

# NEWS SHCG NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP



ISSUE 43 AUTUMN 1998

**PARTNERSHIPS...  
AND HOW TO MAKE THEM WORK**

**COMMUNITY EXHIBITIONS**

**ANNUAL STUDY WEEKEND**

# SHCG NEWS ISSUE 43

## Working Together

Museums do not exist in a vacuum and consequently, it is inevitable and necessary that they are operating a variety of partnerships at any one time.

These partnerships can take many forms including, financial relationships with funding partners, joint ventures with other museums and collaborations with museums' most important partners - their visitors.

This issue of SHCG News picks up the theme of Partnerships explored at this year's Annual Study Weekend and features a range of advice and discussion on how to work towards creating the perfect museum relationship. It would seem from the articles which appear here and the debates that took place at the ASW, that many SHCG members are taking a proactive and enthusiastic approach to forging new partnerships that have a mutual benefit to all parties involved.

Those unsure about initiating a new partnership should draw encouragement and inspiration from the experiences of contributors to this issue of the News.

**NICKY BLEASBY** EDITOR

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.

The views expressed in the newsletter are wide ranging and do not necessarily express the views of the SHCG committee or SHCG, unless otherwise stated. Articles for the NEWS should be between 500 to 2000 words.

Please submit a typed copy of your article along with a copy on disk, saved as a PC word file or richtext format, or you can send it as an e-mail.

Illustrations for articles are always welcome. Original photographs can be returned.

DEADLINE FOR WINTER '98/'99 ISSUE:  
16 November 1998

Send all contributions to:  
Nicky Bleasby, Flat 4, 112 Muswell Hill Road,  
London, N10 3JD. Tel: (0181) 374 4540.  
E-mail: nicky@knn.globalnet.co.uk

Nicky is happy to answer all queries and provide a form sheet if required.

Cover photo:  
Steph Mastoris learns how to use a lathe at the  
Chiltern Open Air Museum during this year's  
Annual Study Weekend.

Design by Paul Cook Tel: 01784 252698

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## Working With Memories

The Department of Museum Studies at Leicester University is running a course exploring approaches to oral history and reminiscence in museums next year from 1-4 June.

Gaynor Kavanagh, who will be leading the series of lectures and workshops, said, "the course will propose innovative and very different approaches to working with memories. It will challenge traditional assumptions about oral history, reminiscence practice and memory within the museum visit. By so doing, the course will aim to lay the groundwork for more sensitive, insightful and rewarding engagement with people's memories".

The course will be delivered through a series of lectures and workshops. You do not need to have any previous experience of oral history or reminiscence work, but open and active participation will be required from all course members. It will be experiential, demanding and thought provoking. It could change the way you think about memory in relation to a wide range of museum activities and commitments.

The outline programme is as follows:

**TUESDAY:**  
What do we know about memory?

**WEDNESDAY:**  
Memory and the museum

**THURSDAY:**  
Working with oral testimony

**FRIDAY:**  
Working with reminiscence

This is a four day course and places will be limited, so book early. The cost will be £225, excluding accommodation. Advice on places to stay locally can be given.

Further information about the course will be issued through the Department's web site <http://www/le.ac.uk/museumstudies/>

**If you wish to book a place, please send a deposit of £25 to:**

Barbara Lloyd  
Department of Museum Studies  
University of Leicester,  
105 Princess Road East,  
Leicester LE1 7LG  
Tel: 0116 252 3963  
Fax: 0116 252 3960  
email: [museum.studies@le.ac.uk](mailto:museum.studies@le.ac.uk)

## Share in the experience of the Quaker way of life...

The Quaker Tapestry, 77 panels depicting Quaker life and history, is available for hire. This community embroidery takes you on a journey from the 17th century to the present as you uncover over 300 years of social history. It was made by 4000 men, women and children from 15 countries between 1981 and 1996.

The exhibition is enhanced by the use of personal headphones and a large screen colour video which gives background information on the making of the tapestry. It also comes with a selection of related artefacts.

The tapestry has a permanent home at the Friends Meeting House in Kendal but will be touring for the five months of the year that the Meeting House is closed.

If you are interested in hosting the Quaker Tapestry, contact:  
Chris Hogg, 4 Kirkfield, Ambleside, Cumbria, LA22 9HA,  
Tel: 01539 432399, to discuss details.

## Pasting up the Past: Wallpapers in the Construction of the Historic Interior

The Wallpaper History Society Conference 1998.  
Royal College of Art, London  
Saturday 7 November 1998.

The attempt to create or recreate interiors which suggest a specific historical moment is never straightforward. Issues of authenticity, heritage, nostalgia, interpretation, use and reproduction always play their part. This is just as true whether the interiors are the work of museum curators, of decorators, designers or ordinary consumers.

The Wallpaper History Society, in association with the V&A/Royal College of Art Postgraduate course in the History of Design, is hosting a one day conference on this topic. Each of the six conference papers offers a case study, examining different approaches to the period interior in different circumstances.

The lectures will cover:

- Refurbishment of the Palaces of Westminster
- Interiors in the period film
- Archaeology of an ordinary private home

- The work of Elsie de Wolfe, society decorator in turn-of-the-century America
- Reconstruction of the interiors of Charles Darwin's home in Kent
- Promotion of the 'English Country-House Style' in post-war U.S.A.

Tickets for the event cost £25

**For tickets or further information about the programme please contact:**

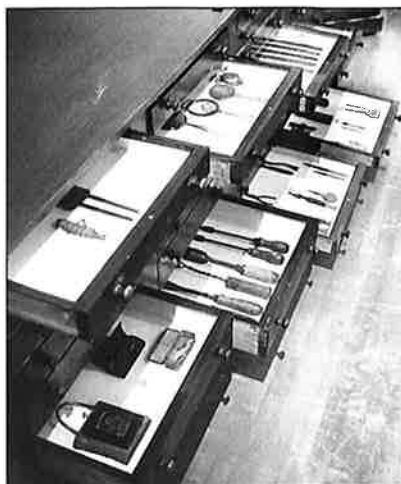
Christopher Breward,  
School of Humanities,  
Royal College of Art,  
Kensington Gore, London SW7 2EU

## Putting the Past in Context...

'Context' - the brainchild of artist, Amanda Ralph - is a new business venture that proposes to unlock part of the country's heritage in an innovative series of artists' interpretative 'showcases' using objects - particularly those from social history collections.

Amanda Ralph describes herself as a "found object assemblage artist" and has received critical acclaim for her recent collaborations with the National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside in her home town of Liverpool. In a recent project for the Museum of Liverpool Life, she installed a series of clinical glass boxes housing rusty medical style implements as part of 'The Doctor Duncan Art Show'. Her first collaboration for NMGM, 'In my Lady's Chamber', resulted in her winning 'Best New Visual Arts Talent' in the 1995 Merseyside Arts and Entertainment Awards. In his review of the exhibition Adrian Henri commented that:

"Ralph is a poet of the discarded, the unwanted; her collection of treasures found in gutters, skips, car boot sales and junk shops has been cunningly deployed to maximise the pathos and odd beauty of her castaway objects.



'In my Ladies' Chamber' Curio Cabinet - detail, Liverpool Museum, October 1995

Here, the work is housed in rather battered, old-fashioned museum-cases, conferring a strange sort of status on the rusty bits-and-pieces, as well as a pleasing ambiguity; these are objects in cases in a museum, so they must be valuable, or historical, or both.

A cabinet of the sort that might contain beetles, butterflies or Roman coins houses families of worn, rusted domestic objects. Four sculptural 'effigies' in a large, glass-fronted case, plaster and cloth embedded with nails, claim curious kinship to the African sculptures next door. The artist seems to claim a metaphorical dimension to her work, where identical, mass-produced units attain individuality through age and use, but need to be reclaimed and presented sympathetically - does this say something about life in the late Twentieth Century?"

In anticipation of creating a second life-size series of 'Effigy Figures', the artist has been collecting buckets of rusty nails, washers and quantities of other reclaimed building material. Blackburn Museum & Art Gallery have accessed Artist Franchise Funding from the North West Arts Board to commission Ralph to make figures specifically for a selection of their display cases. She is also planning work for Astley Hall Museum & Art Gallery where an empty shop unit in Chorley's Town Centre will be transformed by an installation that uses the museum's collections as a starting point.

The Artist is keen to repeat this process for other museums, resulting in a congregation at the 'Liverpool Biennial' in September 1999. She hopes the exhibition will then tour to museums and galleries nation-wide.

More detail and images can be accessed via the internet, [www.designbank.org.uk](http://www.designbank.org.uk) (ID no. 112)

### For further information contact:

Amanda Ralph,  
Arena Studios, 82-84 Duke Street,  
Liverpool, L1 5AA,  
Tel: 0151 707 1676 / 0151 709 9931

Alternatively fax your details to receive progress reports of 'Context',  
Fax: 0151 709 7667

## FORTHCOMING EXHIBITIONS

### Whitstable and the Sea

10 October - 5 December 1998

*Ways of life related to the sea in the 1920s to 1940s are recalled with an array of photographs, specially collected objects and a new video which includes local reminiscences recorded by Anne Pope.*

**For further information contact: Whitstable Museum Gallery Tel: 01227 276998**

To publicise your museum's exhibitions, send listings to Nicky Bleasby, Flat 4, 112 Muswell Hill Road, London, N10 3JD

## SHCG MATTERS...

**Interpretation and Evaluation Project**

Nigel Wright, Chair of SHCG has met with Tim Corum, Chair of the Interpretation and Evaluation Project sub-committee to discuss the way forward for the project. Their conclusions will be presented at the next meeting of the SHCG Committee and decisions taken as a result of this will be reported in the next issue of SHCG News.

**SHCG at the MA Conference**

The Conference has a new look this year and SHCG will be leading a masterclass session. Drawing on the theme of the ASW, our masterclass is entitled, 'Practical Partnerships with People' and will show delegates how to set up successful partnerships with community and focus groups.

**SHCG Online**

A priority for this year's committee will be to create an SHCG website.

If you have ideas about what it should feature, contact Lucy Allchurch, Jersey Museums Service, The Weighbridge, St. Helier, Jersey, C.I. JE2 3NF, Tel: 01534 633323

**SHCG Continues to Grow**

SHCG gained 71 new members in the last financial year, bringing the total number of members to 408. There was a reduced number of lapsed or cancelled memberships and the new database system introduced last year has made it easier to keep track of those who have or have not paid their subscriptions.

Victoria Emmanuel is the new Membership Secretary. She can be contacted at: Birmingham Museum &

Art Gallery, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham, B3 3DH, Tel: 0121 303 1672.

**All Change...**

Three new members were elected to the SHCG committee at the 1998 AGM. The new Chair and committee would like to thank those standing down, Harriet Purkis (Chair & News Editor), Lucy Harland (Treasurer) and Caroline MacFarlane for all their hard work. Thanks are also due to Helen Sykes who has retired as Membership Secretary although she will continue to serve on the committee. Names and contact numbers of current members and officers are listed on the back page.

The information in this section has been extracted from Officers' Reports presented at this year's AGM.

If you would like copies of the full reports and accounts contact:

Lucy Allchurch, Jersey Museums Service, The Weighbridge, St. Helier, Jersey, C.I. JE2 3NF, Tel: 01534 633323

## Recognising Collections

The MGC introduced the controversial Designation scheme in 1997. In 1998 they are developing a scheme to, "recognise collections of regional or local significance". So what does this mean?

Initially, the working party tasked with sorting out this rather woolly phrase felt that any such scheme should, "identify and record the significance of collections in every discipline throughout the UK, and should be as inclusive as possible". If this were indeed possible then the scheme should go on to:

- Improve knowledge of collections and where they are.

- Improve access to collections, including those not on public display.
- Encourage collections research.
- Assist museums in networking geographically or within disciplines.
- Contribute to strategic planning by confirming the need, or not, for new museums.
- Help to prioritise funding for collections in need.
- Inform the Acceptance in Lieu process.
- Enable specialist advice to be targeted more precisely, e.g. advice on security measures for specific types of material.

The first step, however, is identifying the data. Do we know what collections are out there, where they are and how important they are? To make an initial stab at seeing what databases already exist the MGC commissioned the University of St Andrews to undertake a

desk study. The University's findings, not surprisingly, showed that a number of databases have been compiled over the years but that due to inconsistent methodology their value to a national audit was almost worthless. Clearly the data gathering has to begin again.

The MGC will now wait for advice from its newly appointed New Technologies Adviser before it will take the project forward.

**Andrew Mackay**

**Recognition Working Party Member representing SHCG**

## Partnerships... and how to make them work

### SHCG Annual Study Weekend '98 Reading, 9-12 July

This year's Annual Study Weekend explored the theme of partnerships. Jayne Olphert from Fermanagh County Museum in Northern Ireland was attending for the first time...

I was fortunate in being offered a free place to attend the ASW this year and I think I brought more home with me than the complementary travel toothbrush and paste set that Reading University so thoughtfully provided. There was an impressive line up of speakers who gave depth and range to the topic and there were also useful workshop sessions and site visits.

I feel that the museum community in Northern Ireland tends to lag behind developments in England, Scotland and Wales. For example, the standard use of focus groups, community exhibitions and contemporary collecting are now taken for granted in many more forward thinking museums. Weekends such as the SHCG ASW, therefore, have value to those of us working here as they act as a spring board for debate on new and innovative approaches to museum provision within the Northern Ireland context.

The range of speakers, as I have suggested, was impressive and included input from backgrounds as diverse as Maurice Davies (Assistant Director, Museums Association) who sought to define partnerships and their nature and David Kay (Crafts Officer, Southern Regional Arts Board) who argued for museum partnerships with the contemporary crafts community.

Andrew Mackay (Curator, Norfolk Museum Service) from the MGC Recognition Scheme working party, opened the issue of recognition for smaller collections to the floor.

The response was mixed, ranging from a defence of small museums to queries over the definition of a recognised collection (are not all collections recognisable?) to worries about loss of funding due to a failure of a particular museum to rank. In this particular issue, I feel museums should, in the spirit of partnership with each other, make an argument for agreeing a strategy for developing criteria suitable for deciding funding allocation instead of fearing policy shifts from the Museums and Galleries Commission without offering a suitable alternative.

The point of view of a freelancer, Alison James who is a Museum Education Consultant, was a healthy, warts and all, look at how museums currently work with freelancers. I feel her calls for written agreements, standards and clearer lines of communication echo similar short fallings which can occur when museums dabble in dramatic interpretation of their site(s) or collections by outside agencies.

I found the experiences of individuals working on the ground on community based projects such as Eleanor Moore (Museum Assistant, Walsall Museum and Art Gallery), Janet Dugdale (Curator of Social and Community History, Museum of Liverpool Life) and Finbar Whooley (Grange Community Museum, London) inspirational and personally challenging. One factor which appears to be key, however, is a sympathetic environment for these individuals to work in, i.e. institutional support. This is also a key factor when seeking sponsorship. Without the sanction of the



"What shall we do first?" - orientation at the Chiltern Open Air Museum

museum such projects can founder in red tape.

Speakers from outside the museum community gave papers that were very pertinent to us. Katie Norgrove, Senior Case Officer, HLF (Heritage Lottery Fund) for the Midlands and Ruth Ingledow and her colleague Charity Green from ABSA (The Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts) were there, in essence, to spread the gospel of the solid Victorian values of self help and self improvement spiced up with late 90's entrepreneurial zeal. Simply put, museums using a proactive and professional approach can use HLF and ABSA for maximum returns in terms of funding and business support.

Leading on from this, Steph Gillett's community led development work for South Gloucester Council is an excellent example of the philosophy of 'from the ground up' in action. He, as a one man museum service, takes partnerships to their most radical conclusion - he is a touchstone and focus for local community projects which celebrate and preserve the heritage of the area.

Many and varied points arose from the papers, but taking them as a springboard the most important points in my opinion are:

- Be clear as a museum service about what you want to achieve from partnerships whether they be in kind, commercial or community based. Above all things, remain flexible and be realistic.

- Remember that organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund are not partners, they are merely assessors and as such must be impartial. In the same way straightforward sponsorship is not partnership, it is a transaction. For true partnership both the participating museum and partner must be aware of the aims of each other and the set of outcomes both want to see achieved.
- Partnerships, particularly those with local communities, may create a role of social responsibility on the part of the museum. Leaving community partners high and dry after a given exhibition or project undermines community outreach and creates negative public relations. Museums should be clear about why they want to get involved with others, what they want to gain, what they can offer, and whether it is sustainable. (A point raised during the Q&A session involving Janet Dugdale, Steph Gillett and Finbar Whooley was that there is a need for museum staff to receive training in group work skills and facilitation).

Many interesting case studies were explored including the community exhibitions at the Grange Community Museum in London, the Caribbean Garden project, among others, at the Museum of Liverpool Life and Walsall Museum's temporary exhibition project charting music in Walsall, which included creating a film archive of contemporary performers living and working in the Borough. All these case studies had in common a focused goal and open lines of communication. That is not to say that problems in partnerships were not

discussed, Steph Mastoris (Curator, Snibston Discovery Park, Leicestershire) cornered that particular market by explaining the various forms of partnerships he has been involved in that have proved problematical, from University boards to the terrors of an unruly local history group.

The trip to Chiltern Open Air Museum was informative in terms of demonstrating partnership on various levels. Mostly because, as a small independent museum, they depend so much on good relations and external support. Their energy and commitment on a Friday evening after a long day at work was clear. I have to say that I have discovered that brick making as an activity is a potentially perfect antidote when, to use one of Maurice Davies' metaphors, partnerships fall short of blissful!

I returned to the Museum of Reading on Saturday, subsequent to the reception there on Thursday, for my optional trip to talk to the Interpretation Manager/ Keeper of Fine and Decorative Art, Elaine Blake. This meeting built on the information provided by Reading Museum Service Director, Karen Hull. She had explained the secrets of making a successful lottery bid - which revolved around sense of purpose and focus on their collections. The development of



Brick making at the Chiltern Open Air Museum

the museum in the future will hinge as much on relationships and partnerships within the museum as with external ones. The time schedule for redeveloping the museum is tight and key tasks are shared so that the human factor can be taken into consideration - if someone leaves for various reasons this should not hamper the overall project. The Museum has also bravely decided not to hire in designers for their new galleries but are using in-house expertise. This, with the Museum's policy of cross disciplinary job share, makes good internal partnerships vital.

The main thrust of the weekend appeared to be practical do's and don'ts in terms of partnerships. Human partnerships by their very nature are elusive and complicated but, as I have discussed above, there does appear to be some shared views on how both to create and sustain them. From the point of view of a first timer the ASW was a very worthwhile event and I look forward to next year's meeting in Belfast which I hope as many Northern Ireland members as possible will be able to attend.

Perhaps the most interesting case study of partnerships at the ASW was the sharing of experience and support between delegates - support being the operative word after the barn dancing episode! It's good to feel part of a wider community, and thus having found common cause with so many, in the interests of solidarity, I will draw a veil over all extra curricular activity!

## POSTSCRIPT: "AN URBAN MYTH EXPOSED"

**Martin Routledge of Sunderland Museum follows up one of the more important debates at this years Annual Study Weekend.**

This debate took place during the barn dance and was about the name of one of the characters in the once popular children's programme "Captain Pugwash".

I have conducted a thorough investigation into the belief and gone to the primary resources available at my local library. I can now tell you that the principal characters were..Cut Throat Jake..Captain Pugwash..

Cabin Boy Tom..Willie..Barnabas and Master Mate.

A colleague of mine believes that there was a character by the name of Seaman Staines (a friend of his knew the author and he swears it is true) but I have found no evidence of that. Another colleague has a friend who believes that "Pugwash" is an Australian slang word for, well, that kind of frightful nastiness that has been the subject of the name in question.

So maybe there is something to the myth after all...

## ABSA and Museums

**A**BSA (The Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts) exists to promote and encourage partnerships between the private sector and the arts to their mutual benefit and to that of the community at large. It advises, trains and supports the arts and museum community in the development of private sector support and provides a link between museums and businesses.

ABSA can help improve the chances of museums successfully obtaining sponsorship by giving training and advice. However, cash sponsorship is not the only way businesses can support museums; their personnel can provide help in the form of business skills and experience and ABSA's Business in the Arts scheme exists to bring those skills to

the arts in ways which are beneficial to both parties. It operates a Placement Scheme, which can offer museums help on a range of business issues, and a Board Bank, which can introduce museums to potential trustees. ABSA also runs the Pairing Scheme, a competitive scheme for arts and business, which offers financial awards and government endorsement and they would like to see more applications to this scheme from the museum sector.

The following case studies outline how four museums have taken advantage of the different services that ABSA offers in order to complete successful projects that have benefited both the museum and their sponsor.

### BUSINESS IN THE ARTS - NATWEST BOARD BANK

#### MUSEUM OF FULHAM PALACE - SEARCH FOR A NEW BOARD MEMBER

**T**he Museum of Fulham Palace opened in 1992 and exists to interpret the history of Fulham Palace in its broadest sense, including its architecture, archaeology, garden history and social history. The museum features a permanent display in two rooms, with other functions such as, temporary exhibitions, lectures and children's activities held in a third room from time to time. The Trust is supported by a grant from the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

##### New board member needed

In February 1996, the Museum of Fulham Palace became the first museum to apply to the Business in the Arts / NatWest Board Bank. The Trust was seeking a new board member and was very clear about its needs. It wanted to find a finance specialist who would be able to assist the curator with managing the

Trust's finances. A business plan was about to be produced, so it was particularly important at this time to have a financier 'on board'.

##### False start

A candidate was duly found and introduced to the museum in June 1996. As part of a mutual 'vetting' process, the candidate visited the museum, met with the curator and with the trustees. However, it was not a marriage made in heaven, and the museum decided that this particular candidate was not the one for them!

##### Second time lucky

Undaunted, Business in the Arts considered other options and put forward a second candidate, Janet Gough, a Director of Sotheby's. This time, the match was a huge success and Janet was invited to become a trustee.

The partnership has continued from strength to strength. Miranda Poliakoff, curator of the museum, claims that Janet has "brought fresh ideas, a more business-like attitude, as well as essential financial skills. She is prepared to commit time and to guide her fellow trustees into becoming more active."

Janet is equally enthusiastic. She commented; "At first I was horrified. I hadn't realised how tough it is for small museums. They have so few staff and the curator ends up with responsibility for everything, from marketing to finance, let alone looking after the exhibits! Becoming a trustee has been deeply satisfying to me, to be able to give my time, energy and skills in a new environment".

The Board Bank can offer museums potential trustees with a range of business skills, all of whom have been interviewed and trained by Business in the Arts. If you would like to find out more, call Business in the Arts London on 0171 378 8143



## SPONSORSHIP

## HITCHIN MUSEUM

**H**itchin Museum is a local authority funded museum, with both a permanent collection and temporary displays. The Museum has strong links with the local community and a history of innovative displays with regional themes that have an educational emphasis. The visitor profile is comprised of mainly local people and schools groups - Hitchin is not a tourist destination. The Museum is situated on the edge of the town and is attached to the town library.

The Museum is staffed by a Curator, Assistant Curator and an Education Officer. Fundraising is undertaken by a freelance consultant. There are also a number of highly valued volunteers.

### The project

The sponsored project was called The Road to Hitchin - Silver, Spices and Spuds and is about Hitchin's history as a market town and stopping off point for traders and travellers on the old Roman Way. It also celebrates Hitchin as a multi-cultural town, with both Asian and West Indian communities.

Alongside the temporary exhibition, children were invited by local shops to come and see their premises and talk to their staff. The shops that became involved range from Gatwoods (the oldest silver jewellery shop in Europe), Hawkins (a traditional haberdashers), an Asian corner shop and a local Sainsbury. The town's market traders association were also involved. Not all of these shops have sponsored the project in cash, but all have given their time in kind to enable this project to happen - children have not only learned about the history of the shops and how they were founded, but the project has been brought up to date with talks about bar codes and other retail 'trade secrets'.

The project culminated in the production of banners, made by the children and a local artist on relevant themes. The banners were part of a procession around the market (which closed for the afternoon), and a presentation to the town's mayor as part of the Hitchin Festival.



Sponsorship from Sainsburys allowed 3 professional artists to be hired to work with local school children

### The sponsorship

The cash sponsorship by the Sainsbury's store was the result of an approach to the store manager, who then sold the idea upwards to his colleagues at Head Office. The sponsorship amount requested by Hitchin Museum was originally £2,000, but this was reduced to £1,200 due to pressure on the store's budgets. Benefits included the J. Sainsbury logo on all print, guaranteed press coverage with sponsor credits (the local newspaper is happy to credit the sponsors of arts events) and a private view of the exhibition for staff and guests.

### The sponsorship worked for the store in several ways:

- It coincided with the expansion of the store and its re-opening.
- It gave direct access to children and their parents through tours of the store and educational talks by the deputy store manager - building customer loyalty.
- The project involved staff and was the subject of articles in the in-house magazine.
- The creation of displays in the store and use of one of the specially designed banners in the store re-opening.
- Opportunities to network with other traders in the town.

- By providing links with local schools, police and influential town councillors and dignitaries.
- Photo opportunities and editorial in the local press that credited J. Sainsbury.

### Sponsorship keys to success:

There are various factors that contributed to this sponsorship's success and the establishment of a good relationship between the Museum and local businesses:

- A part time fundraiser was employed to recruit and service business partners.
- The sponsorship idea was sold 'person to person' at a local level.
- The Museum was not too ambitious about the amount of money that needed to be raised and had set realistic targets.
- The sponsorship had the full backing and support by the curator and education officer, who worked hard to make all business partners feel involved in the project and were flexible with business benefits.
- The project was well defined and relevant with strong connections to the local community and schools - fitting the sponsor's aims and objectives perfectly.

## BUSINESS IN THE ARTS - PLACEMENT SCHEME

### PLANS FOR THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

The Royal College of Surgeons, founded in 1745, exists to promote the art and science of surgery. In 1799, the government presented the College with the Hunterian Collection and it was from this that the College's existing museums and library developed.

There are a total of five collections at the College; the Library, the Hunterian Museum, the Odontological Museum and the Wellcome Museums of Pathology and Anatomy. In addition, the College houses its own special collection of treasures, including portraits, silverware and ceramics amongst other things. Today the College boasts 25,000 specimens and 90,000 volumes of historical surgical books.

#### Planning advice needed

Early in 1996, the Keeper of the College Collections, Stella Mason, applied to the

Business in the Arts Placement Scheme for a business adviser to help her to write a 5 year business plan. The plan was to form part of a National Lottery application and it also needed to examine the relationship between the museums and collections and the College itself.

A Business in the Arts manager visited the museum and spent some time with Stella helping her to clarify her needs. From this meeting, Business in the Arts was able to find a suitable volunteer to work on the project - David Rice, a Political Adviser at BP. David's main business skills are strategic thinking and planning, organisational structures and staffing.

#### Mission accomplished

The placement lasted for over a year. Stella and David met regularly and communicated by e-mail between

meetings. An impressive business plan was produced - by Stella, but with David's guidance and objective viewpoint. The placement made Stella realise that she needed to think more about her own work-load and how best to plan it. Stella said: "I could not have produced the plan on time without David's help. It was really great to have a clear source of support from outside - as a sort of mentor. A sensible voice to say; 'Why are you doing it like this?' 'Think about this - what about doing this?'".

David benefited too. He said of the experience; "I have benefited personally by the satisfaction of contributing to a worthy project and possibly helping to establish an important new museum in London".

The Placement Scheme can offer museums help on a range of business issues. If you would like to find out more, call Business in the Arts London on 0171 378 8143

## PAIRING SCHEME

### NORFOLK RURAL LIFE MUSEUM

#### The sponsored project

An exhibition entitled 'Life and Death in the Workhouse' that was sponsored by Anglia Funeral Services Ltd. The exhibition looked at death from a historical perspective, but also how death is dealt with in the present day.

#### Background to the sponsorship

Anglia Funeral Services won an award for their staff development programme and were keen to develop an educational outreach programme within the local community to build on this success. Anglia Funeral Services demonstrated the level of their support with a three year sponsorship contract with the Museum

which would allow the partnership to develop and produce an effective long-term educational programme to take into local schools.

#### Commercial logic

The synergy between the 'Life and Death in the Workhouse' exhibition and Anglia Funeral Services is clear, and the sponsorship creates good potential for local publicity. By working with schools and making a taboo subject accessible, Anglia Funeral Services were aiming to educate people for the good of their business and the community in general - promoting their name as a family run, community spirited business.

#### Sponsorship details

- Amount of sponsorship (excluding VAT): £1,500
- Amount of Pairing Scheme award: £1,500 (Three year contract - £4,500 over three years)

#### Use of Pairing Scheme Award

The Pairing Scheme Award was used to produce educational resource packs to be distributed to teachers. The sponsor was credited in all packs and was given the opportunity to become involved in the content of the resource pack. In addition, Anglia Funeral Services also offered schools their time and experience by participating in follow up discussion groups with the children.

## Choosing and Using an Education Freelancer

Alison James, a museum education consultant, has worked with a wide range of organisations including museums, area museum councils, universities and the MGC. Here she outlines factors for museums and galleries to consider when appointing, briefing and working with freelance educators or museum education consultants.

As a result of the increasing number of freelance educators and consultants working in museums the GEM Freelance Network was founded in 1996 as a specialist group of the Group for Education in Museums. It is a self-help group which supports its members by providing training and networking opportunities, raising the awareness of freelance issues, collaborating on joint projects and making available a list of members.

The success of working with a freelancer depends on communication, co-operation and preparation. Both the museum staff and the freelancer should be clear about the task and each others' expectations. This information should be used as a starting point from which to develop a working structure which is clear for both the museum and the freelancer. The advice it contains can be adapted to suit your own circumstances and requirements.

### Why choose a freelancer?

It is important to think about why you are choosing a freelancer or consultant. Do you want someone to deliver an education service, such as a workshop, to

#### Freelance worker or consultant?

There is some confusion about these two terms.

**Consultants:** discuss, inform and advise on a subject within their area of expertise i.e. museum education; they may be employed or self-employed.

**Freelance workers:** sell skills rather than advice; they are self-employed. The term freelancer will be used throughout to include both of these definitions.

undertake a special project, such as writing a resource pack, or to develop educational provision, such as evaluating and advising on existing services and making recommendations?

Are you using a freelancer because of lack of time, pressure of work, availability of resources, lack of in-house expertise or is it because you want an objective approach? Is it a short-term, one-off or start-up project or do you have a very tight deadline to meet?

Choosing a freelancer is not an easy option - don't expect it to solve all your problems! You will still have to be involved with and committed to the project and provide support, facilities, finance, time and follow-up. It is a two-way process. The museum is accountable too.

### Checklist for museums before taking on a freelancer

- What is the task? Define it. What is the end-product you require? Is this achievable?
- Assess the scope of the work. How long do you think it will take?
- What are the immediate and long-term implications of the project on the museum?
- What skills will you require the freelancer to have?
- What are your respective roles and responsibilities?
- What are the resource implications of embarking on this project?
- Do you have approval from management?
- Are staff happy about working with a freelancer? Are there training or management implications?
- What are the budget implications?

- Who is going to liaise with the freelancer throughout the project?
- What will the lines of communication be between you and the freelancer?
- Allow time to prepare the brief, attend progress meetings and provide support.
- Will the freelancer work from home, in the museum, or both?
- What facilities, administration, working space and equipment will be required?
- Are you prepared to pay the freelancer for speculative meetings and initial preparation?
- Are you willing to cover the freelancers' expenses such as travel, postage, telephone and fax costs, or should they be included in the fees?
- Is the freelancer covered by the museum's insurance policy?
- Can your administration staff deal with freelance payments? They need to be aware that freelancers are responsible for their own tax and national insurance payments.

### How to choose a freelancer

- Is there enough time to advertise? Consider using the Museums Journal and GEM News.
- How will you select? Do you require freelancers to tender proposals? Will you take up references? Will you interview applicants? Will you ask to see CVs and examples of their work?
- Are you applying an Equal Opportunities policy? Does the Disability Discrimination Act apply? Do you need police clearance for the freelancer?
- Request lists of freelancers from organisations such as the Museums Association, Area Museum Councils, GEM, GEM Freelance Network, ENGAGE (The National Association of Gallery Educators) and Arts Councils. Refer to the Museums Yearbook (Museums Association).
- Ask colleagues at other museums who may have used a freelancer for a similar project.

### When selecting a freelancer consider the following:

- Do they have the right skills?
- Do they have the practical experience and relevant training required?
- Do they have an understanding of museum ethics and are they professional?
- Can you work with them?

- Are they interested in the museum? Are they enthusiastic about the project?
- Do they offer value for money?

### Once selected the freelancer may need to work in your institution, if so:

- Do you need to gain security clearance for him/her?
- Does your institution have clear guidelines and proper provision for Health & Safety?
- Are you familiar with the requirements of the Children Act? Contact the Children's Legal Centre (Tel: 01206 873820) for information.

### Preparing the brief

A well-prepared brief will benefit everyone involved in the project. You should provide an outline of the proposed work, a description of the museum (its character, collections, sites, staff structure, visitor figures), your mission statement, copies of relevant policies, and your professional code of conduct.

#### The following issues should be considered:

- What is the end-product you have in mind?
- Who will be the designated person in the museum for the freelancer to report to? Can this person make decisions about the project?
- Who will be responsible for project management and for monitoring the work as the project develops?
- Who else is involved - curators, education officers, trustees, designers, printers, artists, photographers?
- Who will co-ordinate the people the freelancer may need to liaise with in the museum?
- Will the freelancer be treated as an equal member of the project team for the duration of the project?
- If your institution has a policy of induction training for new staff will the freelancer be included in this?
- What facilities, support and back-up will the museum need to provide, such as a picture search or collection research, editing, proof reading, background information, typing services, sound equipment, changing space?

- What is the timescale of the project, including details of interim meetings and reports?
- What is the budget? Does it include fees and expenses? Does it include preparation time, travel time and preliminary meetings? Who will pay any VAT incurred?
- Will interim payments be made? At what stage(s) in the project?
- Where will the work take place? What equipment will be provided by the museum/the freelancer?
- Who will undertake evaluation and consultation during and after the project?
- Will the material need to be piloted? Who will carry this out?
- Can the freelancer sub-contract any of the work?
- Does the freelancer need public liability insurance or professional indemnity? If so bear in mind that this overhead will be reflected in his/her fee.

### The agreement

This should include a description of the work to be done, the end-product required, the basis of the charge, payment terms and dates, the start and completion dates, the name of the main museum contact and the facilities and resources available at the museum. The museum and the freelancer should each have a signed copy of the agreement. Both parties must be happy with the terms.

#### The following issues should also be considered:

- What if the nature of the work changes as the project develops?
- Who can change the terms of the agreement? Is it a two way relationship?
- What provision is there for the postponement or cancellation of the project by either party?
- How much notice is required?
- Who has editorial control?
- Is the insurance liability clear?
- Should there be a confidentiality clause?
- Will the freelancer be acknowledged for his/her contribution?
- Who will hold the copyright of written material? (The author owns the copyright unless they agree in writing to assign it to your organisation. The freelancer also has intellectual property rights of his/her ideas which cannot be used without payment - these ideas must be in writing).

- How will the project be evaluated?
- What arbitration procedures will be followed?

### Project management

#### Once the project is underway it will need to be monitored.

- Inform the staff, management, volunteers and the public about the project and introduce the freelancer to them.
- Make sure the freelancer has all the necessary information regarding the target audience and actual bookings - for particular activities.
- Ensure the deadlines for interim reports or meetings or stages of work are met by both parties.
- Oversee the submission and payment of interim invoices.
- Agree any changes to the project in writing.
- Regular contact should be maintained between the freelancer and the designated staff member.
- Use ongoing evaluation to identify potential problems before they jeopardise the project.

### On completion of the project

- The museum should implement an action plan which will follow on from the freelancers' work.
- Final payment should be made.
- Evaluate the project and the freelancer's work. The freelancer may request a testimonial.
- Check that the freelancer has returned any borrowed material.
- Check that the freelancer, the museum and any funding partners have been credited in the final work.
- What plans are there to publicise the end-product? Will any publicity involve the freelancer? Will you pay them for this?
- Check that the freelancer receives a copy of the end-product which is produced e.g. a resource pack.
- Do you wish to maintain some contact with the freelancer, for example, add him/her to the mailing list; provide access to the museum library and facilities; include him/her in future staff training plans or social activities?

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This information has been compiled by Ruth Briant, Ytje Hamstra and Alison James in consultation with other members of the GEM Freelance Network. The information sheet this is based on was funded by the MGC.

### For further information contact:

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## Community Advocacy - Testing new models

**More and more museums are involving the local community in creating and developing exhibitions. Finbarr Whooley, of the Grange Museum, outlines the ups and downs of working with local groups...**

I think that we would all agree that museums operate within a socio-cultural context. Museums are never neutral places. They are often imposing physical pretences in a locality. They are usually the custodians of a local corporate set of values and beliefs. At their worst they can be arrogant and demeaning institutions. However the optimists amongst us see them as places filled with possibilities. They are:

- Places that can effect change.
- Places that can be a source of old fashioned liberal education.
- Places that give us a view into others lives and insights into our own.

If we believe all of this then logically we must look at community partnerships as a fundamental element of what we do. How else can we access or adequately represent community memory. We must sponsor links, dialogues and partnerships with local people.

Our discipline has been by far and away the most successful within the museum profession when it comes to involving members of local communities. From the

oral history and contemporary documentation work pioneered by people like Steph Mastoris to the myriad of projects that members of SHCG have sponsored over the years social historians have been pushing back the boundaries between the institution and the local community. We are good at making links, however I would argue that we are also often overwhelmed by the demands of keeping those links.

There would seem to be three main areas of community partnership at present in the museum sector.

### Operational Partnerships

At present operational partnerships mainly occur through the work of volunteers and Friends organisations.

### Planning and strategic partnerships

These are much newer in a museum context and often take the form of focus groups and user panels.

### Specific projects

Partnerships which coalesce around specific projects are the meat and drink of many of our museums. From Croydon to Kirklees we are all busy getting local groups together to work on specific exhibitions, run oral history projects and donate material for peoples shows. There are pluses and minuses associated with all community partnerships.

### Operational

Operational partnerships usually involve people doing work in the museum or elsewhere on the museum's behalf. Volunteers are the most familiar partnership yet as we know volunteers are often badly treated by their institutions. They often operate without proper job descriptions or adequate supervision. The recruitment of volunteers often doesn't produce a match between the volunteers values and those of the museum. Also increasingly volunteers are unemployed museum professionals who are not from the local community and as a result bring no special knowledge of the local context to the museum.

Much has been said and written about Friends groups and the Friends as Enemies saga. We all know how this classic cycle runs: Local people press for museum; Committee/ pressure group successfully lobbies Local Authority; Museum established/ curator appointed; Friends group of old activists established; Split between professionals and activists; Friends become enemies. This cycle is in no way an inevitable one but it is a well known pitfall.

### Planning and strategic partnerships

Community partnerships at the planning and strategic end of museum work is largely centred around the ubiquitous

focus group. The work pioneered by Croydon some years ago has now become the norm. Like many of you reading this, I too have sat through sessions on cold November nights with randomly selected groups of local people brought together for facilitated discussion about the future of the museum service. Most people had nothing more in common than that they all lived locally and got £15 for their trouble. The focus group has huge strengths in that it allows us to get the non-visitor. Because they are usually externally facilitated they give us a useful impartial view from the outside of what we are doing. Distasteful as focus groups may be in theory in practice they have greatly enhanced the museums ability to plan for the future.

The user panel is a variation of this model. It was pioneered in areas such as the N.H.S. and is now used extensively by Library Authorities. The user panel came into use in the public sector largely as a result of government pressures to quantify the quality of services being produced by statutory providers. They offer similar insights into the workings of the institution as the focus groups but the emphasis is on the user rather than the non-user.

### Project Partnerships

The community project partnership is now a relatively common occurrence. However as community related projects have multiplied over the last decade major problems are beginning to emerge around sustainability of partnerships on a long term basis. The most extensive community involvement project over the last decade was arguably the Peopling of London exhibition. Finally a large national museum was taking seriously a community partnership approach to its work. Subsequently colleagues at the Museum of London have been open about the fact that many of the links made for the Peopling project were not able to be sustained after the end of the exhibition. This crazy approach of inviting people in to the museum and then discarding them (albeit not maliciously) when the project is over just does not make sense. What happens to the commitment, the enthusiasm and the good will when we withdraw?

### Community Advocacy at the Grange

At the Grange we have been attempting to establish a new kind of partnership with our local community. We are not at all sure if this is a sustainable model but we have put a lot of thought into how it might work for us.

We've been involved in community work for a decade. Within the local area we are very much in your face about the particular brand of history that the Borough is interested in. Our work programme relates almost entirely to investigating the lives of local people and providing historical and cultural anchors for the present population, in other words old fashioned civic pride in a modern urban environment.

Our work programme over the past 3 years has covered Muslim and Jewish experiences, a history of the Irish population and a celebration of the achievements of the first generation of West Indian immigration to London. For each of these exhibitions we got together a group of local people, with a knowledge of local community life and an empathy with the goals of the museum.

After each project we have involved in a real way 20-40 people in the work of the museum. Through self selection half a dozen people usually made themselves stand out from the rest through their eagerness to work with the museum and through their understanding of the wider issues beyond the particular project of the day.

We developed the advocacy scheme in an effort to keep on board all of those who had engaged in dialogues with us throughout the years.

Our advocacy scheme works on three levels. At the core is a group of about 12 local people who make up our advocacy group. They are the stars of all of our projects over the past 5 years. They meet at the museum 3/4 times per year and act as an advisory panel on all current and future projects. They are the people who we could ring up for advice or help on any given project.

A second larger group of 30/40 people form part of our larger network. This group consists of people we have had useful dialogues with, people who we collaborated with on joint projects and people who we interviewed as part of our oral history programme. All of these people are on a closed mailing list and receive a twice yearly update from the museum on the programmes and forthcoming events. Lastly we have a larger community mailing list of members who display an interest in the work of the museum. This larger mailing list contains updates on exhibition programmes and occasional events of local significance.

Between all these levels of communication we are trying to engage in a continuous dialogue. Two way discussion occurs primarily with the Advocacy group. However with careful management people will move between all three bands according to the levels of commitment that they can give to the museum at a given time.

Up to this point when we have been involved in partnership projects we have learned to walk a fine line between group decision making and professional responsibility for getting the work done. It could be argued that we have shown willing to stretch well beyond the normally accepted norms of our profession in adapting our work to the needs of local communities.

The challenge for us now is to take this a stage further, to be open and flexible, not just concerning an exhibition or a project but also around the larger issues of museum planning and policy.

With an openness and a willingness to look beyond our own narrow professional boundaries and to make real partnerships with local people I think that we are allowing ourselves to dream of a new type of museum, perhaps a new more realistic model for the future.

## Touch and Talk

**The Warwickshire County Museum is a service with a lot of county to cover! From the farming communities of the rural south to the ex-mining villages of the industrial north, it is a large and diverse area for a small staff (and one lone Social History curator!) to work in. Forging partnerships and working co-operatively with others is one way of making the most of scant resources.**

This article is about Touch and Talk, a joint project between two museum services, a library, and a local branch of a national charity. The team was myself and Johanna Rice (Keeper of Social History and Head of Heritage Education respectively, Warwickshire County Museum); Helen Mears (Outreach Officer Nuneaton Borough Museum); Janet Pickering (Nuneaton Library); and the staff at 'Homestart' - a charity which supports young families under stress. 'Homestart's' base is on the Camp Hill estate, in Nuneaton.

Camp Hill is a sprawling mix of council and ex-coiiliery homes. Built in the 1950's, it dominates north west Nuneaton and has been recognised as an area of special need. An expensive bus ride away from the town centre, its population has no easy physical access to library or museum services. Low self-esteem and confidence, hostility to council services generally, and a feeling that museums and libraries are irrelevant also act as barriers to access.

Touch and Talk worked with a small group of 'Homestart' mums and toddlers over a period of two months. We approached 'Homestart' because it is an established and trusted organisation on Camp Hill and not linked to any council department. The staff were enormously encouraging - any activity which promoted interest, dialogue and self-confidence amongst their families would be warmly welcomed, they said. They advised us to be flexible, open-minded, un-shockable and not to expect too much! We negotiated with 'Homestart' about the nature of the sessions and what we could realistically expect from them. We were frank from the outset about the limitations on our time and resources. We didn't make promises we couldn't keep. Our aim was to create a fruitful partnership with 'Homestart' through

which their families might be encouraged to give libraries, museums and the staff who work in them a chance!

We planned six sessions over two months, four at 'Homestart' followed by visits to Nuneaton Museum and St John's Museum in Warwick. Coaches were paid for by Nuneaton Museum's Outreach budget. 'Homestart' promoted and advertised the project as Touch and Talk, and encouraged people to turn up.

The focus for each session was museum objects. Natural History specimens like shells and butterflies were a starting point for craft activities with the children while in a separate space, well away from scissors and glue, social history and ethnography objects stimulated curiosity and discussion amongst adults. Everything could be touched. Janet Pickering from Nuneaton Library ran a story telling session to promote the new mobile library service for Camp Hill and a recent initiative called 'Babies need Books'.

So, did it all go swimmingly? Well not at first, no! When we turned up for the first session we were greeted by Enid, one of the helpers. "I hate bloody museums. They're like schools and hospitals...." she said. The mums were pleased to see their children busy and happy but were bemused as to why we'd brought objects out for *them* to see. There was constant noise and movement as babies were fed, changed and handed round like parcels, glue-covered toddlers cleaned and pacified and coffee made and drunk. Foolishly, we had expected more calm and focus! But museum objects do exert an influence! By the second week there was intense curiosity to see what we'd brought and a willingness to share ideas. A tiny 19th century baby cap sparked off lively exchanges about child care and child birth past and present, with offers



Maggie Wood with baby Darren and his Mum

of items for the collection. Best of all to see was their growing confidence in dealing with us. We began to have fun!

At the end of the six sessions we went back for an informal chat about how people felt it had gone. Comments ranged from Hayley's "it weren't that bad" (she had expected us to behave like school teachers) to Enid's "it gave the mums another thing to talk about and be interested in. I really enjoyed it and I hate museums". We asked David Cairns, 'Homestart's' organiser, to write a short evaluation report.

This is an extract:

"We had individuals, including volunteers, who were a little apprehensive about meeting representatives from 'The Museum' - a place some of them hadn't been to for many years, and were totally perplexed as to what you could possibly do or talk about that would be of the slightest relevance or interest to them.... every single person that took part in the sessions / trips had at least one positive comment, and bearing in mind the traumatic and transitional phase that 'Homestart' was going through at the time can only be seen as incredibly positive..."

If we continue working in partnership I believe we can sustain the relationship with 'Homestart' and its families. Helen and Janet have been back during the summer to lead local workshops with older children and to publicise events and activities in Nuneaton Library and Museum. Jo and I plan to visit again in the autumn. It's a modest little project, and hardly ground breaking, but may encourage workers in small museums that pooling resources can have real benefits.

**Maggie Wood**

Keeper of Social History,  
Warwickshire County Museum

# What does 'Community' mean to you?

## North East Communities, a regional touring exhibition

This article examines the conceptual, developmental and practical issues faced by Tyne and Wear Museums when producing a touring social history exhibition on that most intangible of subjects, 'community'. It also gives examples of the way the exhibition has mushroomed as it has toured Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery, Newcastle Discovery Museum, Shipley Art Gallery in Gateshead and South Shields Museum and Art Gallery.

### In the beginning

'Community', as we know, is conceptually an extremely difficult subject to tackle, taking its meaning from a host of both geographic and social contexts, and is perhaps more naturally the stuff of a PhD thesis than interpretation through the medium of an exhibition. In creating North East Communities our approach was to tackle the issue head-on, both working with the background sources and comprehensive literature on the subject whilst simultaneously forming our own conclusions about what 'community' meant to us as individuals.

Having completed the background research and confirmed the complexity of the subject, we decided to take a more proactive approach and ask what community meant to the people of Tyne and Wear. This was undertaken through the distribution of questionnaires to several Tyne and Wear Museum sites, local community centres, history groups and the Big Issue North East. We also conducted eight recorded interviews with people from a variety of backgrounds, including a Big Issue vendor and a Bosnian woman residing in Newcastle. Four of the interviews generated oral history recordings for use in the exhibition, whilst the others provided invaluable research and interpretative material.

Needless to say the response confirmed some of our initial conclusions. For most people 'community' relates to their neighbourhood or locality; family and local institutions play an important role in maintaining a sense of community; a

sense of belonging and a need for social interaction was vital; and perhaps unsurprisingly, most people today generally have very negative feelings about 'community'.

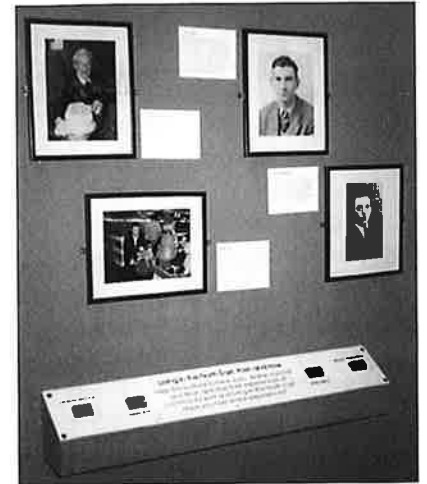
### In the middle

After considering the questionnaire responses, we decided to structure the exhibition around these results by posing a series of questions:

- What makes a community?
- How well do you know your neighbour?
- What has changed your communities?
- How many communities are you part of?
- Can you have a community without a home?
- Communities in the 21st century?

Our aim, through a combination of graphics, photographs, oral accounts and objects, was to demonstrate to visitors that although 'community' can, and does, mean neighbourliness and where we live, it can also have a much broader significance which goes beyond neighbourhood fences and can co-exist with our changing needs and lifestyles. However, as we pointed out from the outset of the exhibition, community and a sense of what that entails is primarily dependent upon the people involved. People are the main ingredient in becoming, developing, maintaining and even losing a sense of 'community' wherever we live or have lived, or whatever we do or have done.

This point was reiterated in the sections, 'How many communities are you part of?' and 'Can you have a community



The oral testimonies of these four individuals were complemented by objects relating to their particular experiences of community in a case nearby

without a home?'. Through these we exhibited the diversity of ways in which people can and have come together and feel a sense of belonging or 'community' in the North East. Included were work communities, social and leisure groups, children's groups, the Freemasons, church communities, gay and lesbian groups, the Arab community and Big Issue vendors. More specifically, we exhibited objects relating to the Chinese and Romany communities, the Showmen's Guild and one of the newest communities in the North East, the Bosnian refugee community. Clearly, most of these groups were not based around their neighbourhood but found a common sense of belonging through, for example, symbols, common experience (good and bad), common interest, employment or history.

We also tried to put the negative perception of 'community' into context by addressing those factors that can and have changed communities in the North East, such as post-industrial decline, the growth of service industries, changes in housing and living standards, crime, vandalism and the changing role of women. Moreover, in the final section we aimed to demonstrate that all of these social, sociological, economic, political and demographic factors will continue to impact on the way we live and interact with each other, but, since people are social animals, we will always belong somewhere, unless we deliberately choose otherwise. We ended the





The 'Peoples Case' at the Shipley Art Gallery, representing some of the community groups found in Gateshead, today and in the past



Despite being on the margin of mainstream society, the strong sense of 'community' experienced by Big Issue Vendors in the North East, was supported by illustrative quotations from participating vendors

exhibition by balloting visitors on their desire to belong to the European Community, the result, at the time of writing this paper, is 50/50.

## A hitch

One of the most difficult aspects involved in the development of this exhibition was the requirement that we include material, whether photographs, objects or information, from the four main geographical areas in which the exhibition would tour. Despite the spatial proximity of these four districts, each have fiercely individual identities. As a result, we included one person from each district in the oral history focus and a representative geographic spread of photographs for each theme. Despite our best attempts, visitors still claim that the exhibition is, for example, Newcastle biased or Sunderland biased, depending on their particular perspective. The difference between this touring exhibition and others which have preceded it, such as *A North East Childhood*<sup>1</sup>, is that a sense of what 'community' symbolises appears to be more embedded in people's perception of their own identity and place in the world than previous themes, hence our intrinsic problems in representing the multiple identities (even prejudices) of people in four very different, but geographically intimate areas.

## In the end

As an opportunity to encourage further community involvement and provide a

'local' focus at each venue, the 'People's Case', situated at the end of North East Communities, displayed new material. Through a public appeal, members of the public were invited to display photographs or objects relating to the communities to which they belong or have belonged. This resulted in a number of interesting and unexpected developments. For example, the showing of the exhibition at the Shipley Art Gallery in Gateshead led to the extended involvement of the Orthodox Jewish population and a small display about the reasons for the strength of their particular community. Currently, whilst on show at South Shields Museum and Art Gallery, the 'People's Case' is displaying material borrowed from a number of Asian and Arab women living in South Tyneside and former employees of Harton and Westoe Colliery.

## In the future

North East Communities, from inauspicious beginnings, has developed a momentum all of its own and the potential to lead to lasting and mutually beneficial community interaction. Presently, the exhibition is forming the focus for the development of a fascinating community art project called 'Community Threads'. South Shields Museum, the Customs House and South Tyneside Art Centre will be collaborating with six community groups and two facilitating artists to produce six banners representing what 'community' means to them. The groups involved will include

people who suffer from mental health problems, residents of a local housing estate, women from a variety of ethnic minority backgrounds, ex-miners, a local school and museum visitors. Once completed, these banners will go on display at different venues in South Tyneside and will, it is hoped, form the inspiration for a piece of public art in 1999/2000.

## And finally....

North East Communities was a difficult exhibition to develop, primarily because of the intangible nature of the central concept involved. However, through our proactive research strategy and constant involvement of local communities it has grown and developed into an interesting basis for stimulating debate and discussion amongst museum visitors and social historians.

### Notes

1. White, H. (1995-96) 'Kids - What can you do? A North East Childhood at Tyne & Wear Museums', *Journal of the Social History Curators Group*, vol. 22, p.21

**Carolyn Abel**

(Assistant Keeper, Social History)  
Tyne & Wear Museums

## COMING SOON...

## Designs on museums...

### The future of museum consulting relationships

Imperial War Museum  
21st October 1998, 10.30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.

This seminar, one of a series of six guideline seminars sponsored by the MGC and jointly organised by the Social History Curators Group and the Museum Exhibition Designers Group, will look at working practices between curators and consultant designers.

The day will cover case studies from both points of view from small and large projects. The format will include talks and workshops.

Confirmed speakers include:

**Julia Holberry**  
Swindon Museum Service

**John Roles**  
Brighton Museum & Art Gallery

**Robin Wade**  
Robin Wade & Partners (consultants)

Cost:

**SHCG/MEDG members £20**

**Non-members £34**

**Lunch £5**

For booking details contact: Jane Seaman, Fax/Tel: 01923 248406  
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For example, Birmingham's contemporary collecting policy embraces the whole of its post-war city life. Irene de Boo of Birmingham Museums and Art Galleries demonstrated how its contemporary stretches over fifty years, drawing on the memories of those still living in the city. By contrast however, Helen Joseph, Tyne and Wear Museums, told us how the Shipley Art Gallery and Museum defines contemporary craft as being produced now, accepting only forward acquisitions.

The greatest challenge to contemporary collecting however, is perhaps as much due to the contemporary itself, as to anything else. The pace and extent of technological change in society over the past fifty years has expanded the media of collecting. Yet, as Birmingham are acknowledging, although oral history collection is an important focus for contemporary collecting it is not the fullest extent of the museum's collecting potential. Contemporary collections require objects too.

Expanding the 'what' of collecting surely entails an expansion of the 'how' too. Just as the media of collecting is changing, so are the means. Anne Roach's experience at St Albans Museum shows how a contemporary collection can sometimes be the starting point for collecting more information from those who experienced the collection before it became a museum piece.

Museums will inevitably 'shop' for the contemporary they wish to collect, reacting to the 'bargains' of the moment. Yet contemporary collecting clearly offers museums a more meaningful opportunity; Nicola Clayton argued that it gives us a chance to advocate and to empower. If this is to happen however, the collecting of the contemporary must involve the public as curators, and ourselves as responsible collection managers. Contemporary culture might be disposable, but the collections and partnerships it offers should not be.

## REVIEW...

## Wanted: ecstasy, slang and attitudes

**Fads, fashions and follies touch our daily lives, yet how much of today's disposable consumer culture survives in our collections? According to Nicola Clayton of De Montford University, today is an untold story in our museums. If, as her survey suggests, fewer than fifty per cent of museums have active contemporary collecting policies, then Carry on Collecting, held at the Museum of London in April was timely and necessary.**

The issues associated with contemporary collecting today are hardly new. Our current curatorial concerns are not fads or fashions, but instead, the continuing challenge of meaningful collecting.

Javier Pes, Reading Museum, argued that museums' growing collections of today's everyday prove our willingness to recognise and to validate our familiar present as our developing past. Cathy Ross explained how, from its beginnings, the Museum of London has had a broadminded approach to collecting the present. In the 1970s, the Museum of London had ambitions to record the contemporary Capital, but of necessity, as in many other museums, their collecting became more the rescuing of a less immediate past.

Recognising that our predecessors have failed to keep up with collecting from their present has inevitably expanded our conception of the contemporary.

**Jo Loosemore**

**Plymouth City Museums & Art Gallery**

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