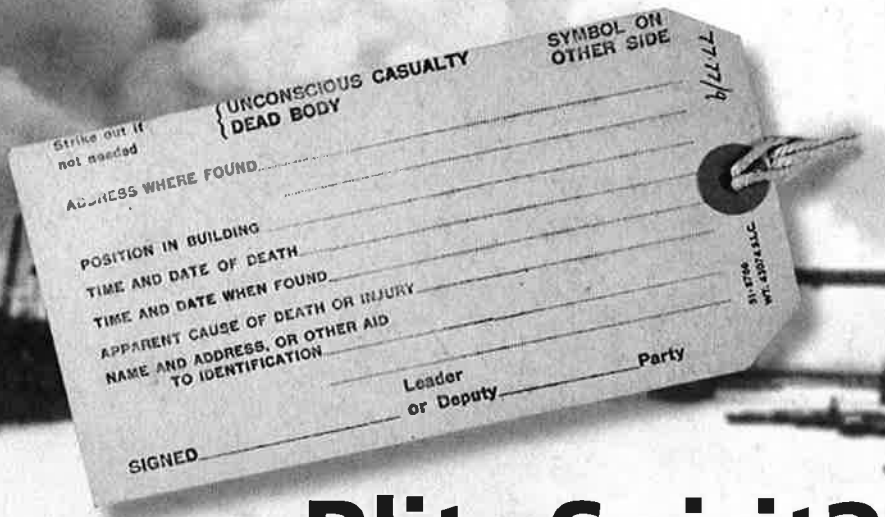


JULY 2001

ISSUE 48



## Blitz Spirit?

# Changing Rooms Identifying Watchamacallits

# SHCG NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

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.

David is happy to discuss any ideas for articles and answer all queries.

Send all contributions to:  
David Broom  
Museum of St Albans  
Hatfield Road  
St Albans  
Herts AL1 3RR  
Tel: 01727 819340  
Fax: 01727 837472  
Email: d.broom@stalbands.gov.uk

Cover photo:  
Label for detailing information about casualties.  
Museum of London  
Contents photo:  
Cover for shielding the flame of a pipe during the blackout.  
Museum of London

SHCG News design by Paul Cook  
Email: pcookdesign@hotmail.com

**DEADLINE FOR  
NEXT (CHRISTMAS)  
ISSUE: 10th OCT 2001**

**W**elcome to issue 48....  
Firstly thank you very much to Nicky Bleasby for all her hard work as editor over recent years and also congratulations on the birth of India Grace on the 10th February 2001 (mother and baby are both doing very well).

Taking over from Nicky's editorship is a hard act to follow but I shall endeavour to continue the NEWS as an important resource for today's museum community. I also hope that we shall remain a forum for debate and discussion of all that is pertinent to the practice of social history in museums. This is your magazine and in the questionnaire in this issue we are seeking to discern what the membership would like to see in the various publications put out by the SHCG.

The articles this issue look at the role of new technologies now available to museums with the Museum of London's online 'Remembering the Blitz' exhibition. We also consider the value of partnership and community projects with Reading's Pied Piper trail and the reviews of the Changing Rooms seminar.

I have also introduced two new sections into this issue: Fundamentally Museums are about material culture, things, objects, there was great enthusiasm for the 'How to Identify Whatchamacallits' seminar in October of last year as Sarah Jillings' report makes clear and it seemed a good idea to have a section looking at an object in depth. I have also introduced a Book Corner - Lost Classics of Social History? In which we consider some of those titles you may have missed! If you would like to write for any of these sections please contact me.

Finally, the Annual Study Weekend will be held 12th - 15th July. This year we will be in Wolverhampton looking at Art and Social inclusion. It promises as ever to be a great weekend - hope to see you there.

**DAVID BROOM – EDITOR**

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## SHCG MATTERS

## ASW 2001:

'Social Inclusion: and the Art  
of Social History Curatorship'  
12th-15th July 2001  
Wolverhampton

Increasingly social history curators are using the visual arts and artists to both interpret and supplement collections. Meet with curators and hear about projects which have sought to use the visual arts in exhibition design, social inclusion work and interpretation.

Have these projects been successful? Might your museum benefit? Is there funding for you? On Friday we will concentrate on the use of diverse art forms in the interpretations of collections from visual artists to the potential of story telling. During Saturday the use of artists in social inclusion work will be discussed with an opportunity to visit Walsall's New Art Gallery and museums.

Speakers will provide case studies on the use of art and artists in the interpretative work carried out by social history curators. Speakers arranged as we went to press included **Jonathon Carter** from the Jersey Heritage Trust, **Susan Dalloe** Senior Keeper of Human History, Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, **Carolyn Murray** Recreating Cheshire project coordinator, **Amanda Ryan** Object Assemblage/Instillation Artist, **Martin Dowland** from Turton Tower, **Katrice Horsley** storyteller, **Steph Mastoris** keeper of Snibston Discovery park, **Peter Jenkinson** Director of Walsall Museum and Art Gallery Service, **Kim Streets** from Sheffield Museum and Galleries, **Graham Worton** from Dudley Museums and **Carl Franklin** from the West Midlands Regional Museum Council.

The conference and the accommodation will be based in Wolverhampton but we shall also be using venues in Walsall and Wednesbury and transport will be provided.

The ASW which promises to be a fascinating few days is an ideal opportunity to meet with other colleagues in the profession, catch up with old friends and make new ones! Also a great way to make up those much needed CPD hours!

## Two Free Places!

Two free places are available for the full weekend for SHCG members who have never attended an Annual Study Weekend. All travel costs are excluded. Please write justifying your reasons for a free place to Robert Rose (address below). Successful applicants will be asked to write a review of the ASW for the *SHCG News*.

If you would like further  
information and/or an application  
form please contact:

**Robert Rose,**  
SHCG Treasurer,  
Braintree District Museum,  
The Town Hall Centre,  
Market Square, Braintree,  
Essex, CM7 6YG  
Email address:  
robert.rose@brainmus.demon.co.uk  
Tel: (01376) 325266 /  
(01376) 551414 Ext. 6180

# The Society for Folk Life Studies and its Annual Conference 6th–9th September 2001

**The interdisciplinary study of regional cultures and traditions is the key aim of the Society for Folk Life Studies. It is the only organisation in Britain that brings together curators, historians, geographers, musicologists, linguists and many other people to explore the regional identity of the British Isles and beyond.**

**F**ounded in 1961, the Society currently boasts an international membership of around five hundred people and institutions. Its main activities are organising conferences and study days as well as publishing a refereed annual journal, *Folk Life*. Members maintain an important informal network of expertise and resources in areas such as traditional crafts, costume and material culture, vernacular architecture, landscape studies, custom and tradition.

Membership is open to anyone with an interest in regional culture and tradition and costs £17 per year. Members receive annually a free copy of *Folk Life*, a newsletter and invitations to conferences

and other meetings. They are also entitled to a 10% discount when purchasing backnumbers of *Folk Life*. Further details about membership can be obtained from the Membership Secretary: Mared Wyn Sutherland, the Museum of Welsh Life, St Fagans, Cardiff CF5 6XB, Wales, UK.

This year's annual conference will be held in the Clyde Valley, a fascinating area of southern Scotland where the interface between rural and urban, agriculture and industry has been a potent feature of local culture for centuries. With this social and economic interplay in mind the themes of the conference will be the industrialisation of agriculture and culture and industry.

Our hosts will be Gavin Sprott and Duncan Dornan of the National Museums of Scotland who are currently working flat out to open the new Museum of Scottish Country Life at Kitchside in East Kilbride by this Summer. Delegates will therefore be able to gain an early view of this exciting and very important new museum and historic farm site and an

opportunity to discuss its collections and their interpretation with the team who conceived Kitchside.

The conference will also visit New Lanark in the Clyde Valley, the location for one of the most famous and important early experiments in early factory-based industrialisation. Other subjects to be considered will include engineering and it is hoped to arrange appropriate excursions and visits.

As usual, the conference will also provide a wonderful opportunity for members to meet and exchange their knowledge and ideas in a relaxed atmosphere. Extremely comfortable accommodation has been booked at the Popinjay Hotel on the banks of the Upper Clyde at Rosebank.

**The estimated cost of the conference is in the region of £250 and further details can be obtained from:**

**Elaine Edwards,  
National Museums of Scotland,  
Chambers Street,  
Edinburgh EH1 1JF  
Email: eme@nms.ac.uk**



## SHCG MATTERS

### The Questionnaire: 'All you ever wanted to know about SHCG News but were afraid to ask!'

What would you like to see in the News or the Journal or on the Web Site? How would you like to contribute to these fine publications? This edition we're printing a questionnaire to discover what members feel and the direction they would like these

publications to go. One opinion expressed for example is that there is a lack of theoretical museum writing around these days and there's more interest in project write ups. Is this the way you feel we should go - here's your chance to let us know!

### SHCG Web Site:

The SHCG Web Site is a great way of accessing all the latest

news and information concerning the SHCG if you haven't already visited the site it can be found at [www.shcg.org.uk](http://www.shcg.org.uk).

We hope to develop the design and content of the web site in the coming years. If you have any comments please contact: **Eleanor Moore (Web Manager) at [webmanager@shcg.org.uk](mailto:webmanager@shcg.org.uk)**

## Bif! Zap! Pow! American Comics from the 1930s–1990s



**W**ith the success of films such as Superman, Batman, Blade and the X Men comic book characters are now big business, but these are just a few of the many characters that have appeared in American comics since their birth in the 1930s. Although superheroes have been the mainstay of the industry, horror, western and romance titles have also proved hugely popular and have influenced the work of now famous 'pop' artists on both sides of the Atlantic. Comics are no longer seen as being just for kids. Based around a previously unseen collection, this

exhibition tells the history of American comics and features some of the most important titles of the past 70 years including early editions of Spiderman and the X Men and includes original artwork from a number of top comic artists. The exhibition looks at the impact and influence of comics including the moral panic they caused in America during the 1950s.

**The exhibition runs from  
26th May–16th September**

**at the Museum of St Albans,  
and admission is free**

## Gadgets and Necessities an Encyclopedia of Household Innovations

**Want to know how Brillo Pads came about, or when coffee grinders first arrived in Europe? This new book by Pauline Webb (Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester) and Mark Suggitt (St Albans Museums) has all the answers.**

**G**adgets and Necessities is an A-Z encyclopedia examining domestic technology and innovations during the twentieth century, exploring the social and cultural conditions which produced such products as the electric iron and the vacuum cleaner. The encyclopedia covers innovations and objects. People and organisations. Institutions and manufacturers.

It examines those objects which have revolutionised domestic life in Europe and America during the twentieth century.

*A gadget is something that already exists; it is tangible. But what of a necessity? A need, the wanting of a thing. As humans we have basic natural needs that must be satisfied to keep us alive, but as the development of civilisation has illustrated what was a luxury to one generation becomes a necessity to the next...* (Webb and Suggitt: vii)

**'Gadgets and Necessities'**

**(ABC-Clio), Santa Barbara,  
Oxford 2000,  
ISBN: 1576070816**

## Oral History Society Annual Conference

**T**his years Oral History Society conference will take place on the 22nd–23rd June at the London Guildhall University and will focus on the theme of: 'Talking Community Histories'. The conference will bring together community oral history groups from all over the UK to discuss, reflect and celebrate their work. The conference will look at three themes: Whose history? What Principles? What Outcomes? Each theme will begin with a short, provocative and thoughtful keynote presentation, then the conference will split into discussion workshops where the main theme will be illustrated through short talks from community projects plus lots of discussion and debate.

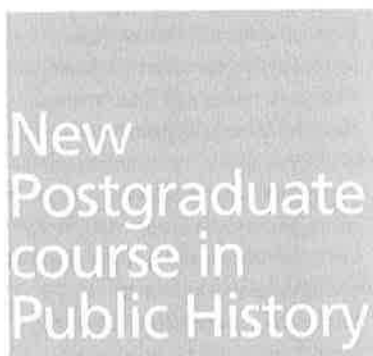
This conference will be an opportunity for an exchange between those new to oral history and more experienced oral historians and a chance to get a sense of the diversity of community work that makes British oral history among the most vibrant in the world.

For further details contact:  
**Belinda Waterman,  
Talking Community Histories  
Conference Administrator,  
Dept. of History,  
University of Essex,  
Colchester C04 3SQ  
Tel: 01206 872313 / 242061  
Email: belinda@essex.ac.uk**

## Victorian Cushion Stuffing Machine

A Mr Pickersgill from Derbyshire writes that he has a Victorian cushion-filling machine that he would like to give to a good home. Mr Pickersgill, a retiring upholsterer, describes the machine as approximately 4' x 3' x 4' it is apparently quite elaborate and in working order.

**Any interested museums should contact him on: 01773 822351**



**'Public history is the study of how we acquire our sense of the past - through memory and archives, images and landscape; and in the presentation of those pasts to a range of audiences - through museums, film, television and historical fiction'**

The School of Continuing Education at the University of Leeds is offering a course in public history for all those working in museums, libraries and archives. The course promises to be both theoretical and practical and a good means of acquiring new skills which might be added to any CPD portfolio.

**Anyone interested in finding out more should contact:**

**Jaswant Bhavra  
Tel: 0113 2333222**



## SHCG MATTERS

# SHCG Listings Project Update

**In the last issue we announced the beginnings of the 'SHCG Listings' Project, here Steph Mastoris ('SHCG Listings' Editor) brings us up to date with developments.**

**T**he SHCG Listings project aims to create an extensive database of references to publications, museum collections and archives relating to the whole range of subjects dealt with regularly by history curators.

The project began last autumn following a proposal at last year's AGM to compile this information over the next two years and publish it for SHCG members. The Listings Editorial team consists of Janet Dugdale, Catherine Nisbett, Robert Rose, Victoria Emmanuel, Eleanor Moore and Steph Mastoris.

The response from members to our initial appeal for contributions has been excellent and offers to compile listings of resources on such diverse subjects as food, death and burial, domestic artefacts, motoring, optometry have already been made. The Editorial Team's work has centred on two key priorities: establishing the format of Listings and creating a structure for arranging the information.

For the latter task many mind-boggling hours have been spent pairing down the full SHIC classification system into around a hundred major subject areas. Although not perfect and lacking the detail of the full SHIC classification system, we believe that, like the *News of the World's* old strapline, all human life is here.

The question of format for disseminating this information has opened up really

exciting possibilities. The development and ever-increasing use of the SHCG website has convinced us that Listings should be an on-line resource. In the longer-term there may be a demand for a hard-copy version in loose-leaf format (as originally envisaged), but for the next few years, while the core of the data is compiled, web-based access will provide the most cost-effective and flexible method of dissemination. This format will also assist in refining the information contained in Listings and allow the project to be truly a communal effort by history curators everywhere.

We have now engaged a firm of web designers to create the database to contain all the data for the listings and it is hoped that the first sample pages will be accessible on the SHCG site by September of this year. Then the really exciting work will begin to create not only an overview of reference literature but also the first attempt to map the significant collections of history museums in the British Isles.

I will be giving a short presentation on the project at this year's annual study weekend in Wolverhampton, and there will be a fuller account in the next News. In the interim if any member wishes to help with compiling listings or just want to get involved in this exciting project, please get in contact with me.

**Steph Mastoris can be contacted at:**

**Snibston Discovery Park,  
Ashby Road,  
Coalville,  
Leicestershire,  
LE67 3LN  
Email: smastoris@leics.gov.uk**



The docks on fire, 7th September 1940, Museum of London

## Remembering the Blitz

One sound that still sends shivers down my spine is the wail of a siren, the air-raid siren of Britain during the war. It is odd, this reaction, because I can't recall being really frightened at the time, though I'm sure that the fear of others, especially my parents, must have conveyed itself to me.

John Benning, born 1933, from his contribution to the Museum of London's online exhibition *Remembering the Blitz*.

**'Remembering the Blitz', the Museum of London's first solely online exhibition, was launched on 7th September 2000 and will be live on the Museum's web site until 11th May 2001.**

**Annette Day**

**Assistant Curator,  
Later London History and Collections,  
Museum of London**

Coinciding with the sixtieth anniversary, the exhibition explores personal and everyday experiences of the Blitz and looks at how we remember it today. Utilising collections not currently on display in the Museum's galleries, it combines text, objects, photographs, paintings, drawings and personal testimony. The resources and stories presented are intended not only to be informative but also to prompt users to remember or to imagine.

Any museum presenting a history of the twentieth century should recognise that users have relevant memories and viewpoints which impact upon their interpretation of that history. These memories and interpretations can also be both important resources and valid reasons for opening a dialogue with users. The concept of *Remembering the Blitz* was founded on the recognition

that many people can remember the Blitz, that many more have formed impressions or interpretations of it, and that these memories and interpretations are valuable. An online exhibition therefore seemed an ideal medium because of the potential of the internet to enable a participatory role for users. A key component of the exhibition is the capacity for users to contribute their own memories or interpretations both to the exhibition and to the Museum's archive. A facility within the exhibition, accessible from every page, enables contributions to be typed and emailed to the Museum and these are added to the exhibition at regular intervals. The exhibition is therefore less a finalised product and more an open and ongoing process.

*Remembering the Blitz* was specifically curated as an online exhibition, rather than as an exhibition that happens to be displayed online. The core museum activities of researching, selecting objects, images and oral histories, and writing text were fundamental to the project, as they are to any exhibition project. However within these activities, different decisions were made than might have been reached for a gallery based exhibition. For example, while in a gallery based exhibition it is important to include objects of a variety of scales, in an online

exhibition size does not matter. However, the online format does particularly lend itself to the display of two-dimensional objects and relatively small and detailed objects which might easily be overlooked or difficult to study in detail within a gallery based exhibition. It was therefore possible to draw extensively and effectively from the particular strengths of the Museum's Second World War collections - paintings, drawings and printed ephemera - while avoiding the use of the ubiquitous gas mask.

While the museum is a public and social space, the physical environment in which users access the web is frequently private and solitary.



Display screen from the Museum of London's online 'Remembering the Blitz' exhibition

A different way of writing therefore seemed appropriate and consequently the tone of the text is relatively conversational, and perhaps might even be described as intimate. It is hoped that this also helps users to feel comfortable about contributing their own memories or interpretations. This potential to contribute and the inclusion of oral history and users' contributions reflects the connectivity offered by the internet, the fact that the user sitting alone at his or her computer is nonetheless connected to the Museum and to other users.

The capabilities of the web were a driving force in the development of the exhibition's structure. In striving to take effective advantage of the capacity for non-linearity, it was essential to consider very carefully the relationships between different sections of the exhibition, levels of information and resources and how users might want to navigate between them. This thinking about the shape

of the exhibition was undertaken almost simultaneously with the preliminary research, the selection of objects and the establishment of the thematic structure. These two processes fed into the development of a map of the intended structure and navigational routes through the exhibition at a relatively early stage in the project. This map was then used as the basis for establishing a flexible framework within which the sub-themes and the text of the exhibition were developed.

After the content and layout of the exhibition had been established in-house, it was passed to the Museum's external web consultants, Adaptive Technologies Ltd., who developed it further in order to optimise its efficiency in accordance with the established standards of the Museum's web site as a whole. The Museum initially digitised the images and audio extracts to the highest standards for archival purposes. Adaptive Technologies then created compressed versions, for which the aim was to achieve an appropriate balance between the quality of the image or extract and the file size and consequent download time. The images were adjusted to a resolution of 72 dpi (dots per inch), while the audio files were converted to the Real Audio format and optimised for delivery via a 56k modem. Adaptive Technologies also created style sheets to control the appearance of the pages, which again decreases download times. The use of style sheets also means that users with certain browsers can select their own preferred settings, for example by changing aspects of the font, which is of assistance to users with visual impairments. The requirements of these users are also reflected in the inclusion of alt tags, textual alternative descriptions, for all of the images. Finally, Adaptive Technologies set up the facility by which users can enter their contributions into a form and press a 'submit' button in order to email them to the Museum.

While Adaptive Technologies undertook much of the 'behind the scenes' programming, the simultaneous development of the content, structure and appearance of the exhibition in-house was invaluable. Most notably, it made it possible to evaluate continually and

more holistically the development of the exhibition as a coherent whole. It also simplified the process of gaining approval of the project within the Museum, in that colleagues could 'try out' the exhibition rather than having to visualise the links and routes.

This approach was made possible because during the year preceding the start of the project, through a combination of self-tuition and a short course, I had developed a knowledge of HTML (HyperText Markup Language) which equipped me with the skills to create the structure and appearance of the exhibition. As museums embrace the web as a further medium by which to present collections and information and indeed to interact with their users, it is conceivable that the concept of curatorship will change accordingly and that curators will develop new skills which enable them to take a core role in the creation of web-based resources which extends beyond creating content alone.

Effective employment of the philosophy and capabilities of the internet is also likely to necessitate a shift in curatorial attitudes towards museum users. The opening page of *Remembering the Blitz* includes the statement: 'Most Londoners and many others 'remember' the Blitz - whether through experience or through family stories, school lessons, photographs, movies, TV, books, art, memorial and museums. If you lived through the Blitz, have been told about it or have impressions of what it was like, we would like to know about your memories'. The intention in including this request at the front of the exhibition was not only to encourage people to think about how their own memories relate to the themes explored in the exhibition, but also to demonstrate that their memories and interpretations are considered an integral part of the exhibition.

In some ways *Remembering the Blitz* is similar to a workshop or reminiscence session. The Museum included in its programme of workshops a session on the Blitz to coincide with the launch of the online exhibition and some interesting comparisons can be made. The contributions to *Remembering the Blitz* have overwhelmingly been made



by people who have direct memories of the war or who have been told about it by their parents. (This of course is not to say that these are the only people who are using the exhibition. Although unfortunately we do not have any data about user profiles, we have had some positive feedback from teachers who have used it in their classrooms.) Equally, the vast majority of the people who attended the workshop had lived through the Second World War. In reality, although it was part of our workshop programme, it was perhaps more akin to a reminiscence session. In order to prompt participation, we showed a variety of objects and played some film and oral history extracts. Once the first participant had related a personal memory triggered by one of the objects, many of the others joined in. To a large degree they continued to direct their comments to us, although clearly intending to share them with the other participants. However on occasions some participants turned around to talk directly to others in the group, particularly when they discovered common experiences. In a sense we, as facilitators, became less important as the session progressed. However we continued to provide the environment and a framework for the discussion, adding further prompts when they were needed as well as responding in order to show our own interest.

*Remembering the Blitz* provides much more information about the Blitz than was necessary in that workshop, since it is intended to be an information resource as well as a location for sharing memories. However it does encourage interaction in a similar way and the Museum equally takes a facilitatory role, again providing an environment, a framework and prompts for those people who want them.

There have been some very interesting, emotive and reflective contributions, although the numbers have not been as high as hoped. These include contributions both about the Blitz and the war more generally and about remembering. To take one particularly interesting example, one woman born in 1943 explains that while she doesn't have direct memories of the war she recalls childhood ideas that were obviously influenced by experiences from her very early years. For instance she remembers

news reports about an earthquake in the late 1940s and that her childhood understanding of an earthquake was a cylindrical metal object which was likely to explode and kill people unless it was defused. This understanding, she explains, was based on her early experiences of unexploded bombs. She goes on to suggest that the connection for her was the concept of evacuation, which took place from the vicinity of both unexploded bombs and the earthquake. She concludes her contribution by commenting that there must be many of her immediate generation who have been affected by experiences that they can not consciously recall. This contribution adds not just further information but also a new strand to the exhibition.

There is clearly value in enabling users to respond to and participate in a presentation and in encouraging them to recognise their memories and

interpretations as historically significant. Indeed one contributor thanked us for letting him record one of his memories. Ultimately, as is made clear in the exhibition, the contributions will be archived together at the Museum as a research resource. This could be of immediate use, with plans for the redevelopment of the Museum's twentieth century galleries currently being formulated. Certainly for my part I still get excited when I see that a contribution has arrived in the inbox of my email, and through reading them I have undoubtedly increased my knowledge and understanding of the Blitz and the impact that it had upon people. *Remembering the Blitz* has thus not created merely the impression of interaction but rather a genuine exchange.

**'Remembering the Blitz' is live on the Museum of London's web site at: [www.museumoflondon.org.uk](http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk)**

## The Pied Piper of Reading

**A musical cum historical trail has been wending its way through Reading town centre every Thursday during school holidays and half terms since last summer. It has proved very popular, even in the depths of winter the trail attracted about 50 parents and children.**

The free trail starts at the Jelly Leg'd Chicken Gallery located in the new Oracle shopping centre. The Jelly is an artist run gallery which runs excellent work shops for the under 5s. The trail finishes at Museum of Reading, about half a mile away. So far each trail has taken a historical theme and so it was my job to develop the content which the tour leaders, a mix of Jelly and Museum staff, deliver in their own inimitable ways. The trail follows a pedestrianised route taking in such historical spots as the Holy Brook (a water course created by medieval monks) and Queen Victoria's statue (which locals say turns its back

on Reading just like the Queen did in real life). There is a touch of the Grand Guignol at St Mary's churchyard where a gravedigger called George 'Wheelbarrow' Tappin was once spotted in the 1840s disinterring old corpses to make way for newcomers. We have a painting of George and a poem dedicated to his memory on show in the Museum.

Thanks to sponsorship by Hammersons, the developers of the Oracle, the trails have been enlivened by professional street performers. Working together, the Museum and Jelly staff together with Oracle's musicians and stilt walkers, (variously dressed up as police officers, chimney sweeps and space travellers) have made the Pied Piper trails a memorable and musical new happening on the streets Reading.

**Javier Pes**  
Development Manager,  
Reading Museum & Archive Service

# ASW 2000 Report: 'Working Lives'

**The SHCG Annual Study Weekend looms close. Every year it promises to be a highly enjoyable event giving all that attend the opportunity to meet with others in the profession, and to look in greater depth at the issues that concern museums today. By way of a sneak preview for those that have never attended and a refresher for those that have been before May Redfern from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge reflects on last years ASW which was held in London.**

## May Redfern

Documentation Co-ordinator,  
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge  
Email: mr295@cam.ac.uk

In July last year I was fortunate enough to have been given a free place to attend the SHCG annual Study weekend. The event gave delegates the chance to explore 'work' by looking at its history and by studying the interpretation of different aspects of work through several museum displays.

When one starts to think about the theme 'work', it immediately becomes apparent that there are so many aspects to it. Work is not a static thing, but reflects changes and shifts in society through the examination of workers' rights, holidays and pay, as well as the intangible such as relations with colleagues and social hierarchies within the workplace. We spend so much of our lives at work. Therefore, how might museums represent this multi-faceted concept? If we chose to represent our working lives through material culture, how are we then to interpret and make accessible the processes of work both of the recent and distant past? And how are we to chose the most appropriate objects to represent work that we in our museum

working lives may have little or no direct knowledge of, say, manual labour or manufacturing? Consequently, I quickly realised that the theme of the weekend was extensive and as such was potentially difficult to interpret within the confines of a museum.

Day one gave an overview of working practices within the UK in the 20th century. The Keynote address by Professor Eric Hopkins (Birmingham University and the University of Wolverhampton) provided a fascinating synopsis of the changes to work throughout the 20th century. Professor Hopkins explored the influence of the two world wars, the rise in the numbers of women joining the workforce, the steady reduction of working hours, improvement of working conditions and the growth and decline of industry throughout the 1900s. The topic of unpaid work was also raised, which covered not only voluntary work but also domestic labour. I was amazed to discover that women on average spend 260 minutes a day doing housework! The talk concluding by bringing us right up to date with the recent introduction of the minimum wage and the rise of sex discrimination and other tribunals.

Gaby Porter, in her paper *The Texture of Work*, brought into the debate the issues of the representation of work in existing museums and displays, where work is represented through industry and craft. Yet we rarely represent the experience of work. How might this be done?

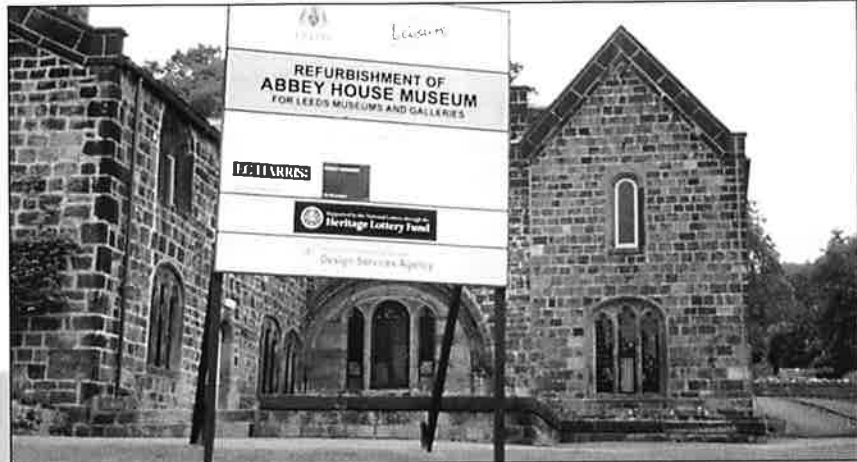
Anne Green (University of Warwick) went on to explore *Employment trends: recent changes and millennium prospects* and noted the shifts from the machine age to the information age, manufacturing to services, organisational hierarchies to networks and the shift from routine work to creative, information and people-

based work. Such transitions brought out several themes, which again led me to question how we might represent these shifts within museums. By examining the key drivers of change within work, we might also look at how external influences to workplace culture, such as the political, economic and technological changes might be represented: for example, ICT is constantly changing. How can we - or should we even try - to keep our museum representations of technology up to date?

Day two focused on the interpretation of various work themes within museums. Javier Pes of Reading Museum Service began by showing us his social history display of the biscuit makers Huntley and Palmers, whose factory was in Reading. Here the subject is explored using various techniques: one, whereby hundreds of biscuit tins were displayed as though on a production line seemed particularly effective. Working life at the factory has also been portrayed through oral history, photographs, music and film.

Martin Routledge of Tyne and Wear Museums illustrated the new Sunderland History Gallery, which intends to explore the city's history exclusively through the experiences of women. Specific characters are being used to explore particular themes within the lives of women, one of which is work.

Andrew Mackay (Curator of Norfolk Rural Life Museum, Gressenhall) illustrated their new exhibition *My Roots*, which sets out to contrast aspects of agriculture and farming of the past to that of today. As such, Mackay explained that the exhibition was theme- and not object-led. Interpretative ideas to bring the subject up to date included the introduction of a current issues board where newspaper clippings had been pasted to a wall and a comments board. My favourite bit



Abbey House Museum, Leeds

# Changing Rooms:

## SHCG seminar on museums and historic buildings

was the fridge, which opened out to show real pigs in their sty (and contrary to some other opinions, I probably particularly appreciated because I have been vegetarian all my life...)

Jurgen Ellermeyer, of the Museum der Arbeit, in Hamburg provided an international perspective. In his paper *Provocation by Everyday Life?* we explored the origins of this Museum, the purpose, themes and interpretation methods used.

On the final day of the ASW, the international theme was continued, as Julie Biddlecombe, of Erewash Museum Service, told us of her experiences of working at the National Museum of Namibia. This included an overview of Namibian Museum working practises compared with our own here in the UK. Other members' papers explored Millennium projects at various stages of completion.

Thus in just three days, I was given the opportunity to explore the many aspects that make up work. How are we to define shifting career patterns, and work which has no defined sense of identity, high turnovers and short contracts? How can we successfully represent the current trend of work, which is becoming increasingly both individual and flexible? Is work an activity, a location or a state of mind? Is the museum audience actually interested in seeing how they work, in their spare time?

With many points raised and with several interesting case studies presented to provide answers and to stimulate fresh ideas, the ASW was a great opportunity for me. It gave me a chance to share and explore ideas in a friendly environment and as such I would recommend the event to everyone.

**I was delighted to be asked to chair this seminar on a subject close to my heart. The museums in which I've worked have all been in historic buildings, whether purpose-built or originating as something completely different (1730s workhouse, converted stables, weatherboarded dispensary, tidal mill, 1840s station, librarian's residence) - and all demand a balancing act from those who run them.**

**Val Bott**

**Museum Consultant, London**  
**Valbott@museums.freeserve.co.uk**

**T**he seminar was appropriately set in Soho House, an 18th century mansion, where that balance is being maintained. It works as a museum because it offers both the House itself and an additional flexible space in a modern extension. Indeed, it provides 'the Birmingham model' which could be applied elsewhere.

The programme included presentations on Birmingham's community museums and two case studies on recent refurbishments of historic buildings. The Birmingham curators spoke enthusiastically about the effectiveness of combining a historic building with a means of providing real opportunities for community involvement. They are aiming to provide a similar mix to that

at Soho House at Aston and Blakesley Halls, and possibly at Sarehole Mill, by extending or converting existing outbuildings, while in the Jewellery Quarter it has already been possible to combine the small factory, with a museum and other facilities, by extending into adjoining buildings. In each case the new premises would provide an opportunity for putting on for events and activities which could not be housed so successfully in the historic building, while a lively approach to interpreting the latter could give it a distinctive and appropriate identity.

Many of those in the audience heard these contributions with envy - almost everyone present came from a museum which occupied a historic building, but few came from a museum service where the opportunity for buying the building next door or building an extension was a realistic proposition. Indeed, some were so modest a part of their local authority's operations that they were simply not seen as candidates for this kind of investment.

Having been briefed on Birmingham's approach to community museums, the participants spent some of the lunch hour exploring Soho House, looking for the strengths and weaknesses of the way it operated. Strengths identified included the care taken in presenting the house and the appropriateness of the furnishings,

the strong storyline about Matthew Boulton throughout the interpretation, using his world-wide trading connections to provide links with the local community of today, the simple interactives for children and the information panels on easels in each room. Everyone praised the welcoming and informative staff. The weaknesses provided a real contrast - there were no smells and none of the clutter of a lived-in house, some austerity about the décor, the storyline was very specific to Boulton and his time and did not reflect the area today despite the strength of its community work, and some of the language in the easel texts was a bit too technical for the general visitor.

The energetic afternoon speakers gave two case studies of recent museum developments. At Kirkstall in Leeds a rather idiosyncratic museum is being refurbished with Heritage Lottery Funding, and is due to open in 2001. The building has at its core a mediaeval abbey gatehouse and many subsequent additions, including 1950s 'street' displays. The refurbishment work will remedy leaking roofs and deal with a huge number of changes in floor levels in this complex building, giving better physical access than ever before. The streets are being upgraded with the help of scenic designers and the toy collection will become part of a highly-designed children's gallery, while the antiquarian links with the Abbey - now separated from the museum by a busy road - will be maintained in appropriate parts of the building, with the 'Norman Hall' providing an extremely dignified café. The building presents both a challenge and an opportunity, since its distinctiveness is worth exploiting, but its structure and dominant style could obstruct effective museum functions. We will have to wait till next year to see what the results will be.

At Seamington Spa, the situation was rather different. A £7.5 million refurbishment of the 1811 Pump Room, Victorian Turkish baths and swimming pool and 1920s tea-rooms, had created a new complex with Museum and Art Gallery, Library and Tourist Information Centre. The location of this group of buildings was significant for the regeneration of the Old Town and had

won the political and, more importantly, financial, backing of both the county and district councils. The scheme had been agreed in 1996 and the Head of the Museum Service was instructed to have it completed by the spring of 1999.

This had been a very ambitious project, with little chance of getting HSF funding in place in time. Even so, a bid was submitted, but rejected in part because of HSF's dissatisfaction with the use of the local authority's own architects for such a specialised job. The outcome, achieved without lottery funding, is interesting because of the way the different functions have been balanced within the mix of old and new buildings. Museum designers played a significant part in defining the use of the different elements and the visitor routes through them, as well as in designing the exhibitions. The most distinctive parts of the buildings, for example, part of the exotic Turkish bath, have been restored to make their rich design visible and enjoyable, while less significant parts of the old structure are hidden or disguised. Specially commissioned furniture and fittings give a distinctive feel to the place. The Museum and Art Gallery now has two and a half times as much space as before and visitor numbers have grown significantly.

So what lessons are to be learnt from all of this? Museums in historic buildings do have to perform a balancing act; a distinctive building can be an exhibit in its own right, while also housing other museum activities within its walls. Sometimes its identity is so strong that it competes with the need to tell a local story, but this can be managed effectively if you have a clear vision of what is to be achieved and for whom. It is clear that the Birmingham model is not the only one which can succeed, though having substantial political and financial support for your museum does matter!

The key to winning such support lies in good communication. Define and get support for a clear role for the museum, first with senior managers and then with the governing body. Recognise and celebrate the strengths of a distinctive building, even though it may need careful handling and could be expensive to maintain, so that it is not just seen as a difficult problem. Ensure that what you propose will fulfill community needs, attract tourists or provide a particular educational function that fits with local political priorities. In the end, some buildings won't work well as museums and it would be wise to accept this and consider a different approach!

# Abbey House Museum, Leeds

## A Case Study: The use of historic buildings for social history museums

**A**bbey House has been a museum since 1927 but the house predates this by nearly 800 years. The building has changed function many times, and each change has added to or altered the structure. Because of this complex history, it has never been an option just to interpret the house as a domestic space. At what point would you try to stop history? 1152? 1509? 1890? Would the 1950s extensions have to go?

In addition, Leeds Museums and Galleries already run two country houses (Temple

Newsam and Sotherton Hall), plus a 'manager's house' at Thwaite Mills and cottage room displays at the Armley Mills Industrial Museum.

Elements of the building's history are still evident within the museum. It began as the Inner Gateway for Kirkstall Abbey (founded in 1152). This mediaeval core is still visible in the 'Norman Hall' (now the café). With the dissolution of the monasteries the building was blocked at each end to form a house, allegedly inhabited by the last abbot, John Ripley.

For the following 300 years the house was home to farmers and later to the owners of Kirkstall Forge, who leased it from the Earls of Cardigan.

Colonel TW Harding, one of the last owners, has left his mark through his Victorian Gothic decoration of the De Lacy room and an oak staircase with medieval style stained glass windows.

Initially Abbey House displayed 'bygones' and folk collections that did not fit with the archaeology and natural history emphasis of the Leeds City Museum.

The museum expanded in the 1950s with the construction of the Victorian Streets under the direction of Mr C Mitchell (formerly at York Castle Museum).

In the 1970s grandiose schemes were dreamt up to create the 'largest street museum in Europe'. Many large objects were acquired, but the building extensions never materialised. These plans were thwarted by scheduled monument regulations as well as their enormous financial implications.

## The Lottery project

In 1995 (the centenary of the reopening of Kirkstall Abbey after being saved for the City) it was decided to raise the money needed to redisplay and improve facilities at Abbey House Museum. The bid was approved in autumn 1997 and work began in 1998.

Why Abbey House? It was seen as one of the most successful, locally loved and popular of Leeds' museums so why meddle with a successful site?

There were of course numerous long-standing issues to resolve. The roof leaked. There seemed to be insurmountable access problems in a building built at different times on many different levels. Under-investment meant that Abbey House lacked the facilities that are now routinely expected by visitors. The displays were tired and a little haphazard.

The process of emptying the museum revealed even more quirks and details that had been hidden by old displays or stores, such as a fireplaces and windows. It also

uncovered hidden dangers of which we had been unaware such as a main public staircase that turned out to have been a boxed-in hay ladder.

The largest task was to replace the 1950s flat roof with a pitched roof. The very complicated roofline has meant that the building is not yet completely watertight, but it is less of a colander than it was before! It also introduced potentially obtrusive supporting columns into the reconstructed streets, which the designers then had to disguise as lampposts.

The other main physical problem was that of level access. Because of the nature of the (listed) building, the architects had to be very ingenious in designing a level route, and unfortunately at a few points wheelchairs still have to take a slight detour. The upper floor is now accessible for the first time by lift.

Other new facilities include an education room, a café, accessible toilets and a new shop. The designers have strived to find common threads to present the museum as a coherent whole. In the streets, the solution has been to focus around a date of about 1889, rather than the vague 'old streets' which combined indentures and ephemera from the 1820s to packaging of the 1950s.

Elsewhere the concept of windows is used to link the experience of wandering through the streets with that of viewing the modern museum galleries.

The Victorian Leeds Gallery displays put the streets below into a broader social history context. An adjacent activity area known as 'Grandma's Attic' incorporates elements of the original house (a fireplace and bathroom wall tiles).

The childhood gallery is the most thoroughly designed of the new displays, based around familiar nursery rhymes. It aims to be fun, but also to have a darker, sinister edge, influenced by the woodcut illustrations found in early children's books.

Wherever building features intrude, the designers have attempted to incorporate them. This is most noticeable in the room dominated by a giant fibreglass boot



Work being carried out at Abbey House Museum, Leeds

('The Old Woman who lived in a shoe'), which utilises an existing fireplace.

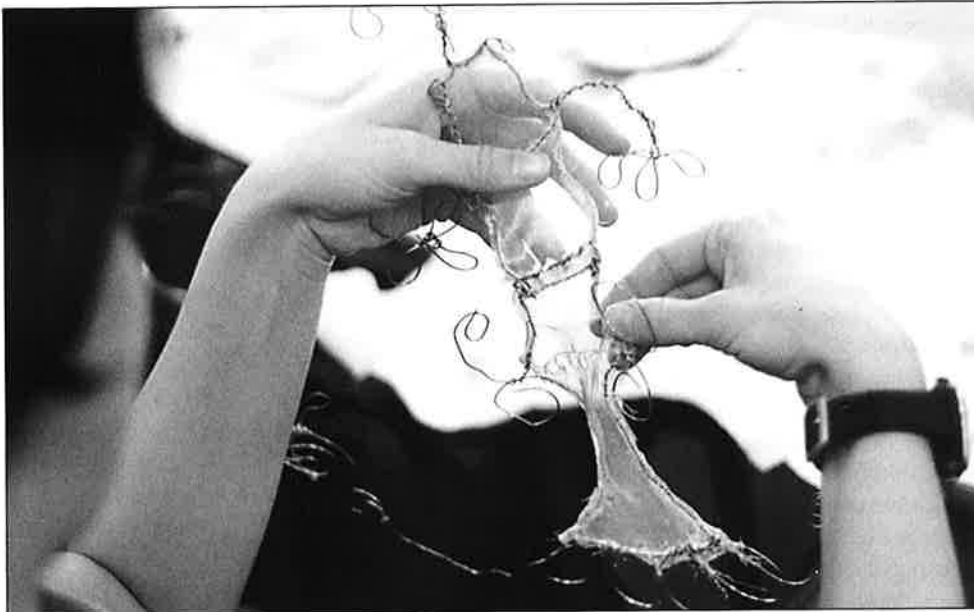
Finally, a third gallery interprets Kirkstall Abbey. Initially this proved to be the most difficult theme to slot into the designer's vision for Abbey House. However, the transition between the medieval archaeology and the Victorian social history of the rest of the museum is bridged by a section dealing with the Victorian antiquarian rediscovery of the Abbey, which led to it being rescued for the city of Leeds in 1889.

The design continues the theme of windows, now styled with Gothic arches. As well as medieval artefacts evoking monastic life, the displays look at the post-Reformation fate of the Abbey as a romantic ruin. The final room has echoes of an antiquarian gentleman's study and looks at the Abbey 'through Victorian eyes'.

When Abbey House Museum reopens to the public on 20th January 2001 we hope that our visitors will appreciate the blend of old and new, with refurbished displays that are sympathetic to the fascinating building in which they are housed. We look forward to welcoming you.

**Kitty Koss**

**Curator of social history  
and costume,  
Leeds Museums and Galleries**



Items of embroidery produced by groups have been exhibited in the Connecting Threads exhibition as part of the Museums and Galleries Month Textile Project - May 2000

## 'Changing Rooms'

**On 11th October 2000 members of the Social History Curators Group met at Soho House Museum in Handsworth, Birmingham for a seminar entitled 'Changing Rooms'.**

**This was a discussion of community museums: the conflicts surrounding them and the developments being made in their use. Among the speakers were Val Loggie, head curator/manager at Soho House Museum, Rita McLean, Head of community museums in Birmingham and Kristina Sayle, curator at Blakesley Hall in Yardley, Birmingham.**

**Esme Hewings**

**Volunteer at Soho House Museum**

The discussions were largely based on the effectiveness of placing community museums within historic houses and the benefits and conflicts that arise from this. Val Loggie drew attention to the basic role of the community museum to establish closer links with the local community and reflect the audience which it serves. Soho House Museum was taken as a case in point. The grade II listed building was opened in 1995 as a reconstruction of the eighteenth century home of the Birmingham manufacturer and entrepreneur, Matthew Boulton. To make the site relevant to

the surrounding Handsworth community where the population is of 20.6% black origin and 43.7% Indian origin, the visitor centre located next to the house has staged two exhibitions entitled *Looking Back at Vaisaiki* (February-March 2000) and *Handsworth Skyline* (November-February 2001) in the past year. A long running connection with the community is seen with the two Asian Women's Groups who for the last three years have met once a week at Soho House and Aston Hall. The groups have produced items of embroidery, some of which are on show at Soho House, and have taken part in the Museums and Galleries Month Textile Project in May 2000 (see picture) as part of the Connecting Threads exhibition on show between April and September 2000. There have also been talks and children's activities over the last month to celebrate black history month.

A common theme which emerged is the balance between interpreting historic buildings through their own history and also running them as community museums. The movements are being made to improve Birmingham's community museums within historic buildings were also discussed. The grade II listed timber framed building, Blakesley Hall in Yardley opened in 1935 as a museum of manorial history.

Kristina Sayle focussed on the importance of Blakesley Hall within the Yardley community due to the lack of any other cultural facilities in the area. Due to the building's age however the rooms are rather small, the staircases narrow and there are no doors in any of the rooms, which all pose problems for the curators. These elements of historic housing all make exhibition display and general visitor access difficult. In light of this, a new visitor centre next to Blakesley Hall is being planned to house exhibition and education space, offices and general facilities such as toilets. The finished visitor centre will be much like that already tried and tested at Soho House.

Similar problems with community museums within historic buildings were those discussed about Aston Hall. The grade I listed Aston Hall which was opened to the public by Queen Victoria in 1858 was the first historic house to pass into municipal hands. Similar moves were made by other local authorities and an example of this can be seen at Wollaton Hall in Nottingham. Aston Hall today is set within an inner city area with it's grounds part of a public park. Rita McLean discussed the negative aspects of the Aston Hall site which suffers repeatedly from acts of vandalism. It is hoped this vandalism will subside if sufficient links can be made with the surrounding community. As at Soho House and Blakesley Hall, it is hoped that with a lottery grant the old outhouses on the Aston Hall site can be converted into exhibition and education space for the local community. As at Soho and Blakesley, links are being forged through exhibitions, talks and temporary displays such as those for Black History Month on the life of Francis Barber (1750-1801) the friend of Dr. Johnson. Through the discussions of the seminar it was well recognised that the role of the community museum was to provide a link between education, culture and the community. With the developments being made at Soho House, Blakesley Hall and Aston Hall a link is being made between the past through the use of historic buildings and the future through the involvement and input of the local community.

# 'How to Identify Watchamacallits'

**When the flyer for a seminar called 'How to identify watchamacallits' arrived on my doormat, I was on the phone the same day to enquire about a place. I came into my first curatorial post with a good theoretical background after an MA at Leicester, but a confrontation with an obscure unidentified object could still make me wilt. Following this entertaining and informative seminar, while I may not quite have made it to Antiques Roadshow skill levels, I have acquired a toolkit that should allow me to make a qualified judgement.**

**Sarah Jillings**

Assistant Curator,  
Jewish Museum  
London

The seminar, held at the Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery, was led by Steph Mastoris (Snibston Discovery Park), John Rumsby (Kirklees Museum Service) and Mike Glasson (Walsall Leather Museum), who were able to offer a wealth of experience for attendees to draw on. An introductory talk from Steph reminded us of the centrality of material culture in museum practice - if we don't know what objects mean, how can we possibly 'repeople' them? He also introduced us to the Holy Trinity of identification: Function, Form and Material, which would underpin the practical sessions over the day.

Curator of the Wednesbury collections, Catherine Nisbet, had laid out a wide range of weird and wonderful objects for identification. We had three handling sessions with these objects: identification of materials and their properties; how objects have been made; and how objects have been used, giving them context and meaning. After group sessions discussing objects amongst ourselves, Steph would pull out a willing 'volunteer' to consider a particular object. It was amazing

to see how a considered analysis of the properties of an object could lead to accurate identifications of oddities including a sausage stuffer, a pork pie mould and an everlasting firelighter!

I picked up all sorts of useful tips and tricks over the day. A traditional wooden cartwheel can act as a wonderful object lesson for the properties of different woods: The hub keeps the wheel together and is constantly under pressure, so needs to be robust. It is usually made of elm, which is knotty and irregularly structured, which gives it strength and prevents splitting. It has a wavy patterned grain and is pale coloured. The spoke keeps the rim attached to the hub; requiring both linear and vertical strength it needs to be hard and hearty, so is usually made of oak (oak is also commonly used in institutional furniture such as school desks, as it takes a lot of knocks well). The rim sections need to be curved and take latitudinal stress. The ideal is ash - strength with length. Ash is commonly used in brooms, pitchfork handles and suchlike for the same reason.

Dairy and food associated objects are usually made of sycamore or beech, which don't hold smells and taint food. Metal for cutting will usually be iron or steel, while brass is never used for kitchen implements, as it corrodes. Plastic designed to imitate bone or ivory is harder than the real thing, with a more regular, even appearance. Object marks can help greatly in dating and identification. Official trademarks date only from 1876. Registered designs have diamond shaped marks from 1842-1884, but after that have a series of numbers.

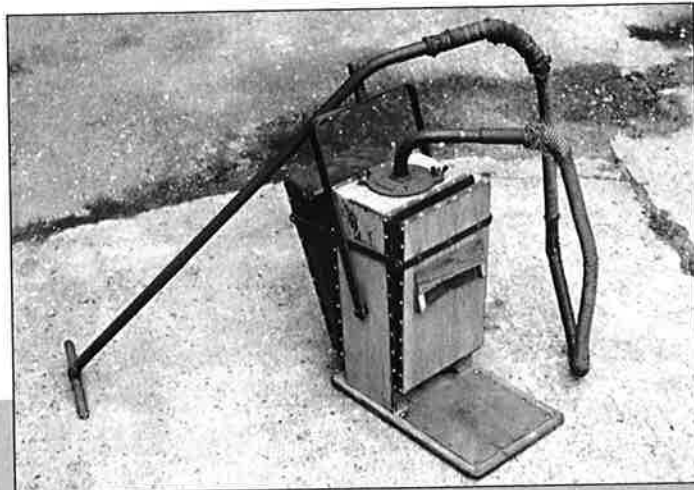
In this age of manufacture, there is a general lack of understanding of the properties of different materials, and basic craft and design processes. Social history curators need to have a

basic understanding of a whole range of issues to be able to identify objects with authority: from production methods to chronologies of style, design and technology. They must analyse objects by observation of material, production method and form, feel, even smell the object, test the moving parts, look at associated objects, tease out the object's history and provenance, examine its personal meanings, both real and symbolic. By the end of the day, it had become clear to me that I should have taken far more notice in design and technology and chemistry lessons in school!

Following the hands on sessions, we had a very useful summary from John about health and safety issues with reference to military collections. Weapons that are made to kill do not simply become safe with age, but may become more and more unstable. World War II gas masks should have their asbestos filter canisters removed. Bombs have two explosive devices, the main charge and a fuse to propel it: make sure both are removed if you want to avoid evacuating your museum. Always check with your local police force about the licensing of antique guns; you may well need to obtain a Museum Firearms Licence from the Home Office.

The day concluded with a review of the literature in the area, stressing that access to decent reference information is vital in aiding object identification. Standard works for our shelves might include Salaman's *Dictionary of Woodworking tools* and *Dictionary of Leather Working tools*, the annual publication *Coins of England*, *Traditional Country Craftsmen* by J. Geraint Jenkins, the National Trust's *Forgotten Household Crafts*, *Classic Plastics* by Sylvia Katz and *Tools: A Guide for Collectors* by Jane and Mark Rees.

Overall, this is one of the most useful training days I have been on in two years at work. It addressed an area of genuine need, particularly for new or young curators, and allowed skills sharing in a convivial atmosphere. Although this was my first SHCG event, I am sure it will not be my last.



1904 style vacuum cleaner after conservation

## Object Focus: The Vacuum Cleaner

Following on from Sarah's report on the popular 'How to Identify Whatamacallits' one day seminar. It seemed appropriate to introduce a new section to the News in which we consider a particular object in depth and from the perspective of a variety of disciplines. If you would be interested in contributing to this section in future editions please contact me.

**David Broom and Philip Carter**

Assistant Keeper and  
Conservation Officer,  
Museum of St Albans

**W**e shall begin with that familiar household object the vacuum cleaner: Hand operated, bellows, vacuum cleaners had been around since the 1860s. But in 1869 Ives M McGaffey of Chicago had developed the 'whirlwind' a more efficient machine which incorporated a hand cranked fan. Hand powered models however had the disadvantage that they could not produce a strong and sustained suction. The first electric vacuum cleaner was developed by Hubert Cecil Booth in 1901. He had seen a demonstration at St Pancras Station of an American cleaner which blew compressed air at carpets in order to drive dust out. Booth, watching this cleaning of a Midland

Railway Company carriage felt that a machine which could suck up dust would be far more efficient, and went on to develop the 'Puffing Billy' a horse drawn van with a petrol driven pump and hundreds of feet of flexible hose. These were operated by uniformed men of Booth's 'British Vacuum Cleaner Company' who went to the owners house to do their cleaning for them.

The first light manageable single operator vacuum cleaner with an electric motor was patented by James Murray Spangler in 1908, he sold the rights to a leather manufacturer by the name of William Hoover who began mass production in the same year. It was not therefore the 'Spangler' but the 'Hoover' which first came to Britain in 1912!

Vacuum cleaners really took off in the 1920s and their development went hand in hand with the greater desire for carpeting throughout the domestic sphere. Cleaners from the beginning were marketed with an emphasis on health and hygiene a theme that has remained and become re-emphasised with the micro filters of today.

In this edition we consider an early hand bellows operated model of vacuum cleaner. Though it is based on a similar

model from 1904 it has the date of 1922 stamped inside the body. A label attached to the front of the body declares that it is a 'British Vacuum Cleaner' manufactured 'By Royal Appointment'. It is similar in design to the popular 'Baby Daisy' Vacuum cleaner being a large square wooden box attached to a footplate with leather bellows on either side. A metal handle pumps the bellows to produce suction in the hose pipe. On the Baby Daisy the handle had a long pole attached which allowed one person to pump the bellows whilst the other cleaned. It seems on our cleaner that there may have been the possibility of attaching a handle but if so this no longer remains.

Here Philip Carter, Conservation Officer for St Albans Museums considers the conservation of this vacuum cleaner, which is held in the collection of the Museum of St Albans.

### Conservation

When the vacuum cleaner was brought into the laboratory it looked in a sorry state, but presented an interesting challenge. This object was interesting to conserve, not only because of its condition but because of the many differing materials used in its manufacture. All the constituent parts were dirty and needed cleaning, but they were also deteriorating in different ways, each requiring their own specific conservation treatment. The wood needed cleaning and treating for possible woodworm attack. The leather bellows were dry and cracked and needed a leather dressing. The 'Lino' material on the foot needed cleaning. The iron pieces were corroded, and the hose had broken in several places. These needed treatment and some repair work. The textile bag needed cleaning and repair. The copper alloy studs, coated with white metal needed cleaning and treatment. The material around the hose was cracked and needed treatment and repair. The metal alloy around the base of the hose was cleaned and conserved.

The wood and the Lino were cleaned first. These were dirty and had a discoloured varnish coating. Both were cleaned with IMS (Industrial Methalated Spirit) on a swab. This treatment worked well. The leather bellows were also cleaned



this way but were also quite badly deteriorated, due to atmospheric pollution attack, sulphur gasses in the air causing the 'red rot' deterioration. The bellows were accordingly treated with British museum leather dressing, which gave back some of the suppleness of the original leather.

The wood was treated with an insecticide against possible future insect attack. A wood polish, 'Calron' liquid, was finally applied to the wooden body of the vacuum cleaner. The material bag was mostly sound but dirty. This was cleaned with a modern vacuum cleaner and the few rips repaired. There were two iron sections on the body and in the hose. The body parts had surface rust but were otherwise sound. These were cleaned with an airbrasive unit, then coated with Waxoyl (a proprietary brand rust inhibitor).

The hose was in a worse condition. It was made of thin iron rod, twisted together to make the tube of the hose. This was then covered with some sort of textile tape. The hose had splits, and was in several pieces. The iron was treated as best it could be as most was under the tape. Loose rust was rubbed down, then treated with Waxoyl. The hose was then repaired with modern textile tape unfortunately it was not possible to completely restore the flexibility of the hose. The metal alloy part was cleaned up again using the airbrasive. The metal studs at first sight had seemed blackish, but it could be seen that they were originally a copper alloy. The studs were cleaned with a scalpel, and buffed up with Duraglit. This cleaning revealed a patchy 'white metal' layer on each of the studs. I tried cleaning the studs with the airbrasive but this damaged the 'white metal' coating. So, the more time consuming method of hand cleaning was used to fully clean the studs. More time consuming but a better result.

As can be seen from the above, composite objects, such as this vacuum cleaner means the use of several different conservation techniques on the one object but this makes the process more interesting. The end result was a vast improvement on the original state of the

vacuum cleaner. It can now be seen on display in the galleries of the museum of St Albans.

### 10 things you didn't know about vacuum cleaners...

The first carpet sweeper was developed 1876 by Mr Bissell a china shop owner in Michigan when he found he was allergic to the dust from the straw in which china was packed.

Booth managed to provide the services of his British Vacuum Cleaner company despite rivals for 5 years without selling a single vacuum cleaner. Though he was obliged to sell one to Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle!

Booth's Trolley Vac and the 'Griffith' foot operated cleaner had a section of glass in the hose to prove to sceptical owners it was doing its job!

It became fashionable in Edwardian London society to employ the uniformed services of the British Vacuum Cleaner Company to clean the room in which you were holding afternoon tea!

An early American model of vacuum cleaner had the bellows built into a rocking chair which allowed one person to comfortably rock whilst the other cleaned!

Spangler's prototype was made out of a tin can, a broomstick, an old flour sack and an electric motor.

The American 'Air Way' model of 1930 could vacuum via the floor nozzle and also via the handle grip in order to clean down the sides of chairs. The air flow could also be reversed to work a hairdryer.

In the U.S. central vacuum systems were first patented by David T Kenney in 1903 and 1905 using a system of ducting throughout a building and wall attachments for hoses. Central systems were expensive and only really practical for large buildings but a system was installed into the House of Commons.

In 1979 Britain's James Dyson produced a cyclone cleaner which used centrifugal suction to keep the air way clear, this was the biggest innovation since Spangler.

Also in 1979 Black and Decker launched cordless cleaner the 'Dustbuster' based on technology they had developed for the Apollo moon landing.

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# SHCG Members Questionnaire

Please take a few minutes to complete the following questionnaire, which will help us to have a clearer idea of what members would like to see in the SHCG News and the SHCG Journal. When you have completed the questionnaire please return ASAP (and by 1st August) to:

David Broom (SHCG News Editor)  
Museum of St Albans,  
Hatfield Road, St Albans, Herts, AL1 3RR

### PERSONAL DETAILS - OPTIONAL

Name:

Museum:

Email address:

### SECTION ONE - SHCG NEWS

How much of the SHCG News do you read when you receive it? Please circle one number

None of it	Some of it	All of it
5	4	3
		2
		1

How relevant do you feel that the articles in SHCG News are to museums today? Please circle one number

Not very	Fairly	Very
5	4	3
		2
		1

What sort of articles or features would you like to see in the SHCG News?

Have you ever wanted to have an article which you have written included but in the SHCG News but not known how to go about this?

What do you see as the primary purpose of the SHCG News?

Would you be interested in receiving the News in an Email format rather than as a printed publication?

**SECTION TWO - SHCG JOURNAL**

How much of the SHCG Journal do you read when you receive it? Please circle one number

None of it	Some of it	All of it		
5	4	3	2	1

How relevant do you feel that the articles in SHCG Journal are to museums today? Please circle one number

Not very	Fairly		Very	
5	4	3	2	1

What sort of articles or features would you like to see in the SHCG Journal?

[Empty box for response]

Have you ever wanted to have an article which you have written included in the SHCG Journal but not known how to go about this?

[Empty box for response]

What do you see as the primary purpose of the SHCG Journal?

[Empty box for response]

**SECTION THREE - SHCG WEB SITE**

How often do you visit shcg.org.uk? Please circle one number

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	
5	4	3	2	1

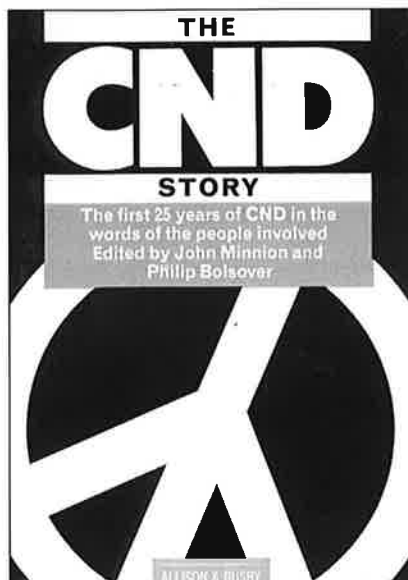
If we were to expand the web site what would you like to see included?

[Empty box for response]

Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the SHCG News, Journal or Web Site

[Empty box for response]

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.



While browsing through my Oxfam bookshop the other day I chanced upon this offering from 1983...

**David Broom**

Assistant Keeper, Museum of St Albans

Written at the height of the resurgence of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament it charts the development of the movement from the first march to Aldermaston in 1958, the direct action campaigns of the committee of 100 (which included philosopher Bertrand Russel) against the Thor missile sites, the arrival of Polaris in Scotland and the crisis over Cuba in 1962. It then goes on to look at the impact of the Vietnam War on the British Peace Movement and the dwindle in CND membership during the mid 60s and early 70s.

It was the American development of the Neutron bomb (a weapon designed to emit more radiation than previous missiles thus damaging more people than buildings) and new thinking concerning the use of 'tactical' nuclear weapons (as opposed to a 'deterrence' based policy (which included the siting of Cruise missiles in Europe)) which led to the massive growth in CND membership and activities in the late 70s and early 1980s. The movement at the time became bigger than it had ever been. In October 1981 around 250,000 people marched in London and in 1982 CND contained a national membership of 50,000. This was coupled with a great deal of direct action at the various peace camps set up where American missiles were to be based the most famous of course being Greenham Common.

It was the memories of those massive London demonstrations of the early 80s that drew me to this book. The CND story is a collection of short articles written by the people who were there and took part in this significant national movement at different times in its history, these include Edward Thompson the historian, Pat Arrowsmith political activist and one of the organisers of the first Aldermaston march, Adrian Henri one of the Liverpool poets and Bruce Kent former Catholic priest and General Secretary of CND.

Whilst reading these memories I was struck again by the impact that a movement like CND has had on British culture and society yet to what extent are these movements recorded or displayed in British Museums? Whilst researching for my MA thesis I found a surprising lack of information regarding conscientious objectors to the Second World War. Museums often contain objects and histories documenting war but how often do they record popular protests and peace movements? I am aware that the new permanent displays at the Imperial War Museum contain information on European anti-nuclear movements and there is even an opportunity to see part of the government's nuclear war civil defence film 'Protect and Survive'. Also The Royal Armouries at Leeds have banners from Greenham Common.

But as I looked at the photographs in the books I wondered how many of these banners had survived? How many local CND groups had given their archives to museums how often do museums record the memories of those who were there? How dilligent have we been in recording this aspect of the historical record? How much time do we spend recording the protests and 'peoples' movements of today (which of course still includes CND). Though it was a fascinating read it is difficult to say how available this book now is, but it could probably be ordered through a local library.

**'The CND Story'**  
 Edited by John Minnion and Philip Bolsover  
 Published in 1983 by Allison and Busby Ltd ISBN: 0850314879

CND can be contacted at  
 162 Holloway Rd, London N7 8DQ  
 Tel: 020 7700 2393  
 Website: www.cnduk.org

## Tea Break! SHCG News wordsearch - find the hidden words...

H E R I T A G E F H Y H P  
 Y F I T N E D I I R O S A  
 M R H N R U A S E U I C M  
 U P M O P R T L S D N U N  
 U H T I C O L E F U T R O  
 C S P H R A Z G G L E A I  
 A I I I G T R A S D R T H  
 V V C S I T G D Z A P O S  
 E E S L D I T G G D R R U  
 W A B C O N S E R V E K C  
 F R O B J E C T D S T O P  
 P T M G S E M I N A R T S  
 D O C U M E N T A T I O N

ARCHIVE  
 ART  
 BLITZ  
 CONSERVE  
 CURATOR  
 CUSHION  
 DOCUMENTATION  
 GADGET  
 GALLERY  
 HERITAGE

HISTORIC  
 HOUSE  
 IDENTIFY  
 INTERPRET  
 MAP  
 OBJECT  
 SEMINAR  
 STORE  
 VACUUM  
 ZAP

### Join SHCG?

If you're reading this and you're not a member of SHCG but would like to join Please contact:

Victoria Emmanuel  
 (Membership Secretary),  
 Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery,  
 Chamberlain Square,  
 Birmingham, B3 3DH.  
 Tel: 0121 3031672.  
 Victoria\_Emmanuel@Birmingham.gov.uk

### Write an article for SHCG News?

You can write an article for the News on any subject that you feel would be

interesting to the museum's community. Project write ups, book reviews, object studies, papers given and so on. The next News will be a Christmas issue so any articles with a social history and festive theme would be most welcome!

**Deadline for the next issue:  
Tuesday 10th October 2001**

**Please send any articles to:**  
 David Broom (SHCG News Editor),  
 Museum of St Albans,  
 Hatfield Road, St Albans,  
 Herts, AL1 3RR.  
 Tel: 01727 819340.  
 Email: d.broom@stalbands.gov.uk

## SHCG COMMITTEE 2001-2002

**CHAIR:** JANET DUGDALE  
 Museum of Liverpool Life,  
 Pier Street, Liverpool L3 1PZ  
 Tel: 0151 478 4060  
 Email: janet.dugdale@nmgm.org

**SECRETARY:** ZELDA BAVEYSTOCK  
 Discovery Museum,  
 Blandford Square, Newcastle upon Tyne,  
 Tyne and Wear NE1 4JA  
 Tel: 0191 232 6789  
 Email: zelda.baveystock@tyne-wear-museums.org.uk

**TREASURER:** ROBERT ROSE  
 Braintree District Museum,  
 The Town Hall Centre, Market Place,  
 Braintree, Essex CM7 6YG  
 Tel: 01376 325266  
 Email: robert.rose@brainmus.demon.co.uk

**MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:** VICTORIA EMMANUEL  
 Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery,  
 Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3 3DH  
 Tel: 0121 303 1672  
 Victoria\_Emmanuel@birmingham.gov.uk

**NEWS EDITOR:** DAVID BROOM  
 Museum of St Albans,  
 Hatfield Road, St Albans,  
 Herts AL1 3RR  
 Tel: 01727 819340  
 Email: d.broom@stalbands.gov.uk

**WEB MANAGER:** ELEANOR MOORE  
 Manchester Museum of Science & Industry,  
 Liverpool Road, Manchester M3 4FP  
 Tel: 0161 832 2244  
 Email: eleanor@efmoore.freereserve.co.uk  
 Or webadministrator@shcg.org.uk

**SEMINAR ORGANISER / CHAIR ELECT:**  
 CATHERINE NISBET  
 Museum and Art Gallery,  
 Nuneaton and Bedworth,  
 Riversley Park, Nuneaton CV11 5TU  
 Tel: 02476 350720

**SEMINAR ORGANISER:** STEPHEN LOWY  
 c/o Victoria Emmanuel,  
 Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery,  
 Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3 3DH  
 Tel: 0121 303 1672  
 Email: seminars@shcg.org.uk  
 Or stephenlowy@hotmail.com

**OTHER COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**  
**SUSAN DALLOE** TEL: 0122 853 4781  
 Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery,  
 Castle Street, Carlisle,  
 Cumbria CA3 8TP  
 Email: SusanDa@carlisle-city.gov.uk

**JAYNE OLPHERT** TEL: 0282 5653663  
 Ballymena Museum,  
 Wellington Court, Ballymena,  
 Co. Antrim, N. Ireland

**JAVIER PES** TEL: 0118 939 9800  
 Reading Museum,  
 The Town Hall, Blagrove Street,  
 Reading RG1 1QH  
 Email: javier.pes@reading.gov.uk

**NICOLA BLEASBY** TEL: 020 7201 5444  
 British Red Cross Museum & Archives,  
 9 Grosvenor Crescent, London SW1X 7EJ  
 Email: nbleasby@redcross.org.uk



enquiry@shcg.org.uk  
 www.shcg.org.uk