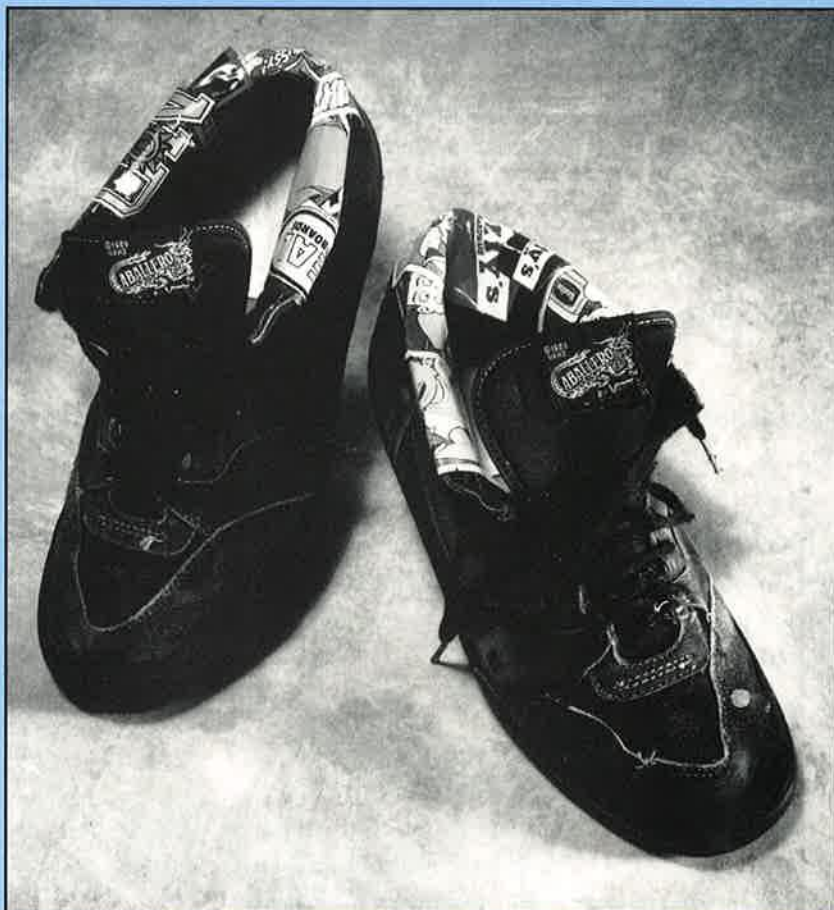


SOCIAL
HISTORY
CURATORS
GROUP

NEWS

ISSUE NUMBER 37
SHCG's 21st Birthday Edition
Spring 1995

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL
HISTORY CURATORS GROUP



From 'Street Style', The Victoria and Albert Museum

STEP OUT IN STYLE . . .

- Clothes Shows
- Helen Clark and Chips
- Annual Study Weekend
- Playing with football ?

Editor's Statement

The views expressed in this newsletter are wide ranging and do not necessarily express the views of the SHCG committee or SHCG, unless otherwise stated.

Mission Statement

SHCG NEWS will encourage and publish a wide range of views from those connected with history and museums.

The NEWS aims to act as a channel for the exchange of information and opinions about current practice and theory in museums.

Articles and writings are welcome

If you would like to write for the NEWS, any terms can be discussed, though we do not pay a fee. For example, if you wish to remain anonymous, confidentiality is assured; if you wish to express a view that may not seem SHCG correct, it can be expressed.

Please type them and double space them. If you are working on a disc it may be helpful to send that in as well as hard copy, it depends on the disc and programme you are using. If you think something should be reviewed, but don't wish to do it yourself, let me know and I may be able to fix up a reviewer. If you would like to write for the NEWS on a regular or one-off basis, ring me.

Issues Future, Past, and Present

I particularly welcome articles for the next issue of the NEWS on the theme of the Second World War; articles from overseas curators, and TV reviews of historical programmes or programmes about popular culture.

A possible new feature for the next issue will be 'The Personal Column' - individual news and views from the museum world.

ISSUE NUMBER 35 never existed. Librarians and 'NEWS' collectors, take note.

The Journal

The new Journal is now being mailed out. Back copies of the old Journals are also available. The next Journal is currently being prepared. This is an appeal for articles. Published once a year, it gives you an opportunity to write an in-depth article or review an important new gallery or book. If you would like to write an article, please contact Jane Whittaker to discuss the subject. She is based at Oakwell Hall, Nutter Lane, Birstall, Nr Batley, WF17 9LG. Tel.: 01924 420536.

Harriet Purkis
Editor

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Annual Study Weekend

Thursday 6 - Sunday 9 July 1995

Tuille House, Carlisle

THEME: COMMUNICATION AND INTERPRETATION

Carlisle is the venue for 1995 annual study weekend, your opportunity to talk, listen, and meet curators from all over the country and communicate about communication and interpretation. In some respects this should follow on from last year's debates on the importance of objects. This year plans to explore the role of museums and curators in communicating with visitors.

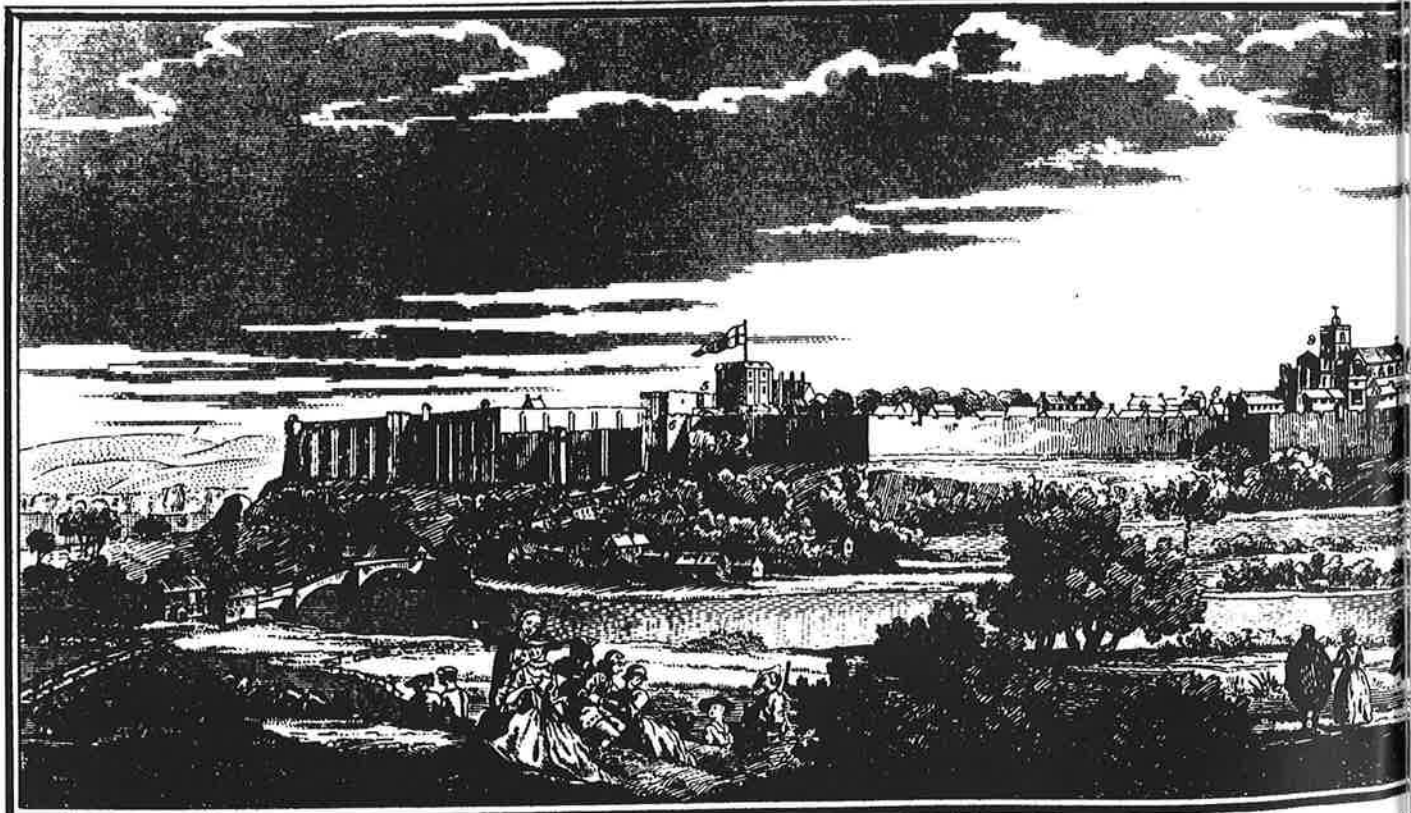
The weekend will include discussion of both the theoretical background to interpretation, and the practicalities of achieving more effective means of communicating. Case studies of different approaches will be presented alongside opportunities to try out some methods in

workshop sessions: whether label writing, low tech hands - on or interpreting objects from different viewpoints. Particular emphasis will be given to practical ideas for museums with small budgets. Visits to museums will also be included. Let's talk about text, interaction, labels and audio visuals !

"Carlisle" says local curator and ASW organiser, Dawn Webster, " is a compact, attractive and friendly city, set in beautiful border countryside. The castle, cathedral and museum are all within 5 to 10 minutes walk from the station." The accommodation will be in the Old Brewery, which was recently converted into student flats for the University of Northumbria. After a welcoming reception on Thursday night with strawberry pavlova, papers and workshops will be held on Friday, Saturday and Sunday in the museum and the city's medieval tithe barn.

REDUCED COPY OF PLATE ENGRAVED IN 1739. THE ORIGINAL PLATE IS IN THE

THE SOUTH WEST PROSPECT OF THE



The weekend will include a SHCG 21st birthday party with 1970's music - on vinyl. Some founder members may like to consider wearing items from their early curating days back in the 70's, or just come as they are. All are welcome to this party, though there may be a small charge for those not attending the whole weekend.

Booking forms and final details will be sent to all members shortly. Non members are welcome, additional forms can be obtained from Dawn Webster at the address below.

MEMBERS PAPERS: Anyone interested in giving a 15 minute members paper about anything - not necessarily related to the theme, please contact Helen Sykes, Tudor House Museum, Friar Street, Worcester, WR1 2NA, Tel.: 01905 20904. Priority is given to members who have not given a paper before - it could be you.

TWO FREE PLACES are available to those who have never attended a weekend before. A free place means everything is free - that's accommodation, food and talks and workshops. You will have to find your travel costs to and from Carlisle - though let us know if this may be a problem and we may be able to help. You'll need to write down a bit about yourself, and your reasons for wanting to go on the weekend. If you are interested please write to Alisdair Wilson, Newcastle Discovery, Tyne and Wear Museums, Blandford Square, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Tel.: 091 232 6789. Letters must reach him by 30 May 1995. He will let you know if you have been successful.

FURTHER DETAILS FROM: Dawn Webster, Tuille House Museum and Art Gallery, Castle Street Carlisle. Tel.: 01228 34781

OBSESSION OF HUDSON SCOTT & SONS, CARLISLE]

THE CITY OF CARLISLE IN 1739.



Home News

We're With The Halifax

SHCG accounts are held with the Halifax Building Society. SHCG Treasurer Tim Corum, is keeping a careful eye on developments as SHCG finds itself with voting rights in the take over discussions of this building society. "I'm reading the financial pages and shall keep members informed of developments", says Tim, "Anyone with strong views about the proposed take-over should let me know. It is not often we find ourselves in the centre of national financial manoeuvres."

The offer of free shares to investing members is clearly designed to persuade them to vote in favour of conversion of the



Halifax to a public limited company. But does SHCG want to become a share holder? With the Halifax sponsoring Rugby League's centenary World Cup, sports minded members of SHCG may think they are being selected by Halifax as holding particular influence in the share deal. Is this sponsorship a blatant or subtle attempt to use history and sport to get our vote? Are we being softened up? The go-ahead for the Halifax to merge with the Leeds has just been legally stamped, but are we "with the Leeds and smiling"? Are we Leeds supporters or are we not? Write in with your views, or send advice to Oldham supporter - Tim, on how we should vote.

Post War Buildings To Be Listed

Stephen "Classic FM" Dorrell, the Heritage Secretary, has drawn up a list of over 100 post war buildings that may become listed shortly. He is allowing time for comments on the buildings he has selected, before listing them formally, which include the Centrepont office block in London. Critics have argued that architectural historians have been pushing for post war buildings to be listed to guarantee themselves work in future years, as Victorian buildings have either all been listed or knocked down.

SHCG News Recruitment Supplement

It'll be interesting to see who gets the new director's job at the V&A currently up for grabs following the decision of the current director not to carry on. With all the re interpreting of what may be termed 'decorative arts' collections going on around the country by social historians, particularly of clothes (nice Street Style Show - thin end of the wedge?), pottery and domestic artifacts, isn't it time for a social historian in this key post? Shame the library - I am reliably informed - does not subscribe to SHCG NEWS. Are they scared of us or something? What would you do to the museum? Answers on an application form to....Seriously though, and to be fair, the V& A purchase fund now offers social history curators financial help in buying social history items.

Victoria and Albert Museum

PURCHASE GRANT FUND

The MGC/ V&A Purchase Grant Fund for the financial year 1995/6 is £1million pounds. This is a fall from last year of 1/2 a million, but has been coupled with a reassessment of the fund's operation and priorities. There have been some changes which could help curators buy smaller items, and social history items are considered important and legitimate. If we can make strong arguments in applications for acquiring social history objects, by establishing the significance of items in the context of our permanent collections, then grants may result. The minimum purchase price is now £500 and for the first time a maximum purchase price of £300,000 has been introduced. The maximum grant is 50% of the purchase price. The total annual limit for each applicant is £80,000. For manuscript material, the minimum purchase price is £350 and the maximum at £12,000. A new logo has been produced to be used throughout the country to acknowledge the V& A Purchase Fund. Please contact Julia Marsh at the V& A for details.



VE Day

This year sees the final opportunity to commemorate the 2nd World War. Different communities may be commemorating Victory in Europe Day, though others may not. Strong views seem to be around concerning how to handle the day with some feeling that V J Day was the true end to war. Curators will be handling the end of the war in different ways. But what will we do next year? With the 50 years after the war commemorations finally over, is this the Very End of 2nd World War temporary displays or will they continue just like wars.

Slave Controversy

Museums were given space in the big newspapers recently. With the new Transatlantic Slavery Gallery at the Liverpool Maritime Museum opening, it achieved near saturation press coverage. But its claim to be the first museum to look at slavery was contested in the National Press by Hull City Museums. They've had a display there for years, at Wilberforce House. Meanwhile the new Education pack on Slavery put out by Hull came in for attack, as it contained pictures to colour-in of slaves being whipped. These have now been withdrawn.

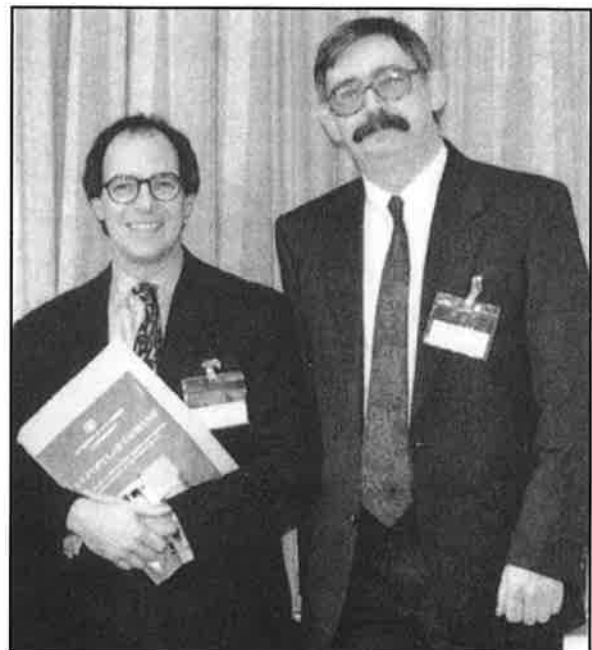
Scorpio's Bust Implants, Is She Bugged?

Hundreds of visitors turned up to Tyne and Wear Museums, 'Creepie Crawlies' exhibition, to see Gladiator Scorpio, David Fleming, as well as some giant scorpions and bugs. Newcastle's marketing chiefs, invited Scorpio along to herald the first day of school half term holidays in February. Said Mr. Fleming, "We aim to reach as wide an audience as possible, so if it means hitting tabloid press with, let's say, less than 'cultural' angles, we'll do it." Readers may like to know he is referring to coverage on page 2 of "The Newspaper Adults Read" - the Daily Sport - not SHCG NEWS. The newspaper concentrated on Scorpio's (Nikki Diamond)

recent implant operation to enlarge her breasts, rather than David's Creepie Crawlies. Scorpio is 28 and her interests include visiting museums. She also has an interest in plants and bugs.

Stuart Davies: By Popular Demand

The MGC recently launched a report called, "By Popular Demand: a strategic analysis of the market potential for museums and art galleries in the U.K." The author is Dr. Stuart Davis of the School of Economic and Business Studies at the University of Leeds, formerly of Kirkless Museums Service and the SHCG committee. The report showed that museums attract over 110 million visits a year, far greater than previously estimated. More than 100 people attended the launch. Stuart is reported to have lunched with T.V.'s Loyd Grossman, who is the masterchef behind the Radio 2 and MGC's, 'Museums Week' (15 - 22 May 1995).



Clothes Shows

1. STREET STYLE: *From Sidewalk to Catwalk*

A review of the 'Street Style' exhibition at Victoria & Albert Museum, London: 16 November 1994 - 19 February 1995, produced by Sharon Beard, Cathie Dingwall, Colin Corbett, Amy de la Haye, Valerie Mendus and Ted Polhemus.

There are leaflets and posters available from the V & A to go with the exhibition. A book, "Street Style" by Ted Polhemus, is published by Thames & Hudson.

Remember being young? The realisation that you had to define yourself in a world for which you were not responsible? Remember the need to express yourself and your golden youth in a way that screamed defiance? How did you do it? Who were your models, what was your music, your drugs, your sexual preference, and, of course, your clothes. In short, your attitude. Did you want to get on the bus to Edge City or stay with the hopeless mainstream. Was it just fashion or did your membership of a teenage "tribe" change you for good? Pretty heady stuff. Complicated, messy, blurred, EMOTIONAL!

Any show which tries to communicate that ragbag of emotion and angst through the medium of objects is going to have a hard time. "Street Style" wisely homes in on the most visual aspect of the conscious dissidence of youth - clothes.

Back in 1990, discussions within the "Dress" department centred on how the world of fashion was no longer dependent on the "trickle down" from fashion designers, but also the "bubble up" of ideas from the "Street" that metaphysical habitat which defines difference. Thus, "Street Style" is not about people in pastel tracksuits, it is about the clothes that people wore to clubs, cafes, bars, parties, Acid Tests and Raves. The

idea of a show was suggested, and three and a half years later, here it is, attracting great attention from the eternal teenagers of the media. How has it worked out?

Let's get one thing clear; "Street Style" is not the definitive statement on "yooof culture", nor is it the first museum to take the subject seriously. After Melly, Thompson, Wolfe, Cohn, Hall and Hebdige, the study of subcultures is academically respectable. "Street Style" is obviously informed by this but concentrates on the clothes worn by these tribes and their relationship with high fashion.

So, at first sight it's pretty much what you'd expect. A chronological show from the 1940's New York Zooties through Bikers, Mods, B-boys, Punks, Ravers and New Age Travellers. Rows of outfits are well displayed openly on neutral dummies in tribal groupings. They are supported by large photographs and two-tier hierarchical text. The headline labels boast a large, clear type-face but are still too long. Individual labels offer insight into some of the passions behind the fashions.

"In my opinion skinhead means more than just a fashion, it's a whole life."

The overall feel is one of a shop, and this works well. There are nice touches, a video wall of posers and "Fly in the Street" footage. The row of bikers' jackets hanging from a large chain is fun. The tribal groupings display originals, revivals and the catwalk versions which drew inspiration from them, allowing instant comparison. Credit should also be given for the presence of black, gay and lesbian styles, all of which have influenced "streetstyle".

Closer inspection reveals how the show was constructed. A real effort has been made to display credible ensembles which were actually created and worn by real people, rather than trying to match up the odds and sods in the stores. The research team networked hard to

find the outfits, which came from V&A staff, ex or die-hard punks, skinheads, rockers as well as the dead famous like Sid Vicious. The result is that most of the figures are not stereotypes, which in turn prompts debate.

"I'd have **never** worn those trainers!" exclaimed one ex-Casual behind me. Maybe, perhaps the donor got it wrong! In streetstyle God really is in the details. It's all so complicated, so messy, so emotional. Because of this the show walks a tightrope between the physical properties of the clothes and the cultures that created them. It cannot go into detail on why subcultures are so male dominated, it only skirts the influence of



Embroidered Western style shirt, Ben the Rodeo Tailor, late 1940s. Worn with a Roy Rogers scarf.

music and drugs and does not discuss the high street appropriation of both "trickle down" and "bubble up". The staff are only too aware of this and see "Street Style" as a contribution to a debate and not the last word on a story which is far from over. At the least, the V&A now possesses a well provenanced collection, and will continue to collect in a controlled manner.

The clothes here are so personal, it will be easy to criticise the details, the peripherals of this show. But the V&A should be pleased. This is possibly their first people centred exhibition, which, because of its subject, cannot escape the sociological and semiotic aspects that dress has always had. If they keep this attitude, the revamping of the "Dress" galleries could be quite something.

"Street Style" is about the survival of the fittest, or perhaps the coolest. Some have died along the way, others just keep on going. Some, like New Age Travellers, have mutated from an assortment of hippies, punks and ravers. The show concludes in this "Supermarket of Style", arguing that today's youth now has over twenty different tribes it can join. It displays a range of influences. A number of these are from contemporary designers; a Pam Hogg bodysuit is labelled as having "Raga, Cyberpunk and Fetish" origins. If you know your sources, pick 'n mix.

Fair enough, but "streetstyle" has always done that. You could play the same post-modernist game throughout the show. Hippies mixed anything going, Prankster style, Punks pulled in an equally eclectic mix of Mod, Ted, Rocker and Fetish styles to create something new. Perhaps it is now more transparent, more knowing. We know that every new wave will be milked for all its worth for a season or two, leaving the diehards as future reference points. Whatever; the final message is positive, new styles will emerge, and more importantly, to those who live them, to those who are young, they are new. Who cares if some forty year old media hack tells them he did it all before, he grew old and got off the bus, and they won't do that, will they?

Mark Suggitt
St Albans Museums

2. FASHION WORKS -

*Makers, buyers, weavers, dyers,
Cleaners, menders, and pretenders.
All about clothes.*

A new permanent gallery at Newcastle Discovery produced by Tyne and Wear Museums. Here, one of the curators of the project, describes the gallery.

This new permanent gallery in Tyne and Wear Museums' flagship - Newcastle Discovery - takes an innovative, thematic look at the history of the fashion trade in the North East of England, from the 18th century to the present day.

The brief for 520 square metres of nigh on derelict space was to create a lively display for a local audience, which was to be unlike any other costume gallery - as most costume galleries are (allegedly) boring! This gallery is not aimed at a specialist audience, but rather for people who might not otherwise go to a fashion gallery.

A budget of £344,000 from the City of Newcastle, the European Regional Development Fund, the Museums and Galleries Commission, and Fenwick Ltd., had to provide the electrics and fire protection, as well as the displays.

The first section focuses on fibres, fabrics, dyes, and methods of manufacture - providing people with the bare threads of the story. This area is small, but highly interactive, with a video screen showing a modern factory, "feely" samples, and a microscope with a video screen which shows, in amazing close-up, different fibres and weaves. This is a particular favourite for staff who need to examine their fingernails, for whatever reason, and I don't wish to know why!

The next section, "Who makes your clothes?", looks at the people in the trade, 80% of whom are female. This gave us the chance to focus on education for girls, and why the fashion and textile trade is seen as "women's work". An atmospheric "Pepper's Ghost", based on the Punch cartoon of 1863 of "The Ghost in the Looking Glass", shows a rich woman confronted by the ghostly image of a consumptive seamstress. Excerpts from Thomas Hood's poem of 1843 underline the painful facts behind the frills and furbelows. A computer database, Fashion Facts, provides detailed information on 30 items from the collection, some of which are on display.

Retailing is, and always has been a major force in the North Eastern economy, so naturally the next section highlights this. Newcastle's Bainbridge, now part of the John Lewis Partnership, was the world's first department store, and Fenwick Ltd. grew from a modest shop on Northumberland Street into one of the country's most successful chain of department stores. By focussing on life in the stores, we again highlight the human angle.

One of the hardest questions to answer is, why are people so affected by fashion? The next section looks at some of the reasons. Standard displays on underwear contrast with diet aids and fitness programmes. In a fascinating computer database of people's attitudes to fashion, style, image and lifestyle, we have given people the opportunity to have their say. Another interactive grew out of research with visually impaired people on how they made choices about clothes, self-image, and colour, and now looks at the cultural, linguistic and social significance of eight colours.

A tiny section on laundry highlights the physically hard and extremely lengthy processes people, again mainly women, had to go through to keep clothes clean.

The next section contrasts how clothes were recycled in the past for reasons of thrift and economy, with today's environmentally-friendly, ethical consumer. Visitors can have a go at making a clippy mat. The final section on children's wear looks at mainly historical clothes in the surreal, but delightful setting of a teddy bears' picnic.

An activities room with natural daylight invites people to take a breather, rest their feet and read a fashion magazine, whilst their children can play with patchworks, jigsaws, and a simple loom.

The purpose-built exhibition space, alongside Fashion Works, will feature 2 or 3 exhibitions a year, and will allow us to deal in greater detail with issues raised in the permanent display, or feature subjects outside the original brief. We hope to bring in touring exhibitions, mainly of an ethnographic nature, to show visitors the incredible range of human body coverings and decoration.

Fashion, fabrics, facts and fantasies - everything you need to know about clothes.

Tyne and Wear Museums' Costume and Textile collection of some 8,000 items, dating from the 18th century to today, is stored at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne. The post of Keeper of Costume and Textiles is job-shared.

Caroline Imlah

Keeper of Costume and Textiles, Tyne and Wear Museums.

3. DOLLY PEG'S COLUMN - *Let it all Hang out !*

Dolly Peg - fashion special.

Clothes Peg

Pegged it down to Street Style with old pal

Polly Posser. Never realised that the V and A had such an atmosphere before - or is that because the lesser spotted, hand-painted tied, Julian Spalding is waiting in the wings?

Looked out for Social History Curators Uniform. Baggy trousers, ill matched socks, cat picked jumper, usually in "autumnal" tones, worn with intense, preferably wire-rimmed spectacles and bad haircuts.

But it's unfair to talk about the men like that. Some now, do own suit. Plus we know it could be worse. We could be mixing with archeologists. Hands behind the ear, all together now. "All around my hat.....!"

Sex, drugs, rock and roll - and suits

And what a suit that was.

Kevin Moore, the man we're likely to hear moore of, was sporting a suit and a mobile 'phone simultaneously at this year's Leicester Christmas lecture. Game Boy!

So Liz Carnegie Talked about Sex again. Well you know what they say. Those that can do, those that can't, collect interestingly shaped vegetables and swop them on Internet. Get a Life Liz, not a Legume.

Mark Down

So farethee well Mark, with your cheap designer clothes and natural good taste...and it's hello St. Albans. Trust you will be well suited to your new post.





Down Under

So Lucy 'children's television presenter' Heartlands is to go on a cultural exchange to New Zealand.

All that urban decay could make a girl yearn for where the sheep outnumber the menfolk. So get a jumper, but remember bright simply isn't us.

Sartorial Elegance 2

Was going to say something interesting about Stuart Davis this time, just to keep the middle-aged reading, but I'd already mentioned him under Street Style.

36DD - The Wonder Issue

So there was no issue 35. Well isn't 36 a much more rounded number. Definitely Desirable.

Put all your eggs in Dolly's Easter Basket.

Send any gossip now to Dolly Peg. Remember the motto! "All in good confidence, all in good taste."

Forthcoming SHCG Seminar on Clothes
see the Seminar Section for details

Another Plaice, Another Museum

A review of a new community museum just opened near Edinburgh, produced by the People's Story team.

Helen Clark talked on tape to Liz Carnegie about the new community museum in Newhaven. Helen's own words have been used throughout this article, and appear in italic

Ace chip shop with a nice museum attached?

In May of last year, a new museum opened in Newhaven, now seen more as part of Edinburgh than a fishing village with a separate and distinct history. Historic it may be, but there were no plans for a museum in Newhaven until Harry Ramsden, the fish and chip entrepreneur decided to open a restaurant in the old fish market and approached Edinburgh District Council with an offer they couldn't refuse. The offer was a twenty year use of an adjacent space which would be made wind and watertight, and rent free.

The museum was made possible with financial help from Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprises and the commitment of lots of staff time. Because there had been no plans to open a museum prior to this, the first step was to see what the public wanted and to then convince the public that the resulting museum would be more than just part of the chip shop.

"At the beginning, there was a lot of animosity towards Harry Ramsden's and people thought this was going to be Harry Ramsden's restaurant museum. What we needed to do was a big P.R. exercise and tell people it was actually a District Council museum and that Harry Ramsden was putting money into it."

Trawling for public opinion

A roadshow was set up to assess the level of opinion the October before the museum was scheduled to open in May. This tight timescale meant that things had to happen very quickly. People were shown photographs and asked if they recognised anyone in them.

"We had a questionnaire which said, 'If you would like to be involved in helping with this museum, please fill this in and send it back to us.', About 30 people did and in conjunction with the community service volunteers we set up a group in January and that meant that we met every week until the opening of the museum."

These weekly sessions followed the pattern of the People's Story where the ideas for the topics to be discussed came from the group themselves rather than being proscribed by the curators. Every session was transcribed and the transcripts were sent back to the group. Some people did question the use of dialect in transcriptions fearing to be mocked for using 'bad' grammar.

"We did have big discussions because they said they didn't talk like that. In the main, they decided that if they said 'didnae' then that was alright but if they said 'wiz' (writer's note: 'was'!), they wanted it changed. A couple of people were quite proud of the way they had spoken. They had been quoted as it was transcribed but we did consult them as to how they wanted that put forward."

To be a real community museum means more than just using quotes in text. In the lead up to the museum, the group put together an exhibition.

"It is taking the group with you and involving them to that extent, they don't want to let go, they do feel passionately that it is their museum. They chose the subjects and they chose the photographs and selected the quotes which went on a 6 panel exhibition which was launched in the library a few weeks before the museum opened."

Time was also spent discussing the 'how' with consultation over the construction of sets and panels. Several members of the group were interviewed individually for the oral history sound posts which are excellent in that unlike most audio in museums - where it seems a gremlin lurks - you can actually hear them, and clearly. And people even sing on tape. They are

easy to work with simple start/stop buttons. There is also a video which charts the history of Newhaven and features the Newhaven Fisher Lassies Choir, resplendent in yellow and white striped petticoats.



Photo: Eairburgh City Museums

Carrying Fish

Hands on and fins to do

Kids and bigger kids and try on those petticoats and dress up as either a fishwife or a jack salt and can prance in front of a mirror living out their favourite advert. There are also those seaside postcard type figures to stick your head through and have a good laugh. In fact the museum, refreshingly, is awash with things to do and touch, designed to meet a potential audience of family groups.

"As we thought our audience would be largely people who had gone to Harry Ramsden's for fish and chips, it is likely they would be families. We had a survey by a student Mike Duhan. He went round the pubs, shops and stood on the local high street and we got a good indication of what the public wanted - something for children."

As the mother of two small children, Helen Clark knows from the firing line the torture of a museum experience where children are bored or even unwelcome.

"I do think if I had had children by the time I set up the People's Story, I would have included more hands on material. It's easier for parents to have information portrayed in a very easy way, so they can digest it instantly and pass it on to children. The next step is interactives in the People's Story."

Involving a school of children

Children had also been involved in the community consultation through the local school.

"The school has always had a museum and way back in 1986 I did a project with the school, so our contact with the school goes back a long way."

Inter-generational work also helped shape the museum with a look at then and now in schooling.

"What was brilliant was that older people were listening to the younger people, just as much as the younger people were listening to the older."

Sole point

As well as the dressing up games, there are net making and knot making. There are many flap lifting games. My own favourite was the guess what a fish looks like in some well known ready cooked meals. I remain unconvinced, however that what passes for scampi, ever had legs.

These interactives are fun and gently educational, but they tell you little about the people of Newhaven or the trials of the fishing industry. Interactives, if they are to avoid being the sole point of interest, need also to convey a part of the story as in one called, 'The Wheel of Fortune'. Called, 'What is Dangerous about Fishing?' various examples come up on the wheel: 'man overboard', 'boiler exploded', 'caught in winch', 'caught in net'. In the words of John Watson, born 1903:

"My father, he'd never had let me go near the trawlers. He said it wisnae a life for a dog, never mind a human being, but there was money in it. I wouldnae say there was a lot of money unless you got to be a skipper."

In Depth

It is at this most human level that the museum works best for me. However, for many the location itself may be the star. The museum looks over the harbour and binoculars are provided. Panels go into the geology of an area in some depth (it is deemed of special interest), and some attempt is made to point out the current problems of over fishing and pollution. Objects, in the main collected for the museum include items from the Society of Fishermen, original costume and fishing material. There are 4 reconstruction sets which show the fish market and aspects of the fishing life, for example, preparing the nets. If the museum does try to do too much, it is in order to meet the needs and interests of a wide range of visitors. It is to Helen Clarke's credit that a museum has attained a level of depth and sincerity in such a small space.

The community consultation did not end with the opening of the museum. The created posts of two part-time attendants were filled by local people. Volunteers regularly come into the museum to talk to visitors. A browsing corner allows visitors to look through a series of folders which have been created with the additional photographs and information which was brought into the museum since opening. Over the years, this will build up into an archive to which the public can have constant access. The fact that this museum has helped to revitalise and create a new interest in the area and will continue to have a valid role in the future seems to argue against museological developments which suggest the community museum is not the



best or at least the sole option with the rise of outreach services which work with local groups on an occasional basis. Helen Clark seems to have provided the best of both worlds in creating a museum which was "outreach led" but has a life span of at least 20 years.

It is always worth the note of caution when considering, 'What is a community museum?' Newhaven museum is still curated if not as is traditionally assumed by the word. That curatorial voice is apparent throughout, particularly in the peopleless section devoted to the area.

"I still think there are too any words. The only way round having too many words is to hand the final editorship to someone else."

One of the current debates in social history is, 'what makes your museum different from our museum?', especially when some even share the same professional designers. The answer is of

course the people. The activity of fishing may differ little from one town to the next. The challenge to face is to give some sense of belonging to a particular place. This is surely achieved through dialogue with locals and through dialect, through superstition and even prejudice. The counter argument of sameness is of course that we as curators at conferences or on busman's outings, have privileged access to museums and can therefore see sameness, where ordinary visitors would not? Is this a good enough argument? Surely as tourists we go to museums to learn something local. Vive la difference.

Newhaven museum has succeeded on several levels beyond providing a place to digest food from Harry Ramsden's. It gives a sense of history of the people and of the area and above all, the interactives ensure it is fun. Well, there's no law against it. is there?

.....

Everyday Things

1. Getting High on Low Culture

A review of the University of Leicester's Department of Museum Studies Christmas lecture, by Jenny Salton from Hull City Museums.

"Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n Roll: Museums and Popular Culture"; at last, I thought, a seriously 'stimulating' seminar. Kevin Moore introduced the day's proceedings: "Hi, my name's Kevin and I'm an addict." (Well, he didn't say that, but I'm a compulsive liar). But, shock horror, he claims not to be a museum addict. What gives him a buzz is Tranmere Rovers; he can't live

without his Saturday fix. As a Man Utd. fan I'm inclined to sneer, but it was this almost instinctive reaction to look down on the interests of others which was the jist of the day. Perceived ideas of high and low culture were challenged. If there were league tables of peoples' interests, museum visiting would surely be in the Premier Division, and trainspotting right at the bottom of a Sunday inter-pub league.

Looking through back issues of SHCG News (as you do on a wet Wednesday in Hull), popular or so-called "low" culture has been on the agenda for some time. I see Ron Dixon from Brookside's sitting room in the Museum of Liverpool Life; 'That's Entertainment' in Hull; and 'The Sixties'

at the Barbican. Thankfully, some museums are interested in their visitors interests and thankfully the seminar didn't dwell on whether museums were the right place for "this sort of thing". It was a relief not to have an introspective and agonising debate on whether we as curators should or shouldn't display popular culture. The speakers had gone past that point and had gone all the way.

First, there was Amy de la Haye from the V&A, talking about, 'Street Style'. The exhibition's look at popular fashion and cult clothing is a welcome and much needed alternative to the much needed alternative to the usual haute couture and high art one expects at this top of the league institution. It was good to see clothing once seen as threatening and dangerous in itself, now threatening the established V&A view of what is stylish and what isn't. It seemed to be a day of confessions; Amy admitted to having been a punk, a Goth and a New Romantic (not all at the same time I hope). This empathy for the subject matter contributed to the success of the exhibition, there was no hint of a condescending attitude towards both the subject matter and the people involved. The slides were so good I didn't take any notes, but I can remember the New Age Traveller - Fraggles - boots, the extremely precise way the skinhead's jeans had to be turned up, the teddy girl suit, wild clubland gear, and Rasta hats. The labels swung like price tags with quotes from the owners. Appropriately there were no glass cases in sight, and importantly, there certainly appeared to be plenty of visitors! The exhibition has undoubtedly succeeded in attracting new audiences to the V&A.

Liz Carnegie, from Glasgow Museums then said, "Let's Talk About Sex". Excuse me again for not taking any notes. I was NOT going to take my eyes off those slides for anyone! The premise of this talk was: if everyone's doing it, why aren't museums recording it? Believe it or

not someone, somewhere, in a house near you, is holding one of those parties and I'm not talking Tupperware. Liz wins the award for the most imaginative piece of outreach so far (unless of course you know different (Finbar...Anne Summers.....Croydon? Ed.)), attending and leaving a camera at a party selling sex aids.

Sex is something if tackled at all, usually appears on the walls of an art gallery. Social History Museums which pride themselves in representing daily life, seem to forget what goes on between the sheets, save for the odd packet of 3 and the contraceptive pill. As for me, well, I've cancelled the museum's subscription to the Local Historian; I now circulate the Ann Summers catalogue instead (in my dreams).

The meal just misses out on an appearance in my 1994 top 5 seminar lunches, though the mince pies with a hint of orange deserve a special mention. The coffee was good (obviously the "drug" promised in the original title).

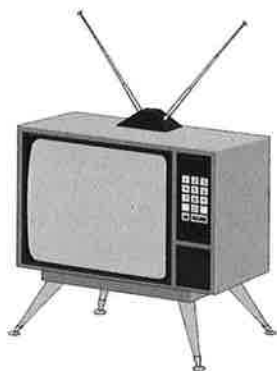
Back to business with an excellent paper by Jo Digger. "Neckties, Sandpits and Jigsaws" sums up the variety of activities going on in Walsall Museum and Art Gallery. This was a welcome opportunity to find out about the People's Shows Walsall had initiated, tapping into the astounding array of interests which people have. Again the theory was not to judge, not to look down, and to get into what the public are into. As a result, the museum's galleries were filled, literally from top to bottom with kipper ties, Marilyn Monroe memorabilia, you name it - it was there.

By way of contrast, but along the same lines, the adjoining Walsall Art Gallery, had its own unique display, the gallery walls completely full of pictures, giving the visitors a spectacular experience. In another effort to attract visitors to the gallery, Walsall had taken art into the street, using pavement artists to recreate pictures from the collections in the shopping areas - an

innovative way of taking art out of the gallery and encouraging people to pop along and see the real thing.

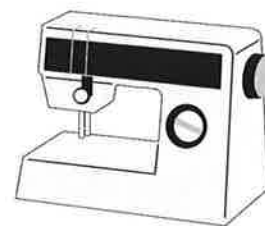
The final session was by Alan Taylor of Stoke on Trent Museum reviewing their exhibition, "All around the garden". The emphasis was on the huge amount of pleasure some people get out of gardening and getting stuck into their allotments. It felt good to see such a colourful and positive exhibition, refreshingly celebrating the simple pleasures in life.

This seminar must have been good. I didn't feel in the least bit tempted to sneak out and partake in that most popular of cultures - Christmas shopping. The seminar dealt with the question of popular culture in a practical and realistic way, the speakers offering a good balance between analysis of the issues and plenty of top tips. I was hooked, some museums are a definite turn on. Many curators are getting excited about what excites their visitors. Questions at the end of the day asked whether curators were patronising their visitors; are we really interested in popular culture? I certainly didn't think the speakers were faking it. Hopefully interest will continue to be genuine, otherwise we may as well go and join "Snobs Anonymous".



2. Collecting and Interpreting Domestic Artefacts

A new publication about museums and household things



The familiar, everyday things in life of today and of the past are the building blocks of social history displays. But are we exploring the full potential of these things, or just using them to illustrate a book-on-the wall story? This booklet tackles the issue of everyday material culture head on. Academic and cultural perspectives on everyday things are written about.

Read about microwaves and 'lifecycles' of technology with Susan Ormrod, about best practice fieldwork in collecting domestic artefacts with Helen Clark, and about representations of domestic artifacts with Gaby Porter. All papers present a much needed analytical perspective to everyday curatorial interpretation and all refer to practical research.

Professor Colin Divall of the Institute of Railway Studies, York, discusses new approaches to the history of technology, and how these might be applied in museums to make more critical and relevant exhibitions. Helen, 'People's Story' Clark's paper argues that artefacts are not complete in themselves, but are intimately bound up with people's experience of living - often ignored in museums. Gaby Porter points out the gaps and omissions in the stories and collections which some museums present, and suggests they act to the disadvantage of women. She suggests it might be different approaches that may be the more successful: imaginative or funny slants to exhibitions should be valued such as the exhibition work produced at the Women's Museum in Denmark.

The booklet explores some of the messages and meanings in museum collections of household things, and suggests how these might be presented.

Questions posed include:

- How can and do museums represent the familiar and everyday things ?
- What is left out of domestic displays in museums, and why?
- What can museums learn from developing debates in feminist and technology studies?
- What can these disciplines learn from museums and their visitors?

When you visit a museum, are you told who used the things that you see on show? As you choose an electric washing machine or iron in a shop, do you know about the people who made it and shaped it?

This publication came out of a seminar and temporary exhibition held at the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry in 1993 called, 'Home Truths? The Secret Language of Everyday Things.' It is published jointly by the Science and Industry Curators Group and the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry.

It costs £4.70 (plus 30p postage and packing) = £5.00. Make cheques payable to 'the Science and Industry Curators Group', stating if you need a receipt, and order your copy from:

Lawrence Fitzgerald, Museum of Transport,
Glasgow Museums, Kelvin Hall, 1 Bunhouse
Road, Glasgow G3 8DP. Tel.: 0141 305 2656.
Fax: 0141 305 2692



3. In My Car

FROM A To B, tales of modern motoring

A review of the BBC TV series. First shown in 1994, with a repeat showing in 1995.

By Nicholas Barker and Martin Parr

There is a BBC book to accompany this series. ISBN 0 563 36984 1

An exhibition of photographs toured 'Welcome Break' service stations nationwide.

Museums can be places to explore, define and represent contemporary culture. They could become unique forums for allowing audiences to question the unquestioned everyday routines in our lives today. So why aren't they? Curators can get people involved in the documenting and representing of their lives as never before. Curators could take directions from this show, and probably do it better at that.

So why have museums - institutions which uniquely have objects at their core - left it to the TV producers to lead the way down this very special road? This programme points the way to new directions in interpreting modern day objects and possibly too, to reinterpreting everyday objects from the past. Objects - cars, washing machines, curtains - all embody signs and symbols, the visible language of values and meanings in our lives today. The way "from A to B" approached the subject of cars, was by empowering drivers to present themselves and their values in their own way. It was exciting and it's worth discussing the incorporation of this approach into curatorial practice.

"From A to B" is the sequel to, "SIGNS OF THE TIMES - a portrait of the nation's tastes" exploring people's taste in their homes. The self-stated aim of this latest show, was, "...to bring together

the separate media of film and photography to chronicle the thoughts, dreams and anxieties of some seventy British motorists..". In five episodes various themes were selected by Parr and Barker to frame and structure the material collected: "women empowered by their cars", "company cars", "family cars", "first cars" and "arguing couples".

The films interview people as they are driving along and they talk to camera, revealing all kinds of personal values. The car is indispensable to many people's lives, plays a part in the domestic and professional routines of life, and presents a self image in a similar way to clothes. Choices of car are analysed, tastes and motivations assessed and dream cars described. The films also allow for a new kind of story telling, the driver in the driving seat of her or his own life story as they recount to the Camcorder. All transcripts were typed up and agreed with contributors before the films were transmitted.

The programmes were more of a reflection or mirror on a few individuals in society today, than anything else. But it was the vitality and personal nature of the programmes that gave them their fascination and appeal.

In museums, collections of cars, armchairs, TV's and other objects of mass production could be documented with special and particular stories of use, and the meanings people attach to them, can be documented with the objects collected. Otherwise, what will we have in the future in our collections? Are we to be saddled with labels in transport museums simply about the technology, the design, the horse power, and the mileage of cars?

Can curators examine people's lives as they happen, and go below the surface of experience to record and represent individual lives and common social trends, and by doing so engage new audiences? Can we explore the modern arenas of life, where sets of objects are brought together, in cafes, living rooms or motor way

service stations? These arenas change over time, for example from the corner shop to the supermarket, even though today they seem unchanging and constant. The gradual social changes can be recorded in this snap-shot, people-centred approach before they are lost. Do we have a responsibility to record people's lives today for the future?

How many of us see a 19th century object in our store and think "what is it?" and then go to an object reference book and find out its name and function. Its meaning and connection with people and peoples lives is lost, because it is unrecorded, the people who used it are dead, and we can't ask them. Will this poverty of meaning carry into the next century, or can we document experiences and connections with today's everyday objects, now? This will affect collecting policies in terms of what we collect, how we select material, and which medium we choose to document in: tapes, objects, photographs? Who knows.

Swedish curators are currently joining forces within SAMDOC making a nationwide contemporary documentation programme looking at the car in society.

Harriet Purkis

4. Flashbacks:

Everyday history of our own times

The **Flashback** series of publications was created as an exercise in recording oral history allied to photographs and relevant documents.

Recent years have seen determined efforts being made to create a better balance between political and social history. Local history societies have emerged with policies of recording and publishing the personal experiences of individuals from their areas. Farm diaries, giving information ranging from climatic conditions to prices at market and wages paid to workers, are now available to the general public in book form.

Perhaps the most exciting of these newly revealed sources has been the move to publish personal histories.

In the mid 1980's, Professor Alexander Fenton, then Director of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, was approached for advice regarding a request for support from the Glenfiddich Living Scotland Awards. This was an application for the cost of equipment to record elderly residents in an area of North East Scotland. As part of the enthusiastic response to assist the project, Professor Fenton produced a simple guide to interviewing, designed partially as an aid to interviewers but mainly to convince subjects that their memories were valid and even a vital contribution to social history.

Some time later, when approached by a colleague, Dorothy Slee, for a project to become involved with, he suggested that she should assemble the recollections of her mother into a publishable form and provided her with a copy of the 'Glenfiddich Guide' as direction. The resulting manuscript became volume 1 of the **Flashback** series.

Under the sponsorship of the European Ethnological Research Centre in association with the National Museums of Scotland, **Flashback** was launched in 1993 with the publication of, 'Two Generations of Edinburgh Folk' by Dorothy Slee. The volume deals with the personal histories of a mother and daughter, and touches on other members of the family, covering from the beginning of the 20th century to the 1990's. We are told how individuals migrated into the city from Fife, Midlothian and Northumberland; how they married, uniting separate families; how they earned their livings; what they ate and how it was cooked, along with much else. In short we are exposed to the minutiae of life that would never be presented in a conventional history book but which is a cogent record of its time and a reminder that a family is more than a genealogy.

Volume 1 was quickly followed by, 'Hard Work, Ye Ken', edited by Ian MacDougal, which is a compilation of the experiences of 4 agricultural workers from Midlothian. The text is expressed in the women's own words, using dialect phrases of their area. Their testimonies include working and social life dating from the latter years of the 19th century until the 1990's, touching on 'feeing fairs' and the dances that followed them, bondager women and the costumes they wore, giving a record of a lifestyle that has passed.

1994 was a barren year as far as **Flashback** publications were concerned with the collapse of our then publishers, Canongate Academic. Now, however, with a third volume in preparation by the newly formed Tuckwell Press Ltd., and with many more manuscripts ready to follow, the world once more looks rosy. Anyone wishing to purchase back copies of existing **Flashbacks** may do so by writing to their offices at :

The Mill House
Phantassie
East Linton
EH40 3DG

The success of **Flashback** as a project relies on the availability of good manuscripts and the finance to publish them. In the latter respect we must thank Midlothian District Council for their support with volume 2.

Anyone willing to undertake the production of a volume, either as an individual or as a member of a group, can write for a 'Guide', available free. Similarly, any individual or body wishing to sponsor a volume can write to:

Flashback
European Ethnological Research Council
c/o National Museums of Scotland
York Buildings
Queen Street
Edinburgh
EH2 1JD

Slavery



1. TRANSATLANTIC SLAVERY - *Against Human Dignity.*

A new permanent gallery at the Maritime Museum, Liverpool.

A impressionist report of a brief visit.

The National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside have opened a new gallery about transatlantic slavery and the slave trade. Billed as the "first museum" to explore the subject in depth in Britain, publicity merchants have been respectfully reminded of Hull City Museums display at Wilberforce House.

Overtly political

It is an important gallery politically, claiming space in a museum for a black history in a world today with racism in it. The gallery's funders (The Peter Moore's Foundation) statement of intent is to "increase public understanding of the experience of Black people in Britain and the modern world through an examination of the Atlantic slave trade and the African Diaspora."

A people's history display

It comes over as a people's history display - it tells the social history of people's experience of slavery from the African and black point of view. It is an educational gallery, incredibly well researched with some hugely important primary source material: objects, quotations and images. All of these combined splendidly, and relied directly on primary source material: direct quotations from those in slavery, drawings from artists of the time, photographs and political ephemera.

When you finally find the way into the gallery, which is in the basement and is poorly signed, you are taken into a fairly dark space, but it is brightly lit and the design is warm with its orange and red stained wood graphic panels. You feel a sense of being in a sunny part of the world.



Jaded 3D models

There are a few models of miniature people in sets, like 3D telly. I didn't like them and they reminded me of dated natural history displays of badger sets and crabs by the sea shore. I'd say these models spoiled the bright feel of the new gallery with its otherwise superb use of mixed media: panels, cases, and sound and video sources. The models undermined the strengths of the gallery: the real source material, the real words of people of the time, real images of people, and real objects of life in Africa before Columbus arrived.

The recreated scenes and mini sets of slave markets and were like a technicolour film of the 1950's but a bit faded and jaded.

Inside the slave ship

The worse point in the visit was walking into the hold of the ship. You walk in, its dark, the wooden boughs of the ship and the shelves for the 'cargo' are to the left and right of you. But it's empty, then you hear this groaning and see moving pictures on a TV monitor on one of the shelves; it's of naked people rolling around, it's like you've become a voyeur, rather than a voyager. "Unexpected pornographic film in here", perhaps the caption should read. I don't know, it just didn't seem to convey much this boat, let alone a successful recreation of what it might have been like being an African chained up on a slave ship.

Contrast Hull's display. You walk into a low ceiling area and suddenly see full size bodies - models - chained up. Next to this are the documentary sources showing a plan of how to fill up a ship with people.

Rich sources of evidence

There are quotes from contemporary sources and from oral testimonies, readings from diaries, slavers' log books and narratives. These do

bring individual's experiences of the times alive, with excellence. For example, Ben Johnson from North Carolina is quoted as saying as a slave, "I had a brother, Jim, whom wuz sold ter dress young Missus for her weddin'". Extensive use is made of the writings of Olaudah Equiano - a slave in the 18th century who wrote his autobiography, "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African, written by himself", published in 1789. The Wilberforce House displays in Hull also draw on his writings.

You are left to question the biased nature of some of this material. Some material was collected originally for a purpose; for the abolitionist cause. I'm not saying the quotes are made up, just that it is worth considering the evidence represented today in context of the past - as political propaganda.

Objects have come from a large collection of West Africa objects in store in the Liverpool Museum. Some have been used to show the wealth of culture which existed in West Africa before and during European slavery. Artifacts include gold and silver items, musical instruments and carved figures and masks

Doing the Right Thing

11 guest curators and a large advisory committee have all made sure they have got the gallery 'right'. This must also have helped the enormous research job, coordinated by the project curator - Alison Taubman, and allowed the gallery to be a great resource.

Overall the gallery was truly educational, very well researched, and interesting and exciting in its presentation.

There is a catalogue published by HMSO edited by Anthony Tibbles. ISBN 0 11 290539 0 paperback.

2. Hull's Slavery Resource Folder

Wilberforce House Museum in Hull have published an educational resource folder on William Wilberforce and the Slave trade. The folder contains copies of original items from the collections and displays.

Items include: the Slave Trade Triangle wall chart, a map showing ships from English Ports being loaded with slaves on the West African coast, bound for the Americas, and their return journey bringing sugar, rum, tobacco and cotton back to England. Also included is a slave's own story, the account by Equiano, a freed slave, of his life in Africa and his capture into slavery. There are copies of original "Slaves for Sale" posters, details on Wilberforce himself and the campaign for abolition, as well as up to date information on slavery around the world today.

The pack is an introduction to slavery through primary source material. It is an important addition to Hull City Museums resources on slavery. Hull was the birthplace of William Wilberforce and opened the first slavery museum in 1906, dedicated to Wilberforce and to the memory of slaves in the British colonies.

The pack costs £2.99 (£3.70 including postage and packing). Contact the social history department on 01482 593902 or the museum reception desk.

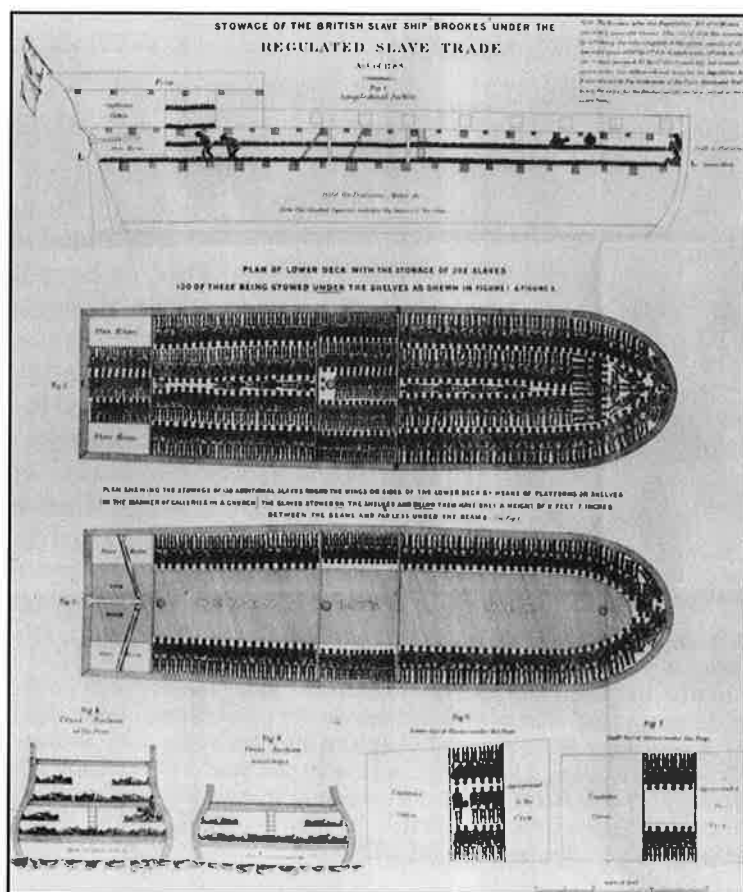


Photo: National Museums and Galleries of Merseyside

Plan of the slave ship the 'Brookes'

3. A Right to Reply

David Devenish is curator and librarian of Wisbech and Fenland Museum which features a permanent display on Thomas Clarkson, Slavery and the Slave-Trade.

He wrote a review for the Museums Journal of the new Transatlantic Slavery Gallery at the Maritime Museum in Liverpool, which was published in the March issue and would like to make the following statement to SHCG members.


"This review in the March Museums Journal under my name is, in its present form, largely the work of the Editor. In particular, I object to the sensationalist title. Since it is now most unlikely that the Editor will publish my letter objecting to his actions, I am writing to advise SHCG members.

He sums up "David C Devenish's experience of Merseyside's Transatlantic slave trade gallery was spoiled by the displays' emphasis on political correctness".

What I actually wrote was:

"The major problem with this is the question of moral stance and 'political correctness'. One cannot deny that transatlantic slavery was a crime against humanity, but making balanced moral judgments on history is not that simple. I should have preferred a strictly dispassionate account. Other people take an opposing view."

\$150 REWARD



RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the night of the 2d instant, a negro man, who calls himself *Henry May*, about 22 years old, 5 feet 6 or 8 inches high, ordinary color, rather chunky built, bushy head, and has it divided mostly on one side, and keeps it very nicely combed; has been raised in the house, and is a first rate dining-room servant, and was in a tavern in Louisville for 18 months. I expect he is now in Louisville trying to make his escape to a free state, (in all probability to Cincinnati, Ohio.) Perhaps he may try to get employment on a steamboat. He is a good cook, and is handy in any capacity as a house servant. Had on when he left, a dark cassinett coatee, and dark striped cassinett pantaloons, new--he had other clothing. I will give \$50 reward if taken in Louisville; 100 dollars if taken one hundred miles from Louisville in this State, and 150 dollars if taken out of this State, and delivered to me, or secured in any jail so that I can get him again.

WILLIAM BURKE.

Bardstown, Ky., September 3d, 1838.

Image: Hull City Museums

Going Green

Where are all the environmental exhibitions produced by social history curators? A plea for social history curators to show greater interest in the environment might sound a little forlorn. Social history curators are not short of important issues to tackle. But given that the world outside museums is taking an increasing interest in the environment, it is worth looking hard at the potential role of social history collections in this area.

The backdrop of developing public interest in the environment should be familiar to everyone. The late 1980s witnessed a dramatic national acceptance in the UK that environmental matters should be taken seriously. By the early 1990s, public interest in the environment (in so far as this can be gauged) began to mature. The economic recession undermined green consumerism, people became bored or depressed by bad news stories, the more radical scientific claims remained unproven, simplistic solutions looked naive against the complexity of the problems. But the environment has not dropped off the public agenda. Public knowledge, attitudes and expectations are changing, but there remains persistent, residual interest in the environment.

Has there been a clearly discernible museum response, or contribution, to this process? There have been high profile landmarks, such as the Natural History Museum's Ecology gallery, The World in Our Hands exhibition at the Royal Museum of Scotland and the Evolution of Wales exhibition at the National Museum of Wales. But is their widespread activity by local museums, or burning interest among social history curators? How does the situation compare with the energy and time spent by social history curators on other issues such as women in history, ethnic minorities or special needs?

Starting points

If you are unsure about the links between social history and the environment, consider the following observations:

- Working with the natural world frequently cultivates a special cultural bond with the environment.
- A desire to conserve the natural heritage is often fired by a sense of place, and a sense of place is often linked to a sense of community.
- Social history collections are, like all collections, the material products of people's interaction with natural resources.
- Current environmental debates have ever-deepening social and economic dimensions.

Any of these statements is a good reason for social history curators to examine the ways in which their work touches on the environment. They all raise questions about how museums should interpret the environment. In fact, most of these ideas already inspire social history in museums. Farming museums often show how traditional land use provided habitats for wildlife. Local museums frequently attract volunteers who combine interests in natural and social history. Industrial museums are concerned with the human use of various natural resources from water power to sand for glass manufacture.

But this work often seems to fall short of fully fledged environmental interpretation. What is the relationship today between farming and wildlife? How many community museums stimulate (and support) community environmental action? Do industrial museums ever consider the efficient use of raw materials? There is scope for most museums to go one or two steps further in their interpretation of the environment.

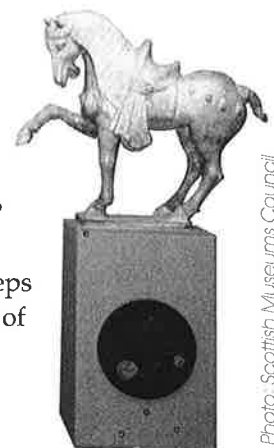


Photo: Scottish Museums Council

Deciding which steps to take can be difficult. A social historian who is new to this area of work might find the following simple points useful.

- Working in partnership with other environmental interpretation providers, such as countryside rangers, can help you see your collection in a new light and generate new ideas.
- What are your visitors' environmental interests and concerns?
- Beware of focusing only on doom and destruction. Consider celebrating the aesthetic, economic and social value of the environment.
- Re-establish the links between your collections and the environment from which they came, or in which they were used.

One interesting recent development in this field has been the number of museums that have picked up on the ideas of the environmental arts charity Common Ground as part of their community outreach work. Common Ground has developed a portfolio of projects that can be used to encourage community groups to identify and celebrate the cultural and natural features of the local landscape. These ideas have been taken up enthusiastically by both museum curators and countryside rangers.

The really ambitious social history curator could consider heading straight for the cutting edge of environmental education. You may have heard of Local Agenda 21 and sustainable development plans. The aim is for most local authorities to have such plans in place by 1996. Do not be put off by the jargon. The idea of sustainability is simple. How do we meet the economic, social and environmental needs of today, without jeopardising those of the future? Part of the Agenda 21 exercise (which came out of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio) is to create public debate, involve local people in the planning process, and to make the concept of sustainable development accessible to the public. Museums are the only public institutions to combine interests in an area's economic, social and environmental history. Museums could use their collections, and their historic and historical perspective, to

become the focus for this critical debate about the future.

There are hundreds of opportunities, great and small, for social history curators to make a greater contribution to people's appreciation of their relationship with the environment. In Scotland, these opportunities are being explored through the Scottish Museums Council's Environmental Initiative. The Environmental Initiative was launched in August 1994 to promote appreciation of the environment through Scotland's Museums Council, in the partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage and the Crown Estate. It is establishing a series of projects and demonstrate a variety of ways in which museums can contribute to public appreciation of the environment. For further information about the Environmental Initiative, contact: Dan Hellier, Environmental Initiative Co-ordinator, Scottish Museums Council, Count House, 20/22 Torphichen Street, Edinburgh EH3 8JB. Tel: 0131 229 7465, Fax: 0131 229 2728.

Further information:

Two thought-provoking and practical introductions to environmental education are:

Cornell, J, (1979), *Sharing Nature with Children*, Exley Publications Limited.

Van Matre, S, (1974), *Acclimatisation - a Sensory and Conceptual Approach to Ecological Involvement*, American Camping Association.

See also the *Bulletin of Environmental Interpretation*, published by the Centre for Environmental Interpretation, Manchester Metropolitan University, St Augustine's, Manchester, M15 6BY. Tel: 0161 247 1067.

Common Ground can be contacted at, 41 Shelton Street, London, WC2H 9HJ. Tel: 0171 379 3109, Fax: 0171 836 5741.

Dan Hellier
Scottish Museums Council



Photo: Scottish Museums Council

The Sports Section

1. First Half

Museums: Homes for Sport?

Passing fad or crowd pleaser? Are museums playing with Football? Which side are they on? Tosca Martine Marletta expresses some views and reviews the "Homes of Football" exhibition at Tuille House Carlisle.

There has been a rash of football exhibitions in the last couple of years, probably due, it has to be admitted, to the jumping on the bandwagon phenomenon which followed the success of Nick Hornby's confessional book of his life as an Arsenal fan, "Fever Pitch". Football is now very trendy. Us middle-class university-educated types watch "Fantasy Football League" on BBC2 and feel very laddish, in an intellectual way. In penance, we have football exhibitions.

"After all, somewhere, wherever it is you are, a football club bears the name of your town, where you come from. And it is especially exciting if that team starts to do well, raising eyebrows down the road." says Stuart Clarke, a fan and photographer. In the "Homes for Football" exhibition at Tuille House, Carlisle, he has put these 2 together to give the public his view of the world of football. This is the side that is rarely seen - not managers, players, sports commentators discussing tactics and transfer deals - but the fans at the hallowed grounds they consider their domain, their home, "with all the warmth and permanence the word 'home' implies".

Crowd puller

Immediately you walk into the exhibition, you feel you belong. You also feel like it is Saturday afternoon, and a feeling of excitement grips you. The set of goalposts on the left seem enormous, and on the right the panels of A3 colour framed photographs, mixed in with a cosmopolitan range of strip tops, their arms raised as if celebrating another goal, pull you into the



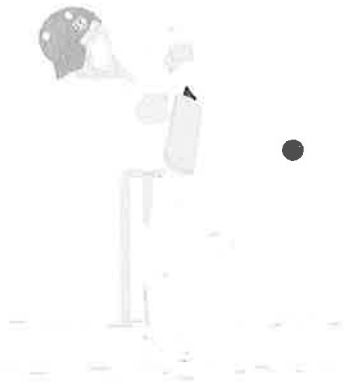
gallery. A comfortable background noise of a TV match with TV crowd gets the visitor in the mood, and people are talking and pointing and running about quite free from the usual awkwardness caused by being in an art gallery. When you eventually discover that the TV match is being shown in a living room setting, complete with brown velveteen sofa, armchairs, and a coffee table, you fully expect to see your father / brothers / boyfriend sitting there, and are overcome by a desire to do some ironing while watching the game.

"The Homes of Football" exhibition, is one of the best football exhibitions to have been shown so far in Britain. It is designed with a national (presumably English?) football museum in mind. It will be interesting to see how this develops.

National fixtures

Already in Scotland, based in the Transport Museum in Kelvingrove, Glasgow, in May - September 1994, a temporary football gallery paid homage to Scottish professional league football. This was run to spark off interest in a planned national (Scottish) museum of football, to be based by 1996 in the South Stand at Hampden Park, and run by the Scottish Football Association Museum Trust. If the temporary exhibition was anything to go by, this will focus on clubs histories and players, rather than the fans - which is fine, of course, and has its place.

But one dreads, instinctively, the 'legitimising' effect this may have on football as a subject fit for museums. Clubs are businesses, after all; businesses which do not like bad press and which, at the moment, are increasingly ignoring fans - by signing deals with TV companies which then dictate match schedules, or by charging inflated prices at turnstiles. Fans have always been vocal in their criticism as much as their support, whether through non-attendance at games, or fan newsletters, or the media. One worries that football museums will side with the clubs, who, after all, will either be the sponsors or trustees, and the fans will be left out in the cold. Football museums may yet prove themselves to be innovative, exciting and democratic.



2. Second Half

The Association of Sports Historians

Stuart Hart here introduces the Association who will participate live in the forthcoming SHCG Sporting Life Seminar at Hull City Museums on Wednesday 4 October 1995. Get your tickets in for the day of the match....see under SHCG Seminar section for full details.

The latent recognition that the understanding of the history of sport in Britain was a subject for serious study came in mid-1993. It was then that Professor Wray Vamplew was appointed to the first Chair of Sports History when he accepted

such a position at De Montfort University in Leicester.

Professor Vamplew (a keynote speaker at our SHCG seminar in October) says,

"I believe that it is important that we set the sporting record straight, not merely in terms of getting the scores and team sheets correct (though this is vital), but in correcting some of the myths which have become conventional wisdom. For instance, despite what the critics of modern sport have to say, there was no past golden age in which corrupting influences were held at bay and participants played the game, umpires' decisions were respected, crowds did not riot and drugs were not taken."

"Just consider the 1844 Derby, the classic test for 3-year-old thoroughbreds, which was won that year by a heavily disguised 5-year-old; the 1890 strike by Celtic players for higher wages - 3 years before professionalism was recognised by the Scottish Football authorities; and the 1908 London Olympics at which the supposedly neutral British officials used their megaphones to urge on home athletes.

"I also maintain that sport has rarely been separate from a nation's social structure, political ideology or economic context, and that what happens on the playing fields can tell us much about the society in which the sport was played. My own work has focused on sport as part of the leisure industry and in tracing its move into the corporate world. En route some interesting economic practices are being revealed: many clubs are prepared to sacrifice profits to secure a championship; the input-output ratios of game preservation seem distinctly unproductive; there is a varying amalgam of investment and consumption in the decision to become a racehorse owner or a football club director; and in few sports is there a desire to become a monopolist for there is economic benefit in being world champion if there are no challengers."

Although there had been a few small incestuous groups prior to 1993 - whose numbers never exceeded four dozen - no one organisation had existed to bring together sports historians for their mutual benefit. The catalyst from the University's decision saw a group of amateur and professional sports historians discuss the idea of forming an association. It was accepted that there were countless numbers of people who were studying sport on a local, regional or national basis and in many instances publishing their own work for mainly local consumption.

It was agreed to form the Association of Sports Historians and that each member of the executive would be, as practicably as possible, not only from a different region of the country but also be representative or specialise in, different sports. This formation duly occurred in early 1994 with a national network of sports historians established by the time of the first meeting which took place in London last June.

Each committee member has a role to play. In their region they monitor local newspapers for any relevant editorial or feature stories; they make a note of any exhibitions or conferences held with local art galleries or museums quite often being venues for such events and they research local magazines and journals for articles on regional sporting matters.

The Association produces a quarterly Newsletter which contains as much of this information as possible. But what is of more importance is that each member has the right to include in any mailing details of their work or of their own specialist organisation. This member involvement and participation is the basis for having such an Association. Each June, A.S.H. holds a convention at the University of London. This gathering has 2 main functions: firstly to enable members to talk of their work and aspirations, and to call for assistance when needed. Secondly, it also allows each member to

have a stall in which they can promote their own organisation by offering information, membership and publications.

As from October 1995, under the editorship of Stuart Bailey, Director of Physical Education at Winchester College, the Association will be publishing an annual Journal, *Sporting Heritage*. This publication will contain major articles of a sporting nature as well as being an outlet for members' research.

A.S.H. membership costs £10 a year. See the enclosed leaflet to this News or contact: The Secretary, A.S.H., 4 Hollington Court, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 5AJ.

3. Extra Time A Football Fantasy ?

Robert Pratten is studying for an M.A. in Museum Studies at Leicester University. In his dissertation he is suggesting that the importance of football as a part of British popular culture should be reflected in national and local museums. He is researching how museums have tackled football to date, and exploring how the inclusion of football in museums can be developed. Any views, experiences, or information that museum professionals could share to assist Robert with his research will be much appreciated.



Please contact: Robert Pratten, The Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, 105 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7LG. Tel. contact: 0115 9413756

**Forthcoming SHCG Seminar on Sport . . .
see the Seminar section for details**

The Seminar Section

Fantastic Plastics

An SHCG seminar held at the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum on 6 March 1995. Julian Bell from Oldham Museum went along. Here is his report.

This one-day seminar aimed to give a broad outline of "Plastics", including their history, occurrence, physical attributes, degradation and conservation.

The speakers, with the exception of Mark Suggitt, were all either from the Science Museum or the Plastics Historical Society, and provided excellent, often surprising, information. A brief history of plastics enlightened delegates of the wide variety of different materials actually classed as "plastic"; as a result, I found the most useful way to determine a plastic was to treat the term as an adjective, rather than a noun; asking whether the object shows "plastic" qualities, rather than is it a "plastic"? Hence, materials such as bone, are classed as one of the earliest plastics, as it can be moulded and shaped in the same way as more modern compounds, and was often used in just such a way, to produce, for example, small ornaments.

The wealth of information provided by the speakers certainly opened my eyes to the rather larger "plastic" content within the collections with which I work, than I had previously realised. What has stuck most in my mind however, are the numerous degradation problems associated with what I had previously assumed to be a fairly stable and inert substance; indeed, the fact that we are so frequently reminded how difficult plastics are to dispose of, or how slow they are to degrade in nature, has, I think, programmed the minds of many people into thinking of them as virtually indestructible. All speakers put this erroneous notion to rest with a variety of examples of how certain plastics give off harmful chemicals, both liquid and gaseous, which can add to their own

degradation if in a confined space, degrade other materials in close proximity, or even burn through tissue paper.

An equally comprehensive outline was given to the steps we can take to prevent such degradation, with the emphasis firmly on preventative, rather than remedial conservation. This information however, although possibly more valuable than characteristics of degradation, did not stay as firmly in my mind as the more alarming reports of acid emitting materials and melting rubber!

Although attempting to include every aspect of the subject at one sitting, and satisfying everyone's individual requirements from the seminar was almost impossible, I did find colleagues, so that whilst different examples were used, the end message was the same.

The object handling and identification session at the end of the day became impractical due to the large number of delegates present, who all, like me, wanted to know how to tell one material (and its problems) from another.

The immense variety of plastic materials, and all the associated problems and remedies, which speakers had talked about, left me with a feeling of apprehension, bordering on dread, as soon as the seminar closed. I was certain that back amongst the plastic collections of Oldham, with objects degrading, melting and cracking before my very eyes, I would be clueless as to which remedy to apply to which object, or even which type of plastic I was dealing with. To this end, I would have preferred the speakers to have spent more time covering the identification of different plastics, so that appropriate action could be taken by those without the inborn ability to distinguish Vulcanite from Bakelite!

A pack of information has however been promised for all delegates, which I am sure will go a long way to laying my concerns to rest, and provide information of an equally high calibre as the day itself.

Forthcoming SHCG Seminars

Tuesday 9 May 1995

FASHION WORKS

Newcastle Discovery, Newcastle upon Tyne

It is a rare social history curator who has not encountered costume in a museum collection. But how should we care for these fragile items and what are the interpretation issues? This seminar will provide some of the answers.

Costume offers an exciting and popular meeting point for decorative art and social history. Recent exhibitions at the V&A and Newcastle Discovery have exploited this potential. Debate will be led by Caroline Imlah, curator of the new permanent costume gallery in Newcastle, and Catherine Dingwall, co-curator of the V&A 'Street Style' exhibition. Freelance textile conservator, Caroline Rendell will run a hands-on and off guide to the care and identification of costume. There will be a chance to see the 'Fashion Works' Show during the day.

Wednesday 4 October 1995

SPORTING LIFE

Old Grammar School Museum,
Hull City Museums

Sport is a vital aspect of past and contemporary popular culture. Yet, despite its popularity and importance in many people's lives, sport is a relatively new theme for museum displays. This seminar will explore how a range of museums have approached the topic and interpreted its material culture.

Confirmed speakers are: Ged O'Brien from Glasgow Museums and the Scottish Football Association; Professor Wray Vamplew who is the first chair of Sports History at De Monfort University in Leicester; Peter Lewis who is the Director of the British Golf Museum in St Andrews, and Jayne Tyler the Keeper of Social History at Hull City Museums and curator of the 1995 'Sporting Life' exhibition at the Old

Grammar School, Hull. There will be an opportunity to view the 'Sporting Life' exhibition during the day.

Fees (subject to confirmation): £10 members, £20 non-members, £5 unwaged members. Free places may be available, please contact Hazel Edwards for details.

Booking Forms and further details from:
Alisdair Wilson,
Newcastle Discovery,
Blandford Square, Newcastle Upon Tyne
Tyne and Wear Museums
Tel.: 0191 232 6789

Other People's Seminars

Oral History Society

Talking about Belief - Oral History and Religion

25th Annual Conference
University of the West of England, Bristol
21 - 23 April 1995

Please contact: Brenda Corti (conference),
Department of Sociology, University of Essex,
Colchester, CO4 3SQ.
Tel: 01206 873333, Fax: 01206 873410

Fees: Full conference, £35.00; members of the Oral History Society, £27.50; students, claimants and O.A.Ps, £15. This is a non-residential conference.

Equal Opportunities - Where next?

17 May 1995

Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester

WHAM and MPG organised, this seminar aims to look at policy issues facing museums and suggest some priorities for action. Speakers include: Gaby Porter on recent initiatives in the USA and elsewhere; Alison Coles, MGC Access Officer; and Nigel Holden, chair of the M.A. Equal Opportunities Committee.



The venue will be wheelchair accessible and I understand that facilities for hearing impaired delegates can be provided on request. There is a £1.50 charge for car parking on the site and the cost of the day is £5 to MPG and WHAM members and £12 to non-members. There is free admission to the museum, and delegates must make their own arrangements for lunch - there's a museum cafe.

For a booking form and further details please contact: Rachel Hasted, WHAM events organiser, 75 Ravensdale Road, London, N16 6TH. Tel.: 081 800 6410

Museum Ethnographers Group

27 JUNE 1995

Study visit to Wisbech and Fenland Museum, Museum Square, Wisbech, Cambs, PE13 1ES. Tel.: 01945 583817.

Contact David Devenish at the Wisbech Museum for further details.

The Open Museum, The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. Tel.: 081 312 6747.

Imaging the Sea:

Film and Historic Photographs

Saturday 6 May 1995 10.15 - 4.15

Genealogy - The Museum's Resources

Saturday 20 November 1995 10.15 - 4.15

What archive material is there in the museum to explore family history ?

A day seminar was held at Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Road, London EC1Y 1AU, Tel.: 071 253 2262 called, 'Museums, Education and Religion' in March 1995. It explored the theme of Education, and looked at issues such as, museum education and different faiths, encouraging the use of religious collections in the teaching of humanities and science.

Exhibitions now on

Hine Sight

Photographs by Lewis Hine at the City Museum, Bethesda Street, Hanley, Stoke on Trent, Tel: 01782 202173. 6 May - 4 June 1995. Photos of immigrant life in America, and of the development and construction of the New York skyline in the 1930's. A touring exhibition from the National Museum of Film and Photography, Film and Television.

The Stoke Open

An exhibition of Stoke people's art and craft work. City Museum, Bethesda Street, Hanley, Stoke. 25 June - 3 September 1995

Josiah Wedgewood

The Man and His Mark. An exhibition about the life and works. 18 June - 1 October 1995. City Museum, Stoke.

Here to Stay: Bradford's South Asian Communities

1 April - 14 May 1995. Elizabethan Exhibition Gallery, Brook Street, Wakefield, Tel.: 295797. Contemporary photographs and oral history combine to show the life of some of Bradford's people. Organised by Bradford Heritage Recording Unit.

Women's Clothes from the 1940's

A new display of one woman's clothes. This changing room will show different clothes from Mrs. Louie Elizabeth Bird of Normanton's wardrobe, over a 2 year period. Wakefield Museum, Wood Street, Wakefield.

Remembering VE Day

Wakefield Museum, Wood Street, Tel: 01924 295351. A special display, asking for contributions to the VE Day scrapbook.

People Before London

A new Prehistoric gallery at the Museum of London. The gallery concentrates on the everyday lives of these early Londoners - what they ate, what they wore and the skills they used.

History From Coins

Wisbech and Fenland Museum, Museum Square, Wisbech. Tel.: 0945 583817

A new permanent educational display with coins from the Ancient Gauls to the Isle of Man, and trade tokens from East Anglia.

A Soldier's Life

Newcastle Discovery, Newcastle upon Tyne.

A new permanent gallery opens on 19 May 1995. The social history of military history is displayed through themes rather than dates of battles. The centre piece of the exhibition revolves around 2 characters living through the First World War - a true story of an engaged couple.

Sporting Life

The Old Grammar School, Hull.

A new exhibition just opened, exploring many aspects of sport including women in sport, heroes and controversial issues.

Joliba: Arts From Mali and the Niger Bend

June 24 - July 1 1995

Wisbech and Fenland Museum, Museum Square, Wisbech. Tel.: 0945 583817

An exhibition of West African art work.

Nelson - a Commemoration

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. Tel.: 081 312 6747

The hero and his health, the significance of key battles, the popular art and ballads associated with Nelson.

Fashion Works

Newcastle Discovery, Tyne and Wear Museums Service, Newcastle Upon Tyne

Great Benin

Museum of Mankind, 6 Burlington Gardens, London W1X 2EX. Tel.: 071 636 1551

Art from West Africa. Until 10 December 1995.

Object of the Month

McLean Museum and Art Gallery, 15 Kelly Street, Greenock. Tel: 01475 723741. Changing objects on show every month, from an Eagle to a 19th century Japanese Tea Set.

Stevenage 100 Years Ago

Stevenage Museum, St George's Way, Stevenage.
Tel.: 01438 354292.

This major new exhibition looks at how people lived 100 years ago. Includes hands-on activities: Have a go at straw plaiting, compare your height to that of an average Board School Child and try your hand at doing the laundry.

Until 11 November 1995.

Transatlantic Slavery

Merseyside Maritime Museum, Albert Dock, Liverpool

Tenement Folk

Springburn Museum, Atlas Square, Ayr Street, Glasgow. Tel.: 0141 557 1405

This new exhibition describes one man's memories of growing up in Springburn in the first decades of the century. He is Mr. Andrew Lillie, now 83 years of age a former architect with the Glasgow Corporation. Includes his painting and writing as well as four tenement room sets. Until 31 January 1996.

Pure Silk

McManus Galleries, Dundee. Tel.: 01382 432020 for further details.

An exhibition of historic and modern clothes and textiles. It concentrates on Scottish and British costume, and includes embroidered robes from imperial China, Japan and Morocco. A soundtrack tells the story of silk and there are examples of silk to touch.

The Prophetic Eye

The life and work of George Peabody (1795 - 1869)

Until 9 July 1995, Museum of London.

Objects, paintings and photographs telling the life story of a man regarded as the founder of modern philanthropy. He founded one of the largest financial empires (Morgan) and gave money to house homeless working people in London.

Eels, Pie and Mash

An exhibition of photographs by Chris Clunn

4 April - 2 July 1995, Museum of London

60 black and white photos of traders and food establishments in London. There is a book to accompany the exhibition.

To feature in this section please send your press releases to the editor. Particularly welcome is exhibition information from smaller museums. Please send your newsletter, or just a brief note about forthcoming exhibitions, or a press release. It's easy.

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Photo: Building The New Museum at Lymington. Although 'The Museum in a Room' opens at Lymington in May, please keep sending items for the NEWS to P.O.Box 14.



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Press releases, reviews, polemics, views, cartoons, photographs, book reviews, and correspondence are all very welcome. Please send to : Harriet Purkis, The Editor, SHCG News, Lymington Museum, P.O.Box 14, New Street, Lymington, SO41 9TW.

Tel.: 01590 679273. Fax: 01590 679997

Next issue includes: Croydon, Live Interpretation and . . . ?

All contributions gratefully received for possible inclusion

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS 5 JUNE 1995