



**Renaissance in the
Regions—Responses?
'Ocean Views'
Oral History
Coffee Pots and
the Great Exhibition**

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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Contents photo:
Hands of Mubin Miah holding prayer beads. Mubin, 23, goes to the Mosque on the Ocean Estate. "People use the beads to pray to Allah, the Almighty, the God". Photograph from 'Ocean Views' at the Ragged School Museum, London.

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**DEADLINE FOR
NEXT ISSUE:
10TH OCTOBER 2002**

A colleague recently passed me a copy of the University magazine 'Oxford Today'. I was struck, by a letter from a Mr AH Pengley, which argued that, while the Faculty of Modern History is booming at Oxford, a subject that does not reach the curriculum, is oral history. Although he acknowledges the potentiality of AJP Taylor's somewhat unfair quip that oral history is merely 'old men drooling about their youth' he advocates that, properly accredited and academically rigorous oral history is as legitimate as any other historical source.

Oral history has in many ways become the bread and butter of Museums' Practice; a great deal of research for exhibitions, publications, archives and so on has been carried out via the medium. Oral history, in the Museum field, has also been a means to an end. An inextricable link has been made between oral history, social inclusion projects and work in the wider community. In this issue we look at one such project in Kettering which recorded 52 people from 40 different countries of origin who had made their home in the Borough. Working with the Racial Equality Council, the Museum sought to use oral history to break down barriers, forge links and celebrate the diversity of the community.

Another consideration for Museums is the democratic nature of oral history - ordinary people are given a voice. It is a vehicle for articulating the experiences of those who would otherwise, historically speaking, remain unheard. Annette Day's article, 'Voices Online' looks at the Museum of London's web based oral history exhibition. This has been an attempt to give greater access to an oral history collection and to see it as a significant historical resource.

Continuing on this theme of empowerment, ethnic diversity and social inclusion, the Ragged School's 'Ocean Views' exhibition has used the medium of photography and oral history to represent the many experiences of life on a housing estate in Stepney. This is an area recently identified by the Government as one of the most deprived in the country.

Renaissance in the Regions is probably a subject that you've found hard to avoid! In this issue the SHCG committee have drafted a response to the document, but we want to hear your thoughts before we respond as a group. See later on for details. Lastly, as you may have noticed, we at the News have reached our golden jubilee! I have spent some time these past months looking at the history of the group and particularly the 'News'. I have also attempted to contact old editors and ask them where they are now...perhaps it's time for some oral history recording... Here's to the next 50!

DAVID BROOM-EDITOR

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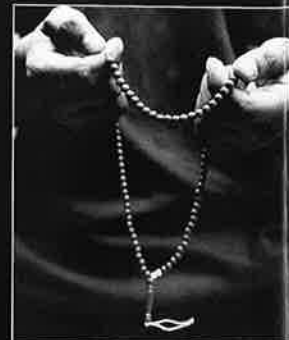
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SHCG MATTERS

Annual Study
Weekend'Object Lessons'
11th-13th July 2002
Newcastle-upon-Tyne

This year's ASW will be both theoretical and practical with a theme that examines the changing strategic framework in which history museums operate alongside a 'hands on approach' with sessions looking at social history curatorship in its broadest context.

The weekend will take a slightly different format from previous years, starting on Thursday lunchtime and finishing on Saturday night.

Thursday will concentrate on current strategic contexts, with inevitably lively discussions on Renaissance in the Regions and cross-sectoral initiatives.

Friday's and Saturday's sessions will explore the wide range of expertise that social history curators so often have to master. Hands-on sessions will include archaeology, ethnography, textiles, digitisation and storage projects.

Speakers include:

- Stuart Davies, Re:source, and Penny Wilkinson, NEMLAC, on Renaissance in the Regions
- Barry Meade, Woodhorn Colliery Museum, on working with archives

- Antonia Lovelace, Leeds Museums and Galleries, on reaching out to local communities using ethnographic collections
- Elizabeth Mullineaux, Cumbria County Council, on digitisation projects
- Plus sessions on identifying and using archaeology and textiles

Visits include new galleries and stores at:

- Beamish North of England Open Air Museum
- Bede's World
- Discovery Museum
- Segedunum Roman Fort
- Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens

Put the dates in your diary now!

Booking information will be available shortly, but the cost is likely to be under £200 for SHCG members.

Two free places for the full weekend are available to SHCG members who have never attended an ASW before.

For more information, contact:
Briony Hudson on 01924 305810 or
email: annualstudyweekend@shcg.org.uk



SHCG MATTERS


firstBASE

firstBASE is coming! Due to a number of technical difficulties the firstBASE part of the SHCG website has been a little delayed. Please see this edition's information leaflet to get the very latest information on this exciting project.

firstBASE can be viewed at: www.shcg.org.uk/firstBASE

Doing Porridge...

'English Prisons: An Architectural History' is a photographic exhibition portraying the history and development of England's prison architecture. The images reflect all aspects of prison life - particularly the human dimension to demonstrate how the buildings are a reflection of the society that created them. Coinciding with the exhibition is the launch of the book of the same name. This represents the culmination of a project that has photographed every prison in the country. The book reveals how prison buildings have developed to reflect changing views of punishment and criminality. The exhibition runs until 31 May 2002. HM Prison Service Museum, Newbold Revel, Rugby, Warwickshire, CV23 0TH, Tel: 01778 834168 Website: www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk



If you have information of forthcoming seminars, exhibitions, book launches, films, web-sites or whatever you feel would be of interest to the readership why not advertise them on the Bulletin Board? It's free! And you get to announce your event to a wide readership. Contact the editor at: d.broom@stalbans.gov.uk

YOU

SHCG News Index and Archives

In celebration of our 50th edition, I and a Museum volunteer, have recently embarked on an attempt to index the back catalogue of SHCG News. The intention is to complete an index of the last 20 editions and then place the results on the web via the SHCG site. Please watch the website for details. I have also begun to check our archives and thanks to Crispin Paine (see later in this edition) I have been able to add 3 missing copies of the News to our collection. We are still however missing a copy of issue 35 (summer 1994). Does anyone out there have a copy they would like to donate? The intention is to bring everything up to an archive standard and find a permanent site for storage. Please contact: d.broom@stalbans.gov.uk

The Romans in Stevenage!



Stevenage Museum's new exhibition 'Home with the Romans' has been supported by an 'Awards for All' lottery grant. Visitors can walk through a round house, play Roman games, try on Roman clothes and see Roman artefacts. There is even a computer interactive which gives visitors the chance to investigate recipes for such Roman delicacies as swan, thrush, jackdaw and crow! Entry is free at: Stevenage Museum, St George's Way, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 1XX, Tel: 01438 218881

The Society for Folk Life Studies: Annual Conference 'Wetlands as a Resource *Fenland Culture' 12th-15th September 2002 Wisbech, England

This year's annual conference will be held in the Fenlands of the eastern England, a fascinating area of drained wetlands covering parts of Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.

The conference will be based in Wisbech, the most important town in the Fens, which possesses a superb Georgian riverside townscape, as well as one of the earliest municipal museums with outstanding collections. Our accommodation will be at the Rose & Crown hotel, an historic inn fronting the mediaeval market square, recently refurbished by its heritage-conscious resident owners.

Our host will be Catherine Wilson, sometime Director of the County Museum Services of both Lincolnshire and Norfolk

and the retiring president of the Society. Catherine has a deep knowledge of the English Fenland and has devised a programme that shows off many of the agricultural, architectural and cultural aspects of this area.

It is expected that the total cost to attend this conference will be around £250 (based on two people sharing a twin-bedded room.

For further information and a booking form, please contact:

Dr Dafydd Roberts, Keeper, Welsh Slate Museum, Padarn Country Park, Llanberis, Gwynedd, LL55 4TY, Wales, UK. Tel: 01286 870630

Booking forms must be returned with deposit by Friday 31st May 2002

SHCG News Reaches 50!

It's not just the Queen celebrating a golden jubilee in 2002. We too at the News have attained 50! Admittedly this is editions, but this year does mark a 20th birthday for the group! In honour of this historical occasion your current editor has spent some time sleuthing in the archives and calling on shady contacts to try and find out the origins of SHCG and particularly the Newsletter...

It would seem that the SHCG as an entity began in 1982. The original group, from whence SHCG stemmed, was called GRSM (Group for Regional Studies in Museums) which had formed in 1975 (itself emerging from the Society for Folk Life Studies). It appears that something of a 'coup' took place in 1982 among those in GRSM who felt that the group did not reflect the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation as it pertained to society. The change in the emphasis of the group (demonstrated in the change of name) reflected the emergence and development of social history in museums.

GRSM News for April 1982 records that, "the committee has agreed with Crispin Paine's proposal for a name change". The committee felt that in the seven years since its foundation GRSM had achieved a lot but that, "so far, it had failed to represent more than a few people working in social history museums". The name, it was felt, was partially to blame for this because: "Regional Studies is simply not a term to which many of us readily relate".

The proposal then was to be given to the 1982 AGM that the group be renamed the *History Curators Group* or the *Social History Curators Group* and the committee looked forward to a lively discussion...

The Brave New World of the SHCG began in Winter 1982. The first issue of SHCG News recorded that the membership stood at 135 but that secretary Helen Clark had brought in 57 new members. The old GRSM newsletter had been replaced by the Journal we know today and edited, at that time, by Sam Mullins. The group were keen to encourage participation in the ASW (see

also bulletin board this issue!) There was discussion of a revolutionary new idea called SHIC, and the group contemplated campaigning for better social history Museum provision throughout the country and against the export of antiquities.

The News has had 8 editors (including the present incumbent) in its 20 year history and I thought it would be interesting to ask - **Where are they now?**

As we have seen our Story begins in those early days of the 1980's: Thatcher's Britain, coal miners on strike, Ken Livingstone at the GLC, a Royal Wedding and a little local difficulty in the South Atlantic not withstanding, the SHCG ploughed on...

Our first editor was **Crispin Paine** (issues 1 - 5, Winter 1982/83 - Spring 1984). Crispin is now a Museums consultant and convenor of the MA in Museum Studies at the University of Southampton.

Crispin was succeeded by **David Fleming** (issues 6 - 8, Summer 1984 - April 1985). David Fleming (now OBE!) is director of National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside having recently moved there from Tyne and Wear Museums. **Mark Suggitt** was the next editor (issues 9 -15, Summer 1985 - Summer 1987). Until very recently the director of St Albans Museums, Mark has now gone to be Head of Museums Galleries and Heritage for Bradford MDC.

Ian Lawley (issues 16 - 27, Winter 1987 - Winter 1991), who succeeded Mark, is now Head of Museums at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke on Trent and **Frank Little** (issues 28 - 34, Spring 1992 - Spring 1994) is visitor services manager for Glasgow Culture and Leisure Services (Museums).

Harriet Purkis (issues 35 - 41, Summer 1995 to Summer 1997) another member of the 'St Albans Mafia' that have edited the News, is now living in Ireland.

Issue 42 (Spring 1998) was put together by an editorial team of **Nicky Bleasby**, **Caroline MacFarlane** and **Robert Rose** before Nicky (issues 43 - 47, Autumn 1998 - November 2000) took the helm until 2000. Nicky gave up the job to look after her new baby, India Grace, born 10 February 2001. She is currently living in America.

Pass-Ed notes

Previous Editor:
Crispin Paine



Current Job Title

Museums Consultant and Convenor of MA in Museum Studies at the University of Southampton.

How did you become SHCG editor?

There was a coup within the Group for Regional Studies in Museums, which changed its name to SHCG, revitalised its activities and gave it a more historical and less geographical bias. I was part of that!

What do you remember most about your time as editor?

Virtually nothing - I vaguely remember lettrasetting!

How did you begin working in Museums?

I had a conversion experience in a Museum in Sarajevo: 'I want to do this'. Returning home I applied for the first job I saw advertised. There were 2 other applicants.

What do you think has been your greatest achievement working in Museums?

Perhaps opening the Museum of Oxford and turning round an Area Museum Council's finances. But satisfaction lies in tiny things: watching a blind child discover a stuffed Bison's head, acquiring a classic bed-sitter gas meter; a class that goes well.

Which social history object would you take to a desert island and why?

A Methodist loving cup, so I can go on thinking about the relationships between religion, society and objects - and when I'm fed up with that I can use it for drinking home-brew!

Renaissance in the Regions—A Response From the Committee...

'Renaissance in the Regions', the long awaited report of the 'Task Force' (formed by then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Chris Smith in December 2000 and Chaired by Lord Evans Chair of Resource) was published in October 2001. This is probably one of the most significant documents concerning Museums to be published in recent years with far reaching strategic implications for regional Museums.

Members of the SHCG Committee: Catherine Nisbet, Steph Mistoris and Stephen Lowy have given the response below, but fundamentally we would like to gauge the reaction to this report among the membership (please see the end of this article for details...)

The long heralded report landed on my desk last year with quite a thud! By that afternoon I had, had my first phone call from someone speculating about the hub in my neck of the woods. By that evening I was fighting sleep to skim read it as fast as possible. This report may have originally been inspired by the large regional museums looking for ways to fund their nationally important collections. However the report and the attendant discussion have been far more far reaching. As for me I'm waiting for my regional meeting to take place to hear more about the effect that this report will have in my area.

The road shows and open meetings continue across Britain. The debate continues, and not least at the last SHCG Committee meeting. In St Albans, (February 2002) we discussed the need for SHCG to forward comments on this report. The problem with Renaissance in the Regions is that either the geographical position or scale of your museum makes a huge difference to how you feel about the propose scheme. For this reason we felt we needed to gather membership opinion before we wrote a response. The solution? This article and a request: **Please let us know what you think!**

What follows are two personal points of view on the report. The authors are not

writing as representatives of their organisations but as active museum professionals. Their purpose is to create debate. We want to know whether you agree or not.

Catherine Nisbet—SHCG Chair

Steph Mistoris works in Leicestershire and has a long-standing involvement with SHCG. He is currently working on the group's firstBASE project.

This is his view:

Renaissance in the Regions represents a major new direction for museums in England, and Stuart Davies especially is to be praised for facilitating and shaping such an imaginative plan to bring central governmental funding to regional museums. The report's analysis of the financial, professional and organisational problems is very acute and there cannot be a member of SHCG who does not recognise at least one of the difficulties outlined in his or her own institution.

However, given that many members of SHCG work in local and community museums, the group should be concerned that little direct comfort to us is being offered in these proposals. There is the assumption that local collections are not significant beyond their locality, and therefore don't count as worthy of central funds. There is also a strong implication that some major rationalisation of these collections should take place. Both points ignore the way in which these collections often have better provenance and significance, and are in greater use by a variety of interpretative methods that more 'regionally significant' collections. Furthermore, where parts of a multi-site museum service may become part of a hub consortium, the smaller, more local branches could become seen as 'second class' and irrelevant in the drive for the main museum to fulfil regional agendas.

This said, there is much to look forward to, if the funding for this grand plan is

forthcoming. The report's strong support for collections mapping, people-centred interpretation and addressing access issues are all very close to SHCG's heart. Many of our members are in the forefront of new thinking on curation and interpretation and should be able to use the hub network to spread the social history approach to other disciplines.

Steph Mistoris—firstBASE co-ordinator

Whilst Steph's concerns centre on the relative status of collections and their influence on strategy and importance. Stephen Lowy's concerns are largely ones of finance, who gets it? And who monitors the outputs? Stephen works in Essex. He has been involved with SHCG as a Seminar Organiser for some years. This is his view:

Before I continue, I broadly support the Renaissance in the Region report and the £267 million earmarked for museums and I have recommended it to my governing body. However like many other groups and individual institutions I do have some reservations about the report.

The report primarily addresses the weaknesses of large regional museums. However, it is important that the report must be fully implemented in order to benefit the smaller local authority and independent museums that form the majority of museums.

I think there is a real opportunity for non-regional museums and museum development services to seek and foster strong relationships with the Regional Hubs. Not only should Hub museums develop the support they give to neighbouring organisations (assuming they do this already!) there should also be a place for smaller institutions to participate in delivering better museum services to the public within the Hub structure. In many cases smaller museums excel in certain fields, especially in community orientated work. Why should this success not be put to good



use in partnership with a regional Hub consortium? This interpretation of hub service delivery may not be obvious to some 'wannabe Hubs', who may feel they must deliver better, and in some case new services, without reference to smaller museums in their region!

Once the Hubs are established there should also be a clear and accountable system for monitoring the regional museums. Although I am sure most organisations will use the extra funds appropriately, there should be a mechanism to ensure the £267 million really benefits the end user: the public; and is not damaging the wider museum community. Exactly who would monitor the hubs is a moot point? Resource, the new Single Regional Agencies or an independent panel?

The recommendation to establish 30 additional museum development officers, each with a budget and grant-aid fund of £100,000 is very welcome. These posts (and their grant-aid budgets) will be essential for the continuing development of smaller museums once the Area Museum Councils are replaced by Single Regional Agencies with a primarily strategic focus.

However the implementation of these new posts and attached grants is not clear. Many counties already provide a sound

county development service, and this good work should be rewarded and augmented. Although it must be remembered that many counties are unwilling or unable to support professional development posts. Although these gaps need to be plugged, this support should not be done at the expense of denying additional funds to existing county partnerships.

Finally, if the Government decides not to fund the entire £267m programme over the 5 years, any reduction in costs should be made proportionally across the board and not by cutting whole areas, especially those that benefit the medium and smaller museums.

Stephen Lowy—Seminar Organiser

Do these views match yours? Do you have other worries for the future? We would very much like to hear your opinions. It's important that we as a group make our thoughts known.

Please forward all responses to the editor at the usual address or via email.

Pass-Ed notes

Previous Editor:
Mark Suggitt



Current Job Title Head of Museums, Galleries and Heritage, Bradford MDC

How did you become SHCG editor?

Dave Fleming asked me! "You live in York - you do it" was the initial briefing.

What do you remember most about your time as editor? Chasing people for copy!

Keeping an eye out for silly little illustrations to steal. Occasionally getting heated reactions from some readers. I always felt that the News had to have a sense of humour and a role in stirring things up a bit. It was always good to get articles that provoked responses. My favourite being the arguments that followed a review of a seminar on Industrial Collections. The 'Power and Process' mob versus the 'People and Politics' crew. Great stuff! What has probably changed little is the follow up process of actually getting hold of the articles. "It's in the post" was a common reply, although this has probably been changed to "Our e-mail is down". Nevertheless it was good fun.

I passed the editorship on to Ian Lawley when I became Chair of the group. Ian actually offered to do it!!

How did you begin working in Museums?

Volunteer at Broomhouse Yard Museum, Nottingham. (Thanks Suella!!)

What do you think has been your greatest achievement working in Museums?

Getting the Sex Pistols and New Order and a packet of Marlborough onto the Museums Journal cover. Or maybe leading successful lottery projects.

Which social history object would you take to a desert island and why?

Solar powered mobile phone (to get me off as quickly as possible!)



'Notes From a Small Island'

Museum Networks on the Isle of Wight

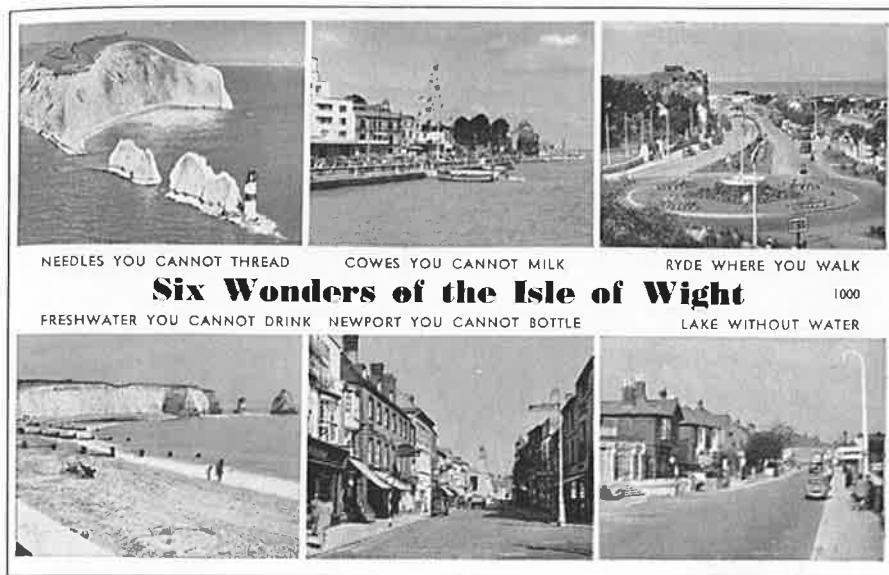
Resource's, 'Renaissance in the Regions' offers visionary blue print for the future of England's provincial museums. Emphasis has been placed upon the need to consolidate the activities of museums in a crowded market-place through creative partnerships between institutions. The report also acknowledges the important role museums and heritage play in the tourist economy of market towns and the countryside. Many of these museums be they privately owned, trust managed or local authority owned have 'found it difficult to source investment money to modernise their infrastructure and so attract both more sponsorship and revenue-earning visits'...

Nowhere is this more evident than the Isle of Wight. Although only 20 minutes from the mainland, life here is far removed from the bustle of the thriving port neighbours Portsmouth and Southampton. The economy of the island relies heavily on the tourist dollar. The recent heritage boom has caused a plethora of 'museums' (I use this in its loosest sense) to mushroom, all offering a vision of the Island. The island has a population of 120,000 for whom there are over 30 museums. Most of these regard themselves more as visitor attractions than as a shared community resource. They range from the working mill at Calbourne to Queen Victoria's holiday home at Osborne House, and from the modern interactive experience of Dinosaur Isle to the ramshackle Ventnor Smuggling Museum recently vilified in the July 2001 issue of *Museums' Journal*.

One recommendation of Renaissance of the Regions is the creation of around 30 Museums Development Officers whose tasks will be to offer support to all museums in establishing creative partnerships via

innovation funds. Such work is already happening on the Isle of Wight where the local authority and independent museums have engaged in a dialogue which has resulted in collaborative projects, improved standards of collection's care and above all a climate of co-operation. As Curator of Human History for the Isle of Wight Council Museums Service I manage three small museums: Newport Roman Villa, the Museum of Island History and Cowes Maritime Museum. I also act as curatorial advisor for three independents: Ventnor Heritage Museum, Julia Margaret Cameron Gallery (JMCG) and Classic Boat Museum.

All these museums have wonderful collections of both local and national importance. JMCG has a tiny but internationally significant collection of plates by the pioneer photographer Julia Margaret Cameron. Ventnor Heritage Museum has a vast collection of its town history and the Classic Boat Museum, Newport owns an attractive array of launches, yachts and lifeboats which it restores and occasionally puts to sea.



Above: Six Wonders of the Isle of Wight postcard c.1920

Left: Tourists on the beach at Sandown in 1900 by James Dore

The role of the Curatorial Advisor is to nurse aspiring museums toward registered status, on the way providing professional guidance in areas of collections care, interpretation and education. In the past some small independents, even those registered as charities have viewed Registration as a layer of unnecessary bureaucracy and a restriction to their financial independence. In turn the 'parent' service has cast a predatory eye over private collections assuming that their own staff are better placed to care for and interpret the material. However, our closer co-operation with the independent sector has diminished this climate of mistrust, leading to the establishment of a broad-based network of Isle of Wight museums.

The key to our successful partnerships has been the emphasis on a two-way relationship. For sure, the independents receive our advice free of charge but we also are able to exploit their own knowledge of collections and links with local communities to develop our own services. As a museum service we accept the imperfections in our Human History sites; staffing is under-strength, we have no adequate temporary exhibition space, no specialist maritime curator despite owning an important local maritime collection and little or no scope for community based projects. Burgeoning partnerships have enabled us to raise Museum standards island-wide and address our own shortcomings.

In 2000 I embarked on a joint-exhibition project 'Turning Points' with the JMCG, funded by a grant from MGM 2000 which provided for exhibition standard display frames. The exhibition highlighted events or themes in island history and how they have

impacted upon the people and landscape of Isle of Wight in 2000. It provided us with an opportunity to display a set of historic 19th century prints by engravers William Westall and George Brannon and photographic plates by a Sandown photographer John Dore. The historic images were shown alongside work from year 11 photography students from Sandown, Ryde and Cowes High Schools 'Turning Points' was displayed at the JMCG throughout summer 2000 and later toured to Cowes Maritime Museum. I helped the Gallery apply for the grant and we selected the images together while JMCG staff mounted and displayed the work. The end result was a successful exhibition in which we were able to achieve our objectives in community involvement in the interpretation of our collections, while JMCG finished up with around 30 reusable grant-aided display units. In August 2001 I presented another collaborative display: 'Cowes Yachting Heritage' comprising of material from our maritime and the Classic Boat Museum's collections. The display opened in time for the Cowes Week festival and the sumptuous celebrations of the 150th Jubilee of the America's Cup.

More often than not, independent museums are run by local people with excellent contacts with local businesses. Sponsorship for small-scale projects is better served with association with local firms who often view the 'council' activities with suspicion. Through her contacts with Cowes Business Association Kim Lyall, the Classic Boat Museum's director, easily obtained sponsorship enabling us to market and enhance the

interpretation of the exhibition. Frequently independent museums are managed by retired business people who bring with them valuable commercial experience, often lacking in local authorities.

The developing relationship with the Classic Boat Museum provides us also with an opportunity to extend public access to our own collections. Due to lack of space in our own museum we have two large motor boats languishing in a Cowes boatyard. The imminent conferment of registered status upon the Classic Boat Museum raises the possibility of our large objects coming out of store and being transferred to their site.

The Classic Boat Museum also has a volunteer legion of knowledgeable maritime experts with whom I am able to exchange knowledge about both our collections. Their assistance with the identification of mystery items in my collection is reciprocated by my 'professional' guidance as to appropriate storage or preventative conservation. I may be able to advise the best way to display an object but not before the experts enlighten me as to what it is!

Some of our partnerships are less involved. Ventnor Heritage Museum is run by the local history society, which is comprised mainly of retired volunteers. It prefers to maintain its activities at the manageable level of organising one exhibition a year. As the collections of Ventnor material are exhaustive and acquisitiveness unabated our A and D policy omits Ventnor local history. We have provided sporadic advice and this year the Museum was granted full registered status.

None of the activities are particularly ground breaking and most of our arrangements regarding collections seem like common sense. However these activities provided an opportunity to develop a climate of mutual understanding where we were able to learn and value each others' expertise. In areas like the Isle of Wight and the south-west of England where museums seem to have difficulty in reconciling their roles as community remembrances to that of tourist attractions, the formation of networks provides the most effective means to negotiate shared visions, values and objectives.

Tony Butler

Tony was Curator of Human History for the Isle of Wight Council Museums Service until the end of March 2002.

He has recently been appointed Public Service Manager at Ipswich Museums and Art Gallery



Voices Online

Putting Oral History on the Web

Over 4,000 hours of recorded oral history interviews, hundreds of interview summaries and thousands of pages of interview transcripts are contained within the Museum of London's oral history collection. Millions upon millions of words which express the rich, fascinating and often moving life stories of the hundreds of people who have been interviewed since the Museum established its oral history section in 1992.

Annette Day

Assistant Curator for Oral History and Contemporary Collecting,
Museum of London
www.museumoflondon.org.uk

The collection is accessible by appointment to researchers, but until now only a tiny fraction of it has been featured in galleries, exhibitions, publications and events. Most commonly oral history is used in public displays in the form of compilations of extracts and as such is frequently highly effective in conveying detail, depth, complexity and emotion. A key aim of 'Voices Online' is to build upon this by making widely accessible, both physically and intellectually, a selection of full interviews, placing them at the core of a public presentation. At its very heart are 19 interviews featuring people of a variety of ages, professions, backgrounds and interests, who grew up in many different parts of the world, but who have all made a home in London. By bringing together these interviews and drawing out areas of commonality, 'Voices Online' also aims to encourage a greater cross cultural perspective among users. And in so doing, it aims to promote greater understanding and

appreciation of the value of oral history and to encourage users to view their own life stories as significant historical resources.

'Voices Online' is part of a wider Museum of London project, 'London's Voices', which is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. With the twin aims of increasing access to the Museum's oral history collection and exploring and reflecting cultural diversity within the city, 'London's Voices' is a three-year programme of exhibitions, activities and events with an emphasis upon innovation. 'Voices Online' began life as a 'computer interactive' which was part of an exhibition held at the Museum of London between 2nd November 2001 and 16th April 2002. A positive public response to the interactive supported the Museum's original intention to adapt it for presentation on the world wide web. But this is still only the beginning. Built into 'Voices Online', both technologically and conceptually, is the capacity for ongoing development in the future.

Left: Mr Handley Best one of the interviewees for the Voices Online project

One of oral history's great values is also arguably one of its great challenges - its extraordinary richness and detail. The 19 interviews currently featured in 'Voices Online' total approximately 300,000 words. Therefore the first step in developing the project was to make this information manageable and easy to use. The way in which this was done effectively mirrors but also enhances the techniques used to make the oral history collection as a whole more easy to use. Every interview within the collection is summarised, with summaries describing the content of the interview in order to aid users in finding their way around it. Some of the interviews are also transcribed, although the resource-intensive nature of transcription means that it is not possible to transcribe all of them. Summaries, transcripts and a selection of digitised audio extracts were produced for each of the 19 interviews featured in Voices Online. Previously only accessible to visitors to the actual Museum building, these are now available remotely to users via the World Wide Web.

Moreover, the resources of 'Voices Online' are actually more user-friendly than those of the collection generally. Key to this is the hyperlink. Hyperlinks enable the connection of different pieces of data within a web site and have been perhaps the most valuable tool in the development of 'Voices Online'. In order to make it easier for users to find their way around an interview, each line of the interview summary is linked to the relevant segment of the transcript and vice versa, using hyperlinks. This means that users can read through the summary and, upon finding a section of the interview in which they are particularly interested, can click on the link provided and go directly to the relevant part of the transcript. This saves considerable time as it negates the need to skim through entire transcripts, usually comprising many pages of often densely typed text.

Of course while there are long-term benefits in organising the material in this way, developing this structure was relatively labour-intensive. The interviews had to be organised into segments, what might be called 'paragraphs'. In doing this, judgements about where to put the breaks were based upon creating paragraphs that are reasonably manageable physically but also conceptually coherent. This was really a curatorial task rather than a simpler one of creating breaks after a given number of words or other such criteria. In total the 19 interviews were divided into approximately 1,000 paragraphs, with a line of summary then being produced for each paragraph and

a link created from each line of summary to the related paragraph of the transcript and vice versa. One of the great advantages of the web is that it is relatively simple for non-experts to create effective web sites. And hyperlinks have a very easy format, so this kind of approach to increasing physical access to oral history interviews is actually not difficult to realise technically and need not be prohibitively expensive.

As a museum undertaking, improving physical access to the collection was only one aspect of 'Voices Online'. With the resources available for the project, it would have been possible to put more interviews online in this way if the focus had been entirely upon this part of the project. But promoting 'intellectual access' was also considered fundamental to realising its potential. A thematic presentation was therefore developed, bringing together almost 100 audio extracts drawn from the 19 interviews featured. This acts not only as an interesting display in its own right but also as a way in to the full interviews. Users can concentrate upon the thematic presentation if they wish - choice and user-driven navigation is fundamental to 'Voices Online'. But if, while browsing the extracts, they find one of the interviewees to be of particular interest, they can move directly from any extract into the full interview from which it is taken. And there is the option to go either to the beginning of interview or to go to the point at which the interviewee talks about the subject matter of the extract in question. The thematic presentation is thus both a coherent product in its own right and an entrance to something much bigger and more complex.

The thematic presentation is based upon the concept of every individual being at the centre of a series of social circles, spreading out within their family, their communities, the city and the world. This concept was selected and developed based on a survey of the full collection of oral history interviews held at the Museum of London, rather than being focused directly upon the 19 interviews that are currently featured in 'Voices Online'. It was felt to be a strong concept because it can be applied virtually universally, relevant to the lives of interviewees and users alike. As such, it meant that strands of commonality as well as of difference across the 19 interviews could be examined. This was particularly important in fulfilling the aim of the project to explore the cultural diversity of the city and, in doing so, to encourage a cross-cultural perspective. It was also hoped that this concept would inspire users to think about their own lives, to compare their

experiences to those of the interviewees and indeed to identify with them. This concept is of course only one way of looking at a life and a city, but as 'Voices Online' develops the intention is to add other presentations, which take different perspectives.

In the thematic presentation there are several extracts drawn from each interview. There were a number of reasons for taking this approach. At a simple level, it enables users to get to know the interviewees a little better. It helps them to get a stronger sense of the contents of their interviews and therefore to make more informed choices about which ones, if any, to examine further. And it means that there are several routes into any given interview from the thematic presentation, enhancing its role as a way in to the body of full interviews. It also reflects and emphasises the richness of the interviews and the multiplicity of meanings inherent in any single life story. And finally it gives a sense of how many different connections and comparisons can be made between just a relatively small number of interviews.

Ultimately the thematic presentation is intended to demonstrate how oral history interviews might be used, how information and experiences might be drawn from them, how connections might be made between different interviews, and fundamentally how life stories can be effectively used as primary historical resources. There is a high element of transparency in this given that users do have access to the full interviews and therefore can see what curatorial decisions were made in selecting particular extracts and organising them according to what was essentially a curatorially developed thematic structure. A desirable thing of course, but there is a certain added pressure in the awareness of this!

'Voices Online' is a new departure for the Museum and something that it wishes to build upon in the future. Consequently evaluation was conducted with users while it was temporarily on display in the galleries. This evaluation took the form of an exit questionnaire which contained both quantitative and qualitative elements and which was aimed at discovering both what users made of 'Voices Online' specifically and also more generally how they responded to oral history and its display.

In developing access to interviews in the future, it will of course be invaluable to develop our understanding of the triggers, which lead users to choose to access certain interviews rather than others. What the evaluation ultimately highlighted was the complexity of these triggers. But it was interesting to note that often, although by no

means exclusively, users selected interviewees in whom they recognised some point of commonality. For instance one user commented that she was, "particularly interested in the Russian, whose experiences reminds one that their war and life was worse than ours during the war years". This is interesting in that it shows that the user was attracted to this interviewee by their common experience of war but also that she either developed or had reinforced an understanding of the multiplicity of experiences of war. It was also encouraging to see that users identified with interviewees with whom they might at first glance have very little in common. For example one Scottish woman in her 70s was connected with a young female interviewee who came to Britain as a refugee from Vietnam, writing, "Funnily enough, I most identified with My Tang because my father died when I was about the same age as her". But other users found the interviews compelling in a much broader sense, for example one expressed a, "sheer interest in other folks' upbringing".

Users who completed the questionnaire also appear to have appreciated the value of oral history as a historical resource. One user stated that, "I think it is good for young people to know about what older generations have been through". Another commented that, "I think it is very important for the stories of everyday people to be known and for all of us to understand more about fellow Londoners". And one user explicitly described the connection between the individual life stories and broader historical events and processes when she wrote, "they all show the human face of major events and changes and how the big and the personal relate to each other".

Evaluation of 'Voices Online' in its web-based form will continue and will feed into the future development of this resource. The intention is to add more interviews, more audio, more thematic presentations, and in doing so to respond to the reactions of users so as to continue to build a resource that is useful and interesting. 'Voices Online' is not and probably never will be a finished product; rather it is conceived as an ongoing process, something that will expand and evolve to meet the needs and interests of users.



Hidden Histories

Celebrating Diversity in Kettering

How many different nationalities do you think are represented in the population of the town or city in which you live? There is probably at least one person from every country in the world living in a place like London, but what about a small town in rural Northamptonshire? How diverse are the ethnic minority communities in such places, and more to the point, what can museums do to be relevant to them all?

These were some of the questions that the staff of the Manor House Museum in Kettering, Northamptonshire were asking themselves after receiving an interesting request from the local Racial Equality Council (REC).

Mike Cavanagh

**Assistant Heritage Manager,
Manor House Museum, Kettering
www.kettering.gov.uk**

The Museum, Art Gallery and Tourist Information Centre make up the 'Heritage Quarter' of Kettering, and are set in the grounds of the Manor House Gardens at one end of the town centre. The museum's collections comprise social history, archaeology and natural history, while fine art is kept at the gallery. The majority of these collections relate to Kettering itself. However, until very recently, there was little if anything on display, directly relating to the multicultural nature of the local community. We had been looking to remedy this situation for some time and a number of project plans had already been put forward when the REC approached us in 1998 with their request.

The REC wished to discuss the possibility of having local ethnic group members' memories recorded and perhaps incorporated into an exhibition. Many of these people came over to England from abroad in the 1950's and they were beginning to forget things about their early lives. With the year 2000 approaching, they felt it was a good time to look back on cherished memories and share them with the people of Kettering.

While we were happy to work with them on such a fascinating project, we were keen to open it up to other relevant members of the public outside of the REC; thus reaching

what we suspected to be a hitherto largely non-visiting audience.

The project plan was finalised, and funding was secured through a successful Heritage Lottery application. The aim was to interview 60 members of the community, all of whom had one thing in common; they were born abroad but came to live in Kettering at some stage in their lives. They were to be asked a series of questions split broadly into 3 categories:

- **Their life before they moved to England**, including why they came.
- **Their life in the first few years in England**, including such things as how they got on with finding a home to live in, how they found the food, the language, and whether they were treated with respect or subjected to prejudice.
- **Their life now**, regrets, changes to Kettering etc.

Trying to find 60 people who were willing to be interviewed was not easy. We were surprised to find that the R.E.C only gave us a few names of potential candidates, leaving us to find the vast majority of volunteers ourselves. A newspaper appeal was suggested, but this risked us having to turn people down who had come from countries where we already had a volunteer. Turning down interested members of the community would have had the opposite effect to that which we were trying to achieve in terms of forging closer links with communities in the town; consequently we chose not to follow this path.

All the staff played their part in the recruitment process, though primarily it was the museum and gallery attendants who, with their local knowledge of relevant individuals and communities, recruited the vast majority of the participants. Indeed, the project team was very much a cross-staff selection, which included curators, attendants and volunteers, all of whom were trained to carry out Oral History Interviews. Eventually we managed to interview 52 people, representing 40 different countries of origin. Although we didn't manage to get the 'full quota' of 60, we felt this was a pretty good achievement in the limited time available.

The resulting archive of Oral Testimony gained from interviews with the 52 volunteers, formed the primary source for the production of a touring exhibition and CD-Rom, both entitled 'Hidden Histories'. The exhibition opened in the large room of

the Art Gallery (our largest space) in June 2000. Selected sound-bytes from all the participants were made accessible via three phone units, and in addition, objects and photographs were borrowed from the interviewees to supplement the text panels and phone units.

The exhibition attracted a great deal of publicity including regional television, numerous newspapers and radio stations. It was opened by the Mayor of Kettering and the Kettering MP, Phil Salford, in the presence of the interviewees and their families. On the day, many of the 52 participants of the project volunteered to bring in food, which related to their own cultural background, and the resulting spread was a sensational mixture of Asian, African, South American and European culinary delights! The opening had a real 'party' atmosphere, with participants meeting each other for the first time, seeing and hearing themselves in the exhibition and sampling each other's food. Perhaps most importantly, they all felt that the exhibition had represented them accurately and they were all very positive about the whole experience.

The exhibition toured for five months around the Kettering Borough. In that time it was displayed at various venues including local libraries, churches, village halls and schools. As a consequence, the number of people able to see the exhibition was dramatically increased; it was well worth the time spent moving it from venue to venue every week. The project working on the development of a CD-ROM, was also well underway at this time. It was planned to install this into the museum in the New Year. The CD-ROM would use a touch screen kiosk and promised to allow greater access to the original interview archive than could be made accessible through the phone units.

Looking back on the project now that the dust has settled, a number of lasting benefits can be outlined.

1. Community backing: Perhaps most important of all. The project brought us closer to a great many people in Kettering - previously not museum visitors. We gained their trust and they appreciated the way we valued their history, cultural traditions and lifestyle. As a result, we now have much stronger links with members of the local community and especially ethnic minority communities. These links will be invaluable

in the future as we look to build on the work done with minority communities and to maintain momentum to ensure that 'Hidden Histories' is not remembered as a tokenistic and unsustainable project.

2. Members backing: The project helped us in our on-going commitment to the council's objectives, which include; equality of opportunity, improving access to services, and to enable citizens to participate and influence our services. It had the backing of members, many of whom attended the opening, several of whom are now much stronger supporters of the museum service as a result of what we achieved.

3. Resources: The grant, awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, for the project was such that we could afford to purchase specialist equipment that would not have been possible within existing budgets. Equipment such as portable tape recorders, a new office computer, specialist software, a touch screen and several new display cases, will have lasting benefits well beyond the life of the initial project.

4. Skills: The museum service now has five, fully trained, staff to carry out oral history interviews. One of the problems with a small museum service, such as the one in Kettering, is the small number of curatorial staff employed to run them. In our case we have only 3 curatorial staff to manage a Museum, Art Gallery, and Tourist Information Centre. Consequently, we rely on museum and gallery attendants, together with a small number of dedicated volunteers to supplement our number. In this project, we made a point of training up 4 attendants, a volunteer and a curator to carry out oral history interviews so that the work could be shared out, and to ensure that we were making the most of our staffing resources.

Apart from these benefits, it is hoped that the exhibition contributed towards changing some people's views of recently settled families and individuals from abroad, into the borough of Kettering. The project was not just about giving people a voice in the community, but was also there to demonstrate and celebrate the rich tapestry of life and diversity that Kettering enjoys. At a time when immigration issues are currently very much in the public eye, largely in a negative capacity, it is hoped that the project went some way towards redressing the balance and highlighting the benefits brought with these arrivals.



Left: Hajera Khatun Shefa, 14 (left) and Momina Akther, 12 (right) attend Bengali Mother Tongue classes. Their teacher, Mahfuza Begum, "likes to teach proper Bengali for children because in this country they are talking all the time Sylheti, which is another language"

'Ocean Views' A Community Photography Project

"Basically, before I never used to like the place, but after all them things they are doing in the Ocean Estate I like it so much. Ocean Estate is just one of the best estates to be in. There's everything in this place. I never want to move away."—Abdul Azim, aged 17

**Liz Braby—Curator
Ragged School Museum, London**

Everyone, like Azim, has their own views about housing estates. Some people live on them, some do not. Some residents will comment on the community spirit in the place. However, outsiders often have their views coloured by newspaper reports of drugs and street crime.

In the summer of 2001, the Ragged School Museum embarked on a community photography project to find out the truth about housing estates from those who live, work and spend their leisure time there. The project focused on the Ocean Estate in Stepney, East London - an area recently identified by the Government as one of the most deprived areas in the country. Its aim was to capture, through interviews and photographs, numerous 'snap shots' of life on the estate, from people's working and home lives to their social activities and favourite places. As their community Museum, we also wanted to show that museums are just as interested in what is happening today, as what was happening fifty or a hundred years ago.

Local organisations were approached to find participants for the project. These organisations ranged from community centres and religious organisations to self-

defence classes, youth groups, sports groups, retirement homes, schools and shops.

Participants were asked to select a place or an activity on the estate. They were then photographed by a professional photographer within this setting and interviewed about their specific choice of image and their general thoughts about the estate. They were encouraged to be honest and were free to say good or bad things about the place. Their photographs and statements were to be displayed in an exhibition that would serve as a forum for their opinions.

Seventy five percent of the people living on the Ocean Estate belong to the Bangladeshi community. Many of the younger generation are able to speak English but their parents and grandparents often cannot. This was a potential problem, as we were keen to be as inclusive as possible. We worked around this issue by asking the centre or group leader to interpret for us. This emphasised the importance of working in partnership with other community organisations in community-based projects.

In some cases, the Bangladeshi women that we interviewed did not want their photograph to be taken as it is not considered acceptable in their culture. The photographer therefore found creative and interesting solutions to enable them to be included. We specifically chose a local Asian photographer for the project because he knew the area well and we felt that he would be understanding of Bangladeshi cultural beliefs.

In several instances we took a photograph of Bangladeshi children in the chosen context, when a woman did not want

to be photographed. (For example, when we interviewed the teacher of a Bengali 'Mother Tongue' class, we pictured a couple of her students). In one case, we photographed just the feet and shadow of a mother and child at a 'Mothers and Toddlers' class. We also took photographs that focused only on an individual's hands and what they were holding.

In all, forty photographs were taken of groups and individuals. Short captions to accompany the photographs were selected from the interviews. All of these were translated into Bengali to ensure accessibility to the exhibition by the local population.

The collection is currently displayed in the temporary exhibition area on the second floor of the Ragged School Museum. The Museum is a listed building and does not have a lift so we had concerns about physical access. As a result, it was decided to present the exhibition in a number of other ways as well. These included a touring exhibition, a publication and a bus campaign.

Firstly, a touring version of the exhibition was launched at the same time as the main exhibition. So far, this has been displayed in the foyer of a library on the edge of the estate, in the waiting room of the estate's hospital and in a meeting room of the local Bangladeshi community centre. These locations were chosen specifically as they are wheelchair accessible. We also believe that they will encourage the exhibition to be seen by people who do not usually go to, or indeed, have never been, to a museum.

Host organisations were supportive and shared our enthusiasm. Timothy Hayes, Director of the London Independent Hospital said, "We are delighted to be putting the exhibition on show. It offers a welcome distraction for our patients waiting for appointments and gives them a real flavour of local community life".

A book has also been produced that includes all the photographs and captions in the exhibition, in both English and Bengali. Again, this is intended to widen access. All participants involved in the exhibition received a copy of this book as a thank you and reminder of taking part in the project. Extracts from the exhibition have also been displayed as posters on Stagecoach buses that run through Mile End - where the Museum is located.

We believe that the collection of photographs and statements demonstrate the wealth of activity that people often do not realise takes place on housing estates, like the Ocean Estate. It shows important aspects of different people's cultures, celebrates diversity, and encourages people

to understand those who are different from themselves.

The exhibition also demonstrates how everyone living in, or using, an area shares a 'common ground'. They see the same houses, walk along the same roads and go to the same shops. Yet it shows how, as individuals, opinions differ considerably and we all see different things as important or special depending upon our experiences.

So what did participants really feel about their estate? What was really noticeable was the really positive view of the Ocean Estate that came out of our discussions with individuals. A minority of people commented on poor living conditions, boredom and crime - "there's stuff if you find it to do, but otherwise there ain't" (Shayne Wellington, 15). However, many individuals focused on the fun and excitement of life on the estate and the activities that take place.

Margaret Heath, 80, fondly remembers her wedding reception in the local pub, "We didn't have a hall like now - we couldn't afford it - so we had a good old knees up in the pub. We had the piano going and everyone was getting up dancing and singing and really enjoyed it. One of my relations got pulled down on the floor and laddered her tights from all the dancing!"

Muthahir Ali, 12, enjoys soccer practice at the sports centre, "I like playing football here cos they take us to lots of places to train and meet other people. My favourite player is Ryan Giggs cos he runs about and does solo goals. I don't think that I play like him but I am trying!"

Kathleen O'Brien's favourite place is the canal, "People don't realise it's here. My nephew came through here last year, and he said, I didn't know it was like this. It's lovely".

In all, the photography project has shown that there is a lot more to our local housing estates than meets the eye. It is often far too easy to stereotype them. Yet the individuals that are highlighted in this exhibition show that every estate is unique and rich in the personal stories and memories of the people that live and go there.

The book, 'Ocean Views', is available from the Ragged School Museum priced at £3 (plus £1 postage and packing)

**The exhibition is online at: www.raggedschoolmuseum.org.uk
A touring version of the exhibition is also available for hire.
Please contact Liz Braby on 020 8980 6405 for details.
The Ragged School Museum
46-50 Copperfield Road,
London E3 4RR**

'Showing Your Mettle in Sheffield'

The relatively short time spent on Museum studies courses, or the new direction of the Museum Association's AMA have been cited as some of the causes. But whatever it may be, there has been a greater desire for more practical, 'hands on' style workshops in recent times. The need has been felt for more training in the areas of object care and identification where curators sometimes feel less than confident. The SHCG has sought to meet this demand through its one-day seminars and through this years ASW (see Bulletin Board for details). Here two delegates report back on the recent metals seminar held in Sheffield...

It was the prospect of attending one of SHCG's renowned seminars that prompted me to leave Beaulieu at 5.30am to arrive at Sheffield's Millennium Galleries for 10am. The 'Show your mettle' seminar aimed to equip delegates with the basics of metal identification and preventative and remedial conservation techniques. As the collection that I work with at the National Motor Museum is predominantly metal, this seemed a perfect opportunity for me to get to grips with identification particularly of plated objects. I was pleased to see how popular the event was, with delegates from all over England, Scotland and Wales.

Sharon Wilson from Tyne & Wear Museums took the metals workshop. She began by introducing us to the types of metals that we would encounter in our collections and the ways in which we would be able to identify them. This included identification through the use of colours, the type of corrosion present and any identification marks used. Sharon went on to explain that you would be more able to produce an environment which will slow down the corrosion process by understanding the way corrosion occurs and the way metals are produced. I was relieved when this was explained without the use of complex chemical structures and in a way that everyone could understand.

Ideal environmental conditions for metals, including relative humidity, storage and display material were then discussed, followed by basic cleaning methods and materials. Hands on identification techniques were then used on some of

Sheffield's Millennium Galleries collection. Attention was then turned to the objects brought in by the delegates (many in an interesting state of corrosion) for further debate on conservation and cleaning.

After lunch, we had a guided tour around the Metalwork Gallery by Clare Starkey. This was a great opportunity to see Sheffield's internationally important collection of metalwork from the 14th century to the present. The use of open display draw units was an interesting use of space and allowed as many objects as possible to be used within the gallery. Interactive screens were used to show manufacturing and design techniques, these proved very popular with the visitors. Equally creative and obviously popular with both children and adults was the opportunity to produce your own hallmark and to identify various marks on some of the objects. Overall the gallery was a striking display and showed just what could be achieved with a lot of planning and money.

Alison Duce continued the theme of the Sheffield Galleries by taking us through the roll of the Designated Challenge Fund Project. She explained how the fund had helped over the last three years in providing new and improved storage facilities and documentation for the collection. As this stage of the Challenge Fund finishes in March, it was hoped that it would be reintroduced in the near future to enable funds to be accessed to complete the project.

Questions and answers completed our day. Despite the long drive, the seminar was well worth attending and I believe all learned a great deal not only from the speakers, but from each other as well.

Lorraine Cornwell

**Curatorial Project Assistant,
National Motor Museum, Beaulieu**

The collection that I work with at the Cheshire Military Museum in Chester contains a large number and variety of metal objects. As might be expected medals, badges and weapons form a high percentage of the total. So when the opportunity came along to learn more about the conservation of such objects, I did not hesitate to book my place on this one-day workshop.

I joined the SHCG while working for National Museums & Galleries on

Merseyside, so I was pleased to be able to join together with former NMGM colleagues for the Train journey to Sheffield. Despite the threat of disruption to services from Industrial action by Railway Workers our journey was without any hitches and we arrived in Sheffield on time.

The programme for the day proved to provide a good balance between theory and practice. Sharon Wilson began by taking us through the essential definitions - 'What is a metal? What properties do metals exhibit? What are the causes of corrosion in metals? Some of these questions took me back to Physics and Metalwork at Secondary School over 25 years ago!

This session was followed by a chance to handle and examine closely some objects from the collection at Sheffield. We had been asked to take along an object from our own collection, and many of those attending received expert advice on to care for objects ranging from a large pulley wheel to a 1930's Toy Train.

Following a very agreeable lunch in the Restaurant on site, we were introduced to the Metalwork Gallery by Clare Starkey of Sheffield City Museums. The Gallery exhibits include the Millennium punch bowl and the Millennium canteen (made in 1997). Good use is made of inter-actives and video to explain the metal working processes carried out in Sheffield.

To complete a very interesting day, Alison Duce, talked about how collection care has been improved in the Sheffield Galleries as a result of the Designation Challenge Fund Project. The main aims of the project have been to enhance storage, improve documentation and improve access to the collections. It seems that regardless of the size of the institution, most museums suffer from similar problems when it comes to storage facilities and the lack of environmental controls.

Of course, what makes most events of this type memorable and worthwhile is the opportunity to meet with other museum professionals, share problems and experiences and catch up with the latest gossip! The 'Show your Mettle' seminar was no exception...and by the way, the object I took along to be identified was a Wartime Blackout shade for car head-lamp.

David Blake—Museum Officer

Cheshire Military Museum
email: david.blake@chester.ac.uk

Object Focus: Patently Obvious?

The Patents Information section of the British Library opened their doors to museum curators in a couple of half-day seminars in February. Their aim was to publicise their services and encourage curators to make better use of patents to research their collections. Stephen van Dulken (author of 'Inventing the 19th Century' and 'Inventing the 20th Century', both available from the British Library) gave a detailed explanation of the complex world of patent numbers (not to mention registered designs and trade marks).

Kitty Ross

Curator of Social History and Costume,
Leeds Museums and Galleries

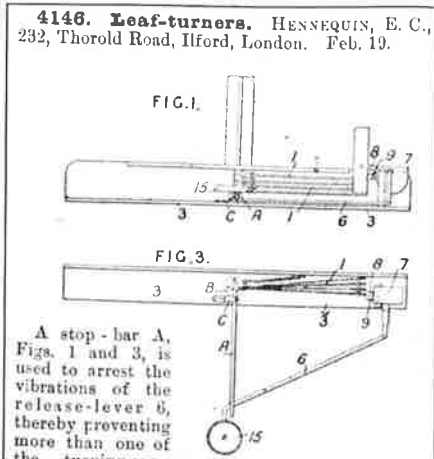
At best, a patent number on a mystery object can be the key that unlocks not only what the item is, but who invented it, when and for what purpose. Just a few days prior to the seminar I had stumbled across a strange device amongst the contents of an old music shop. The only clue on this baffling object was a bone plaque marked:

'PAT. NO. 4146-09 - THE BRITISH PATENTS MANUFACTURING COMPANY, 99 FENCHURCH ST. EC, MADE IN ENGLAND'.

The British Library staff were quickly able to tell me that it was a 'leaf-turner', i.e. an automatic device for turning music pages, patented by one E.C. Hennequin in 1909.

However, many patents are not so straightforward to research. There was no standardised way of marking the patent number on an object. Some items frustratingly are just marked 'PATENTED'. Others may be marked by the patentee's name. Even when a number is marked, it may only be a stock number for the manufacturer. English Patents started in 1617 and the first sequence reached 14,359 by 1852 when the system was reformed and united with the Irish and Scottish systems. These numbers are never found on objects, as they were only allocated when they were indexed and published in the 1850s.

From October 1852, all patents were printed in separately numbered annual sequences until 1915. Unfortunately, the



Leaf-turner patented by EC Hennequin in 1909

year is rarely marked, and a search may involve consulting every year's sequence until it is tracked down. From 1916, the British system began a new numbered sequence beginning with 100,001.

The picture is complicated further by the fact that inventors could make a 'provisional' application, which had to be followed up by a longer 'complete' application before a patent number could be allocated.

A patent number may not of course be British. Most European countries and the USA had their own systems, and an invention had to be patented in every country where it was to be marketed. If a patent has the date of application clearly marked, it probably relates to a US patent. German patents also use the term 'PAT' or 'PATENT'. The initials 'D.R.P' or 'D.R.G.M.' also indicate a German patent.

The British Library is keen to emphasise that they welcome enquiries. Museum collections hold the answer to the question of which patented inventions actually made it out into the real world. The library is planning one further information session, probably in the summer.

The Patents Information web site is at www.bl.uk/patents and gives much useful information and links to other useful databases. Enquiries can be sent through their e-mail at patents-information@bl.uk. There are also several regional Patent information offices (such as at Leeds and Manchester) which are also able to assist with enquiries.

Object Focus:

'Every Object Tells a Story'

Coffee Pots and the Great Exhibition

In June 1954, Wakefield Museum bought a matching coffee-pot and teapot from a Miss Scholey. According to our records, Miss Scholey's mother bought the coffee-pot, teapot and also some Berlin work slippers (donated to the Museum later in 1959) at the Great Exhibition in 1851.

Briony Hudson

Assistant Keeper, Social History, Wakefield Museums and Arts

I had been looking for some time for an object or small group of objects to use in a display about identification, and these seemed to fit the bill. Wakefield Museum has a small case in the foyer that gets a great deal of through traffic. I wanted to use it to give visitors an idea of the amount of information it was possible to get from looking closely at an object - bread and butter stuff for museum curators, but, my experience suggests, a mystery to most visitors. I hoped that demystifying some identification techniques would, at the least, encourage visitors to look closely at the hundreds of objects in our permanent displays to do their own detective work. Another aim was that the display would put pay to the idea the curators are somehow able to pluck detailed information about objects from out of the air!

I labelled the case using pairs of questions and answers. The second question in the pair was always "How do we know?" I was also very straightforward in the information I gave: the answer to how I knew about Britannia metal was "From reading books about Britannia metal, and looking closely at the object!" To emphasise the fact that curators don't know everything (!), I explained the idea that we record information about objects for later curators to use, and that we can search it via a computer database. I included the coffee-pot's MODES record to show the format of the information that we have. Also, by chance, both pots had some old display labels inside them, some typed, some hand-written. So I put these in the case as well to

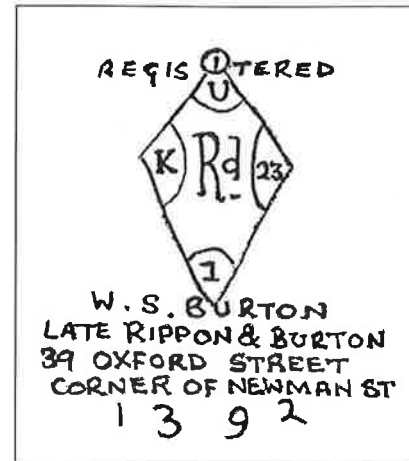


give a sense of the changing museum context that they've been through.

I also included the questions "Would you serve coffee in a pot like this?" and "Do you like it?" The danger was always that the tone would be too patronising, but we had no negative feedback to this effect.

Anyway, back to the objects. Both the coffee-pot and teapot are made from Britannia metal, a material we touched upon at the 'How to identify watchamacallits' seminar last year. Britannia metal was developed in the 1760s, as an alternative to pewter. It is an alloy of primarily tin and antimony. Its appearance is very similar to pewter, and the coffee-pot and teapot had previously been identified as pewter. However, rather than having pewter touchmarks on the base, Britannia metal objects usually have the name of the company and a style number stamped on the bottom.

The objects themselves are also typical. Britannia metal could be rolled out into very thin sheets, pieces cut out of the sheets, pressed into shape and soldered together. This made it ideal for making hollow items, such as coffee-pots. Pewter, on the other hand, is nearly always moulded into shape, and could not be rolled out into thin sheets like its imitator. Even the design of the pots is very typical of the objects made from Britannia metal in the mid-1800s. The leaf and bud on the top of the lids were the modest end of a 'naturalistic' design trend in



Above: The information stamped into the bottom of the coffee-pot. In the Registered Design mark, the K stands for November, the U for 1848, and the 23 for the day. The 1 at the bottom means the first bundle for that day.

Left: Coffee-pot and tea pot exhibited at Wakefield Museum

the mid-century. Of the opposite, most flamboyant end, the judges at the Great Exhibition were highly critical, as being excessively over the top.

Dating the coffee-pot quite closely was made easier because of the Registered Design mark on its base. It shows that the design for the coffee-pot was registered on 23rd November in 1848. Of course, as the coffee-pot was bought from the Great Exhibition, it must have been made by the time that the Exhibition opened in 1851.

The manufacturer's name was stamped on the base: W.S. Burton, late Rippon and Burton, 39 Oxford Street, corner of Newman Street. A quick phone call to Sheffield Museum, the manufacturing centre for Britannia metal items, confirmed that this wasn't a Sheffield firm. The obvious Oxford Street was of course in London, and my A to Z showed that there is a Newman Street running parallel to Tottenham Court Road. I managed to check this out via the Great Exhibition catalogue. We have one volume of the catalogue in Pontefract Museum, bought by the curator at a flea market. Amazingly, it was the one with Burton's entry in it!

William Samuel Burton, 'Inventor and Manufacturer' exhibited in Section III, Class 222 - 'General Hardware, including Locks and Grates.' They even merited an illustration of their 'Nautilus Register-stove' next to their entry in the catalogue.

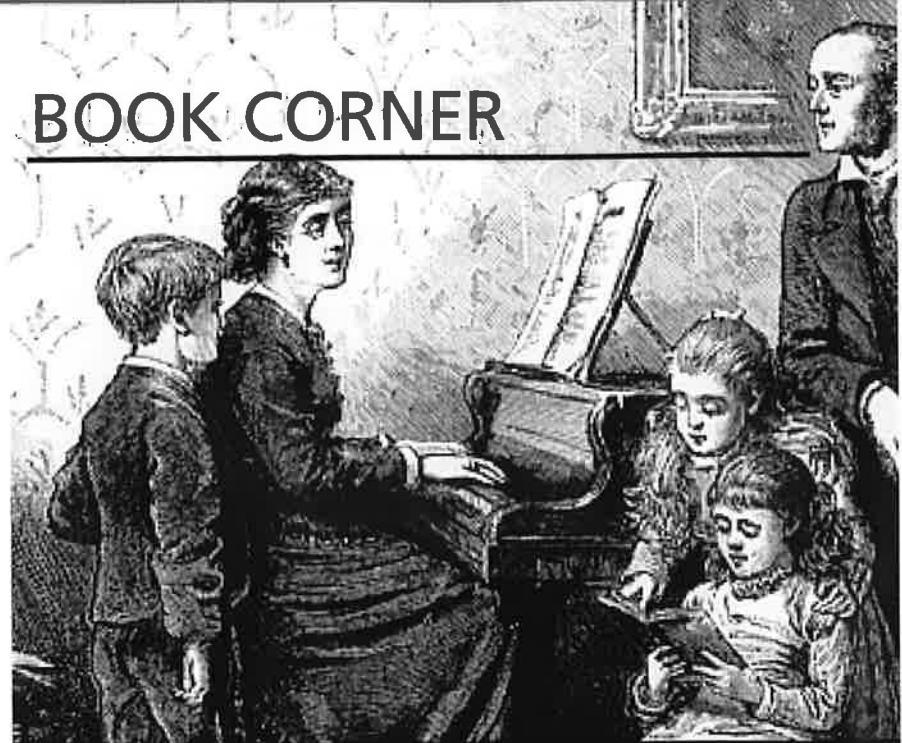
Over 6 million people visited the Great Exhibition, held in the awe-inspiring Crystal Palace. Its phenomenal success spawned a large number of regional exhibitions in the following decades. Wakefield held its own Industrial and Fine Art Exhibition in 1865. I included a photograph of the exhibition building, and one of the prize medallions (awarded to Eliza A. Smith for wax flowers) in the case to bring the story back to Wakefield.

Of course, there were more avenues I could have followed - who was Mrs Scholey? What did she think of the Great Exhibition? Was the coffee pot expensive? I may have been able to raise the questions, but the answers don't lie immediately at hand. Actually, the question that's bugging me, as a non-coffee drinker is - why are coffee pots taller and thinner than teapots? Is it simply to distinguish one from the other so you get the right one in a dark cupboard, or does coffee taste better in a taller pot?

Answers on a postcard please...

Bibliography

Peal, CA 1971
'British Pewter and Britannia Metal'
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Glanville, P (Ed) 1996
'Silver'
(V & A) London



**'What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew':
Fascinating Facts of Daily Life in the Nineteenth Century'**
By Daniel Pool, Published in 1998 by Robinson Publishing Ltd. ISBN 1854878751

I bought this book on a whim in the shop at the Geffrye Museum, simply because it looked like fun. Written by an American as a guide and glossary to accompany nineteenth-century novels, 'What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew' really does contain a wealth of information, both meaty and titbits, about the nineteenth century. The introduction explains that it arose from a need to know something about social and economic history in order fully to understand and appreciate novels, that in themselves were so bound up in their period. Therefore, although it was written for and by students of English literature, there is a great deal in it for the historian of the nineteenth century, and for those for whom it's 'not their period.'

Part One consists of short sections about aspects of English life. 'The Basics' of currency, calendar and measurements, leads on to 'The Public World', which includes how to address your betters, the rules of whist and schools. 'Travel and Transport' touches on carriages ('Please, James, the Coach') rail and mail, while 'The Country' spans life on the farm, fairs and markets, and fox-hunting. 'The Private World' is perhaps the most useful for readers of Austen, with sections on marriage, houses, lighting and 'A Taxonomy of Maids', although she may not have approved of a section overtly titled 'Sex'. Part One ends with 'The Grim World', a more Dickensian section about apprentices, orphans, diseases and the workhouse. No topic runs to more than about 4 pages, and so is very easily digestible. For example, I read the section on coaches and carriages before embarking on some more in depth research for an exhibition, and it certainly was a good introduction. Pool, predictably, intersperses the facts with literary quotations to illustrate

his points, and also makes lots of contemporary comparisons. Going back to carriages, he suggests that the curricle was a young man's coach, rather like a sports car today. It was what the young Dickens bought for himself when he began to make money.

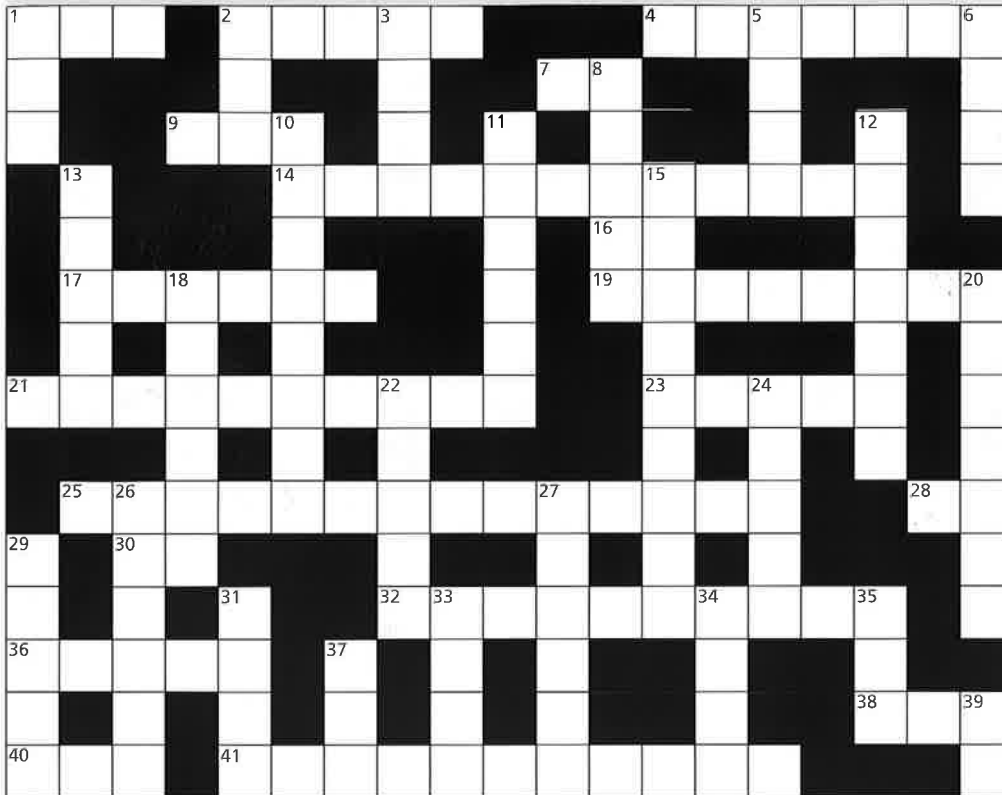
Part Two is a straightforward alphabetical glossary from 'Abigail' - a lady's maid, to 'Your Worship' - the correct form of address to a magistrate. Although you have to be patient with some of the entries, remembering that this was written for an American audience (for example, the entry for assizes begins, 'pronounced with emphasis on the second syllable'), there are some excellent snippets of information. For example, did you know that 'snob' meant someone of no social standing until Thackeray changed its meaning to the current one in his *Book of Snobs* in 1846? Or that 'negus' was a popular drink at balls and dances, named after Colonel Francis Negus who was the first to serve this sugar, water and port concoction?

The whole book is written with a great sense of humour (for example, the definition of 'epergne'; 'a great hideous candlestick like affair'). Although I've had it on my bookcase for over two years, I still haven't read the whole thing. It's definitely a book to dip in and out of rather than read cover to cover. But if, like me, you have a weakness for the minutiae of life, or need to know how to address a bishop, leave a calling card or find out about nineteenth century puddings in a hurry, this is a thoroughly enjoyable book to put on your Christmas list.

Briony Hudson

**Assistant Keeper of Social History,
Wakefield Museums and Arts**

Never a Cross Word...



Across:

- 1 Weapon first used at Ypres 1915 (3)
- 2 Battle beginning 1 July 1916 (5)
- 4 Political extremist (7)
- 7 Periodically silver (2)
- 9 North Vietnamese offensive 1968 (3)
- 14 Surreal Spaniard (8,4)
- 16 Bodyguard formed by Hitler in 1921 (2)
- 17 Writer that sought seaside platform in 1930s mining town (6)
- 19 Greek Seer; voice in decimated country for 10 down (8)
- 21 Accidentally discovered by Alexander Fleming in 1928 (10)
- 23 Opera by Puccini first performed in 1902 (5)
- 25 Gardener with a collection that formed the Ashmolean Museum (4,10)
- 28 Crowd with whom it's hip to be associated (2)
- 30 Classes for bodily improvement (2)
- 32 Country gaining independence from Japan 15 Aug 1945 (5,5)
- 36 Mellow...out of a crisis (5)
- 38 Witticism (3)
- 40 Fishy when gold ore turns out to be caviar (3)
- 41 Burned guitar on stage in 1967 (4,7)

Down:

- 1 We fall back to this in autumn (3)
- 2 Wartime Secret Service (3)
- 3 Plate was stronger (4)
- 5 Anarchic art movement of the 1920s (4)
- 6 Season of fasting in Church year (4)
- 8 Spectre (5)
- 10 English poet with Roman half century (2,6)
- 11 Voyaged on Beagle 1831-1836 (6)
- 12 (Academic slang) affectedly precise (7)
- 13 Wooden O holding vasty fields of France (5)
- 15 Company not kept by Stephen Byers (9)
- 18 Two brothers that left the ground, 17 Dec 1903 (6)
- 20 First orbited the earth in 1957 (7)
- 22 To inwardly digest; the purpose of education (5)
- 24 Classical Indian instrument (5)
- 26 Religious painkiller? (6)
- 27 Planet with day lasting 10 hours 14 minutes (6)
- 29 Tree similar to Birch (5)
- 31 Religious pilgrimage (4)
- 33 Exclamation of pain (4)
- 34 All (4)
- 35 Killer of Cleopatra (3)
- 37 Intention; to point a rifle (3)
- 39 State refusal (2)

COMPILED BY DAVID BROOM

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If you're reading this and you're not a member of SHCG but would like to join please contact: Victoria Emmanuel (Membership Secretary), Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham, B3 3DH. Tel: 0121 3031672. Victoria_Emanuel@Birmingham.gov.uk

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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: 10th Oct 2002

Please send any articles to:

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Tel: 01727 819340.

Email: d.broom@stalbans.gov.uk

Congratulations to Jane, Patricia and Jeanette of Inverness Museum who won our Christmas quiz; as I write a fabulous prize wings its way towards them! If your presents lay neglected, your Christmas dinner ruined and your new-year rendered a wash out due to your fuming and pondering over the woods used to make a wassle bowl, the name of the German festive cake or the title of Cliff Richards' 1982 hit...Then fret no longer...This issue - the answers:

1. Prince Albert
2. Gooseberries
3. Myra in Asia Minor - modern day Turkey
4. Quirinius - Gospel of St Luke
5. Hanukah
6. Sandringham
7. Jacob Marley
8. As dead as a door nail
9. Advent crown
10. Coat hangers
11. River Thames, London
12. Because the Native Americans brought Pilgrim Fathers wild Turkeys at 1st Thanksgiving in 1621
13. 12 on each of the 12 days of Christmas
14. the holly
15. Panetone
16. Stollen
17. banned it
18. St Stephen
19. lentils
20. 6
21. Holiday Inn (song written by Irving Berlin 1942)
22. designer of 1st Christmas card
23. Diwali
24. Mummer's plays
25. football match between British and German troops
26. Coal, bread and a coin
27. Queens College
28. Bay and Rosemary
29. Yule log
30. It was too long because he stuttered
31. Mince meat / mince pies
32. 'Stir up Sunday'
33. Christmas tree from Norway
34. Poinsettia
35. Crackers
36. Peter Pan
37. Great Ormond Street Hospital
38. Serpentine swimming race - cup donated by JM Barrie
39. collection of carols
40. No number given. Only 3 of the gifts are mentioned so 3 wise men are presumed by legend
41. Silent Night
42. Christingle
43. Oh Little Town of Bethlehem
44. 1982
45. Christina Rossetti
46. Holly or Maple
47. Glastonbury thorn
48. JRR Tolkien
49. Testing 1st H bomb
50. Sir Isaac Newton

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