

DECEMBER 2001

ISSUE 49

**Bumper
Christmas Issue!**



**Museums
and Food**

**Live Interpretation
ASW 2001:
Reports & Papers**

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

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

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Cover photo:
Window display at the
Black Country Living Museum
comprising of dehydrated bread,
salted bacon and rabbits
prepared by taxidermy.
Contents photo:
Costumed demonstrators at Leeds
Royal Armouries Museum

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**DEADLINE FOR
NEXT ISSUE:
11TH MARCH 2002**

*Orwell, G (1942)
Looking Back on the Spanish War,
in Orwell, and Angus (1968)
'Collected Essays, Journalism and
Letters Vol II' (Secker & Wharburg)

George Orwell observed in 1942 that:
"The outcome of the Spanish war was
settled in London, Paris, Rome, Berlin
- at any rate not in Spain..." there was
no escape from the international
nature of this seemingly localised conflict*.

As we go to press it is unclear where the outcome
of current battles will be resolved. The clash
again is as much between ideologies both political
and religious as between armies and weapons of
mass destruction.

An interesting time therefore for the Imperial War
Museum's: 'Dreams and Nightmares - the Spanish
Civil War'. This major exhibition, the first of its
kind to be mounted in the UK, brings together a
wide collection of artefacts from both private and
public collections and looks at the War particularly
from the perspective of artists, writers and
intellectuals - further details on the Bulletin Board.

Exhibitions, means of interpretation, and intended
audiences seem to have formed a theme in this
issue. This year's highly successful Annual Study
Weekend held in Wolverhampton looked at art,
social history and issues of social inclusion.

The reports and papers reflect the wide-ranging
nature of the topics considered. We also ponder
here the benefits, or pitfalls, of live interpretation,
taking Leeds Royal Armouries as our case study.
And there is also a look at the joys or struggles of
working with partnership Museums, especially
when those Museums happen to be several
thousand miles apart!

I was very pleased that the introduction in the last
issue of our two new News sections - Object Focus
and Book Corner, was greeted with such
enthusiasm and several writers have stepped
forward this time to continue this tradition.

Tradition, of course, is central to Christmas - or is it?
Some of our traditions are put under the
microscope as we spend a little time in this issue
considering those seasonal subjects of food, cards
and presents (the latter in the form of fabulous
prizes for our Christmas quiz!)

Lastly if you're a previous editor of SHCG News
we'd like to hear from you - please take a look at
the Bulletin Board...

Happy Christmas to all our readers!

DAVID BROOM-EDITOR

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COMMITTEE
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SHCG MATTERS

Help us build
firstBASESteph Mastoris brings us up
to date with the now re-titled
SHCG 'Listings' project

In the last two issues of the News I have been reporting on the birth and development of the SHCG Listings project -an ambitious attempt to provide history curators with a database of essential bibliographic and collections information about most aspects of our discipline.

Steph Mastoris

By the time you read this, the skeleton of the database will be live on the SHCG website and a host of people will be busy adding information to it. But before I report on how this is being done, a word about a change of name for the project. Following the last issue of the News, a number of members contacted the Listings Editorial Team and said that the title suggested it dealt more with information about current events and exhibitions. Therefore, after much discussion, we decided to re-name the project firstBASE as we felt that this implied that the database would act as a first point of reference for the beleaguered curator seeking reference information about an unfamiliar subject.

As firstBASE is part of the SHCG website it can be accessed through either our URL (www.shcg.org.uk) or most of the popular internet search engines, using the keywords 'Social History Curators Group' (or even 'firstbase' if you use Google!). The database will provide lists of key references, arranged by the SHIC classification system, of the most significant publications, collections and archives over the whole spectrum of social history in museums. firstBASE will also provide a gateway to other relevant specialist groups and societies. We hope to have information on all the major subject areas available on the firstBASE website by July 2002.

If you have some expertise in a specialist area of social history, or have just completed an exhibition, catalogue or book on a relevant theme or type of artefact, then please share your knowledge with your fellow museum workers. Also, if you curate a collection of more than local significance this is a useful opportunity to make its existence and importance more widely known. The Editorial Team is particularly keen to include collections of film, photography and oral history in the firstBASE listings. The information within firstBASE aims to be selective, emphasising the most significant publications and collections within a subject area. Ideally, references on a single topic should be contained within no more than two sides of an A4 sheet of paper.

If you can help, please contact the relevant member of the Editorial Team listed below:

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Freemasonry gets computerised

The Library and Museum of Freemasonry have announced their intention to catalogue their collection of books, journals and objects in a new computerised system which they describe as using several 'international metadata formats in a single integrated system.'

The Library and Museum are open weekdays 10.00am-5.00pm, and more information can be gained by ringing 020 7395 9251 or the website at www.grandlodge-england.org

Making History

Tyne and Wear Museums have recently issued a book based on their successful 'Making History', millennium collecting project. The project featured more than 200 people of different ages, interests and backgrounds from all over the region. They are featured in this book with

photographs of themselves and the objects they have donated to the Museum. The collection now reflects some of the histories, lives and stories of local people at the turn of the century. The book itself is in colour,

beautifully presented and very inspiring, also very reasonably priced at £3.99 (+ £1.50 p&p) it is available from:

The Discovery Museum,
Blandford Square,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
Tyne and Wear, NE1 4JA

A Call for help and information

Rhiannon Williams from the University of Derby has written to the News to ask if any members could help with the research for her PhD: THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF KITCHEN CLEANING CLOTHS...

As a textile and design historian, I am undertaking PhD research concerning domestic cloths in everyday life. In particular, my work considers a group of textiles which most of us take for granted or simply overlook - kitchen cleaning cloths. I am in the course of exploring how these textiles do, in fact, have cultural and social meaning - how they have been made, kept and used; how their function is closely linked to changing ideas about hygiene (do you clean with old pants or an antibacterial wipe?); how they reflect deep seated habits and cause domestic tiffs ('the dishcloth lives on the sink not in it!') and how wipes have become commodities for modern housework ('Hyperwiper - lifts dirt like magic!').

Cleaning cloths have a very particular place in the economy of the household and very often they are torn from other redundant cloths or garments and make their way down a functional hierarchy ending up as the 'floorcloth' or 'the cat cloth'. Finally, they are ejected from the home altogether, perhaps only to be recycled and introduced back into the consumer chain in some other way. During my study I have come across numerous ways of making, storing, laundering and worrying about kitchen wipes. I now have my own study collection of about two hundred cloths including J-Cloths, knitted squares, sponge wipes, anti-bacterial wipes, scrubber cloths, rags, chamois leathers and one pair of underpants. Some cloths are clean, others are soiled. This collection has been treated as a serious archive and it is fully labelled and catalogued - many of the cloths have been used for object analysis as a way of exploring social meaning by starting with the material artefact. An anthropological approach can be taken here - what social meaning is given to a textile

that has become grubby and smelly but is kept carefully for specific tasks? How does a culture deal with dirty cloth, or cloth used to clean other objects or surfaces? Are there any 'rituals' surrounding these cloths and their cleansing activities?

One aspect of my research looks at museum collections and exhibitions relating to domestic textiles and themes surrounding the history of housework. Have cleaning cloths been collected? How have they been used in exhibitions? Are they given full status as artefacts or are they just 'props' purchased to flesh-out a kitchen or scullery scene? So far, most of my 'finds' come from social history collections incorporating domestic history. Unlike tea towels (which have an immediate visual attraction), cleaning cloths are often dull and anonymous, without provenance or value and few have made their way into museums. I would be interested to know of any museum that holds in their archives or exhibits dusters, wipes, scraps or rags. If catalogued under SHIC, these textiles are likely to be listed under the following references:

- 2.51 House Cleaning
- 2.52 Utensil Cleaning and Maintenance
- 2.537 Shoe Cleaning and Storage
- 2.831 Textile Crafts
- 4.5543 Household Textiles
- 4.9421 Window Cleaning

If you have any information which you think might help, please contact:

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Dreams and nightmares

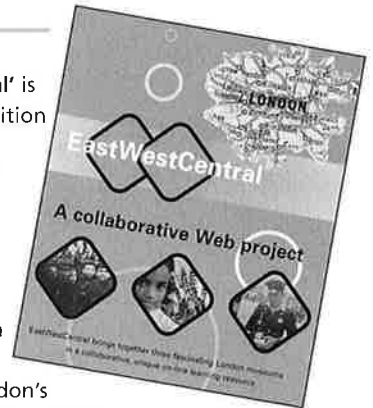
The Imperial War Museum's next special exhibition will consider a subject often untouched by Museums looking at the causes of the Second World War. *Dreams and Nightmares* is a major loan exhibition looking at the Spanish Civil War, concentrating on the personal experiences and the impact of the war on artists, writers and intellectuals. As a precursor to the Second World War, the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) drew up the lines of conflict, exposed the territorial and ideological desires of the European nations and demonstrated the horrors of modern weaponry including aerial bombardment on civilians. It was a war fought with the help of European volunteers, mainly from the left, by those who had eyes to see the future, horrified by the non-involvement



and acquiescence of the British establishment. As a republican poster read after the bombing of Madrid 'If you tolerate this - your children will be next'. The Imperial War Museum is open 10-6 daily. An adult ticket is £6.50, but the Museum is free after 4.30 and will be free from 1 December 2001. www.iwm.org.uk

Book Search?

The Clique, a book collecting service, have recently set up a website at www.ukbookworld.com. The site holds a collection of over half a million books published between 1600 and 1990 and covers a multitude of subject areas including those related to social history.



'EastWestCentral' is an on line exhibition and resource coming out of a collaboration between the Ragged School Museum, the Grange Museum of Community History and London's Transport Museum. Check www.eastwestcentral.co.uk for further information.



SHCG MATTERS

Are you a previous editor of the SHCG News?

The next edition of SHCG News will be our 50th! And in celebration of this fact it has been proposed that we run a feature looking

at previous editors and asking 'where are they now!?' As far as your current editor can ascertain, the earliest form of this publication was called GRSM News (from the Group for Regional Studies in Museums) it became the SHCG News for the winter 1982/83 edition when the group changed its name to the Social History Curators Group. If you're a previous editor reading this, please get in touch with me at the usual address...



Bungalow Blitz

The Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture are considering the way in which self build bungalows have altered the look and lifestyle of rural Ireland since the 1970s in their exhibition *Bungalow Blitz: Another History of Irish Architecture*. The Museum is at Middlesex University, Cat Hill, Barnet, EN4 8HT. Open Tue to Sat 10.00am-5.00pm, Sun 2.00am-5.00pm. Admission free. www.moda.mdx.ac.uk

Prison service

The HM Prison Service Museum is running an exhibition entitled - 'The Prison Officer' looking at the developing role of the Prison Officer from keeping prisoners secure to assisting with their rehabilitation back into the community. The exhibition will run until 20th December at the Museum, Newbold Revel, Rugby, Warwickshire, CV23 0TH. Admission free.

The British Library, London is holding a special exhibition entitled - 'Lie of the Land: The Secret Life of Maps' until 7 April 2002. The exhibition includes maps made for deception, escape, discovery and geographical recording. Admission free. Check: www.bl.uk for further details.

ASW 2001: Delegate's Report and Papers

On 12th July 2001 social history curators descended upon the West Midlands, keen to explore the local museums, hear lots of lectures and perhaps sample the local pubs. There was also the theme to explore, 'Social Inclusion: and the Art of Social History Curatorship'...

Clare Parsons

**Acting Keeper of Transport,
Hull City Museums**

The weekend began with an evening reception at Wednesbury Museum, including a welcome from Raj Pal, Principal Heritage Officer at Sandwell Museum Service. What was said will have to remain a mystery here as Jayne (my colleague) and I arrived late - the journey from Hull to practically anywhere takes ages. We had to spend the evening dining and shopping at the nearby 24-hour Asda and then heading for the pub where we met with other delegates for last orders. An interesting start to the weekend!

Throughout the weekend the aim was to hear about projects where the visual arts have been used in exhibition design, social inclusion work and interpretation. The West Midlands is an interesting location to explore such topics, especially with the well-documented projects at Walsall's and Wolverhampton's Art Galleries, for example.

It was down to business on the Friday, beginning bright and early (9am!). The focus for the day was on the use of visual artists and diverse art forms to interpret collections. The keynote address was Nick Dodd from Wolverhampton Art Gallery. The Gallery is currently closed, undergoing major redevelopment. To interpret a piece of art or an exhibition social history techniques are employed. Commissioned artists work within this framework and to avoid any complications, this approach to interpretation is explained at the start.

The second speaker, Jonathan Carter (Head of Curatorial Services, Jersey), questioned whether the use of artists in museums was interpretation or public art. In contrast to the approach at Wolverhampton, Jonathan was advocating taking risks with artists, allowing them to choose the method and style of interpretation, rather than channelling it to suit a standard approach.

Other speakers included Martin Downland, talking about an artist residency where a room setting will be created as an artistic expression at Turton Tower Museum. Susan Dalloe from Tullie House Museum explained about an exhibition there, exploring room settings and questioning, *Which is art and which is life?* A particular favourite of mine was the *Recreating Cheshire* project, a three-way partnership

between museums, artists and schools. The Museums involved were The Boat Museum (Ellesmere Port), The Salt Museum (Northwich) and Quarry Bank Mill (Styal). Visual artists were commissioned to work with schools to look at their collections.

Carolyn Murray (Project Co-ordinator) talked of how the artists brought a new way of looking at old machinery, tools, buildings etc to bring Cheshire's industrial history to life. The artists worked with the pupils to create artwork using a range of materials and techniques, including batik, collage, computer generated prints and sculpture.

The outcome was an exhibition, *Recreating Cheshire*, incorporating the work of the pupils in a gallery space. The success of the project is not only measured by the media coverage, attendance to the exhibition or catalogue sales; pupils saw the museums in a new light, they explored different art techniques, pieces were used for GCSE work. Amongst the artists there were some that were also enthused to want continued collaboration with museums, including residencies and exhibitions

After lunch on any course or conference it is always difficult to be energetic, so Katrice Horsley, an acclaimed storyteller bounced around the room in tight leather trousers, telling us stories and how to tell stories ourselves. As an activity, we even had to go off in groups and reveal

embarrassing tales from our past! I did originally begin to write this review as a story, in response to this session but it became clear that I'm no J. K. Rowling so I reverted to a simpler form. I also won't be repeating my embarrassing moment in print! Interestingly, Katrice prefers not to record the stories she has collected from various countries and communities in a written form. This raises the issue of ultimately losing fascinating tales, which are an important part of any culture. This can be preserved by recording voice, as Katrice has done but the question was raised as to whether this was enough.

The organised trips included Bantock House Museum in Wolverhampton, and The New Art Gallery, Walsall. For me it was my first visit to these sites. Bantock House has recently undergone major redevelopment. Once a family home to the Bantocks, a local wealthy family, this is represented in the beautifully restored rooms on the ground floor. The upper floor is in stark contrast, with bold colours and a more hands-on feel. I thought that this was a brave move in an historic house but one that worked well.

In their own words, Walsall's New Art Gallery is the 'best thing to happen since the illuminations!' Peter Jenkinson was the keynote speaker on Saturday, discussing the gallery as a tool to social inclusion. Developing the local audience during the construction stage and onwards was an important element of the project, creating a sense of ownership. The gallery has a prominent position in the town centre and was certainly thriving on the day of our visit. *Building The Audience*, a published report, details the various elements of the public consultation programme and builds on the points Peter Jenkinson raised in his talk.

Saturday's programme explored the use of artists in social inclusion work. In addition to Peter Jenkinson, speakers included Kim Streets, presenting a case study from Sheffield Museum and Galleries. Graham Worton discussed how geology collections (including the famous 'Dudley Bug' trilobite) are made more accessible in Dudley, giving examples of the work of Stephen D Field.

Further projects were explored on the last day, including *Planes Tools and Automobiles*, an outreach project run by Coventry Museums Service, resulting in a Virtual Gallery created by museum non-users. I particularly liked a project from Whitstable: *Grotta*. Using an early photograph of two young boys standing by a grotter (dome made from oyster shells), holding out upturned shells to collect



Above: The formal dinner held at Sir Jack's restaurant, Molineaux Stadium. The editor contemplates the muse!
Far left: The new Art Gallery at Walsall



money, an artist (Stephen Turner) created one, installed in the gallery, whilst also constructing ones on the beach and museum courtyard with the help of local schoolchildren. Not only are these structures beautiful, a tradition was revived during this project and the community was involved in the project, down to the restaurants saving the oyster shells for this mammoth task of building the grotters.

Lastly, what Steph Matoris (Curator, Leicestershire Museums) does not know about pigs probably isn't worth knowing! *Images of Luck and Slaughter* was the subject, looking at how the pig, bred for slaughter in urban backyards (particularly common in the West Midlands), has developed into a lucky symbol and a cute, cuddly image.

Whilst 'study' is an important element of the weekend, I'm keen to stress that the ASW is more than this. With this being my first time admittedly I didn't know quite what to expect, accommodation included. We stayed in the Halls of Residence at Wolverhampton University, with each room having en-suite facilities.

Ample breakfast provisions were left in the kitchens and the food provided at the various venues was fantastic. I particularly liked the café at Bantock House Museum.

Socially, it was great to meet new people and to make contacts with other SHCG members. It isn't just about hearing about other projects, although the weekend is an excellent opportunity to do this. I felt that the environment was friendly and relaxed, with new attendees made to feel welcome. The sun also shone!

Our 'local' became a pub favoured by Wolverhampton Wanderers fans, with the Stadium located just round the corner. This was the venue for the dinner in Sir Jack's restaurant. The Molineaux stadium has undergone a massive transformation, with millions of pounds spent on both it and the team. You don't have to be a die-hard Wolves fan to enjoy the view of the pitch and the gold and black stands from the restaurant window and the food was good too! It perhaps all proved too much for some, caught dozing on camera!

In search of Arcadia? Displaying furniture, period rooms and room settings as social history or art history?

One of the papers given at this years ASW was from Martin Dowland Manager/Curator of Turton Tower (near Bolton, Lancashire). In this paper he looked at the implications of social and art historical interpretation applied to this ancient property, the varying styles and tastes of its generations of inhabitants and the possibility of interpretation by fine artists.

**Martin Dowland - Manger/Curator
Turton Tower**

A major part of my job over the past ten years has been the interpretation, via display, of Turton Tower. I am an art historian by training but have concentrated on working mainly with 3D objects which may or may have a utility, as decorative arts are defined by the MDA. Thus, I consider objects for their use, but most especially their role in the history of domestic design.

The main building was built from late medieval times, when it was a rough defensive structure. Greater domestic

comfort was afforded by oak cruck frames in the early 16th century, then the Renaissance extensions of the 1590s. Re-enforcement's using stone were added in the early 17th century. Then the Tower was neglected for over 100 years until the restorations of the Victorian Era and a mid-Victorian extension.

The earliest period holds few opportunities for an art historian, because artistic expression in related domestic artefacts would have been minimal. There may have been some fine textiles, but unless we can demonstrate the era with genuinely old objects, we would merely be creating a Yorvik. The outside of the building shows some features from this time, but little of the medieval tower is expressed. Although I immediately might suggest that a medieval display could be the work of a social historian, I must honestly say that I would be attracted to the idea of this minimal-comfort environment at least to compare and contrast with later times.

The up-front comfort and ostentation of the Tudors is lavishly displayed with a quantity of original furniture including a major part of the large loan collection from the V&A. The carving in the wooden furniture is a fantastic source of interest, escape and emotion for visitors who give themselves the time to look. The overall impression is one of wealth in a time when attention was paid to detail and imagination was profound.

This art historian created environment provides the backdrop to living history activities, with role players re-living the lives of owners in the late 16th century, demonstrating their desire to impress. But this is also a social history exercise, because it does show them warts and all. A greater grim reality is possible and certainly planned.

The on-going demonstration of wealth, through the objects that were used, is displayed in the late 17th century rooms. These rooms also feature furniture that was not really for use but could sit with furniture that was, looking lavish, pretty and expensive, but also looking useful.

The presence of anything in the way of Georgian furniture is minimal because the owners were not here then, so there is little excuse to include this period. We do however have a gothic china cabinet and some other items which make up the collection of antique furniture as it would have appeared as furniture in the Antiquarian Victorian owners' inventory.

The 19th century owners were very keen

on impressing that they were dedicated followers of fashion, thus we have represented, in different rooms their attraction to the era of Pugin, re-inventing furniture from another era for modern times and a later generation being attracted to the Arts & Crafts movement. I have therefore had many excuses for cramming art history in to the house, to represent taste and aspiration to taste in many periods.

My approach to individual objects, has taken on the attitude of those in Search of Arcadia. Thus, whereas my colleague curators of social history might consider a pot or a chair for its role for being sat on in some daily duty, I will look at its form as an object of power, of sexuality, happiness, intelligence or simply a desire to impart a style (would any social historians like to reply? Ed!).

The need to impress, as the need of previous owners, has been an attitude I have learnt to mimic. I manage a large country house, occupied for many centuries by people with rather a lot of money who wished to impress. The house wasn't quite as fine as the owners wanted it to be so they extended it and filled it with great items of interior design and furniture; often the amendments and extensions were a bit too expensive or grand for the original style. In fact, the family, which relished on and flourished in the Renaissance in the 16th century, had to remortgage to pay for their lifestyle.

This has all left me with a great excuse to fill the house with the sort of furniture which makes art historians get excited in a day of name brands! Turton Tower can demonstrate the same by showing off its Pugin, Morris, Rossetti, Ashbee and attributed Chippendale.

Room settings are realistic: you may walk into a room and around it and get the atmosphere created of the time, gaining the aesthetic experience intended. What is missing is a downstairs; the service rooms are stores, offices, a tearoom and shop. So, the service wing is still the service wing. The impressive reception rooms are still there to impress. The reality of the house's intended function is partly at least, still there. The house is used as a back drop for outdoor theatre, music and other leisure events, attended en-mass by the public wishing to improve themselves in an 18th or 19th century tradition, but essentially they are there to escape.

Owners of country houses in the 19th and 20th century escaped from the grimness

of their sources of income to these palaces of leisure and Arcadian fantasy, in the same ultimate manner as do our visiting public today. There is also a return to childhood in the visit to a large country house. Going back to when the world was larger and all shapes and forms had a private meaning to you. Visitors to a house bigger than their own are doing the same. The displays are crammed full of images. The carved wood furniture from the 16th and 17th centuries is packed with images of sad and happy people, monsters and fabulous fruit. Remember looking at curtains and seeing fabulous images? A visit to Turton Tower is a return to this time.

Contemporary art is an important part of the programme of temporary exhibitions at Turton Tower.

'Please justify this', our more cynical visitors say. 'I want to see old art'. 'Only old art should be in an old house, this is foreign, not local history, it shouldn't be here!'

The rehearsed answer is this: A big house, set to impress will always bring in from outside. The new and unusual is the way to impress. The Tudor owners employed a Italian to sculpt an ornate ceiling in the great hall. The Edwardians commissioned some contemporary paintings of idyllic landscapes. Yet, the current exhibition, conservative by our standards, is Diane Hamnett's oil and mixed media, *Impressions of a Time Spent in South West France*. Her paintings date from 2000 and are quite impressionistic. If we said they were by Van Gough, the criticism would waver a bit, but the comments would become, 'not my sort of thing'. This is the usual response when something apparently modern, and therefore not authentic, turns out to be old. Christopher Dresser's teapot - old, therefore good. A rare exception was John Makepiece's chair, made in 1986, but assumed by some to be a very good condition 1698!

This year we are having a video installation. Artists were asked to compete, showing in their work their reaction to the house and its contents. This is continuing a long held tradition on site, the owners have been self-consciously re-inventing the building since the 1590's.

A visitor will now walk into the gallery and see video and T.V. monitors. Must be bad!! What will we see on them, we do not yet know, but it will be the artist's reaction to the house. The artist couple whom we have commissioned has hinted that they will be looking at the interiors from a child's

perspective.

This will take interpretation a stage further, beyond our often used in the past, practice of looking at the modern version of something older. We will continue however to look at the best of new design, new escapes, ways to impress and be comfortable in one's own environment. The analysis of the displays at Turton Tower by fine artists rather than applied art historians and designers will not however be a first.

I think that the video Installation will be another example of escapism, sitting back and looking at an environment with time to analyse in much needed leisure time.

One artist who was employed on the site before as a sculptor said nothing inspired him at all. Apart from a split chicken on a 17th century carving of the Last Supper. The chicken was split because of a split in the wood. This artist took a very large chunk of elm, left languishing in the grounds, then split it to look like a giant version of the split chicken. This was where I became cynical. I do not know what my Social history curator colleagues thought.

We are telling a story for those who want to read one. We are creating a giant doll's house, or a treasure trove of indulgence for others. A social historian could also see the different ideas of comfort from the 16th century to the 19th century bedroom. Others might just seriously get Inspired by a split carving of a chicken.

So are we all In search of Arcadia? Most of us, I think.

In this country we have, certainly since the 18th century, tried to make ourselves believe that we live somewhere else. We do this, in our visits to the seaside, pretending we are going to the beach. Creating picnics and forgetting that it may be raining, or cold. We forget that we will be bitten, stung or that some other wonderful reality of rural England will attack us. Something which does not appear in Poussin paintings! The gardens at Turton Tower are the same, designed for the few, rare fantastic days when they are not a no-go zone.

So, to keep the Arcadian myth going, we go inside. We decorate, paint, carve, we hide the Arcadian delusion behind glass. Decorating and furnishing is a way of creating a myth. We need this myth, it is part of our social history.

Planes, Tools and Automobiles

A museum website, designed by non-museum visitors

'Planes, Tools and Automobiles' is a joint project between three Coventry Museums, the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, the Museum of British Road Transport and the Midland Air Museum. The total budget was £74,403 with £43,545 of this being in grant aid from the DCMS/Re:source ICT Challenge Fund. The project is still in existence, but the main outreach work took place between May 2000 and March 2001.

Robin Johnson

**Lifelong Learning Officer
Coventry Museum**

The projects main aims were

- To create an exciting and innovative website
- To increase the access to our collections (machine tools, planes and cars)
- To attract museum non-visitors
- To create ICT training opportunities
- To link to our CALM 2000 cataloguing database
- To increase and build on links between the museums

A very strong element of this project was outreach and social inclusion. We didn't just want another museum web site. We wanted it to be irreverent and fun. We decided that the community elements of the web site were to be produced by non-museum visitors, in fact ideally we wanted people who had NEVER visited a museum before. We hoped to get a completely fresh perspective. In this we were only partly successful.

The project offered free training in web design. We purposefully didn't call it a museum project, in fact we deliberately hid this from most participants! We called it a web design project using museum collections as a stimulus. It was the ICT element that hooked people in.

Identifying groups

We used a 'text-book' approach, collecting and analysing visitor statistics of all the



museums. Two of the museums had done formal visitor studies over the past couple of years, which was also useful. Postcode analysis was also used, which led us to quite detailed results about areas that people were coming from to visit (or not). We were able to narrow it down to almost street level. These results were very unsurprising (you can guess that most of our visitors came from middle class, affluent areas).

Once we had identified areas of Coventry that we wanted to concentrate on, we used Coventry City Council's Area Co-ordination teams to identify groups for us to target. Area co-ordination works across departments to help establish local networks and projects. We also worked with Coventry City Council's marketing department and the City Library Service's 'Peoplelink' database.

We particularly wanted to work with ethnic minority groups in Coventry, as we knew they were under represented in our visitor profile. Also we wanted to target 'disaffected' youth groups such as young offenders and excluded school children. We also targeted FE colleges and members of 'New Deal' groups.

In the end we worked with a variety of groups: **Headway** (Self-help organisation for people with head injuries), **Focus Housing** (New Deal organisation), **The Indian Community Centre**, **Spongate School** (Wrap-around club), **The Venue** (Organisation for 'disaffected youths'), **Tile Hill College** (Summer School), **Warwickshire College** (Media course), **Henley College** (New Media course).

Basically, when the groups were established at various venues throughout the city we arranged trips to all three museums with a digital camera available and with curator-led access to the collections pre-arranged. Over a series of weeks and months, the web pages began to come together. Unfortunately, some members of the groups did what they 'thought' we wanted. Not what 'they wanted'. We suspected this was because although the participants were chosen for their lack of experience of museums they still had pre-conceptions about what museums (and therefore their web sites) look like, which is an interesting social phenomenon. Most project members though did take on board the fact that we wanted the site to look like it had not been designed by the museum.

A secondary part of the project that is still being developed now, is the ability for virtual visitors to create their own gallery by searching the database and submit to us for publishing on the website. This is the part of the project that gave us most technical headaches and has taken many months to resolve.

Lessons learned

- Corporate IT departments find it difficult to keep up with the speed with which you need IT skills and advice, even hardware. Local authority museums particularly, seem to have needs far in advance of anything the corporate, centrally contracted, IT Company can offer.
- Use local FE colleges (or other training organisations) as bases with a named contact. Be careful though that this doesn't dilute the relationship between the participants and the museum.
- Get a clear contract with any consultant you use so you know what should be there at the end.
- We hope the project has opened the eyes of some people who wouldn't have considered a museum visit.
- When undertaking any project with New Deal participants make it appear less of a leisure pursuit, more of a 'qualification'.
- Be clear in your message that the participants can design anything they like, but you have ultimate editorial control.

The web site can be viewed at:
www.virtualgallery.org.uk



Living Lessons Exploring collections via live interpretation

The Royal Armouries, as the National Museum of Arms and Armour, covers an enormous subject area, as reflected by the sheer size and diversity of the collection. The earliest items on display, date from around 2500 years ago and the most recent are modern day. With such a vast range of time and variety of artefacts to interpret, conveying their use and significance to the public in a meaningful way without boring them to death could be somewhat problematic.

Stuart Ivinson
Leeds Royal Armouries Museum

All of the traditional modes of interpretation are employed. Labels in cases detail specific items and historical backgrounds. Audio-visual displays examine historical contexts, battle tactics or specific subjects, whilst computer

interactives examine given themes and invite audience participation in them. Using the computers you can learn how heraldry worked, how to spot and track animals in the wild, or try your hand at generalship in the bloody grind of the First World War.

From the very beginning Live Interpretation at the Royal Armouries was intended to form the cornerstone of the interpretative process. Live Interpretation at the Armouries is based on the premise that a given artefact or subject can be made much more relevant and understandable to visitors if they see it in action, hear a person talking about it, and then get a chance to handle it (or more usually a replica) afterwards. In this way visitors learn about the collection and its history in a much more entertaining and interesting way than simply reading labels.

Five years ago Live Interpretation was a technique which was still somewhat in its

Left: Stewart Ivinson demonstrates live interpretation at Leeds Royal Armouries Museum

infancy in Britain, and therefore making it such a large part of what the Armouries was intended to be posed several problems. Most importantly of course, was just what form should it take at the museum? Battle re-enactment, illustrated lectures, costumed guides and acted pieces are all forms of Live Interpretation and all have their uses, but not all would be appropriate in our case. For example, some sites choose to use costumed actors who assume a given historical role and stay in it throughout the working day. This form of role-play is fine for a site or collection which covers a specific period or subject. It was rejected at the Armouries because the collection is so diverse.

Instead it was decided that the approach would be based on a programme of short pieces; illustrated lectures, story telling sessions and acted pieces, based upon given, clearly defined themes. The result is that a visitor can witness an account of the battle of Agincourt through the eyes of an English archer, watch a demonstration in the Tiltyard of Tudor riding skills and hear the story of a UN soldier in Bosnia, amongst several others, all on the same day. The pieces all follow the same general format. The interpreter greets the audience and introduces the piece he or she is about to perform. They then step into character, deliver the piece, and finally step back out of character to lead a handling session and answer any questions.

In this way Live Interpretation has been able to cover the whole range of the collection both in time and diversity. The scale of the Live Interpretation programme is continually changing, as new interpretations are added to discuss all topics of the use of arms and armour; war, self defence, hunting and sport. At this time there are over sixty different interpretations in the repertoire. It has been highly successful. In 1998 the museum was privileged to win the Themed Entertainment's Association of America Award for its Live Interpretation. More importantly, ask any visitor and they will tell you that the interpretations have been the best part of their visit, apart from the collection itself of course. The key is that they are not just fun, they educate you too. You learn far more about Elizabethan swordsmanship by watching people fight with Elizabethan swords than you ever will by looking at swords in cases.

Sometimes the interpreters have to work hard to dispel the visitors preconceptions. Take medieval plate armour, for example. Even after seeing one of the interpreters

perform a cartwheel in six stones of armour, I remember one visitor firmly stating, 'Ah, but you can only do that because yours is lighter than the real stuff!' He was most surprised when the answer came back, 'Actually, if anything, this is heavier than the real stuff.'

That example illustrates a critically important point, that in all interpretations authenticity is paramount. Had that armour fight been performed in lightweight aluminium harnesses, then what would have been the point of it? It would have taught us nothing about the way armour worked and how men fought in it. Getting the facts right is vital to maintain integrity. Therefore creating any interpretation follows the same rigorous process. The historical background is carefully researched, and all costume and equipment to be used are either original or highly accurate reproductions. Similarly if it is an acted piece then the script is based upon first hand accounts, wherever these exist, or modern scripts are carefully researched and crafted to capture the feel of the theme in question.

Naturally enough the most popular interpretations are the combat demonstrations. As with the other pieces, the research is extensive. The combats themselves are usually taken from contemporary manuals such as Hans Talhoffer and although they are staged for the safety of the audience, they are choreographed to make them as realistic as possible. As the interpreters perform more fights they learn more and more about what the weapons themselves can do, and this knowledge is then passed on to the audience through the demonstration and discussion afterwards. In this way the combats actually become a form of research in their own right, from which visitors, academics and our own curators can benefit. The process is furthered outside in the Tiltyard where demonstrations of horsemanship from many periods take place. Not for us the stunt jousting of the theme park, but genuine historical research which also happens to be exciting!

People are always inquisitive about what items actually feel like, and usually take every opportunity to handle replicas. It would be nice to expand these opportunities in the future. The education department has a large handling collection and providing access to it for all visitors is one possibility.

I myself am not an interpreter, but have worked with the department upon numerous occasions. As I tour the galleries in the costume of a Viking Hersir (or

whatever), I find that visitors are actually more likely to stop and talk to me than when I'm in my normal museum uniform. This is one phenomena that the museum is currently looking to exploit. Chatting about the clothes I'm wearing and the kit I'm carrying leads naturally into discussions about aspects of the collection. We are also playing host to several Living History groups this year on themed weekends covering various topics. To date these too have been very popular.

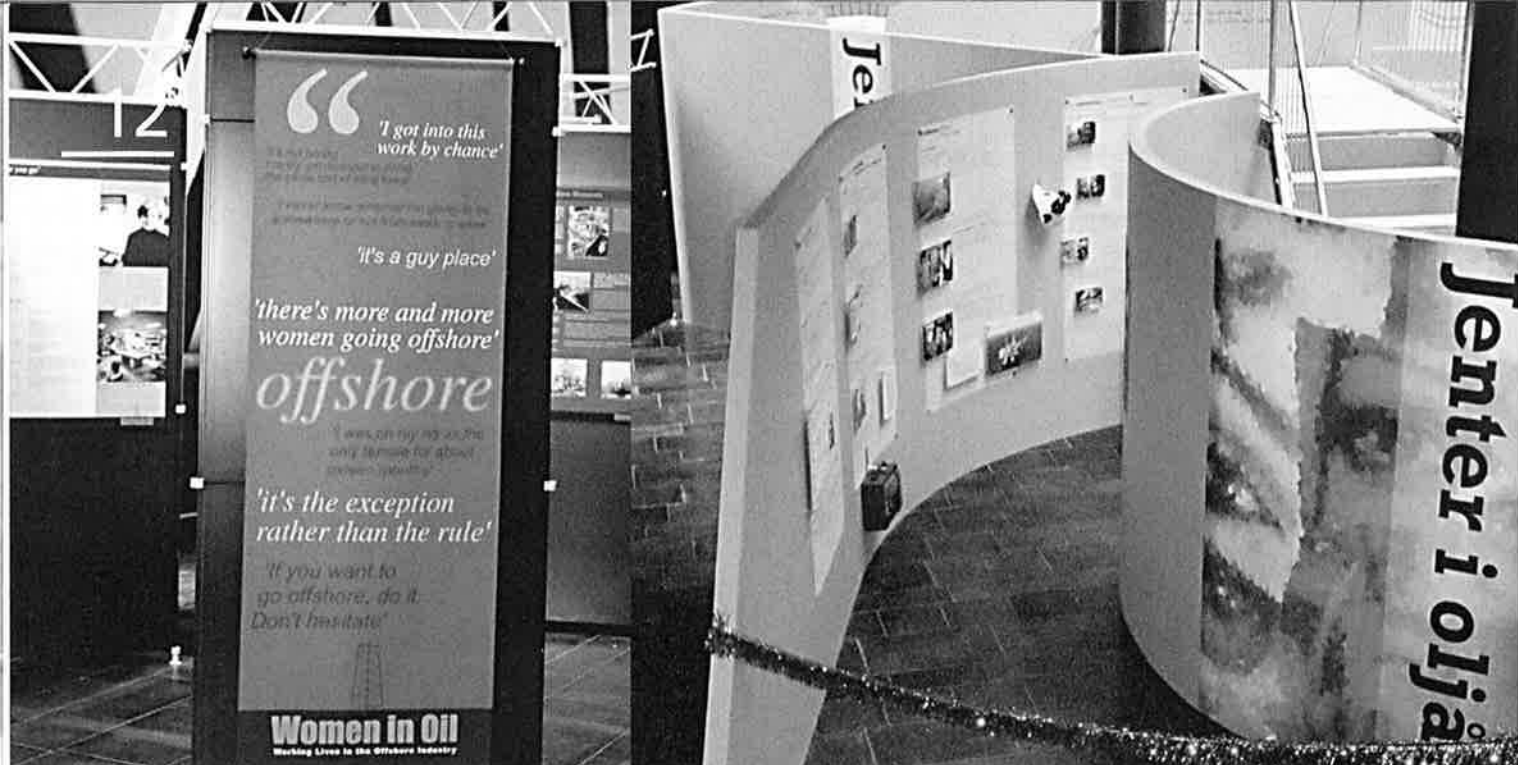
Live Interpretation then comes in many guises, all of which have proven their worth at the Royal Armouries. It is a blend of research, role play and demonstration intended to engage people further in their understanding of the collection and its history, in as interesting a way as possible. It works. The demonstration schedule thus far has proved highly successful in bringing home to the public the realities (often very grim ones) behind the artefacts they are looking at. It is my belief that Live Interpretation the Armouries way will become a major mode of collection interpretation in the future, and that it is most definitely here to stay. Finally, to sum everything up I think the best example of Live Interpretation's value is to quote a visitor I heard chatting to one of my colleagues recently:

'These interpretations are what makes this museum brilliant, instead of just good'. Thank you very much sir!

**The Royal Armouries are open daily from 10.00am–5.00pm.
Tel: 0113-2201999.
Website: www.armouries.org.uk**

Stuart Ivinson has recently published: 'Anglo-Welsh Wars 1050–1300' (Bridge Books, Wrexam 2001, ISBN 1872424864, £7.99)

The book considers the troubled early history of the relationship between Wales and England. The first chapter deals with Viking raids on Wales before moving on to look at the history of the various Norman attempts at conquest culminating in the final destruction of opposition under Edward I's brilliant generalship. There are useful sections looking in detail at the arms and armour of the period and the significance and operation of the Norman system of castles. This is an interesting and thorough account, which includes an extensive bibliography, good maps and photographs (see if you can spot the author!)



Women In Oil

A Scottish-Norwegian Collaborative Exhibition

On 14th June 2001 the exhibition 'Women in Oil / Jenter i Olja' opened at the Norwegian Petroleum Museum in Stavanger. This was a collaborative project between the Petroleum Museum and Aberdeen Maritime Museum. As with most exhibitions, it seemed a good idea at the outset and the final display was well received - but there was a lot of frantic stuff in the middle.

Catherine Walker, Assistant Keeper (Maritime History)

**Aberdeen Maritime Museum
Website: www.aagm.co.uk**

The idea for the exhibition came out of a workshop attended by a former colleague during the Aberdeen

Women's Festival. A representative from a Norwegian women's organisation, 'Kvinner Viser Veien' (Women Show the Way), made the initial contact with the Petroleum Museum and suggested a joint exhibition. The curators at Stavanger were enthusiastic and the opening was programmed to coincide with the KVV fair in Stavanger in June 2001.

Aberdeen Maritime Museum's permanent displays include a large section covering the history of the offshore oil and gas industry. The museum also collects contemporary material. However, given the

size and scale of many items related to the oil industry, much of this tends to be in documentary or photographic form. In September 1999, we began a programme of interviews with people involved in various aspects of the industry. These interviews, recorded on MiniDisc, asked people about their working experiences, what a typical day was like, and so on. The suggestion was that the 'Women In Oil' exhibition would be based on similar interviews.

I inherited this project in September 2000 and found it was still at an early stage. When I contacted Kari Meek, the exhibition officer at Stavanger, she had just secured sponsorship and was beginning to plan the display. Kari hoped to visit Aberdeen in a few months to discuss her ideas further.

The distance between the two museums was a problem throughout this collaboration. Without e-mail, it would have been impossible. At the outset, Kari and I had not met and neither of us had visited the other's museum. I had not seen the area where our exhibition would be on show and had no idea of the Petroleum Museum's display style.

Without a clear indication of what the Norwegians were planning, the obvious course was to continue the interview programme. My former colleague's file consisted of interviews with three women

who had responded to an advert in the museum leaflet some months earlier. The trail seemed to have gone cold.

The main reason for highlighting the role of women in oil is that the industry has a macho image and is regarded as male-dominated. It is male-dominated. Figures were difficult to source but it is estimated that around 1% of offshore employees are female, with a larger number onshore. Coupled with the fact that many people who work offshore are not resident in Aberdeen, only passing through the city's airport and railway station, women were difficult to find! In the end, the exhibition featured fifteen women. These were found by a variety of means: approaches to oil companies, a big mail-out by the offshore union OILC and, of course, word of mouth.

Kari Meek and a colleague visited Aberdeen in December. A face to face meeting was enormously useful - we discussed the project and compared approaches. The Norwegian exhibition plans were still quite vague: they had not selected the women who would be featured or carried out any interviews. At this point, neither of us was sure whether our respective exhibitions would include objects.

The meeting highlighted the need to see the display space in Stavanger before development of our exhibition went much

From far left: The exhibition at the Aberdeen Maritime Museum and at the Norwegian Petroleum Museum in Stavanger

further. Money was a problem - until I discovered that the trip would be eligible for 50% funding from the City Council because Aberdeen and Stavanger are twin towns. This is an avenue worth investigating if you are looking to work in partnership with a museum from another country. To obtain funding, I had to demonstrate that the visit would help establish long term links and lay the foundation for future joint working.

I was also fortunate in obtaining sponsorship from Scandinavian Airlines in the form of heavily discounted flights (covering both the 'reconnaissance mission' and another visit to attend the exhibition opening). This meant that the museum had to pay only a small proportion of the overall travel costs.

Scandinavian Airlines also agreed to transport the finished exhibition to and from Stavanger free of charge, on condition that it was 'not too heavy' (I'm not sure if that was in form or content).

The exhibition designer and I visited Norway in early March. With no opportunity to revisit the display space, all measurements had to be checked (twice) and we took a lot of photographs. We were also able to look around the permanent displays and get a feel for the 'house style'. At the outset, I thought we could produce an exhibition without visiting Stavanger, working solely from plans and photographs. Although these were useful, the site visit was essential to put it all in context - if you are planning this type of project, you should try to include a visit in your budget.

This visit, together with the weight restrictions from SAS, led to the conclusion that the exhibition should be two-dimensional. As the exhibition was based on interviews, it seemed important to focus on what the women had actually said. Also, there were no objects that were particularly relevant, and three-dimensional items would present additional difficulties for transport, insurance and display.

At this stage, I commissioned a photographer to take black/white portraits of the women interviewed. This, in itself, proved problematic. It was not possible to photograph those who worked offshore at their workplace. Two of the women were camera shy. One woman agreed to be photographed but was unavailable because she was then posted to Nigeria for several months. In the end, eight were captured on film.

I also asked the women involved for work-related snapshots. The idea was that these would contrast with the formality of the portraits. Unfortunately, only one

woman had any photos she was prepared to put on public display. However, these were very good - including views of the crew doing Step Aerobics and Christmas dinner offshore.

The emphasis on what the women had said meant that the exhibition relied heavily on text. As it was going on display in Norway, I felt it had to be translated into Norwegian. This was not a cost I had anticipated: my former colleague's notes suggested the Stavanger curators would be able to do the translation work. This was not the case.

Through the City Council's Twin Town Committee, we found a translator with reasonable rates. After this work had been done, one woman asked for a quote to be rephrased. All participants had been given the opportunity to check their quotes before they were included in the exhibition. This request came after the deadline for responses but I decided to make the effort and asked Kari Meek to take a look at the offending sentence.

I was alarmed to receive an e-mail in reply which said that the Norwegian was 'funny' and could she have a look at the rest of the translation? With our deadline for production rapidly approaching, there was a frantic exchange of e-mails with chunks of Norwegian flying back and forward. As I do not speak any Norwegian, there was a lot of margin for error.

The process was not helped by the fact that our exhibition designer works on a Mac computer which removed Norwegian accents at every opportunity. We did meet the deadline but, in retrospect, should have programmed in time for our Norwegian colleagues to read over the translated text. The problem seems to have arisen because the translator was used to working on technical publications whereas we were asking her to translate informal spoken sentences. Kari Meek had recommended a translator to us whose rates were higher. Next time, I'd go with the personal recommendation.

The finished exhibition consisted of fifteen laminated panels, with text in English and Norwegian. These featured photographs of the women, snapshots and general views of the oil industry. Quotes from different women were grouped into themes, such as 'how did you choose your career?' 'What is the worst thing about your job?' and so on.

The Norwegian exhibition used a panel per person and focused on life histories. They also included some objects e.g. a mop to represent a woman who worked as a

cleaner. The two approaches were complementary but helped differentiate the two exhibitions.

Now that it's over, was it worth it? The main obstacle was a familiar one: money. Due to the museum's location, it was only possible to have one visit to view the space and discuss the design of the exhibition. It also limited the size and format of the finished display. Our free transport from SAS was dependent on lack of weight and on the panels being small enough to fit through the aircraft's cargo door! The language difference was a problem in that translation work required additional time and money. The Mac computer's dislike of Norwegian accents also led to some complicated proof reading.

Despite the troubles along the way, the project had many positive outcomes for Aberdeen Maritime Museum. It was very helpful to visit another museum and see how the same subject is approached and displayed. This was particularly true when dealing with sensitive areas, such as disasters and environmental issues. The education officers from both museums were able to compare approaches and are now in regular contact. The exhibition also laid the foundation for future collaboration. We are already thinking tentatively about another project: focusing on an aspect of the oil industry and comparing the UK and Norwegian sectors seems to work well. Next time, we might do Men in Oil...

Another benefit was the exhibition deadline itself: It ensured I did some fairly concentrated work on women in oil. This was an aspect of the industry that the museum would probably not have focused on in any depth without such an incentive. The exhibition's departure for Norway generated a lot of press interest and publicity, and having a display in Stavanger for six months is also very good exposure for the museum.

In conclusion, the benefits made the collaboration well worthwhile. I would certainly work on such a project again - though I'd like to think this experience will help ensure things run more smoothly next time.

The 'Women In Oil' exhibition will go on display at Aberdeen Maritime Museum in summer 2002, together with sections of the Norwegian display.

The possibility of touring the display after that has also been raised - with interest so far from Denmark and Canada.



Museums & Food

Deterioration, conservation and display...

Christmas and its related mid winter festivals have always been a time associated with food. It would seem appropriate, therefore, in our Christmas edition to look at what food might mean to Museums. Mary Beckett graduated last summer with a degree in conservation and restoration and as part of the course wrote her dissertation on food products in museum collections, their deterioration, conservation and display. Here she summarises some of the findings from her research.

Mary Beckett

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Around Christmas time 1814, a family went skating on the River Thames. They bought a slice of gingerbread but they did not eat it. 187 years later that same piece of gingerbread can be found in the collections of the Museum of London. Food objects can be found in many social history collections, from tinned soup to dried milk, chocolate Easter eggs to rock salt. Extensive research has been undertaken on the history of food and technology, and food

science, yet despite the presence of food products in collections 'very little is known on caring for foodstuffs in the museum context' (COX, 1993, p.217). Research relating to the care and conservation of food products in museum collections appears sparse providing little information for curators and conservators. Therefore, I decided to investigate this almost unknown area of conservation for my undergraduate dissertation.

As a basis for my research, fifty-three questionnaires were circulated during January-March 2000. Initially these were sent to British social history, military and specific subject museums. As the research developed, links were established with food companies, historic houses and museums abroad. The main aims were to compile a list of the foods, which exist in collections, if, and how they are deteriorating, and any possible causes.

Thirty-seven questionnaires were returned and of these 5 were void, 22 ticked 'yes' for having food and 10 ticked 'no'. When asked to specify, the results indicated that although a variety of food products exist in collections they can be divided into five defined groups: confectionery, baked dough products, canned, bottled and dried foods. Military rations are fairly common and can comprise of all of the above. There are also

many examples of sugar, syrup, salt and tea. These are foodstuffs that have undergone some processing but are usually used as ingredients or additives. In the dissertation each food was discussed individually in terms of history, common composition and usual packaging.

Food in collections appear to have survived for one of two reasons. Either because they were processed to prolong the natural life expectancy of the food i.e. canning or dehydrating, or because they are inherently quite stable i.e. bread and chocolate. However, of the 22 museums with food in their collections, 9 said their food specimens were actively deteriorating. Food in museum collections deteriorates as a result of factors that affect all artefacts over a period of many years. The factors that cause deterioration very rarely work in isolation. They interact with one another to cause some form of change, making determination of the cause and sometimes the type of degradation very difficult.

The deterioration of food in museum collections can be divided into chemical and physical degradation. Chemical processes take place in some foodstuffs due to the presence of moulds, yeast and bacteria (microbial deterioration) or enzymes (biochemical deterioration). The action of micro-organisms may cause the object to

Left: Store Cupboard at Mr Straw's House (National Trust) containing empty packaging, some with contents

change in appearance and/or become poisonous. Oxygen, temperature, pH and humidity dramatically affect the growth rate of microbial organisms, whereas enzymatic activity is dependent on chemical activity, pH and heat.

Suitable environmental conditions can also lead to insect and rodent infestations, and will encourage the continued growth of pests. A pest attack can alter the physical appearance and weaken the structure of an object, leaving it more susceptible to handling damage.

Environmental factors can directly lead to the degradation of an object. Extremes in temperature, although only likely in a disaster, could cause chocolate to melt and liquids to freeze. Loss of moisture from some foodstuffs will lead to desiccation, causing embrittlement, loss and abrasion. A high moisture content will cause 'caking' in sugar and changes in the chemical state of salt, resulting in the formation of patches of opaque, white powder on the surface of the salt. Light will only cause negligible changes in colour in most foodstuffs but it is fundamental in some chemical reactions, such as the oxidative rancidity of fat. Light falling on an object can be converted into other forms of energy, which will cause degradation over time. Finally dirt, which as well as attracting pests, can alter the aesthetic quality of an object. Dirt can be hygroscopic and may hold moisture on the surface of an object. This has been found to be particularly problematic for uncovered sugar cones.

Unless the food packaging is deteriorating, it will fulfil its purpose to store and preserve its contents. However, many cases of corroding, leaking and sometimes exploding food cans were reported as well as perishing rubber seals. As salt is hygroscopic, it can cause damage to paper wrapping and particularly metal containers, for example the metal lids of Bovril jars. Also, paper packets are at risk from insect infestations, such as the silver fish and book lice, which were found in bags at the Tate and Lyle collection.

Above is an extremely brief overview of deterioration processes and factors. Case studies examining a variety of different food products are also included in the dissertation.

The questionnaire was also used to gather information on methods of disinfestation. Various techniques have been employed to eradicate insect infestations in food objects, both 'traditional' and more recently developed methods. These were insecticides (more specifically Constrain),

fumigation (methyl bromide) and atmospheric gases, also freezing and elevated temperatures. Each method of disinfestation was considered in the context of application to historic food objects, using published and primary sources.

Consideration was given to the effect on the object, human health and safety, the environment, ease, cost and duration of treatment. An experiment was also conducted to evaluate the effect of freezing on desiccated cake and bread, chocolate and dried peas. In conclusion, the most suitable methods of disinfestation are an anoxic environment using an oxygen scavenger such as **Ageless** for chocolate and the use of elevated temperature, as offered by **Thermo Lignum Ltd**, for dried foods. If freezing is the only viable option due to money, time or geographical restraints, then it appears to be a successful method in terms of eradicating insect pests, causing no damage to objects and posing no threat to the environment or human health.

As a result of insect infestation or other forms of deterioration, remedial conservation treatment may be required. Described below are examples of treatments undertaken on food objects in museums, historic houses or art collections. They are taken from private correspondence and published articles on chocolate conservation. Some are really conservation of the packaging, as treatment of the food is its disposal. However, these have been described as the current methods for dealing with actively deteriorating food.

Desiccated breads, buns etc. are extremely brittle and friable and at risk from physical damage. C. Waller from *Long Life for Art* treated decorated bread, broken into two parts, by soaking it in molten paraffin, under the recommendation of the German Bread Museum in Ulm. Although the two parts adhered well and the butter was prevented from further breakdown, the method is 'crude (and) changes the aspect of the surface' (WALLER, 2000). Also, paraffin wax when used as a consolidant 'can rarely be removed and prevents the application of other materials for conservation' (HORIE, 1987). An acrylic co-polymer (Paraloid B72 in an unknown solution) was successfully used at the Museum of London to re-adhere sections of broken gingerbread. Rancidity of fats can be prevented by storage in an environment low in oxygen and relative humidity, with little light and free from metals.

Treatment of corroding and leaking cans is commonly to remove carefully any labels and open the can, dispose of the contents

and then either leave the can open or solder the base back in place. Food must be disposed of in accordance with local authority regulations and out of the reach of children or animals because of possible toxic products and bacterial spores. Disposal of food whether to preserve the packaging, prevent damage to another object or for reasons of health and safety is an option most museums would chose. Twenty museums responded positively to the question: would you consider separating the food and packaging if damage was being caused by one component to the other?. 90% of museums asked would dispose of a food object if it posed a threat to the rest of the collection. However, comments were made regarding giving careful consideration to each individual case and that disposal was a last resort.

The article by Helen Cox (1993), *The Deterioration and Conservation of Chocolate from Museum Collections* provides the most detailed account on cleaning and adhering broken chocolate. Gap-filling and replication can be undertaken using molten chocolate or pigmented micro-crystalline wax as used in the conservation of Claes Oldenburg's chocolate and paint sculpture entitled 'Earthquake' (WHARTON, 1995).

The implementation of passive conservation techniques is imperative to ensure preservation of the object. If an Easter Egg has survived for 70 years the last thing you want is for it to start deteriorating when it enters your museum! Food is usually easier to preserve in storage as the ideal conditions are darkness, low temperature (above freezing and below about 21(C (72F) and low humidity (15% or less). Foods should be stored in airtight containers, impervious to moisture, light and preferably rodents. Boxes need to be kept off the floor and away from exterior walls to avoid condensation. However, food included in displays and exhibitions works well to re-create a particular image or atmosphere and original food products in good condition can be incorporated. A balance needs to be reached in display conditions between object and visitor comfort. This is generally easier with glass cases than open displays. Food on open display in collectable packaging is also at risk from pilfering. Objects should be handled with the same care afforded to any museum artefact. Extra consideration must be given to any food known or believed to be harbouring bacteria of possible danger to human health. As well as pathogens and exploding containers there is the hidden risk of food (mainly 18th and 19th but possibly

20th century) being adulterated with poisonous substances.

Frequently, new food, usually treated to prevent rapid deterioration especially from pest attack, is used in displays, as is 'replica' food. There are conservation and aesthetic considerations for any materials and techniques to be used in a museum environment.

The approach to the treatment of food is not really all that different from other museum artefacts. They require stable, controlled environments and remedial conservation specific to the needs of the object. The difference lies in the lack of knowledge surrounding food artefacts, both in terms of locally within a museum's collection and more broadly regarding their care. This can often lead to the rapid deterioration and subsequent disposal of objects. Through my research I hope to raise awareness and interest in this rather neglected area of conservation. Successful passive and remedial treatments can be formulated by collaboration between food scientists and conservators. Curators can also help by documenting food collections and raising its forgotten status, hopefully slowing down the disposal of an essential part of your collection. So, as you sit down to eat a slice of Christmas cake over the next few months spare a thought for my cause and e-mail me with any tales of food, whether old or new, in your heritage collection.

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Object Focus: The Christmas Card

Love it or loath it (and most people do both!) the Christmas card is an integral part of festive celebrations in Britain.

Steph Mastoris - Curator

Suibston Discovery Park, Leicestershire
Museums, Arts & Records Service

In many respects, the giving and receiving of a card is the most basic level of recognising an acquaintance (how often do we hear the phrase, 'We don't keep in touch much, just a card at Christmas?'). Indeed, the Christmas card list could be seen as the ultimate signifier of the extent of a person's network of friends. With around 2,000 million being exchanged in Britain each year the Christmas card is also very big business for publishers, shops, the Post Office and charities, and yet it is a very transient product, usually discarded by early January. In this, the card is the epitome of that great bete noir of the social commentators, the commercialised Christmas.

How did this type of greetings card become so universally recognised (and hence, vilified)? As with most examples of popular material culture, there is a fascinating story here of the interaction of invention, innovation, technology, artistic fashion, economic and social trends and the

evolution of custom and tradition.

The published Christmas card originates from a number of influences. Most fundamental is the custom of wishing friends, and relations the compliments of the Christmas season. This is as old as the festival itself, and it is no heresy to state that Christmas was first located within December of the ritual year by the fathers of the early church only in the mid fourth century. In this way it echoed similar pre-, and non-Christian religious customs celebrating the middle of winter prevalent throughout the Northern Hemisphere. In small, close-knit communities there was little need to record such intercourse on paper, but with increasing literacy in the eighteenth century and the greater dispersal of families through urbanisation and industrialisation, as well as the greater secularisation of the festival, the Christmas letter became a part of the social custom amongst many in England.

With the formalisation of codes of social relations, a scribbled greeting on the back of a calling card was often seen as a quick way of sending compliments of the season to all but immediate family. A final influence was the written valentine love token, which dates back to medieval times, but which by the early nineteenth century was becoming formalised into a type of printed greetings card.

It was therefore only a matter of time before someone saw the advantage of creating pre-printed greetings cards, and the honour is usually accorded to the busy public servant (and founder of the V&A Museum) Henry Cole. In 1843 Cole commissioned a design from the artist John Horsley and had a thousand images printed in monochrome lithography on a small-unfolded sheet of card. Each image was hand coloured and those not used by Cole for his personal use were sold through a stationer for a shilling (5p) each.

Thus was a fad born amongst the wealthy, literate professionals who quickly used the recently introduced penny post to send Christmas cards throughout the country. By the 1850s the market for mass-produced cards began, and the custom was soon being aped by the less well off. The two technical developments of chromolithography (to produce coloured images in large numbers) in the 1840s, and the bulk production from the 1860s of woodpulp paperboard through mechanised and chemical processes meant that the cost of such greetings cards fell and a mass-market could be created. The introduction of the halfpenny post for cards in 1870 and the growth of basic popular education (and hence literacy) by the 1890s boosted the demand for Christmas cards even more. By 1880, the Post Office was recording around 11.5 million cards being sent, which now came in all shapes, sizes, colours and prices. Throughout the twentieth century sales of cards rose almost exponentially (470 million in 1938, 1,000 million in 1977) and Britain's imperial interests ensured that the tradition was exported around the world.

Cole and Horsley designed their card with images of charity and family conviviality, rather than overtly religious symbols. In this they represented the social ideology of the nineteenth-century moral reformers, such as Charles Dickens. The new, Victorian Christmas was to shun ritualism, both religious and popular. Traditional Christmas customs were seen to be rowdy affairs of drunken adults following communal semi-pagan rituals out-of-doors and this was to be replaced by modest celebrations at home, focusing on children, family and friends. It is no coincidence that Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, was published the same year as



Object Focus: The tale of an Iron Bar

At first glance this is an unprepossessing object. A broken iron bar, tantalisingly marked "PATENT", but without that all-important registered number. Found unaccessioned in a museum store it would probably languish in a corner waiting to be reunited with its missing half. However, nothing is that simple. This bar has a tale to tell (even if at second hand).

Kitty Ross

**Curator, Social History and Costume
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The story begins in 1913 when a woman travelled down from Leeds to London where she tried to smash the display case containing the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London. Caught with an iron bar in her hand, the culprit, Leonora Cohen, was sentenced to imprisonment in Holloway. She was of course a Suffragette. Born in Leeds in 1873, she described her motivation:

"My mother was left a widow with me and my two brothers. Life was hard. My mother would say 'Leonora, if only we women had a say in things' but we hadn't. A drunken lout of a man opposite had a vote simply because he was a male. I vowed I'd try to change things".

The incident at the Tower was not Leonora's only act of protest. She spent time in Armley Gaol as well as Holloway and went

on hunger and thirst strike. The extension of the franchise in 1918 and 1928 vindicated her stance. In her subsequent career Leonora Cohen went on to be President of the Yorkshire Federation of Trades Council and a Justice of the Peace.

Throughout her life she gave lectures about her suffragette exploits and amassed an archive that is now housed at Abbey House Museum in Leeds. As well as pamphlets, correspondence and news-cuttings, the collection includes a dress designed by Mrs Cohen in Suffragette colours with a doll dressed as a prison warder, which she wore at an Arts Club Ball in 1922.

A key item in the collection is of course the iron bar. However, in a further twist, this bar is not the original exhibit A, which would have been confiscated by Scotland Yard. Leonora had to find a replacement prop for her lectures. So how genuine is the object? Does it matter?

Since entering the museum in 1990 the bar has largely been displayed in the context of the Suffragette movement. However, it is currently proudly on show at Armley Mills Industrial Museum, Leeds, between a toffee hammer and a mallet, in the exhibition 'Show of Force'.

Nearly 450 words about a broken iron bar... It just shows you that provenance and context are everything in a social history collection.

the Cole's card.

Such thinking resulted in the images of early Christmas cards rarely dealing with overt religious themes and this was seized upon by many commentators as an indicator of the spiritual decline of the festival (and, by implication, society at large). Flowers, snow-scenes and robins soon became the stock-in

trade images, along with some rather odd humorous illustrations criticising over-indulgence which were thought of 'dubious taste' even by contemporaries (see *Diary of a Nobody*). However the evolution of the Victorian Christmas soon created Santa Claus out of an amalgam of the English icon of Old Father Christmas and the North

American adulteration of St Nicholas. As a result a key image for the twentieth century Christmas card was born (and no, Santa's red clothes are not the result of Coca-Cola advertising!).

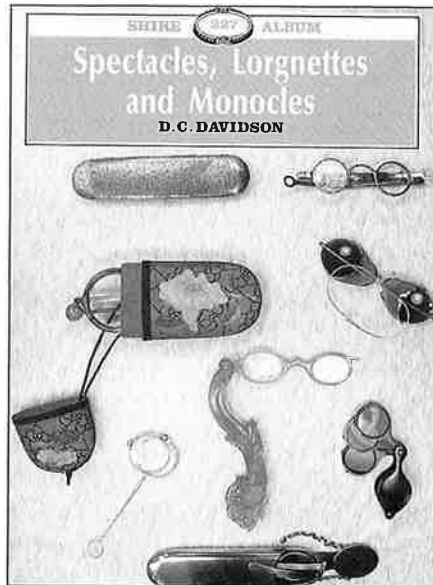
From the 1880s the standard folded or hinged format of the card became standard and a whole succession of fashions in decoration, shape as well as image followed. As cultural documents, Christmas cards are of limited use. On one hand there are a number of stock motifs that are now accepted as suitably festive images, but on the other hand designers of cards have frequently used contemporary politics, fads and fashions to dress up such iconography. Further, the physical nature of cards have reflected the development of new materials (such as cellulose and other plastics) and technologies (such as gramophone records, holograms, and microchip-driven sound and light). In this way the traditional Christmas card may now be reaching the beginning of its end. The proliferation of the Internet and the increasing use of e-greeting cards could represent the next quantum leap of communications and technology in a way similar to that realised by Henry Cole in 1843.

Further reading:

- BAKER, Margaret (1992)**
'Discovering Christmas Customs and Folklore' (Shire Publications)
- BLAIR, Arthur (1986)**
'Christmas Cards for the Collector' (Batsford)
- BUDAY, George (1964)**
'The History of the Christmas Card' (Spring Books)
- HUTTON, Ronald (1996)**
'The Stations of the Sun: a History of the Ritual Year in Britain' (OUP)
- MASTORIS Steph (1989/90)**
'Glad tidings... Collecting Contemporary Christmas cards',
SHCG Journal, 17, pp 18-21.
- MILLER Daniel (1993) (Ed)**
'Unwrapping Christmas' (Clarendon Press)
- PIMLOTT, J. A. R (1978)**
'The Englishman's Christmas' (Harvester)
- WEIGHTMAN Cavin & HUMPHRIES Steve (1987)**
'Christmas past' (Sidgwick & Jackson)

Major Collections:

- British Museum (Dept of Prints & Drawings) - Queen Mary collection
Victoria & Albert Museum
Hallmark Greeting Card Co., Kansas City, USA. Hallmark historical collection



If you have a set of Shire albums take a fresh look ('look' being the operative word) at this offering from 1989....

**'Spectacles, Lorgnettes and Monocles' (Shire Album 227) By D.C. Davidson
Published in 1989 by Shire Publications Ltd. ISBN 0 85263 975 9**

Think of a subject that straddles medical science and the fashion industry, a subject which the Science Museum classifies under 'Classical Physics' and the V&A under 'Costumes and Textiles', a subject that can involve both famous and ordinary people in all regions of the country at any stage of their lives. It has to be eyewear.

Thankfully there is a little introductory guide to assist Social History curators in sorting their pince-nez from their folding eyeglasses and their quizzers from their gallery-type monocles. It should be considered an essential inhabitant of the museum bookshelf and the good news is that a revised edition is in preparation for late for next year. Like the original edition the new book will be produced in association with the Ophthalmic Antiques International Collectors' Club and it will serve as a tribute to the author (and club founder in 1982), the late Derek Davidson.

In an unusual arrangement, highly beneficial to both parties, the OAICC has effectively adopted the BOA Museum housed at the College of Optometrists in London and is contributing the expert knowledge of its members to the major redevelopment project that should see a new public display open at the College in 2003. The Museum, which marked its centenary in 2001, should be your second port of call if this book fails to answer your question.

Spectacles were most probably invented

around 1270 in Northern Italy - a surprisingly late development considering that visual impairment has been known and written about since Ancient times. No examples have survived from earlier than the fifteenth century, though there is pictorial evidence for them. Still more amazingly the first effective method of holding spectacles in place (the use of sides or temple-pieces) cannot be dated much before 1727. It is examples from the eighteenth century onwards that most museums are likely to have in their collections and which form the bulk of the book's content.

Davidson gives a brief but thorough run through of the major changes from rivet spectacles, which were literally two magnifying glasses pinned at the ends of their handles, through nose spectacles, which had to be held in place with the hand, to wig spectacles for the dandy with more than just a pair of glasses adorning his head. Other sections cover the various organic, metal and 'plastic' materials used in the manufacture of visual aids and the cases in which they were carried whilst the book ends with a few paragraphs on oriental spectacles. The radically different design of these last objects is testament to physiognomic differences amongst eastern people, not just separate cultural trends or preferences.

The continuing research programmes of the BOA Museum have uncovered some errors in the original edition. Benjamin Martin's Essay on Visual Glasses was published in 1756 not 1760; we know because there is an early copy in the BOA Library. The 'Samuel Pepys' horn magnifier illustrated with great prominence on page 7 is, in fact, a simple microscope and irrelevant to the subject whilst monocles are now thought to be German, not English in origin. Since the date of publication, spectacles with spiral terminals (circa 1730) have been found in England: They are the only example in the world...and I have the pleasure of looking after them! In fact they had been in the collection for some time but never recognised for what they were - so maybe you should get yourself a copy of the book and start searching your stores!

Neil Handley - Curator

British Optical Association Museum
42 Craven Street, London, WC2N 5NG
Tel: 020 7839 6000
www.college-optometrists.org/college/museum

The Ophthalmic Antiques International Collectors' Club can be contacted at:
3 Moor Park Road, Northwood,
Middlesex HA6 2DL

In the last issue I wrote a short review of 'The CND Story' by Mynnion and Bolsover and readers may be interested to know that I had some correspondence regarding this with Margaret Brooks, Keeper of Sound Archives at the Imperial War Museum. She writes:

"I enjoyed reading your piece on the classic 'CND Story' in the recent issue of SHCG News. You may wish to know that the Imperial War Museum Sound Archive has about 450 recorded interviews relating to the anti-war/anti-nuclear movement. If anybody contacts you, as a result of your article, about existing anti-war recordings or about participants who ought to be recorded, we'd be very happy to follow up these leads. We also have a small 'online exhibition' about Greenham Common: www.iwm.org.uk/online/"

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Write an article for the 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.

We welcome a wide variety of articles relating to social history and Museums.

Deadline for the next issue:

Monday 11th March 2002

Please send any articles to:

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Tel: 01727 819340.

Email: d.broom@stalbans.gov.uk

With Christmas soon coming and in my case, the Soya bean and nut loaf, getting fat it seems appropriate to include a few festive conundrums into the proceedings! This time however as you forgo that opportunity to watch Sound of Music yet again and to settle down with this quiz in a post Christmas dinner haze bear in mind that there are fabulous (well fabulous-ish!) prizes to be won this time! Yes the first 3 correct sets of answers to be drawn out of the hat on January 20 2002 will receive Santa's Museum goodie bags! So pencils at the ready and eyes down for a full house...

- Which member of the Royal family is attributed with having introduced the Christmas tree to Britain?
- Which hairy fruit was given its name by a traditional Christmas dish?
- Of which 4th century Roman ruled city was St Nicholas the bishop?
- Who was Governor of Syria in the days when Caesar Augustus decreed that all the world should be taxed?
- What is the name of the Jewish mid winter feast that roughly coincides with Christmas?
- Where do the British Royal family spend Christmas?
- What was the name of Ebenezer Scrooge's long dead business partner in Charles Dickens 'A Christmas Carol'?
- And how dead was he?
- What is made on Blue Peter every year in the weeks before Christmas?
- What is it made from?
- Where in London in 1683 was a mid winter fair held - which included an ox roast - that couldn't have been included at any other time of the year?
- Why do Americans eat Turkey at Thanksgiving?
- How many mince pies must you eat, and when, in order to ensure good luck in the coming year?
- According to the carol what was the first tree in the green wood?
- What is the name of the Christmas cake eaten in Italy only at Christmas?
- And the name of a similarly festive cake from Germany?
- What did Oliver Cromwell do to Christmas in 1647 which Charles II undid in 1660?
- Which saint celebrates his feast day on Boxing Day?
- What pulse vegetable representing money must every Italian eat during the New Year celebrations?
- How many geese are laying in the twelve days of Christmas?
- Which film was the song White Christmas written for?
- With which first is John C. Horsley associated?
- What is the name of the winter festival of light celebrated in India in honour of the goddess Lakshmi?
- In which series of plays might you find the characters of a dragon, a Turkish Knight and Father Christmas?
- What strange event took place during Christmas 1914?
- What three things are carried by a 'First Footer'?
- Which Oxford College has a feast each year at Christmas time where the Boar's Head Carol is sung and a boar's head appears on the menu?
- According to the Boar's Head Carol if I was holding the Boar's Head in my hand what would it be bedecked with?
- What Christmas form of central heating is named after the Scandinavian winter festival honouring the gods Odin and Thor?
- Why did the King's speech sometimes cause Christmas dinners to go cold in Second World War time Britain?
- Which now vegetarian Christmas treat was originally made from meat?
- What takes place on the Sunday nearest to St Andrew's day (30th November) and is so named after the Prayer Book Collect for the day?
- What first happened in Trafalgar Square in 1947 that has happened every Christmas ever since?
- Which traditional Christmas flower was developed in the 19th century by Dr Joel R. Poinsette of South Carolina?
- What is believed to have been invented by Tom Smith in 1847 that makes Christmas go with a bang?
- Which essential to the English Christmas was first performed at the Duke of York Theatre, London in 1904 and has been performed every Christmas ever since?
- Who receives the royalties from number 36?
- Which event takes place on Boxing Day in Hyde Park in competition for a cup donated in 1903 by the writer of 36?
- The earliest collection of these was printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1521 what were they?
- According to the Gospel of St Matthew how many wise men were there?
- Mouse damage to an organ resulted in the composition of which Christmas carol?
- Which Christmas object from the Moravian Church consists of an orange, a candle, a red ribbon, fruits and originally goose quills?
- Which carol was written by American Bishop, Phillips Brooks, inspired by his ride, from Jerusalem to Bethlehem?
- In which year did Cliff Richard release his own version of number 43 in an attempt at the number 1 Christmas slot, eventually charting at number 11?
- Which Pre-Raphaelite and author of Goblin Market also composed the carol 'Love Came Down at Christmas'?
- Which two woods might a Wassail bowl be made from?
- Which plant from Somerset is cut annually in order to decorate the Queen's Christmas table?
- Which author wrote letters to his children, featuring a mischievous North Polar Bear, which were collected together in a volume known as the Father Christmas Letters?
- What took place on Christmas Island on the 1st November 1952?
- Which famous scientist was born on Christmas day 1642, later to acknowledge that everything he had ever discovered was thanks to painful fruit?

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