunners recent renaissance. The film is interesting because it has the quality of an apologia: managers who underachieved are said to have 'done their best' (with the implication that their best just wasn't good enough for Highbury's admittedly high standards). Moreover it is endearingly hagiographic: for instance Charlie George as great goal scorer is shown, (and his golden goal trophy is in the Museum) but he isn't shown inflaming Derby supporters as he did by giving them the two fingers after a late equaliser, ruefully recalled by Nick Hornby in 'Fever Pitch', in (1992:58).

'The Story So far' is an orgy of great Arsenal goals. Opponents score, such as Manchester United, twice in quick succession at Wembley in 1979, but, of course, the point is they were losing goals. There are Arsenal goals galore in black and white, from newsreels and archive t.v., and glorious colour ones from 'Match of the Day', 'The Big Match' and lately, 'Sky Sport'. The film should end with a warning against immediately rushing on to the pitch to re-enact any one of them.

Theoretically this is quite possible, because the Museum is situated in the new North Bank Stand. Most people visit the Museum as part of a tour of Highbury Stadium and so they see such things as Highbury's marble entrance hall, the board room and wonderful art deco architecture of the West and East stands. Although running the risk of repetition, re-creating key elements of Highbury's architecture, iconography and sacred places, and a more theatrical three-dimensional approach in general would have meant that relatively characterless floor to ceiling graphic panels did not dominate the Museum space as they in fact do.

The special meaning of this Museum for fans who are collectors is evident in the fact that they are already lending artefacts specially and often expensively purchased with it in



mind. At the moment an historic pair of Michael Thomas's boots (the ones with which he scored against Liverpool) are being conserved for display. The Museum is open to the public on Fridays and on match days to Bond Holders. On match days the Museum must have an atmosphere that you could cut with the proverbial knife. On non-match days the addition of a soundtrack of crowds, commentaries and snatches of Arsenal cup-run pop records such as 'Good Old Arsenal' would enhance the Museum as an 'experience'. If the audio tape included specimens of player's, manager's or spectator's 'colourful wit' (aka abuse), then historical bowdlerism, an 'ism' that invariably inhibits museum displays of popular culture, would have been 'nicely' overcome. Arsenal like its home city is big, rich and internationally famous and both have recruited talent from afar. This is represented in the Museum. Liam Brady and David O'Leary are some of Arsenal's famous 'Green Gunners' whose international caps, track suits or shirts are in the Museum. Chapman was a Geordie, Bastin came from the West Country and of course Arsenal's founding players, Alex James and current manager are a few of those who have come from north of the border. Cups, goals, players and managers are very much the story the Arsenal Museum tells. Statistics too are central to the world of

Arsenal and interactive games provide club knowledge tests. The story the Museum does not tell is the fans story. Nearby the North Bank Stand shop is full of an amazing diversity of contemporary Arsenalabilia: there are Arsenal key rings, videos, scarves, hats plus full, Junior, and miniature (!) kit, not to mention boxer shorts, baseball caps and bedspreads. Arsenal fandom currently supports no less than four fanzines with wonderfully graphic titles: 'An Imperfect Match'; 'Up the Arse' 'One Nil Down Two Nil Up' and 'The Gooner'. There is a wealth of subjective evidence in both Nick Horby's best-seller, 'Fever Pitch', mentioned earlier, which reveals the very complex, very painful, and very frustrating 'pleasure' of being a serious Arsenal fan, and in Tom Watt's excellent new oral history 'The End: 80 Years of Life on Arsenal's North Bank'. But perhaps wanting the inclusion of the history of the fans' experience and material culture, is to miss the point of the Arsenal, as only an outsider could, a bit like going to a church (or in Highbury's case a cathedral) to find out about the church goers as opposed to the religion?

*Javier Pes
Museum of London*

NEWS

PASSMORE EDWARDS STILL UNDER THREAT

After several months of uncertainty, Passmore Edwards Museum is still under threat of closure. As a cost cutting exercise, Newham Council had intended to close the Museum and had hoped to sell the building to East London University, part of which is situated next door. However, the University's interest has now cooled.

A proposal still exists for the closure of the Museum but the Council are also considering "other options" before the final decision is made. What is certain is that the post of Curator, still occupied by Valerie Bott as "News" goes to press, will be cut.

Recent local calls for the survival of the Museum have included a petition of almost 5,000 names gathered in just over a month. Furthermore, at the opening of the 'We Came to Newham' Exhibition (at Passmore Edwards from 23 October 1992 to 24 April 1994), poet Benjamin Zephaniah made a passionate plea for its survival. Zephaniah praised the Museum for allowing its settlers to tell their own story in the exhibition and asked that those of influence do all they could to save the Museum. Lynn Brown who opened the exhibition as Chair of Leisure Services, remained silent on the issue.

GULBENKIAN AWARDS

Jersey Museums Service has won the annual Gulbenkian Award for the most improved catering facilities in a museum in the UK.

The museum cafes at both Hamptonne and Jersey Museum were judged by Barbara Woroncow, Director of Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council, who described the quality of food as 'Truly impressive. Whatever your tastes the Jersey Museums Service can cater for them all - from the sophistication of the chic restaurant in St Hellier to the charming country cafe at Hamptonne'.

The Jersey Museum Cafe has established a reputation for high standards of food and service since its opening in March 1992 and the facilities at Hamptonne, Jersey's new country life museum, were commended.

This year's joint winner of the Gulbenkian Award, Best Museum Publication Category was won by Springburn Museum. In a new collaboration, Springburn Museum and Possil/Milton Forum on Disability published 'Talk in Pictures' which features photographs, prose and poetry by members of Possil/Milton Forum on Disability produced during workshops with artists Brian Jenkins and Chris Bowman.

ORAL HISTORY SOCIETY NETWORK

In response to the growing need for reliable advice and guidance on oral history methods throughout Britain the Oral History Society has set up a regional network of contacts. The list is of accredited individuals who are members of the Society, experienced in oral history methods and practice. All are able to assist anyone new to oral history or wanting to discuss their work in detail. Some can recommend local equipment suppliers and may even be able to lend equipment. Others will have archival and copying facilities. All represent the Society in their area and will lend an ear.

Please note that to take advantage of the Network enquirers must be members of the Oral History Society. For enquiries about the Network please contact Kathrine Towsey, Red House Museum, Oxford Road, Gomersal, Cleckheaton, BD19 4JP. Tel: 0274 872165

CENTENARY FOR PARISH COUNCILS

Readers may like to note that next year is the Centenary Year for Parish Councils. Royal assent for Local Government Act 1894 was given on 5th March 1894, the first elections were held on 8th November, and new councils started to meet from that December. There will be a number of celebratory events and activities, nationally and locally, and in Humberside we are aiming to produce a modest exhibition on 'Parishes: Past, Present and Future' in conjunction with the County Record Office and others.

The year gives social historians an opportunity to link many aspects of community life connected with both the ecclesiastical and civil parish, the geography and the people. Non-documentary display

items may be limited but there is scope for oral history and evidence of Parish Councils activities today, which can be very varied. Here, we have also used it as a chance to update the CRO indexes on where records are currently kept and encourage new deposits. Any readers wishing to develop similar initiatives might like to contact the relevant County Association of Local/Parish and Town Councils.

*Further details from
Charlotte Hursey, County Secretary,
Humberside Association of Parish and Town
Councils, 14 Market Place, Howden, Goole,
North Humberside, DN14 7BJ.
Tel: 0430 430904*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,
Perhaps we need sour and reactionary old fartism of the kind emitted by David Tucker to remind us that our battles are far from won. Thank you, Mr Tucker.

Mischievous, Mr Editor.

Yours Faithfully

*David Fleming
Director of Museums and Galleries
Tyne & Wear Museums Service*

HANDLING MATERIAL WANTED

SEARCH for Science is a new "hands-on" natural sciences centre being developed in Gosport by Hampshire Country Council Museums Service. We are looking for any natural science specimens which may be surplus to requirements in other museums but which we could use for handling material in the centre. The material will probably be without data and should be in reasonable conditions and foreign in origin.

Please contact:

*Ann Nicol (Natural Sciences Development
Officer for SEARCH)
50 Clarence Road, Gosport, Hampshire,
PO12 1BU. Tel (0705) 501957.*

SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

WHERE WAS SHCG AT THE MA CONFERENCE?

Although the MA Annual Conference last September already seems a long time ago, I feel that members should receive an explanation for the last minute cancellation of the SHCG workshop due to take place on 17 September.

In February/March 1993 the Chair and Secretary of the previous executive committee undertook to organise the SHCG contribution to conference. Three agreed to participate and I was asked to chair the session entitled 'National and Locals'. Mid-August, when returning from holiday, the session organiser received a letter from one of the speakers explaining that, although he had written a paper, he would not be able to take part in the session. As his contribution was the one coming from a National Museum 'proper' (the Imperial War Museum) it seemed crucial to save it. On 3 September the session organisers were told that no replacement speaker could be found from within the institution.

I subsequently became involved in the situation and, having read the paper found it did not lend itself to simply being read out either by myself from the chair or anybody else. The next few days saw a lot of discussion and consultation between the session organiser and members of the new executive committee but it seemed impossible, at such a short notice, to find anybody from the ranks of SHCG available to take the 'National' side in 'Nationals and Locals'. As a result one of the remaining contributors began to have serious doubts about the quality of the presentation if somebody unprepared was to step in. Committee members who have been approached for their views agreed that, however reluctantly, we should cancel the session.

A letter containing this decision, with an explanation of the situation and apologies for the inconvenience it would cause, were sent to the MA conference organiser.

Understandably, this was not well received

and the view was expressed that a replacement speaker need not be a social history curator - anybody would be better than a cancellation. We did not share this view and although another attempt was made to find a replacement, in the end we had to admit defeat - the session was definitely cancelled.

No doubt it was all a bit of a mess, and we were well aware of the fact that it would not reflect well on SHCG but things like this do happen. We again offered the MA conference organisers our heartfelt apologies and the best we can do now is ensure that 'it won't happen again'.

Details of SHCG's workshop at the 1994 MA Conference will follow in the next issue of the News

Marij van Helmond
Chair

TOOLS FOR THE JOB: THE SALAMAN COLLECTION

Thursday 25 November 1993

'A tool enables you to do something you can't do with your fingers'. This is how Chris Green, Principal Keeper, defined a tool and it was this very practicality of the tools themselves that characterised the SHCG seminar on the Salaman collection of tools at St Albans Museum in November 1993.

The seminar was an opportunity for curators from a variety of collections to handle and learn about the practical aspects of what is a tool and how do you curate it? It was also a chance for the Museum of St Albans to do a little public relations exercise to show off their new display of the Salaman Collection. Sam Mullins, Director, began the day with an introduction to the museum and the gallery. He gave a brief history of the museum and the tools which Salaman collected as he travelled around Britain whilst working for Marks and Spencer. He also discussed the thinking behind the new gallery. It had to have impact as it was the entrance gallery of the museum but they also wanted to show as much of the collection as possible. The resulting gallery is not particularly innovative but is fairly impressive with ranks of tools from floor to ceiling inspired by trade catalogue illustrations. There are workshop scenes and also interactives including putting different

joints together and drawers to pull out showing the evolution of a variety of tools up to the present day.

How to conserve tools was next on the agenda. Philip Carter, Conservation Officer, gave a step by step instructions which was particularly helpful for curators without conservators.

Chris Green, Principal Keeper, talked on the social history of tools starting with the interesting observation that the majority of tools in a collection are there due to 'survival of the unfittest' - tools that have been unsuccessful, broken or uninteresting to today's private collectors. Many of today's tools are less crafted than in the past partly due to less discerning users which has led to the demise of many tool making trades. This was when Ken Hawley arrived on the scene - a wonderful character from the Sheffield tool industry who started making cine films in the 1960s of the dying trades - for example, scissor making. He showed us videos from his films giving us a very informative and amusing narrative. It ran on slightly so we had even less time for actually handling the tools in the last session, something that perhaps should have been at the start of the seminar. However, it was a good opportunity to discuss and question why different woods are used and how tools are used.

The seminar gave a reasonably brief but often detailed look at tools and the how, what and why. As one grateful curator put it 'a good seminar for the lone curator looking for somewhere to start'.

Naomi Beeley

SHCG SEMINAR

FOLKLORE AND CUSTOMS

Venue: Welsh Folk Museum, St. Fagans, Cardiff

Date: 3 March 1994

Cost: £5 SHCG Members, £10 Non-Members

This seminar will look at the current state of research into folklore and customs and its application in the museum context. Morning sessions will also consider aspects of folk culture such as art, customs, etc, while a practical session in the afternoon based on the collections at St. Fagans will look at

conservation and display techniques.
More information and booking forms: please contact John William-Davis at the Welsh Folk Museum. Tel: 0222 569441

COLLECTIONS, CULTURES AND FAITHS

Presenation of Religion in Museums 2
Venue : The Bar Covent, York
Date : 21st February 1994
Cost : £17 Waged, £10 Unwaged
For further information contact: Alison Taylor, curator of Wesley's Chapel (071 252 2262) and Crispin Paine (0285 640428)

ICMAH CONFERENCE

ICOM (International Council for Museums) is the UNESCO organisation concerned with museums. It is divided into a number of National Committees e.g. ICOM (UK). It is also divided between a number of International Committees, such as ICMAH. For some purposes ICMAH may be considered the international equivalent of SHCG, although in other respects it corresponds to SMA (Society of Museum Archaeologists).

In September a meeting was held at Innsbruck in Austria. From the point of view of SHCG the most interesting aspect was the work being done in France on the display of 20th century French History - the Last War, including Petain and the Resistance and the Algerian War.

I should guess most of the readers of this newsletter were born too late to have heard the French side regarding the Algerian War. I suspect that you will all embrace a traditional 'progressive' and 'anti-colonialist' view. But, then, probably none of you are of "Algerois" or "Harqi" origin!

In France itself there were and are a wide range of views on the Algerian problem. This was also true of Algeria, until it was "ethnically cleansed" of its European population and the Harqis were exterminated. The next meeting of the ICMAH will be in Senegal from the 14-19 March 1994. There will be a session here on museums of modern history. Following the recent wind of change, this will be led by Delegates from the South African Museums Association.

The dates may seem a little inconvenient, but this is the best time of year climatically. The Hon. Sec., Jean-Yves Martin reassured members that Senegal was a relatively civilised country and not a dangerous one to visit.

Programme details available from D C Devenish or; Contact : Jean-Yves Marin, Hon Sec ICMAH, Musee de Normandie, Logis des Gouverneur, Chateau, F14,000 CAEN, France

David C Devenish
Wisbech and Fenland Museum

WAR AND MEMORY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Conference, University of Portsmouth, 25-27 March 1994

Organised jointly by the University of Portsmouth and the Oral History Society themes include Gender and War; War and Film; Memories of the Holocaust; Colonial Wars and Monuments and Memory. Further details from Dr Kenneth Lunn, School of Social and Historical Studies, University of Portsmouth, Milldam, Burnaby Road, Portsmouth PO1 3AS. Tel: 0705 842203

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Interpreting Heritage Today

This series of six day schools run by the Centre for English Cultural Tradition aims to highlight aspects of material and non-material heritage and a variety of approaches to their interpretation. Areas covered include the built and natural environment: educational projects within museums and historic houses that involve objects, historic role-play situations and inter-generational interaction; non-material culture, including language, childlore, customs and beliefs, stories, legends and folktales: and traditional dance, drama, music and song.

For further information on dates and course details please contact Robin Wiltshire, Heritage Interpretation and Education Assistant, The Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN. Tel: 0742 768555

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