

Issue 63

July 2009

SHCG **news**

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

Two years on the streets of Rotterdam

Rethinking Disability Representation

Old Stories: New Expressions

SHCG seminars and reviews

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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Email: Kay.Jones@liverpoolmuseums.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:
19TH OCTOBER 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.

Send all contributions to:

Lydia Saul,
Keeper of Social History, Bedford
Museum, Castle Lane, Bedford,
MK40 3XD. Tel: 01234 353323 Email:
Lydia.Saul@bedford.gov.uk

Front Cover: Tattoos illustrate the love for 5314 or 'South Side', Two Years on the Streets, see p10. Photo by Kees Spruijt



8 Old Stories: New Expressions

Dear readers,

I hope that you enjoy the new colour edition of the SHCG News, along with its redesign courtesy of Oojah Design. Please do offer some feedback if there is anything else you would like to see included in the newsletter, as we want this publication to continue to be a useful resource and reference to you all.

Following on from a fascinating SHCG Conference 2009 celebrating SHCG at 35 at Leeds City Museums and York this month, the articles in this issue reflect some of the interesting themes and issues around engaging new audiences and re-interpreting our collections.

This issue has been spoilt for choice with articles about the latest projects going on around the country and indeed even internationally. We welcome articles from all our members so please do contribute with your own news. The MLA South West New Expressions Projects are really imaginative and creative with the ways in which they have connected communities and new audiences with collections. One case study is taken from the Royal Cornwall Museum's project working with 16 – 26 year olds and engaging them with a variety of collections through art workshops. Kenny de Vilder from the City Museum Rotterdam explores in his article the issue of community representation and identity and how a museum is well placed to explore some of these more contemporary issues, alongside individuals' cultural heritage. The Hidden Histories article demonstrates the development of volunteers contributing to collections research, leading to an exhibition, film and performance linked to that research.

We have a review of the SHCG Only Human seminar in collaboration with the Museum Ethnographers Group, that took place last February, as well as an interesting book review on the subject of Rethinking disability representation in museums and galleries.

I hope you enjoy all the news and reviews over the summer and the colourful new look to the SHCG News.

Lydia Saul
News Editor

Issue 63 Contents

BULLETIN BOARD

SHCG Matters	3
SHCG list	4
Facebook Friend	4
SHCG online	4
Walks of Art	5

THEORY & PRACTICE

Hidden Histories: Heroes of the First World War	7
Old Stories: New Expressions	8
Two Years on the Streets	10

REVIEWS

Only Human Seminar	13
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OBJECT FOCUS

Thomas Gainsborough, Self-portrait	15
Tunbridge ware, a Victorian fashion	16

TEA BREAK

Book Review	18
SHCG Committee	19



10 Two Years on the Streets



13 Only Human Seminar



15 Thomas Gainsborough

SHCG Matters

What to do with Wooden Spoons?

Friday 16th April
2009
Venue TBC

This seminar is a joint initiative between SHCG and the History of the Home SSN (featured in last December's SHCG News). It will explore domestic life collections and how to make best use of them for access, interpretation and display.

Hannah Crowdy
or Kylea Little

Seminar organisers
enquiry@shcg.org.uk.
Keep an eye out for updated information and future seminars on the SHCG website.

Correction - Social History in Museums vol. 33 (2009)

In the latest issue of the SHCG Journal Social History in Museums, we misprinted the title of one of the reviewed books. Michelle Day reviewed "Uses of Heritage" by Laurajane Smith, not "The Politics of Cultural Heritage". The version available to download from the SHCG website will contain the correct title.

SHCG-list SHCG online

We are told that members see our email discussion group SHCG-list as one of the most useful 'perks' of membership! Whether you need to ask advice, want suggestions of best practice, are publicising a new job or are desperate for help to identify that mystery object that's just been left at the front desk, SHCG-list is the perfect way to communicate with other social history curators.

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 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.

Log on!

Keep an eye on our website and be the first to hear what we're up to!

We use the website as our first point of contact with members, so it's one of the easiest ways to find out the latest SHCG news, or to hear about our new seminars and events first. Over the last couple of months we have added more resources and information to the site, so log on and see our changes.

We have made booking for our seminars easier by including downloadable booking forms to our events information.

Our Resources section includes information about SHCG News, explains how to join our email discussion group SHCG-list and provides access to our Journal archive (right back to 1975 when we were known as the Group for

Regional Studies in Museums), which has now been expanded to include our Object Lessons resource guides.

Object Lessons, available now on the site for download, is a series of resources designed to help you develop your skills and confidence in identifying and caring for core materials found in social history collections. We have packs looking at Wood, Plastics and Metals which guide you through the basic principles of materials' identification and care. The resources are designed to be used with a 'loans box' of actual examples of the materials in question, but can be used on their own too.

Go to our website and look under our Resources section to find out more about the Object Lessons resource packs and loans boxes.

Find out more at www.shcg.org.uk

Be our Facebook friend

SHCG is now on Facebook, publicising what we're up to and promoting our training events and publications. Be one of the first to hear our news by joining our Facebook friends! 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. You don't have to be an SHCG member to be part of our Facebook group so why not tell your friends about us and get them to join too?



Victoria Rogers

Web Editor
vrogers@cardiff.gov.uk

Identifying prints

What process is it and how is it done? | 17–18 September

A two day seminar and workshop explaining and demonstrating the range of printing processes – relief, intaglio and planographic, in black and white and colour. The course will focus on a wide range of printed ephemera as well as fine art print making, illustration and reproduction. The course is particularly aimed at librarians, archivists, curators and social historians who need help with print identification for describing, cataloguing and evaluating. The course will give an historical perspective, concentrating mainly on the nineteenth century.

Information

Date Thursday 17 and Friday 18 September 2009

Start 10.30am for 11am until 5pm

Cost £285.00 inclusive of lunch, coffee/tea & materials

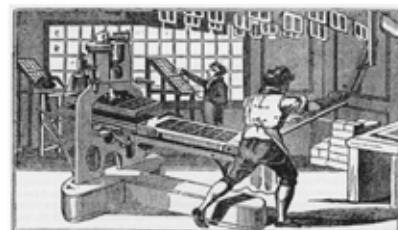
Please make cheques payable to:

University of Reading (Maximum of 15 places, so early booking recommended)

Venue Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading

If you wish to attend please contact:

Department of Typography & Graphic Communication
University of Reading
Whiteknights
Reading, RG6 6AU
c.mcgroarty@reading.ac.uk
Tel (0118) 378 8081/7213



Walks of art: university launches audio trails around the Royal Docks

A series of audio trails around the Royal Docks have been launched by staff at the University of East London, concerned about the lack of historical interpretation of the docks.

The audio trails are free to download for use with an i-pod or mp3 player with printable maps from www.portsofcall.org.uk. The recordings contain highlights of dozens of interviews of local people talking about the history of the dockside communities, their present and their future. Many of the interviews are rare archive recordings from oral history collections created by Eastside Heritage and the Museum in Docklands.

Project director Toby Butler said: 'The closure of the working docks, once the busiest in the world, and their ongoing redevelopment has completely transformed the landscape and the dockside communities such as Silvertown and North Woolwich. By creating online maps, public art and historical audio trails with the involvement of residents I hope that locals and newcomers alike can discover new things about their surroundings and visitors can gain a deeper understanding of this fascinating part of East London.'

'I am also keen to make people feel comfortable exploring new dockside developments like the UEL campus, City Airport and the Excel Centre – they are interesting places to visit, but if you have never walked through them you might not realise that they are publicly accessible.'

Young people at the Asta Centre youth club in North Woolwich helped create one of the trails by recording interviews

and composing music with professional composer and UEL lecturer Jo Thomas. Other residents have helped to identify sites of importance and have attended a series of free skills workshops in local history research, mapping, interviewing skills and tour guiding at the university.

The trails have been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Royal Docks Trust. They are up to two miles long and cover the Royal Docks, North

Woolwich, Silvertown, Barrier Park and West Silvertown. For those who do not have an mp3 player, listening equipment and CD versions of the trails can be borrowed from North Woolwich Library.

Any group who would be interested in attending an organised walking tour should contact

Toby Butler
0795 729 4907 or
t.butler@uel.ac.uk

PORTS OF CALL
AUDIOTRAILS

walks of art at the royal docks

walk 1: the west silvertown trail
gunpowder, fire and flood

walk 2: the asta trail, silvertown
trains, planes and graffiti walls

walk 3: the north woolwich trail
deep water

Hidden Histories: Heroes of the First World War.



Nuneaton, the birthplace of the writer George Eliot, has a rich heritage of industry in the West Midlands. The Museum stands opposite to the towns two war memorials to the Boer War and the First and Second World War. In late 2007, Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery was awarded funding through the Big Lottery Fund and MLA as part of the Their Past Your Future 2 programme.

The Museum embarked on their most ambitious project to date, focusing on the legacy of the First World War, including an exhibition, a film and drama project and a unique volunteer project. Volunteers would have the opportunity to research museum objects whilst receiving specialist

training from a variety of sources.

Advertising for 'new recruits' was through the local volunteer centre and through an in-house produced leaflet. This was successful as it attracted the attention of a wide range of ages and occupations. In particular, individuals that wanted a day break from their regular jobs, post-graduate students and those wishing to return to work. Application forms were produced via S.A.F.E. in conjunction with national legislation with working with vulnerable people and children. Potential volunteers could supply a CV or list occupations with their application which was useful, as it indicated existing skills and skill development. The process then involved an informal chat to ensure that the volunteer understood the content of the project and the commitment required.

The training days consisted of a period of four Mondays in a row during February. Training was

arranged via new and established partnerships in the Borough and County. One new partnership via Adult and Community Learning through Warwickshire County Council allowed some post-graduate museum learning on material culture. The importance of recording stories to the wider communities of the Borough, highlighted not only its importance, but the work of the museum and the ongoing processes of this work.

Training included: Handling objects, interrogating artefacts, a site visit to Warwickshire County Record Office, a visit of Nuneaton Library's local studies section and digitisation of artefacts, scheduled later in the project.

The evaluation process using Generic Learning Outcomes revealed that the training proved to be a great success. It brought together the volunteers' existing knowledge, challenged preconceptions and

highlighted the importance of the collections and local knowledge.

“Never looked into Naval History of WW1 before, [it] will be a challenge”.

“History is an emotional subject and can make you feel that way. You must not let emotion get the better of you when you are trying to learn about something as tragic as war”.

“[I] feel the courses have pointed me in the right direction to achieve some investigations on at least some of the objects.”

The volunteers have worked very hard in investigating the objects and have used a wide variety of resources including meeting every Tuesday at the museum to talk about their ongoing work. They have also engaged with their families through discussion, interaction and watching relevant television programmes to support the work they are accomplishing at the museum. The volunteers have also contacted relevant institutions and discovered lost links and relationships with objects which were virtually unknown; for example,

“History is an emotional subject and can make you feel that way. You must not let emotion get the better of you when you are trying to learn about something as tragic as war”.

a discovery was made that Nuneaton holds a small archive of a lost airbase in Port Victoria, Kent. Another volunteer has enthusiastically investigated the manufacture and production of camera guns, how they were used, their importance during the First World War and the role of aerial darts or flechettes. The volunteer has discovered a link between a piece of German aircraft wreckage in the collection and the flechette itself which is currently under investigation. Others focussed their work on finding more about the local families of those who

fought and died and uncover their legacy from objects given to the museum.

The project completes at the end of April, though our volunteers have already expressed an interest to continue and train in oral history. The project itself has challenged why museums collect stories and the sensitivity of those stories when dealing with subjects such as conflict. It has redefined the importance of collecting stories from our objects and the provision of an emotional link to a local person using the items dated from 1914 to 1918. However, the key part of the success has been the enthusiasm and dedication of our volunteers. They have expressed such knowledge and understanding of the First World War collections through their work, and have been an inspiration.

Rebecca Walker

Assistant Museum Officer
Nuneaton Museum and Art
Gallery
For further information please
contact: rebecca.walker@nuneatonandbedworth.gov.uk



Volunteers on the training course

Old Stories: New Expressions

New Expressions was an MLA South West funded project, with support from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, aiming to open up new dialogues between audiences, contemporary artists and collections.

Museums are often seen as traditional places, full of traditional things, run in traditional ways, for traditional audiences. The New Expressions project seriously challenged these stereotypes by creating new dialogues between the Royal Cornwall Museum's collections, fifteen local young people aged 16-26 and photographic artists Matthew Pontin, Jonathan Blyth and Ted Duncan. We chose to work with young people because they are amongst our most infrequent visitors yet they have the ability to freshen and make our collections relevant to contemporary society. The young people were chosen for the project from a variety of backgrounds, in order to facilitate the possibility of alleviating social problems for vulnerable and socially disadvantaged people. The process of the project was as important for the collections, museum and young people as the final product, which was to be a series of contemporary photographs inspired by unsung stories behind the museums' collections.

Audience-led, story-based research into the collections was conducted by the Curatorial Team following guidance and advice on how to best appeal to youth audiences from the Learning Team. Once research was underway, the project's Youth Mentor, a young person herself, was consulted to refine the stories further, rating which

might best appeal to this age group and offering advice on story development. The final 35 stories were delivered by the curators as a tour of the collections to a group of seventeen young people on the first day of the project. They were instantly hooked, each having their favourites. Discussions about the objects and stories helped this group of strangers to bond with each other as well as museum staff, to whom they posed queries. The return of 15 participants the following week, each pitching against each other for the chance to add their own contemporary twists to the objects' tales, is testimony to the success of the audience-led story-based approach we had experimented with. The audience-

led story-based approach was also appreciated by the curatorial team who felt it gave them the "opportunity to look again at the objects on display and think about new ways of interpreting them for a specific audience" (Sarah Lloyd, Curator of Social History).

During the following six weeks, the group was guided and supported by the museum staff and photographic artists to investigate the stories further and develop and practice technical photographic and image manipulation skills. They created their own photographic interpretations at a variety of locations across Cornwall to strict deadlines and budgets: just like the 80s TV show Challenge Aneka! The project



Young people learning photographic techniques at the museum.



Curator's tour of the collections for the young people

fostered an atmosphere of open articulation and the exchange of ideas that honoured individuals' creative expression. Many of the participants worked towards the nationally recognised Arts Award qualification. This group of strangers developed into a network of friends who enthusiastically supported each other in both work and play. The 'can-do' attitude that was fostered resulted in everyone producing at least one photographic interpretation of the collections

'New Expressions has proven to us that museums can and should use the arts to engage young people outside of the education system.'

that is temporarily displayed nearby its object of inspiration within the permanent galleries. Each image is highly individual, ranging from a posed image of a celebrity footballer auctioning toilet rolls that was inspired by the museum's soap bar which the Prince of Wales washed his hands with when laying the foundation stone of Truro Cathedral to archival images of Cornwall's Helston Flora Day contained within the shapes of pots that was inspired by narrative scenes on Greek ceramics in the collections.

Lead Artist, Matthew Pontin said: "I was impressed by the creativity and energy that the group put into this project. The various ideas explored using many types of image-making should hopefully inspire a younger audience to visit the museum and discover these fascinating stories!"

New Expressions has proven to us that museums can and should use the arts to engage young people outside of the education system. The museum is fully committed to delivering engaging and inspiring creative projects for this next generation of museum goers, ensuring they value, enjoy and protect our heritage. To that end we will continue to work closely with other organisations, supporting the involvement of young people in culture and the arts whilst benefiting from the fresh insight they can offer.

Louise McDermott

Interpretation and Community Officer, Royal Cornwall Museum



Flora Day archival photograph projected onto a vase

Two Years on the Streets

In 2007 the City Museum Rotterdam (HMR) started a study, 'Roffa 5314', of youth cultures in a southern district of Rotterdam.

The aim was and is to analyse several youth groups who show a remarkable pride in, and love of their neighbourhood. At the same time we wanted to document their life style and obtain the characteristic objects that function as markers of that lifestyle. During the two year research period, we have been actively involved with these young people in order to get a better understanding of their relationship with the city.

5314: more than a feeling

The project started in 2007, after a curator had spotted numerous youths in a part of southern Rotterdam who identified themselves strongly with '5314', the number code of the public transport system in the area. This part of Rotterdam is home to large groups of immigrants and is known for its derelict neighbourhoods and underprivileged population. As a result, the district suffers from a negative image. To find young people who expressed a fierce love for their neighbourhood, was therefore somewhat surprising. We decided to pay special attention to these young people

who express their love of '5314' visually: they had tattooed this number on their bodies, applied 5314 prints on clothes, used nicknames referring to 5314 on websites and painted 5314 graffiti all over the city. The project was called 'Roffa 5314' for obvious reasons: Roffa means 'tough' in Sranan Tongo, the language of Surinam, and is also street slang for 'Rotterdam'.

In the initial phase of the project we focused on hiphop youth, whose pride of 5314 was the first to be discovered and the most visible. Soon, however, we found they were not the only ones to identify themselves with 5314. Remarkably, young extreme



Feyenoord hooligans are proud of their part of the city.

supporters of Feyenoord, showed the same devotion. Feyenoord is a major Dutch football club from southern Rotterdam and notorious for its share of fanatic fans, often called hooligans by media and politicians. Though a very different group compared to hiphop youth, in outward appearance as well as behaviour, these young hooligans embrace 5314 with just as much enthusiasm. Both groups paint 5314 graffiti, have 5314 tattoos and use 5314 nicknames on the internet.

For all these young people, 5314 is more than just showing love for their home ground, it is a complete way of life. The main difference between the two groups is that whereas hiphop youngsters most notably use 5314 in their rap lyrics, the young hooligans use it to project a certain toughness when opposing fans from other football clubs and even fanatical Feyenoord supporters from other parts of Rotterdam. During the research it became clear also that

ethnic background is no issue among young people embracing 5314. Both the hiphop and hooligan groups were made up of young people from different ethnic backgrounds. Being from a certain neighbourhood was clearly more important to them than ethnicity.

Methods

We started the project by sending out photographers and researchers to the 5314 area to make contacts with young people on the streets. Following this initial contact, in-depth interviews were conducted with several young people. After this, we developed several strategies to contact more young people and gain more information about them. The methods used are certainly not typical museum business. We organized, for example, three events specially aimed at the youth in the 5314 area. Two of these focused on music and took place in a major discotheque in

the neighbourhood; the line-up was created in cooperation with young people from the area, and featured local artists certain to appeal strongly to the target group. A third event focused on different sports such as street football, break- and streetdance and computer gaming. All three events attracted hundreds of young people and gave us the opportunity to observe them and make additional new contacts.

Besides organizing these events, the HMR published four editions of a free magazine specifically created for the youth in southern Rotterdam. Again, the subjects of our study themselves were directly involved; they were asked to suggest topics for the magazine and even co-write articles. The magazine's enthusiastic reception was certainly also due to the fact that many recognized themselves or their friends in the articles and accompanying pictures. Finally, the internet played an important part in the way the HMR



Photo by Kees Spruijt

gained information. We set up a website with information about the project. Furthermore, we created a Facebook-like website where young people can post their own pictures, video clips and messages and contact other members of the site.

Results

On the basis of our research, the museum has acquired a representative collection of objects of the studied youth groups. The analysis of the interviews, all of them documented on camera, and other research materials has resulted in a database full of information on youth culture. The collected objects are presented in a dynamic exhibition, not in the museum in the centre of Rotterdam, but in a location in the heart of the 5314 homeland. On view are objects related to the 5314 feeling, such as clothes, electronic gadgets, jewelry and lots of pictures showing tattoos, graffiti and young people on the streets. Video clips, performances and music illustrate the lifestyle of the different youth groups in still more detail. The results of the research will also be presented in a publication at the end of 2009, written for the young people about whom the project centred as well as for professionals interested in contemporary, urban heritage.

Also, the exercise of researching youth culture has led to a vast network among youth in the 5314 area, to fresh insights into the phenomenon of urban youth culture, and to new ideas about obtaining contemporary cultural heritage. In the future, the HMR will focus on getting out on the street and into the neighbourhoods of the city; the results will also be presented on location. As far as we have experienced, this is a very good way to get the local population closely involved with the museum.

Kenny de Vilder MA.

City Museum Rotterdam



Typical clothing illustrates the 5314 hip-hop subculture. Photo by Vincent Dekkers.

Only Human Seminar Review, February 2009, Leeds City Museum

I attended my first seminar connected with the Museum Ethnographers Group when they held their joint seminar with the Social History Curators Group entitled Only Human at the new Leeds City Museum on Friday 27th February 2009.

This was not my first visit to the new Leeds City Museum, as I had been just after it re-opened with my wife and children. We did enjoy our visit and as regular partakers of what the modern museum world has to offer my children aged 12, and 16 thoroughly enjoyed their day out. The group which attended the seminar from the Middlesbrough Museums, where I work with the Social History and ethnography collections, included curatorial, front of house and technical staff from both our institutions the Dorman Memorial Museum founded in 1904 and the Captain Cook Birthplace Museum founded in 1978.

These regular staff visits to

*“ Everything has a beauty, but not everyone sees it”
-Confucius.*

seminars and site visits to exhibitions and institutions has included visits to Norwich, Cambridge, London, and Whitby, of which provide an experience and learning opportunity to collate what others are doing and how they work. The programme for





the day looked extremely varied and interesting, but we were slightly disappointed to discover the final speaker Suada Motara was unable to attend.

The background to the Leeds City Museum was provided by Antonia Lovelace and Kitty Ross, Curators of Leeds Museums collections. The complexities with designers over type face, size and colour sounded all too familiar to me and I am sure to many other museum professionals present. The saga of its development that has been so many years in the making now gives Leeds a museum that it deserves as a new truly regional capital and a venue and home for its collection for the city to be justifiably proud of.

The presentation by Miriam Scargall on the Mary Edith Durham collection of textiles and accompanying drawings provided us with an amazing glimpse into the world of an intrepid Victorian woman pioneer. Mary was born in 1866 and became an academician artist whose forays into collecting, writing up and visually recording her travels in the dangerous regions of Montenegro, Bosnia, Albania and the Balkans created an amazing collection. Their significant impact was recorded when they were given as a gift to the Bankfield Museum in Halifax.

The debate between diversity and identity and the collaborative ethnography and social history project by Tony Eccles at Royal

Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter and David Mullin at the Museum in The Park in Stroud was also a great insight into how a project that at first appears like it might not work out, turns out to be a triumph of the curators craft. In Stroud where the exhibition was held visitor figures revealed that nearly a third of the population had visited the exhibition and provided for a wide variety of groups of visitors, including many families, as well as achieving significant repeat visits.

After lunch, which was an unusually mouth watering local authority produced bill of fayre, we toured the new Leeds Galleries in the company of Antonia Lovelace and Kitty Ross whose explanations of how and why things developed provided an interesting insight from the providers angle rather than that of the consumer.

The most interesting of the day's presentation was Daniel Smith's work on the photographic

archive created by the Mass Observation's Worktown Project in the local history collection he cares for in Bolton. The content of this archive, created in the 1930s by a group of artists, writers, academics, students and even a tramp, included all of the interest of the modern digital age, for example subjects like soap opera, espionage, sport, technology and industry.

On the whole it was an incredibly well organised and extremely worthwhile day that I was very pleased to attend. To recall the day and sum it up in one, I quote from Eccles and Mullins presentation;

" Everything has a beauty, but not everyone sees it" Confucius.

Ian Stubbs

Assistant Curator,
Middlesbrough Museums
ian_stubbs@middlesbrough.gov.uk



Thomas Gainsborough, Self-portrait

This roughly A4 size sketch by the artist Thomas Gainsborough (1727 – 1788) came into the British Museum Prints and Drawings collection in 1988 with assistance from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Pilgrim Trust.

One of the previous owners was Gainsborough's great nephew, Richard Lane (1800-1872), who made a lithograph copy as part of a series for Sir Thomas Lawrence. Lane was also a famous portraitist and collector of drawings in the eighteenth century. The portrait has recently been displayed in the Intimate Portraits Exhibition.

This is a fascinating piece as it is the only self portrait drawing by Gainsborough which still exists. The young Gainsborough probably drew this self portrait for his family, who almost certainly kept it framed as a memory of him, he would have seen this as a finished drawing. It also bears similarities to Portrait of the Artist with his Wife and Daughter (c. 1748, National Gallery), in which he is seen in a reversed position seated with similarly rather stiff crossed legs.

Gainsborough, best known as a successful society portraitist in his time, was particularly known for his depictions of the exquisite high fashion silk dresses of his female sitters and well dressed gentlemen. The roughness of the lines may come as a surprise, particularly when compared to his more finished style in earlier portraits like Mr and Mrs Andrews (c.1750, National Gallery). It is as though he is looking forward to his future style as the imprecise hasty graphite lines are very close, if a little stiffer, to the style of his brushstrokes in his later portraits.



©The Trustees of the British Museum

Both this sketch and later portraits convey the sense of a blustery landscape.

Gainsborough was perhaps a frustrated landscape painter. Despite being particularly interested in landscape he was forced to paint society in order to make a living. In Mr and Mrs Andrews he paints far more of their fields than the sitters who are seated on a bench to the side of the portrait, although this does illustrate their ownership of several acres of land. In the self-portrait he seems at one with the landscape, as his figure sinks into the natural elements. In fact he drew his self portrait using a mirror on a separate piece of paper, which he later cut out and pasted here. His closeness to nature is evident in other portraits, for example where gentlemen are depicted as seated on the

ground. In later life, Gainsborough mainly drew from his studio, for example using parsley for trees. In this picture he seems to actually be drawing outside, perhaps a practice more common in his youth?

The intimacy of the sketch conveys something of the young artist getting to grips with his beloved landscape, and in doing so creating a sketch to be intimately treasured by his family in later years. It is an interesting drawing because it gives us a glimpse of the artist himself in action and was also what probably interested Lawrence and others in the piece, as well as myself.

Eleanor Beyer

British Museum

Tunbridge ware: a Victorian fashion



By the time this work table was made, in the mid 1850's, Tunbridge ware was at the height of its popularity. The table represents the culmination of centuries of development within the Tunbridge ware industry, in terms of techniques used, decorative devices employed, and its ambitious scale. It represents Victorian popular taste – extravagant, visually complicated and with a touch of gothic in its design.

Tunbridge ware is the name given to items of decorative woodware produced in the locality of Tunbridge Wells from the late 1600's until the early part of the 20th century. It was originally produced for visitors to the Wells to take home as a memento of their stay, imitating a similar industry in the resort of Spa in Belgium. Early Tunbridge ware takes the form of small painted woodware items such as stamp boxes, letter openers and pincushions. By the early 1800's Tunbridge ware had developed into a style of marquetry – using different coloured woods to produce decorative patterns and images.

Following Princess Victoria's patronage of the town and the coming of the railway, Tunbridge Wells became a fashionable place for the wealthy and the rising middle classes to live. As the nature of the town changed, Tunbridge ware makers adapted their products to meet the tastes and needs of their audiences. Larger items of Tunbridge ware which could adorn the home, such as sewing boxes and writing

Image courtesy of Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery

slopes, were in vogue. The wealthy commissioned large items of furniture such as pianos, games tables and mirrors.

This work table was produced in the factory of Edmund Nye, one of three Tunbridge ware makers to show their products at the 1851 Great Exhibition. We know that Nye and his designers developed new patterns especially for his exhibition stand, and his efforts were rewarded by the judges, who gave him an honourable mention.

One of the new designs Nye developed for the Great Exhibition was that of the tropical butterfly, which he used to decorate a bookstand. Unfortunately we don't know where the bookstand is now, but the same butterfly motif was used on several other items around this date, including this work table and a small stationery box in the collection at Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery.

Produced by a
method of

marquetry called gauge work, each tiny section of the butterfly's wings and the lines of its body are created from tiny wood veneers. A study of a single eye on one of the wings reveals at least four separate pieces of wood have been used to make up the round shape. A business card, which accompanies the work table (allegedly in Nye's handwriting) declares the butterfly to be 'a mosaic of twelve thousand pieces'.

The colours within the butterfly, from black to every shade of brown and then to pink and green are all naturally occurring. Nye and his designers were the greatest proponents of using green oak, which was the result of a fungus affecting fallen logs.

As well as this striking central image on a light background (Nye's signature style), there are many other decorative devices on the work box, which were calculated to impress. Every single edge of the box is decorated with tessellated mosaic strapwork, and being a complicated

sarcophagus shape the box has an abundance of edges! Each piece of strapwork features a decorative motif, usually recognisable as a local flower or plant, composed of thousands of tiny tesserae. The larger the band, the more impressive – and special note should be made of the large piece of concave banding around the base of the box itself, which is adorned with very realistic oak leaves and acorns.

Although amazingly skilful, tessellated mosaic is not quite as intricate as it looks. Each tiny piece has not, in fact, been individually dropped into place by hand. With typical Victorian ingenuity, Tunbridge ware makers devised a method of mass-producing these images: by sticking thin veneers together to form a block (almost like a stick of rock!) and slicing through the block they were able to produce many duplicates of the same pattern. These would then be assembled together.

For me, this work table by Edmund Nye represents many of the contradictions of the Victorian aesthetic. It shows a fondness for the natural world in its motifs and materials, and yet it is extremely artificial. Function follows form entirely in this piece, as all methods of construction, and even the core materials used, are hidden behind a veneer. Although the box is clad in a variety of expensive woods, the main body of the object is constructed of cheaper material. At the same time, the amount of thought and time that has gone into Tunbridge ware gives it an enduring sense of quality. Its style may not appeal to everyone, but you can't fail to be impressed by its intricacy.

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Image courtesy of
Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery

Rethinking Disability Representation in Museums and Galleries

Rethinking Disability Representation in Museums and Galleries explores the power that museums and galleries have to effect change in the way that disability is conceptualised. The Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at the University of Leicester took the social model of disability as its starting point and set out to explore alternative approaches to representing disability in museums and galleries through nine case study interventions that are recorded - and reflected on - in this publication.

Rethinking Disability Representation follows on from Buried in the Footnotes, the 2004 publication that highlighted the lack of disability-related

information in narratives in UK museums and galleries and revealed a fear of tackling the subject.

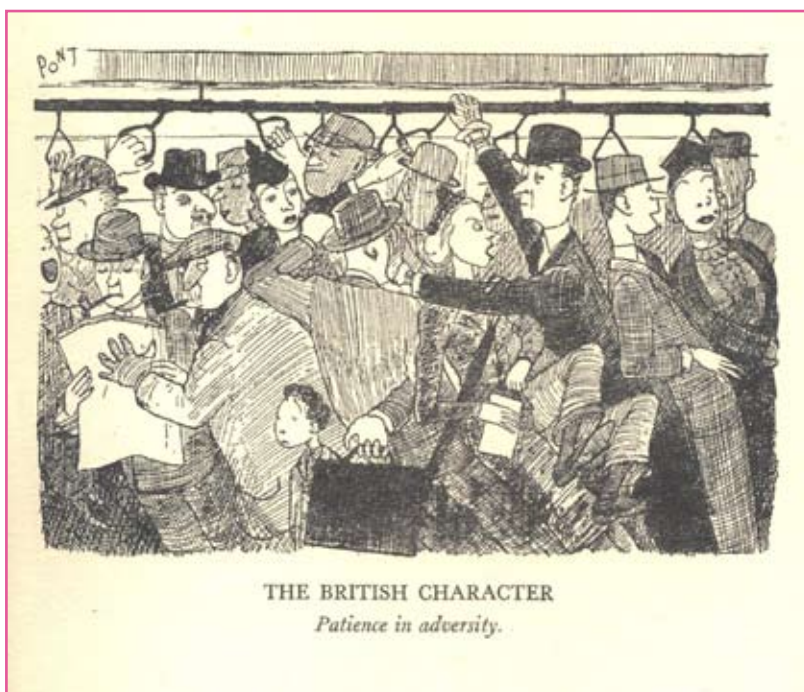
Part 1 – Perspectives on Disability Representation makes the case for why the sector must overcome this fear and contribute to changing the way disabled people are portrayed. It is bold in intent and powerful in delivery. The contributors convince on the value of change, both in terms of positively affecting disabled people's lives and in developing democratic and meaningful museums.

Part 2 – Museum Experiments gives the bare framework of each of the nine case study interventions and Part 3 – Reflections on Practice allows

the museum practitioners who delivered the interventions to reflect on their experience under a series of thematic headings. This structure works far better if you dip in and out of the case studies rather than trying to read them sequentially; it is indicative of the idea of this book as a useful, practical, reference work.

Overall, the case studies should give confidence to social history curators, for it is largely in the museum services set up on the social history model - used to community consultation, open to co-production, familiar with person-centred interpretation – that the approaches taken in Rethinking Disability Representation seem at home. In particular, Lives in Motion: Transport and Disability at Glasgow Museum of Transport came across as integrated into an embedded interpretation structure and institutional culture and, therefore, as likely to have an ongoing legacy. Across the range of projects there is inspirational practise, whether it is Colchester and Ipswich Museum tackling disabled identities head on or Northampton Museum and Art Gallery transforming its way of seeing its shoe collection.

Much is made of the diversity of the nine museum and gallery projects however there were unifying factors. All the interventions adopted the social model of disability and all were overseen by a Think Tank comprised of disabled activists, artists and cultural practitioners who lead on shaping content and tone. This support structure clearly had benefits in terms of building confidence and coherence, however, it also created limitations. In her piece Framing the Project, Kylea Little



Title: The British Character, Patience in Adversity
Published in PONT, by Collins, 1942 from Hull Museums Service Collections.



powerfully recounts the conflicting priorities of Tyne and Wear Museums' consultation group of local disabled people and the Think Tank. The social model of disability is contested, in this case by disabled people themselves, something which Rethinking Disability Representation cannot meaningfully engage with given its research framework.

Part 4 – Visitor Responses reports on project evaluation carried out by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries. It makes a compelling case for the power of museums to make a difference to the way visitors think about and talk about disability. However, this publication is a beginning rather than an end. The success of Rethinking Disability Representation will be measured by whether social history curators, and others in the sector, respond to its rallying cry.

Jocelyn Dodd, Richard Sandell, Debbie Jolly and Ceri Jones (eds), Rethinking Disability Representation in Museums and Galleries, (RCMG, Leicester, 2008) ISBN 13: 978 1 898489 46 7

Copies of the publication can be ordered from RCMG or downloaded at: <http://www.le.ac.uk/museumstudies/research/rcmg.html>

Anyone interested in contributing to discussions about Disability Representation in Museums please contact Tom Hodgson, Community History Manager, Colchester Museums Service.

Reviewed by Georgina Young

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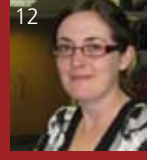
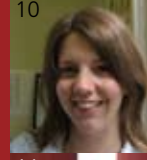
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