

DECEMBER 2008

ISSUE 62



Introducing The Histories Of  
The Home SSN  
Greasy Luck to the Whalers  
A Tale of Two Ports  
Conference &  
Seminar Reviews  
SHCG online

SHCG NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

# DECEMBER 2008 ISSUE 62

## 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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## 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:  
20TH APRIL 2009**

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: LSaul@bedford.gov.uk

Send all contributions to:

**Lydia Saul,  
Keeper of Social History, Bedford  
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Front Cover: Garden designed by Percy Cane by George Sheringham, 1923 ©Geffrye Museum see p06.  
Contents Photo: Playing croquet on the front lawn of the National Maritime Museum see p12.

**W**elcome to Issue 62. It is approaching the holiday season and I hope this will give you the opportunity to catch up with all our news and reviews.

This issue really has something for everyone. The bulletin tells you all you need to know about for the up and coming SHCG seminar collaborations, website and email updates, as well as a taster for the SHCG Conference 2009. There is also information on an exciting new Subject Specialist Network Histories of the Home and the launch of the Object Lessons resources produced by SHCG, now available to borrow by organisations.

The theory and practice articles have a maritime theme, featuring an article examining exhibitions dealing with the history and impact of immigration in Newcastle and Cardiff; *A Tale of Two Ports*. The second article *Greasy Luck to the Whalers* explains and contextualises the creation of Scrimshaw by Whalers from a Social History perspective.

The reviews will give you an insight into the SHCG Conference 2008 'Ahead of the Game' held at Greenwich, London during July, providing you with all the relevant details of the three days, including planning for the 2012 Olympics, the Cultural Olympiad and ideas for events and exhibitions from case studies presented. The *No Conservator, No problem* seminar review also provides some handy tips on preventative conservation advice and where to find a conservator when you need one.

The Object Focus articles explore *Everything including the Kitchen Sink*, a 1940's Kitchen, acquired in its entirety by the Museum of London, and for a touch of warmth during the winter months, a story of a quilt and its maker in *Family Treasures*, from the newly opened Quilt Museum and Gallery in York.

There has been quite a changeover following the AGM and elections in July onto the SHCG Committee. Our Chair Elect is Victoria Rogers, Treasurer is Joe Carr, Membership Secretary is Kay Jones, as well as Michelle Day, Kylea Little and Adam Bell joining the Committee as ordinary members. Our thanks go to Zelda Baveystock and Kitty Ross, as they step down from their long serving positions of Treasurer and Membership Secretary respectively. For full details of all committee members please see the inside back cover.

If you feel inspired by the articles you have read and wish to contribute an article highlighting your own news, projects or collections please contact me at LSaul@bedford.gov.uk. The next deadline is the 20th April 2009.

Whatever your plans are this holiday season I hope you enjoy reading Issue 62 of the News.

Seasons Greetings

**LYDIA SAUL – EDITOR**



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## SHCG COMMITTEE



## SHCG MATTERS

# SHCG Annual Conference, Leeds

9th – 11th July 2009

2009 marks the 35th anniversary since the Social History Curators Group, then known as the Group for Regional Studies in Museums, was formed from the Society for Folk Life Studies. Social history has changed a lot in the last 35 years so where do we go next? What is the future for the Curator? How should SHCG progress in the 21st century? We will attempt to answer these questions and more at next year's conference in Leeds, 9th-11th July 2009. With a chance to explore the new galleries at Leeds City Museum we hope it will be an inspiring place to evaluate milestones in the development of Social History, with highlights from key speakers, and to discuss the issues impacting on Social History Curator's regionally and nationally. Don't miss it!

Further details for booking your place will be circulated via the SHCG-list, our website and through the post next year, so keep a look out. We look forward to seeing you there.

Michelle Day  
Conference Organiser

# SHCG online

## Log on!

Over the last year we've done a lot of work to make sure that the website is current and correct, and many thanks to all who responded to my plea for feedback on how you used the website and the improvements that you wanted.

The consultation we did at the beginning of the year indicated that you were keen that the website becomes a 'one stop shop' for social history in museums and that you most valued information about events and training, news of SHCG initiatives and SHCG resources.

As a result of this evaluation, we made several amendments and additions to the website over the summer. We now have an improved 'About SHCG' section, with downloadable copies of our constitution, forward plan and committee role descriptions; improvements to the training and events section to allow downloadable booking forms; and a new 'Resources' section, with improved information about SHCG News, Journal, SHCG-list and Object Lessons resources.

**Remember**, we use the SHCG website to keep members up to date with what the committee is up to, of new initiatives or news that's particularly relevant to members, so it's well worth keeping an eye on it! Find out more at [www.shcg.org.uk](http://www.shcg.org.uk)

Recent updates have included our new Forward Plan and amended Constitution, dates for our upcoming training and conference and an archive of the entire back catalogue of SHCG Journals – right from the group's first newsletter in 1975 when we were known as the Group for Regional Studies in Museums! To find the Journal archive, go to the Resources section and click on Journal.

## SHCG-list

Firstly a big thank you to Jack Kirby who's recently stepped down as the SHCG-list administrator. Jack set up the list almost four years ago in response to members' wishes for a simple, immediate way to communicate with each other. The list has gone from strength to strength since then, and it's obvious that it remains a very useful and valued aspect to SHCG membership. We now have 172 members subscribed, and messages range from appeals for help in identifying mystery objects, requests for advice and examples of best practice to posting job applications and notifications of training opportunities.

If you are an SHCG member, or work for one of our institutional members, and haven't yet joined up, it's very easy. Just send an email to: [shcg-list-request@mailtalk.ac.uk](mailto:shcg-list-request@mailtalk.ac.uk) with

your name, and whether you are a personal member or employed by an institutional member. You'll then get an automated acknowledgement of your request, and another once it's been processed.

Be our friend on Facebook  
We are currently looking at the possibility of using social networking websites as a way to raise SHCG's profile and increase our membership. We have recently created a page on Facebook, where we will publicise what we're up to, details of upcoming training and publications. You don't have to be an SHCG member to be our 'Facebook friend', so if you use

Facebook, why not become our fan and tell your friends about us and get them to join too? Just search for 'social history curators group' and join up by clicking on 'become a fan' in the top right hand corner of our page.



Find us on  
**Facebook**

**Victoria Rogers**

Web Editor

[vrogers@cardiff.gov.uk](mailto:vrogers@cardiff.gov.uk)

# SHCG Future Seminars

## Only Human

**Integrating Social History and Ethnography Collections**

**Collaboration with MEG (Museum Ethnographers Group)**

**Date: Friday 27th February 2009**

**Venue: Leeds City Museum**

A seminar based on the view that Social History and Ethnography are essentially slightly different approaches to the same subject; that is the study of people and their cultures. We will be exploring the similarities between the two types of collections and how we can integrate and interpret them more appropriately.

## Marks and Meanings

**Working with Industrial Collections**

**Collaboration with the Monument Fellowship, Museums Association**

**Provisional date:**

**Monday 1 June 2009**

**Venue: Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum**

What is a patent number? How do you decode a hallmark? When was that design registered? Come and learn about the marks found on social

and industrial history artefacts and what they can (and can't) tell us about objects and their designers and makers. Learn where to look for information and how to use a free online database to trace 20th century patent numbers. A Monument Fellowship Masterclass in association with Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum. Organised as part of a programme of Monument Fellowships from the Museums Association. Full details will be circulated nearer the date.

## What to do with Wooden Spoons?

**Making Use of Domestic Life Collections**

**Date: February 2010**

**Collaboration with the History of the Home SSN**

This seminar will explore approaches to interpreting and researching domestic collections.

**For more information please contact:**

Hannah Crowdy - Seminar Organiser  
[Hannah.crowdy@chester.gov.uk](mailto:Hannah.crowdy@chester.gov.uk)  
01244 402014



# Object Lessons

Following the launch of Object Lessons on the 24th June 2008, the object boxes are now in their new home at the Discovery Museum in Newcastle and ready to be used. The boxes are the result of feedback from members of SHCG, who said that they wanted more support in developing subject specialist skills, particularly around materials identification. The boxes have been developed with funding from MLA's Renaissance SSN Implementation programme to be used as a sustainable learning resource to help Social History curators identify and care for materials commonly found in their collections.

There is one box each for plastics, metals and woods. Each box contains a selection of objects which are accompanied by tailor-written resources, and a selection of further reading. The objects have been donated through museum disposal schemes, the majority coming from Beamish, the North of England Open Air Museum. The resource book guides you through a series of activities to help you learn more about how to identify each material, and to develop your understanding of any specific collections management needs of each. As part of the activities there are individual

identification cards for each object which are a useful starting point for you to test what you already know.

Object Lessons has been designed as a flexible learning resource which can be used in a variety of ways. If you prefer self-directed learning, you can work your way through the resource booklet, investigating the objects at your own pace and in your own time. As they are portable resources, you can take the box into store to assist you with a programme of documentation, using the objects as a point of comparison with your own collections. The box can also be used to support a one-day seminar for a group of colleagues, such as an AMA support group, or perhaps a group of volunteers. The resources include a suggested timetable for a day event, along with guidance on how to plan and run the day, including sample booking and evaluation forms for you to adapt for your own use. If you would like to organise your own seminar, contact SHCG's seminars organisers, as they can offer advice on how to get the most out of a day.

For further reading, a selection of books is provided with each box and lists of other publications and websites are provided

in the resource book. Other useful information, such as environmental and storage requirements is also supplied. If you are interested in borrowing any or all of the boxes then you will be required to fill in a booking form. A suggested period for the loan of the boxes is one to two months but this will be negotiable, depending on the demand for the boxes. Although the resources are free to borrow, transport of the boxes must be arranged by the person or organisation that wishes to use them. The borrower must also have sufficient insurance in place to cover the boxes in transit and whilst in their care.

The written resources will also shortly be available to download from the SHCG website – look in the resources section. However, as they have been written to be used alongside the actual objects, this will only give you a flavour of the whole scheme.

**Christine Hutchinson**

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# INTRODUCING THE HISTORIES OF THE HOME SSN

In November 2007 the Geffrye Museum was awarded a grant by Renaissance London to explore the feasibility of developing a new Subject Specialist Network (SSN), this led to the creation of Histories of the Home.

The Renaissance London support enabled the Geffrye Museum to undertake a wide ranging consultation process in March 2008 which involved museums, galleries, historic houses, libraries, archives, specialist groups, HE institutions and research centres across the UK. The very positive level of support expressed by over 70 institutions, and a number of independent researchers, made the Geffrye confident in taking the project forward. In May 2008 the Histories of the Home SSN was launched.

The SSN's mission is 'to establish a Network that deepens understanding of the home by sharing expertise and skills, promoting good practice, disseminating information and developing collaborative projects in order to inspire new ideas and stimulate innovative use of collections by professionals and the public alike.' Given our aim to facilitate exchanges and open up dialogue, we adopted a cross-disciplinary approach from the outset, encouraging scholars and practitioners from fields as diverse as economics, archaeology, social history, gender studies, geography, colonial and postcolonial studies and art history, to name but a few, to participate in and contribute to the SSN. In addition, our concept of 'the home', including gardens, is also taken in a broad sense to include not only the physical spaces and material objects of the dwelling, but also ideas, dynamics and experiences of the home within and beyond the domestic sphere.

Support from the MLA through Renaissance London is enabling the SSN to undertake a range of activities, from the publication of a quarterly newsletter and facilitating study visits between participating organisations to organising events. *Domestic Exposure: Exploring Photography at Home, 1850 to the present* launched the SSN events programme on 27 September 2008; the symposium was very well attended and received excellent feedback.

Our next event will be a symposium around the themes of working at and in the home and will take place on 21 March 2009 in Manchester at the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI). Another exciting event to watch out for is the first Histories of the Home SSN Annual Conference, which will explore different approaches to the study of the home and will take place on 3 April 2009 in London. Details to be announced through the Newsletter – you can find current and back issues posted on [http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/find\\_a\\_network/subject\\_specialists/Histories\\_of\\_the\\_Home](http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/find_a_network/subject_specialists/Histories_of_the_Home)



A domestic interior with a display of blue and white china, signed M.A. Tallan, pencil and watercolour on paper, c.1910 ©Geffrye Museum



Patrizia di Bello on photocollage and flirtation in Victorian photoalbums

We are also working in partnership with Collections Trust to develop a dedicated website through the SSNConnect platform and one of our main plans for the next two years is to compile a register of expertise. Given that there are currently 170 institutional and individual SSN participants this may not be a simple undertaking.

**We are very eager to build links between SHCG and *Histories of the Home* so if you would like to get involved or join our free mailing list, please contact SSN Co-ordinator**

Krisztina Lackoi  
klackoi@geffrye-museum.org.uk  
0207 739 9893.

## CAST-IRON FIREBACKS RESEARCH

Iron firebacks are a neglected source of social history. While reproductions are still popular with homeowners, the interpretation of their images and designs is often misunderstood. German and French firebacks have been extensively studied, but not so those from Britain. Jeremy Hodgkinson, a writer and lecturer on iron making who is author of a recent book, *The Wealden Iron Industry*, (Tempus, 2008), is compiling a catalogue of British fireback designs and styles from the 16th to 18th centuries, with the aim of eventual publication. To assist him in assembling a comprehensive database, which already includes over 600 examples, he would be most grateful if curators could contact him with details of iron firebacks in their collections, with a view to him visiting and recording them. Photographs and measurements would be welcome.

For further information please contact :

Jeremy Hodgkinson  
jshodgkinson@hodgers.com



An iron fireback made in 1662, probably at Brede in Sussex. Depicting a vase surmounted by a lion's face.



©Trustees of the British Museum

**Which cats are the most well known? Your list may include felines, such as Garfield, Tom (as in 'and Jerry'), TweetyPie eating Sylvester, or even the loveable Bagpuss. However, in Museum terms there is none as important as the Gayer Anderson Cat at the British Museum.**

**B**rent Museum in North-West London are delighted to have been successful in London Museum's Hub's *National: Regional Loan Project*. The project involves developing Brent Museum with additional capacity and support to take small scale, high quality loans from national museums. In 2008/9 this project is being delivered between the London Museums Hub and The British Museum, as

part of its *Partnership UK* programme. The British Museum will lend one of their most famous and best-loved Egyptian artefacts, the Gayer Anderson cat. This statue is dated to after 600BC, it is 42cm high and adorned with gold and silver jewellery. It is one of the finest examples of a copper alloy statue to survive from ancient Egypt. The Gayer Anderson Cat will be exhibited at Brent Museum from mid March 2009 for a two-month period. A programme of events and activities to celebrate this important loan will accompany the exhibition. We are delighted to be welcoming the Gayer Anderson Cat to Brent Museum and we are excited about the opportunity it offers to increase access to collections of national importance. The project will provide the opportunity

to develop partnerships and secure future high quality loans at Brent from national and Hub museums, with a view to integrating a loan programme into the Cultural Olympiad building up to the 2012 Olympics.

**For further information about the Gayer Anderson Cat Exhibition at Brent Museum, please contact:**

Joe Carr - Curator  
Brent Museum  
joe.carr@brent.gov.uk

# Greasy Luck to the Whalers

## Viewing Scrimshaw as Social History

**Scrimshaw is the folk art of the whaler, usually made from whale bone, teeth or baleen, a hard substance from the mouths of filter feeding whales. It is the by-product of a huge industry and is often confined to the pigeonholes labelled Maritime history, Natural History and Curiosity. However, there is a strong Social History aspect to scrimshaw as well. This small article does not aim to discuss the morals of whaling, past and present. What it does, is suggest that in viewing scrimshaw as folk art, it helps us to understand the world in which the whaler lived, worked and died. This naturally helps us to interpret these objects for our visiting public. As with anything made by a human, there is a human story behind it.**

The origin of the term 'scrimshaw' is not entirely clear. In parts of England it was used early on to describe past-times, games and recreations. When a captain ordered his crew to be 'scrimshandering' for the day, he wanted them to be pre-occupied with a creative past time. The main reason for making scrimshaw was to pass the time, to keep men occupied and out of trouble. Sailing, and especially whaling, involved long, tedious periods of waiting and doing nothing. Anything that took a long time and helped you to express the world you lived in would have been a welcome hobby. Preparing the surface of whale bone or ivory was extremely time consuming, taking many hours of cleaning and sanding with sharkskin, even before any inscriptions or ink were added.

Scrimshaw was at its height in the mid 19th century, especially in the US, and much of the scrimshaw in the collection at Hull Museums is American in origin. These are often the pieces most people think of when scrimshaw is mentioned, made out of the distinct teeth of the Sperm whale. British whalers generally didn't hunt the Sperm whale as it didn't live in the Arctic where they predominantly worked. One American example at Hull Museums is a tooth decorated by Edward Burdett in the early 19th century, showing the ship the Phoenix.



Above: Whale Tooth engraved by Edward Burdett.  
©Hull Museums, Hull City Council.

This is a rare example because it is fairly certain who the artist is. Burdett was born in Nantucket in 1805. He entered the whaling trade as a young man and developed a distinct style of scrimshaw. He has since gained the reputation as one of the finest scrimshaw artists. Burdett's fate, however, is typical of the world he worked in. He died at the age of 28 when he became caught in a harpoon line and was dragged overboard. Whaling was a difficult and dangerous job. Many whalers were killed by whales upturning their boats, by accident, illness or by suffering extreme weather in the Arctic. The Hull ship the Diana is one of many known to have been frozen in by the Arctic seas, forcing its crew to try and survive the winter.

Burdett's Phoenix tooth shows a classic scrimshaw image of the whale hunt. A whale hunt would have been a sudden burst of action and excitement in an otherwise boring world. It's no coincidence that most whaling images on scrimshaw show the glamorous aspects rather than the gruesome. A whale also meant money, and a 'full ship' meant turning homeward bound.

Both British and American whalers could be away from home for many months and even years at a time. In the later 19th century 'try works', for producing oil from blubber, were installed onto ships. This meant longer passages became the norm for American ships, including periods as long as five years. A whaler could become a stranger to his own wife and children. He might have children he'd never seen and hope at least to return to find them alive. Sometimes images of death, such as tombstones, urns and tombs, were used on scrimshaw. A whaler would be very aware of his own mortality and that of others.

The subject matter in both American and British scrimshaw highlights the mental preoccupations of the whaler. They depict their own world of hunting, patriotic slogans and flags and occasionally exotic people and creatures. But they also depict images of home, of reunion and women. Many of the images of women on the scrimshaw collection at Hull are extremely respectable. These are clothed Victorian ladies, probably copied from fashion magazines, with only the occasional mermaid type figure appearing. Erotic scrimshaw is very rare. Scrimshaw was often made to be seen on return to home, and to be given as a present or displayed as a conversation piece. If erotic scrimshaw was made it's possible it never made it off the ship, or at least not into the box of family heirlooms.

A typical piece of scrimshaw from the British whaling industry is the staybusk. A strip of whalebone intended to slip down the front of a bodice to help keep it rigid. These became traditional gifts for wives and sweethearts and as such they often depict romantic images of hearts



Right: A staybusk made from Whale bone.  
©Hull Museums, Hull City Council.



and of domestic idylls. These were meant to be worn literally next to the heart, and rarely depict the images of danger and derring-do we see on other examples. Another domestic present might include a pie crimper made of whale bone and other pieces designed to keep the whaler as a presence in his home during his long absences.

Another type of British scrimshaw often seen is work done on walrus tusks. Whaling trips into the Arctic inevitably led to increased contact with indigenous communities. Trading with the Inuit for Walrus tusks providing a ready supply of scrimshaw materials for both British and American whalers. However, one example of walrus tusk scrimshaw at Hull offers an interesting twist to this. It is a cribbage scoring board made from a tusk by an Inuit carver called Angokwazhuk. That he made a scoring board for a western game says much about the cross-cultural influences. Angokwazhuk lived in Alaska, but in 1892 travelled with a Captain Bodfish to San Francisco. During this trip he was given the western nickname of 'Happy Jack'. Angokwazhuk's opinions of his journey are unfortunately unrecorded.

What many of the scrimshaw images illustrate is a life that few men would choose if they had an alternative. It was a dangerous, lonely and monotonous existence. Extreme hardships had to be endured and the right men were sought out for the job. On British whalers, including those from Hull, many natives of the Orkney and Shetland Isles were recruited for their skill in boat handling. American whalers could easily have a crew compiled of Portuguese, African, Pacific Island and Hawaiian sailors. They all had one thing in common, however, they understood a life that most people back on



A version of the Susan tooth by Frederick Myrick in 1829.  
©Hull Museums, Hull City Council.

land couldn't begin to comprehend. And they all tried to depict this world through their folk art of scrimshaw.

One final example from the Hull collection is a version of the Susan tooth by Frederick Myrick in 1829. There are seven known versions of this tooth depicting the whaler the Susan. Most, like Hull's version, have the same curious poem summarising the whaler's approach to life.

*'Death to the Living,  
Long life to the killers,  
Success to Sailor's Wives &  
Greasy Luck to the Whalers.'*

**Robin Diaper**  
Hull Museums

Robin.Diaper@hullcc.gov.uk  
or to explore the scrimshaw collection  
go to the Hull Museum collections  
website [www.hullcc.gov.uk/  
museumcollections](http://www.hullcc.gov.uk/museumcollections)

## A Tale of Two Ports

Local history museums are at the heart of their communities, telling the story of their locality and its people. Many are working to represent the diversity of their area through displays and the hidden histories that collections can reveal. But what if you don't have very much in your collection at all? This article reflects on the experience of actively collecting to represent cultural diversity in two different museums using exhibitions as a spring-board. It looks at the aims the exhibitions had, challenges met, methods used, impacts made, and lessons learnt.

I have curated two cultural diversity exhibitions, both focussing on immigration to two ports: Destination: *South Tyneside* in 2005, while working at Tyne and Wear Museums and last year *Roots to Cardiff* in my current role with the Cardiff Museum Project. Both exhibitions grew out of a realisation that the museums did not have much in their collections that was relevant to, or represented, the cultural diversity of the locality, a fact that needed addressing actively. It was hoped that we would add to the collections



Large scale portraits and extracts from oral histories were used to encourage empathy with migrant stories  
© Cardiff Museum Project

by working with local communities to produce an exhibition. Both these projects therefore had a dual aim; of helping the museum become more representative for the long term, as well as having a more immediate product, which would promote an appreciation of the diversity of the area amongst the wider community. One of the key challenges to presenting a history of migration to an area is establishing who its communities are.

Census information provides a starting point, but a very broad one. Even if you know there are certain communities in your area, they can be hidden in the official census recording. It is then often difficult to find historic information about communities; frequently this type of information was just not recorded 'officially' at the time. When exactly did the first Somali seaman arrive in Cardiff, or the first Indian restaurant open in South

Shields? Although some communities have had their histories documented by academics more than others, when researching for both *Destination* and *Roots* it very quickly became obvious that generally the information just was not out there in an easily accessible form for an exhibition curator!

This lack of information leads to a positive and exciting opportunity. It means that you are not able to put together an exhibition by reading books or third hand accounts of a community's history. It means that you have to find out from the community itself. In doing so, our exhibitions became much more of a partnership. We explained that we wanted the museum to be more representative and relevant, that we wanted to know about the history of their community, about individuals' stories of moving and settling, that we wanted our collections to include things that tell their story; but that crucially we needed their help to do it properly. We were going to community groups with an agenda, but it was one that was received with a great deal of enthusiasm.

Similar themes were identified for both exhibitions and similar methods used.

*Destination: South Tyneside* was based around seven people's stories of moving into, settling and moving out of the borough. *Roots to Cardiff* concentrated on 19 individuals' or families' stories of moving into the city. Both also explored the legacy of migration on the areas' culture and society.

The exhibitions explored reasons, both pulls and pushes, behind migrating; moving to be with family and friends, to escape, to study or for work. We aimed to demonstrate that there is no one experience of migration. A flavour of the diversity of migration stories was probably achieved better in *Roots to Cardiff*, simply because we were able to include more stories under each reason due to the size of our gallery. General introductory panels to each theme provided context, emphasising that moving has been part of population change throughout the ages. 'Did you know' panels gave fun facts, illustrating the themes further.

I very much wanted the exhibitions to be about people. For impact, and to engage the wider community in the exhibitions, I felt it was important that we were talking about individuals and not faceless

communities. The main body of both exhibitions comprised large-scale portrait style panels, with quotes from oral history interviews. These panels therefore ensured that the exhibition was about Verron, not the Congolese community, and his experience of fleeing government forces, or Vimla, not the Indian community, explaining her need for the support of others sharing the same language when she married her husband and moved to Tyneside. These portrait panels explored the themes of the exhibition deeper, but on a personal, and therefore more powerful level.

Objects displayed were a mix of historic and contemporary, a few items from the existing collection, and loans of iconic objects, including costume and very personal items; for example, photographs of family left behind, passports and copies of evidence for refugee status applications. Simple, low-tech interactives were used to explore some of the themes; for example, exploring the impact that migration has made to our everyday lives by examining the accents that made up the Cardiff accent and worldwide words in common usage in the English language.



Roots to Cardiff borrowed objects from community groups and individuals in the city  
©Cardiff Museum Project

## Having an impact

There was certainly evidence of the impact of the exhibition on visitors with them enjoying and learning from *Roots to Cardiff*. The exhibition attracted over 16,000 visitors during its four month run, with 98% feeding back that they felt the exhibition to be 'very enjoyable' or 'enjoyable'. Comments made indicated that the generic learning outcomes we had identified for the exhibition had been met, that people had gained an appreciation of the diversity of the area and an empathy with migrants' stories. Despite no formal evaluation of *Destination* being undertaken, comments on our feedback board again seemed to show that visitors had responded to the themes and were making the link that diversity was relevant to their own lives and family's history.

Participants of both exhibitions were incredibly positive and enthusiastic about the experience of inputting to the projects. Without exception, all contributors were pleased, that the museum was interested in their lives and their community's history. To many it seemed to suggest that their histories were being 'officially' recognised and valued. A crucial part of this was the fact that they appreciated we were asking them to tell us what they thought was important, and how best to represent them. Many participants in both projects became real advocates for the museum, encouraging others to visit, and brought friends and colleagues into the museum throughout the exhibition runs. A key aim of both exhibitions had been collection and knowledge development. Both certainly resulted in a body of information about the cultural diversity of the region that the museums previously did not hold. Several oral histories, both individuals' and community histories, were taken into the Tyne and Wear collection after *Destination*; including not only those who were featured in the exhibition, but also recordings from visitors who had left their stories in the gallery, who we subsequently contacted. We also had some donations as a result of the exhibition, but in both *Destination* and *Roots*' case, the majority of objects in the exhibition remained loans and were returned after we closed. It may well be that in the future those objects, having been seen to have value to the museum, will be donated by participants. However, I feel more could have been done to encourage donations or, as in the case of an Irish dancing dress used in a later exhibition, using some of the exhibition budget to purchase objects from community groups.

## To the future...

So had I failed in my objective of making the collections more representative? Possibly, if the exhibition had been the culmination of a project, but unusually



Portrait panels, costume and objects (historic and contemporary, iconic and personal) helped tell *Destination: South Tyneside's story* ©Tyne and Wear Museums

both *Destination* and *Roots* were seen as exhibitions to start a project. They both clearly aimed at kick starting a programme of engagement and outreach to develop collections, relationships and knowledge for the long term.

After *Destination* my colleagues and I returned to individual communities to interview more members, getting further viewpoints, stories, information and expanding the collection with oral histories and objects. We produced two further exhibitions *Little Ireland* and *Sikhism: our story* and a community case display by a group of BME teenage girls. This work by both the history and outreach teams continues, including this year's *Destination: Tyne and Wear* exhibition.

In Cardiff we have worked further with members of diverse communities to incorporate stories into our subsequent exhibitions, and will be returning to represent diversity in our collection in earnest next year. In addition, I am currently working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission Wales to produce a new website based on *Roots to Cardiff* so that the exhibition itself has a legacy that anyone can access.

## Taking it further

My parameters for both exhibitions were to show the experiences of migrants and how immigration has shaped all our lives, culture and society. As such, both exhibitions demonstrated solidarity with migrants, and through their personal stories showed that we all want or experience similar things and emotions; or in the case of those who flee for their lives, we are grateful that we do not. Apart from individuals' stories of moving to seek refuge, or feeling lonely once arriving in Britain, both exhibitions were primarily positive in tone. We wanted *Destination* to be celebratory and so did not include many negative stories, despite

there being, for example, riots against Arab seamen in South Shields in 1930. In *Roots to Cardiff* I wanted to explore the view of Cardiff as a welcoming place. We included photographs and stories from three historic riots against the city's Irish, Chinese and Arab communities and also statistics of racially motivated crime in the city today. However, we could have made this stronger, perhaps by interviewing and including a portrait panel of someone who had actually experienced racism to strengthen this message. We also perhaps should have included more signposts to community organisations. We were raising issues for people to think about, we were hoping to challenge people's assumptions of immigration and potentially to change their minds. We had a responsibility to help visitors take that further if they had wanted to, something which in hindsight we could have been done better for both exhibitions.

## The way forward

At last year's Museums Association conference, one session asked if the UK needed a national museum of migration. A great deal of work is being done up and down the country, by museum services and other cultural and heritage organisations, to document and represent the story of migration in their localities. If the argument for such a museum gathers pace, it will be interesting to see if, and how, all these projects can be brought together to tell the migration story on a national level.

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Delegates arriving at the Museum of Childhood, Bethnal Green

# SHCG Annual Conference 2008, 'Ahead of the Game', Review

## 10th – 12th July, Greenwich, London

The SHCG Annual Conference 'Ahead of the Game' was held in London to explore the issues for Museums in preparing for the London 2012 Olympics. Speakers from the MLA and the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG), alongside presentations on many sporting and leisure community focused exhibitions provided delegates with information and ideas to help them get 'ahead of the game'. Joe Carr reports his experience of this year's SHCG conference.

**Joe Carr**

Curator  
Brent Museum

**Thursday 10th July,  
Museum in Docklands,  
Theme: Setting the Pace**

**M**y Thursday morning train journey into London Liverpool Street was surprisingly trouble free, a good sign for my first SHCG conference. As a veteran commuter I was delighted not to hear any of the usual heartbreaking announcements during my journey, such as; 'we apologise there has been a signal failure at Ipswich', or my personal favourite 'we apologise there are llamas on the line!'. So with the absence of signal failures and llamas I had a trouble free journey to the first venue, the Museum in Docklands.

After registration and a fine lunch at the Museum in Docklands we began the presentations with Isobel Siddons, MLA Programme Manager for 2012. She described the MLA's *Setting the Pace* programme. I was particularly interested in this presentation, partly due to the fact that we at Brent Museum are involved in a number of the strands to the *Setting the Pace* scheme. *Setting the Pace* is the prospectus, which is the MLA's vision for the Cultural Olympiad. It's a programme for all parts of the sector to build partnerships and develop activities that make a contribution to the Cultural Olympiad. It was key from the presentation that a fundamental outcome from *Setting the Pace* and the Cultural Olympiad will be building successful and sustainable partnerships across the cultural sector and beyond.

*Setting the Pace* incorporates a number of different strands: Literature and Story telling; Inspiring young people by celebrating 'London and the UK welcoming the world' through both written and spoken word. Information Hubs: showcasing the cultural wealth of London and the regions to an international audience. The Record; Setting a new standard for a comprehensive Olympic Games archive and enabling this rich legacy to be used to inform and inspire. The People's Record; Capturing people's life stories in London and across the UK and their engagement with the Cultural Olympiad and the 2012 Games. 'Stories of the World'; Being told through the re-interpretation of UK collections involving international curators and local communities, delivered through partnership projects of museum and gallery exhibitions in the years leading up to 2012.

We then heard from Rebecca Lee of Renaissance Yorkshire. *China in Yorkshire*

is a museum and arts festival during 2008 celebrating China hosting the Olympics Games. Museums and galleries in Leeds, York, Sheffield and Keighley, and many other Yorkshire museums, worked with their local Chinese communities to celebrate their Chinese collections and the wide range of Chinese cultural activities taking place in the region. This programme is a great example of working in partnership with national and international institutions, as well as forging strong links with the local communities. In the name of research I have also had the opportunity to play the project's interactive adventure game *Youngs China Quest*, an online game aimed at 10 – 14 year olds, as part of the programme. I am very pleased to say I completed all three levels. Have a go yourself on <http://www.mylearning.org/intermediateinteractive.asp?type=4&journeyid=517>.

The last speaker of the day was Sarah Barnwell, the Cultural Opportunity Manager for London 2012. She talked about

the London 2012 Logo and brand and how we can apply for our projects to be accredited with the official Inspire Mark, formally recognising them as part of the Cultural Olympiad. She explained some of the restrictions and criteria in applying for the mark. There was some discussion regarding the fact that although there is no money attached to being awarded the mark, one of the limitations for consideration was the fact a non-Olympic commercial sponsor could not assist in funding the event or exhibition and be recognised for their contribution, as this would compromise the official sponsors recognition in connection with the brand. This is the first time the official organising committee of the Olympic Games have allowed anyone outside the official sponsors to apply for use of a registered brand associated with the Games, so some aspects of the regulations are still being clarified. The process can take several months, and you should contact a London 2012 Organising Committee's regional creative programmer officer to apply, there are further details at [www.london-2012.co.uk/LOCOG](http://www.london-2012.co.uk/LOCOG).

The Museum in Docklands was an excellent choice for the first day of speakers. The museum as a venue is first-rate and it gave me the opportunity to explore the new gallery, *London, Sugar & Slavery*. This exhibition is fascinating and reveals just how embedded into our culture the effects of African slavery and its abolition actually is. A quick tube journey took us to our accommodation at the University of Greenwich. I was pleasantly surprised with the quality of the accommodation especially as I have bad memories of Halls of Residence when I was at University, the design of which was based on a Swedish prison! After a quick freshen up we headed to our Thursday night entertainment, croquet on the front lawn of the National Maritime Museum. I think we all agree this was a really great experience and I am keen to play again. I am pleased to say after perfecting how to 'stalk the ball', Alexander Jackson and I became rather good. I would like to thank all at the National Maritime Museum who made the evening so enjoyable.

### Friday 11th July, Hackney Museum and Museum of Childhood, Theme: Interpreting Sport

After a fantastic Tapas meal on Thursday evening we all enjoyed a good 'community' breakfast and bundled onto the coach towards our first venue, Hackney Town Hall. Hackney is one of the five Olympic host boroughs; along with Greenwich, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. Hackney will be at the heart of the 2012 Games, bringing the most significant regeneration project ever



Georgina Young enjoying the Spirit of Sport exhibition at Hackney Museum.

seen in London. At Hackney we heard from Jane Sarre, Museum Development Manager for Hackney Museum. Hackney are developing the *Mapping the Change* project, which is a unique history project exploring the people of Hackney and the impact the Olympic and Paralympic Games will have on their lives. Hackney Museums and Archives will be recording the changes to local people's lives through community interaction and activities. The project will create an archive of material documenting the change to the borough and will create links with a variety of community groups and organisations. I am very interested in how Hackney Museum plan to make these community links sustainable and if they aim to continue to build and develop these relationships after 2012.

We were then able to explore Hackney Museum and the new Olympic exhibition, *Spirit of Sport: From Mount Olympus to Hackney Wick*. The exhibition examines the origins of the ancient and modern Olympics and the 1908 and 1948 Olympic Games in London. It has a variety of interactive displays designed for children and families.

After an enjoyable lunch we bundled back into our coach to head to Bethnal Green and the Museum of Childhood, the venue of the afternoon's presentations. Exploring the museum was a real nostalgic treat as I discovered toys, which I enjoyed playing with as a child. However, it also brought back painful memories, for example, I found a Star Wars 'Millennium Falcon' on display similar to the one my mother sold at a car boot sale for a mere 50 pence... 50 pence!! In addition to this the Museum of Childhood had a special exhibition exploring the symbolism and interpreting the artwork of the posters created by the various countries who have previously hosted the Olympic Games, including posters connected with the British Olympic Games of 1924 and 1948.

The speakers for the afternoon were excellent, all had a great deal of passion and knowledge about their particular projects. We began with Michael Rowe of the World Rugby Museum who talked about the Sports Heritage Network and London 2012. The Sports Heritage Network was formed in 2004 from a variety of sporting heritage organisations in the UK, including the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum, the Museum of Rugby, Twickenham, the River & Rowing Museum, Henley and the National Football Museum. In January 2007 the Network launched its proposal, *Our Sporting Life*, for a national programme of events to celebrate sports heritage in the run up to London 2012 and beyond.

Hamish MacGillivray and Steve Hill then gave an animated and enjoyable

description of *100 Years of Passion and Pride: the Crystal Palace Football Club Centenary Exhibition*, which was on show at Croydon Clocktower. The task of putting the exhibition together was carried out in three months from May 2005. Working with the fans was a key part of this project as the wealth of items donated for display were items which fans had hidden away in their attics, cupboards or garages. The presentation culminated with a t-shirt revealing display, which certainly roused the front row.



We ended with a presentation from Dr Peter Davies of the University of Huddersfield. The presentation focussed on a local history project examining how cricket is a fundamental part of local cultural tradition, yet it often is neglected. This project received a £43,400 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and also received an in-kind contribution of £7,000 from the University of Huddersfield. It aimed to explore and celebrate the cricketing heritage of Kirklees and Calderdale, focusing in particular on the 100+ local league cricket clubs and grounds in the Kirklees-Calderdale area. The project is a fantastic example of how sport can act as a key to bringing communities together and bringing ordinary peoples' histories and stories alive. You can look at the project in more detail on its website, <http://www.ckcricketheritage.org.uk>.

Friday evening's meal was at a very nice Caribbean restaurant called 'Windies'. It was my very first experience of Caribbean food and as one of the token vegetarians in the group I am pleased to say we were very well catered for! Good food mixed with Caribbean rum resulted in an enjoyable evening's entertainment for all.

### **Saturday 12th July, National Maritime Museum, Theme: Youth and Community**

## **Involvement**

Saturday morning we made our way to the final programme of talks at the National Maritime Museum. The theme of this final day was looking at youth and community engagement and we were fortunate to have a number of very interesting presentations describing a variety of projects. The Trendsetters Project saw Eastside Community Heritage working with young people from Sarah Bonnell and Forest Gate secondary schools to explore, document and present the history of black African and Caribbean fashion by presenting their very own exhibition and fashion show. Judith Garfield, manager of Eastside Community Heritage, gave an insightful description of the problems, successes and achievements of running a youth project. We also heard from Liz Neathy of North Somerset Museum who described the Then and Now- teens through a time warp exhibition, which was curated by 30 young people in Somerset. It took a total of 18 months to curate, with the teenagers undertaking more than 50 interviews. Both presentations show how successful, rewarding and exciting working with young people can be and if we dedicate time and effort to support and encourage them, then truly fantastic results and relationships will be developed and achieved.

The afternoon discussions looked at the development of sports exhibitions with discussions from Victoria Rogers of the Cardiff Museum Project and Alexander Jackson from the National Football Museum and Leeds Metropolitan University. *Bats, Boots and Balls* was an exhibition showing the highs and lows of sport in Cardiff and aimed to explore how sport has helped form the city's social, cultural and physical identity, and the impact it has had on the lives of local people. *Jumpers for Goalposts* is an exhibition developed at the National Football Museum, which explores the changing place of football in childhood from the 1880s to the modern day. Both exhibitions are excellent examples of how sport can capture the imagination and passion of local communities. This was confirmed through Alex's simple show-of-hands activity. Whether we loved or hated football everybody raised their hand and had experienced some aspect of football in his or her everyday lives.

Having experienced my first SHCG conference I have found it an extremely rewarding experience. The excellent range of speakers, delegates, discussions and venues has really brought home how important the Olympics and community engagement will be over next four years and beyond. We as museums need to ensure that we maximise the potential that sport, the 2012 Olympics and Cultural Olympiad has to offer.

They think its all over... the fun is just beginning.

# No Conservator? No Problem!

## Preventative Conservation for Curators

**Eleanor Beyer**

Museum of Science and Industry,  
Manchester  
Friday, 5 September 2008

**The idea of 'no conservator = no problem' struck me as a controversial and challenging theme, was it possible to learn enough in one day to tackle this issue?**

I was enthusiastic about going to this seminar day because it offered an excellent chance to get an insider's view of how collections should be cared for in a museum when it is not possible to have a conservator present. Since museums continue to be short of funding towards conservation and care of their collections and premises curators are frequently forced to 'make do' without a conservator, often relying on common sense. Having little background in conservation this seemed an ideal chance to learn more about preventative conservation.

### Basic Housekeeping, The National Trust Way

Margaret Stone from the National Trust set the tone for the day with an in depth summary of housekeeping methods and materials used in National Trust properties. This was particularly useful as she mentioned brands and means of adapting brushes and other utensils for cleaning. Her explanation of how the National Trust keep up with their cleaning regime, especially now that Trust properties are open for long periods and with fewer staff, set a useful example for delegates. This procedure allows the public to observe furniture being removed and the process of opening up and closing down the houses each season, thus improving public understanding of how these properties and their collections are being cared for.

### Assessing Objects for use in Museums

Next we were introduced to how to assess whether objects needed attention from a conservator and some basic conservation tips by Irit Narkiss from Manchester Museums. This presentation gave an overview of the problems associated with

different types of objects, from paper to plastics, all of which are very relevant to curators. The simple suggestions for testing an object's integrity were easily understandable, for example sniffing plastics if a sweet smell is produced it indicates that the plastic is breaking down or and looking out for mould or damage from damp.

### Moving Large Objects and Collections Hazards

Rachel Hammond of the Museum of Science & Industry, MOSI, spoke about moving large objects, the difficulties involved and how to coordinate contractors. Her practical suggestions of forward planning routes and measurement of access points for the object, as well as how to move objects, were practicalities that could potentially be overlooked by the inexperienced or time pressured. The discussion of collections hazards by Rachael Metcalf of Tyne & Wear Museums continued the practical note. This involved a further discussion of ways in which people, pests and the environment can damage museum collections. For example, when packing it is important to ensure the object is secure as well as avoiding actually damage from the packing material to the object. Rachael made us all sit up and take note when she mentioned radioactivity as a danger lurking in many historical collections, and potential hazards to staff if collections contain chemicals or poisons.

### Demonstration of the Object Lessons box

The afternoon session opened with a discussion about the object lessons box developed by SHCG to provide a resource to assist staff in how to care for objects. By going through questions about the boxes it became clear that delegates were seeking further conservation advice. There was also a discussion of how and where delegates could source conservation information, suggestions included advice from national museums, from fact sheets, and from conservators listed on the ICON website.

### Practical cleaning session

The practical cleaning talk by Rachel Smith of the National Trust gave detailed guidelines for object cleaning, following on from Margaret Stone's morning discussion



Practical cleaning session with Rachel Smith, National Trust.

of National Trust housekeeping. This was a practical session as Rachel had brought in objects from which she demonstrated. For example, ceramic, copper and silver-plated items which each require different treatments. Watching her carry out cleaning techniques on small sections of each object made it clear how they should be picked up, and gently brushed or might be cleaned by using cotton wool to apply and remove wax.

### Tour around Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI) stores

The walk around MOSI's stores with conservator Rachel Hammond gave an excellent insight into how the museum has accommodated such a wide ranging collection, from a photograph store, clothing, to larger items like a urinal. We also learnt how certain areas have been opened up to the public, so visitors can explore how items are stored, observe other store rooms through windows, and occasionally go on tours of further storage areas. There is also a handling collection in boxes, which visitors can open and hold while seated at tables. There is no supervision other than observation by camera in these areas, which allows the public to explore unhindered. Hearing the thinking behind how MOSI had

increased accessibility to the public was also interesting in the context of a number of other national museums, which have followed similar lines, providing handling collections and access to what would normally be closed areas, for example the Natural History Museum.

### Conclusions

The idea of encouraging public interaction with the museum through increased access to handling collections and stores, provided it is carefully controlled, seems an excellent way of making more of museum objects. Irit Narkiss' description of how members of the public are involved in physically carrying out conservation under the supervision of a conservator of the more robust objects in Manchester Museums' collections also brought up two advantages; enhanced public interaction and understanding of collections, and achieving a larger volume of cleaning than would be possible for an individual conservator. Allowing the public to have this insight and a part in taking care of our collections and historic houses also fulfils the remit of the majority of museum aspirations. After all, the current generation of museum staff is being educated to preserve our collections, therefore enlightening the public for the future should also be a priority!

The day certainly lived up to my expectations and I learnt a great deal, particularly from the case study approach. The practical information and discussions I had with other delegates gave a useful background as to how, why and when conservation work is necessary, and preventive measures which could be adopted. The day was able to give me a better understanding of some of the issues faced by all museums concerning conservation, when environmental, display or other problems arise, since all museum staff face challenges in the upkeep and care of their collections.

So are conservators are still necessary if curators and members of the public can pre-empt many of the problems surrounding care of objects? Can common sense ever occupy the place of the conservator? In fact the day made it clear that in some cases conservation expertise was essential, our discussions pointed to an acknowledgment of the importance of conservation guidance from professionals. Since the budgets of so many museums are continually in threat, giving more conservation information and guidance to museum staff is a very practical measure. The main point of the day was that delegates came away with the knowledge of how to manage without a conservator, and when to call on assistance.



Delegates being given a tour around MOSI stores by Rachel Hammond.





# Everything including the Kitchen Sink

**The story of the acquisition of a fitted kitchen unit from Flat 25, Isleden House, London, N1 by the Museum of London. I recently received a phone call from a lady who had grown up in Isleden House, Islington, a small Corporation of London development of flats, which is home to a mixed community of elderly people and young families. The Corporation was about to refurbish the flats' kitchens; 'could we save anything?' the caller asked.**

London Parochial Charities built Isleden House in 1948 'to accommodate the Aged Poor and others' and its original fitted kitchens were still in use. Our interest was aroused, but little did I realise when I first visited, that we would end up acquiring a complete kitchen!

The flats' planners gave much thought to maximising space and minimising cleaning. Along one side of each 'kitchenette', as they were described, was a single unit, finished in cream enamel. It contained a stainless steel sink and draining board, a gas cooker, an electric refrigerator, a heated towel airer, an electric clock, a loud speaker for wireless programmes and cupboards

for food and household utensils. These were state of the art facilities, contrasting markedly with the previous slum homes of many of the tenants. On the opposite wall was a folding flap table.

Research at the London Metropolitan Archives revealed that Isleden House was designed by City of London architects Campbell Jones and Sons. The development also contained a sickbay, laundry, rest home and communal garden. A common room provided a hot lunch for residents. This was the first scheme of its kind in London, and in 1949 *The Builder* journal ran a 6-page illustrated feature about it.

Despite the storage implications of the kitchen unit's size, it measures 10 feet in length, we felt that its rich history, the many stories it can tell and its display potential justified its acquisition. It fits perfectly into the long story of welfare provision in London, vividly representing the change from charitable and philanthropic housing and welfare provision to state and local authority-run services. Its facilities illustrate the capital's hopes and plans for post-war London, as well as changes since, in domestic design,

technology and fashion, and in Londoners' shopping and eating patterns.

We have built up a rich pool of information about the kitchen, including a film we made before its removal and an oral history interview with its final user who still lives in the flat, a remarkable elderly lady who moved into Isleden House in the 1980's. The son of the Corporation's Clerk of Works in 1948 recently provided copies of photographs of the flats under construction.

External specialist contractors took 3 days to remove the unit and, other than cleaning off nearly 60 years of cooking stains, little conservation work was required. It is now safely stored awaiting reconstruction for future display. However, its acquisition has meant a commitment to de-accessioning a number of our 1940's fridges and cookers with no recorded provenance. A project I am yet to embark upon ...

**Julia Hoffbrand**

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# Family Treasures

## The Cann family quilts at the Quilt Museum and Gallery, York

The Quilter's Guild has a collection of over 600 quilts and quilt related items – and every quilt has a story to tell; about its construction, the fabrics that made it or the social and historical context in which it was made. However, like all social history objects, quilts can really come to life when you know about the people connected to them.

This story of five family quilts starts with Mary Dennis Cann, a farmer's daughter, born in Devonshire in 1798. Mary developed excellent sewing skills, and by the time of her marriage to Richard Cann in 1828 she had made an exquisite and structurally complicated coverlet for her dowry, known as the 'Mariner's Compass' due to its central medallion design. This coverlet, made from printed cottons has small, but perfectly sewn diamond pieces, constructed individually by hand using the 'piecing over papers' technique, before being hand sewn together. It is also one of the largest coverlets in the collection, measuring 252 x 273 cm, showing how much time and skill it must have taken Mary to create.

Mary and Richard had six daughters; Annie, Jane, Elizabeth, Fanny, Mary and Margaret, and one son, John. Unfortunately, Richard died of Typhoid Fever in 1842, leaving Mary and her children no choice but to leave their farm and move to Hartland village where they ran a drapers and grocery shop. Mary stayed running the shop for the next 50 years before her death at the age of 92 in 1891.



Mary must have passed on her sewing expertise to her daughters, four of whom stayed at home to help her run the shop, giving them ample spare time for sewing and quilting. Two quilts belonging to the



family are cot quilts, and were possibly made for the one married daughter's son, Charles Tottenham. The other two quilts were made in the mid to late Victorian period; one from printed cottons and one from silks. It has been speculated that these later quilts are not the workmanship of Mary as the quality and accuracy is visibly different to the 'Mariner's Compass'.

The latest of the family quilts is a silk triangles coverlet, made from dress and mourning silks, which were probably remnants of fabrics sold in their drapery shop. The coverlet is one quarter of its original size, and it is likely that it had been made earlier, and then converted into a decorative parlour item by reducing its size and adding a lace frill. This would have coincided with the late Victorian craze for having all things embellished and ornate as decoration in their living space, in contrast to earlier patchwork that was more practical and functional for the bedroom. This was intended to show the wealth and

status of the family, as they had access to expensive fabrics, and had the leisure time to create complicated patchwork.

The contrast between these last two quilts could also indicate the change in fashionable fabric being sold in the Cann's shop. Printed cottons, once a high status fabric, fell out of favour as they became cheaper and more readily available, making more expensive brightly dyed silks more fashionable for those wanting to show off their wealth and status.

After Mary's death, the quilts were passed down through generations of the Cann family, and eventually donated to the Quilter's Guild. They are family treasures and objects of great craftsmanship, and we are very fortunate to have them and preserve them for future admirers.

**Heather Peacock - Curator**

[www.quiltmuseum.org.uk](http://www.quiltmuseum.org.uk)

# TEA BREAK

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