

JUNE 2003

ISSUES



War and Peace?

NO TO ANOTHER
HIROSHIMA
IN IRAQ!

NO TO THE NEW
WORLD ORDER!

ASW Reports
Life Laundry
God-in-the-Bottle

SHOCKNEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

SHCG NEWS will encourage and publish a wide range of views from those connected with history and museums. The NEWS aims to act as a channel for the exchange of information and opinions about current practice and theory in museums.

The views expressed in the newsletter are wide ranging and do not necessarily express the views of the SHCG committee or SHCG, unless otherwise stated.

Articles for the NEWS should be between 500 to 2000 words. Please submit a typed copy of your article along with a copy on disk, saved as a PC word file or richtext format, or you can send it as an Email. Illustrations for articles are always welcome. Original photographs can be returned.

Send all contributions to:
Zelda Baveystock,
Discovery Museum,
Blandford Square,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
Tyne and Wear
NE1 4JA
Tel: 0191 232 6789
Email: zelda.baveystock@
tyne-wear-museums.org.uk

Front Cover:
Banner of the Worker Communist
Party of Iraq at the London
anti war demonstration,
15 February 2003.

Contents photo:
Pig at the medieval farm at
Bede's World, Jarrow.

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

**DEADLINE FOR
NEXT ISSUE:
30 SEPTEMBER 2003**

Notes for Editorial:
1: Dylan, 'Gates of Eden' 1965.
2: c/f Orwell, '1984' (1949)
1988 p147.

Of War and Peace the truth just shifts...or so wrote Bob Dylan in 1965¹. This seems just as true in 2003, though it was a year that bore more of the hallmarks of 1984. The Orwellian resonance was loud during this second Gulf War: 'Oceania is at war with Eastasia, Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia...Britain has always been at war with Iraq...?'² Doublethink? Did the truth continue to shift, or was it an early casualty of war?

How will Museums faithfully chart this period of history? The soldier's story, and that of the peace protestor? What objects, memories or sounds will capture this event? The wounded child, the thousands of lives lost, and the political systems that precision bombing reduced to rubble.

And what of the local impact? The school children that blocked the roads in central London, the millions that marched in protest, and the governments that largely ignored them. What also, for the Museums community, of the Mesopotamian objects looted from the Baghdad Museum, objects that chart the birth of civilisation? What is the role of the social historian in sifting out the fact from the fantasy, the truth from the myth and faithfully recording the human story?

The human story is the central question of Steph Mastoris' article 'In Small Things Remembered' which looks at the power of seemingly incidental objects to make strong personal links with the past, across the gulf of bereavement and separation. Objects, as he argues, acting as points of departure rather than fixed destinations in the user's imagination. The human story, too, reflects the desire for connection with the other. Objects, constructed to reflect the devotional and religious beliefs of the maker, can be quite outside official and organised religion. In this issue Crispin Paine considers God-in-the-bottle.

My story, also, is now changing, and this is the last SHCG News that I shall edit, as I am moving on to other things and retiring from the committee after this is published. I would just like to give my thanks to everyone that has worked with me, the other committee members and everyone that has written articles. Some of you I have met, in the course of events, or at the ASW. Others have been a voice at the end of the telephone, or fingers at the end of an email, but it has been good to be in contact with so many from the profession, and thank you to you all for your contributions.

I hope this Newsletter has managed to inspire, offer ideas, or even frustrate. If so it will have done its job...social history is a debate that needs continual input and discussion. I hope that this publication will continue to be used by the profession to share ideas, build new pathways, and if necessary court controversy. And so we come full circle. Within the shifting sands of truth, museums exist to tell the human story. This was captured in the slogan of the first museum I worked in: 'About Human Beings, About Being Human...'

DAVID BROOM—EDITOR 2000-2003
davidbroom66@hotmail.com

**03
BULLETIN
BOARD**

**05
ASW 2002**



**Delegates'
Reports**

**08
THEORY
AND
PRACTICE**

**In Small Things
Remembered
Life Laundry,
Bereavement and
Significant
Artefacts for
Reminiscence**

**Digitisation
in Cumbria**

11

OBJECT
FOCUS

God-in-the-Bottle

Victorian
InnovationsAt the Command
'Gas' Stop
Breathing...

14

BOOK
CORNERRaise the Banners
High: The City of
Edinburgh's Banner
Collection

15

SHCG
COMMITTEE
2003

SHCG MATTERS

Annual Study Weekend 2003

'Town and Country'

Thursday 10th–Saturday 12th
July 2003, Manchester

The 2003 annual study weekend will look at how museums treat contemporary rural and urban issues.

There will be case studies examining the diverse city, regional identity and the changing face of the modern countryside.

Visits to museums and heritage sites in and around Manchester.

Total Conference Fee: around £200 or less.

For further information about the annual study weekend
email: annualstudyweekend@shcg.org.uk

SHCG offers two free places to SHCG members who have never attended an Annual Study Weekend before. To apply, please include a letter stating why you'd benefit from a free place to the SHCG Secretary, Zelda Baveystock, Discovery Museum, Blandford Square, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne & Wear NE1 4JA. Those awarded free places will be asked to write a review of the Weekend for SHCG News.



SHCG MATTERS

firstBASE

firstBASE the SHCG's Web based information resource continues to go from strength-to-strength. firstBase can be accessed through the SHCG web-site: www.shcg.org.uk

Please Contribute...

The editorial team is keen to hear from anyone in the profession who could contribute information to the project. If you've just completed an exhibition, catalogue, or book on a relevant theme or type of artefact, then please share your knowledge with your fellow museum workers. If you curate a collection of national importance this is a great opportunity to make its existence and importance more widely known. The team is particularly keen to include collections of film, photography and oral history.

For more information email general enquiries at: firstBase@shcg.org.uk

FORTHCOMING SEMINAR

'Ethics for Social Historians'

Friday 12th September 2003.
The Charity Centre, Stephenson Way, London.

Organised by the Museums Association
and the SHCG. Entry is Free and includes refreshments and lunch.

Should there be additional ethical guidelines for Social History curators?

Or does the Museums Association Code of Ethics provide all the advice that you need?

This one-day seminar will provide a chance to consider the ethical dimension of your daily work. Through case studies and small-group discussion, take some time to think about the issues involved in all aspects of Social History curatorship, from contemporary collecting and

working with communities to reminiscence and oral history.

Book now by contacting:
Kate Dunk,
Professional Development and
Ethics Administrator,
Museums Association,
24 Calvin Street, London, E1 6NW
Tel: 020 7426 6955
Email: katedunk@museumsassociation.org

Any other enquiries? Contact Briony Hudson,
SHCG Seminars organiser on 020 7572 2211 or bhudson@rpsgb.org.uk

Call for Medical Material

The Art Gallery and Museum at the Royal Pump Rooms, Leamington Spa is looking for Medical equipment, books and ephemera related to Spa treatments, physiotherapy and hydrotherapy. They would particularly like to hear from museums wishing to dispose of such items, but also from museums with comparable collections that may be able to help us identify our existing material.

Please contact:

Nicky Tibbitts,
Curatorial Officer
(Social History),
Tel: 01926 742703
Email: ntibbitts@warwickdc.gov.uk

British Optical Museum - new shire book on spectacles

Those who enjoyed Neil Handley's book review of Shire Album 227: 'Spectacles, Lorgnettes and Monocles' (SHCG News 49) will be pleased to know that a second edition of the book has now been published...

Neil, Curator at the British Optical Museum, London, has written to say that the second edition, was published in October 2002.

It contains revisions by Ronald MacGregor and a completely new set of colour illustrations drawn, with one exception, from important private collections. The book includes one other highly significant addition: an important family tree style diagram,

developed in conjunction with the British Optical Association Museum in 1999. This details both a chronology, and the correct English terminology for spectacles.

'Spectacles, Lorgnettes and Monocles'

Davidson, D.C. and MacGregor, R.J.S., 2002.
2nd ed,
Shire Publications Ltd,
Princes Risborough.
ISBN 0 7478 0545 8.
(www.shirebooks.co.uk)



ASW 2002: Delegates' Reports



Above: Making a 'Proggy Mat', practical workshop at Sunderland Museum.

Top: The Roman bath house at Segedunum in the shadow of the cranes of Swan-Hunters shipyard.

I spent a beautiful few days in Newcastle with the SHCG in July. It was my first SHCG event - the annual study weekend, which I was fortunate to get a free place on. I set out with slight trepidation from Bristol, trying to imagine exactly what it would be like, whom I would meet and how we would all get along...

Sarah Riddle

**Assistant Collection Officer (History),
Bristol Industrial Museum**

The first day started at the Laing Art Gallery with addresses from the keynote speakers, Stuart Davies of Resource and Penny Wilkinson of NEMLAC. They had very interesting things to say - from the origins of the SHCG (Regional Studies Group) and how social history curators have a role in setting today's agenda, and the transition of AMCs to cross domain organisations. Two speakers, Barry Mead and Ian Chappell, spoke of their progress with HLF bids for new developments, explaining the pitfalls and perils, but also ways around these. It was

especially heartening to realise that many of the delegates to the weekend suffered from similar financial and organisational constraints, which we all share.

The evening trek from Castle Leazes (student halls of residence, known as 'Castle Sleazes' to the student population) to the Discovery Museum, was that of excitement and (almost) getting lost around St James Park. Once we had arrived for our evening viewing of the newly developed Newcastle Galleries, we were addressed by Alec Coles and provided with wine, which was very welcoming. The new galleries are similar to Great City in style being cross-disciplinary in approach. They are effectively a prelude to the existing Great City galleries telling the earlier story of the development of the city and the lives of its people. The evening ended with dinner at a Persian restaurant and seemingly never ending supplies of food and wine. A small group of us attempted to find a cash machine after the meal, which entailed being propositioned and finding innovative ways to return to Castle Leazes. This involved crossing a dimly lit park full of cow poo, whilst trying

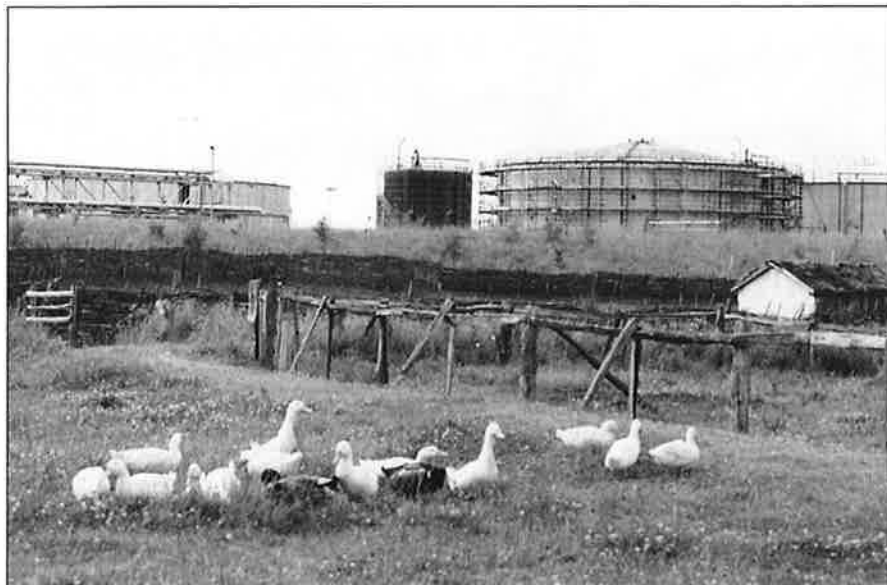


to catch up with the rest of the group and following the retreating figure of Steph Mastoris. And of course discovering the location of a cash point en route.

After a huge breakfast where Stephen Lowy and Neil Ballantyne tried their best to eat as much as was physically impossible we were taken by coach to one of Tyne & Wear's recent museum developments, Segendunum at Walls End. The first session we attended was led by Steph Mastoris, who explained the development of the firstBASE website and how we could all contribute to it. Then we participated in an archaeological handling session with Alex Croom. It was great fun and good experience to look at the archaeological objects.

Throughout the morning I had imagined I could hear a dull 'thud, thud' sound and thought it might be the air conditioning, but after a while I became used to the noise and paid it no more attention. Then we listened to talks by Antonia Lovelace and Elizabeth Mullineaux. Antonia spoke of the projects she had been involved in with communities in Leeds and the difficulties of not having a museum to work in. Elizabeth told of the digitisation project that she was managing; presenting her findings in a frank and practical way.

We were given a short time to look at the galleries before going on a tour of the archaeological site. One interactive in the shipping gallery was enough to give me nightmares of maths classes at school. Whilst walking around the fort site with Bill Griffiths the 'thud' noise became more apparent and explained by the nearby Swan Hunter shipyard constructing a new dry dock. It was so loud that you could feel the impact from the ground and hear the noise echo in the superb bathhouse



Above: SHCG members in serious contemplation the monastic life at Bede's World. The Medieval farm at Bede's World stands adjacent to the modern industry of Jarrow.

Opposite: Archaeology for Social historians. Alex Croom's session looked at identification of Roman material, Steph Mastoris demonstrates firstBASE the SHCG's web resource.

reconstructed on the site. The building quite literally appeared to shake.

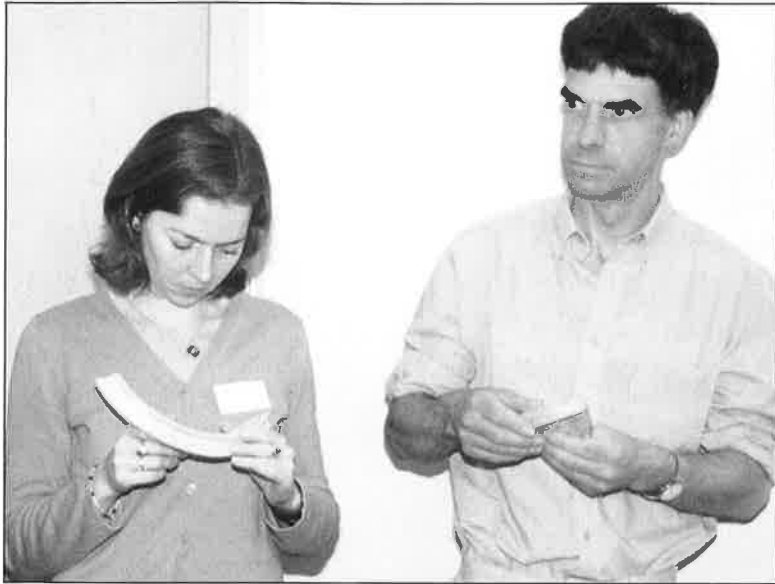
Then we were off again on our coach going south across or rather under the Tyne to Jarrow to Bede's World. Allowed to roam free (after a short introduction from curator Laura Sole) we inspected what the Museum had to offer; galleries, dressing up opportunities and an early medieval farmstead to explore, complete with pigs, geese, a fish pond and three Anglo-Saxon buildings. It seemed quite a stark area, surrounded by industrial estates. After our fresh air it was time to return to Castle Leazes and prepare for the annual dinner.

We had previously experienced warm and sunny weather, but when the time came for us to walk to the Tapas Bar it had begun to rain quite heavily. So the less brave (or perhaps the more sensible) decided to call for taxis. After a taxi mix up and a wet walk for some we assembled in the restaurant, where again we were well supplied with a constant stream of food, until we could eat no more. Then there were various plans to visit the BALTIC on its opening night - we were to set off in groups to a bar on the Quayside before crossing the new bridge to Gateshead to join the queue. At least this was the plan... after various attempts by different groups to get into bars with varying degrees of success some of us queued to get into the BALTIC. It was a very chilly night to be queuing past midnight to get into an Art Gallery. After some time spent waiting we were admitted into the building. I did not realise then that Briony Hudson's aim in life is to climb to the top of every (very tall) building then gradually make her way down (I know it does make sense, but following her up there was exhausting). I think my favourite part of the BALTIC was the room filled with gongs - my abiding memory is of Fiona Ure

hitting one gong with some gusto and then one of the attendants rushing to reprimand us. But then again watching the video was also enjoyable mostly, (philistine that I am) because after a long day and lots of walking and standing, I got to sit down. Again it was an unusual route back to Castle Leazes taking in some of the less salubrious parts of the city centre, armed with bread rolls (obtained by the BALTIC).

On the final day all of the group were very tired. We sat quietly on our coach to Sunderland to visit the Museum and Winter Gardens. There we were addressed by Caroline Imlah, Caroline Rendell and Joanne Cunningham with regard to display, interpretation and care of textiles. We even got to try our hands at making a proggy mat. The AGM passed swiftly and smoothly and then we were on our way to Beamish. We were welcomed by Hannah Gould and shown around the stores by Rosemarie Allan and the joint regional store by Jonathan Old. This completed our programme of events at the annual study weekend.

So the annual study weekend...I think that we all proved that we were historians at heart, not geographers (judging from the amounts of time spent returning 'home' from across the city). We all enjoyed the sumptuous amounts of food and the visits and talks from interesting speakers. And I am looking forward to the next SHCG annual study weekend. Finally many thanks to our kind hosts in Newcastle for a most instructive, exhausting and wonderful weekend.



As a new Social History Curators Group recruit I was thrilled to find that I'd been awarded a free place on the 2002 Social History Curators Group Annual Study Weekend. I had really enjoyed 'Show Your Mettle', the SHCG training day that I had attended earlier in the year and I expected 'Object Lessons' to provide more useful training in object care...

Georgina Young

**Museums Collections Assistant,
Warwickshire Museums**

It turned out that I had underestimated 'Object Lessons', it did provide great sessions on caring for and identifying objects, but it also sought to debate and explore the role of objects within wider agendas.

Day one focussed on two of the biggest issues affecting museums at the moment: Renaissance in the Regions and cross-sectoral partnerships. Stuart Davies, Director of Strategy and Planning at Re:source illuminated the genesis of Renaissance in the Regions (and the vital role of SHCG!) in the first session of the conference. His positive and honest approach to the future and the role of social history curators within it sparked a lively exchange of ideas and got the weekend off to a flying start.

The rest of the day was devoted to cross-sectoral working. Penny Wilkinson provided a potted history of NEMLAC, the first single regional agency to be set up, and stressed its strengths in terms of added value. Perhaps the best argument for SRA's and partnership working was put forward by Barry Mead. His frank and funny summary of progress on the Experience Northumberland at Woodhorn project (an integrated archives, records, local studies and museum service for Northumberland) showed that cross-sectoral

working could provide real benefits for objects and communities, but not without vision, hard work and a sense of humour! Ian Chappell also helped to show how the theory could be put into practice by describing how Portsmouth Museums and Records Service has worked as a joint service since 1994 and sharing some exiting plans for a joint collections centre.

Day two took the delegates a step closer towards a wide range of objects, many outside the traditional boundaries of social history. Dynamic databases, web development and online resources were first on the agenda. There was an impressive demonstration of FirstBASE, the SHCG's own web resource, by Steph Mastoris and a practical guide to digitisation projects by Elizabeth Mullineaux of Cumbria County Council. Great sessions on using ethnographic collections in inventive and engaging ways from Antonia Lovelace and hands on identification of Roman archaeological material from Alex Croom followed.

The new Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens provided a stunning and stimulating backdrop for day three. I really enjoyed looking around the 'Textile Traditions' gallery - the different levels of interpretation worked brilliantly and I loved the touchy feely toys (created by the museums own quilting group!) that illustrated the five themes arranged around the edge of the circular space.

There were many beautiful objects alongside oral history booths where local people talked about their experiences of making and using textiles and space devoted to proggy mat making and gansey jumpers that really brought a sense of local textile skills and traditions to the gallery.

The level of thought that had gone into putting the objects on display was evident

and it was fascinating to hear Caroline Imlah, Keeper of History at Tyne and Wear Museums, and Caroline Rendell, Textiles Conservator, talk about the process of developing the gallery and the reasoning behind the decisions that they took on how to display challenging and complex objects.

Objects were important in 'Textile Traditions', but people were at the heart of the displays - a central activity space allowed the objects and ideas on display in the gallery to be explored and expanded by amazing activities within it. Jo Cunningham, Education Officer for Tyne and Wear Museums, talked through the inventive collaborative projects that have been developed around and within the gallery.

Overall, the combination of the visit and the talks worked brilliantly and the day just got better with a visit to Beamish North of England Open Air Museum - an endlessly fascinating place!

Rosemary Allan of Beamish took us behind the scenes to see the impressive new social history stores and computer search facilities in the Regional Resource Centre. It was a treat to be able to see the amazing things in store and to find great ways into the Beamish collection.

Joined by Jonathan Old of Tyne and Wear Museums we went on to investigate the Regional Museum Store - a huge treasure trove of large industrial, maritime, transport and agricultural objects from the collections of both Beamish and Tyne and Wear Museums. Funded by the Designation Challenge Fund the services have worked in partnership to find a new way of storing large objects - arranging them in a visually pleasing way within a purpose built space.

'Object Lessons' was much more than I expected: it gave me the chance to engage in debate about current issues, to gain hands on collections advice, to see some excellent museums and, certainly, to enjoy myself. I can't wait until next year!



In Small Things Remembered

Life laundry, bereavement, and significant artefacts for reminiscence

Why are some museum artefacts better to use for reminiscence than others? Some recent personal events and television programmes have made me ponder this and as a result I have acquired a strengthened belief that it is in the small things of everyday life that the greatest power to evoke meaningful memories resides...

Steph Mastoris
Curator, Snibston Discovery Park

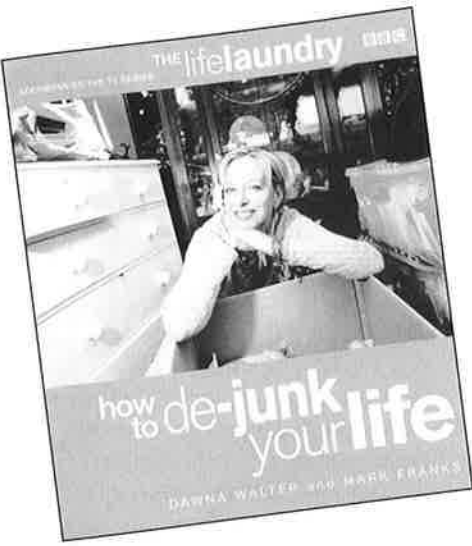
For many reminiscence workers historic artefacts are a key resource. An old tool or ornament or piece of domestic equipment can provide a useful illustrative focus for discussion on a certain topic or an imaginative spur to tangential subjects. At their most obvious level these objects provide a welcome tactile experience for those reminiscing, especially if these people are institutionalised and divorced from daily

contact with the weight, texture and density of everyday things. For the museum curator who frequently makes these artefacts available for reminiscence sessions, observing the powerful emotions often stimulated by the most mundane of items is a wonderful proof of the old maxim that their collections are points of departure rather than fixed destinations in the user's imagination.

The current vogue of undertaking a life laundry has been popularised by a recent series of television programmes and an accompanying book (D. Walter & M. Franks, 'The Life Laundry, how to de-junk your life', BBC 2002). The key aim is to help people rationalise their possessions which have overwhelmed their houses and in the television programme this is carried out over a weekend by a team of experts who are really very ruthless at urging people to "let go" of their clutter. A central maxim of life laundryism is, "use it or lose it" and viewers

witnessed many of the programmes' participants tearfully accepting the advice of the experts to dispose of some really personal items on the basis of their (current) lack of utility. Now, no one would argue that irrational clutter and being overwhelmed by one's possessions are healthy traits. But the underlying message from 'Life Laundry' is that using non-current artefacts to contemplate the past is not healthy. What really matters is the here and now and a more efficient and tidy future stripped bare of irrelevant artefacts. Such thinking is almost a return to the idea that reminiscing is a negative activity, a view that was widely current before Robert Butler's seminal research in the 1960s in support of the benefits of reminiscence by the elderly.

At about the same time as 'Life Laundry' was screened, my mother died. An inveterate hoarder, she left me a rambling family home to clear of items, photographs



Left: Clutter in need of Life Laundry, or small things remembered?

and documents stretching back at least four generations. Almost as soon as I began this mammoth task I became aware that I was practising hands-on reminiscence upon myself as I sifted through what to anyone else would seem unwanted and sometimes incomplete clutter. Two key points emerged as the clearing progressed. The first was how events and people long forgotten were suddenly and clearly brought back into my consciousness by a small toy, ornament or item of clothing found at the back of a drawer. The second was how these rekindled memories allowed me to identify the purpose of the most miscellaneous and sometimes incomplete artefacts.

Although I have never really doubted the power of artefacts to awaken memories, I was astounded at the potency of such mundane house clutter to stimulate really meaningful reminiscences in me, who only has around forty-five years' worth of life experience. Again, I seemed to be re-learning the lesson that in reminiscence, the significance of an artefact depends less on its value, rarity or popularity and more on its role within personal experience and life history. Incidentally the same is true of music for reminiscence. What we listen to now out of choice and taste is rarely the most significant music in our lives. That often comprises trite jingles or kitsch pop songs played at the many emotional moments during our childhood, adolescence and courtship.

My experience of clearing my mother's home of its clutter provided me with a further gripe with 'Life Laundry'. It denies the importance of the small things remembered in favour of those items that

are valuable, stylish and useful. This, in turn, has helped me clarify why some items used in reminiscence sessions are consistently more popular than others. Currently a flat iron, a whipping top or a dolly-peg, is guaranteed to evoke strong reactions in anyone over the age of seventy. Such emotion arises from the frequency with which these items were used repeatedly in the past, often when the reminiscers were still children. The wide currency of these artefacts is also an important factor. Play, keeping clean and looking smart are pretty widespread motivations within our society and so artefacts associated with these activities are easily recognised by people from many backgrounds. Finally, the ease with which many of these objects can be handled by even the frail elderly provides them with physical accessibility. The shape of all the three items just mentioned is distinctive and highly tactile and as they are very "low tech" items requiring little else to make them work their function can be easily recalled.

The final characteristic of these highly significant artefacts for reminiscence work is their difference from today's experience. Reminiscence is about the activation of living memory, and so key artefacts for this need to be young enough to be remembered and not seem like redundant antiques, and yet old enough so as not to be viewed as contemporary and mundane items. Ironically it is not just the practitioners of life laundry that despise such mundane items. Museum curators frequently complain about how ubiquitous and unexciting such artefacts are. However, it is the way in which reminiscence celebrates the ordinary that is the reason why such work is fundamental to understanding the populist significance of such artefacts. Many curators who espouse the cause of people-centred museums would do well to use regular reminiscence sessions as one way of testing the relevance of their collections to the communities their institutions serve. The small things remembered provide the greatest meaning for curator and reminiscer alike.

Digitisation The Cumbrian Experience

One of the papers given at the ASW was by Elizabeth Mullineaux and concerned the digitisation of photographic images from Cumbria.

Elizabeth Mullineaux, 12 July 2002

The Cumbrian Digitisation Project is called 'The English Lake District - A Living Landscape'. The project aims to digitise three thousand images from Cumbria County Council's Local Studies Libraries and Record Offices. These images are then to be made accessible on the internet via a purpose built website, along with forty minutes of digitised audio material.

The funding has been provided by the New Opportunities Fund (NOF), which allocates lottery money to education, health and environment related projects. Our project is one of many NOF Digi projects which aim to extend access to educational material to a wider, and hopefully more

diverse audience. The project has received roughly £90,000 funding from NOF, and £30,000 from Cumbria County Council. A Digitisation Assistant and Project Co-ordinator do all the digitisation work in-house.

The basic piece of equipment being used is a digital camera - a Fuji Finepix S1 Pro. It has so far produced excellent images with a minimum of problems. The camera does not expose the original image to the same intensity of light and heat as a scanner would. The camera also copes with originals of various sizes, rather than being confined to the A4 or A3 scanner size. Most importantly, the digital camera takes images instantly, with only a few seconds of download time if working directly onto the PC. The computer specification for the project had to supply fast machines with large amounts of RAM to enable the images to be manipulated easily. (To this end the machines are 1.4Ghz with 512 DDR).



Elizabeth Mullineaux demonstrates the Excel database for the Cumbrian digitisation project.

Large monitors with flat screens to enable image quality to be adequately assessed. A large hard drive was not required as the data is stored directly onto a departmental server and backed up onto tape.

Although the camera is the main tool, there is also a flat bed scanner for scanning glass plate negatives and lantern slides. This is an A4 Epson Perfection 2450. A pair of Bowen's studio lights supplies the flash lighting for the digital and the 35mm cameras. The cameras are mounted on a Kaiser stand on the workbench, and the lights are arranged on either side, casting a flash across the original.

The 35mm camera is a Nikon F65, with a Sigma 50mm Macro Lens. A photograph of every image is taken on 35mm film as a further method of preservation.

There are many important factors to be taken into consideration when choosing an area in which to undertake the project, such as space, lighting, and security against possible theft or flooding. The project is housed within the Carlisle Local Studies collection itself. The area is cool and secure, and there is a locked cabinet in which valuable equipment and archives are stored.

There is an absence of natural light, which means that once the overhead fluorescent lights are turned off, the settings on the equipment remain fairly standard.

The images are selected for digitisation subject to their content (e.g. - are they interesting?) and their status regarding copyright. Modern images produced by a source other than Cumbria County Council are generally avoided as these cannot be mounted on the web without permission. Once the images are selected, reference numbers are allocated if the image does not already have one.

The equipment is then set up, with the image being laid on the Kaiser stand and a light meter being used to set the correct flash on the studio lights. Any plastic or melanex sleeves are removed from the image to prevent unnecessary reflection. From the PC, the camera settings are checked (such as using the 'fluorescent one' setting to compensate for fluorescent light in the room), the picture is taken remotely, and is saved directly into the appropriate folder.

After about 50 have been taken, the cameras are swapped over and the 35mm camera is installed. The process is repeated

(without the PC), changing the light settings to suit the changed format. The images are photographed and the order in which they are taken is recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. This can then be printed out and given to the appropriate librarian or archivist, along with the developed negatives, as a finding aid.

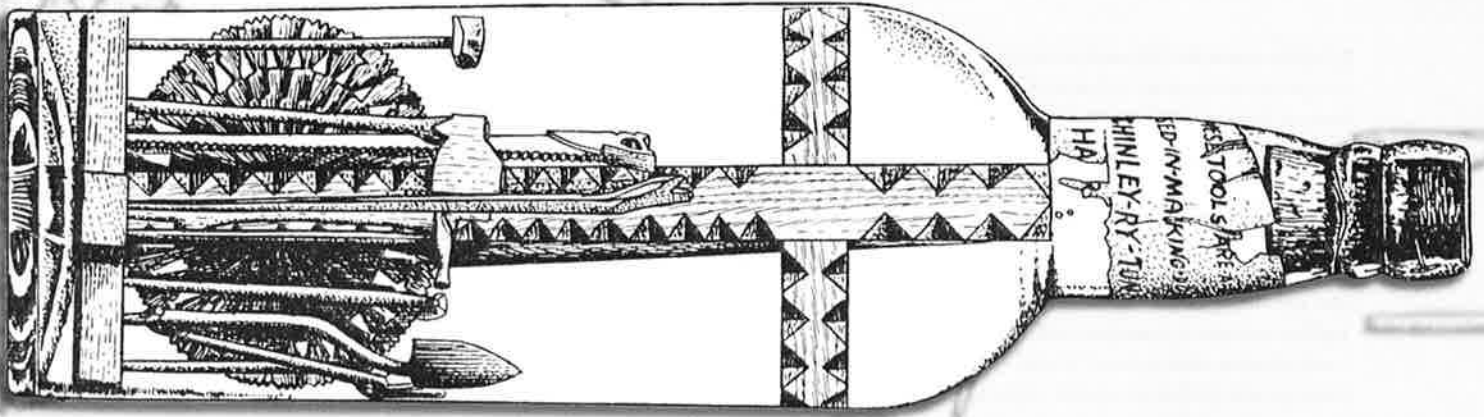
The resulting digital images from the camera are saved in two different formats. The first is the original uncropped image saved as a Tiff file. The Tiff files are very big - about 10MB (5 floppy disks worth of information), and so is unwieldy and take quite some time to open and manipulate.

The second image is a Jpeg file, and these are created in batches. Folders of Tiff's are selected and compressed into Jpegs, which are then cropped to provide a pleasing image with minimal rough edges or expanses of sky. The Jpeg will be the image used on the website, and will also be available through the database for internal use by Cumbria County Council.

The database has been built in-house with some consultation with the website designer. It is needed to help to organise the images into a usable system, and to record the metadata. Metadata is merely information about each image, and various standards are being introduced. The Dublin Core standards were used when developing this database, which outline 16 fields that ought to be used to describe digital material. This means that the database can be used for in-house image retrieval, but as it complies with the standards for putting data onto the internet, it can be used for driving the website. There is a subject drop down box available for each record which can contain as many or as few relevant subject terms as the image requires.

Finally, an external designer is developing the website. Searching will be available via subject terms, keywords, place names and date. The results of searches will be displayed with thumbnails that can be clicked to view the image page. This will contain the image at about 500 pixels high, plus the description, date and possibly other information plucked from the database.

This website will in certain respects be a short-term outcome of the project - with Cumbria County Council being committed to maintaining the website for a minimum of three years. However the project will also produce a large image database for in-house use, has digitised a significant number of images for long term preservation, and has furnished the Council with both the equipment and the expertise for digitisation to continue into the future.



Early example from the 1880s, showing mining tools and cross.

Object Focus:

God in the Bottle

This splendid name was invented, so they claim, by John Gall and Rosemary Allen of Beamish.

It describes a crucifixion scene - often the cross together with all the instruments of the Passion, including ladder, hammer, nails, dice etc etc - modelled inside a bottle, just like the better-known ships in bottles.

Examples seem to be found in many museums, and the purpose of this note is to ask for information. Do you know of any? At present it seems that they are found particularly in the north: Beamish has eight, and John and Rosemary themselves have over a dozen. But this may simply reflect the fact that folk-art collectors are more common up there - my own two examples came from a carboot at Southsea and an antique shop in Hastings.

There seem to be two main types. One is a crucifixion scene, modelled out of wood, more or less elaborate. The other - presumably derivative - is modelled out of pith, and consists of a simple cross in the centre of a 'bunch' of flowers.

When is the earliest British example? Most of them seem to date from the 1920s and '30s, many are probably more recent. Beamish has one made by an Italian ice-cream salesman, born in 1893, who came to the North East aged 18. The Museum has recorded an interview with him.

So far I've found virtually nothing published on the subject in this country - again, I should be grateful for information.

The exception (as so often) is by Peter Brears. In his 1989 'North Country Folk Art' Peter illustrates an example from Ireland that includes Masonic symbols, and a remarkable one dateable to the late 1880s. This includes, beside the usual cross, a navy's tools, and bears the label 'These tools are a replica of those used in making Dore and Chinley R(ailway) Tunnel', which is on the Sheffield-Manchester line. Peter suggests, very reasonably, that it was made by an Irish navvy.

However, the inclusion of working tools perhaps links it to an earlier tradition of models-in-bottles. These are mining scenes, and achieve astonishing technical and artistic skill. They tend to be in large square bottles, and show three or four levels of a mine in the greatest detail. Known as 'Geduldfaschen' (Patience bottles), they are found all over the mining areas of central Europe. The earliest known example dates from the late 17th century and is in the museum at Waldenburg, near Chemnitz.

By some extraordinary adventure, the second oldest known - and perhaps the most remarkable - is in Snowhill Manor, Broadway, Worcestershire. It was made in 1719 by Mathew Buchinger. It comes with

its own box, with an inscription 'GENTLEMEN AND LADIES, Here is to be seen contained in a small glass a wonderful sight of miners drawing up with an engine at a Mill the like of which was never seen before'. It has only two levels: on the lowest miners dig the ore, on the next level up is a wheel used to draw the ore up, and a man sharpening a pole with an axe. Born without hands or feet, and just 29 inches tall, Buchinger was an accomplished calligrapher, musician, juggler, artist and conjuror.

The story of models-in-bottles seems to go something like this. Once clear glass bottles became available in the early 18th century, miners in central Europe began to use them to make models of their mines. To these were soon added crucifixion scenes, closely similar to those seen in Catholic churches in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The earliest known of these dates from 1736, and is in the Bavarian National Museum.

The earliest known ship-in-a-bottle was made in 1784, and is now in the Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte in Lübeck. The Rotterdam Maritime Museum has a Dutch one of 1795. They seem to have become common from the mid-nineteenth century, when no doubt empty bottles were common below decks.

From its central European heartland, the craft seems to have spread throughout Europe, helped no doubt by the invention in 1789 of a cheap way of manufacturing glass from soda and lime. Peter Brears records (though without references - his notes are now at Beamish) that 'In 1860 Swedish craftsmen such as Edvin Johansson were also producing crucifixion tableaux in bottles...In Ireland a similar tradition was established about this time'. I have no doubt that they are still being made in many parts of the continent - I recently saw an elaborate one made in the 1990s by Romanian monks.

The craft flourished in America. Sue Jones of Indiana has posted pictures and descriptions of her collection of over 350 models-in-bottles on her website. From the three traditional European subjects - mining scenes, crucifixion scenes and ships - the Americans have elaborated a huge range of subject matter, from saloon-bar scenes to wishing wells via Maryland State

Penitentiary. These have earned their American name of 'whimsey bottles'.

The most famous American model-in-a-bottle maker was the itinerant worker and hobo Carl Worner, who seems to have moved from near Frankfurt to the US around 1890.

I should be very grateful for any information anyone can offer. I should particularly like to know of any dated or provenance examples, and any unusual ones. Is anyone in Britain still making them? They are elsewhere, for globalisation has finally hit God-in-the-bottle. As well as Jewish ones, Sue Jones lists a Thai bottle with 'shrine and household goddess'.

Crispin Paine - Museum Consultant
crispin@crispinpaine.freemove.co.uk

Resources:

Brears, Peter. 1989.
 'North Country Folk Art.'
 Edinburgh: John Donald.

Fitz, Otto and Huber, Peter. 1995.
 'Bergmännische Geduldflaschen.
 Vienna: Österreichisches Museum für
 Volkskunde.'

Available from the museum for
 11,60 Euro plus P&P.

'Geduldflaschen.'

The website of Peter Huber,
 an Austrian geologist,
 mining historian and collector.
<http://members.eunet.at/huber/flaschen.htm>

He includes an invaluable list of the
 oldest dated bottles.

'Folk Art in Bottles.'

The website of Sue Jones, an American
 collector.

<http://sdjones.net/FolkArt/>

(There are numerous less ambitious
 ship-in-a-bottle websites)

'Bottleship' the journal of the European
 Association of Ships in Bottles.

The editor is Alan Rogers,
artful-uk@supanet.com.

Object Focus: The Four Beam Letter Balance

The reign of Queen Victoria (1837 - 1901) is remembered for many things but for most one of the greatest symbols of the Victorian era is invention, epitomised by the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Usually a sure sign of the work of Victorian inventors is ingenuity. Working through part of the collection of postal history objects at the store of Heritage Royal Mail I came across an object, which straight away shouted Victorian. From the very first the sheer brilliance of the idea simply had to be Victorian, the mix of practicality with elegance. The object in question is a letter balance, one among many held in the collection, however one with a difference. Rather than a simple balance mechanism of which the collection has many fine examples this balance offered not one, but four separate, independent balance arms stepped one above the other, giving it the name four beam ladder balance.

The ingenuity does not stop there, however, because as well as weighing letters

in the system common in Britain at the time, ounces, it would, with the turn of a handle, offer weights in the format preferred then, and today, in much of Europe, grammes. Simply by flipping the counter balance weight through 180° on the pivot the balance would weigh using the alternative units. The lower arm will offer weights in 20g or 1oz while the next one up in 40g or 2oz and the second from top 60g or 3oz.

The top arm is different again providing a more traditional balance mechanism with a small round tray for the weights. Sadly most of the weights are no longer present. Two small cubed weights, however, are still present, those being for 1 and 2oz.

De Grave of London manufactured the balance in 1867 and this particular type of balance was made throughout the mid 1800s, the first being made in 1851. They manufactured these balances for the commercial market as well as for the General Post Office (GPO), those made for



The Four Beam Letter Balance, patented 1867.

the Post Office, such as this one, were all stamped 'GPO'.

Avery purchased De Grave in 1924 and now items relating to De Graves' history are held by Avery Historical Museum in Smethwick.

As well as providing a useful glimpse at the workings of the Post Office in the nineteenth century, the balance demonstrates how as early as the 1860s the Post Office was considering the need to provide weighing devices in metric and imperial, a subject that still causes contention today. It also demonstrates the inventing ability of the Victorians once more and reminds us why the Victorian age will always be remembered as the age of invention.

Chris Taft

Curatorial Assistant,
 Heritage Royal Mail



Gas masks old and new. The editor wears the current, British Army issue, S10 respirator, whilst holding a Second World War civilian issue mask.

Object Focus: At the Command 'Gas' Stop Breathing¹...

From Ypres to Abyssinia; Grunard Island to Halabja, chemical weapons symbolise the horror and ambiguity of modern warfare.

The machine-gun, the long-range missile the atom bomb, agent orange, napalm, the private car, the passenger jet...the categories of modern warfare blur. Where is the distinction, home front or fighting front? What stands betwixt and between? Armies don't fight on far off battlefields but in towns and cities, Kabul, Nasaria, Baghdad, Belfast, New York...London?

Chemical warfare is the weapon that you can't see. It stands at the apex of modern military development; something so deadly that whole nations go to war over the legitimacy of possession. A weapon that represents the blurred categories of the modern battlefield and exchanges clean air for poison.

On 22 January 1915 German use of Chlorine gas on the Ypres salient eliminated British resistance along a four-mile front.

After 9/11 sales of gas masks across

Britain and America rocketed. Though many of them, purchased from army surplus shops, would have been of very little use.

In 1938 during the Munich crisis the British Government issued 38,000,000 gas masks to men women and children

In February the Guardian reported that the inhabitants of Sulaymaniyah, a Kurdish city in Northern Iraq, were making cloth masks filled with crushed charcoal and salt, 'to stop the chemicals getting through'².

Physical Construction

Gas masks are constructed from vulcanised rubber and fitted with transparent eyepieces. The mask is designed to protect the respiratory tract, eyes and face. They are tightly fitting to ensure that air breathed by the wearer is drawn through the filter. The filter uses fibre screens to strain solid particles whilst charcoal and soda lime purify the air. Charcoal is prepared by heating to 1000°C at which temperature it is made active. Charcoal absorbs and holds a large volume of gas whilst soda lime

neutralises the toxic materials released by the charcoal.

Social Construction

But the gas mask is not merely a functional object to guard against chemical or biological agents. Within the social world of objects it bears a symbolic and metaphorical status.

The anthropologist Edmund Leech³ argues that human beings are fascinated by the parts of the body that offer entry to the inner world. The gas mask emphasises the orifices of the body and makes them the most prominent feature. That which would normally be hidden is made plain; the binary opposition is reversed between the internal and the external. The lungs are placed outside the body, the respirator exposes the respiratory system, and the boundary to the other world is exposed. The mask occupies the space of ambiguity, the wearer operates in the world of the betwixt and between. The line of demarcation between this world and the world of the other is crossed as the relationships are exchanged. With the lungs placed outside the body, poisoned air is made clean.

As a symbolic construction of the social and material world the synthetic rubber skin of the mask distorts the features and creates a new face for the wearer. Is it the face of the new society? The impact of chemical and biological warfare on the modern psyche has in many ways made the gas mask 'the face' of the late 20th and 21st century. Since 9/11 and throughout the 2nd Gulf War the image has been used widely in the media to represent the potential of the coming nightmare world.

The gas mask as a ritually symbolic and meaningful object represents the boundary between object and purity, the fantastic and the real, the distortion and the truth; it is the difference between life and death.

The gas mask will keep the wearer alive, but only for as long as it is worn. Outside is the poisoned world...Anthrax; Risin; Phosgene; Sarin; nerve agent, or Mustard Gas; the exchange has taken place, but the New World no longer supports human life...

Notes: 1: Instructions given to Sgt M.J. Hailey, RAMC, anti gas training 1939-1945.

2: Guardian, Tuesday 18 February 2003.

3: Leech in Pearce (1994), 'Interpreting objects and collections' (Routledge) London.

**David Broom - Assistant Keeper,
Social History, Museum of St Albans**

**Web site for further information,
with a useful archive including
pictures and identification of
different gas masks:
www.nofuture.com/lmag/lmag.htm**

'Raise the Banners High: The City of Edinburgh's Banner collection'
Compiled by Helen Clark
Published in 2001 by the City of Edinburgh Museums and Galleries.
ISBN 0900353171

This award-winning catalogue of the City of Edinburgh's banner collection represents a significant contribution to banner literature¹. The collection of 143 banners is probably the best in Scotland and this lavishly illustrated book features all but ten of the banners in full-colour. But what really makes this book and the collection it describes so unique is the dazzling range of banners. Parading banners in Edinburgh has a long history and amongst the earliest survivors are the ten flags flown at the historic visit of George IV to Edinburgh in 1822. Nearly two centuries later, despite the huge advances in communication, men and women still carry banners through the streets of Scotland's capital.

Collecting and displaying banners

This catalogue will appeal to people with a special interest in banners as well as those with a general interest in Scottish history. For the social history curator, however, it provides a fine example of social history collecting. In the 1960s the Scottish Labour History Society, led by Ian MacDougall, had the foresight to collect many of the early Reform and trade union banners. "Without his energetic collecting", as the book's author, Helen Clark, generously acknowledges, "many of the precious banners...would have been lost forever. His efforts also did a great deal to raise the profile of the museums as the ideal place where banners could be deposited".

For the past 17 years Clark, has been responsible for the care and interpretation of the banners as Keeper of Social History for the City of Edinburgh. She ensured that they are integral to displays at the People's Story Museum in Edinburgh - there are 15 banners on display at any one time - and curated the exhibition of banners which accompanied the launch of the book in December 2001. Clark and her colleagues have also continued to build up the collection. They have broadened the definition of a banner so that the hastily prepared banners carried in campaigns for a Scottish parliament or at the protests against the poll tax have been collected alongside professionally made banners. The book offers a useful analysis of banner design and includes a homage to the chief 19th century banner maker, George Tutill. His signature

can be found on a large number of Edinburgh's banners. The conservation and care of these banners is also described in the first part of the book by the Keeper of Conservation, Dorothy Marsh.

Cataloguing banners

The larger part of the book is devoted to a comprehensive catalogue of the banners and it is here that we can really appreciate the range of banners in the Edinburgh collection. It is divided into no less than fourteen chapters, each devoted to a different political or campaigning group. They range from trade unions, co-operative and friendly societies, to the Society for the Prevention of Vivisection and the British Women's Temperance Association. Each chapter opens with a brief introduction to the group followed by a list of the relevant banners with their dates, description, dimensions and history. Colour illustrations of all the banners, except ten very fragile regimental colours, appear in the catalogue and photos of the banners being carried are included wherever possible. Furthermore, many of the banners can be viewed on the Scottish Resources Access Network website².

Dedication

Over the past decade our knowledge of surviving banners and our ability to care for them has been greatly enhanced due to the People's History Museum's National Banner Survey and the publications and exhibitions produced by museums, historians and conservators³. The only regret, amongst those of us who share a passion for banners, is that John Gorman, author of the seminal book, 'Banner Bright', did not live to see this flowering⁴. Sadly he died in 1996 but his pioneering work in rescuing and researching banners inspired many and it is very fitting that Helen Clark has dedicated her book to his memory. He would certainly have relished this excellent book!

Notes:

- 1: Raise the banners High has been awarded the 2002 Scottish Museum of the year Award: Special Category.
- 2: The Edinburgh banners can also be viewed on the Scottish Resources Access Network website on www.scran.ac.uk.
- 3: Hazel Edwards is currently compiling a banner bibliography for firstBASE.
- 4: 'Banner Bright: an illustrated history of trade union banners' by John Gorman was first published in 1973 and re-printed in 1986 by Scorpion Publishing Ltd.

**Review by Hazel Edwards,
Keeper of History (job-share),
Tyne and Wear Museums.**

'Raise the Banners High' can be purchased from the City Art Centre Shop, 2 Market Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1DE. Please enclose a cheque for £24.95 (£19.95 + £5.00 p.&p.)

Join SHCG?

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

Kitty Ross,
Abbey House Museum,
Abbey Road,
Kirkstall,
Leeds LS5 3EH.
Tel: 0113 2305499
Email: membership@shcg.org.uk

Write an article for the SHCG News?

You can write an article for the News on any subject that you feel would be interesting to the museum's community. Project write ups, book reviews, object studies, papers given and so on. We welcome a wide variety of articles relating to social history and Museums.

Deadline for the next issue:
30th Sept 2003

Please send any articles to:
Zelda Bavestock,
Discovery Museum,
Blandford Square,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
Tyne and Wear NE1 4JA
Tel: 0191 232 6789
Email: zelda.bavestock@tyne-wear-museums.org.uk

SHCG COMMITTEE 2003

CHAIR: CATHERINE NISBET
Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery,
Riversley Park,
Nuneaton CV11 5TU
Tel: 02476 350720
Email:
Catherine.nisbet@nuneaton-bedworthbc.gov.uk

SECRETARY: ZELDA BAVEYSTOCK
Discovery Museum,
Blandford Square,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
Tyne and Wear NE1 4JA
Tel: 0191 232 6789
Email: enquiries@shcg.org.uk

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

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: KITTY ROSS
Abbey House Museum,
Abbey Road,
Kirkstall, LS5 3EH
Tel: 0113 2305499
Email: membership@shcg.org.uk

NEWS EDITOR: DAVID BROOM
(Retiring from committee after this issue)
davidbroom66@hotmail.com

CONTACT FOR NEWS:
Zelda Baveystock,
Discovery Museum,
Blandford Square,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
Tyne and Wear NE1 4JA
Tel: 0191 232 6789
Email: enquiries@shcg.org.uk

JOURNAL EDITOR: REBECCA FARDELL
Littlehampton Museum,
Manor House,
Church Street,
Littlehampton,
West Sussex BN17 5EW
Tel: 01903 738111
Email: journal@shcg.org.uk

WEB EDITOR: STEPHEN LOWY
Essex Records Office,
Wharf Road,
Chelmsford CM2 6YT
Tel: 01245 244612
Email: webmanager@shcg.org.uk

SEMINAR ORGANISERS: BRIONY HUDSON
Museum of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society,
1 Lambeth High Street,
London SE1 7JN
Tel: 020 7572 2211
Email: seminars@shcg.org.uk

ASW 2003 ENQUIRIES: CLARE PARSONS
Hull City Museums,
Ferens Art Gallery, Queen Victoria Square,
Hull HU1 3RA
Tel: 01482 613923
Email: asw@shcg.org.uk

ZELDA BAVEYSTOCK
Discovery Museum,
Blandford Square,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
Tyne and Wear NE1 4JA
Tel: 0191 232 6789
Email: asw@shcg.org.uk

OTHER COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
JAVIER PES
Museum Practice,
24 Calvin Street,
London E1 6NW
Tel: 020 74266920
Email: javier@museumsassociation.org

JILL HOLMEN
The British Museum,
Great Russell Street,
London WC1B 3DG
Tel: 020 7323 8786
Email: jholmen@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

SARAH MAULTBY
York Castle Museum,
The Eye of York,
York YO1 9RY
Tel: 01904 553145
Email: sarah.maultby@york.gov.uk

firstBASE CO-ORDINATOR: STEPH MASTORIS
Snibston Discovery Park,
Ashby Road,
Coalville LE67 3LN
Tel: 0153 0510851
Email: firstbase@shcg.org.uk

Social History
Curators Group



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