

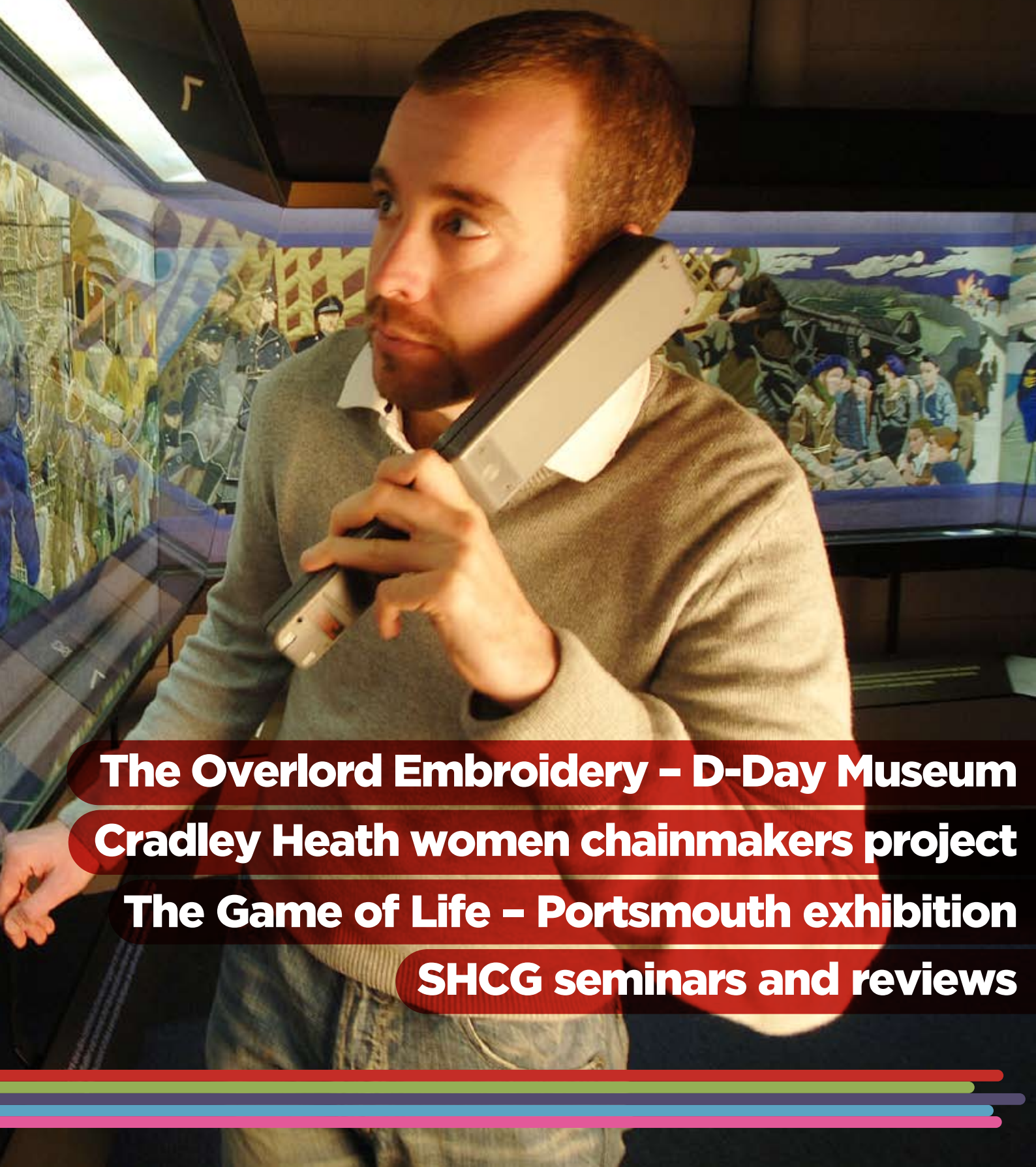
**Issue 64**

**Dec 2009**

**SHCG**

**news**

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP



**The Overlord Embroidery – D-Day Museum**

**Cradley Heath women chainmakers project**

**The Game of Life – Portsmouth exhibition**

**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:

**Kay Jones,**  
**National Museums Liverpool,**  
**Dock Traffic Office,**  
**Albert Dock,**  
**Liverpool L3 4AX**  
**Tel: 0151 478 4068**  
**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:**  
**16TH APRIL 2010**

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: The Overlord Embroidery,  
D-Day Museum, Portsmouth, pg 15.

Dear SHCG Members,

2010 has arrived and with it Issue 64 of the SHCG News. We have some interesting features of the latest exhibitions and projects going on in Museums around the country. Portsmouth Museums have a fun interactive exhibition called The Game of Life.

We have a seminar coming up 'What to do with Wooden Spoons?' in partnership with the Histories of the Home SSN in April, helping members to reinterpret their domestic collections. Our 2010 SHCG Conference in Birmingham, 'More for Less: Big Impacts with Small Resources' will be a great opportunity to pick up some useful money saving tips and find good value for future exhibitions and projects. Our Object Lessons resources are available online and the boxes for collection by any interested parties – please see details in our bulletin section.

The theory and practice articles showcase two very different exhibitions, one focussing on re-discovering a hidden history of women chainmakers in the Black Country, the other a re-interpretation and refurbishment of the Leamington Spa Museum Haddies gallery, named after a circus elephant!

Our object focus pays tribute to all the D-Day commemorations of 2009, through The Overlord Embroidery at the D-Day Museum Portsmouth. Also the Tynemouth Medal celebrates the bravery of those saving lives at sea.

Our review of SHCG at 35 Conference 2009 held at Leeds last July is an enjoyable reminder for all who joined us and a useful summary for anyone who missed it. The SHCG Journal will be featuring articles from many of the contributors so we look forward to that publication.

The Committee has a few new faces. Victoria Rogers is our new chair and we welcome her, thanking Jill Holmen for all her hard work over the past two years. Ellie Swinbank has joined us as our new Web Editor and SHCG email list co-ordinator. Georgina Young is our new Secretary with many thanks going to Hannah Maddox for the many years she contributed in that post.

I hope you enjoy all the articles and reviews in the latest SHCG News and wish you all the best for 2010.

Lydia Saul

SHCG News Editor



5. Name of the Game - Kevin Wilshire looking at the Dansette he donated

# Issue 64 Contents

## BULLETIN BOARD

- SHCG Seminar – Wooden Spoons 3
- SHCG email list, website and facebook 4
- Object Lessons Advert 4
- SHCG Conference: Call for Papers 5
- The Game of Life – Portsmouth exhibition 5

## THEORY & PRACTICE

- Women chainmakers project – Black Country Living Museum 6
- Leamington Spa new gallery – Vicki Slade 9

## REVIEWS

- SHCG Conference 11

## OBJECT FOCUS

- The Overlord Embroidery – D-Day Museum Trust Medal from Newcastle Collections 15
- 16

## TEA BREAK

- Lantern Slides – Charles Dickens Christmas Carol 18
- Word Search – Dickens theme 18



6. Black Country Chains



11. SHCG Conference



17. Tynemouth Trust Medal

## SHCG Matters

### What to do with Wooden Spoons?

16th April 2010  
Geffrye Museum,  
London

This seminar is a joint initiative between SHCG and the History of the Home SSN and will explore new ways of interpreting domestic life collections.

Speakers include;

**Zoe Hendon,**

Curator, Museum of domestic Design and Architecture

**Rhian Morris,**

Audience and Community Development Manager, Osterley Park

**Dr Victoria Kelley,**

Research Co-ordinator, Rochester History and Theory Tutor

**Rachel Mercer,**

School Services Manager, Weald & Downland Open Air Museum

**Eleanor John,**

Head of Collections and Exhibitions, Geffrye Museum)

**Louisa Knight,**

Documentation and Research Assistant, Geffrye Museum

There will also be a guided tour of the Geffrye Museum.

<http://www.geffrye-museum.org.uk/>

£30 for members of SHCG and the History of the Home SSN and £35 for non members.

Kylea Little

To book a place please contact Kylea Little at [kylea.little@twmuseums.org.uk](mailto:kylea.little@twmuseums.org.uk) or download a booking form from our website.

## SHCG online

### Website

Having just taken over as Web Editor from Victoria Rogers, I'd like to thank her for the marvellous job she has done with the website. I am sure that everyone will agree that it has come on in leaps and bounds in the last year or so, becoming a truly useful resource for curators of social history, and a portal for SHCG members to keep up to date with the Group's news and activities.

And the website continues to develop. A new section has just been added to allow users to download handouts from our training and events. Notes from past events should be appearing there soon. Have a look at the Resources page of the website for more details.

Also newly added to Resources is last year's Journal, number 32. The Journal contains ten articles looking at the ways museums can address topics which can be seen as sensitive or controversial...are they 'too hot to handle'?

Remember, we use the SHCG website to keep members up to date with what the committee has been up to and with initiatives or news that we feel is particularly relevant, so it's definitely worth logging in frequently to see what's new! Find out more at <http://www.shcg.org.uk/>.

### Facebook

The SHCG now has 96 fans on Facebook! It is proving to be a useful tool for spreading the word about what we do, and keeping both members and non-members up to date with our activities. We intend to expand and extend our use of Facebook further, so do keep an eye on the page. Also, if you have any bright ideas about things that we could do with it, please let the Web Editor know. Similarly, feel free to add any relevant pictures or news articles, and remember to tell your friends to join up as well! It is not necessary to be a member of SHCG to join up to the Facebook page. Just search for "social history curators group" and click on "become a fan."

## The British Library's UK Web Archive

Since 2004 The British Library has archived thousands of United Kingdom websites. These are available from the UK Web Archive provided by the Library at <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/ukwa/>. Most sites are collected again and again so it is possible to observe how they have changed over time. The subject range is vast but one of the collection's particular strengths is the social history of the UK. For these reasons, when the BL requested to archive the SHCG website, we gladly accepted and are delighted to know that the site will be available to researchers in the future. Should any contributor to the website or author of SHCG resources (eg. previous Journal articles, etc.) prefer that their work is not included in this programme, please contact the SHCG Web Editor.

## SHCG-List

The SHCG-list has continued to flourish, and has a record 191 members as this goes to press. It is clear from the consistent activity on the list and the wide range of people who use it and topics discussed that it remains a key aspect of SHCG membership. As well as being an extremely useful resource it is a great way of "meeting" colleagues across social history museums in the UK, identifying good sources of expertise and expanding your network of contacts. It is also frequently a good source of office conversation and intrigue whenever a mystery object is posted for identification!

If you are an SHCG member, or work for an organisation with institutional membership, and are not already a member, it is very easy to become one. Just send an email to [shcg-list-request@mailtalk.ac.uk](mailto:shcg-list-request@mailtalk.ac.uk) with your name and whether you're a personal member or are employed by an institutional member. You'll then receive an automated acknowledgment of your request, and another once it has been processed.

## Object Lessons

### Practical resources for developing curatorial skills

Can't tell your cellulose nitrate from your cellulose acetate? Confusing your brass with your bronze? Can't see the wood for the trees? SHCG has the solution!

### What is Object Lessons?

Object Lessons is a new series of resources designed to help you develop your skills and confidence in identifying and caring for core materials found in social history collections. Each resource is made up of a loans box of museum objects with an accompanying resource pack which guides you through the basic principles of materials' identification. The box also contains a selection of key books currently available on the topic.

4 loan boxes are currently available:  
Object Lessons 1: Metals  
Object Lessons 2: Wood  
Object Lessons 3: Plastics  
Object Lessons 4: Conservation



### How can I use Object Lessons?

The resources are designed to be borrowed by an individual or an institution for a fixed period from one to two months. You can use them in any way you see fit to suit your own needs. For example, you can work through the resources as part of a CPD programme of self-directed learning, or organise a one-day seminar for a group of colleagues, or you can even take the resources into store to assist you with a programme of documentation work.

### How much does it cost?

Object Lessons is free to borrow, but you will have to cover the cost of transporting the box to and from your venue.

### How can I find out more?

Contact:  
[Kylea.little@twmuseums.org.uk](mailto:Kylea.little@twmuseums.org.uk) or  
[Adam.Bell@twmuseums.org.uk](mailto:Adam.Bell@twmuseums.org.uk)

# Life is the name of the game

The Game of Life is a new exhibition at City Museum in Portsmouth, exploring family life in Portsmouth between 1920 and 2009.

Share the experiences of 140 local people in early childhood, teenage years, courtship and marriage, parenthood and old age – through their own words, in sound pictures and objects. Something for, and about, all ages!

It is about people and their lives – the choices they made or had imposed upon them, the experiences they and their families underwent. It contrasts how we live now with how our parents and grandparents lived.

The displays challenge you to pick your viewpoint on important issues relating to people's lives, such as what toys to give your children, how to discipline them, whether older people have the place they deserve in society.

Each section has personal testimony on audio and video, the opportunity to vote on a couple of issues – and compare how the visitors to the exhibition as a whole have felt about them so far – plus a rich selection of objects, historic photos and works of art. Interviewees have included both locally-born people and residents who have moved here for a

relationship, to make a living or to escape persecution.

The Game of Life is part of the Portsmouth's Voices project, run by Portsmouth Museums & Records Service, The University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth Royal Dockyard Historical Trust, and is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund with a grant of over £223,500, plus £10,000 from Portsmouth Museums & Records Society and £3,000 from Portsmouth University.

Portsmouth's Voices has now involved over 300 local people being recorded on audio and video talking about a huge range of topics: from what goes into school dinners to CCTV, running Chinese and Indian restaurants to working as a nurse or complimentary therapist, childhood toys to golden weddings – the result is a rich and fascinating insight into people's lives.

The exhibition runs until 17th January 2010 and a booklet and dvd are being compiled to provide access to the oral histories collected.

For more information visit [www.portsmouthmuseums.co.uk](http://www.portsmouthmuseums.co.uk)

## SHCG Annual Conference: Birmingham, 8th – 10th July 2010 More for Less: Big Impacts with Small Resources

Museum professionals are experts at utilising creativity, verve and imagination to overcome the potential limitations of small resources. At different times we are all likely to face the difficulties of shrinking budgets, limited funding options and overburdened resources.

This year's conference tackles these problems head on, and shows you how you can rise to the challenge and provide high quality and engaging experiences for your visitors. Topics covered will include proven strategies from previous times of economic difficulty and recent case studies that have demonstrated innovation and inspiration despite various restrictions.

SHCG are pleased to invite proposals from across the museum profession, for presentations which address one or more of the core conference themes:

- Survival stories – how museums have coped with resource cuts and limitations
- Engaging and increasing your audiences without increasing your costs
- Creative ways of working with small budgets – examples relating to collections, interpretation, partnerships, learning and marketing
- Minimising the environmental cost – sustainability and recycling
- Developing partnerships with libraries, archives and children's centres
- Digital technologies – new solutions for age-old problems

Please email proposals for presentations to Hannah Crowdy, [hannah.crowdy@nmni.com](mailto:hannah.crowdy@nmni.com), by 1st February 2010

Proposals for a 30 minute presentation should include a 200 word summary of the presentation, contact details and institutional affiliation (if any).

Speakers' travel and subsistence costs can be reimbursed (travel reimbursed at standard fare rate) and there will be no attendance fee on the day of speaking.



Norah Coote beside her AV

# “A Queen Among Beggarmaid”

**Construction began on the Cradley Heath Workers’ Institute in the winter of 1911. It was built as a lasting tribute to the bravery and determination of the Cradley Heath women chainmakers. Their successful strike achieved a minimum wage in one of the most notorious of sweated industries.**

The Institute, paid for partly from the strike fund surplus, was an impressive demonstration of the design style of the Arts and Crafts movement, and was quite unlike anything in the area. Set amongst the soot and smoke from furnaces, “the frowning black chimney stacks and countless rows of depressing red-brick buildings”<sup>1</sup>, Philip Snowden, later the first Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, described the building as “a queen among beggarmaid”. Less than a century later it faced demolition to make way for the Cradley Heath by-pass.

The Black Country Living Museum was quick to recognise the significance of the Workers’ Institute to the history of the Black Country. Designed by a well-respected local architect, Mr A T Butler, it is a very complete example of a scarce building type. Perhaps more importantly, it has strong associations with British labour and women’s history and Britain’s pioneering



role in regulating low pay.

For many decades, reformers had tried to solve the problem of sweated labour; work that paid starvation wages for long hours in poor working conditions. The National Anti-Sweating League, a powerful pressure group, was established in 1906. Its influential members included Mary Macarthur, George Cadbury, Joseph J. Mallon and historian and Christian socialist R. H. Tawney. They believed that the only way to rid the country of sweated labour was to pass laws to set a minimum wage. In 1909 the Government introduced the Trade Boards Act. Chainmaking was the first trade to be considered under the Act. It dealt with that part of the industry producing hand-hammered, country chain in small workshops

and domestic forges, the type of work carried out mostly by women.

The women were promised a minimum wage of 2½d an hour, more than double their previous earnings, but many employers tried to take advantage of a clause that allowed them to delay increasing pay for six months. Meanwhile, they tried to trick or force women to sign forms agreeing to contract out of the minimum wage. Mary Macarthur, a charismatic union organiser and champion of working people, predicted that if women worked outside the new rate for six months employers would stock pile cheap chain and dismiss the women when the new rates

<sup>1</sup>“Slaves of the Forge”, Mary R. Macarthur, ‘The Christian Commonwealth’



*The National Anti-Sweating League, a powerful pressure group, was established in 1906.*

became payable. This gave the impression that the first effect of the new Act was to create unemployment and a slump. Over 800 women chainmakers, dubbed 'The White Slaves of England', came out on strike for what the Trade Board had promised them.

Mary Macarthur's greatest strength lay in her powers of

persuasion and the ability to communicate with everyone from the aristocracy to the poorest of workers. She brought national and international attention to the chainmakers' plight and attracted funds from rich and poor alike. The strike fund grew to over £4,000 pounds, the equivalent of a quarter of a million pounds today. The Cradley Heath women chainmakers' strike of 1910 had been a test case. Had the strike failed it is probable that the Trade Board policy would have failed too. Their victory helped to make the principle of a national minimum wage a reality.

On the 10th of June 1912, thousands of local people turned out to see the Countess of Dudley officially open the new building. For many years the Institute was

a focus of community life, at one time a cinema, and later a billiard hall. It served as a venue for educational lectures and social events. Many and varied organisations, from an operatic society to a poultry club rented rooms at the Institute. For much of its history the building's offices were used by the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Union, the National Federation of Women Workers and later the General and Municipal Workers.

The Black Country Living Museum is renowned for its expertise in dismantling buildings and reconstructing them on its site. Negotiations to save the Workers' Institute began in January 2004. Agreement was reached with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council,

and dismantling began in September of that year. There followed several months of painstaking work, photographing and recording every detail of the building, cleaning, numbering and packing every slate, every brick, every fixture and fitting. There then remained the challenge of securing sufficient funds for its reconstruction. The Heritage Lottery Fund provided over £1.5 million and match funding was raised from a range of charitable trusts, trade unions, companies and corporations. Individuals were invited to contribute through the Museum's 'Sponsor-a-Brick' campaign. In 2005, the Museum, in association with the Midlands TUC and other unions, held a Women Chainmakers' Festival to commemorate the successful 1910 dispute, the first of what has since become an annual event.

Now re-sited at the Black Country Living Museum, the Workers' Institute opened to the

public in 2008. Set in the 1930's, it is a centrepiece of a major new development, the creation of a 1930's 'High Street'. The building is once again able to fulfil Mary Macarthur's vision for it as a place of social activity, learning and recreation. The building houses permanent exhibitions, and through a living history interpreter and other media, visitors are able to hear the previously hidden stories of those campaigners who shaped Black Country labour history.

The book *Women Chainmakers: Be Anvil or Hammer*, is a teaching resource aimed at key stages 2 to 4, and tells of the story of the women chainmakers' struggle, and the subsequent building of the Institute. Currently the Museum is involved in the MLA's 'Learning Links' initiative. In partnership with High Arcal School and Dudley Archives, the Museum is developing a citizenship teachers' pack with a focus on the plight of sweated workers in the Black Country, and especially

the women chainmakers. Future partnerships could include the Museum in the British Library's 'Campaign' project, which promotes the use of historical campaigns to inspire and teach campaign communication skills.



*Women Chainmakers: Be Anvil or Hammer* is available on request from the Black Country Living Museum please see their website at: [www.bclm.co.uk](http://www.bclm.co.uk)

Barbara Harris

Research Assistant,  
Black Country Living Museum





# Creating Haddie's Gallery: A tale of two elephants

**Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum has recently opened Haddie's Gallery, a space where families can informally learn about the history of Royal Leamington Spa. It was created in the room previously occupied by the Cabinet of Curiosities, opened in 1999 as part of the £7 million redevelopment of Leamington's historic Royal Pump Rooms into a cultural attraction.**

The 'Cabinet of Curiosities' was the Art Gallery & Museum's principal resource for children, focusing on how its collections had been acquired, cared for and interpreted. The gallery was popular with visitors, but had begun to look increasingly 'tired'. More pressingly, there were increasing problems maintaining and updating the audio-visual and interactive displays. Beginning in 2007, the team began to plan the refurbishment of the 'Cabinet of Curiosities', with the aim of completing it in 2009 to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the re-opening of the Royal Pump Rooms.

An initial in-house study of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing gallery and the potential for redevelopment was produced in March 2007. This was followed by a Story Trail project led by storyteller Graham Langley, which demonstrated the value of using a circus elephant as a character to engage the interest of younger children. The evaluation of the Story Trail project produced in November 2007 concluded that 'The River, The Pump Rooms, The Town Hall and Sam Lockhart's elephants, are examples of



General view of the family gallery.

central elements [in the history of Leamington]. The story allows for changes and adjustments ... perhaps every two years or to reflect a different theme.' These elements underlay the refurbishment of the 'Cabinet of Curiosities'.

Locally based designer Richard Marshall-Hardy was engaged to produce an initial design for the refurbished gallery. The project was titled Wilhelmina's Gallery, after the cartoon elephant who would introduce children to the gallery. Wilhelmina was one of three elephants owned by Leamington based elephant trainer Sam Lockhart in the early 20th century. The project brief identified the core audience as children aged 3 to 11 years, accompanied by their families. The new exhibition also needed to be suitable for school visits and complement an existing 'Victorians' learning package. The projected cost of the design, excluding in-kind contributions, was around £64,500. It was hoped to meet this through funding from Warwick District Council (the Art Gallery & Museum's parent body)

with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Friends of Leamington Art Gallery. An application to the HLF 'Your Heritage' scheme was submitted in June 2008 was unfortunately unsuccessful.

Despite the shortfall in funding, the council decided to explore whether it was feasible to go ahead with the project in a less ambitious form. A budget of up to £35,000, split over two years was approved. This meant that savings of around £30,000 had to be made from the project. They were achieved in two main ways: Firstly by dropping desirable but dispensable elements from the original scheme, including a Research Officer post, a circus ring dressing up area, and a heritage trail around south Leamington. Secondly we made savings by reusing existing equipment where possible, for example the room lighting and the showcases. Crucially, the search for a manufacturer able to refurbish the showcases uncovered a small but experienced company capable of building a good quality exhibition

within the budget. At this time too, the opportunity was taken to rename the gallery after Haddie, another of Lockhart's circus elephants, on the grounds that this would be easier for young children to pronounce than Wilhelmina.

As the design crystallised, there was some dispute within the team as to whether the gallery was solely for children or whether there should also be provision for accompanying adults. This was resolved in favour of an inclusive approach, so the project was henceforth referred to as the family gallery rather than the children's gallery.

The final scheme was implemented between February and mid July 2009. The exhibition has six main themes, each introduced by Haddie. A second complimentary text, higher up the panel, provides an introduction for accompanying adults. The themes, which reflect those developed through the Story Trail project, use objects and images from the Art Gallery & Museum's collections, supplemented when necessary by loans. Titled Roll up! Roll up!, Playtime, Looking after Leamington, Living by the Leam, ...a little learning, and Home Sweet Home, they present different aspects of life for a child in Leamington around 1900. Each section has a number of low-tech interactives, such as



Some of the activities and interactives in Haddie's Gallery.

questions which can be answered by lifting flaps, spinners which need to be aligned to show Victorian characters (clown, policeman, etc), and a stamp that embosses a Haddie logo. The interactives also include a Victorian style 'myriopticon', a hand cranked panorama showing some of Leamington's best-known landmarks along the river Leam. Other simple resources include writing slates, colouring sheets, and specially made stencils which allow children to make their own coats of arms. The new gallery is lit by the repositioning of some of the existing ceiling light units and by installing new fluorescent tubes in the refurbished showcases. The total cost of the finished gallery, excluding staff time, was £29,000.

Haddie's Gallery was formally opened on Saturday 25 July 2009, and has proved an immediate hit with the target audience. Initial evaluation of the project shows that: all visitors had a positive reaction to the gallery, with younger children enjoying using it alone, as well as with adults. Looking back on the project, staff felt a great sense of achievement finishing the gallery to such a high standard on a relatively tight budget, despite the impact of the unsuccessful HLF Bid. Even so, Haddie's Gallery has demonstrated that there is life beyond the Lottery... which is not to say we would not welcome its support for future projects!



Interactives in the Gallery.

The client and curatorial side of the project was led by Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum (Warwick District Council). Design and installation management was by Marshall-Hardy Ltd, Leamington Spa, with fabrication and installation of the displays by Inovello Ltd, Derby.

Jeff Watkin & Vicki Slade  
Heritage and Arts Manager  
& Curatorial Officer

# SHCG Annual Conference 2009, 'SHCG at 35: The Past, Present and Future of Social History'

Review 9th-11th July, Leeds & York

**Thursday 9th July,  
Leeds Discovery Centre**

I spent some of the train journey from Preston to Leeds on Thursday morning flicking through 'Social History in Museums: A Handbook for Professionals'. Produced way back in 1993 (I was only twelve!), the preface refers to a discipline full of 'vigour and commitment'. Well, I reflected, I would need plenty of that vigour and commitment to see me through my first SHCG conference.

The venue for day one of the conference was Leeds Museum Discovery Centre. This is Leeds City Council's new state of the art storage facility. After a super buffet and interesting short tour of the stores, we all settled down contentedly for the first speaker of the day.

Appropriately given the location this was Kitty Ross, Curator of Leeds History at Leeds Museums & Galleries. Kitty looked back at the colourful history of collecting social history in Leeds Museums, a history that in many ways provides a microcosm of the wider trends within social history practice. There were many nodding heads as Kitty described the early focus on bygones and folk material, and the shift to collecting industrial history in the 1970's and 1980's. The future focus at Leeds is on increasing online access, undertaking more collections research, proactive collecting and rationalisation. Again this mirrors wider trends, and many of the talks over the two days, as well as discussions I had with colleagues, would return to these themes.

Dr Cathy Ross, Head of Later London History and Collecting at the Museum of London, provided a synopsis of social history collecting over the past 30 years. The key shift has been away from a typological, fetishist approach to what we all recognise as the 'social history approach' – where context and what objects can tell us about people and their lives

is all important. Cathy pointed to online collections access and use of digital media generally as a crucial area for future development.

Oral history was the subject of the next paper by Annette Day of the Museum of London. Although the use of oral history by museums has come a long way, too many



organisations still view the collection and use of oral history as an afterthought. The value of oral history is that it provides a voice for people often sidelined or ignored in the historical record, something that fits well with the people orientated approach of social history. Annette emphasised the need to integrate oral history more fully into the work that museums do, and to come up with more creative uses for it in the future.

Stuart Davies, the Museums Association President, spoke about the past, present and future of social history. There were two points especially that I thought were interesting. Firstly, Stuart wondered whether we would eventually look back on the last 10-15 years as a golden era for museums. Second, he proposed public history rather than social history as a more egalitarian and accessible name for our beloved discipline. SHCG members – it's over to you!

Next up were two prize heavyweights from the field of social history, locking horns in 'The Great Debate: Social History in the Dock'. First up was Museums and Heritage Consultant Crispin Paine as the pantomime villain. Social history has lost its way he said. Displays rehash the

same old themes and ideas. The SHCG has failed to show the way forward. Did Crispin really believe what he was saying, or was he trying to provoke a reaction? There was suddenly an air of introspection in the room. And then up stepped Steph Mastoris, Head of the National Waterfront Museum. Steph offered a passionate defence of the SHCG. The newsletter and journal, the discussion list, First Base, all these things and more, said Steph, have stimulated debate and helped to develop history curatorship.

Well, what an enjoyable and thought provoking day it had been. After checking into accommodation, we headed to the Cross keys pub, where Steve Morley of the Yorkshire Film Archive treated us to a fascinating medley of clips from four films of amateur filmmakers. Then it was off to Casa Mia and a hearty meal, followed by a pint (or two) and then to bed.

## Friday, 10th July York Castle Museum

Day two started with a visit to York Castle Museum. We had a look at the revamped Kirkgate Victorian street, which is a

wonderfully evocative setting. I was also impressed by the free copies of the 'Kirkgate Examiner' newspaper, an innovative bit of interpretation. There was also time to take in the Sixties gallery, where one of the highlights was a fabulous Lambretta scooter.

A short walk took us to the beautiful Merchant Adventurer's Hall, built in the mid 14th century. After some refreshments we settled down for the two talks that would take us through to lunch.

First up was Martin Watts of York Museums Trust, & Gwendolen Whitaker, formerly of York Museums Trust but now at Ken Hawley Collections Trust in Sheffield. The talk was about three new studio spaces that have been built at York Castle Museum. There are obviously many museums that use multi functional learning spaces, but surely not many that are fitted with working kitchens! It was interesting to hear about how the team manage collections access in the spaces, and also how front of house staff have thrived upon taking on new responsibilities in the spaces. One session the museum runs in the kitchen studio is the cooking of cakes and biscuits using recipes from different historical eras. We were treated to some tasty samples - my own favourite was the Victorian seed biscuit!

Roy Brigden of the Museum of English Rural Life spoke about a project called 'Collecting 20th Century Rural Culture'. This is a 4 year project funded through the HLF Collecting Cultures initiative, and aims to acquire material that builds, decade by decade, a picture of the countryside in the twentieth century and its relationship with society. This was really interesting as it has involved the museum collecting items from popular culture that perhaps they may not have considered relevant before. For example, a poster advertising the 1971 film *Straw Dogs* was acquired because the film presents a controversial and violent depiction of rural life.



After another great lunch, or what we had room for after our historical biscuit tasting session, we heard two presentations on the benefits for museums, visitors, and non-visitors alike, of working with community groups.

Firstly, Liz Braby told us about Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery's community-curated exhibition about hair. This hub-funded project had the clear goal of attracting a young and Black and Minority Ethnic audience, and was preceded by extensive community consultation. The community groups involved were given the chance to learn skills relating to exhibition development and staff benefited from an influx of new ideas and perspectives around a seemingly unlikely subject, but one which everyone can relate to.

We then heard from Tony Butler, Director of the Museum of East Anglian Life (MEAL), who described the museum's transformation into a social enterprise. Tony told us how MEAL worked with local councils to develop volunteer placements for people with learning disabilities and the long-term unemployed, offering them both formal training in the form of NVQs, as well as the chance to gain informal skills and raise their self-esteem. The scheme has been so successful that MEAL is now working with a partner museum in Kenya to develop a similar scheme there. Tony's talk provided inspiration for museums in the recession, indicating that creating a social enterprise can not only help to tackle social exclusion, but can also generate income, as MEAL did through selling products made by volunteers in the museum shop.

After the coffee break, Jim Garretts gave us an informative overview of the Thackray medical museum in Leeds. Public health was also the topic of the last session of the day. Helen Barker, Outreach and Access Officer at Beamish, described how the museum had recently acquired the 'Westoe Netty', a South Shields toilet and famous local landmark which was immortalized in Bob

Olley's 1975 cartoon. The Netty is now situated at one end of the 1910 town, and has provided inspiration for a variety of art projects produced by community groups. It is proving a hit with visitors, if a little to literally at times, and Helen described the problems of communicating to visitors that it was not plumbed in and was not in use! The title of Helen's session, 'spending a Penny (or two) at Beamish', set a punning precedent for the next hour, and her presentation culminated in an invitation to create our own graffitied Netty brick. We were flushed with success at the results of our efforts!

After a nice pint in a typical old York pub, we rounded off the day with a great meal at Melton's too.

## Saturday 11 July, Leeds City Museum

Before the day's sessions began, Kitty Ross, Curator of Leeds History, gave us an introduction to the new museum and an opportunity to look round. Six engaging permanent galleries cover social history, natural history, world cultures, and the history of collecting in Leeds. A personal highlight for me, in the Leeds Story social history gallery, was an extraordinarily poignant AV display about life in a Leeds 'back-to-back', featuring



oral history interviews with local residents.

The theme of the day looked at new ways of interpreting social history collections, and the first two presentations discussed the opportunities offered by digital technology. Nick Poole, of the Collections Trust, outlined the key developments and thought processes characterised by what is increasingly referred to as Museum 2.0. This is where web 2.0 technology, which promotes participation via the internet, can help museums transform from agents of passive consumption to active co-creation. I was particularly interested in Nick's presentation as recently the

the videos is the best testament to the success of this project, which aims to capture 1,000 digital stories over two years. Numerous fascinating personal testimonies can be found online at [www.cultureshock.org.uk](http://www.cultureshock.org.uk).

After coffee, Hanah Crowdy and Simon Grennan, from the artistic duo Grennan and Sperandio, expounded the virtue of artists' residencies in museums. They discussed Grennan and Sperandio's responses to the collections at the Grovesnor Museum, Chester, which was part of a residency funded by the Leverhulme Trust. I wasn't really aware of this stream of funding, so was interested to find out more

collecting initiatives encouraged visitors and non-visitors alike to engage with community history. The presentation could only give a snapshot of the vast array of projects undertaken by the group, and on browsing the My Yorkshire website—[www.myyorkshire.org](http://www.myyorkshire.org)—in the name of research, I got a better sense of the variety of stories involved. That of Fenella, the Holmfirth tiger (!) was a particular favourite.

David Fleming rounded off the conference programme with a survey of 35 years of social history in museums, and an examination of the current state of play. He charted the shift since the SHCG's foundation away from passive unrepresentative collections, towards a growing interest in learning in museums. This, he claimed, had encouraged the development of active displays where stories and objects work together, with social historians leading the way, bringing people-stories alive for diverse audiences. He reflected positively on the social inclusion agenda in museums, which social historians have helped to shape, and which we saw much evidence of during the three days.

This was my first SHCG conference, and it has definitely made me want to come back for more. The range of discussions provided food for thought on the future of social history in museums, with new ideas for how we can continue to engage active visitors, and encourage them to co-create exciting exhibitions with us.

For more information about SHCG at 35 and the issues discussed at the conference, the next SHCG Journal will be featuring articles from many of the speakers – so keep an eye out for your copy as it will soon be hot off the press.

Past issues of the SHCG Journal are now also available to view on the SHCG website.



museum where I work brought visitors and users of the photo-sharing site Flickr together to reflect on the images on display. Nick's comments enabled me to think further about how we in the exhibitions team could work more closely with our colleagues in digital media on future projects.

Iain Watson described a recent digital storytelling project undertaken by Tyne and Wear Museums where local people were trained to use video- editing software, and then made their own stories in response to the collections. Watching some of

about how the Trust supports artist's residencies. Hannah said that the residency had allowed objects which had rarely been on display due to their poor provenance to be given a new lease of life by being incorporated into artworks.

The theme of digital storytelling was picked up again by the members of the Hear My Story Partnership, a hub-funded community history project bringing Yorkshire museums together. The project used a variety of methods of engagement. Digital elements, exhibitions and contemporary

Jude Holland & Ben Whittaker

Thanks to reviewers Ben Whittaker (first half) and Jude Holland (second half)

# The Overlord Embroidery: A National Treasure in Portsmouth



**Textiles have been used to commemorate many major events, most famously in the form of the Bayeux Tapestry. The latter was the inspiration for the Overlord Embroidery, which tells the story of D-Day and the 1944 Normandy Landings.**

At 272ft (83m) in length, it is the longest embroidery of its kind in the world, and for 25 years has been on display at the D-Day Museum in Portsmouth. It is not just the Embroidery's length that makes it famous. Its vivid colours and striking images are visually impressive and a very effective way of telling the story of D-Day.

On 6 June 1944, Allied troops began landing on the beaches of Normandy, France. This was D-Day, the greatest seaborne invasion in history, which led to the liberation of Europe from Nazi occupation and the end of the Second World War. The Overlord Embroidery was commissioned by the late Lord Dulverton of Batsford, as a means of commemorating Operation Overlord – the codename given to the military campaign that began on D-Day. Sandra Lawrence was chosen as its designer. The Embroidery consists of 34 panels, each 8ft (2.5m) by 3ft (1m). Beginning with the early years of the war, it then illustrates the preparations for D-Day, the Allied landings on 6 June itself, and the subsequent fighting in the Battle of Normandy (up to

*'More than fifty different materials were used, including wartime fabrics such as parachute silk and the woollen battledress cloth used for British soldiers' uniforms.'*



the end of August 1944). It was important that the Embroidery would commemorate the liberation of Normandy, but it also had to avoid glorifying war through taking a celebratory or propagandist approach. The Royal School of Needlework was tasked with producing the Embroidery itself, from 1968 to 1972 (the final panel was added in 1973, and was completed by a single embroiderer). Fabrics were selected to match the colours and textures of Sandra Lawrence's designs. More than fifty different materials were used, including wartime fabrics such as parachute silk and the woollen battledress cloth used for British soldiers' uniforms. Two methods of embroidery were used: appliqué for the larger areas of colour, in which pieces of fabric were sewn onto the backing material, and stitching alone for the finer details, such as some of the faces. After touring round North America, and a six-year display in London, the Embroidery came to Portsmouth, which in 1944 had played a vital part in the preparations for D-Day. At the suggestion of Portsmouth City Council, in 1984 the D-Day Museum was built in that city

to mark the 40th anniversary of D-Day, with the Overlord Embroidery as its centrepiece. The Overlord Embroidery is now seen by thousands of people who visit the D-Day Museum each year, helping to ensure that the events of D-Day will be remembered by future generations.

For further information about the tapestry and contact details for the D-Day Museum go to [www.ddaymuseum.co.uk](http://www.ddaymuseum.co.uk)

Andrew Whitmarsh  
Military History Officer,  
Portsmouth Museums &  
Records Service





# The Tynemouth Trust Medal

**Awards for bravery, for saving others are a common sight in museum collections, be they medallions, certificates, or trophies. The Tynemouth Trust medal is a little known, rather geographically specific award, whose very establishment was inspired by such courage and bravery.**

The mouth of the river Tyne was notoriously dangerous for seafarers. If a ship was caught on the Black Midden rocks to the north, the Herd Sands to the south or the Tynemouth Bar across the entrance, the strong powerful waves of the North Sea would destroy them within hours.

On the 13th January 1891, hurricane force winds drove the schooner Peggy to find shelter in the Tyne, but she got caught on the rocks on the north side. The Tynemouth Volunteer Life Brigade, formed in 1864 to help the Coastguard save life from wreck, took their Breeches Buoy equipment down to the rocks and managed to save most of the crew. However, crew member Frank Whittet had been so badly hurt after falling twice from the rigging while trying to get into the buoy that he was unable to try again. He was tied to the rigging and left on board in the hope that both he and the ship would survive the storm.

One of the coastguards who was on duty that night, George Edwin Hoar, volunteered to go out to the ship to try and bring Whittet ashore. He was hauled across on the buoy, assessed the situation, hauled back to give instructions to those on land, and then hauled back again. Untying Whittet,

he dragged him onto the buoy, wrapped his legs around Whittet's and grasped him around the waist. Hoar's bravery saved Whittet - despite the hurricane winds, the huge seas crashing them against the rocks, threatening to sweep Hoar out of the buoy or Whittet from his grasp, and all in the pitch black.

New York lawyer, E B Convers, at the time staying with his friend in Tynemouth, noted Coastguard Hoar's bravery. On his return to America, Convers established the Tynemouth Medal Trust, to recognise gallantry with a silver medal. Convers specified that his identity was to be 'strictly suppressed' and that he should only be referred to as 'a gentleman of the Hudson who has friends by the Tyne!'. Medals were to be given to 'those who had done a heroic deed - in the widest acceptance of the phrase - either within the ebb and flow of the Tyne or its adjacent sea, or by Tynesiders on a foreign sea, or by foreigners in local waters'.

The medal, designed by Convers himself, shows a shipwreck scene with Tynemouth north pier and lighthouse in the background, and lifeboat going to the rescue. Around the top is the inscription PALMAM QUI MERUIT, translated 'Let him bear the palm who deserves it' and around the bottom TYNEMOUTH MEDAL. The ribbon is usually dark blue, although some had special red, white and blue ribbons to commemorate the coronation of King George V. The reverse shows the recipient's name. In 1911 it was decided to add a gold medal for special cases and a third level of award, a parchment certificate.

This particular medal, in the Tyne and Wear Museums collection at South Shields Museum, was

awarded to John Whale. On 12th November 1901 the Norwegian Christiani, on its way to North Shields Fish Quay, ran ashore on rocks just outside South Shields in a gale. John Whale, at great risk to his safety jumped aboard the vessel and assisted several of the crew to safety, and brought the steward ashore who was too exhausted to leave the rigging.

All credit for the research on the Tynemouth Medal Trust must go to Chris Lambert of the Tynemouth Volunteer Life Brigade.

Victoria Rogers

Project Officer  
Cardiff Museum Project  
(formerly of Tyne & Wear  
Museums)



# Dickens Wordsearch

Christmas  
Carol  
Scrooge  
Cratchit  
Fred  
Ghost  
Past

Jacob  
Marley  
Tiny Tim  
Fezziwig  
Fan  
Belle  
Humbug

G	C	A	R	O	L	A	C	M	Y
G	H	O	S	T	T	D	M	A	T
G	R	O	Z	S	I	B	R	I	H
I	I	R	F	A	N	O	H	G	U
W	S	A	D	P	Y	C	B	J	M
I	T	L	U	G	T	A	E	I	B
Z	M	O	E	A	I	J	L	D	U
Z	A	M	R	T	M	C	L	E	G
E	S	C	R	O	O	G	E	R	W
F	Y	E	L	R	A	M	H	F	J

Lantern Slides depicting the story of the Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens, created by Walter Nicholls Henman from Bedford Museum Collection.



# SHCG Committee 2009-10

**CHAIR:**  
**VICTORIA ROGERS**<sup>1</sup>  
 Cardiff Museum Project  
 Old Library  
 The Hayes  
 Cardiff CF10 1WE  
 Tel: 029 2087 3197  
 Email: vrogers@cardiff.gov.uk

**SECRETARY: GEORGINA YOUNG**<sup>2</sup>  
 National Museums Liverpool  
 Dock Traffic Office  
 Albert Dock  
 Liverpool  
 L3 4AX  
 Tel: 0151 478 4068  
 Email:  
 Georgina.young@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

**TREASURER: JOE CARR**<sup>3</sup>  
 Curator,  
 Brent Museum,  
 Willesden Green Library Centre,  
 95 High Road,  
 Willesden Green NW10 2SF  
 Tel: 020 8937 3602  
 Email: Joe.Carr@brent.gov.uk

**MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: KAY JONES**<sup>4</sup>  
 National Museums Liverpool,  
 Dock Traffic Office,  
 Albert Dock,  
 Liverpool L3 4AX  
 Tel: 0151 478 4068  
 Email: Kay.Jones@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

**NEWS EDITOR: LYDIA SAUL**<sup>5</sup>  
 Keeper of Social History,  
 Bedford Museum,  
 Castle Lane,  
 Bedford MK40 3XD  
 Tel: 01234 353323  
 Email: Lydia.Saul@bedford.gov.uk

**JOURNAL EDITOR:**  
**MICHAEL TERWEY**<sup>6</sup>  
 Senior Exhibitions Organiser  
 National Media Museum,  
 Bradford,  
 West Yorkshire BD1 1NQ  
 michael.terwey@nationalmediamuseum.org.uk

**CONFERENCE ORGANISER: HANNAH CROWDY**<sup>7</sup>  
 National Museums Northern Ireland,  
 Cultra, Holywood  
 County Down, BT18 0EU  
 Northern Ireland, UK  
 Tel: 01244 402014  
 Email: Hannah.Crowdy@nmni.com

**SEMINAR ORGANISER: KYLEA LITTLE**<sup>8</sup>  
 Keeper of History  
 Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums,  
 Discovery Museum,  
 Blandford Square,  
 Newcastle NE1 4JA  
 Tel: 0191 277 2199  
 Email: kylea.little@twmuseums.org.uk

**SEMINAR ORGANISER: ADAM BELL**<sup>9</sup>

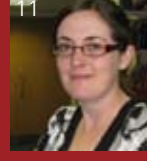
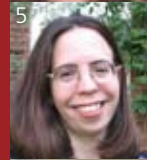
Assistant Keeper of History  
 Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums,  
 South Shields Museum & Art Gallery  
 Ocean Road,  
 South Shields NE33 2JA  
 Tel: 0191 456 8740  
 Email: adam.bell@twmuseums.org.uk

**CONFERENCE ORGANISER:**  
**MICHELLE DAY**<sup>10</sup>  
 Events Outreach Officer,  
 Hull Museums and Art Gallery,  
 Ferens Art Gallery,  
 Queen Victoria Square,  
 Hull HU1 3RA,  
 Tel: 01482 613902  
 Email: Michelle.Day@hullcc.gov.uk

**WEB EDITOR & EMAIL LIST COORDINATOR:**  
**ELLIE SWINBANK**<sup>11</sup>  
 The Scottish Mining Museum  
 Lady Victoria Colliery  
 Newtongrange  
 Midlothian  
 EH22 4QN  
 0131 663 7519  
 assistantcurator@scottishminningmuseum.com

**FIRSTBASE CO-ORDINATOR:**  
**STEPH MASTORIS**  
 National Waterfront Museum,  
 Swansea,  
 Wales  
 Email: Steph.Mastrois@nmgw.ac.uk

**GENERAL ENQUIRIES:**  
 enquiry@shcg.org.uk  
**EMAIL LIST ENQUIRIES:**  
 shcg-list-request@mailtalk.ac.uk





Social History  
Curators Group

[enquiry@shcg.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@shcg.org.uk) [www.shcg.org.uk](http://www.shcg.org.uk)

