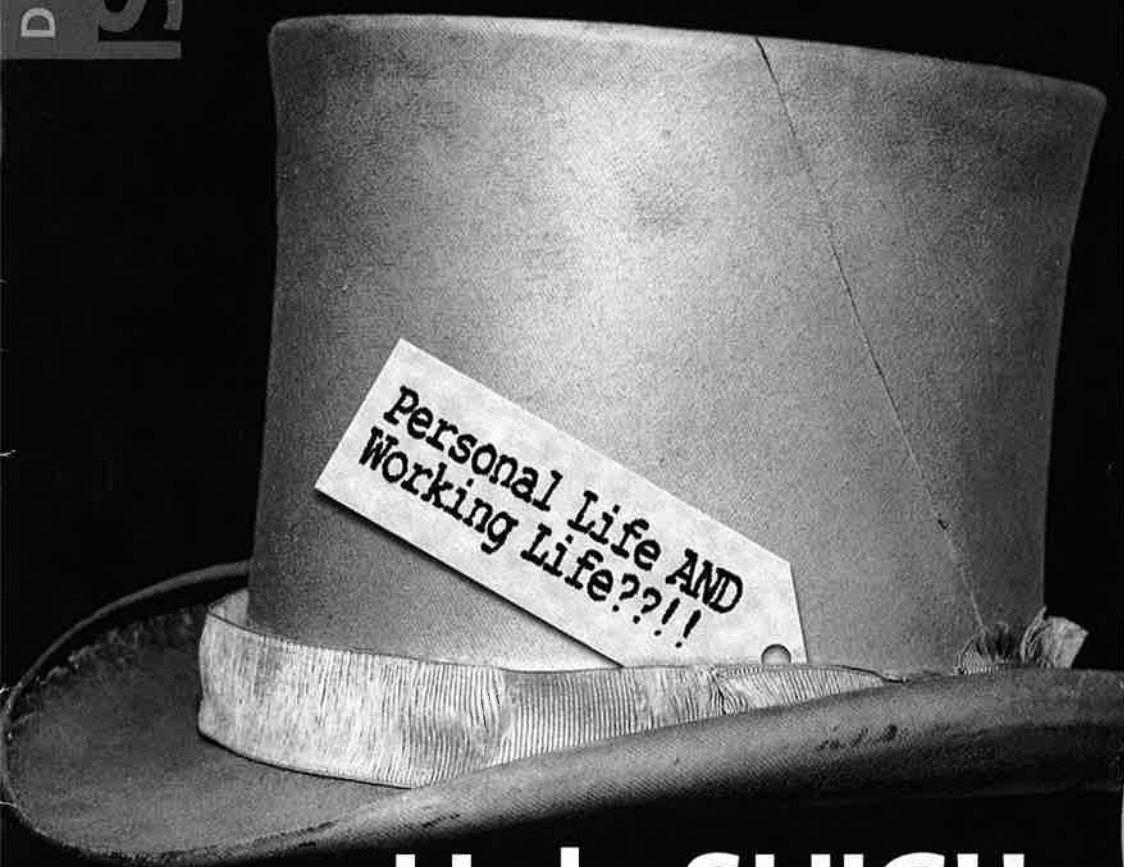


DECEMBER 2006

ISSUE 58



Holy SHIC!!

A special report
on the Social History &
Industrial Classification system

Annual Conference &
Seminar Reviews

SHIC NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

Join SHCG?

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

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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
NEXT ISSUE:
23RD APRIL 2007**

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.

Alternative formats:
Electronic copies and alternative formats are available on request. Please call 01904 650363 or Email: sarah.maultby@ymt.org.uk

Send all contributions to:
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York YO1 9RY
Email: news@shcg.org.uk

Front Cover:
A Top Hat in the collection at Wakefield Museum. Image courtesy of Wakefield MDC Cultural Services.
Contents Photo:
Group peg making, St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery, Lymington.



Welcome to Issue 58. Firstly I would like to thank the committee members involved in organising an excellent Annual Conference held in Edinburgh and Glasgow in July.

Special thanks need to go to Briony Hudson for her tireless efforts in pulling it all together, it was very much appreciated. For those of you who could not make it and for the delegates who need to refresh their memory as to what it was all about, the Conference reviews are well worth a read.

The conference for next year is currently being organised. It will be based in Yorkshire and the theme for 2007 is all about exploring controversial subjects. This will include slavery, with a visit to the newly re-opened Wilberforce House Museum in Hull. Details will be on the website soon and the dates for your diary are 5th to 7th July 2007.

This Issue is slightly different as the Theory and Practice section has been entirely devoted to SHIC. This came about after a flurry of interesting emails about SHIC were posted on the SHCG email list. The articles are about the past, present and future of SHIC and will hopefully start a long overdue debate about it. Love it or hate it the Classification system has been used by curators for around a quarter of a century, in what format will it survive the next 25 years?

There are three very diverse Object Focuses in this Issue; one is about nineteenth century beaded purses, another about a needlework exercise book and one about traditional gypsy pegs. It is the story behind these objects that helps to make them so fascinating.

A big thank you to all the contributors to this issue, I shall be emailing a call for articles for the next edition in March, the deadline is 23rd April 2007. On behalf of the Committee I would like to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

SARAH MAULTBY—EDITOR

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SHCG MATTERS

SHCG Annual Conference 2007

Based in Yorkshire
5th-7th July 2007

Join us at our annual conference to explore current theory and practice in social history curatorship. As usual the conference will run from Thursday lunchtime until Saturday, with conference sessions, a full social programme and accommodation included in the price.

We are planning the 2007 conference theme around subjects that often court controversy or emotive subjects that can

disturb and affect. We hope that sessions will include topics such as the potential for history to heal in Northern Ireland, practicalities of exhibiting potentially provocative and evocative objects, working with the travellers' community, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender history, and of course in 2007, slavery. Visits will include a look around the newly refurbished Wilberforce House Museum, Hull.



SHCG MATTERS

Proud Nation Training Conference

Exploring lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender history, heritage and lived experience.

14th December 2006
Leicester University

The Social History Curators Group and Proud Heritage have teamed up to offer the first day conference providing training for museums and archives who wish to develop their work in lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans social history or the heritage of same sex love/desire and gender transgression.

In association with the Department of Museum Studies, the conference is on 14th December at Leicester University, and is designed primarily to assist those institutions, large and small, that may be new to the field, or who wish to find fresh ways to extend their current activities.

The programme will explore:

- The unique challenges of work in this field.
- How homophobic exclusion functions within a museum or archive context.

- Finding the queer in your collection - issues of interpretation and collections management.
- Models for collaboration: How LGBT people have been engaged to help shape, collect and interpret their history with museums and archives.

And offer an opportunity to develop the basis for a project of your own.

For more details get in touch with Emma Williams, SHCG Seminar coordinator:

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River Street, Truro TR1 2SJ
Tel: 01872 242785
emma.williams@royalcornwallmuseum.org.uk

SHCG's email list has continued to grow, with over 140 members now signed up. The list is open to all members, whether personal or working for an institutional member. Why not join if you haven't already done so - the feature on the SHIC classification system in this issue was prompted by discussions on the list, so the list feeds directly into other aspects of SHCG's work. You won't be overwhelmed by emails, and it's easy to unsubscribe at any time.

One discussion in recent months focused on the desirability (or otherwise) of acquiring objects via the internet auction site eBay. The significant drawback is that objects may not come with a full provenance or evidence of usage; less of an issue for some common social history objects but certainly a concern in relation to rare and archaeological material. One museum had received anonymous messages via eBay's 'tell a friend' feature suggesting items that the museum might be interested in buying. As the internet becomes ever more integrated into society, museums will have to grapple with audience expectations about our use of new technology.

As usual, mystery objects have been posted on the list for help with identification, also appeals for objects and objects (or even a whole pharmacy in one case) in search of a home. Issues around using collections with communities continue to be a popular topic for discussion. Examples of community consultation projects were given from across the country, and it's clear that audiences are being given an increasing say in what goes into exhibitions, both community specific and mainstream.

Practical discussions have included aspects of collections management, such as emergency planning training. With emergency planning now a requirement of Accreditation, more and more museums are writing plans, but how many have tested them? The question asked on the email list was seeking training providers who could set up a mock emergency exercise. The National Trust, Harwell Document Restoration Services, English Heritage in partnership with University College London and consultant Jane Henderson were all suggested by list members.

Joining the list

SHCG-LIST is easy to join and use even if you've never been on a mailing list before. To join, please send an email to shcg-list-request@mailtalk.ac.uk (this is also the



Members wishing to source new material on Travellers' history and culture need look no further than

www.travellerstimes.org.uk/remember following the recent launch of 'Travellers Remember', a new DVD and on-line educational resource, from The Rural Media Company.

The personal reminiscences of Travellers from the West Midlands have been recorded and brought together in this collection of 25 digital stories. Each lasts between two-three minutes and features different aspects of life on the road in the 1960s and 1970s.

Travellers Remember is a pioneering audio-visual project and truly inter-generational, with everyone from children through to mums and dads and grandparents involved. Traveller families worked with experienced outreach media workers to learn the necessary technical skills (how to use a camera, scanner, microphone and laptop). These newly acquired skills were then put

into practice to record parents' and grandparents' memories. The recordings were illustrated with images and photographs - many of which were drawn from the families' own albums. Traveller history and culture are often overlooked or misrepresented. *Travellers Remember* ensured that Travellers themselves were the driving force behind the project, and that they decided what to record for posterity.

As well as being accessible free-of-charge via the website, a DVD containing all 25 stories is available to buy (£10 per copy or £15 for two) from the Rural Media Company. Further information may be obtained as follows:

E-mail: info@ruralmedia.co.uk

Web: www.ruralmedia.co.uk

Tel: 01432 344039

Post: Sullivan House,
72-80 Widemarsh Street,
Hereford, HR4 9HG

address for any queries you may have) stating your name and whether you are a personal member or employed by an institutional member. If you work for an institutional member, please also state the name of the institution. You will receive an automated acknowledgement of your request: and may be asked to click on a link to confirm your email address (this is one of several features that keeps the list secure and free of spam).

What happens next?

Requests to join the list are processed manually, usually within 48 hours, but please be patient and allow up to 10 days. Once your membership is processed you will receive some automatically generated

emails, including one containing a jargon-free guide to how the list works and one containing more technical information about the list. You should save both of these emails for future reference as they contain important information such as how to unsubscribe from the list. After this, you will receive all emails sent by members to the list address, and will be able to post messages yourself by following the simple instructions in the guide.

Please email shcg-list-request@mailtalk.ac.uk if you have any questions about the list - I'm happy to help.

**Jack Kirby—SHCG Committee,
Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum
Email: shcg-list-request@mailtalk.ac.uk**



A SHIC Special

This special edition of the Theory & Practice section is devoted to the Social History & Industrial Classification system known as SHIC. The idea came about after this email was posted on the SHCG Email List:

Hi All,
Having audited all our collections recently, we were discussing whether it is useful to still give every object a SHIC code(or two) anymore. Our department were dedicated SHIC users in the past and the store, library and files are all organised according to it. But does anyone use it any more? Is there a future for it? Is there anyone discussing these issues that we can get involved with? Ideas welcome...
Sinead Byrne,
Birmingham History Curator,
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

There were a number of responses describing how various museums up and down the country used it. Mostly they were positive although they did admit there were some limitations. I hope the following articles spark a debate about the future of SHIC which is long overdue.

The evolution of SHIC...

The Social History and Industrial Classification (SHIC) evolved from several existing systems both within the museum community and beyond. It began to emerge over 30 years ago but has a much longer pedigree, one line being traceable back to about 1912. This ancestry is a mixed blessing, with hindsight we might wish that we had started with a clean slate.

Museums have long wrestled with classification systems to help them organise data about their collections. Unfortunately, we have never had the resources to develop structures to match those which emerged long ago in the library profession. Nor have we found library systems ideally suited to our needs. Consequently there have been a number of home-grown attempts that have generally evolved piecemeal to fill the need to find items related to particular subject areas. A few found favour beyond their originating institutions and were more widely adopted. One such was the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) Classification, itself owing much to the classification developed by the Welsh Folk Museum. MERL served social history collections well for many years but its understandable bias towards rural and agrarian artefacts limited its value for classifying urban and industrial material.

In an effort to rectify this and following the wise principle that before inventing something new one should investigate what already exists, the North of England Open Air Museum at Beamish looked beyond the museum community to see if suitable taxonomies that might be applied to museums already existed elsewhere. They found the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC), a Central Statistical Office publication originally dating from 1949 but with subsequent revisions. This had the great advantage that in 1949 most 18th and 19th century industries still survived, at least in small numbers, and so it covered virtually all the areas old and new in which museums have an interest. It was revised in the 1960s, bringing in emerging concepts such as the computer industry, and in 1980 was harmonised with similar documents throughout the European Community. The staff at Beamish therefore combined the structure contained within SIC with the

ideas of St Fagans and MERL to create a new in-house system.

When a member of staff at Beamish became the first director of the Black Country Museum he took the new classification with him and so when I was appointed as his Keeper of Collections I became acquainted with it and, following the long tradition of adaptation, I started to modify it to meet the particular needs of my museum. Meanwhile, staff at York Castle Museum had also adopted it and were independently adapting it in slightly different ways. Before long we all realised that we were missing an opportunity to pool resources and so agreed to co-operate more closely to avoid 'reinventing the wheel'.

Seeing the advantages of collaborative development, we tried to open things up further. Several of us were members of the Group for Regional Studies in Museums (the name by which SHCG was known in those days) and it seemed appropriate to put the idea of a standard classification system to the GRSM membership. Through the good offices of the GRSM committee, a meeting was arranged which was well attended but sadly produced no new recruits to the existing band of enthusiasts. The apparent bias towards industrial collections resulting from the wholesale adoption of the already well established SIC may have deterred those with more of a folk life bent or perhaps the GRSM membership were just realists and could see the overwhelming magnitude of the task we faced.

As active users of various incarnations of the Beamish classification we had a greater incentive than most to persevere and so the SHIC Working Party was born. With hindsight, the decision to go-it-alone was a blessing as it freed us from the politics which almost inevitably dog more formal organisations. We quickly gained two additional members from the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust but lost two other early recruits who found other priorities more pressing.

With the support of our employers, we began to meet regularly to try to refine and develop the Beamish system to create a single all embracing classification which could serve all our institutions. A huge amount of work was done both during our

employers time and also in our own time, the project becoming a labour of love. It is very much to the credit of our directors that they supported this activity to the hilt.

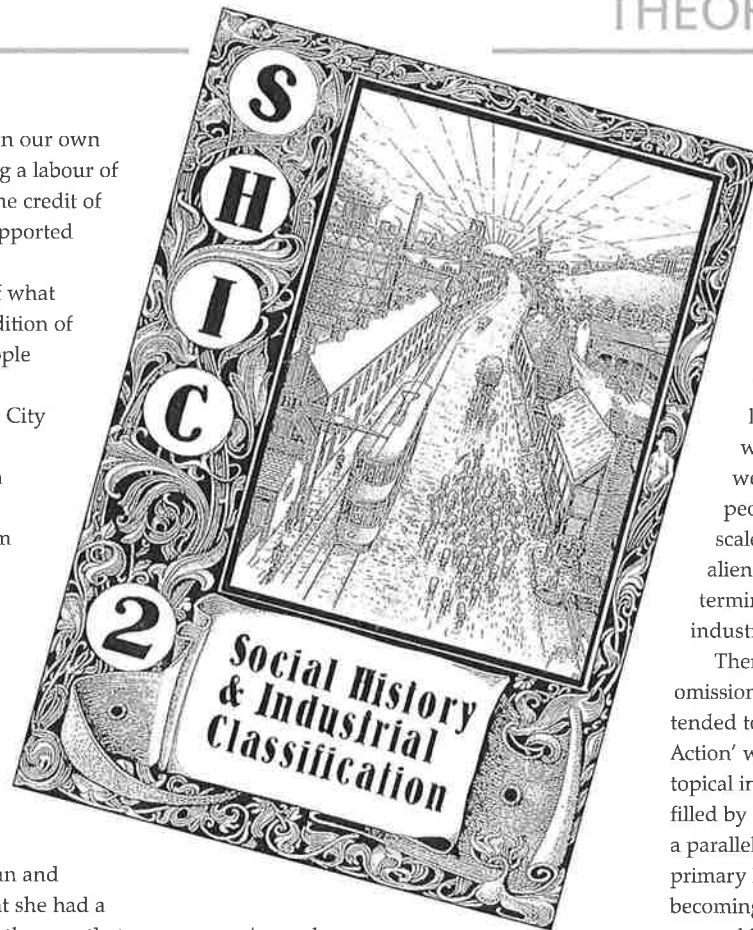
In the development of what was to become the first edition of SHIC, a team of eight people from six institutions were involved (Beamish, Leeds City Museum, the Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, BCM, Ironbridge Gorge Museum and Lucas Industries).

We knew little about classification theory, most of us were amateurs floundering about in the dark and this probably shows in the end product. We did have one member of the team who was a trained librarian and looking back it is clear that she had a considerable influence on the way that we went about things, bringing a little order to our creation.

At an early-stage (but not early enough) we decided that whereas some earlier systems mixed the concepts of object typology and associated subject areas, we would try to concentrate on a subject classification in which objects were classified according to the context in which they were used. Other classification systems and thesauri (Nomenclature, AAT) were by then appearing which, although not ideally suited to UK usage, facilitated retrieval by object type.

This decision allowed the classification to be applied not only to museum objects but to the content of images, film, oral history recordings, etc. We did not really decide this early enough and we allowed ourselves to be swayed by one or two external subject specialists whose preconceptions didn't really fit our overall strategy. 25 years on we still haven't fully eliminated all of these inconsistencies.

Over a period of several years we substantially refined the Beamish classification working very pragmatically with little knowledge of classification theory to hamper us. The work was arduous but enjoyable as we argued passionately over where various concepts fitted into the grand scheme of things. In those far off days we didn't have the benefit of e-mail so most decisions were thrashed out face to face, necessitating regular train journeys to attend meetings.



As work progressed, we began to be taken seriously by the museum community, MDA being particularly supportive. In 1983 we decided to publish our creation, as colleagues in other museums were showing increasing interest. A supporter of the project generously offered an interest free loan from his own pocket to fund printing and in order to open a bank account we formed a legal partnership making us jointly liable for any debts we might incur (the only formal status the Working Party holds).

The publication of the first edition was a massive milestone. On the whole, SHIC was well received by the museum community and began to be adopted widely. However, we had our critics. Some people failed to appreciate our decision to concentrate on classification by context and bemoaned the absence of object type categories (we always hoped that eventually suitable taxonomies might be developed by other groups - in the event the current range of thesauri produced under the auspices of MDA represent a far more realistic and achievable option).

The feminist lobby were vociferous in their criticism, perhaps with some justification but often due to misunderstanding. For example, it was suggested that the role of the home maker was denigrated within SHIC as this activity did not appear in the 'Working life' section. This seemed to us a little unfair as we had dedicated an entire section to 'Domestic life',

much of which covered the labour of running the home. Another criticism was that female outworkers were ignored. Because headings like 'Lace-making' had scope notes that mentioned various types of machine-made lace, it seems it was wrongly assumed that hand-made lace was somehow excluded. This was never the intention but perhaps we had misjudged the extent to which people with collections covering small-scale craft industries would feel alienated by the presence of so much terminology relating to mechanised industry.

There were certainly significant omissions. The 'Community life' section tended to ignore concerns over 'Positive Action' which was becoming increasingly topical in the 1980s. This gap was admirably filled by Christine Johnston who developed a parallel system that she offered as a fifth primary heading (inevitably leading to it becoming known as the 5th column!). This was published by SHCG and has been adopted quite widely. The Working Party felt that this was best used alongside SHIC and so no attempt was made to negotiate with Christine for its formal adoption as a fifth section. However, her 5th column heavily influenced the revision of some areas of 'Community life' as we were preparing the second edition.

Despite its faults, interest in the classification was such that in due course our initial print run of 1000 copies was sold out. In 1993 (having recouped printing costs and repaid the loan) following revision and expansion of some of the weaker areas, we released a second edition. Publication of this edition was funded by the Museum Documentation Association who have always handled SHIC sales on our behalf. The revision was achieved with a smaller, leaner active working group which benefited from the involvement of two new members. As before there was much philosophical discussion. I particularly remember an entertaining lunchtime debate over whether or not activities such as burglary and prostitution should be allocated to 'Working life'. In our saner moments we made some areas more subject based rather than object based. We also introduced new concepts such as 'Attitudes' to fill some of the gaps highlighted by Christine Johnston.

One of the great strengths of SHIC is its comprehensiveness, a feature that can make it a useful tool for spotting gaps that need to be filled by proactive collecting. Few collections are likely to utilise every available

category but it is perfectly possible for the smallest museum to use SHIC, simply ignoring the many headings that do not apply to their collections. However there was a perception among such museums that for them SHIC was overkill and so, in the face of increasing demand for something simpler and with financial support from MDA, Simple Subject Headings was born. Published by MDA in 1996 this cut-down version omitted the more detailed low-level subdivisions. The wisdom of classifying, for example, items from a chemist's shop as 4.8430 in some museums and in others just as 4.84 (along with items from every other kind of retail business) can be questioned. However, they all share the same root which gives some scope for searching across all collections at broader levels, even if valuable precision is lost. The alternative would probably be the creation of totally new and incompatible schemes.

Since the publication of Simple Subject Headings there has been little further progress, although some significant activity has occurred behind the scenes. Many original members of the SHIC Working Party now find themselves in posts where there is little time for hands-on development work and even arranging meetings to discuss broad strategic issues has been problematic. There is an obvious need for a machine-readable version that can be built in to computerised collection management systems, public access databases, etc. This has long been recognised by the Working Party but uncertainty over how best to license an electronic version in order to safeguard funding for ongoing development work has held back the release of computer-based products. New proposals from MDA seem set to break this impasse. Much of the work required to publish SHIC in digital form has already been undertaken. All we need now is for a formal proposal from MDA to be accepted by the Working Party and to decide exactly how SHIC should be updated to keep it relevant in an ever changing world.

The views of SHCG members will be invaluable in determining future strategy and there is likely to be a call for new recruits to work alongside those Working Party members who are still able to commit time to the project.

Stuart Holm

Freelance documentation consultant and SHIC Working Party member.

The wonder of SHIC...

SHIC is a wonderful tool for both the public and social history curators, because it lets you use systematic information creatively. It combines superbly with databases, and provides a quick and effective mechanism for all sorts of searches.

Christine Johnstone

Principal Cultural Officer: History, Wakefield MDC Cultural Services.

I first used SHIC in its pre-publication form in 1981, on a room-sized mainframe computer. In 1989, through SHCG, I published a supplementary section to take account of cultural diversity. In 1993, I switched to the second edition of SHIC, which I still use (along with the supplementary section).

SHIC is basically a hierarchical, numerical code, which classifies associations. Numbers beginning with '1' relate to community life, with '2' to family and domestic life, with '3' to personal life and with '4' to working life. The '5' section that I devised in 1989 relates to cultural diversity.

You can use SHIC at any level. I almost always use it at two to four 'decimal points' as appropriate - e.g. 2.85 [music], 2.851 [played instruments] or 2.8512 [brass instruments]. The associations that SHIC records tend to be broad, rather than specific, and a certain sort of brass instrument, or ones by a certain maker, can most easily be found by a supplementary simple name search, not by ever more complex SHIC numbers.

All objects have at least one association, many have more. Generally I give objects between one and three SHIC numbers. But this does depend on the associations that are relevant to your users and your museum. We have no sports goods manufacturers in Wakefield, so a rugby ball used by one of the district's teams is only given 4.967 [professional sport], not 4.5942 [manufacturer of sports goods]. However, the ball with which Arthur Atkinson kicked his record-breaking goal is also given 3.22 [personal mementoes], as it has the details of the occasion painted on it. The trick is to record the associations that are relevant to your museum's users and staff.

SHIC also works better than simple names when you want to identify a group of associated but disparate objects. Search on the simple name 'hammer' and you will find every hammer from a blacksmith's hammer to a toffee hammer. Search on 4.432 and you will find everything associated with blacksmiths - anvils, photographs, oral history, tools and, of course, hammers. Similarly 4.842 will list everything to do with sweet shops, including any toffee hammers.

SHIC stops you relying on personal memory, which is always faulty and always partial. You can carry out broad searches for things that you are not sure you have.

Wakefield has a very small minority ethnic population, which is primarily of Kashmiri origin. To answer an enquirer searching for evidence of Black [African Caribbean] workers in Wakefield, I wouldn't rely on memory and I couldn't go to a vast section of the store and see hundreds of items. Instead, I use SHIC to search our database on 5.1 [Black, African Caribbean] and then search the resulting subset for objects with additional SHIC numbers relating to 1. [public service work] and 4. [working life]. The result? We have three relevant photographs, two of Black nurses and one of a Black rugby league player.

SHIC can also identify gaps in the collections, and thus inform your collecting policy. A search on just one number [2.954, immigration and emigration] rapidly identifies a gap in Wakefield's collections. There are only two items relating specifically to migration - a mug commemorating the 350th anniversary of the Mayflower's sailing, and a plate commemorating post-famine Irish emigration. The evidence shows that we need to collect more about the experience of new immigrants.

You can also use SHIC to search for very specific things. Perhaps you remember



Rugby Ball classified as 4.967 and 3.22. (courtesy of Wakefield MDC Cultural Services).

seeing some jewellery made of watch cocks, but have no idea how many, or where they are? Search on 4.42 [timepieces], create a subset, and search that on 3.3382 [accessories added to women's bodies or clothing for ornament]. Immediately the full details of the museum's two brooches and two necklaces made of watch cocks are listed for you. Perhaps someone is interested in unusual uses for perfume? Search on 3.56 [perfume], create a subset, search again for all the items with other SHIC numbers, and see what is listed. At Wakefield, an object listed on 3.56 and 1.1110 [Christian religion] turns out to be a perfumed card sold for the Bethel United Methodist Chapel's Bazaar Fund. One listed on 3.56 and I.846 [First World War] is a sachet sold in Normanton in aid of 'our soldiers and sailors'.

SHIC is not just relevant to social history. In Wakefield we also use it for decorative art and for that archaeology which has a definable association. The other specialist curators use their own specialist classifications too, but this crossover helps us identify, for example, a Roman sandal for a 'social history' shoe exhibition. I would like to use it on figurative art - 1.413 for Barbara Hepworth's drawing of a tibia graft operation, 2.661 for a still life of a bowl of fruit, 3.14 for a portrait, 4.4732 for a painting of boat-builders - but this is still just an aspiration.

All museum users would benefit if more museums used SHIC, and if all those using it made sure they were using the second edition. Museums are being asked to share collections, and what easier way is there of answering the question 'What have you got on ...?' Even better, if museums use SHIC to provide searchable databases on the web, then everyone can ask and answer the question 'What have they got on ...?' A very small step forward would be finding out which museums use SHIC, and how many provide publicly searchable databases with it. The next step might be to put the second edition of SHIC onto the SHCG website, available to all.

SHIC has a few imperfections, but this is no reason for ignoring it. It is unrealistic to wait until something perfect turns up - it never will! Similarly, SHIC can and should be updated, but changing large elements of the second edition would be both counter-productive and unnecessary. If you see a serious gap, and want to fill it, you can always write a 6th, 7th, 8th or 9th section, without imposing any changes on anyone else. Alongside collections databases, SHIC is, I believe, the best tool that social history museums have to increase access to, and enjoyment of, the collections.

Holy SHIC:

Social History classification for the 21st Century

Since 1983 SHIC has proved to be a valuable tool for museum professionals. Recent discussion on the SHCG List has thrown into question whether the system has a place in the 21st Century Museum?

John Whitaker & Tim Burge

John Whitaker:
Senior Cultural Officer, Social History
Tim Burge: Registrar
Wakefield MDC Cultural Services.

Traditionally SHIC's role has been more than just a classified number. For many museums it has also been a method of storage - keeping like with like. However, times have changed. With the advent of 'Benchmarks in Collections Care', a renewed focus on collections management and a slow but positive move away from outdated storage facilities, the need to store collections by SHIC is disappearing. As collections grow it is virtually impossible to allocate space according to SHIC. It is now more typical or aspirational to store collections by their material or environmental requirements. However this does not necessarily mean there is no future for SHIC.

At Wakefield SHIC is the foundation for documenting, displaying and providing access to our social history collections, and still plays a part in how we store certain objects.

Documentation

As part of the accessioning process every new acquisition is assigned at least one SHIC code. Looking at the strengths of any particular collection there is the risk of some SHIC numbers becoming oversubscribed. For example, in Wakefield we have substantial collections relating to coal mining (SHIC 4.2121). To ensure that the classification remains meaningful we have added a suffix after the code to further clarify the subject. Objects can then be classified to 4.2121 underground, 4.2121 overground or 4.2121 dispute. This same subdividing principle has been applied to other areas of SHIC such as sport (4.967) and has proved invaluable in breaking down the topography of Wakefield (1.92) into manageable geographic chunks. (1.92

Wakefield Agbrigg, 1.92 Wakefield Sandal, etc).

A word of caution - for those curious about adopting SHIC it's worth pointing out that as with all aspects of museum life, it's only as good as what you put in. SHIC requires complete commitment. If you miss objects out of the SHIC system or do not use the correct codes any searches will be incomplete.

Storage

Taking the principal of storing collections by material, Wakefield's photograph and ephemera collections are housed together. But this does not mean that the SHIC method of storage is redundant. Secondary to material, the collections are then boxed by a SHIC code (if an object has more than one code only one is assigned as the location code). That way all ephemera relating to schools (1.51) is stored by its material AND its subject.

Exhibition Research

When it comes to interrogating the collections database the SHIC code really comes into its own. It acts as a base level search and safety net. For example, putting together an exhibition of women's costume. Rather than trawling through every simple name you can think of - dress, skirt, bodice, boob tube etc - searching for SHIC code 3.33 provides a starting point of all female costume. It's also an insurance against simple name typos and human error. As long as your use of SHIC has been consistent you will quickly get the desired result. From this point on the curator's flamboyance can flourish. SHIC has done the hard/boring work and the curator is free to select the objects which best realise their vision for the exhibition.

Public Access

SHIC has always been a professional's tool for collections management, very much behind the scenes. However with an increasing demand for visitor access to collections and the opportunities afforded by new technology, SHIC is again highly adaptive and flexible.

In the same way that curators can use SHIC to flag up potential objects for exhibitions, the same system allows users to access information held in museums. In

Wakefield we have low-tech and high-tech versions of this.

As part of a recent revamp of Wakefield and Pontefract Museums, we took the decision to provide public access to additional reference material (press cuttings, student dissertations/essays, articles etc.). These have been made available in a reference room in box files arranged by SHIC.

A more high-tech version of this system has been used to provide access to our digitally available photograph collection.

As the entire collection was already SHIC'd, there was no need to reindex the photographs for public use. Instead we substituted key words for the number codes i.e. 4.73 Inland Waterway becomes Canals and Rivers on the public system. Without realising it, the public user is searching our collections with SHIC. The logical progression of this system is the Internet,

and improving virtual access to collections. We are currently developing a series of subject specific online catalogues. These will provide access to images and data straight from our MODES database. As with the photos the SHIC system provides a basic framework for searching by Theme. You can see our work in progress at www.wakefieldmuseums.org.

So where can SHIC go from here?

For the Internet savvy user the ability to search several collections at once isn't an unreasonable demand. Not all users want to be bound by geographic lines! SHIC is a common ground which could be utilised to link collections databases (a service already growing on the SHCG website). At Wakefield, we are starting to allocate SHIC codes to our archaeology collections (after all, archaeology is social history - just a long time ago!).

The Future

SHIC is extremely flexible.

The first edition was revised in 1993, and further updates added in 1996.

In 1989 'SHIC 5' was informally introduced as a means to expand the system to incorporate wider themes within popular culture -

Attitudes, Equal Opportunities etc. Regarding the debate around SHIC's relevance, whilst a complete revision at this stage would be counter-productive, an update of category examples might be useful. A lot has changed since 1996, for example digital culture is now ubiquitous. To remain relevant SHIC needs to continue to accommodate the changing social fabric of life.



Top hat [3.3271]. Thanks to SHIC, we also know straight away that it relates to tram driving [4.7143] as the driver of a horse tram wore it in 1910.

The Future of SHIC...

"There are four primary headings (Sections) covering all aspects of human activity." There is something breathtakingly ambitious about the Social History and Industrial Classification Scheme, known fondly throughout the UK museums sector as SHIC. The above quote, taken from the SHIC website, speaks volumes both about the scale of this ambition and the curatorial challenge that lies behind it.

Nick Poole—MDA Director

SHIC is an excellent example of necessity begetting invention. When launched in 1983, it represented a statement of what until that point had only existed in the heads of social history curators around the country. In formalising all of this knowledge and expertise into a classification scheme, SHIC made all of that shared insight accessible and, more importantly, usable by the whole museum community.

Terminological standards play a profoundly important and practical role. We can all think of an occasion when an object has had us stumped. It's been a long day, you've had to move stuff in and out of storage, and the last thing you want is to have to think hard about classification. Its then, when all hope seems lost, that schemes such as SHIC descend with all their authority and collective wisdom to help you out.

SHIC is twenty-three years old this year. In the same year, the Thames Barrier began

operation, Thatcher was re-elected and the Internet Domain Name System was launched. In many ways it was a remarkably prescient piece of work. It foresaw a time when information would need to be organised and shared in sensible ways. When real people would need to be able to browse through all this information using words that were natural and comfortable to them.

It has been 10 years since SHIC was last updated, and it is a testament to the original work that it has stood the test of time so well. But 10 years is a long time in social science and the UK has seen global shifts in attitude and culture, politics and belief. If we are to continue the core work of the museum - which is to reflect the panoply of society - then the tools and standards we use must continue to grow and develop.

Between 1999 and 2001, the Museums and Galleries Commission gave way, first to Re:source and latterly to the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). This wasn't the first time that museums, libraries and archives had been brought together (most Local Authorities had structured things this way for years), but it was the first indication of the deep overlap between the work of the different sectors.

The emergence of the 'cross-domain agenda' poses a particular challenge for SHIC. In the libraries and archives world, schemes such as the Library of Congress Subject Headings and UK Archival Thesaurus are already supported by active

user communities.

Put simply, if SHIC is to continue to hold its own in this brave new world, it will need to be brought up to date and made available in the most immediately accessible form. Over the next few months, MDA will be putting forward a proposal for two strands of work.

The first will be to develop the current version of SHIC for publication free of charge in a structured electronic format. It will form part of a series of similarly structured terminologies which we are making available for download through SPECTRUM Terminology (<http://www.mda.org.uk/spectrum-terminology/>). The aim is to make the SHIC scheme both accessible and flexible to support the developing needs of a new generation of museum users. The second will be to work towards an update of SHIC to reflect the changes of the past decade.

As the primary and most active group of SHIC users, the Social History Curator's Group has an incredibly important role to play in this process. The chances are that you will have developed your own solutions and workarounds, hacking the standard to make it fit your needs. Over the coming years we will need to gather all those hacks and amendments back into the fold and use them to inform the next stage of development.

SHIC is a unique and important piece of work, too much so to be allowed to fragment or fade. At MDA, we very much hope that, working in partnership with the original Working Group and the SHCG, we can ensure that it continues to play this vital role.



SHCG Annual Conference 2006

Edinburgh and Glasgow, 6th–8th July 2006

Friday morning Theme: 'Choosing and Using: The Glaswegian approach'

Friday, was the jewel in the crown of this year's conference. After much food and drink the night before, we left Edinburgh bright and breezy (or not as the case may have been) for Glasgow Museums Resource Centre. After what seemed like a very roundabout journey through an industrial estate, we found ourselves outside a new modern building, home to collections from no less than 13 Glasgow museums.

The resource centre is a publicly accessible store for the city's museum service. Built in 2003, the centre offers much more than a storage facility. It is an impressive space, with a number of environmentally controlled storage areas, referred to as "pods". The staff deliver a first-class service to visitors, which we soon discovered as we were taken on a guided tour of the building.

First stop was the foyer, which contains "drop-in" facilities for community use.

Computer terminals provide internet access, scanners, web cams and access to computer programmes. There were also some interactive displays, and a simple but cleverly designed exhibition giving tantalising snippets of what was to be expected behind the closed doors of Kelvingrove.

The storage facilities are impressive to say the least, covering 6000 square metres in total. The pods vary in size, and each one is environmentally controlled to suit its content. Artefacts are securely stored, but are also arranged in such a way to maximise the visitor experience. Many large heavy artefacts are left on open display, placed strategically on the visitor path. Examples of small items are left unwrapped on shelves depending on the size of objects. Such shelves are fronted by either metal grids or Perspex, depending on the size of the objects, to ensure wandering fingers don't lead to wandering or broken objects.

It was particularly interesting to see how the art store was structured to make it

suitable for group sessions. The paintings hung on opposing racking systems, of large pull out panels. Fully extended, each panel took up the whole width of the corridor, creating a block and thereby containing the visiting group. The collections were grouped into themes and also by artist, and care had been taken to hang paintings for close inspection at an appropriate height. To see through the stores was an absolute treat, and something I would certainly recommend to even non-curatorial types!

We were then presented with 3 talks by staff involved with the Resource Centre. The first was by Morag Macpherson, Manger of the Open Museum. She outlined the background and history of the Glasgow Museums Resource Centre, and spoke of the age-old challenge in finding the balance between collections curatorial needs, and public access. From what we had seen of the stores, I felt they had achieved this balance particularly well.

Morag explained how the centre was funded and supported by the Council, as



Above: The Conference delegates outside Kelvingrove. Left: Kelvingrove Museum: Mark O'Neil giving a very animated introduction to the new displays.

part of their broader agendas for social regeneration and inclusion in that area of Glasgow. It was built to coincide with the closure of Kelvingrove; large temporary storage was urgently required to hold the collections during their development phase. The level of service on offer has been limited since opening, due to staff and resources being concentrated on the Kelvingrove project. However, despite stumbling blocks and from what we saw and heard, what they have achieved is no mean feat.

Morag also explained their development plans, which by now should be underway. Phase 2 is a HLF funded initiative, which includes the Riverside Museum redevelopment. The Resource Centre will be extended to include further storage facilities and a library and archive block, as well as a block to provide viewing platforms in to conservation areas.

Dr Martin Bellamy, Research and Major Projects Manager, then delivered his talk entitled "What have we got, and is it any good?". He explained their new digitised collections management system, that makes sense of the 1.4 million objects (1.4 million objects!!!! I could feel myself breaking out into a sweat, even at the prospect). This is to be a public access catalogue, available online.

He then described the 'collection significance' questionnaire they had developed in order to assess the quality and relevance of what is being collected. What Martin described was an excellent tool - the data collated from questionnaires is used for a number of purposes: to make collections more accessible to staff and users of the service; to inform Collections Policies; to identify opportunities for research; to allow

the priorities of the service and the priorities of the collections to become streamlined; and as a political tool to secure further funding.

I was also interested to hear how the centre has been completing research projects in collaborative partnerships with Universities. The Research Team identify topics for study, and farm these out to the universities. This brings benefit to both organisations, and I thought it was an excellent example of how to make best use of limited resources.

We then heard a fascinating talk on the redevelopment of the Riverside Museum (formerly Glasgow's Museum of Transport), by Kirsty Devine, Project Curator. The scale of the Riverside Museum project is immense, and it was interesting to learn how they are approaching this capital build. Zaha Hadid was selected as architect, and Event Communications as exhibition team. She showed us concept drawings of the building and display areas, and explained how they intend to focus on people (makers, drivers, users of the vehicles), rather than the modes of transport in their own right. Movement and theatre is to be introduced into the displays as much as possible. The number of objects to go on display will double from current provision, and she described some of the key attractions, including a 'car wall' and street displays, consisting of 3 streets spanning the time period from 1900 to the 1980s.

With so much packed in to the morning, there was little time for questions, discussion and tea and biscuits at the end, however for what we gained these were well worth sacrificing! Glasgow is an exciting place for museums at the moment, and the visit to the centre gave us all a real flavour of that.

Saturday morning Theme: 'Choosing and Using: at the National Museums of Scotland'

Saturday was spent at the National Museum of Scotland. The morning consisted of presentations by NMS staff, on the theme of "Choosing and Using". We were presented with varying perspectives on this theme by John Burnett, Project Coordinator, Alison Taubman, BT Connected Earth Curator, Wendy Turner, Head of Collections Management and David Forsyth, Senior Curator for Scotland and Europe collections.

What stood out to me through all of the talks is how NMS is changing. Their exhibition and display ethos seems to be taking a more people based approach, and turning away from the traditional object based experience. John Burnett spoke of the new Modern Scotland gallery which is currently under development; the displays are to focus on human experience of Scotland's changing story. Alison Taubman backed up this approach, speaking of how science and technology subject and collections need to meet with social history based material. She stressed that an object is not an end in itself: what gives it value is human interaction with that object, and this needs to be reflected in collecting. Later in the morning we saw how NMS is integrating this approach into their galleries, as David Forsyth took us on a tour of the new Sporting Scotland gallery. The displays were largely graphic based, with sizeable images juxtaposed with iconic objects to create a sense of human interaction. In addition to this the central feature of this gallery is the Hall of Fame, where Scotland's sporting heroes are represented individually.

Another recurrent theme, as you would expect from a "choosing and using" theme, was collecting - how to collect, what to collect and what do you do with it once you've got it. John highlighted the importance of collecting against criteria. Later, Alison described some of the difficulties in collecting modern material for modern communications collections: with technology changing so fast focusing is difficult as who knows what will be a passing phase, and what will be revolutionary.

Wendy Turner did an extremely engaging presentation on NMS's new storage facilities at Granton. On completion the project involved moving a colossal 1.6 million objects into their new homes (she then conceded that many of these were insects, so perhaps wasn't as bad as it initially sounded!). Museums stores expand and expand as more objects are brought in. If this doesn't highlight the difficulties collecting more and more stuff, then nothing does! This led neatly into the afternoon session on disposals.

Saturday afternoon Theme: Choosing and Losing with Confidence

Speakers for this session were Jayne Tyler, Head of Professional Services for Hull Museums, Roy Brigden, Keeper for Museum of English Rural Life, and Caitlin Griffiths, Adviser on Professional Issues for the Museums Association. This was followed by healthy group discussions on the thorny old issue of disposals.

The big question of the afternoon session was, "what are we going to do with all this stuff???" There were 2 main ideas that threaded their way through talks and reoccurred in discussions - change of use, and shared collections.

Roy Brigden gave information on the Rural Museums Network, an organisation initiated by the Museum of English Rural Life and funded through the Designation Challenge fund. The network, currently with 53 member museums, exists to bring museums of farming and the countryside closer together for mutual benefit and extends across England, as well as including the national collections of Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The RMN has developed a methodology for the Distributed National Collection. Through the scheme members can identify duplications in collections, allowing them to manage their individual collections in an efficient way. Members make best use of resources by sharing collections.

Caitlin Griffiths outlined the work the Museums Association is currently doing on disposals. She echoed some of what Roy had said, as she encouraged transferring artefacts to other organisations as an ethical means of disposal.

Another strong contender for dealing with "dead-wood" in collections, is finding new uses for the material. This cropped up repeatedly through the afternoon. Roy described his approach to this in taking a different look at an object, and searching for new meaning and audiences. Caitlin also raised this, as it encouraged curators to look for new connections, new relevances, to think of future projects for the material and other purposes for it.

In general it was very clear that Collecting Policies need to be very strict and focused, in order to avoid a build up of too much irrelevant material. Disposal is just as an important element of museums work as collecting is, and each individual organisation needs to implement their own procedure. Attitudes to disposal and sale are always shifting, however it was clear that the MA is doing a lot of positive work to help aid museum with this issue.

Lynsey Anderson

Curator & Exhibitions Officer,
Shetland Museum

Choose it, Use it or Lose it? Curating collections in the 21st century

Thursday

The day dawned sunny and bright over the first day of the Social History Curators Group conference, as we left the high street shops and headed for the City Arts Centre, Edinburgh. The Committee's discerning eye had chosen a venue to keep wayward curators entertained - all-automatic bathrooms, good food and plenty of both.

The talks of the day brought us all face to face with the substance of museums: the collections. The first day helped us to re-examine just what our collections are, in terms of being a resource and an asset for the work we do, and to think about how we might use them more strategically in the future.

Suzanne Keene (University College, London) took us back to basics. She questioned the role, uses and perhaps value of the 'fragments of the world' we hold in museums. Although museums' collections have grown, the tiny number of people given direct access to the collections raises awkward questions for us as curators. Keene argues that many collections could be more widely used for research, learning and enjoyment but the necessary documentation, resources and relationships

with other organisations have not developed in line with the collections museums hold. She concluded by challenging museums to think of better uses, and more use, of collections. We need to be facilitators of engagement with the collections.

Nick Poole (Museums Documentation Association) then took up one of the obstacles to completing this challenge: documentation. Although most museums now have some form of electronic documentation, some even with digital images; only a few have web-enabled documentation and even fewer have started thinking in terms of e-learning and thematic trails. The general direction museums are heading in, according to Poole, is tailoring collections expertise to audiences. He explored how the changing role of collections and information opens new opportunities for museums to create and manage intellectual property. Museums are uncomfortable with pandering to market demand, but a sensible business model could provide what public sector investment may not. And the danger is that if museums do not organise the process of publishing our information, there are plenty who will. After that vital component of museum



Glasgow Resource Centre: Interactive displays in the foyer. After a busy day there were still opportunities for 'networking'! Tea and cake: an important part of the conference.



endeavours (tea and biscuits. Is this on Museum Studies curricula?), we settled in to hear from those in the field.

Gillian Findlay (Scottish Museums Council) described the aims of the national Collections Development Strategy (CDS) for promoting Scotland's collections and their possibilities for engaging people. More than 12 million objects are in Scottish collections, with 54% in non-national museums - effectively a distributed national collection. The CDS aims to 'shape' collections to ensure their relevance and power to inspire and engage; as well as capturing the associated knowledge in an accessible form. In this Findlay echoed the previous points on the value of collections and the importance of documentation, whilst the priorities for working together and supporting stewardship encourage museums to share their solutions and ideas.

Finally, John Edwards (Keeper of Science and Maritime History, Aberdeen Museums) picked up the idea of choosing by actively developing collections through partnership. With careful forethought and through developing good relations with the oil industry, Aberdeen Museums has been able to develop comprehensive collections on the industry. Once the industry understood what the museum wanted they were able to make constructive suggestions, as well as being more inclined towards donations. Aberdeen now leads in this area and they share their knowledge with other museums - a real life example of the Collections Development Strategy's 'working together'

priority. The first day had set the scene for the conference. Collections were firmly in the focus. We were beginning to think more strategically about choosing, using and losing our collections to get the most out of them. But first we had to get to halls.

I'm sure I'm not alone in feeling that students have got it good these days - and I didn't leave that long ago! The rooms at Edinburgh University were neat, clean and comfy. The en-suite demonstrated how clever paper bath mats with footprint shapes really distract from the claustrophobic feeling of a room less than a metre wide.

The evening reception at the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons was also very cool. Our suave surroundings instilled a lot of awed whispering, but after a glass of wine we were ready to ogle some of the more gruesome pictures and implements. I'm sure there were more than a few vegetarians later that evening.

Friday afternoon

I was very excited about our opportunity to peek behind the scenes at Kelvingrove, as I had never been before. We certainly got off to a sumptuous start with a gorgeous meal laid on in the chic new café-restaurant. Admittedly some of us had already had salmon the night before, but when in Rome...

Kelvingrove did not disappoint. It truly is a splendid building, and the museum has some wonderful collections. The building has been beautifully restored with a new entrance using the old basement, making

really good use of space and creating a more accessible building.

In contrast to the previous museum layout, the fine art collection has been moved from the upper floor to fill one wing instead. It is hoped that more visitors will see it, whereas previously it was often missed out. I particularly liked the use of additional, optional, information in the art galleries, allowing visitors to flip through extra notes without distracting or frustrating purists. The interpretation also gave us a glimpse into the artists themselves, a human side for the non-connoisseur.

Other favourites are sure to be the *Record Breakers* natural history display, and the armouries gallery. The natural history display featured all sorts of animals that were remarkable in some way. The interpretation simply said how the creature was 'record breaking', without interfering with how the object engages people. The armouries also let the objects speak for themselves, with beautiful arrangements. The relatively low amounts of information was a little frustrating at times and is perhaps something that will change as the new exhibitions settle in and develop. All in all, however, Kelvingrove is a spectacular place to visit and is definitely recommended.

Jenny Brown

Curatorial Assistant (Collections Access)
Beamish,
The North of England
Open Air Museum

On 5th June 2006, delegates from across the country gathered at Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery in Warwickshire for the ever-popular 'How to identify Whatchamacallits' seminar, the first of which was held in 2000. The speakers had brought objects with them, and Becki Walker and her colleagues at Nuneaton had laid out a further selection as well as hosting the day.

Jack Kirby and Emma Williams

Steph Mastoris of National Waterfront Museum, Swansea, kicked off by explaining that the aim of the day was to provide an opportunity to refresh curatorial skills. Social history collections in museums had, he suggested, been formed from 'the bits that nobody else wanted to deal with', and as such we as curators need to be aware of materials, design concepts and styles and production methods from a range of disciplines.

In his introductory session on concepts of identification, Steph explained that we have to consider the purpose, date, method of production and wider significance of each object to be identified. He advised us to 'never be without a magnifying glass' in order to observe items closely. In analysing an object, we should consider a triangle of interrelating elements: form, function and material. Style is an additional element that is particularly useful for dating, although objects could sometimes be made in the same style for several decades, and obsolete technologies could survive for a long time.

Even an apparently obvious object such as a hammer can be considered using these analytical techniques: is it the standard woodworking claw hammer; or an engineering hammer for use on metal; or a leadworker's hammer made of hard wood; or a toffee hammer with a hatchet at one end to score lines for breaks; or a jeweller's hammer with an elongated handle to make delicate, measured strokes?

Nearly all items in social history collections are the products of human agency and so have a point of manufacture, a period of use and associated wear and tear, all of which may provide clues for identification. Steph pointed out that good design develops into durability and secondary uses: we use screwdrivers to open cans of paint, and old metal Oxo cube boxes to store innumerable small items. He concluded by suggesting useful resources, but also highlighting the potential of asking people about objects used within living memory, which can be a rich source of stories and information.



Delegates learning more about object identification at the Watchamacallit seminar.



Next up was Maggie Wood of Warwickshire Museums, to give us an introduction to costume. Maggie told us that to identify and date costume we needed to consider a 'package' of clues including shape and style; cut and construction; fabric; and embroidery, decoration and trimming. Looking predominantly at items from the 19th century Maggie helped us to identify and date different fibres and showed us that details such as pockets, dress shields, fastenings and dyes could be the keys to unlocking the mysteries of garments. She also warned us that it was dangerous to rely on one aspect of a garments construction or decoration as quite often it has been altered, repaired or completely reconstructed!

In the afternoon, Sylvia Crawley of Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery talked to us about wooden objects. We spent a lot of time looking at different sorts of wooden objects trying to identify whether they were made from hard or softwoods. The types of woods could often be easily identified by understanding its properties and the purpose of the objects. For example Elm is very tough, difficult to split and water resistant so its great for wheelwrighting, water pipes, cheese mould and coffin construction. Sycamore however, is extensively used in diary and kitchen equipment because it can be easily carved or turned, scrubbed without 'scratching' its surface and can tolerate getting wet and dry repeatedly. Finally, Sylvia then tested our new found knowledge with some mystery items from the Nuneaton collections, some of which left all of us flummoxed!

Steph Mastoris then gave a second session, this time on tools. The sheer diversity of tools made it hard to recognise every type. The phrase 'the right tool for the job' explains the proliferation, as a task becomes much more difficult if the wrong tool is used, and may sometimes be impossible without a tool. Most tools in museum collections are muscle powered, and so there is an interaction between the user, the tool and the material.

Key groups of tools include those for cutting, piercing and knocking. When trying to identify how a hand tool was used, we need to consider how it was held in the hand - not just for balance but for leverage and potential energy. It also helps to have an understanding of how tools were treated to improve their qualities in use. For example an iron chisel might have the tip heated then quenched in oil to produce a very sharp point. It would then be tempered (heated again) to make it more malleable.

Steph concluded by urging us to think about how tools were actually used: those that survive in our collections may be those that were less well used. It helps to see a suite of tools, for example those in a carpenter's chest and consider the relationship between them. It's also very useful to see original workshops and think about which tools were kept within arm's reach. To improve the interpretation of tools in museums, we need to set them in the context of their use.

The day concluded with an identification session looking at some unusual objects brought by delegates or selected from Nuneaton's collections - some of which were identified and some of which still remained enigmatic! An odd folding wooden frame was thought to be possibly for use in laundering clothes, but its exact purpose and use were mysterious. Some objects were unique or made in small numbers, and these will always be hard to identify even with expert knowledge such as that of the speakers at the seminar.

It was clear that one seminar wouldn't be enough for us to become experts: experience and knowledge of artefacts can only be acquired over time. To fully understand objects we also need to understand their original context through an awareness of the periods and settings in which they were used. However, we came away from the day armed with techniques to observe and analyse objects, and more confidence for dealing with the next mystery object to be found in our stores or brought to the museum.



Object Focus

Hand-crafted Gypsy pegs— an object of a forgotten community?

In 2005 Hampshire's Museums and Archives Service was awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to explore and present the county's hidden Gypsy Traveller heritage and culture. *The Living Album* project aims to help members of Hampshire's wider Gypsy and Traveller community to discover and access relevant museum and archive collections in a creative as well as an informative way. The project began in January 2006 and the outcomes to date have been the development and production of a project website (www.hants.gov.uk/rh/gypsy), a learning pack and DVD for schools and a touring exhibition.

The big question was how we could accurately represent this community that has been overlooked for so long? With the help of a knowledgeable steering group comprised of members of the Gypsy Traveller community we began to research and collect material for the project.

Within the archives in Hampshire there is a wealth of information relating to Gypsy Travellers which dates back as far as 1543. There is also a superb collection of photographs dating from the nineteenth century. However, despite the abundance of official records and other material which recorded Gypsy Travellers there is very little material from Gypsy Travellers themselves. This is due in part to the fact that Gypsy Traveller culture is based around oral traditions with stories and information being passed on through the generations. Also, due to the highly mobile nature of life in the past few Gypsy Travellers regularly attended school and there continues to be issues around literacy. The result of this meant that the only way to achieve a truly representative exhibition was to work closely with the local Gypsy Traveller community.

Another problem when considering the touring exhibition was that there was a real lack of objects that could be displayed.

Gypsy Traveller culture by its very nature meant that families lived on the road and therefore there was only room for the very essentials of life. Also, the traditional custom of burning the possessions of the deceased meant that many items were destroyed. Hampshire's Museums Service has a limited amount of Gypsy related objects in its stores including a model wagon, bee skeps, horse shoes and an infinite number of pegs. Indeed, to non-Gypsies, or Gorgios, traditional Gypsy pegs, along with the brightly painted wagons, have become one of the defining symbols of the Gypsy Traveller community. But what can these pegs tell us about the people they have come to represent and how well do they actually reflect Gypsy Traveller history and culture?

In many ways the craft of peg making represents a bygone era of Gypsy Traveller history and highlights the huge changes that the community has undergone since the mid-twentieth century. This set of pegs

were hand-crafted by Mr Smith, himself from Hampshire's Gypsy community, during the summer of 2006. Mr Smith was taught how to make them by his mother. The pegs are made from birch wood which is stripped of its bark, then cut to the right length, split up the middle and bound with a small piece of tin and fixed together with a small tack. This seemingly simple procedure actually takes a great deal of skill and practice to get it right. The pegs were not intended for use by the Gypsy Travellers themselves but were made to sell, or hawk, to people in the houses near to where Gypsy Travellers had set up camp. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, hawking represented an important means of making a little extra money, as Mr Smith remembers "making and selling the pegs kept the belly from rumbling many a time". For many house-dwellers, a visit from a Gypsy hawker could bring news of events from afar and could be the only visitor some rural people had for weeks on end. As well as selling pegs and other hand crafted items such as wooden flowers, some Gypsy Travellers also made money by providing a service as knife grinders, rag and bone men or scrap metal collecting. At various times of the year in many places, especially in the south of England, Gypsy Travellers were an important part of the labour force required for fruit, potatoes or hop picking.

The art of peg making can also tell us a lot about the roles of men and women in the Gypsy Traveller community and also about the importance of family life in their culture. Often, the whole family would be involved in the process of peg making, the children would find the wood and the older children and parents would make the pegs and the women would go out to sell them. In a time before Gypsy Travellers and their mobile lifestyle was curtailed by various pieces of legislation extended family groups would travel together to well-established stopping places. Close familial bonds remain vital to the Gypsy Traveller way of life and elders are well respected.

This set of pegs is not only symbolic of a bygone age but also represents the rapid changes that this unique community has undergone in recent years. Today, unfortunately, it is only the older generation who have the skills to continue the traditional crafts. Even the tin that holds the pegs together is hard to come by as fewer people continue to make them. In recent years legislation has put an end to cold calling, therefore the hawking of wares has ended and other traditional forms of work undertaken by Gypsy Travellers such as tarmacing, landscape gardening and scrap

metal dealing has also been affected. The maker of the pegs, Mr Smith, is now only able to travel with his wife in their traditional bow top wagon for a couple of weeks a year, and the rest of the time they live on a static caravan site. The Gypsy Traveller community is keen to preserve "the old ways" but for many young Gypsy Travellers the traditional Gypsy pegs represent a way of life that they simply cannot relate to as their culture has undergone such a transformation. It is only recently that interest in the Gypsy Traveller community from museums is growing and a number of projects are currently recording the hidden history of this community. Although this is a positive step forward, it reminds us that unless we as professionals actively seek to uncover these under-researched groups these fascinating histories and cultures can disappear without a trace.

So, this unique set of pegs, with good interpretation, can communicate a huge amount of information about the Gypsy

Traveller community. However, only using a limited number of rather predictable objects, such as the set of pegs, to represent the Gypsy Traveller community can serve to reinforce stereotypes and prejudice. To really inform and challenge visitors a commitment to contemporary collecting is the answer. Today, the traditional symbols of Gypsy Traveller lifestyles have been replaced by mobile phones, imitation Chanel and Dior products and Crown Derby china. A combination of old and new objects, supported by sound research and community participation can bring the history and culture of this often misunderstood group to life. The traditional Gypsy pegs are just one of many objects which can begin to help us to understand this unique and vibrant community.

Lorna Digweed—Project Officer

**'The Living Album'
Hampshire's Gypsy Heritage.**

Janet Arnold's needlework exercise book

Bristol's Blaise Castle House Museum houses a collection of items relating to Janet Arnold's school years. Janet, who died in 1998, spent her life studying historical costume. Her research of costume collections throughout the UK and abroad, combined with the publication of several authoritative books, made her a well-known and respected authority among the museum community.

Adam G. Bell

**Documentation Assistant, Social History,
Blaise Castle House Museum**

Janet Arnold's contribution to the study and appreciation of costume history was one that few social history curators will be unaware of. Her ground-breaking Patterns of Fashion series - in which she illustrated, with meticulous detail, the cut and construction of historical female dress - has been much valued by museum curators and period costume designers from stage

and screen, since publication in the 1960s. An internationally renowned expert in her field, many museums welcomed Janet into their stores, and it was with a great sense of loss that her death at the age of 66 was announced in 1998.

At Bristol's Blaise Castle House Museum (BCHM), Janet was a familiar face, using the Museum's extensive costume collection - the fourth largest in the South West - as a teaching resource for students at the then Bristol Polytechnic (now University of the West of England). Under Janet's tutelage, students carefully analysed pieces from the costume collection, producing detailed drawings, many of which now form part of the object record. Janet's familiarity with Bristol and the South West was, however, not entirely down to the excellent costume collections in this part of the country. In fact, she grew up in Bristol, her secondary education received just a few miles from BCHM at the Red Maids' School in Westbury-on-Trym.

A treasured collection of items relating to her time at the Red Maids' School was bequeathed by Janet to BCHM in her will. Within this collection is a school exercise book used by Janet, age 13 (TD3332/2). This item is, without a doubt, my favourite object at BCHM. What singles it out as truly special is that it was Janet's needlework book, containing neat little drawings of garments and their construction. Just under twenty years later, Janet's *Patterns of Fashion: 1660-1860* was published. Appreciated as much for her wonderfully accomplished line drawings as for the research underpinning her expertise, it brings a smile to my face to look through her needlework book, the pages of which hint at the early beginnings of what was to be a lifetime's passion.

Janet began her schooling at Red Maids' in 1943. Here she was to make life-long friends, among them Sue Thorn, whom I spoke with prior to writing this article. While Janet was known of and esteemed by many, Sue knew Janet better perhaps than anyone else. In speaking with Janet's old school friend, I gained an insight into the young Janet - a petite, pigtailed schoolgirl known to everyone as 'Tich'. Sue recalled an amusing prank played out in their first form classroom, which contained wooden lockers for pupil's belongings. "Janet being very small" remembered Sue, "we shut her in one of the lockers, before Miss Stoker arrived. When she came, and the Register was called, this little muffled voice - 'Here miss' - came from the locker".

Red Maids' School was founded in 1634, and is the oldest surviving girls' school in Britain. The school takes its name from the bright red uniforms worn by the pupils, and among the items in the Janet Arnold Collection at BCHM is a list, supplied by the school to Janet's parents in July 1943, detailing the required items of uniform (TD3329). Glancing at the list, Sue exclaimed, "Oh yes, those black knickers were ghastly!". She explained that "Mother went spare" at the extent of the list, which included for example three different types of shoes (four if you include shoes for lacrosse, listed as "advisable additions to those which are compulsory"). The list ends however with the note that, "Owing to war conditions the School cannot insist on the purchase of all articles of uniform, but in cases of any difficulty the Headmistress would like to be consulted."

In addition to the above list, a handwritten note made by Janet's mother reveals the expenditure on her daughter's first school term, the red tunic being the most expensive item at £1 15/- 3d. Because

of the difficulty of obtaining the necessary red dye in wartime conditions, the school eventually allowed pupils to wear red and white check. Other items bought included shoes costing 19/- 11d, second-hand books 17/- 6d, a cardigan 12/- and a hat costing 9/- 6d.

At school, Janet excelled in art, receiving the Junior Art Prize (shared) for 1947. Before leaving Red Maids' in 1949, she sat the Cambridge School Certificate, gaining distinctions in English literature, English language and French. An exam sheet from the summer exam of her final year (TD3335) includes the questions "Do you believe in equal pay for equal work? Answer in the form of a discussion, if you like" and "It is more important to teach good manners in a school than to provide free milk. Discuss this statement and give your own views".

Teaching domestic science, housewifery and needlework was a Miss Lewarne, a Jewish woman of German descent who had moved to Britain to escape Nazi Germany. Described within Janet's third form housewifery & domestic science exercise book (TD3332/1) is everything from the "correct" way in which to hang clothes on a washing line to the cleaning of a toilet brush. A paragraph that merits quoting in full is that on personal hygiene:

"Personal hygiene means personal cleanliness. You should change your clothes regularly to obtain this cleanliness. Baths should, if possible, be had once a day. Underwear should be changed at least once a week, twice if possible. Socks or stockings should be changed every day & silk ones washed as soon as you change them. Shoes should be worn turn & turn about, if possible. Hair should be washed once every three weeks." (emphasis my own). Sixty years on, some of these recommendations sound rather far removed from today's idea of personal hygiene, making me wonder what people will think of our present standards of hygiene in the year 2066!

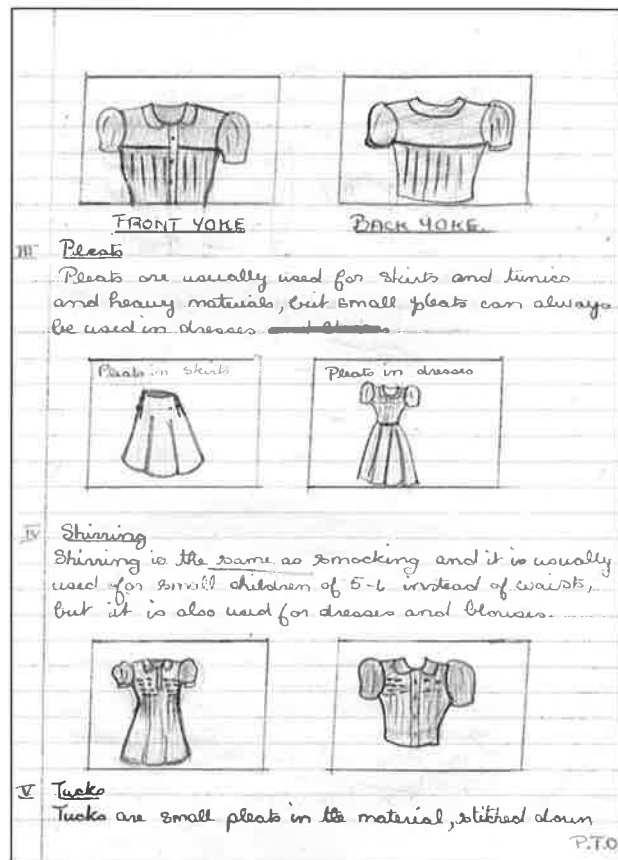
Turning to Janet's needlework book (TD3332/2), it should come as no surprise that the young pupil excelled here, gaining mostly A+ for her work inside. Instructions on how to go about "cutting out a blouse" and "fixing on a collar" appear alongside descriptions of techniques including "pleating, tucking, gathering & etc.". At one point, the teacher has noted in red ink, "The work is set out very well and the drawings are very pleasing". Looking at the neat drawings with carefully annotated descriptions, there are clear similarities with the patterns drawn by Janet many years later.

I have Janet Arnold to thank for a good deal of my knowledge and interest in historical costume; in fact I clutched a copy of her *Patterns of Fashion: 1860-1940* as I walked into my first museum interview. Coming into contact with her needlework exercise book and other associated school items was a pleasure that made me say to myself, "This is one of the reasons I so enjoy my job".



Janet aged 11: On the back is written 'To Aunt Elsie With Love From Janet ('Tich)'.

Below: Pages from the Needlework book.



Selected books by Janet Arnold:

'Patterns of Fashion: Englishwomen's dresses and their construction c. 1660-1860', Wace 1964 / Macmillan 1972 (revised metric edition 1977).

'Patterns of Fashion: Englishwomen's dresses and their construction c. 1860-1940', Wace 1966 / Macmillan 1972 (revised metric edition 1977).

'A Handbook of Costume', Macmillan, 1973 (reprinted 1978).

'Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd', W.S. Maney & Son Ltd., 1988.

19th Century Beaded Purse

Josie Sheppard

Curator of Costume and Textiles,
York Castle Museum

"One skein of cerise, one of blue fine crochet silk, one skein of gold twist; one hank of gold beads N0.6, one ditto of silver; a gilt top and tassel will also be required."

In this somewhat peremptory manner an 1849 issue of *The Ladys' Magazine* introduces its readers to a new pattern for a crocheted and beaded purse; details of how to make the purse then follow.

By the middle of the nineteenth century women's magazines regularly featured patterns like this, and they could also be found in the little instruction books on needlecrafts which were published in increasing numbers. Even museum collections that do not include much in the way of costume and textiles will often have a number of these dainty items tucked away somewhere in their stores, and if the quantities that survive are anything to go by, they were very popular needlework objects. They would be intended for their maker's own use, or as gifts for family or perhaps meant for sale at a fund-raising bazaar. One reason for the numbers of beaded purses that survive is probably their small size. They would require little financial outlay in materials, and even a less-than-enthusiastic needlewoman could finish a purse in a fairly short, before the project lost its appeal.

The techniques most often seen in surviving nineteenth century purses are knitting, crochet and netting. Netting was especially popular in the early years of the nineteenth century, and crochet was used from the 1840s until beaded purses fell from favour in the 1870s. Knitted purses were made throughout the period.

Silk appears to have been the most popular yarn, and it was used with very fine-gauge steel knitting needles and crochet hooks. Tiny glass beads were available in a myriad of colours, and these were sold in hanks. For ease of use many women kept their beads in small pill-boxes, sorted by colour. Early nineteenth-century beads are much smaller than their later counterparts; some are so minute that they resemble large

grains of coloured sand. Steel bands became popular in the 1840s, although sadly they are prone to rust.

Before work could begin, the beads had to be strung onto the yarn, in the order in which they would be worked into a pattern. If beads of only two colours were used, this was simple process, but if the pattern was more complicated - such as multi-coloured flowers - a chart had to be followed. Very fine beading needles - sometimes called 'straws' - were used for threading the tiny beads onto the yarn. Each bead was taken up, a stitch at a time, until the knitted or crocheted pattern was complete. The purse could be finished by mounting on a metal frame, made of pinchbeck, steel, or - more rarely - silver, and a tassel was often attached at the base of the purse.

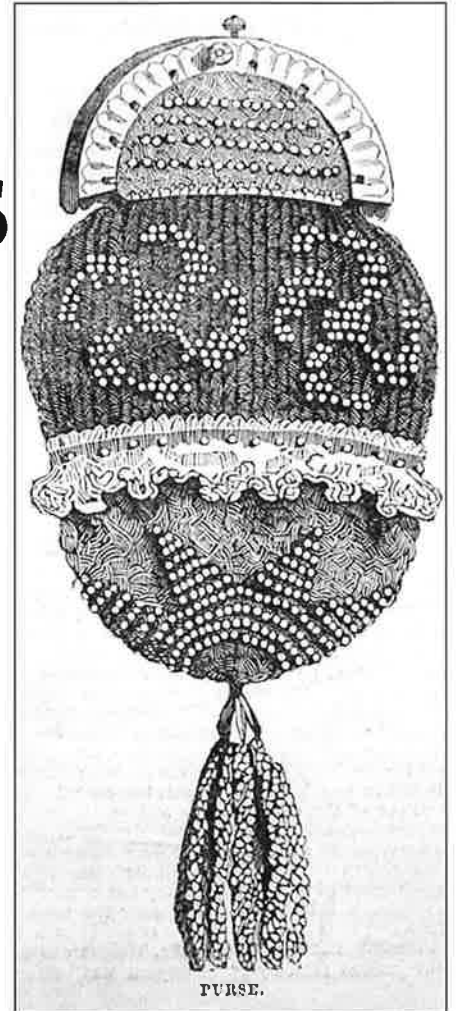
A different style of purse, made using the same methods is sometimes called a 'miser's' purse, or a 'long' purse. This is simply a narrow tube, with an opening half-way down its length. Two rings or 'slides' can be moved along to trap the contents at either end. There are some finely-worked early nineteenth century examples, but these purses seem to have been most popular between 1850 and 1870, when many were crocheted and decorated with quantities of bright steel beads. Pairs of slides and matching tassels could be purchased as sets for making long purses: Steel or pinchbeck are the most common materials, but more expensive examples could be made of ivory, mother-of-pearl, or enamelled metals.

By the 1870s mass-produced purses made of leather or metal were becoming popular, and fashions in needlework were also changing. Home-made purses were still produced, but the intricate and time-consuming techniques which can be seen on beaded purses in the early and middle years of the nineteenth century were no longer widely used.

Useful Reference Books:

Clabburn, Pauline, *Beadwork*, (Shire Books, 2001)

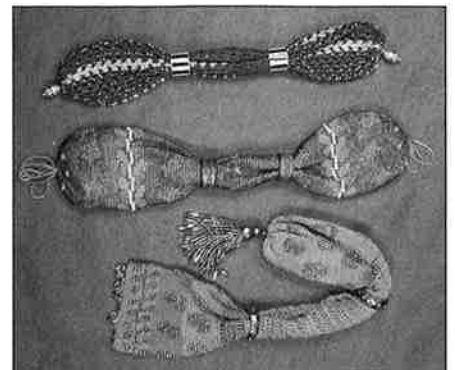
Foster, Vanda, *Bags and Purses*, (Costume Accessories Series, Batsford, 1982)



Above: Crocheted silk beaded purse, from a pattern in *The Ladys' Magazine*, September 16th 1849.

Below:
Materials used for making purses.

Long Purses, top to bottom
Crocheted, with gilt beads, pinchbeck slides, 1840-1860.
Knitted, with glass beads, yellow metal slides, 1820-1850.
Crocheted, with steel bands and slides, 1840-1860.





Picture Hunt, All "B's"

Thank you to 'Community Games Series' by Universal Publications Ltd for this edition's Tea Break puzzle. There are 60 objects portrayed in the picture above—each one commences with a letter 'B'. How many can you get?

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41. Bowler	21. Battleship
42. Boy	22. Bear
43. Bracelet	23. Beast
44. Branch	24. Beauty
45. Bread	25. Beaver
46. Bricks	26. Beekeeper
47. Brogue	27. Beehive
48. Broom	28. Belt
49. Bucket	29. Belt
50. Buckle	30. Bin
51. Bulls	31. Birds
52. Bumble Bee	32. Biscuits
53. Bundle	33. Bluebell
54. Bungalow	34. Boat
55. Bush	35. Bodice
56. Buttercup	36. Bonnet
57. Butterfly	37. Book
58. Butterfly Net	38. Boots
59. Buoy	39. Bo-peep
60. Buttons	40. Boulder
	20. Bathing Hat
	19. Bathing Costume
	18. Bather
	17. Bath Chair
	16. Bat (Mammal)
	15. Bat (Table Tennis)
	14. Basket
	13. Barrel
	12. Baron
	11. Barley
	10. Banjo
	9. Band-bax
	8. Bananas
	7. Balloon
	6. Ballet
	5. Ball
	4. Bag
	3. Badge
	2. Baby

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