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ISSUE 59



**Histories
Revealed at MSIM**

**Time travelling
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**SHCG & mda
partnership news**

**'Hello Sailor' & Proud
Heritage Reviews**

SHCG 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:
 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 NEXT ISSUE:
 8TH OCTOBER 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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Front Cover: Autographic Junior camera and Vest Pocket Autographic camera with case, made by Eastman Kodak. Copyright Museum of Science & Industry Manchester.
 Contents Photo: Hello Sailor!, p15.

Welcome to Issue 59. The committee have been busy organising the Annual Conference, this year it will be based in Sheffield with a day trip to Hull. The theme is 'Too Hot to Handle? Exploring emotive issues in social history'. The conference also hosts our AGM and this year we have a number of committee posts up for election. If you are interested in becoming a committee member, (it looks good on your CPD Plan!) please do get in touch with our Chair: Briony Hudson, or any committee member, our contact details are on the back cover, to find out what is involved.

The Theory and Practice section contains three articles about outreach projects all working with different audiences. The 'Histories Revealed' project in Manchester aimed to collect the social history stories surrounding many of its science and industry based objects. Many oral testimonies were gathered by people who worked in the industries or used the products. By contrast the North Somerset Museum has been working with a group of teenagers to produce an exhibition called 'Then and now - teens through the time warp', and the Royal Cornwall Museum has co-ordinated a project recording I.K. Brunel's legacy in Cornwall with help from a group of volunteers.

There is a review of 'Get the Picture!' a seminar about care of and access to photographic collections, held at Beamish Museum in February. Also there is a review of the seminar run with Proud Heritage looking at lesbian, gay, bi and transsexual history for museum staff followed by a review of 'Hello Sailor! gay life on the ocean wave' an exhibition originally on at the Merseyside Maritime Museum but now in Southampton.

The Object Focuses in this issue are very different but each has a personal story to tell. Enjoy reading them along with all the other articles in this Issue. There is just space to say a huge thank you to all the contributors, I shall be emailing a call for articles for the next edition in September, the deadline is 8th October. Hopefully I will see some of you at the Annual Conference, if not have a lovely Summer.

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SHCG MATTERS

Annual Conference 2007:

Too Hot to Handle?
Exploring emotive issues
in social history

Thursday 5th–Saturday 7th
July 2007
Sheffield and Hull

This year's conference will examine how social history museums can interpret controversial and emotive subjects, including those that disturb and affect, or subjects that are more difficult to enable the public to engage with.

With sessions looking at the reasons why museums should be interpreting such subjects, and case studies involving a whole range of themes and projects showing how they can, there should be plenty of food for thought and inspiration!

Sessions will cover themes such as interpreting the Holocaust, refugee experiences, the Ku Klux Klan, mining disasters, working with the Gypsy/Traveller community, and exhibiting the Troubles in Northern Ireland. As 2007 marks the anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, we will also be looking at how two major new projects at Hull and the National Maritime Museum, are interpreting the history and impact of the slave trade. Visits include:

- Wilberforce House Museum, Hull
- Millennium Galleries, Sheffield
- Tipton Masonic Hall
- Weston Park Museum, Sheffield

Total conference fee is £230

Non SHCG members will be charged an additional £20

Including B&B accommodation for Thursday and Friday nights in single en-suite room, buffet lunches and refreshments, evening meals on Thursday and Friday evenings (N.B. alcohol is not included) and transport to Hull.

Non Residential Day Fees start from £30.

DEADLINE FOR BOOKINGS:
All forms must be received no later than 22nd June 2007.

Two free places are available to members who have never attended a conference before.

Applicants should write justifying their reasons for requiring a free place. Successful applicants will be asked to write a review of the conference for SHCG News.

Please apply to:

Zelda Baveystock, (SHCG),
The International Centre for
Cultural and Heritage Studies,
University of Newcastle,
Bruce Building,
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU
or email
Zelda.Baveystock@newcastle.ac.uk
by Friday 8th June.

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BK SHCG COMMITTEE

Aiming High

The Archives in Museums Subject Specialist Network (AiM SSN) has recently been successful in its bid for an Implementation Grant. £16,250 was awarded by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) to this network, to produce a sustainable training programme. This is an exciting time for archives, many of which are held in museums.

MLA/SSNs

SSNs are a way for the cultural sector to share knowledge, expertise and collections. Stephanie Lewis, Renaissance programme manager at MLA, is keen for the networks to bring about cross-domain working. "Bringing together the museums community with expertise and support from archives and libraries is a key element of many of the networks we are funding and something we hope all networks will move towards," she said.

The Project

A number of reports have highlighted the need to increase awareness of archival principles and practices amongst those working outside the core archive

community, to help make their archive collections far more accessible to users. The 'Understanding Archives in the South East' report, 2005, found that 'Museums represent by some margin the largest group of archival institutions in the region, and also the most diverse'.

The AiM SSN wants to help make archive collections in museums more accessible (both physically and intellectually). It believes that the best way to achieve this is by training those who work with these collections, who are generally non-specialist, lone workers. The network will develop a comprehensive skills sharing programme, drawing on its cross-domain membership. Professional archivists will work with museum colleagues to develop and deliver training sessions on the care & interpretation of archives in each of the 9 MLA regions, Scotland, and Wales. Participants will be provided with training materials to take what they learn back to their museum, helping ensure the project has a sustained impact.

A training package will be produced to include guidance notes and a demonstration dvd of material. This will cover basic archive skills, potentially including basic preservation techniques, storage materials and methods, cataloguing, digitisation, interpretation. Network members will be

involved in each of these sessions, to provide real life case studies.

All museums with archive collections will potentially benefit from this project, gaining a greater understanding of the needs of archives and able to improve their own collections and accessibility. The formal training events and training pack will be available to all museums which hold archive material. The professional archivists and record offices involved will build an understanding of the archive collections held in their area, or area of interest, and help ensure their preservation.

Building on the skills development programme, the network also intends to develop a Skills Bank: a directory of members as a framework for the future exchange of knowledge and support.

This project emulates the network's overall mission to help provide museum staff and volunteers with the skills to make their archive collections accessible. It will also help build relationships for continued partnership working to which the network is committed, and help build and sustain contacts within the network to provide help and advice to other members.

For more information contact:

Heather Boyns (Chair), AiM SSN,
Email: heather.boyns@beaulieu.co.uk.

Email list roundup

SHCG's exclusive email list for members is now two years old.

Over 150 SHCG members use the list to share news and information on topics relevant to social history in museums. The list usually receives around one email each day, so email overload is not a problem.

In the last few months the list has seen discussion of several topical issues. As Accreditation continues to be rolled out around the country, there has been discussion about writing documentation procedural manuals. The general consensus was that producing this document is a time-consuming process, but that MDA's factsheets (available on the MDA website) are very useful.

Access to museum collections for people with disabilities is a practical area often raised on the list. Several members contributed suggestions about interpreting historic buildings for visually impaired visitors. Ideas included using touchable examples of key architectural features and furnishings (as used at the Victoria and Albert Museum) and using audio guide

trails. There were also international examples of good practice from the Netherlands, Germany and Finland - the latter two as part of an EU-funded Access to Cultural Heritage project.

Another discussion considered the merits of different audio guide handsets. There are several practical features such as carrying straps and reasonably sized buttons that make these devices easier to use, although varying needs mean that manufacturers have not yet produced a handset that will suit everybody.

List members also debated the practicalities of acquiring objects that are destined to be regularly borrowed for ceremonial functions. The thread was prompted by an offer of a football trophy which would be taken out and inscribed with a new winner's name each year. The most famous instance of this kind of ceremonial usage is the Lord Mayor's coach at the Museum of London, but items from Masonic lodges and in cathedrals provide comparable examples. While these kind of objects place an administrative burden on museums, there was a feeling that they do represent a living side to collections and can

raise the profile of museums.

There have also been a few pictures of mystery objects for list members to try and identify. A mysterious polished wooden stick caused much debate, with opinion divided as to whether it was an 18th-century head/ wig-scratcher, a ring-stretching device used by jewellers, or even a glove-stretcher. A reminder that objects for quite different uses can have a broadly similar appearance.

Joining the list

If you would like to join the list, please send an email to shcg-list-request@mailtalk.ac.uk (this is also the address for any queries) stating your name and whether you are a personal member or employed by an institutional member. You will receive an automated acknowledgement of your request, but please note that requests to join the list are then processed manually, not automatically.

**Jack Kirby-Thinktank,
Birmingham Science Museum**

If you have any queries about the list please email Jack via:
shcg-list-request@mailtalk.ac.uk

SHCG wins major grant award for 'Object Lessons'



Exciting times for SHCG lie ahead, as it has won its first major grant of £23,250 from the MLA's Renaissance Subject Specialist Network Implementation grants programme. The award will help us develop our programmes of materials-based training for the benefit of everyone working with diverse social history collections.

For a long time, you have told us that you want us to deliver more practical seminars, and that it is increasingly difficult for social history curators to find training to develop their knowledge of materials. Whilst SHCG organises and delivers at least two collections-oriented seminars a year, the workload of the committee has meant that we have found it difficult to deliver more than this. This grant will help our training programme become more sustainable, by creating a unique series of practical learning resources.

'Object lessons' will deliver the equivalent of loans boxes for curators, to help you develop your knowledge of materials commonly found in collections. Each box will contain samples of one kind of material (e.g. a range of different types of wood, metal, ceramic or glass) alongside associated handling collections and paper-based learning resources. The boxes will be available to be borrowed either by a single member institution - you could, for example, take the resources into store to help you work on one aspect of your collections, or work through the resources with a team of colleagues at your own pace. The resources

'Object lessons' developed after the success of the Whatchamacallits' seminars.

will also include a toolkit of how to expand the box into a fuller facilitated training session, so that a pre-existing network such as a regional AMA support group or Federation could borrow one for a more formal one-day event, much like the existing SHCG Seminar series.

The grant will allow SHCG to develop the template for these resources and to run a pilot of the scheme initially in the north-east. However, it is hoped that once the resources have been drafted and tested, members in other regions will offer to house additional boxes, for easier distribution around the country.

A survey of members will be following shortly, to ensure that the boxes created will meet your training priorities. We will also be looking for a small quantity of handling collections to provide the content for the boxes; so if you are currently considering any disposals, please get in touch. We will be seeking small, portable items only, but will welcome objects that are deteriorated or in poor condition, especially if they are a good illustration of common collections' care issues.

If you have any comments to make about the scheme, please contact

Zelda Baveystock at Newcastle University
Tel: 0191 222 3858 or
Email: Zelda.baveystock@ncl.ac.uk

'Collections Link' wins Best of the Web Award

MDA is delighted to announce that the Renaissance-funded 'Collections Link' website (www.collectionslink.org.uk) has been named the Best Museum Professionals' Site at the Best of the Web Awards.

Winners of the prestigious awards were announced on 13th April at the 2007 Museums and the Web conference in San Francisco. The awards are presented annually to recognise achievement in heritage website design in a range of categories honouring the best online exhibitions, research and educational sites and resources for heritage professionals.

'Collections Link' is a partnership of more than 15 national professional organisations, and is managed by MDA in partnership with The Institute of Conservation and the National Preservation Office. The site provides easy access to guidance and best practice in the management of collections, featuring a wealth of information on issues from conservation, copyright and environmental monitoring to insurance, security and emergency planning.

In making the award, the international panel of judges praised the site as a valuable service with an expansive scope, and described it as 'very informative and also very educational, accessible and easy to use.' Nick Poole, MDA Chief Executive, commented, 'At MDA, we are passionate about delivering sensible, practical resources which are genuinely useful to people who work with collections. Winning Best Museum Professionals' Site at Best of the Web is a tremendous validation of our work and really shows what you can do when you work together.'

Alison Hems, Renaissance Director at the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, which sponsors MDA commented, 'Renaissance is all about delivering improvement in museums, and developing Collections Link as the single, authoritative place to go for all collections advice is a key part of our strategy. This award is a real seal of approval on our work, particularly since it is voted for by museum professionals.'

The full list of winners from each of the award categories is available now at: www.conference.archimuse.com

SHCG in partnership with MDA

In April, SHCG signed a partnership agreement with MDA.

This milestone development arose initially from discussion over collaborative working that began when Nick Poole, Director of MDA, spoke at last year's SHCG conference.

Briony Hudson—SHCG Chair

MDA are particularly keen to work with us to develop the firstBASE database, and this led Nick to offer SHCG a formal partnership. The agreement, initially until March 2008, covers a number of areas of work and specific projects where partnership working will be mutually beneficial. MDA are also providing SHCG with funding to enable us to meet our joint objectives. The agreement covers three main areas:

firstBASE

MDA are extremely keen to continue to build on the potential of the firstBASE database that SHCG have been developing since 1999. As well as the addition of further data to the online bibliography, we plan to explore ways to link the information to MDA's Collections Link site, to review the current software used to run the database, and to work together to increase the accessibility of both existing and new data beyond SHCG's current remit.

SHIC update

MDA are committed to producing an updated, electronic version of SHIC. As Nick Poole outlined in his article in the last issue of the News, the plan is to ensure SHIC's usefulness into the 21st century. MDA quite rightly view the SHCG membership as the core users of SHIC, and therefore as vital stakeholders in this process. They aim to collate all of the changes, alterations and ways of working that museums have already developed to fit SHIC to their needs, and attempt to use this as the basis of the update. SHCG's role is at

least two-fold:

- 1: To use our networks so that all members can contribute to this exercise.
- 2: To have an SHCG representative on the SHIC editorial committee that will be leading the update.



Joint promotion

Both organisations will publicise each other's events and activities. We will also be able to draw on MDA's annual market research exercise for data that might be useful to develop SHCG's work. In addition, we will be investigating the possibility of using MDA's new online shop (launched in April 2007) to sell places on seminars and conferences, and perhaps even membership in the future!

We also hope that MDA are going to take over hosting SHCG's website with a view to moving it onto a Content Management System. This should make updating and adding content easier for committee members, and therefore enable us to make better use of this channel of communication and publicity for the Group.

Clearly the partnership is a fantastic opportunity for SHCG to make an impact, benefit from MDA's expertise, national role and increased remit, and to continue to develop from a strengthened position. The potential for future collaboration is significant, so please do not hesitate to get in touch if you'd like more information about the current proposals, or have suggestions for other areas of mutually beneficial work. We will keep you updated on progress and, of course, you will be hearing from us for input into the various projects in the next few months.

What's the difference?

Thank you to 'Party Pepys Games' for this edition's Tea Break puzzle. There are 12 differences between the two pictures. Look very closely to spot them all!



1. Lower cricket stump longer.
2. Seam on cricket ball moved.
3. Collar on Son's shirt missing.
4. Bat longer.
5. Bush longer (in background).
6. Button on Dad's shirt-cuff moved.
7. Strap missing from pad (left leg).
8. Blade of grass missing (right).
9. Flag moved on tower.
10. Window moved on tower.
11. Daughter's sock pulled up.
12. Part of ball missing.



Histories Revealed

at the Museum of Science and Industry

This article is an account of the issues arising from the design and use of an outreach programme to support a collection project at the Museum of Science and Industry.

John Collins

**Histories Revealed Project Officer
-MSIM**

'Histories Revealed' is a Designation Challenge Fund project that aims to enhance understanding of the Museum's collections by gathering stories from the people behind the objects.

These stories are collected by recording oral history interviews and collecting other material from people who have had contact with the industries with which the project deals. These collections are supported by an outreach programme that aims to engage with communities to encourage people to realise the potential for their experiences to be relevant to the project and so to their community and the historical record.

The majority of the objects in the Museum's collection have been made by or

used by people in Greater Manchester and represent an important and significant collection of Manchester's heritage. Some of these objects are however lacking a human dimension without which visitors can find it difficult to appreciate the nature and scope of the collections.

'Histories Revealed' aims to collect 150 oral histories. As well as adding to the Museum's collection, the recordings will be presented in 2 temporary exhibitions. They will also inspire 8 travelling exhibitions that will tour community venues while also being highlighted on the Museum's website.

The new resources provided through interviews will be used to make improvements to the permanent galleries as well as to inform a review of the Museum's collecting policy.

The Museum had existing links with the community in East Manchester, which the project seeks to build on while also establishing new links with the communities with relevance to the project. The project aims to reach over 1000 new users through outreach activities that include object handling and reminiscence sessions. The purpose of the project's outreach work

is multifarious. It acts as a means of familiarising participants with the range of material the Museum holds as well as prompting reminiscences related to the Museum's collections. The work also aims to encourage outreach participants with relevant personal experiences to come forward to volunteer an oral history interview, as well as incorporating material collected as part of the project into further outreach sessions.

These manifold objectives all aim to impart upon participants the relevance of the Museum's collections to their own lives and that of their community, as well as highlighting the potential importance and relevance to the project of the stories that participants can tell of their own experiences.

Handling Sessions

The content of the outreach programme has a number of determining factors. It should be stressed that it was never a case of designing an unchanging programme based on the collections available in the Museum's handling collection and taking these sessions out to the community. The

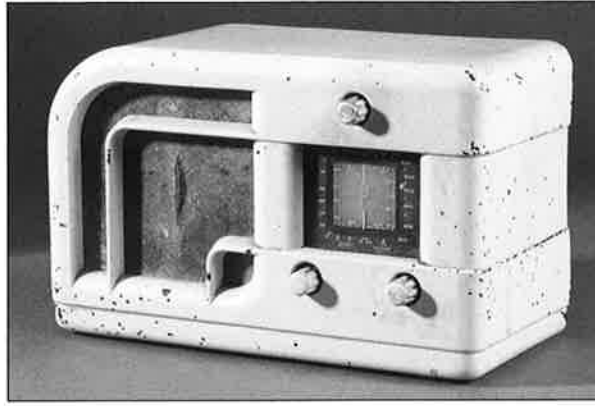
programme's content has been informed by a number of issues but has throughout the programme been flexible, pragmatic and responsive.

Outreach activities have a significant reliance on the Museum's handling collection. This collection consists of accessioned objects which are presented without interpretative materials in almost 150 boxes. These boxes are held on site in the Museum's collections centre in their own handling area, and while they are not loaned out to groups the objects are available to be used in sessions. The benefit of the handling collection make up is that rather than prescribed themed handling boxes with consistent predetermined content, the collection can be used more flexibly, so allowing more sessions to be created from the same group of objects. The content of the handling collection is varied and so required sessions to be planned to create a coherent theme using the objects in the handling boxes.

As well as the objects from the handling collection, sessions have included where appropriate, images from the Museums archives. These resources went to the production of a number of themed sessions although their content was decided by an array of factors.

With the overall aim of the project to collect oral histories, the sessions were designed to elicit responses among certain groups. The design was sometimes influenced by the objects held in the handling collection and the Museum archive. In some cases the handling collection includes objects which have direct relevance to the project and need little interpretation. The Museum has in its collection items which are from companies in relevant districts of Manchester such as Ferranti radios from Moston and a number of clay pipes from Pollock's Pipes in Ancoats. In these cases the objects, supported by material such as advertising and catalogues from the Museum's archive, can stand alone as sessions about the companies and their products and the ways that participants have engaged with both.

However, in the case of the textiles industry and many of the other industries of East Manchester, the handling collection does not have objects with provenance to link them specifically to the places, people and industries with which the project deals. As a result sessions have to be devised which rely on interpretation and the use of objects to prompt more general memories. Such general sessions can make use of objects such as protective clothing and tools to create sessions (with the help of archive material) on working life and cameras to



Left: Ferranti radio model 546, used as part of 'Radio and Entertainment' handling session.

Previous page:
'Radio and Entertainment' object handling session at Histories Revealed launch event.

create sessions on photography. The aim of such sessions is to prompt more personal reminiscence which might reveal experiences that participants may not realise are of relevance to the project and so identify potential oral history interviewees who would otherwise have been hard to reach. It has also been possible to generalise sessions which use specific objects such as Ferranti radios to become a session on the story of 'Radio and Entertainment' with similar aims to reveal knowledge participants might not consider important.

Another factor which has informed content has been feedback received by groups in the course of outreach. This feedback has sometimes taken the form of an informal suggestion and sometimes has been a result of reflecting after a session on the types of topics that groups were keen to talk about. Interestingly none of the feedback forms received have ever suggested new topics for sessions.

As a result of reflecting on sessions it became apparent that especially in group situations reminiscences were improved if themes to which everyone could relate to were discussed. One topic that recurred was home and domestic life and as a result a session on this topic has been put together. This session topic had the advantage of being well represented by objects in the handling collection and also reflecting a section of the oral history interview which asks about home and family life, and so remained relevant to the project.

A distinct advantage of the outreach programme and oral history collection running concurrently is that while oral history recordings are used in galleries and as part of many interpretative projects such as temporary exhibitions and education workshops, the project is able to produce new material to replenish the content and themes of outreach sessions. In this way the sessions can become increasingly relevant to participants and so making it more likely that new participants can be identified to give oral histories.

Lessons Learned

The outreach programme identifies groups to participate through networking and publicity including flyers encouraging people to take part. East Manchester was targeted geographically while mapping exercises for textile industry locations directed textiles outreach.

Many of the groups who have been involved in outreach have been pre-existing groups who have requested a session. It has been an issue that for a group participating in an outreach session the full rationale of the project has in some cases been a little lost. On telling a group that in the session you are about to run you want to hear their stories and experiences, it is often the case that participants have taken the session itself to be their opportunity to relate such tales. Often, if you successfully bring the museum to a group in a session they can assume that what they have said has been said to the museum. It is difficult when a group will most likely meet next to do something completely unrelated to your session to impart that to contribute their story to the project they need to follow up afterwards. There is also a hesitance to give out personal details after the session when, as far as some are concerned, they have already given you the information you have asked for.

In some cases participants in outreach did not have direct experience of the industries the project deals with. However groups are through this process engaging with the Museum's collections and due to the replenishment of sessions with material from interviews, such groups are among the first to experience the interpretation of the new material which the project has collected.

Despite these difficulties, outreach participants do come forward with stories that lead to oral histories being recorded. The material collected as part of oral history interviews continues to be used to inform and refresh the outreach programme which remains on target to create and maintain links with the communities and reach new users.



Those were the days

The story of time travelling teenagers

Working with young people has been challenging for museums. Their preconceptions of what a museum represents makes them 'dull', 'boring' and 'not representing their interests'. Over the past 18 months I have been working with young people on an exhibition project exploring experiences of teenagers from the 1950s to the present day. This has engaged the museum with a new audience and has led to an exciting and innovative exhibition.

Elizabeth Neathey

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work at North Somerset Museum in Weston-super-Mare. As we planned our exhibitions programme my colleagues and I explored an idea of working with young people. The theme which we felt would engage them seemed obvious, teenager's experiences from the post-war period. However getting young people to step into the museum is a challenge let alone to work on a project. This proved to be easier than we imagined, after being introduced to Ian McMaster from North Somerset Youth Service. Soon Ian and Geoff Sharpe, both experienced youth workers, met with me. We had a lot to learn. I had to find out how to engage young people. Ian and Geoff had to find out what was involved in planning and delivering an exhibition. Our first meeting with young people took place in the autumn 2005. This was to gauge

if young people were interested. They were! Soon the group developed the project title - "Then and now - teens through the time warp".

To give the young people an appreciation of exhibition design we visited some regional museums. They used ideas to take the project forward.

From there on the group worked on developing a wide range of skills. They received oral history training and practiced their skills on the directors of our services and the Principle Youth Officer. They conducted interviews with teenagers from the 1950s onwards. The interviewees found their experiences were in some ways not that different from what young people are going through today.

From early on the project team wanted to produce a quality exhibition. There was an opportunity to achieve this through a



Heritage Lottery Fund Young Roots Grant and funding from the Youth Service. The HLF bid for £22,100 was successful. We engaged a design company who explored the options available for the gallery. Their designs, approved by the young people, were stunning. When the panels were set up in the gallery, I could not get the young people to go home as they were so impressed by this! It did not stop here. They worked on the displays, decided on what should go where and how to label the objects.

The exhibition opened on 27 January 2007. Over sixty people attended. The young people all spoke enthusiastically about their experiences of working with the museum and youth service. I was proud to have worked with such a fantastic group of young people. Additionally the project showed how well partnerships work and it has gained recognition throughout the local community and beyond.

What next?

We are planning to develop events around the exhibition, by engaging with local youth groups as well as those who worked on the project. Once the exhibition finishes at North Somerset Museum, it is likely to be touring venues in Weston-super-Mare. We are also exploring options of loaning it to other museum services as it has received enthusiastic reviews from fellow professionals. From this project we are exploring new ideas for young people to engage with the museum. So watch this space!

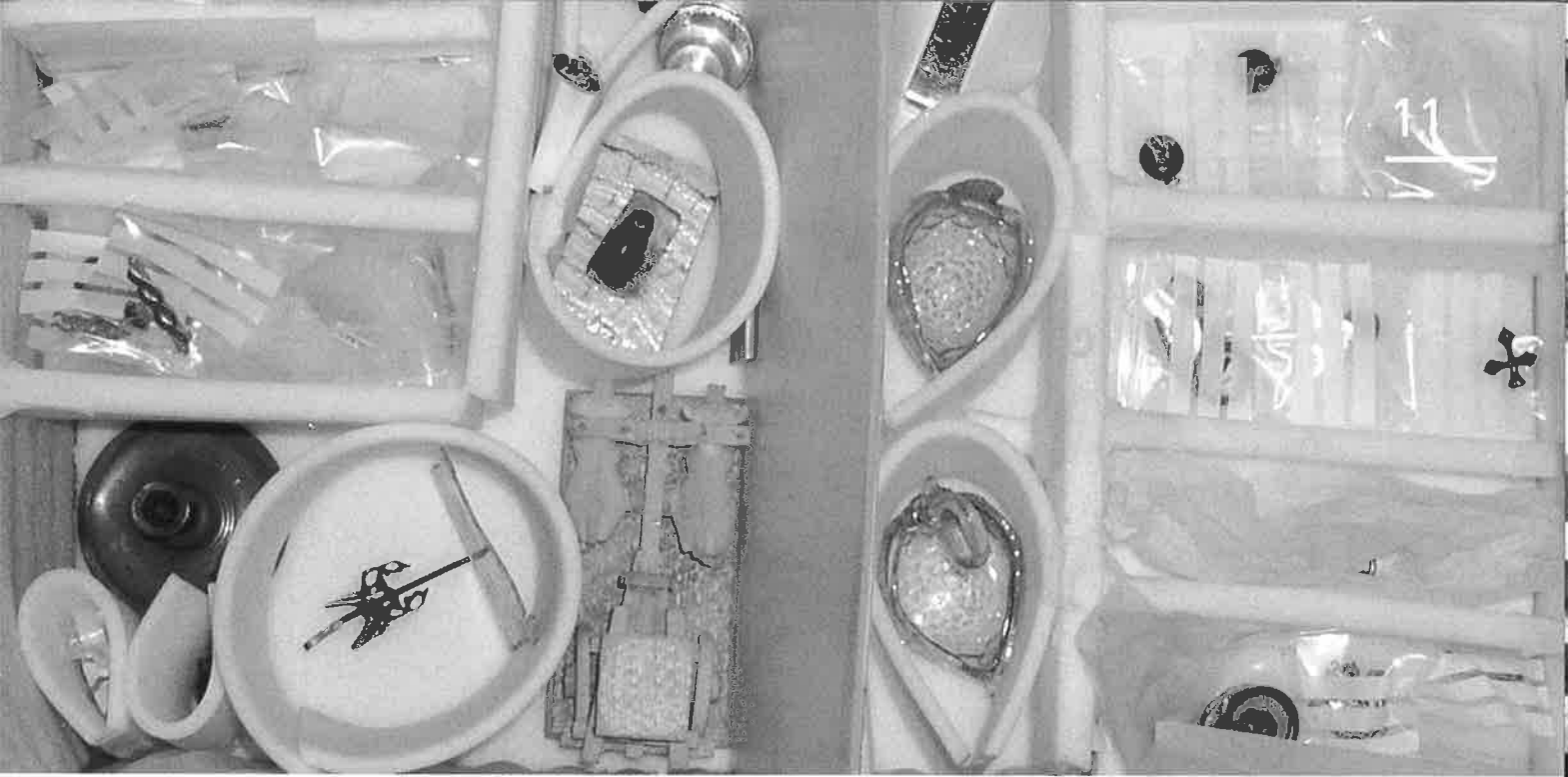
What did the young people learn?

The project gave the young people a good, all round experience of managing an exhibition project. They developed skills around recording oral histories, identifying quotations and images for the display panels. Working with the media, the design company and other partners enabled them to find out about effective communications. They learnt how to handle objects and develop displays. They gained a sense of place and remain proud of their achievements. Perhaps the last word should go to Amy (aged 17) who has been involved in the "Then and Now - teens through the time warp" exhibition for the last 18 months.

"Right from the beginning this project was different. From the people I worked with down to the actual work itself, but no matter what I did, I enjoyed every single minute of it; even when the interviews were getting long and getting perfect quotes was difficult. This project was all about getting information about people and their teenage lives, whether it would be the 1950's or the 1990's, then putting on display to the public. At the beginning it sounded simple, collect information and show it, but of course there was always more to these things than meets the eye. We had countless meetings about how to display information, what was best for all ages of today, where to get artefacts to be able to display them. This was a fantastic experience as we got to do everything, from interviewing people to talking to the press about how the project was progressing and what we would be getting out of it. For

instance, we learnt how to collect history through recording peoples' experiences and gained knowledge of how to put together an exhibition. It was hard work but great fun!"

"Then and Now-Teens through the time warp" will be on display at North Somerset Museum until 15 September 2007.



Sausages, snakes and snowballs:

rewiring Cragside, the 'temple to high Victorian technology'.

Sarah Schmitz describes the process of dealing with a major reservicing project for one of the NT's largest and most popular houses, involving the protection and packing of its collection.

Sarah Schmitz

Sarah Schmitz is now House Steward at Tyntesfield, but previously at Cragside, Sarah.schmitz@nationaltrust.org.uk

Electricity has always been high on the agenda at Cragside, in Northumberland, home of the inventor and engineer Lord Armstrong (1810 - 1900), whose friend Joseph Swan installed the first electric lightbulbs there, powered by hydroelectricity. It was a much more recent routine electrical installation inspection that revealed the need to rewire the house at Cragside. Health and safety is of particular importance to a building welcoming over 100,000 visitors each year through its doors. The intention to rewire was important, but the safeguarding of the collection housed there was something equally necessary to consider throughout the project.

It was decided that a full lighting and power rewire would take place, which would also involve work to install new

security and conservation heating systems. The mains supply would have to be upgraded, and a new sub-station built. As with any building project undertaken by the National Trust, fundamental principles were set early in the planning stages to protect the fabric and appearance of what is an extremely important Victorian home, and thereby the social history aspects of all that is contained there.

- Light fittings, accessories and switches would remain the same in appearance despite being refurbished to meet current fire and safety regulations
- Historical electrical services such as cables dating from the earliest phase of hydroelectric power would be retained in situ because of the high historic value of the early technology
- The new cabling would follow original cable routes wherever possible to avoid altering or weakening the fabric of the building by, for example, notching joists or chasing plasterwork
- Any new discoveries made relating to the history of the house would be thoroughly recorded with photographs and plans and should only be removed if absolutely necessary.

An important element to preparation was the packing away of the contents, a collection some 10,000 object strong, on the

whole original to the house, and much of it having belonged to the first Lord Armstrong. The house contains a rich array of artwork, furniture, workaday Victorian items and personal family belongings, including taxidermy, a shell collection, 55 quilts and corridors lined with majolica tiles. Taking conservation, security and cost into consideration, storing the collection on site was the best course of action. A dedicated storage area was created within the house in which to protect pianos, paintings, curtains and clocks, using heavy-duty shelving once the floor loading had been secured.

Books, natural history specimens, ceramics and ephemera were then wrapped, labelled and placed in storage by the five-strong house team with help from volunteers who were usually room stewards when open to the public. New packing methods were an important part of caring for the collection. Traditionally, wrapping everything separately into small parcels might have seemed to be the obvious answer, but with so many items to relocate and only a small number of pairs of hands available, a speedier method had to be learnt. So, with the learning that had already taken place from other similar projects, the Regional Conservator, Caroline Rendell, was able to introduce simpler ways of compartmentalising the many hundreds



of crates awaiting use. Inert materials such as plastazote (snakes), acid free tissue (snowballs) and jiffy foam (formed into sausages) were used to build up barriers which would prevent most movement within the crates as the items were moved about during each phase of the rewire. Careful listing of each crates' contents has since been vital in locating items whilst stored away, such as for specialist photography, and similarly for relocating everything at the end. The simplest of ideas have been the ones that worked best in practice: rehangng clocks on temporary screens made of low formaldehyde mdf, covering in the billiard table to become a work bench, applying a colour code to each room for ease of relocation of objects.

In addition, the house itself contains wonderful examples of both Victorian decorative interiors and elements of the later Arts and Crafts Movement. Original wallpapers, carpets, light fittings, sculpture and wood carving fill the house and all had to be adequately protected from damage during the re-wire, as had structural elements such as doorways and floors. Acres of antinox sheeting provided temporary screens and allowed the two project joiners to create doors to prevent dust travelling about the rooms too much, as

well as protecting floors. Low formaldehyde mdf allowed secure, pressure fitted boxing to be built for various immovable items such as an enormous model ship and various sculptures: the ingenuity of the joiners proved their worth very early on.

The house team maintain the building when it is open to the public and were on site at all times during the project to provide expert knowledge and work alongside the electricians, ensuring the re-wire went as smoothly as possible.

Seizing the opportunity of the house being closed to the public, work was able to be done with the collections; items from the reserve collection storerooms were checked and repacked, work was done to update the computerised inventory and generally everyone set about making the best use of the time we had to get to understand our collections rather better - including research into some items such as a large number of historic lightbulbs we discovered, and the production of a major new conservation plan document for the house.

After 18 months in which the house had to remain closed, despite the lack of revenue this would bring to the property, work in the 40 show areas is at long last complete, as is that in the 60 or so offices, stores and other rooms that make up the sprawling mansion

over five floors. As the handover of completed areas from the contractors to the house team progressed, the work of thoroughly cleaning and reinstating the show rooms began, along with the relocation of everything in storage, eventually clearing everything out of its storage areas and allowing the dismantling of all the shelves and protection that had been installed. A little time has also been available during all this for some redisplay work on a couple of show rooms, plus a major overhaul to storage areas (there are some advantages to having to clear it all out and then put it all back after the floors have gone back down). There has been a huge amount of furniture movement, picture rehangng, cleaning and tidying, making good and finalising of finishing touches. If the rewiring has been a success in conservation terms, it will have appeared relatively unchanged to the visitor's eye. Recent visitor figures suggest that our public have returned to enjoy our collection and the historic setting in which it lies with renewed vigour, and seem largely unaware of all the work it has undergone in the time of closure.

Other properties, such as that at Saltram in Devon, have been able to take some of our packing and protection materials: those that we ourselves adopted from the rewiring at Snowhill Manor in Gloucestershire. The rewiring of our 100 room mansion has been an integral part of the 'Regenerating Cragside' project - a programme of capital works launched with the objective of assuring the estate's future and of which the rewiring has been an important part, also including reinstatement of Armstrong's cascades and work on the single span iron bridge. Throughout it all it has been that age-old balance between access and conservation that has had to be struck, hopefully successful in achieving the newest of objectives for the Trust: the 'triple bottom line', sustaining business, the environment and our supporters involvement to the best of our ability.

Overall project cost: £1.65 million
Miles of wiring gone into house: 30 (including M.I.C.C., data and security)
Light fittings rewired: 250
Man hours for electrical work: 10,000
M&E Consultants: Giffords
Electrical contractors: Yorvik Electrical
Security Engineers: C.D.S.
Quantity surveyors: R.N.J.
Archaeology: Bernicia Archaeology



The End of the line

A celebration of Brunel in Cornwall

In 2005 we were invited by the Brunel 200 organisation (www.brunel200.com) to join the celebrations marking the achievements of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. After much wracking of brains and many meetings with other interested bodies in Cornwall we put in a bid to HLF for a small but perfectly formed project, and low and behold we were successful.

**Emma Williams—
Curator of Social History**

Our project was very different from those proposed elsewhere around the region as it was to be totally driven by a group of volunteers. The idea was to take a digital photograph of every remaining Brunel structure in Cornwall. This would be no mean feat as Brunel designed at least 51 viaducts in Cornwall, let alone bridges and stations. The result would not only form a lasting archive in the museum but become a small photographic exhibition and a free booklet that would be sent to all schools and

libraries in Cornwall and be available to museum visitors. A daunting task even for the most competent curator!

We appealed for volunteers in April and by the end of May we had a merry band of seven ready for the challenge - to research the remains, photograph them, and search the historic photographic archive here at the RIC to source images of how the structures looked originally. Photographer Simon Green provided Digital photography training. He showed the group how to get the most out of our digital cameras and what to think about when composing shots and working in the field. The latter proved quite difficult in practice, because by the summer a lot of sites became obliterated by foliage.

As well as selecting the best pairs of images, the volunteer team had to design the exhibition layout and its interactive elements, write all the marketing information, press releases, exhibition text and labels and finally install the exhibition and host a private view. They worked closely with Amy Seymour, our Exhibitions



Above: The Brunel Team (from left): Peter and Caroline Somers, Steve Burstow, Emma Williams, Bill Anderson, Richard Truscott, Elizabeth and Peter Stethridge.
Top: A Brunel designed viaduct in Cornwall.

Officer, who guided them through all the stages. It took a week, all told, to install the show with all hands on deck but the finished product was truly a credit to the team and to the memory of I. K. Brunel whose enduring legacy really shone through.

Now, after a well earned rest, the group is back on track and in the final stages of producing a publication on the fruits of their labour. Hopefully it will be in print by the end of April and will be available free to anyone who would like one, so please do contact us if you would like to find out more about Brunel's legacy in Cornwall.

SHCG Proud Heritage

LGBT History Training Seminar

14th December 2006, Leicester University

On the 14th December 2006 the Social History Curators Group and Proud Heritage held the first day-long training seminar about lesbian, gay bisexual and trans (LGBT) history for museum staff. Leicester University, in association with the Department of Museum Studies, provided the venue. A great deal of ground was covered but due to limitations of space only a very brief account is possible here.

Stuart Frost—Gallery Educator

Medieval & Renaissance Galleries Project
Victoria & Albert Museum

Jack Gilbert (Proud Heritage) facilitated the seminar. The day began with introductions and all participants shared their responses to several ice-breaking questions with the rest of the group. This preliminary activity revealed a great deal of common ground. The collection, recording and confidentiality of data related to sexuality generated much discussion. Ethical concerns emerged about access to demographic data related to gender and sexuality. Should people donating objects be required to state their sexuality, and which terms should be used to categorise it? It was felt that a consistent approach to terminology across collections databases would make access to information easier for future researchers.

Institutions are increasingly being more honest in acknowledging same-sex relationships openly, but questions were raised about whether it was appropriate to do so where an individual had not 'come out' during their lifetime. Should museums, for example, retrospectively 'out' someone who had kept their sexuality private during their lifetime? This was felt to be particularly significant where an individual's friends and family members were still alive but was also an issue for non-contemporary history. Should the sexuality of more distant historical figures, like Leonardo da Vinci for example, be discussed where there is no

conclusive evidence that the individual had same-sex lovers? References to same-sex relationships have often been elided from the biographies of individuals represented in museums whilst references to the heterosexual relationships of artists and famous figures are often included. There is arguably a need for museums to redress this imbalance.

Concerns over terminology also extended to inappropriate use of modern terms in historical contexts. Whilst same-sex desire and love is universal, the concept of 'gay' or 'homosexual' is not. The term 'homosexual' for example is a late 19th century term, and isn't necessarily appropriate for figures who lived before then, whether in Renaissance Florence, for example, or in ancient Greece or Rome.

Several participants were also concerned about inadvertently offending visitors due to their own lack of knowledge. Here Jack Gilbert highlighted the importance of consultation with focus groups whilst stressing that there wouldn't always be unanimous agreement within LGBT communities. Museums need to be prepared to acknowledge ambiguity and differences of opinion. Attitudes to terms and labels will vary. Perspectives may vary depending whether an individual was born before and after the legalisation of homosexuality in 1967.

The representation of LGBT histories within museums and galleries was debated. To date few museums have integrated LGBT stories within their permanent displays. A number of case studies were highlighted.

Rose MacMahon gave a short presentation about the history of Plas Newydd and the 'Ladies of Llangollen' (Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby) who lived there. Both ladies left Ireland for Llangollen where they established a romantic home. They moved into Plas Newydd (New Hall) in May 1780 and their story is now regarded as part of LGBT history.

Dr. Richard Sandell (Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester)

gave an overview of his recent unpublished research. Richard focussed on several museums, exhibitions and historic buildings with a clear connection to sexuality to see if and how the subject was addressed. The case studies included: The Liberace Museum, Shibden Hall (home of Anne Lister); Leighton House; Plas Newydd, Llangollen; the Michelangelo Drawings: Closer to the Master exhibition at The British Museum and the Walt Whitman Birthplace. In each case several questions were investigated: How if at all is sexuality addressed? What factors shaped the approach? How did museums respond?

The approaches varied significantly. The Liberace Museum did not acknowledge his sexuality at all. The Michelangelo Drawings exhibition at the British Museum included a text-panel which did discuss his sexuality and the culture of male same-sex desire in Florence. Here the approach was driven by audience research. During the development of the exhibition focus groups were invited to respond to two approaches, one art historical, the other more biographical. There was a strong preference for the latter and so Michelangelo's sexuality was addressed.

Jan Pimblett discussed the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) work in collecting LGBT material and making it accessible. The LMA host an annual LGBT conference and are also partners in the 'Out There' project with The National Archives. This partnership has created a portal to help researchers identify archive resources for LGBT history.

Participants from museums and archives with only small LGBT holdings were concerned about producing displays that might be seen as tokenistic. The issue of collecting was a recurring theme throughout the day. The collecting policies of previous generations mean that LGBT audiences are underrepresented in many museums collection. Jack Gilbert expressed the view that queer histories can be found in straight places and used a sequence from the film 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' and extract from

Bronski Beat's song 'Small Town Boy' to underline his point. By developing relationships with LGBT individuals and groups museums and archives can also increase the opportunity to acquire material. Both the Museum of London and the Croydon Clocktower acquired objects and histories as a result of developing temporary exhibitions. Museums may find it helpful to revisit their collecting policies.

The value of community partnerships in collecting, curating and interpreting objects was emphasised on several occasions. LGBT people can, for example, offer a different perspective on a museum's holdings. There are likely to be objects, paintings and photographs in collections that have LGBT connections of which the museum is unaware. Much material reflected to LGBT histories is in private ownership. There is a danger that many histories and artefacts may be lost as individuals who lived through the 1940s, 50s and 60s die. Museum curators have an important role to play in ensuring that these stories and artifacts are not lost to future generations. Jack Gilbert and Jan Pimblett both felt it was important that museums and archives help people

maintain their own collections if they did not wish to donate them.

Attitudes to same-sex relationships and have changed dramatically in recent years but homophobia is still an issue. Jack talked about responses to the Proud Heritage survey for which questionnaires were sent to museums and galleries. Jack showed several completed examples that were shocking in terms of the prejudice that was expressed. Museums that address LGBT histories need to be prepared for some homophobic responses.

The unique cultural challenges of working with LGBT audiences were discussed during the seminar. Migration at all levels, for example, is a common issue for many LGBT people. Gay people have frequently left intolerant areas taking their stories with them. This poses challenges for regional museums: how can stories, experiences and histories be captured and recorded in the individual's place of origin or departure? In addition there is not yet an established culture of transmitting LGBT histories and memories. Traditionally there has been little encouragement for people to talk openly. There has been a culture of self-

ensorship and many LGBT people place little value on their own objects, stories and memories. Transmission has been very low. Museums and archives have an important role to play in redressing this.

The seminar proved to be a very successful forum. There is a great deal of potential for museums and archive to represent LGBT histories more effectively for all visitors and audiences. There is also an increasing body of case studies for museums to adapt. Further seminars like this one have a significant role to play in raising awareness of key issues, identifying potential partnerships and in empowering museum staff to develop projects related to LGBT histories.

Find out more:

To find out more about
LGBT month visit:
www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk

For further information about
Proud Nation visit:
www.proudheritage.org

To find out more about Out There:
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/partnerprojects/outthere

Hello Sailor!

GAY LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE

25th August 2006 - 25th March 2007

This groundbreaking exhibition explored gay life on passenger and merchant ships between the 1950s and 1980s. Although the exhibition has recently closed at the Merseyside Maritime Museum the exhibition will travel to several other venues and is currently on display in Southampton.

This display covers a lot of ground, effectively highlighting the links between gay culture and life at sea. Life on ships provided unique opportunities for expression and exploration of sexuality. Before the legalisation of homosexuality in 1967 the Merchant Navy was one of the few places where gay men could express themselves more openly. The modest extent of the exhibition is an advantage allowing other venues with limited space to accommodate it

The curators deserve great credit for creating such a concise exhibition from the book *Hello Sailor! The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea* by Paul Barker and Jo

Stanley Harlow. In the Museum the narrative is communicated largely through text panels, understandably perhaps given the limited number of objects available. However effective and imaginative use of audio and monitor screens allows a number of men to tell their own stories through their own words. Audio files are also available on the exhibition website.

A recreation of a steward's cabin creates the most visually appealing section. A small cased display includes a selection of fascinating artifacts and memorabilia including material related to crew shows and gay literature. Intelligent use of film clips of shows from the 1950s and 1960s, photographs and other ephemera from the period, all play a part adding 'personality' to the displays. The section exploring Polari, a 'secret' language used at sea until the 1980s, is especially interesting, explaining the origins of terms like *kamp* (known as male prostitute) and other words that are now common currency.

The Museum used the exhibition as an opportunity to gather stories about life at sea inviting visitors to contribute to a new oral history archive, sea stories. Research for the exhibition also allowed the Museum to acquire or loan material missing from its permanent collections. A series of events associated with the display also enriched the visitor experience of the exhibition and helped ensure that visitors of all ages could enjoy a visit. The exhibition is on display in Southampton until 9th September 2007.

For more information about 'Hello Sailor!' visit.

www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/exhibitions/gaylife/

Get the Picture!

The Beamish Museum Regional Resource Centre, February 8th 2007

I was fortunate to be given a free place at this one-day event. As a new member of the SHCG I had not attended an event before and so this was an opportunity to gain new knowledge and experience. Despite the snow and dire predictions of worse weather to come delegates converged on the Beamish Museum from various parts of Britain and Ireland. Upon arrival we were taken by steam train to the Beamish Museum's Regional Resource Centre, which proved a pleasingly surreal experience on a winter's morning.

Jim Gledhill—Curatorial Assistant
The Foundling Museum

Matt Parson, Paper Conservator at the Tyne and Wear Archives, opened proceedings by addressing the topic of conserving photographic collections. Matt explained that photographic conservation is a relatively new field. He described what a photograph is made of, silver bound by gelatine, and how physicality is crucial to our approach to working with photographic collections. Photographic images are formed by light, but their physical and chemical deterioration is affected by both their physical composition and environmental conditions, including light levels and humidity. This raised a fundamental ethical question about the duties of museum professionals with regard to objects which contain inherent vice. Due to their physical elements, such as silver, photographs deteriorate naturally, so to what extent should conservators endeavour to counteract this process? Matt made a distinction between, on the one hand, the process of restoration, and on the other, simple preservation of collections in their natural state when they enter a museum. He highlighted the issue of individuals interfering with the integrity of photographs through intentional processes, such as



retouching them with paint and other materials. To what extent therefore should these processes be preserved as part of the photograph's history? Should these processes be reversed through conservation? There is no simple answer to these questions and it remains very much an ethical decision for individual curators and conservators in my view.

Beside the important theoretical questions raised, this session also had a really useful hands-on component where groups got the opportunity to examine and handle collections. Matt illustrated methods of storing collections and the kind of materials that should be used, such as polyester sleeves and acid-free envelopes. He explained that fragile objects, such as negatives or plates, should be kept inert in storage by packing them in plastazote which acts as a shock absorber. Environmental conditions must be kept constant.

Matt discussed digitisation as a means of preserving photographic images and the potential benefits to the public of making images available online. With digitisation emphasised as a major priority for museums in the 2005 Collections for the Future report, this was a timely issue to touch upon. Matt gave some helpful advice concerning scanning photographs for image capture, including the need to use card frames to prevent damage during the scanning process.

Christine Stevens, Head of Collections at Beamish, spoke on the subject of dating photographs. One of the best ways in which this can be done is to use costume to determine the period when a photograph was taken. Historical events, such as wars, may be illustrated in photography through the presence of objects and the dress worn.

Fashion and style, in particular, can be

useful indicators as to the time period the photograph was taken in. The format of the photograph may also give helpful clues. For example, if the format indicates that a photograph had novelty status then this suggests that it was taken before the twentieth century when photography became widely accessible to ordinary people. The invention of modern industrial sewing machines also had a significant impact on the appearance of clothing. Twentieth century modernity in the form of mass production allowed ordinary people to purchase more elaborate dress manufactured using machines.

Christine emphasised that continuity in fashion styles often makes exact dating difficult. It occurred to me that this was probably more true now than ever before given the popularity of 'retro' fashion in modern Britain. This continuity is more evident in men's fashion than women's as historically the former has shown less tendency to change.

Due to their functionality, working clothes have a less marked tendency to follow trends in style and fashion. Working clothes may also be subsequently reinterpreted as fashion items however, as illustrated by denim jeans which were originally manufactured as hard-wearing clothing for industrial workers, but are now marketed as fashionable garments.

After Christine's talk we conducted a group exercise which involved sorting a selection of photographs into approximate chronological order. Again this hands-on activity proved a dynamic and enjoyable way of putting theory into practice.

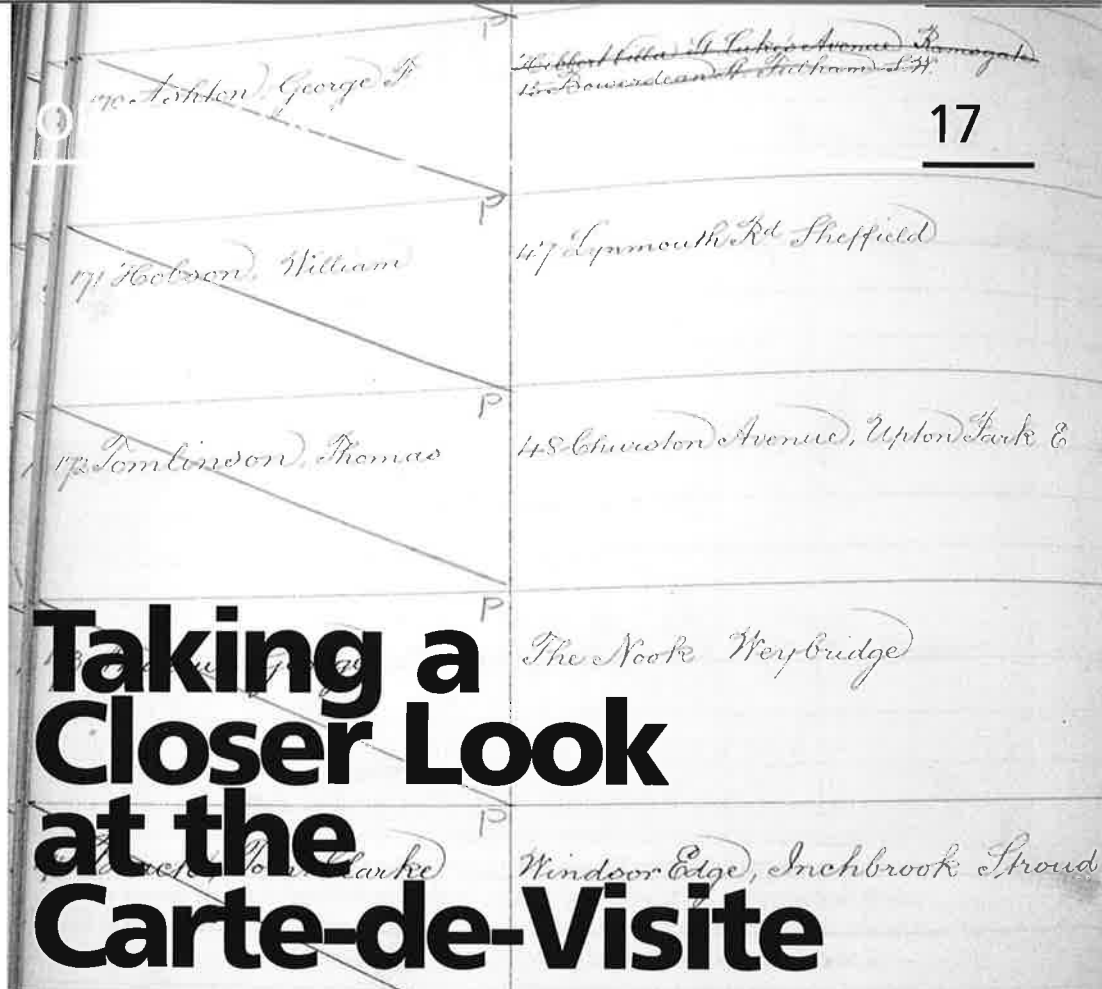
The last speaker of the day was Brian Barker of the Northern Region Film and Television Archive (NRFTA). Brian's organisation is based at the University of

Teeseide where it collects and preserves moving images which reflect the history of the Northern region of England. To do this the NRFTA works in partnership with other regional archives and organisations. The archival material is accessible to students and researchers, but also to the wider public through broadcast events, such as film shows. The NRFTA also intends to make its collections accessible via the internet in the future.

This part of the day's event was particularly interesting to me, as I have never worked with moving image collections before. There was however, a significant crossover with Matt Parson's talk earlier in the day which provided useful continuity and helped to emphasise common issues. Brian discussed ways in which film and video material can be damaged by chemical deterioration and the physical environment (in the same way as photographic material). He also described how material, such as video, deteriorates through regular use and therefore may need to be restored.

Brian described the processes of copying and restoring film footage undertaken by the NRFTA. Brian illustrated this by showing us a collection of film clips featuring restored film footage and sound. We watched an excerpt from a 1913 football match between Newcastle and Sunderland and a 'Local Topical', a short news film which was shown in local cinemas in the 1920s. My favourite was 'Your Tea Madam', a promotional film reminiscent of Mr Chumley-Warner, advertising Ringtons Tea (which is still on the market I believe). We also watched several films capturing dramatic historical events, such as a colour film of VE Day and the famous Labour politician Aneurin Bevan addressing trade unionists at the Durham Miners' Gala in 1952.

In conclusion, this seminar was both highly informative and enjoyable. I thought it was also pitched perfectly for a diverse audience of professionals involved in both conservation and curatorial work. The hands-on, practical dimension of the day's event really complemented the series of talks given. The use of a multimedia presentation, in the form of the film show, also provided a visual stimulus to the discussion. Seminars can often be dry affairs but this one was full of life and highly rewarding for all participants.



Taking a Closer Look at the Carte-de-Visite

Although the set poses in cartes-de-visites appear identical a closer look reveals the hidden stories behind them.

Jane Findlay

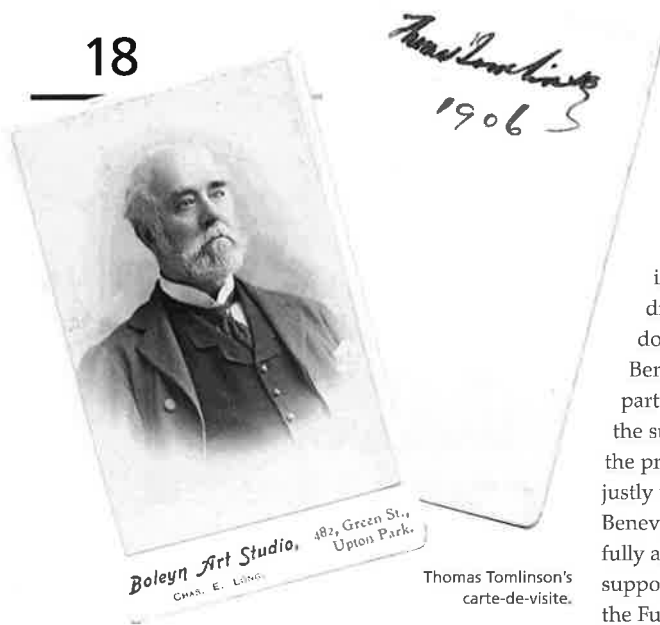
MA Museum Studies Student at UCL,
Documentation Project Assistant
at Museum of the
Royal Pharmaceutical Society

During a documentation project cataloguing the Museum of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Benevolent Fund photographic archive I happened across a carte-de-visite portrait of a pharmacist called Thomas Tomlinson who was partially sighted - evident from his glass eye. The Museum's Benevolent Fund collection is already unique in that its photographs hold the often untold narratives of the elderly and those without financial means but this discovery also revealed another hidden history - stories about disability.

Thomas Tomlinson's carte-de-visite follows the standard format of the time. It is a 2-1/2 inch by 4-1/2 inch photograph mounted on a cream and blue photographer's card featuring their details on the obverse. His pose, head facing a quarter turn to his left and solemn faced, reflects the conventions of the late 19th century and early 20th century. Photographs were intended to convey the

subject's composure. Smiling was thus unwise, as this was said to indicate frivolity. Thomas' glass eye remains, however, a visible clue to his disability. The reverse, unlike earlier cartes-de-visite does not feature an intricate maker's mark. In this case the name of the photographer - Chas E. Long, who worked for the Boleyn Art Studios on Green Street near to Thomas in Upton Park, is only stamped on the obverse.

Appearances aside, it was the story in front of the lens that was the most fascinating. Tracing Thomas back through the Museum's archives and the English Census returns I was able to discover more about his life and career as a pharmacist. Thomas had always lived in London and had qualified before the Royal Pharmaceutical Society was established in 1841. Prior to moving to 48 Chiveston Avenue in Upton Park, he resided at 21 Lower Seymour Street in Marylebone with his wife Marianne. They had married in this same parish in 1860. Despite not having children, Thomas and Marianne did not live alone. The census returns from 1881 show that the couple also shared their Marylebone home with a servant called George Funnel, a sick nurse called Maud Pope and Thomas' apprentice Algernon Boulton. Originally from Lincolnshire, Algernon went on to run a successful practice in Essex after his training with Thomas in London. Being partially sighted did not appear to have a negative effect on Thomas' life. He had a successful career like many other disabled



Thomas Tomlinson's
carte-de-visite.

people. As well as being a beneficiary of the Benevolent Fund Thomas had contributed to the fund as a Society member. For instance in 1894 he donated £1 1s 0d, according to the *Pharmaceutical Journal* of that year.

By 1906 Thomas had moved to Upton Park and was now seeking assistance from the Benevolent Fund. In October that year, at the age of 70, the Benevolent Fund committee marked Thomas' case for consideration. The process of application was public, and involved presenting his case to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society members who would then vote on whether or not to accept his request. Thomas' election results can be found displayed openly amongst the attendance figures for the museum and papers on reducing agents printed in the *Pharmaceutical Journal*. He was elected on 11th Dec 1906 receiving a total of 5191 votes. Of the six other candidates two pharmacists, George Ashton and William Hobson were elected annuitants aside Thomas. He died seven years later in 1913.

The Museum's carte-de-visite collection is a result of this election process. A photograph was required for each annuitant to accompany their information that was recorded in the Benevolent Fund Register. The carte-de-visite was the first time that portraiture came within the reach of ordinary people. By taking shots on an eight lens camera obscura multiple photographs could be printed on a single plate thus reducing the cost and time involved in their production. Popularised by Andrei Disderi the carte-de-visite reached its apogee between 1859 and the late 1860s. As the Benevolent Fund photographic archive attest, however, they remained the standard style of portrait well into the 20th century.

Offering an exceptional glimpse into evolving social trends, the Museum's Benevolent Fund collection features

photographs that run from around 1890 to 1945. Reassessing the photograph collection is an important way of representing different viewpoints to those that dominate mainstream history. The Benevolent Fund is also an important part of the Society's past and was often the subject of hot debate in the pages of the professional society journal. Acting justly was of utmost importance to the Benevolent Fund committee who were fully aware of the necessity of their support. In the year of Thomas' election the Fund's committee chair noted that the correspondence they received "caused them the greatest anxiety and concern that they might arrive at the right decision and deal justly and kindly with applicants, and the same time be fair and just to those that contributed to the fund". Today the Fund is a registered charity and its cases are reviewed in complete confidentiality.

Although interesting on its own merit, Thomas' story is also significant as a hidden history. Disabled people are rarely represented in museum collections, or when they are it is typically in the form of either a freak or hero. Highlighting his life through the carte-de-visite collection can enable us to move away from this stereotypical portrayal of disabled people by recognising their ordinary experiences. Such personal accounts can draw attention to the complex ways in which disabled people have contributed to our collective past. They also offer an insight into how disability was dealt with in society and can contextualise how disabled people are represented today.

Thomas Tomlinson's carte-de-visite is a reminder to other museums to look behind what can be perceived as identical objects. Collections hold a wealth of narratives waiting to be teased out to reveal different experiences. You never know what you might uncover.

Stitches That Tell a Bitter Tale

"THE PEOPLE ARE REAL ENGLISH TRAMPS HAWKERS SHOW PEOPLE ENGLISH NOT ONE BELONG TO ANY OF MY CLASS NOT ONE HERE HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH MY PARTY..."

Ruth Burwood—Access Officer

Do objects really speak to us? This one does...well actually I would say it shouts. The above words are transcribed from a sampler in the Costume and Textile collection from Carrow House, Norwich. At 12ft long, and 1ft wide, it is certainly one of the more unusual pieces in the collections. It is the content of the text however, that makes it an extraordinary piece. It not only tells us about the life of an individual and the experience of living with mental ill health, but also challenges the reader, when so many other stories and voices have become lost or are silent in the modern world.

Made over a century ago, the sampler takes on the form of one, very long, and often confusing, rant. With no punctuation, and entirely in upper case, each word is virtually spat out, and the angry tone is relentless throughout. Every word has been hand-stitched onto a patchwork of fabrics by its maker, Lorina Bulwer of Great Yarmouth,

Norfolk. What makes it even more remarkable is that she made it in 1901 in Great Yarmouth Workhouse, in the female lunatic ward.

Born in Suffolk in 1838, Lorina was one of five children. Her parents, Ann and William, had moved the family to Yarmouth by 1861, by which time Lorina's eldest sister, Anna Maria, had married and moved away. Anna Maria went on to have a son and it is a reference to this that enables us to date the sampler at 1901. By 1871, all the Bulwer children had left home except Lorina, who was now 32. Later that year, her father died and Lorina and her mother moved to another property that they ran as a boarding house, with Lorina employed there as a general servant. Her mother, Ann, died 22 years later in 1893, aged 86. The next reference to Lorina is in 1901 where she can be found in the female lunatic ward of Yarmouth Workhouse - one of 516 inmates.

In many ways, Lorina's story is not a particularly special one, but her sampler does give the reader a quite unique view of the family. With much of the tone angry and embittered, Lorina reserves some of her harshest criticisms for her own family, and in particular her sister Anna Maria Young, and sister-in-law Ann; "I MISS LORINA BULWER WONDER THE PEOPLE HAVE

NOT THROWN ALL THE SLOPS OF THIS NOTORIOUS BUG LICE AND FLEA TRIBE CAMBRIDGESHIRE SOCIALIST DEN AND PELTED HIM {her brother Edgar} WITH ROTTEN EGGS AS HIS SOCIALIST ANN OLD FAGGOT WIFE DIED AND WENT TO HELL ...". Her mother on the other hand, is referred to in quite different terms; "BLESSED MOTHER ANCY NANCY TICKLES MY FANCY DIED AND WENT TO HEAVEN TO LIVE IN PERPETUAL BLISS WITH THE LORD..." Loyal to her parents, Lorina often seems to have been pre-occupied with the Bulwer family name, referring to certain individuals as "impostors", and weaving complicated connections to nobility. Lorina's angry assertions about legitimacy are none so intriguing as when on the subject of the Royal Family, at one point stating that she is the lost daughter of Queen Victoria. The

interesting effect on the reader, who naturally begins to sympathise with Lorina's consuming sense of injustice, is that one almost starts to believe her. Indeed, whilst her often cruel descriptions of people are no doubt exaggerated, they are still based in truth. For example, a neighbour is described by Lorina as follows; "MRS GOOCH IS A WOMAN OF SHORT STATURE A DECREPID OLD WOMAN A FULL RED FACE HAIR BROWN TINTED A BRIGHTER HUE BROWN EYES WALKS THE AID OF A BLACK WALKING STICK HER HANDS ARE CRIPPLED WITH RHEUMATIC ALSO HER LEGS WHICH SHE RUB WITH OIL ST JACOBS OIL AND MANY MORE SHE WEARS LONG DRAB LINDSEY DRAWS..." If you check the census returns, there is Mrs Gooch living right next door to the Bulwers.

Lorina's frustration at being incarcerated in the workhouse is undoubtedly the main stimulus for her stitching. There were various reasons why people ended up in the workhouse, but it was mainly because they were unable to support themselves any longer. It would seem that this is quite likely to be what happened to Lorina, having lived with her parents until their deaths. There may also have been a lack of willing on the part of her surviving siblings to care for her, which again could be a cause for the resentment she expresses through her stitching. Either way, by 1901 at the age of 63, Lorina had gone from being the sole sibling living with her mother, to being one of over 500 inmates in the local workhouse. It is not surprising that she was angry at losing her rights to property and inheritance; her only possessions were now a bed and uniform. Again, there is a temptation on the part of the reader to believe in the story that Lorina is suggesting



i.e. one of a sane woman, abandoned by her family in the workhouse and stripped of her rightful inheritance. Indeed, there were cases during the 19th Century, of women being deposited in the local workhouse or asylum by unscrupulous family members, or husbands wanting to avoid questions about their infidelity.

One of the most interesting themes that Lorina, perhaps unsurprisingly, returns to is that of mental health. Here is her scornful description of one character: "OLD MAD MOLLY HAWES WHO WAS TAKEN TO COLNEY HATCH ASYLUM IN A TINKERS CART STRAPPED IN SHE LOOKED AS IF THE DEVIL HAD CHASED HER THREE TIMES THROUGH THE FLAMES OF HELL FIRE AND TURNED OUT THIS HIDEOUS WILD BROWN EYED OLD WOMAN - DIED TWENTY ODD YEARS AGO; THIS VILE HERMAPHRODITE OLD HAG WOULD BE NEARLY A HUNDRED YEARS OF AGE HAD SHE LIVED..." Lorina herself makes no reference to her own health, and she does not appear to have been recorded in any other census return as having a disability. However, modern thinking at the time was that the best treatment for people with mental illnesses, was to be in a quiet and civilised environment - possibly just the type of environment that was provided previously for Lorina by her mother at home. It is also true that by the beginning of 20th Century, some early asylum reformers had begun to experiment with occupational therapy, encouraging patients to paint and do fancy embroidery. It is very unlikely however, that Lorina's sampler was the result of such a development in Great Yarmouth Workhouse. In a conversation I had with an occupational therapist who worked in asylums in the 1950s and 60s, she

commented that Lorina was probably allowed to work on the sampler as it kept her quiet and occupied. With regards to a diagnosis, it would seem both impossible and inappropriate to attempt to make one. One professor of psychology suggested that it was likely Lorina had suffered a trauma earlier in her life, and was particularly interested in the references to 'Dr Pinching', who examined Lorina to find if she was 'a properly shaped female'. One thing is clear, the sampler is certainly 'thought-disturbed', and readers are warned to be careful of trying to make sense of something that was created in a reality different to their own. This approach is best summarized by Caroline Douglas, writing in a catalogue produced for the exhibition of works from the Prinzhorn Collection: "One has a sense of a logic operating in parallel to 'normal' logic - tantalisingly close enough for us to follow it, yet running a course which may never intersect with ours".

Lorina Bulwer died of influenza in the workhouse in 1917. The story doesn't quite finish there though. In 2006, a museum volunteer recounted seeing the sampler in a local auction in 1995. She had been allowed to photograph it and had saved newspaper cuttings from the time. When handing over the photographs she had taken, I was surprised to find that this was not in fact our sampler. This was another sampler, also 12ft long and 1ft wide, also by Lorina, and in exactly the same style. So it seems this extraordinary sampler is not unique after all, and that Lorina could have sewn many, many more words.

If you would like a copy of the full transcription, or to make an appointment to visit the Carrow House collections, please contact Ruth Burwood on 01603 493640, or ruth.burwood@norfolk.gov.uk

Notes:

1 Douglas, Caroline, 'Precious and Splendid Fossils', published in *Beyond Reason. Art and Psychosis: Works from the Prinzhorn Collection*, London, 1996, p46



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