

Social History Curators Group

SHCG NEWS

5

SPRING 1984

edited by Crispin Paine c/o AMSSEE, 34 Burners Lane, Kiln Farm, Milton Keynes MK11 3HB (tel 0908 563997)

Acting Editor: David Fleming, Leeds City Museum,
Calverley St., Leeds LS1 3AA.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Crispin Paine still being in Cairo, and Gaby Porter wisely having done a runner, the drab and ragged mantle of News Editor has been draped around my stooped shoulders. "You work in Leeds - you do it!" - how could I resist this awesome display of logic by our smooth-talking Chairman?

SHCG MEMBERSHIP - SUBS DUE APRIL 1ST 1984

This is a plea for members to pay their subscriptions for 1984-5 NOW. The vitality of the Group and its programmes of publications and meetings can be maintained only if our finances are healthy - this means that subs must be paid regularly and promptly. We cannot continue to subsidise members who will not pay their subs on time. Currently, there are over 80 members on our books who have not paid last year's subscriptions (1983-4), yet who have received a full year's publications and discount rates for seminars. Committee would be guilty of negligence and mismanagement if it did not remedy this.

Please pay now - we do need the cash. Send money (£4, cheques payable to SHCG) to Helen Clark, Beamish North of England Open Air Museum, Stanley, Co. Durham, DH9 0RG. Go on make a friend.

COMING EVENTS

- May 11: Urban History in Museums - SHCG Training Seminar at Manchester Studies Unit (see enclosed Preview and booking form).
- May 12: Interpretation in Open Air Museums - Joint SIBH/SHCG Seminar at Black Country Museum.
- May 15: SHIC Users' Seminar - at Leeds City Art Gallery (contact David Fleming, Leeds City Museum, Calverley St., Leeds, 0532-462443).
- May 16: SHIC Users' Seminar - at National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh (contact John Shaw, NMAS, Queen St., Edinburgh, 031-5568921).
- May 22-4: History Museums and Research - at Dept. of Museum Studies, Leicester University.
- July 19-22: SHCG Annual Study Weekend (including AGM) at Southwell Lodge, Norfolk (see enclosed details and booking form).
- Aug 9: Documentation of Social History Collections - SHCG Training Seminar at Leicester Museum & Art Gallery (contact Sherri Brown, Newarke Houses Museum, The Newarke, Leicester, 0533-554100).
- Oct 11: 20th Century Collecting in Social History - SHCG Seminar at York Castle Museum (details to be announced).

COMMITTEE REPORT

It has been an active period for Committee, which met in Market Harborough in August, at Beamish in November and in York in February.

As reported in February's Museums Bulletin, and in the last edition of SHCG News the Training Working Party has been re-formed. A questionnaire to ascertain what Diploma students require and what is already being provided in the way of training has been sent out to students. A Seminar Programme has been drawn up on the Scottish model and two meetings have so far been planned - on Urban History at Manchester on 11th May and on Documentation at Leicester on 9th August. These are aimed at all social history curators, not just Diploma students. It is also felt that the Group should publish a Manual for Social History Curators.

It became apparent at the last AGM that the Constitution of the Group needed to be renewed. This edition of SHCG News carries the new Constitution as proposed by Committee. Suggestions from the membership are welcome. The new Constitution will be discussed at the AGM in Norwich in July, there to be rejected or adopted as the meeting sees fit.

Owing to the pressure of other work, there has not been a great deal of progress on the Survey of Social History Museums in major towns and cities of the U.K. A test case of Birmingham was made last March. Committee is always keen to hear about any threats of closure or reduction in museums services. When appropriate, a letter is sent to the body responsible. For example, the Chairman has recently corresponded with the Office of Arts and Libraries detailing the likely effects of abolition of the Metropolitan County Councils and the Greater London Council on local and social history museums.

Thanks to the efforts of the Membership Secretary there are now 242 members of the Group, an increase of 61 since last August. However, since a large number of members have not renewed their subscriptions the Group is finding it difficult to finance publication of the Journal.

Sue Kirby (Hon. Secretary, SHCG).

ANNUAL STUDY WEEKEND - SPONSORSHIP

At the committee meeting at Market Harborough on 3rd August 1983 it was decided that every year the Group should sponsor one member who had been unable previously to attend its annual study week-end. If you would like to come, have not been to one in previous years, and are non-waged or unable to secure sponsorship from your governing body, please apply to the Secretary, Sue Kirby, Carlisle Museum, Castle Street, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 8TP by 31st May.

REPORT ON THE MUSEUMS DIPLOMA 'A' COURSE
(FEBRUARY 1984) AT LEICESTER UNIVERSITY

At the outset, we hoped the 'A' Course would provide a general perspective of museum studies and that the specific learning goals would be developed.

Lectures by members of staff were supported by course notes and occasional discussion documents, while visiting lecturers provided a vital insight into aspects of collections management which are frequently unavailable in contemporary literature. Practical sessions enabled students to familiarise themselves with both photographic and environmental monitoring equipment. Visits were arranged to local museums, and it was possible to meet staff who dealt with individuals' specialisms.

It became obvious in discussion with other social history curators that the term "folk life" is inadequate when applied to our discipline. Indeed, this highlighted one of the most useful aspects of the course, that is the forum it offered for structured and informal discussion with colleagues. This provided useful sources of information and new approaches to curatorial problems in our own situations.

A meeting was held at the end of Course 'A', between staff and students, to discuss possible improvements to the course and a consensus appeared to be reached over the main issue. It was agreed that course notes of simple factual content would be sent out in advance of Course 'B' (November 19th - December 7th) to allow more time for structured discussion in seminars. Other points were raised and the department agreed to take these into consideration when planning future courses.

In conclusion we felt that not only were our expectations met, but they were in many respects exceeded.

Andrew Hill, Scottish Country Life Museums Trust
Siobhan Ratchford, Dumfries Museum

EDITORIAL COMMENT

This carefully worded Report from two of our Group's student members is, I feel, a very fair reflection of the views of the whole body of students, including myself, who attended the Diploma 'A' Course during February. We were a large group of twenty seven, representing twenty four local government, independent and national museums in the U.K., and encompassing seven specialist disciplines (ten of us being registered in 'folk life'). Our individual lengths of service in museums ranged from one year to ten and more. I believe I speak on behalf of my fellow students in stating that I found the Course immensely enjoyable, highly stimulating and thoroughly worthwhile. Yes, there was scope for "improvements", but the staff of the Department were responsive to useful suggestions, some of which were actually implemented before the end of the three-week course.

Before I attended this course I had a strong instinct that it was in the best interests of the profession to maintain direct links between itself and a university department. I am now convinced that these links form an integral and crucial part of the creaking edifice of museum training, and that only good can come from their strengthening. This view seems to be shared by the rest of the 'A' Course students, twenty six of whom agreed in a statement made towards the end of the course to the Director of the Department of Museum Studies, that "The students are committed fully to the role of the Department in museum training". I hope that the Department is encouraged by the opinions of the 'A' Course students, and that it continues to develop in its role at the heart of museum training.

Footnote: The comment made by Andrew Hill and Siobhan Ratchford concerning the narrowness of the term "folk life" is one which is being made increasingly by social history curators. SHCG Committee is making representation to the Curatorial Board of Studies that the broader term "Social History" is substituted for "Folk Life Studies" in our Diploma specialist option. This overdue change will reflect far more accurately both the nature of social history collections and the diversity of the work undertaken by social history curators which, while it most certainly includes folk life studies, extends far beyond the confines of that particular discipline.

David Fleming, Leeds City Museums.

'DIPLOMA TRAINING: THE WAY FORWARD'

REPORT ON THE MPG SEMINAR

This seminar, held at Leicester on 16th March, was attended by a number of SHCG members. The formal papers of the morning session (by Geoffrey Lewis, E.J.S. Becklake and Simon Olding) and the afternoon's discussion are to be published in a forthcoming MPG Transactions. Some problems well known to SHCG members were given an airing, including that of specialist training provision within the Diploma. Simon Olding's suggestion that 'The Way Forward' was through a new alliance between Leicester and Regional Training Seminars (administered by the Association, organised by Area Councils and supervised by the Department of Museum Studies) was not greeted with any great enthusiasm. On the other hand Geoffrey Lewis's aim of a University recognised qualification validated by the Association appeared to offer a rational long-term objective.
To be continued

Stuart Davies, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

SALE OF WORKS IN TRAFFORD

Trafford Borough Council was formed in 1974 from the former Altrincham, Sale, Stretford and Urmston authorities and inherited the historical and art collections of the boroughs. The new Borough Council has made no attempt in the intervening years to make adequate provision for the arts and in November 1983 the Council decided to sell off the collections.

Notwithstanding the efforts of the North West Federation, the collection was sold off at Sothebys, Chester, on 12 and 13 January 1984. However, the Natural History Collections, originally scheduled for sale, have been transferred to the Manchester Museum and two other categories of object were retained, namely those subject to a specific trust and those items with a local connection.

As the Town Clerk admitted, documentation inherited from previous authorities was poor and had not been augmented since 1974, so that it was almost impossible to identify items subject to a specific trust. Identification of such items together with material of local interest was re-mitted to a council sub-committee. As we all know, unless an item has a specific inscription or adequate documentation it is almost impossible to identify it positively as local without lengthy research. No Museum professional sat on the committee, and at least one item was bought back at the Sotheby's sale by the Town Clerk who realized from the catalogue that the item had a very important local connection indeed. How many other items were not recognized as being of local significance we shall never know.

Some social historians have been heard to grouse about the collections policies of the Metropolitan Counties collecting on 'their' patch. But what price giving responsibility to the boroughs if this is all they can do with it?

Janice Murray, St. Helens Museum & Art Gallery.

SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP
(formerly the Group for Regional Studies in Museums)

OFFICIAL INVOICE

To one year's subscription for institutional/individual membership of the Social History Curators Group for the year commencing 1st April 1984.

Membership fees:

Individual:	£4	Institutional:	£7
<u>Overseas individual:</u>	£7	Institutional:	£10

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Please complete and return to the Membership Secretary: Helen Clark,

c/o Beamish North of England Open Air Museum, Stanley, Co. Durham DH9 9RG

I enclose a cheque for £ individual/institutional membership of Social History Curators Group. (Please make cheque out to S.H.C.G.)

Name: Museum:

Address:

Agenda for AGM of SHCG to be held at Southwell Lodge, Norwich on
Saturday 21st July 1984 at 8.30 p.m.

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of AGM held at Hebden Bridge on Friday, 24th June 1983
3. Matters arising
4. Officer's Reports
 - Chairman
 - Secretary
 - Treasurer
 - Membership Secretary
 - Editor (Journal)
 - Editor (News)
 - Seminar Organiser
5. Increase in subscription rates. Committee proposes: £10.00 institutions, £6.00 individuals, £9.00 two individuals at the same private address.
6. Adoption or rejection of new constitution
7. Election of Officers and Committee
8. A.O.B.

Item 6

Elections: If the old Constitution is retained the following officer and committee posts are to be filled at the AGM - Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Seminar Organiser and 3 ordinary committee members.

If the new Constitution is accepted, members of the existing committee will retire but may seek immediate re-election to the following officer and committee posts - Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, and nine ordinary members of committee.

Nominations are invited for these posts. Any nominations must have the consent of the nominee, who should be a paid-up member of SHCG. Please complete the accompanying form and send it to the SHCG Secretary, Sue Kirby, Carlisle Museum & Art Gallery, Castle Street, Carlisle, Cumbria. CA3 8TP

Please note that smoking is not permitted at the A.G.M.

SHCG AGM 1984 NOMINATIONS FOR COMMITTEE

NB PLEASE ENTER NOMINATION(S) ON BOTH FORMS

NOMINATION FORM 'A' (OLD CONSTITUTION)

<u>POST</u>	<u>NOMINEE</u>	<u>MUSEUM</u>
Chairman
Vice-Chairman
Seminar Organiser
Ordinary Member
Ord. Memb.
Ord. Memb.

NOMINATION FORM 'B' (NEW CONSTITUTION)

<u>POST</u>	<u>NOMINEE</u>	<u>MUSEUM</u>
Chairman
Secretary
Treasurer
Ord. Memb. (Ed. Journal)
Ord. Memb. (Ed. News)
Ord. Memb. (Memb. Sec.)
Ord. Memb. (Sem. Org.)
Ord. Memb.
Ord. Memb.
Ord. Memb.
Ord. Memb.
Ord. Memb.

The person(s) named has/have consented to be nominated and is a/are fully paid-up member(s) of SHCG.

Signed

Museum

Address

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URBAN HISTORY IN MUSEUMS - PREVIEW

The first seminar in our 'Social History in Museums' series will be held at Manchester Studies Unit on 11 May 1984. The title is Urban History in Museums, and it should be valuable for all curators working in city, town or industrial museums. The four speakers will explore different approaches to the study and presentation of urban society, in three cases in museums, in the fourth case at Manchester Studies Unit itself.

The Unit, in fact, performs functions which might normally be associated with museums - the active collection and recording of photographs, and oral history recording. In so doing the Unit highlights the widespread inability of museums to shoulder these responsibilities. What implications does this have for social history curators, and what lessons can we learn from the Unit?

The Greater Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, opened for a Preview Season in September 1983, is sited in Castlefield, Britain's first 'Urban Heritage Park'. What is this? How will it develop, and is this a glimpse of the future for declining urban areas?

The Manchester Jewish Museum opened on 1 April 1984, heralded by these comments from The Guardian: "Britain's first provincial Jewish museum, to be opened in a newly-converted Manchester synagogue ... will have lessons for other immigrant communities. It will trace the history of a district which once provided a home for 25,000 Jews, mainly from Eastern Europe ... it will seek to help counter anti-semitism by explaining the Jewish way of life". The relevance of museums to Britain's 'ethnic minorities', and the service museums should provide for these groups and communities, is now one of the major issues facing social history curators. What about the Irish? The Poles? The West Indians? The Scots?! What role will political pressure or social tensions play in future foundations?

"... a nasty, ill-looking place, half clown and half cockney". Not Manchester this time, but Cheltenham, spa town, home of gentlefolk, the Ladies' College and GCHQ. Compare and contrast the approach to the study and illustration of urban society in Cheltenham Museum and Art Gallery with the methods adopted in the North's most populous conurbation.

David Fleming (on behalf of SHCG Training Working Party)

SHIC USERS' SEMINARS

Following the recent official launch of the Social History and Industrial Classification at the Science Museum, reported above, the SHIC Working Party is to hold a series of regional workshop seminars. These will include papers by members of the Working Party and by users, and will provide a forum for the discussion of problems and the further explanation of the uses and functions of SHIC. All users or potential users are welcome.

The first of these seminars will be held at Leeds City Art Gallery on 15th May, 1984. This will feature an explanation of the use of SHIC to re-classify the massive social history collections at York Castle Museum, and of the value of SHIC in a computerised catalogue.

The second seminar will be held the following day, 16th May, 1984, at the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh, and will include discussion of the use of SHIC on the photographic collections at Dundee Museums.

A seminar will also be held at Bristol on 31st October, 1984. Other regional seminars will be announced in due course.

The arrival of SHIC last year was an important landmark in the development of Social History as a museum discipline. A few months after its low profile introduction SHIC was launched officially to a capacity audience at the Science Museum on February 29th. It was welcomed by Geoffrey Lewis, who hoped it would not be seen as "yet another classification" but as an important tool for the curator.

Peter Brears (Leeds Museums) spoke of the development of the system and the twilight world of the Working Party. SHIC had grown from earlier systems but was more flexible. The Working Party had seen the need to look outside their respective museums, bearing in mind that the nature of museums had changed. The terms "bygones" and "folk life" are no longer appropriate to collections that encompass the industrial and urban communities. Peter mentioned the problems of getting SHIC printed. Let us hope any revisions and reprints will not suffer similar delays.

The general principles of SHIC were introduced by Michael Vanns (Ironbridge). Michael illustrated the value of placing objects in the context of society rather than the abstractions of earlier systems. He also stressed that SHIC can be used by museums of all sizes and has the flexibility to reflect individual priorities.

Experiences of using the system were discussed by Michael Seabourne (Museum of London), Steve Harrison (Manx Museum) and Stuart Holm (Black Country Museum). Michael Seabourne spoke of its application at the Museum of London's copy slide library, SHIC being the first system to be used on that collection. He highlighted the need for cross referencing, which will be a future priority. Steve Harrison described his experience of converting two existing systems to SHIC at York Castle Museum and the Manx Museum. It can be done without tears! Stuart Holm talked of the value of SHIC in classifying objects in the West Midlands Collections Research Unit. SHIC helped sort out disagreements over how to classify objects from different museums. All agreed that SHIC allows the curator to expand his/her classification and weed out errors. The results should act as an indicator for future collecting and potential research areas.

Richard Light (MDA) explained the role of the MDA as adviser to the Working Party and its current role as mailbox for enquiries. He saw SHIC as part of the information retrieval process, stressing the need to maintain and refine it.

The speakers were optimistic about SHIC's future. It was universally agreed that the present index was unsatisfactory and would benefit from revision. This can only be done with the active co-operation of current users and observers. Any revision will not affect any existing categories in the main classification. If you feel there are errors the Working Party wants to hear from you. Museums need SHIC but SHIC needs their expertise to fulfil its potential.

Mark Suggitt, York Castle Museum

STYAL, QUARRY BANK MILL : BICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS, 1784-1984

The Quarry Bank Mill Trust has announced a programme of events for 1984 to coincide with the bicentenary of the Mill, at the same time launching a £350,000 Appeal to complete the Museum's development. Notable among the many events planned are the completion of the restoration of the 1850 Fairbairn iron suspension wheel, and the re-enactment of the first shipment of cotton from the Southern States of America to North West England, via Liverpool. A Textile Festival will be launched in October. For further information contact David Sekers, Quarry Bank Mill, Styal, Cheshire, SK9 4LA (tel. 0625-527468).

Constitution of the Social History Curators Group

1. The Group shall be known as the Social History Curators Group.
2. The office of the Group shall be situated within Great Britain.
3. The object of the Group is to improve the status/standards of social history/local history/folk life and allied disciplines within museums by any appropriate means.
4. Membership of the Group shall be open to any person or institution sympathetic to its objectives.
5. The expenses of the Group shall be met from the subscriptions and from such funds as the Group may by donation or otherwise acquire.
6. Each member shall pay the subscription on joining the Group and shall then be entitled to receive a copy of each of the Group's publications in the current subscription year, and advance notice of events organised by it. The annual subscription for personal and institutional members shall be decided by the Committee and approved by the Annual General Meeting.
7. Subscriptions shall fall due on 1st April each year.
8. The subscriptions and all the property acquired for the purposes of the Group shall be deemed to be vested in the Officers of the Group as trustees for the members. The accounts of the Group shall be subject to annual audit.
9. The affairs of the Group shall be managed by a Committee, whose Officers and Ordinary Members shall normally be elected by the Annual General Meeting. At any meeting of the Committee the presence of six elected members will constitute a quorum. The Committee shall present a report with audited accounts to the Annual General Meeting of the Group. The Committee shall have power to co-opt additional members as it finds necessary and also to form any sub-committee or working parties which may be required from time to time.
10. The Committee shall consist of a Chairman, a Secretary, a Treasurer, nine others, and any persons who may be co-opted by the Committee for specific purposes.
11. The Chairman shall be elected for one year, the Secretary and Treasurer for three years each, and all other Committee members for two years each. Co-opted members must retire or seek re-election at the Annual General Meeting immediately following their co-option.
12. All Committee members shall be eligible for re-election immediately after their retirement.
13. Nominations for Committee members may be received by the Secretary at any appropriate time provided that the nominee's name has been given.
14. Any vacancies that arise among Officers or Ordinary Members of Committee, for whatever reasons, may be filled by the Committee.
15. Any proposals for the amendment of the Constitution of the Group must be submitted to the Annual General Meeting. If at least two-thirds of the members present at the meeting vote in favour of it, then it shall be subject to a postal ballot of the entire membership. If at least two-thirds of postal votes cast are in favour of it then the amendment shall be adopted.

16. Special General Meetings shall be held at such times as the Committee may decide or on the written request of not less than one fifth of the members of the Group. Upon receipt of such a written request the Secretary shall give notice of a Special General Meeting to the members within 28 days, allowing a period of 14 days to elapse between the sending of the notice and the meeting, and stating the reason for which the Special General Meeting is held.
17. If the Committee decides it is necessary or advisable to dissolve the Group, the Secretary shall call a Special General Meeting. If such a decision is confirmed by a two thirds majority of those present and voting at such a meeting, the Committee shall have power to dispose of any assets held by or in the name of the Group to any constituted group, society or charity having similar objectives to the Group.

PLEASE NOTE

Any members who wish to comment on the draft constitution are invited to write to the Secretary, preferably within two weeks of this News being published. A final draft will then be drawn up for discussion and voting upon at the AGM in 1984.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

The Past Displayed by Gail Durbin (Norfolk Museums Service, 1983, £2.95, 48pp). A Norman castle used as a prison; a medieval house; a shoe factory formerly a lock-up for vagrants; a disused medieval church: 4,785 birds of prey; 30 tons of horse-chestnuts; a tiger fighting a python; the world's first wire-netting loom; a beehive; the time ball: put all these together and you glimpse the variety of the Norwich Museums. This book is a picture history of the Norwich Museums, containing 120 black and white illustrations ranging in date from c. 1660 to 1983, with a text by the Museums' Education Officer. Available from Publications Dept., Castle Museum, Norwich, NR1 3JU at £2.95 plus 75p p & p. Cheques to be payable to Norfolk County Council.

Turrets, Towels and Taps by Rachel Wilkins (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 1984, £1.95, 24pp). Public Washing Baths were established in the nineteenth century to improve standards of public health, and between 1851 and 1938 were opened twenty seven Birmingham Corporation Baths which included suites of washing baths for public use. Their rise and decline is linked to, and reflected in, changing standards of housing, family routine, public services, population change and urban redevelopment over nearly 150 years. This booklet, containing 32 black and white illustrations, describes Victorian housing conditions in Birmingham, and the routine of the Baths, based on taped interviews, documentary sources and the study of the structures themselves. It has been produced as part of the Local History Department's project recording change in the inner city. Available from the Museum at £1.95 plus 35p p & p.

EXHIBITION NOTICE

Change in the Inner City is the title of an exhibition at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (Local History Gallery) which ends on 24 April. Sponsored by the Inner City Partnership Programme the main element is Celia Grant's photographic study of Birmingham shops entitled 'Opening the Shutters'. Ms Grant has looked at the issue of small shops being under threat from urban renewal, road construction, economic decline, while noting their continuing value in the city. Other material in the exhibition includes the city's Public Washing Baths and the experience of ethnic communities before they came to Birmingham.