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SHCG

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

GROWING UP
IN DEWSBURY



ISSUE NUMBER 40 AUTUMN 1996

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GROWING UP IN DEWSBURY
ASYLUM LIFE IN PRESTON
OUTREACH IN SOUTHAMPTON
ANNUAL STUDY WEEKEND

**SOCIAL
HISTORY
CURATORS
GROUP**

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. Articles should be between 500 to 2,000 words. 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.

The Journal

The next journal is currently being prepared. This is an appeal for articles. It gives you an opportunity to write an in-depth article or review an important new gallery or book. Articles should be around 2,500 - 5,000 words, typed and double spaced. Please write, contributions are gratefully received. If you would like to write an article, please contact Nigel Wright at Astley Hall to talk about it.

This NEWS

Thanks to Barbara Bamford for the design work on this NEWS.

Harriet Purkis
Editor

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Annual Study Weekend Report

27 - 30 June 1996
Edinburgh and Glasgow

The theme for the study weekend was targeting and evaluation in museums.

A series of papers and workshops enabled members to find out about marketing and evaluation in theory, as well as explore practical ways to have a go.

Louise Perrin and Christine McLean were in Edinburgh and they report on the details of the papers and workshops below.

Survival and Success

Kevin Moore from the department of Museum studies at Leicester University began the weekend's papers by asking, 'What does marketing offer to the social history curator?' He put the case for marketing in museums, de-mystifying the process and suggesting ways of minimising costs by for example sharing market research costs with other organisations. He said that it is crucial to the survival and success of museums and the process of democratisation - serving all sections of society.

Marketing is often neglected in museums because of its hard-sell image, and because it appeals to the lowest common denominator and is seen not to be appropriate for museums. But marketing is about focussing on customer requirements: who are the current users and non-users; what do they think of what you do, and what might tempt them to use your services? If you haven't asked these questions, how do you know your exhibition will be successful?

He questioned whether we need to target non-visitors because there will always be people who cannot be reached. This may be important when resources for marketing are limited. Kevin packed it in for a full half-hour, and very helpfully provided copies of his overheads in advance. Other presenters take note!

Prejudices, preferences and reactions

Dr. Paulette McManus, a museum and heritage consultant, took a more pragmatic approach. Examining the difference between quantitative and qualitative forms of investigation in visitor study work, she then concentrated on front end evaluation.

Qualitative information is open-ended; it is about gut feelings, emotions, prejudices, and social norms. Typical methods are focus groups, structure interviews, individual 'on the floor' interviews and doing formative evaluation. Interpretation of the data can require professional knowledge. Quantitative evaluation is closed, where some behaviour is black and white and where parameters are specific such as male/ female or age. It is numerical data, percentages, statistics and often involves simple yes/no answers. It is typically used in demographic studies and during summative evaluation. However, to obtain the widest possible view both techniques should be used.

This paper was difficult to absorb. In particular, the lack of supporting overheads which would have clarified the various terms and technical jargon used throughout. However, Paulette did stimulate lively debate, not least her opinion of the value, or otherwise, of student placements to carry out visitor research.

Wooing the audience

Susie Fisher from the Susie Fisher Group, brought a breath of fresh air, and talked about the use of qualitative evaluation with potential audiences. She reassured us that even visitors themselves do not necessarily know what they want from a museum, but they know what they can respond to. It is our responsibility to find out how our visitors naturally react and then design exhibitions with this in mind: engage the visitor psychologically, woo them - then draw the story out from the objects and collections on display.

Qualitative research is about listening, talking to people, understanding their perspective. It is extra work but a sure route to excellence. Case studies were quoted, and demonstrated how evaluation can influence decisions and exhibition plans. The 3 main areas of change are characterised by: a slight shift of ideas; something glaringly obvious has been left out; the visitors come up with something new and precious.

Many of the papers were about getting people into museums, so it was delicious to hear Susie Fisher talk about objects, and how they are a number one strength. Excellent!

Arts about Manchester

Andrew McIntyre raised fears about statistics which suggest 8 out of 10 visitors to museums are not returning, predicting a total saturation of the market within 5-10 years. He did a joint presentation with Gerri Morris from Morris Hargreaves consultants, which presented the case that a museum is a very effective machine for turning potential visitors into lapsed visitors.

Discarding targets based on traditional audience segmentation, Andrew introduced the Adam's Flow model (this can be found in the ICOM book, 'Marketing the Arts'), segmenting visitors by levels of knowledge of the museum and creating an hierarchy of visitor needs. These are from Orientation - how to get into the museum and use it without betraying their obvious inexperience of the museum, through 7 stages culminating in Intimacy - total, relaxed experience and familiarity with the museum. The session closed with the message that Product Development is crucial for the survival of museums.

Packaging, Pirates and Pineapples

Maureen Barrie, an Education and Public Relations Officer from the National Museums of Scotland, next spoke about some of the ideas and motivations behind recent exhibitions at the National Museums of Scotland. It considered how to identify groups of non-visitors and how to find hooks for potential audiences.

The Robert Louis Stevenson and Treasure Island exhibition in 1994 helped make Pacific ethnographic material accessible to the public by basing it around the popular themes of childhood, pirates and adventures. Areas of dark Victorian pirates contrasted with areas of light Pacific seafarers and a walk down the gangplank connected the two. Different levels of text were used and empty spaces became a secondary exhibition, usually at children's height, to display shells and shell necklaces for example.

The 1996 Art and Industry exhibition was designed with a specific interactive area for young people, with plenty of drawers to open, and objects with questions attached. There is little supervision in this area, little damage and a little minor theft.

Workshops

Delegates had the opportunity for more detailed discussion and exchange at the workshops on Friday afternoon. Each of the people who had given a paper then led a workshop. Themes included: examining visitor behaviour using a video; re-writing text for different audiences; dream exhibitions that curators might want to do; and how to ask the right questions in market research.

Museums in Glasgow

A quick trip on a coach transported us from Edinburgh to Glasgow and to the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art. Julian Spalding, the director of Glasgow Museums, introduced people to the museums service and spoke about his particular view that museums should be in the business of generating interest to the public. He also questioned the internal structures in many museum services, and presented the view that separate museum education services may not be necessary.

Stitching up cultural divides

This intensely personal paper, left the audience visibly moved and demonstrated how one person's personal vision, determination and imagination can have a direct influence for good in the life of the community. Eleanor Viegas from Birmingham Museums is a textile specialist and outlined a project based at Aston Hall in which Asian women come together to practise traditional embroidery skills that are in danger of being lost. Using the architecture and design of Jacobean Aston Hall, the women began to create their own designs fusing their old world skills with new sources of inspiration. Although a simple concept, the project has had an enormous number of spinoffs, which continue to reverberate. These include reducing isolation of Asian women and building up confidence in their own worth. The women are producing 2 hangings for the forthcoming V&A mogul tent project and in planning this event, it was the first time that some women in the group had been to a museum, been to London, or had ever left Birmingham.

Italians in Edinburgh

In the 1991 census, Helen Clarke told us, it was shown that 16% of people in Edinburgh were born outside Scotland and that 2.4% identified themselves as being non-white. 'The Peoples of Edinburgh Project', a joint initiative to celebrate the cultural diversity of Edinburgh and the contributions that differing communities have made, was set up by the WEA Scotland, Edinburgh Museums and the Scottish Arts Council. The aim was to produce an exhibition and a book.

An appeal leaflet was sent out in 1995 followed by a forum meeting. Following this, training sessions were set up for things such as oral history recording. 14 different groups then came together to talk about why they had moved to Edinburgh and what they were doing to keep their cultural heritage alive. The steering group met every 6 weeks and it became clear that tensions existed between the Asian and European groups, and assumptions held by the organisers were challenged. For example, the Italians did not consider themselves to be 'ethnic' and members of the Chinese group did not know that the museum had a collection of Chinese objects.

Drawing in your dinner

The under-fives were targeted by Walsall Museum and Art Gallery and a programme for developing an exhibition for 3-5 year old was progressed. Statistics show that Walsall has the highest nursery school provision in England, and the largest number of unwanted pregnancies in Europe. A questionnaire showed a high visitor profile for the under 11's and yet there was limited provision for the under-fives and their carers.

A project began which aimed to produce an art exhibition that would run for just 7 weeks appropriate for this age group, that would be safe, stimulating and fun. There were a number of perceived difficulties to overcome about 3 - 5 year olds: too many risks involving health and safety; children will play not learn; we don't know their needs; there is no expert help available; young kids will spoil the gallery for adults.

By the end of the START exhibition most of these issues had been addressed and resolved. Like many successful projects, the Walsall museum policy of taking risks and making mistakes paid off. It wasn't only the visitors who benefited; museum attendants became more involved in the work of the gallery, and links were made with many community groups. START 2 is being planned for May 1988 which will include social history objects.

End in sight

The final session of the conference followed on from two members papers by Alison James and Valerie Wardlaw. It was a discussion amongst all participants that centred on the idea that if you don't want to hear the answers, then don't ask the questions. The scientific approach using quantitative data, may be useful when talking to sponsors and local authorities, but qualitative data - which is more time consuming to collect and interpret - will often give more relevant information. Many of the papers touched on visitor empowerment and democratisation and this was seen as an opportunity for change and the end of the museum 'comfort zone'. This session was definitely one of the best bits, worth sticking it out to the bitter end. However, as a first timer I felt it would have been useful to have someone chairing the session as not everyone had the opportunity to put their point of view. This was the only time I had any inkling of the supposed SHCG clique.

The end

I had a completely open mind as to what to expect from the whole weekend. I was not disappointed and would recommend the ASW to anyone who may be hesitating. The organisation, accommodation and food

were fine. There were plenty of opportunities for museum visits and for getting together informally. People were very open, welcoming and friendly.

Louise Perrin and Christine McLean

Asylum Life in Preston

THE STORY OF WHITTINGHAM HOSPITAL

1 June - 2 November 1996

Unbeknown to most local people, the Lancashire cotton town of Preston at one time had the second largest mental hospital in Europe. With over 3,500 patients and 900 staff it was almost a small town in its own right, with a private railway, brewery, bakery, fire brigade and farms. It's hardly surprising that local people are oblivious to this fact given that Victorian mental hospitals with their high walls, long drives and vast grounds deliberately cut themselves off from the world 'outside'. By surrounding themselves in mystery, these gloomy red-brick institutions inevitably attract speculation about what goes on inside. It is no surprise that ignorance and fear surrounding psychiatric hospitals is so widespread. So, when the Harris Museum and Art Gallery was approached in 1995 by the NHS Trust who administer Whittingham Hospital to put on an exhibition to mark its closure, it seemed an intriguing challenge.

A brief history

Staging an exhibition on the subject of the treatment of mental illness is bound to be controversial. Although ostensibly the exhibition was about the history of one Victorian mental hospital, it soon became apparent that it would be difficult to avoid all moral and ethicopolitical debates that seem inseparable from

mental health services. The exhibition brief, however, made it clear that 'Asylum' would only provide an introduction to the wider issues concerning mental illness within the context of this one hospital. By narrowing the focus of the exhibition, an excellent opportunity was provided to concentrate on adding the 'human dimension' to the history of this vast institution. The aims of the exhibition were to increase public understanding of the function of psychiatric hospitals, illustrate the historical role asylums have played in caring for people with a mental illness and to raise awareness of issues relating to mental health.

Patients and things

The core of the exhibition was to be a collection of miscellaneous artefacts belonging to the hospital including old medical equipment, uniforms, domestic items, curiosities, documents and photographs. These were supplemented by further artefacts and photographs following a public appeal. It soon became evident that it would be difficult to illustrate the long and complex history of this hospital using only the material evidence that had survived. It was also hard to use the objects to illustrate the experience of being a patient. A further complication was that no personal details or photographs of patients could be displayed for reasons of confidentiality. Given these constraints

there was a danger that the patients could become 'invisible' with emphasis focussed on buildings, treatments and staffing.

Patients and memories

One way around these problems was to use transcriptions of oral testimonies to describe life for patients at the hospital. A public appeal for memories directed at

and working conditions and by describing friendships they had developed with patients over many years. For example former nursing staff told of the complete lack of personal dignity of patients who were made to wear ill-fitting communal clothing, bathed in rows in communal bathrooms and denied privacy of a bedside locker on wards of up to 180 patients. None of this could have been revealed with such poignancy through artefacts and photographs alone.



former staff, patients and their relatives resulted in about 40 potential contacts for an oral history project. From these, 9 people were selected, all of whom used to work in the hospital; no patients came forward. 2 people who used a day centre today wanted to show their art work and poetry, but it proved very difficult to talk to any former or present patients despite numerous efforts. Not only is it difficult to contact former patients who are living in the community, mental illness by its very nature is a condition that most people would regard as a very private matter and not something they would wish to broadcast to visitors at an exhibition.

Although the museum was unable to interview former patients, former staff with intimate knowledge of the hospital and its practices were able to give the patients a 'voice' through descriptions of daily routines, living

Different Meanings

One thing that emerged clearly from the oral history project was that Whittingham Hospital meant different things to different people. To some it was a large, inhuman institution where people with a mental illness lived in social isolation stigmatised by their disorder and their environment. Others saw it as a peaceful haven offering an escape from the pressures of everyday life, much as the Victorian reformers had envisaged when such places were originally founded. The oral history recordings enabled people to tell their own stories of the hospital from their own view point whilst the exhibition text could remain neutrally objective.



The Exhibits

The artefacts were powerful and emotive. A large wooden barrel was used to illustrate the stigma attached to mental illness and the widespread concealment of sufferers in the 19th century. It had been to 'home' of a child with mental illness for 14 years before he was brought (still in the barrel) into an asylum for treatment. Objects such as padded gloves, keys and locks were symbolically piled into a case to support information relating to personal freedom. Displays of the bizarre objects swallowed by patients preserved in the hospital's pathology museum were used to illustrate the state of mind of some of the patients. Boxes along the wall featured the different types of treatment for mental illness, including early electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) machines and drugs used to control behaviour. These exhibits have evoked the strongest reactions. The primitive technology of the ECT machines shocks visitors and prompted one former patient to write to the museum describing it as "the beast". Many former patients visited the exhibition, interested in the history of a place which their lives have been intimately involved with and which many regarded as their home. Clearly these objects have the power to trigger emotions and feelings in people which we may not be aware of. Some of the feelings may be therapeutic, others may be traumatic. One visitor wrote to point out that as responsible organisers we should acknowledge the emotions the material in the exhibition may evoke. We are seeking professional advice.

Feedback for the Future

The exhibition provoked much interesting comment and it has become apparent that the exhibition will grow as people keep coming forward with new material. Former patients are also visiting the exhibition and sharing their experiences with staff, confident that issues are being treated sensitively. Various support groups and social services are interested in using the exhibition for reminiscence therapy sessions with former patients. It has already been used by one organisation who work with people with learning difficulties to run sessions which focus on the effects of institutionalisation.

As the organiser, I feel that the greatest achievement is in educating local people about the issues surrounding the hospital's controversial closure in 1995. The exhibition points out that the old custodial asylums

had represented a necessary form of care in their day but now alternative systems of care and treatment for mental illness are available. People who were last year happily signing petitions in the Market Square to keep the antiquated Hospital open were leaving the exhibition remarking quietly, "It's not a bit like I thought, some of it was awful." I feel the exhibition has somehow given a voice to the silent majority of long term patients at the hospital, even though none felt able to be directly involved.

Museums and Mental Heath Network

Exhibitions such as "Asylum" and Glasgow Museums', "Out of Sight, Out of Mind", have highlighted the importance of recording and preserving the history of the treatment of mental illness. There is clearly a need to undertake contemporary collecting initiatives in this area in the light of the widespread closure of psychiatric hospitals and the establishment of new services in the community. Either Sally Coleman (Harris Museum, Preston - 01772 258 248) or Deborah Haase (Museum of Transport, Glasgow Museums - 0141 287 2650) would like to hear from museums professionals currently working in this area or interested in documenting the changes in mental health provision in their region.

Sally Coleman

Growing up in Dewsbury

'Growing up in Dewsbury' is the title of a new gallery at Dewsbury Museum, part of Kirkless Museums. I was born in Dewsbury and grew up a few miles down the road.

Dewsbury Museum was somewhere I went on a fairly regular basis. Whether I went with members of my family or with school,

the suggestion of going to the museum always met with a groan. It was a dark, dank, depressing place with that unique dingy museum smell, a mixture of damp clothes and bad drains. It was enough to put anyone off museums for life - believe me. The brown sign which points you in the right direction off the main road still reads, "Museum, Hospital, Crematorium", not very promising is it? Somehow I was coaxed back to write this review.



Expectations

Before I set off though, I wondered what was in store. I was reminded of that Leicester Museum Studies

essay question which went something like: "The representation of children in history museums, or just more toys on display?" Would this new gallery be a museum of the social history of childhood or just another toy museum clearly representing the formative years of upper and middle class children?

Sunglasses and shock

I was in for a very pleasant surprise. The first thing that struck me in the gallery were the dazzling colours. Luckily I had my sunglasses. The gallery's design, I have to admit, is superb. It is inspired by playground furniture. It is all nattily suspended from apparently off the peg scaffolding which can now be ordered in totally glorious technicolour. The scaffolding construction needs the minimum fixing to walls. This avoids too much disturbance to the integrity of a grade II listed interior. It also meant that no compromise was necessary in the design, it is unashamedly dynamic, bright and different. I found it a bit of a shock at first (the smell had disappeared too!), but the kids in the gallery seemed at home with the more vivid design. The design sets the scene, it is obvious from this point onwards that this is a young person's gallery.

Time travel in my head

The gallery is centred around personal stories of growing up in Dewsbury. A time travelling automaton welcomes you and stamps your boarding card, a card which guides you in your journey back in time. The journey commences in the present day and the route through takes you back through the decades to the turn of the century. The idea being that children start off in the familiar and move back step by step to more and more unfamiliar territory. The initial display is a series of large photographs of common contemporary scenes of growing up in Dewsbury, representing Dewsbury's mixed and varied multi-cultural population. Amongst them I spotted pictures of Scouts, teenagers from Bosnia, kids eating school dinners, the local hospital children's ward, gym clubs for disabled youngsters, galas and fetes, scenes of daily life at a preschool nursery - to name a few.



kicked and name-called in the playground. The other girl went to the main Catholic school in the area, St John Fisher's. The name of the school brought back memories for me. St John Fisher was the school with the most fearsome sports teams in the world, or so it seemed to me at the time. You quaked at the thought of that particular hockey fixture, and dreaded being picked to play. Her objects include her first communion dress, school photos, and she tells of her recent success as an actress in BBC's Byker Grove.

Paul's craze

Moving on, you now come to the section called, "Times A Changing - 1965 to today." The first personal story is Paul's and is meant to appeal to anyone who has ever had a craze. Paul's particular craze was

Star Wars. Many of the cases in the gallery have been individually designed with obvious flair and some impressive attention to detail. Paul's cases resembled a space ship and in it he displayed plenty of teenage memorabilia, including a detailed Star Wars model he had created, and many drawings on the subject. Contrasted with Paul was Amjad's story. Amjad came to Dewsbury from Rawalpindi in Pakistan in the seventies. His story tells of immigration, his academic success at university and the difficulties he subsequently faced finding a job due to racial discrimination. His objects relate to his Muslim faith, his wedding, and his passion for cricket. I thought this section worked particularly well. The people had unique stories to tell but there were enough common elements within those stories for others from that generation, such as myself, to relate to. A difficult thing to achieve without resorting to stereotyping.

Young people today

In this same section a temporary exhibition case called the "Time Capsule" highlights the very different personal stories of 2 young local people. Using a mixture of objects, oral testimony, quotes, manageable chunks of information on graphic panels, and photographs you can tune into the life of a small Asian girl - Bina - who describes her experiences, and sadly describes racism at school to the extent of being

Cath wants to dance

In the 1950's section, Cath's story relates to her teenage years and stories of trying to persuade her parents to let her go to the dance halls. She had to be in at a certain time and her oral history tape tells of the occasion when she wasn't! The integral seating attached to the scaffolding came at just the right point for a rest, as sensors sparked off some 1950's foot tappers. The rest also gives the visitor a chance to read some juicy stories of teddy boy disturbances from the local paper.

The Second World War

The years of the Second World War are covered by snippets of information on VE day, a room setting with taped up windows and sponged walls, a radio plays in the background. The historic environments created by the designer are presented as background effects rather than literal reconstructions which allows the objects from the period to be clearly defined. This also provides reasonably sized areas for groups to gather to look at the cases and listen to oral history, in this instance of people remembering bombs dropping in the locality.

Alice's Wedding

"Between the Wars 1920 - 1938" had my favourite display, and, incidentally a fabulous piece of repro 1930's carpet! The case contained items relating to Alice's wedding day. Alice's wedding dress was surrounded by all her receipts from her marriage. She had kept in immaculate condition the receipt for her wedding photography, the order and receipt for her bouquet of flowers from the florists, and the receipt for car hire. By coincidence, Alice had held her wedding reception in the very room where the museum display is now situated, formerly a function room. The receipt for her wedding breakfast came to 3 pounds and 8 shillings. There was plenty of local ephemera in these cases, providing enjoyment and interest not only for the young but perhaps also for the older people.

Sarah and Willie

The First World War story is told by Sarah. She also tells the story of her brother Bert who was killed in action. As a child she opened the letter telling of his death. The letter can now be seen in the display along with her words of sadness. The section moves further back in time to tell the story of the Thornhill pit disaster and the display of the enormous banner commemorating the day when 139 men and boys lost their lives. Curatorial licence does come into play here to a certain extent. Willie's story (one of the survivors) continues the personal history device, but his story is gleaned from reports from the local newspaper and put into the same format as before. "A New Century - 1900 to 1913" concludes the gallery. It is here, right at the end, that you will find the more traditional and classic cases of Edwardian toys in a reconstruction of Jubbs Arcade, Dewsbury. The toys are indeed beautiful, and visitors are allowed a brief moment to indulge in a little romance and nostalgia.

Jenny's View

I felt that the gallery successfully covers many of the more realistic elements of growing up: inequality, prejudice, bereavement, struggles with parents, hobbies and interests, finding a job, and finding a partner. Contemporary collecting with oral testimony has enabled these less object orientated subjects to be explored. I was surprised at the display's chronological approach though; I was expecting to see the life cycle approach as adopted in the Story of Hull and it's People, where visitors, education workers and staff alike are able to compare material from different time periods to great effect. However, what we have to remember here is that this is not a gallery for you or for me, it is a gallery for the young, whether they come as a school group or, as on a Saturday afternoon when I went along, without an adult in a group of their peers. The gallery is aimed at people aged from 7 upwards and the chronological approach, for me, had a certain clarity. This fits in on the one hand with the requirements of the National Curriculum; it also presents a logical and uncomplicated approach for children still learning the sometimes difficult concept of history.

Jenny Salton, Barnsley Museums.

Outreach in Southampton

Reaching the parts other historians fail to reach - securing the future for local authority museum services?

Your place or mine?

The theme of 'a sense of place' is proving a current fascination for historians and social scientists with a whole swathe of conferences and papers recently dedicated to the issues of belonging, migration and the human structures within cities. Many social historians working in local authority museums, libraries and archive offices, under financial pressure, have also been looking for strategies to involve and reflect local communities in their work, and redefine their place in those communities. This article suggests some reasons why such approaches are still alien to many local authority museum, archive and library services, and argues for an approach that may secure these services within the local government context in the longer term.



Often this status has been the main reward for the traditionally low salaries of these public servants. Until relatively recently, the training of historians, archaeologists, archivists and museum curators has focused on a material culture or document dominated approach to history with little reference to ideas of meaningful discourse and partnership in their role.

Unwilling democratisers

Many attempts at broadening the scope of museum work have foundered on the

sanctity of the object and the perceived centrality of - and conversely often poor access to - the historic museum building as the focus for the interpretation of history. Many museum professionals still seem unwilling to embrace any process involving the 'democratisation' of their institutions. Already a number are publicly stating a need to return to 'traditional museum values', rejecting the concepts of 'people centred institutions' and 'part-time community work'. This essentially conservative approach is perhaps best illustrated in outreach strategies with the purpose of attracting a wider audience (including 'minority' groups) to the museum by putting on 'minority' interest exhibitions which are defined and controlled by the curator, the 'sari and samosa' syndrome. Exceptions to this approach do

The professionals

For many of those working in museums, archives and libraries, the concepts of community involvement and accountability are alien to a tradition or training which vests much in the professional and expert nature of the curator, archivist or librarian in his or her local role.

exist, for example the work of Glasgow's Open Museum; the Museum of London's 'Peopling of London' exhibition; recent work at the Museum of Reading, and Southampton City Council's Arts and Heritage Roadshow.



What are we doing here?

What then should be the purpose of a publicly funded museum, library or archive service in the 1990's? How can or should we be making ourselves relevant to the communities which sustain us while remaining cognisant of our role in collecting and conserving a reflection of our society for future generations? It is this balance which is crucial to the future relevance and funding of local authority museums, with or without the panacea of the National Lottery. We now turn to a suggested model for the local authority museum service of the 21st century, one which maintains standards of preservation and recognises the importance of primary evidence, yet involves local people.

Local people in local museums

Much of the public interaction with local authorities concerns the reality of everyday life - council tax, refuse collection, housing, planning, environmental health, to name a few. At worst, day to day contact with these areas can result in antagonism between the authority and the public. However, museum visitors, researchers, donors, and participants in oral history and other outreach projects have, we hope, a different experience of the local authority - the local authority as provider of a relevant, interesting and positive service. Therefore, museums should be looking to maximise their advantage as providers of rewarding experiences, moving away from the perception of

them as non-statutory services liable to cuts to the centre of local government activity. This can be done in a number of ways. For example, museums can provide:

- testimony centred community and work related history exhibitions giving local people a sense of influence and ownership of museums and allowing the

collective experiences of those communities and work practices to be reflected in a museum or community centre

- access to collections in store, allowing local people to select, interpret and curate their own exhibitions
- partnership with other departments in local authorities, for example housing, planning, environmental health, and advice on the retention of photographic and other records which are invaluable evidence for the recent histories of our communities
- work with departments of local authorities such as education, social services, planning and community development. Results of such work can include reminiscence work in hospitals and homes, community archaeology projects, contemporary collecting by local people in the context of the planning process and regeneration of urban areas, community publications, and the establishment of local history groups
- an established link with groups and individuals in the local community, thus making any local authority consultation processes easier and more representative
- exhibition openings and events which are an opportunity for local councillors and business people to network, and for all local people to talk to staff members and influence future activities.

Breaking up tradition

Are we therefore prepared to venture forth from our traditional role as keepers and interpreters of the

collections we hold, to seek opportunities to move our services towards the centre of the authorities who fund us? WE have the capability to provide a wonderful example of local democracy at work by opening our collections to the people who own them, involving people in making their own histories and exhibitions, forging partnerships with other areas of work in public institutions, and seeing the communities we work in as forums to involve and reflect on the 'sense

of place' and common identity of those of us who live there. This can be a powerful way of on the one hand democratising the institutions we work for, and on the other hand proving our centrality and relevance to the concepts of public service which many of us often proclaim. Are we then brave enough to take down the barricades?

Sian Harrington (Heritage Client Manager) and Donald Hyslop (Community History Officer) Southampton City Council

The Sports Section

New institute

Following on from the successful SHCG seminar on sport and museums in Hull last year, Sally Coleman reports on the launch of a new Institute of Football Studies being established in Preston.



As a student, I lived right next door to St James' Park, home of Newcastle United and was always amazed at the passion the game aroused in local supporters. I could well believe the stories I was told of how production in local factories went up dramatically due to the 'feel good factor' aroused by Newcastle's successes on the pitch. This was a point that Bryan Gray, the Chair of Preston North End football club and Chair of Trustees of the Football Museum took up in his opening address at the press launch of the new Institute of Football Studies in Preston recently. Football, he said, impacts on society in many different ways and touches many people's lives. All the more reason therefore to set up an Institute of Football Studies which will promote the study and understanding of all aspects of the game.

The Institute is an innovative joint venture between the University of Central Lancashire and the Football Museum. It will be an integral part of the Football Museum, currently being planned and which will be located at Deepdale, the home of Preston North End

Football Club. Bryan Gray stated, "Our objective is to create a resource centre where anyone can study any aspect of the game. We are creating a library containing a wide range of documentary material relating to football, which can be used for research purposes. This facility will provide a valuable resource for anyone with a general or specific interest in the game." The University is planning to develop research projects and teaching programmes involving both themselves and the Football Museum. By such means, they hope to advance the study and understanding of football.

The Institute will assist the Football Museum, who aspire to achieve national status, in gaining further academic credibility. Addressing this somewhat controversial issue one of the trustees of the Football Museum and Vice Chancellor of the University stated, "A national museum for football is long overdue and it is fitting that such a project is happening in Preston where the professional game has its roots." Conscious of the fact that representatives of the Scottish Football Association Museum Trust, Museum of British Football at Carlisle United and the World Football Museum in Sheffield were all at the press launch and visible wincing everytime the word 'national' was used, Bryan Gray extended an olive branch with the hope that the Institute and the Football Museum "could work in close co-operation with other football museum projects to make the study of football more accessible". This was echoed by Robert Pratten, the Museum's Researcher, "Whether we achieve national status or not, we are trying to actively collect together documentary and other material evidence together in one place."

The beautiful game show

John Davis - currently a volunteer at the Pump House, reviews the exhibition, "The Beautiful Game: A tribute to the football fans and players of Europe", held at the Pump House People's History Museum, Manchester in the summer.

Regular readers of the SHCG News cannot have failed to notice that the recent growth in the popularity and media coverage of sport - and football in particular - has been reflected in

an interest in representing the subject in museums. It is hardly surprising then that the European Football Championships held in England this summer was seen by museums in the host cities as an opportunity to attract the crowds.

The exhibition took its cue from recent changes in the domestic game which have effectively made it part of a global entertainment industry.

The evolution of this international, and particularly European dimension of the game was represented with the help of photographs and a wide range of objects including caps, shirts, pennants, medals, programmes and printed ephemera; as well as sections on women's football and the campaigns to

eradicate racism from the game. The ways in which television and all seater stadia are changing and the traditional culture and composition of football supporters were also highlighted.

Overall the exhibition was a thoughtful and attractive exhibition which touched upon many of the issues current within this highly popular sport. However it concentrated almost exclusively on the 'top end' of the game and neglected the lower leagues, let alone the non-league and amateur football. The exhibition stopped short of attempting any critical exploration of the cultural phenomenon of football support.

Rather than invite this specialist audience of fans to engage in a degree of self-examination, a more celebratory approach was adopted which ignored the

question of what the fans get out of their ardent devotion to a particular team.

Clearly football is a powerful vehicle for national and other identities, and such questions seem highly relevant in the light of the press coverage of the England team and their opponents during the Euro 96 tournament.



Unfortunately, such fascinating, if difficult, issues can only be accommodated by a more disinterested approach than that offered by "The Beautiful Game", and therefore remained the most significant absences from the exhibition.

The Seminar Section

Writing Exhibition Text

A review of the SHCG seminar held at the Museum of Liverpool Life on June 3 1996.



As students in the midst of our Museum Studies MA, the recent seminar on writing exhibition text reinforced ground already covered during the course and opened our eyes to some of the realities of museum work. The 2 speakers covered both the theoretical and practical elements involved in communicating information through text whilst the group session in the afternoon gave delegates the opportunity to analyse each others work.

Who are we writing for?

Helen Coxall, a museum language consultant, began the day by asking us to consider who we are writing for, how we are writing, what we are saying and what has been left out. She stressed how important it was to consider the target audience before writing anything. Are they children? Do they speak English? Do they have a detailed knowledge of the exhibition's subject before visiting it? Once that audience has been considered, the text writer must be careful not to alienate the reader by using unfamiliar or inappropriate language. We must also be aware that by using careless language it is possible to exclude the very people for whom the text is intended. Resistant readings will be made if the text only demonstrates the author's standpoint. Coxall illustrated her points with a variety of examples of museum text which, at first glance appeared harmless enough, but once closely analysed, demonstrated how powerful language can be. A word added in one sentence or taken out in another can create a very different impact.

Text in context

Alison Taubman spoke of her experiences in producing the Transatlantic Slavery Gallery at Liverpool's

Maritime Museum. She highlighted the many problems in tackling such a delicate and emotive subject, explaining how difficult it was to involve all the interested parties without alienating them.

A consensus was finally reached with focus groups of local black people deciding the parameters of the gallery. This meant, for example, a change from the planned timescale of the gallery to include the life of Black Africans before and after slavery. Text was written by guest curators which was then edited by copywriters. The involvement of the focus groups had a great impact on the type of language used and the order in which information was presented.

The problems of using academics to write the draft text are still evident in the gallery. The exhibition has achieved its aim of exploring many aspects of slavery from several viewpoints. However, it is extremely text led. Visitors may give up reading the panels thus missing the subtleties of approach that were so carefully constructed.

Writing practice

In the afternoon session, delegates split into small groups in order to compare and contrast each others own museum text. There was perhaps not enough time to get to grips with the close analysis necessary to identify the effect of the language which had been used. However, the session gave us the chance to put into practice some of the ideas introduced by Helen Coxall and was a welcome chance to discuss ideas with colleagues. The practical session highlighted how difficult it is to assess the type of language we use when writing museum text. Most people wanted to consider other interpretative devices such as photographs as a way of improving the impact. All aspects of interpretation are, of course, important but this seminar gave a revealing insight into how vital it is for us to consider our language when writing text. Helen Coxall stressed that there is no such thing as a good or bad label. Whilst her suggestions could not necessarily be implemented in every situation, the basic ideas are very important. They should make all those who attended the seminar think even more carefully next time they sit down to write a label!

Caroline Bradley and Nicky Bleasby

The Pinboard

The MGC/ V&A Purchase Grant Fund

The fund has moved offices within the same building.

The address is the same: V&A Museum, South Kensington, London SW7 2RL, but the new telephone number is 0171 938 9641. The budget for 1996/7 is £1million. The maximum grant is 50% of the purchase price up to a total annual limit of £80,000.

Objects costing between £500 to £300,000 are eligible; manuscripts, photographs and documents should be purchased between £350 and £12,000.

Please make a strong case and apply for the money.

Social history items are considered.

Wham event

Women, Heritage and Museums are holding an event called, "Working Wear For Women".

It is on Wednesday 30 October 1996 at the Museum of the Order of St John, Clerkenwell, London, between 10 - 4. Please contact Elaine Sansom at the Institute of Archeology, 31 -34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY.

Industrial Collections Conference

A conference is planned in Cardiff from 9 - 11 April 1997 about the care and conservation of industrial collections. The conference will include trips to museums and sites. Papers will look at ethics, management and conservation. The conference fee will be in the region of £120, including a reception at the National Museum of Wales. Please contact Diane Dollery, The National Museum of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF1 3NP. The conference is jointly organised by the U.K. Institute for Conservation (UKIC) and the Council for Museums in Wales (CMW).

Documentary Photography Archive afternoon

An afternoon of talks and displays for curators in the north west is to be held at the Conference room, Greater Manchester County Record Office, 56 Marshall Street, Manchester M4. The event is free. Please call Audrey Linkman, D.P.A. on 0161 247 1765 for more information about this event.

Index and Update for SHIC 2

Users of the Social History and Industrial Classification system (SHIC) will be pleased to hear that an index to the second edition (SHIC 2) has just been published by MDA. It is free to those people who bought SHIC 2, and is available from

Katherine Futers at the Museums Documentation Association (MDA), Lincoln House, 347 Cherry Hinton Road, Cambridge CB1 4DH. Tel: 01223 242848.

Updated pages to SHIC 2 are also available free to existing purchasers. The complete SHIC 2, including classification, index and update is available from the MDA priced £25.

The SHIC working party is currently working on the options for a machine-readable version of SHIC.

They would like to hear from interested users.

Please contact Stuart Holm (01603 870772).

Exhibitions now on

Growing up in Dewsbury

A new gallery about childhood and teenage years by Kirkless Museum Service. At Dewsbury museum, Crow Nest Park, Hecknondwike Road, Dewsbury WF13 2SA. Tel: 01924 468171

Brecknock Townlife

A major new gallery at the Brecknock Museum in Brecon, explores what makes the towns distinctive in the Brecknockshire area of Powys. Includes an interactive video projection installation with Welsh and English captions.

The Colour Centre

The Colour Museum in Bradford is currently developing new galleries and spaces after receiving a European Regional Development Fund grant. The Colour Centre is to be created, allowing educational hands-on activities such as dyeing and printing.

To feature in this section please send your press releases to Nigel Wright, Chorley Museums Service, Astley Hall, Astley Park, Chorley, Lancs. PR7 1NP. Particularly welcome is exhibition information from smaller museums. Please send your newsletter, or just a brief note about forthcoming exhibitions, or a press release. That's all you have to do. Where's yours?

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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, Museum of Science and Industry, Liverpool Road, Manchester M3 4FP.

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