

Issue 66
Dec 2010

SHCG news

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP



SHCG Conference and Seminars, 2011

A Winter's Day in St. James' Park

Mary Greg's Bygones

Object Lessons

Join SHCG?

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

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Write an article for 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:
15 APRIL 2011

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 copy of your article by email, saved as a PC word file or richtext format. 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:

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Front Cover: *A winter's Day in St. James Park* pg. 18



Welcome to Issue 66.

As the new editor of SHCG News, I'd like to say a big thank you to Lydia Saul, who undertook the role since Issue 61, back in July 2008. In her time as editor, Lydia took us from black and white to colour, as well as overseeing a complete redesign of the News.

This issue really is a bumper one; at 24 pages, it's the weightiest in recent years (perhaps I've even set a record, I must look through the complete archive to verify!)

As I write, the UK has been visited by the earliest widespread winter snowfall since 1993 and 2010 has been confirmed as Britain's coldest year since 1996. As such, Catherine Stanton's Object Focus on John Ritchie's 1858 painting *A Winter's Day in St. James' Park* seems rather appropriate!

Considering the news that Prince William and Kate Middleton are to tie the knot at Westminster Abbey on 29 April 2011, Catherine Littlejohns' article about her collecting appeal for 1977 Silver Jubilee items has an appropriately Royal theme. As social history curators, I'm sure many of us got excited about having an opportunity to collect some more Royal Wedding tat (or limited edition commemorative souvenirs, depending on your outlook!) to compliment that which we undoubtedly already have in our stores and galleries. How many of us rushed out, petty cash in hand, to get the first commemorative mug from Asda?

I was watching *Have I Got News for You* on tv the other night, and the 'guest publication' was a magazine for pillar box collectors. I'll never forget the episodes in which such gems as the Barbed Wire Collector Magazine and Milk Bottle News featured. I half expect SHCG News to pop up at some point, in fact if it did, I'd consider that a high-point of my editorial career! Dare I slip a copy in a manila envelope addressed to BBC Television Centre?

Enjoy Issue 66, have a wonderful, snowy yuletide, and don't forget to send me your news and articles for Issue 67 by 15 April 2011.

Adam G. Bell
SHCG News Editor

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SHCG Matters

SHCG Annual Conference Manchester and Liverpool 7th & 8th July 2011

Are we subject specialists or generalists? In these times of limited funding, overstretched resources and need to demonstrate impact we might be forgiven for losing something of our sense of identity in an attempt to be all things to all people.

This year's conference invites those who work with social history to stand up and be counted and asks "what does it mean to be a social history practitioner?" SHCG is pleased to invite proposals for contributions from across the museum sector that reflect on one or more of the following core themes:

- What are the defining skills of a social history curator?
- How important is subject specialist knowledge and where does it come from?
- How can we advocate the role of social history in museums?
- What does the individual bring to their role?
- What added value can we attach to social history in museums?

SHCG Annual Conference will aim to cover these themes in a variety of formats, including presentations, debate, workshop and skills development sessions. Proposals for a 20 minute paper (plus 10 mins answering questions) should include a 200 word summary of the presentation, your contact details and institutional affiliation. Please email expressions of interest and proposals for contributions to Karen Oliver-Spry by Friday 28 January 2011. Speakers' travel costs can be reimbursed (travel reimbursed at standard fare rate) and there will be no attendance fee on the day of speaking.

Karen Oliver-Spry

koliver-spry@worcestershire.gov.uk

SHCG Website

The SHCG website brings together all of our resources, from booking forms for conferences and handouts from our seminars to back issues of our journal, 'Social History in Museums'. It is also our main way of communicating with our membership and keeping you bang up to date about what's going on, so remember to click on to the site regularly!

A selection of papers from the 2010 Conference, 'More for Less', are now available in the Resources section, and a brand new events calendar will be launched in the new year to keep you up to date with various events, festivals and anniversaries that impact the world of Social History in museums.

Visit us at <http://www.shcg.org.uk/>

Facebook

171 people across the world are now fans of SHCG on Facebook and our page regularly receives up to 600 views a week proving that, not only do we have international appeal, but that the web 2.0 generation are out there and are interested in social history curatorship, and in what our group has to offer.

Why not find us on Facebook and start a discussion, add some interesting images, or tell the world your museum's news? If your museum has its own Facebook page, you can link it to the SHCG page, adding us as one of your page's favourites. Send me a message to let me know you've done it, and I'll be sure to add you as an SHCG favourite in return!

Ellie Swinbank, SHCG Web Editor
ellie@scottishminningmuseum.com



Find us on
Facebook

search Facebook for
"Social History Curators Group."

Object Lessons



SHCG's Object Lessons resources incorporate a detailed information pack and a box of objects covering Metals, Wood, Plastics and Conservation. The benefit of having real objects to demonstrate, alongside the information pack, makes Object Lessons a cost effective self-led training option, without the usual travel expenses and time restrictions.

See this issue of SHCG News for a review of Object Lessons by Vyki Sparkes at the British Postal Museum & Archive. If you are interested in borrowing the Object Lessons boxes and using them as training aids within your organisation, please contact: Jennifer Broadbent E-mail j.broadbent@wlct.org Tel 01942 827594

SHCG Mailing List

Most of our membership would agree that our Mailing List is one of the most helpful and fun perks of being an SHCG member. It is always active with lively discussions about current issues, job adverts and event information.

Recently, there has been a plethora of object identification requests, ranging from a clutch of metals and badges to a genito-urinary medical set! There really is never a dull moment, so please do join in the fun by posting your own information and queries, and having a look to see if you can help out a colleague in need.

The Mailing List is a great way to virtually network with colleagues, keep up to date with the issues facing your counterparts in museums throughout the UK and sometimes even help to solve interesting collection-based puzzles, so if you aren't already a member, just send an email to shcg-list-request@mailtalk.ac.uk, stating your name and whether you are a personal member or employed by an institutional member. If you work for an institutional member, please also state the name of the institution.

Museum Ethnographers Group Annual Conference

The Annual Conference of the Museum Ethnographers Group (MEG), titled 'Words and Objects: Writing on, around and about things' is to be held at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford on Thursday 14 and Friday 15 April 2011. The conference will focus on an analysis of the words written on, around and about museum things; that is, the diverse forms of tangible and virtual documents written about objects including inscriptions, labels, display texts, indexes, catalogues and databases. It is anticipated that papers will explore the role of words in the

documentation, interpretation and presentation of objects – both historically and in the present, what such analysis tells us about both explicit and implicit aspects of museum practice, as well as an exploration of the issues relating to translation and transcription which are often key to producing the textual adjuncts to objects. Booking for the conference will commence in early January 2011, please go to the Museum Ethnographers Group website for further information www.museumethnographersgroup.org.uk/

South Shields Museum Celebrates 150 Years

2010 marked the 150th anniversary of the opening of the building now occupied by South Shields Museum & Art Gallery. Originally built for the South Shields Mechanics Institute in 1860, the building was, from 1873, the town's first free public library. A museum room was opened in the building in 1876, displaying the recently unearthed artefacts from the town's Roman Fort. When the library moved into new purpose built premises in 1976, South Shields Museum & Art Gallery as we know it today began to take shape.

To celebrate a century and a half, a special exhibition opened at the Museum on 16 October 2010. Called 'History in the Making: 150 Years of South Shields Museum & Art Gallery', the exhibition explores the history behind the



Stuffed lion on display in History in the Making at South Shields Museum

building from its inception through to the present day. The exhibition also features a fascinating array of artefacts, including many of the museum's 'star items' and 'hidden gems' as well as examples of natural history, ethnography and archaeology, harking back to the Victorian style displays of curiosities from the natural world and far flung corners of the globe.

A key part of the exhibition is people's memories of visiting or indeed, for some, working in the building. Many South Shields townsfolk contributed memories, which were used in oral history listening posts and incorporated in the gallery text.

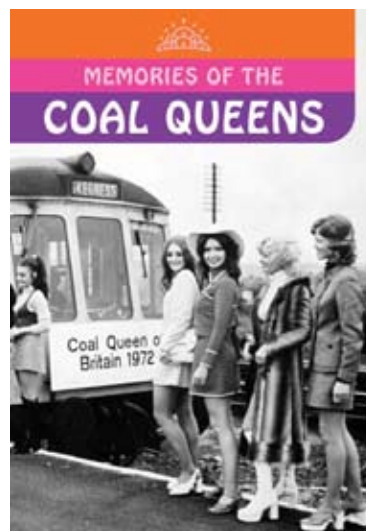
The exhibition runs until 26 February 2011.

Coal Queens

The National Coal Mining Museum have published a new booklet titled "Memories of the Coal Queens". Coal queen competitions developed from small local colliery level contests to a large scale National event which ran between 1969-1983. There is little written about these contests, which added a touch of glamour to the coal industry and provided fantastic opportunities to miners' wives and daughters.

The booklet combines oral histories with former winners of the competition recalling memories and anecdotes from their reigns, and photographs of the competitions and entrants.

The Museum are hoping to sell the booklet in different areas of the UK as the coal queen competition was a huge national event at its peak in the 1970s and early 1980s. The "Memories of the Coal Queens" tells a social story in the entrants



own words of a very important time to them.

For more information and costings, please contact Rebecca Hudson, Collections Assistant, National Coal Mining Museum for England, rebeccahudson@ncm.org.uk

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 we 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.

Bedford Museum Redevelopment



Artist's impression of the new Gothic Revival Gallery, Cecil Higgins Art Gallery & Bedford Museum

The Cecil Higgins Art Gallery & Bedford Museum has secured an award of £959,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards planned redevelopment of the facilities, specifically for improvements to buildings and the fit-out of new exhibition spaces. The award signals the start of the work at the Art Gallery & Museum following confirmation of Bedford Borough Council's £3.6m investment earlier this year.

The £6.6m Redevelopment Project will involve the complete redesign and redisplay of the galleries in Cecil Higgins Art Gallery & Bedford Museum. For the first time, Bedford's major collections will be united under one roof to create an outstanding, combined facility. The revitalised buildings, with new galleries, collection stores, spaces for learning activities and corporate hire, shop and café are set to be an excellent resource for local people and visitors to Bedford, right in the heart of the cultural quarter at Castle Lane.

The HLF grant will enable the Borough Council to progress the project to the next stage, namely to work up detailed building and exhibition designs and place the work out to tender; tenders are expected back in March 2011, followed by the works starting in

May 2011. The works, including the design of new exhibition spaces and displays, are expected to take approximately 18 months with the facilities re-opening in late 2012 or early 2013.

For updates on the project, visit the blog at <http://chagbm.blogspot.com/p/redevelopment-plans.html>

1897 Diamond Jubilee

To celebrate Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee in 2012 Kensington Palace is planning an exhibition exploring Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. The exhibition aims to explore the many ways in which people, across the globe, celebrated the event, especially but not exclusively looking at the focal point of the celebrations in June 1897.

Alexandra Kim, Collections Curator at Kensington Palace, would love to know if people have any dress items (or other interesting Jubilee objects) in their collections relating to these celebrations, whether it be a commemorative apron, a dress worn at the Devonshire House ball or a Jubilee rosette. In particular, Alexandra would love to know if any items connected to celebrations outside London survive.

Please contact Alexandra by email alexandra.kim@hrp.org.uk or tel. 020 3166 6414

'Talking Textiles' Seminar

Save the date in your diaries for the next SHCG Seminar, "Talking Textiles" which will take place at York Castle Museum on 7 February 2011.

This seminar will be facilitated by Mary Brooks, a textile specialist and conservator working as Monument Fellow with staff at York Castle Museum. It will look at the history and classification of different fibres, and how this can help you understand the textiles in your collections.

For more information, contact Jenny Brown, SHCG Seminar Organiser (jenbrown@aberdeencity.gov.uk) and look out for updates via the SHCG Mailing List and website.



Mary Greg's Bygones: A Misplaced Collection?



The Mary Greg Collection of 'Handicrafts of Bygone Times' at Manchester Art Gallery numbers over a thousand beautiful yet humble, intricate and often tiny everyday objects ranging from keys to miniature books, rusty spoons, embroidery, toys, games and dolls' house ephemera. Everything is well-worn and loved, often damaged with traces of its former life.

Its indomitable collector, Mary Greg (1850-1949) was fascinated by the inspirational power of such domestic and often hand-crafted objects, and she had a particular interest in their use for children's education, perhaps being something of a pioneer in museum learning. In the preface to her 1922 catalogue, she states, *"We owe it to those who have preceded us and have left us those specimens of their painstaking and beautiful work and to those who will come after us to do likewise, to treasure good work and produce something into which we have put our best, our love, our intelligence, our power."* Yet for much of its life, this incredible collection has lain dormant. In storage for some 50 years, the collection has been housed, almost forgotten, in dark cupboards and drawers.

In addition to the vast collection of objects is an extensive, almost obsessive correspondence consisting of about 800 letters, dating between 1920 and 1949, charting Mary's regular correspondence with William Batho, then Assistant Curator at the Art Gallery. These letters contain clues about her motivations for collecting, anecdotes about some of the material she collected and cherished, and details of new objects she thought would be suitable for the Gallery's collections. This fascinating archive documents a rich and ever-developing relationship in which Mary, always highly courteous, nevertheless has a way of ensuring that her mark is stamped onto the Gallery's displays. The letters have recently been rediscovered, archived, transcribed and photographed and are as much a source of inspiration and wonderment as the objects themselves.

Born Mary Hope, she came from a large and well-connected wealthy Liverpool family of bankers and philanthropists. Mary married the renowned ceramics collector Thomas Greg (of the Greg cotton family from Quarry Bank Mill), whose collection of English pottery dating from Roman times to the early 19th century was bequeathed to Manchester Art Gallery upon Thomas' death in 1920. Mary's own donations to the Gallery followed suite, piecemeal, with the main items accessioned in 1922 and 1934. In the 1930s, Mary's collection of dolls' houses displayed at Heaton Hall attracted thousands more visitors than her husband's ceramics did. Despite this popularity, it is often claimed that the only reason the Gallery took on Mary's collection was because it was keen not to jeopardise the acquisition of her husband's 'more significant'

collection of ceramics. Thus, her bygones soon found their way into storage. While Thomas' collection is seen as scholarly, focused, methodical, comprehensive and is very well documented, Mary's has been seen, in contrast, as personal, whimsical, eclectic, chaotic and even unreliable.

As such, the Mary Greg Collection sits uneasily within the context of Manchester's world-class art collection, its fine Pre-Raphaelite paintings, international contemporary art exhibitions and significant collections of craft and design. It occupies a strange and complex space within the Gallery's own biography and narrative. It is a social history collection, not fine art. Yet it is housed amongst fine and decorative art collections, taking up 'valuable' space in the art and costume stores, with only a small amount on display in the Gallery of Craft & Design. It is conserved by professionals yet has no dedicated expert curator. Although catalogued, many of its objects have a lack of in-depth



Having a rummage

documentation and, unlike most fine art, there is little knowledge of provenance other than the anecdotal. As such, its position has been much contested over the years. A misplaced anomaly in an art gallery? A forgotten collection of cheap tat? A disposal potential?

“I was hooked the minute the first drawer was opened. Spoon upon spoon upon spoon, a seemingly random assortment of shapes and sizes of no particular style or era.”

Or could it be something else? Something to be used in ways more akin to the educational desires and motivations of its collector, Mary Greg? Something seen for its rich potential to inspire others to make, write, create, imagine? Something to enable us to question the notion of value and what is collected within the Gallery?



Something to allow us to challenge institutional policies around object handling, to plan for audience access into stores, to become actively engaged in the paradoxes of conservation? Something to permit us as museum professionals to take risks and try something new? Something that might enable us to question notions of traditional curatorial authority, to ‘let go and open up’, and hand ownership to the public? All these are issues with which we have grappled and which have often raised more questions than they have answered. But it is from these lines of enquiry that the project *Mary Mary Quite Contrary* was born.

In 2006, artist lecturers Hazel Jones (a metalworker) and Sharon Blakey (a ceramicist) from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) showed work together in ‘Out of the Ordinary’, an exhibition at MMU about the ways in which artists use collections to find inspiration for their own work. It was based on the Special Collections there with the aim of showing how historic collections have contemporary relevance. What soon became apparent was that Sharon and Hazel’s interests lay not in the prized or valuable items, but in the untreasured, forgotten, broken remnants and traces of things that once were. And it was on a chance encounter with this exhibition, that the Gallery’s Liz Mitchell (who had formerly been Documentation Assistant working on Mary’s collection in the mid 1990s and who was now Interpretation Development Manager), made immediate connections between Sharon and Hazel’s artistic responses and the potential for a similar creative exploration of the Mary Greg Collection. Soon after, Liz invited Sharon and Hazel into the stores for what soon became known

affectionately by the project team as ‘having a rummage’, their first encounter with Mary and her objects.

As Sharon later commented: *“I was hooked the minute the first drawer was opened. Spoon upon spoon upon spoon, a seemingly random assortment of shapes and sizes of no particular style or era. No prized or polished silver here, but the tarnished, worn and broken. A spoon box containing the wrong spoon, handles showing family initials but with no sense of belonging, a tablespoon used so many times that one side of the bowl is almost worn flat...”*

Sharon and Hazel began making responses to the collection, and it was at this point that the project began to spiral and evolve beyond our small team. Other academics, museum professionals, artists and writers began to make contact about Mary’s collection. We were making new discoveries and contacts on a daily basis. Cotton threads found by Hazel in a letter addressed to Samuel Crompton were labelled the ‘finest spun on the mule’, a dance card naming members of the Rathbone family enabled gaps in the family tree to be filled, links were made with the Guild of St George, the British Museum, the Fitzwilliam Museum, the V&A Museum of Childhood at Bethnal Green, museums across Hertfordshire, and even Timaru Museum in New Zealand, to all of which Mary had corresponded and given objects. What started from the humble passions and investigations of a few individuals gradually became something much more collaborative, open-ended, ambitious and multidisciplinary than we ever could have planned. How could we harness this mass of creative





energy
and
excitement
and share our
processes and
findings with the wider
world?

Our goalposts began to widen. What if we were to document all our research findings, sketchbook material, historical research and museological thinking? What if we were to invite other members of the public into the stores to give them the opportunity for a 'rummage' and to create their own responses? What if we were able to undertake further research into Mary's biography and that of her collection? What if we were to run some projects for students at MMU to develop their own practice? What if we could make films of all these processes to share with the public? We began working closely with Martin Grimes, the Art Gallery's Web Manager and Alan Holding of Manchester Digital Development Agency. Could the medium of a blog be an appropriate way to document the web-like enquiries with which so many people were now engaged?

And so it is that the project blog www.marymaryquitecontrary.org has become the repository for our research processes. A unique luxury within a museum world so often tied by targets, budgets, strategies and timings, this blog offers a unique means for public engagement with the Gallery's practices. Beyond the confines of deadlines (for the moment anyway), it is entirely organic, collaborative and passionate. Through the blog, it is hoped that our audiences will take on responsibility for determining the future of this collection.

But that is by no means the final picture. Where there have been

squeals of excitement, successes and answers, there have also been controversies, questions and problems. Allowing public access into the stores is a logistical, security and staffing challenge. Allowing objects to be handled is another logistical, staffing and conservational challenge. Unlocking what has been a hidden collection for so long is not without difficulties. It is hoped that there will be an exhibition of research findings and creative processes at Platt Hall Gallery of Costume in Autumn 2012, subject to funding. But are we taking away something of the uniqueness of this forgotten collection by opening it up and allowing it to be used *too much*? Did its identity lie in its hiddenness? Or does it lie in its bizarre unconscious misplaced

existence in the stores of an art gallery? Have we lost something of the essence of a broken and battered object when it is conserved and restored for public display? Did the broken wooden zebra really want to have its head stuck back on?

Learn more about the Mary Greg Collection at:

www.marymaryquitecontrary.org.uk

Alex Woodall

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Consultant
(formerly Interpretation
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Ask the Audience: Practical Tips on Public Collecting Appeals

Public appeals for objects can be a highly effective way of involving the local community, an opportunity to collect proactively from the recent past, and a good way to raise the profile of your institution. But they can also gain a life of their own, require huge resources, and still sometimes remain unsuccessful.

As part of the team developing content for M Shed, Bristol's new city history museum, the search for significant objects and untold people's stories has found me happily clearing brambles in gardens, crouching in damp basements, and braving infested roof spaces.

So when I was asked 'What Silver Jubilee things are in the collections?' you can probably understand why I thought this one would be simple. What social history collection doesn't include a respectable number of red,

white and blue badges, mugs, and flags? And I knew there was more – tissue boxes, jubilee beer, aprons, tea towels. But of course a plastic commemorative cream pot isn't going to say anything much about a jubilee street party.

What was really needed was fancy dress, bunting, home made things that told a personal story about that June day back in 1977. But were there any out there? Would anyone still have that special silver cardboard and tissue paper crown they had made?

The Bristol Silver Jubilee collecting appeal began slowly, and initially I did wonder if it was going to work at all. People generously offered more badges, mugs and flags, and many could tell me in tantalising detail what they had made or worn, but no one had kept anything. Then I got a call from BBC Points West, wondering why on earth the museum would be looking for such things, and the rest is (soon to be) museum history.



The Royal Yacht Britannia - winner of the Dakota Drive Best Dressed Lamp post competition, Whitchurch, Bristol, 1977

"If it's within living memory then you can almost guarantee that someone, somewhere, will have it"

I am still astonished and humbled by what people keep and why. The most common reason people gave for donating objects was they didn't realise the museum would be interested, but loved the idea of themselves or their family 'being a part of the city's history'. If it's within living memory then you can almost guarantee that someone, somewhere, will have it – they just need to know the museum wants it.

What follows are a few tips I picked up along the way which might, I hope, be of help to anyone in a similar position.

1. Limit your appeal to no more than two areas. It's tempting to draw up a long list of 'gaps' in the collections, but people will really only pay attention to the first one or two.
2. Before you start, be clear in your own mind about what you are looking for and what the best outcome would be. Draw up a wish list and also think about how you might deal with great but unexpected items.
3. Be clear and specific – a 'wartime objects' appeal is too open ended if what you're really hoping for is Utility furniture.
4. Use your existing networks. Write a press release, advert, or just a few lines, and send it to everyone in your museum, your professional contacts, museum friends groups – you'll be amazed at how far you can reach and what those people might have stashed in their attics.
5. Be prepared to talk to your local press. Try to find a quirky or humorous angle that will appeal, and have one or two objects or images available for newspaper or TV reporters. Getting good publicity can make a huge difference to the success of the appeal as well as giving you contacts for next time.
6. Be sure to brief everyone in the museum who might need to know, especially front of house staff. Even if you put a direct line as the contact, many people will simply call the museum or turn up in person.
7. Set a deadline and don't make any decisions until then. This will save you from ending up with duplicates or missing out on something really good. You'll still receive offers afterwards, but it's helpful to have a cut off point you can refer to.
8. Don't underestimate how much work it will be. You'll need to

answer all offers or you'll lose a lot of goodwill.

9. Clear space and allocate resources. It sounds simple, but it's well worth clearing out the freezer to ensure you can treat everything you collect as it comes in.
10. Be clear about whether you're seeking loans or donations, and what you will be doing with items you collect – it will save you time and help to manage expectations.
11. Consider launching with an event. It doesn't have to be grand, or even entirely focussed on the appeal. You can use an existing event or activity such as an 'Ask the curator' day and give it a theme that ties in with what you're looking for.
12. Use an appeal carefully. It won't always be newsworthy and you'll be offered many things you don't ultimately collect. If you're looking for a single item, or you can get it elsewhere, then an appeal is probably not the best way. But if it's recent history, and you can be flexible about what you collect, then a public appeal could be the answer.

The Bristol Silver Jubilee appeal resulted in one ladies Union flag dress, two children's fancy dress outfits, accessories including a bobble hat and waspy belt, and two almost perfect cardboard and paper crowns! The stories and photographs that accompanied them were so good that the planned content for the section was altered, and many people and groups who might not otherwise have felt the museum was for or about them can't wait to come and see their objects displayed.

When M Shed opens in summer 2011 it will display the results of two large and several smaller collecting appeals. The red white and blue mug, tissue box, and cream pot will be there too; paired with the paper crowns and the stories of best dressed lamp posts, they suddenly became much more interesting!



Child's Coldstream guard uniform, fancy dress, 1977

Catherine Littlejohns

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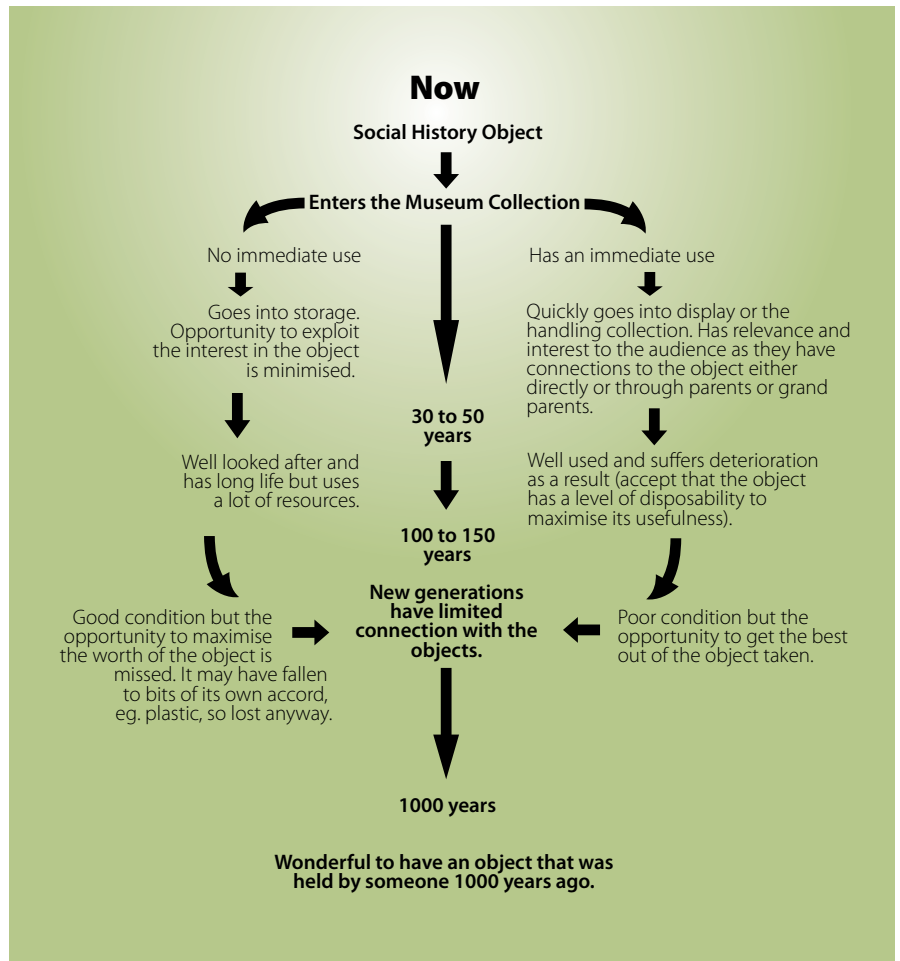
The Routledge Theory

Martin Routledge, Keeper of History based at Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, discusses issues surrounding the balance between preserving museum artefacts in aspic, getting them 'used' and the critical timeframe in which their public appeal may be greatest.

This is a theory which may be of particular interest to those who think that it has only been in the last few years that curators have sought to get their objects out of their stores and that, in 'olden days' – yes, the days when I started – curators were only interested in keeping them out of public reach in locked-up stores.

I first expressed the theory which follows below, whilst on my Leicester Museum Diploma 'A' course in 1988. I do not know if I am entirely comfortable with it myself but this may be because I was sorely castigated for expressing it by a fellow course member at the time. This was following a visit to the Local History Museum in Cambridge, where everything was just laid out on tables and even on the floor, in the open. I was asked what my opinion of the museum's treatment of these objects was. Although clearly full of risk for the objects (you literally stepped over some of them) I did get the feeling at the time that, in a sense, it was quite refreshing to be so close to the objects. Thinking about it more afterwards, I developed a theory which I think holds true for many, but not all, types of objects we collect and is something we should consider when we are engaged in collecting.

My theory is as follows. Objects have a maximum appeal or relevance to those people who recognise what the object is and what it was used for, linking in with their own, their parents



and/or their grandparents' lives. The appeal of the object is, therefore, time limited. 200 years in the future a television may just appear as an odd curiosity to a member of the public and may be of little or no interest at all. For us in the present, however, an old television set may bring back memories of black and white programmes, on smaller distorted screens, recalling the days when, if you missed a programme you might have to wait some time to see it again when it was next repeated on one of only two or three channels! That in itself is not a reason for not having televisions in the collection in 200 years, but maybe a reason for not having pristine televisions in the collection.

Many objects are made with a limited shelf life anyway, so no matter what we do they may have perished in 100 years or

so, or at least be well on their way, particularly if we're talking about plastics. Therefore, to maximise the benefit of having the object and justify the resources summoned to care for it, we should not be putting objects in 'over safe' conditions but rather getting them 'used'. Although the condition of the object may be poorer later on than it would have been if kept out of the way, it may, 1000 years in the future, have again developed an appeal as people marvel at having something that was used 1000 years ago?

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More for Less: Big Impacts with Small Resources

SHCG Annual Conference 2010, Birmingham & Coventry

Georgina Gill of Museums Sheffield and Brendan Carr of Reading Museum teamed up to review the 2010 SHCG Annual Conference in Birmingham and Coventry. The conference theme was 'Big Impacts with Small Resources'.

Thursday 8 July, Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham

My name is Georgina Gill and I joined the Curatorial Team at Museums Sheffield in January 2010 after working for two years in the Front of House department as Assistant Manager. I was therefore very excited about attending the SHCG Conference because meeting other curators and sharing experiences at a forum of this kind was very much a new experience for me. The conference subject – 'Big Impacts with Small Resources' – is of course a topic that is pertinent to everyone working in the arts and heritage industry at the moment. As such, I thought to discuss these issues at the conference was a really good idea.

The first day of the conference was full of interesting and varied talks that got me thinking about things to do back at work. I'm currently coordinating a full refurbishment of the Ruskin Gallery and so I had this project in mind throughout the three day conference to see what useful information I could take back with me to Sheffield.

The opening talk of the conference by Mike Benson was



Conference organiser Michelle Day and Dr Colin Harris with an example of a Green Man

a real treat, not least because I learned what a Parmo was! (for those of you who don't know, it is a famous Middlesbrough culinary dish made of fried chicken or pork, covered in sauce and lots of cheese). Talking about the importance of passing on information for future generations and being able to actually know what your museum's mission statement is, Mike really got me thinking about heritage as a resource for people and how simple objects can tell the most powerful stories. This may sound obvious, but actually getting you to think about what you do in your everyday role at work made a real impact not just on me but, I imagine, other conference goers too.

The next talk by Anthony Kimber

was really useful in relation to my current project because he described the structural improvements made at Rye Art Gallery. Being able to have a clear idea about what you want to do and ensuring that you make the most of opportunities as well as reviewing your work were some of the main subjects he discussed. It was a reminder to me that projects need ample planning!

The talk which followed on from Anthony's was of particular interest to me as volunteer management was something I had been working on the past two years in my previous role. It is often tempting in times of economic downturn to think that money can be saved by employing volunteers as front of house staff but volunteers don't always



Ruins of Coventry Cathedral

want the same experience from volunteering as paid staff and cannot always offer the skills and experience needed for a front of house role. This being said, the talk did highlight just how much volunteer engagement can enrich the workplace and be beneficial to both volunteer and organisation. The point which I thought was particularly insightful was that, in a place like the National Waterways Museum, heritage skills can be passed on to young people.

The afternoon session was just as informative as the morning talks (including 'Survival Tactics in a Recession' from the Thackray Museum and 'Digital Technologies in Museums' from the Museum of London) and it got me thinking about new fundraising and digital technology ideas. In the evening I felt really looked after with a Thai buffet meal at a beautiful old pub called The Barton Arms in Birmingham. Not only that, but we all got to listen to Dr Colin Harris give a lively talk about The Green Man in folklore and legend. The next time I'm visiting cathedrals I'll be sure to look out for this grotesque little creature!

Friday 9 July, Herbert Museum & Art Gallery, Coventry

The second day of the conference was at The Herbert Museum & Art Gallery in Coventry, which I had never visited before and so was really grateful of the opportunity to have a tour by the curators. I found the displays really interesting and there was certainly a lot to explore. It also felt like they had pitched the interpretation and interactive elements at the right level i.e. not just for children but for people of all ages to enjoy. I was truly inspired by looking around, and this was before the first talk had even begun!

Despite the monumental destruction rained upon it, the ruins of Coventry Cathedral retain a sense of sacredness and, when standing where John Piper sketched amongst still smouldering fires, The Herbert's 'Peace and Reconciliation' gallery resonates with clarity of purpose. We learn that the city's people have campaigned for justice and peace with compassion and resilience ever since the fateful events depicted in Coventry Cathedral (1940). This is social

history at its best; using material culture to tell the story with a definite point of view. The objects are interpreted to provoke thought and promote discovery in a manner which is outward looking, conveying universal messages drawn from local experience and recollection.

The power of social history collections to achieve such things was a recurring theme in the conference presentations; artefacts as the cause around which, in straitened times, we must rally again.

The talks by Vicki Slade and Rachael Lovering were both around the theme of developing a gallery on a small budget and how to make full use of the resources you already have. Some top tips I picked up, which I hope to put into practice for the redevelopment of the Ruskin Gallery, were to maximise space; recycle objects if possible; and to make connections with local retailers and groups. Rachael Lovering's story of scooping a celebrity to open the newly refurbished Chartist exhibition in Newport (Newport born actor Michael Sheen, star of 'Frost/Nixon' and 'The Damned United') was lovely to listen to as she told her tale with such enthusiasm. I imagine they had people coming to the exhibition that would never have even known about the Chartist movement in Newport or even gone to a museum before, and so the talk was really encouraging.

A seasoned advocate for social history in museums, Steph Mastoris began his presentation by describing forces that endanger the discipline, suggesting that whilst these are not unprecedented, museum practitioners must be prepared to act tactically in countering an unpredictable volume and combination of threats. Mastoris likens the current situation to riding a snake, which will shift speed and direction of travel with little or no warning. As cuts begin to bite and spending reviews translate into choices about priorities and personnel structures, navigating a route that safeguards our cause requires a game plan.

Convening a change management panel, or 'War Cabinet', consisting of committed staff and critical friends was among suggestions offered with what, I suspect, is the benefit of hindsight. Certainly the point being made was clear – an antidote can be found by referring to the profession's collective memory, to be forearmed with an array of responses to possible scenarios arising from demands for yet more constraint. Another thought delegates took away was the need to focus on the core business of providing public service through guardianship of material culture and facilitating our community's engagement with it.

Well organised social events made it much easier to enjoy exchanging notes with my opposite numbers from other museums and, after a delicious pizza in a tastefully converted medieval town house, I slept soundly.

Saturday 10 July, Austin Court, Birmingham

Jane Findlay's presentation on the final day of conference illustrated that when uncertainty over the benefit of using Web 2 technology is addressed, with evidence based social media policies, it can be a cost effective and creative means for empowering audiences to engage with their heritage. After Nick Sherrard from Involve & Create had given the results of impressively detailed research into the potentially high impact of digital tools, Findlay's proposals were all the more convincing; particularly this notion that the Internet's responsiveness can engender democratisation of museum practice, by providing avenues for dialogue with hard to reach and culturally excluded groups.

With reduced exhibition budgets museums will be prompted to do less with more for longer, and so the inter-disciplinary and commercially-minded approach that Museums Sheffield took in delivering the exhibition, 'Big Bug Show', is a formula worth imitating. Teresa Whittaker described how healthy internal



Georgina Gill poses as a Mystery Play Actor

communication helped her institution to identify latent talents amongst staff and volunteers, allowing all to contribute to the exhibition and its accompanying public programme.

This, combined with harnessing the goodwill that local business people have towards museums, resulted in a show which maximised outcomes from a traditional exhibition theme. Ambitious, outward looking and with all-important learning outcomes for diverse age ranges, 'Big Bug Show' sustained its appeal for a prolonged period of time because of those priceless commodities: team work, commitment, imagination and enthusiasm.

Museums may collect the matter of life and death and offer mankind well-being but the consequences of economic disasters will always visit during the early stage of recovery. Given the consistent and more catastrophic danger presented by natural phenomenon, museums should, by now, be much better equipped to prepare for such things as fire, flood and infestation. Alarming, this proved not the case during the heavy rains of 2008 and, according to Christine Johnstone, our central cause (the artefact) was vulnerable and suffered in some under-resourced and geographically isolated settings. Johnstone warns against

complacency and the temptation to give disaster and business continuity planning low priority during hard times. She has to be commended for her current work in developing Regional Rapid Response Networks.

This year's SHCG conference was rounded off by Alison Bodley, who provided details of how to use social history collections to support school citizenship curriculums through the British Library's excellent initiative, 'Campaign! Make an Impact'.

Overall, I felt the SHCG Conference was really well organised and there were talks that covered a whole variety of themes. The topics we discussed gave me a lot to think about. It is encouraging to know that even in the wake of cuts in the arts sector, there are many highly motivated people working to provide marvellous visitor experiences at our museums.

Georgina Gill, Gallery Development Co-ordinator, Museums Sheffield (first half of review) and Brendan Carr, Community Engagement Curator, Reading Museum & Town Hall (second half)

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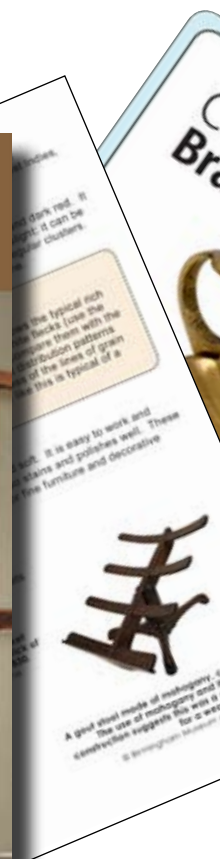
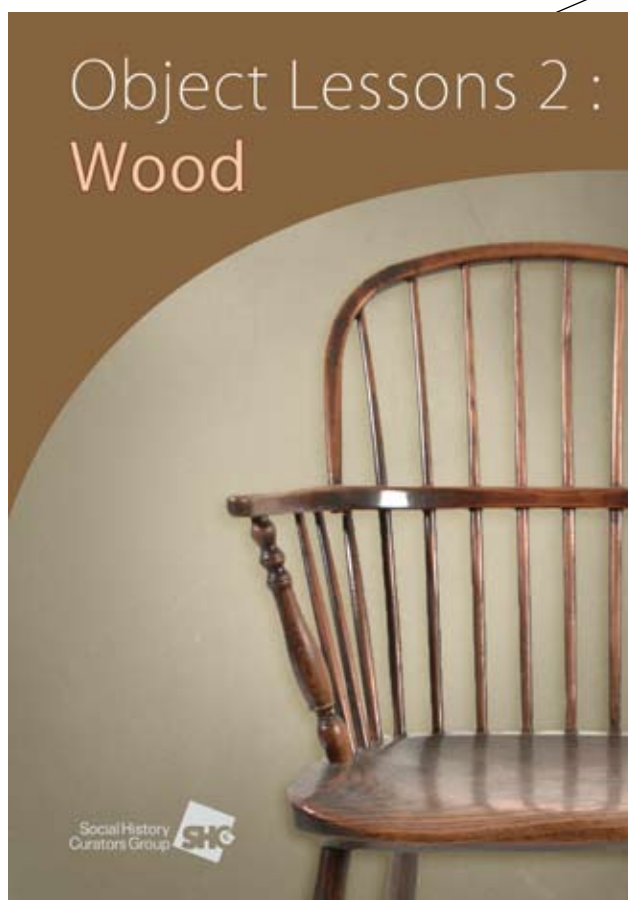
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Object Lessons: A Review

This summer the British Postal Museum and Archive borrowed the SHCG Object Lessons boxes to facilitate an in-house training session on identifying materials. This article is a summary of how we used the boxes, and our resulting comments, which I hope will be of interest to anybody considering using them in future.

Object Lessons are a set of loans boxes designed, as the SHCG website says, “to help you develop your skills and confidence in identifying and caring for core materials found in social history collections”. Each box focuses on a different material, and contains objects and an accompanying pack with practical exercises designed to help guide you through the basic principles of materials’ identification and care.

We focused our study day on the three main boxes: Metals, Woods and Plastics. One person was nominated to lead on each box; none of these were specialists, but we thought it important that somebody take charge of each session. The leaders went through the boxes and supporting material in advance, to have the confidence to lead the sessions. Additionally, my previous attendance at a course on ‘How



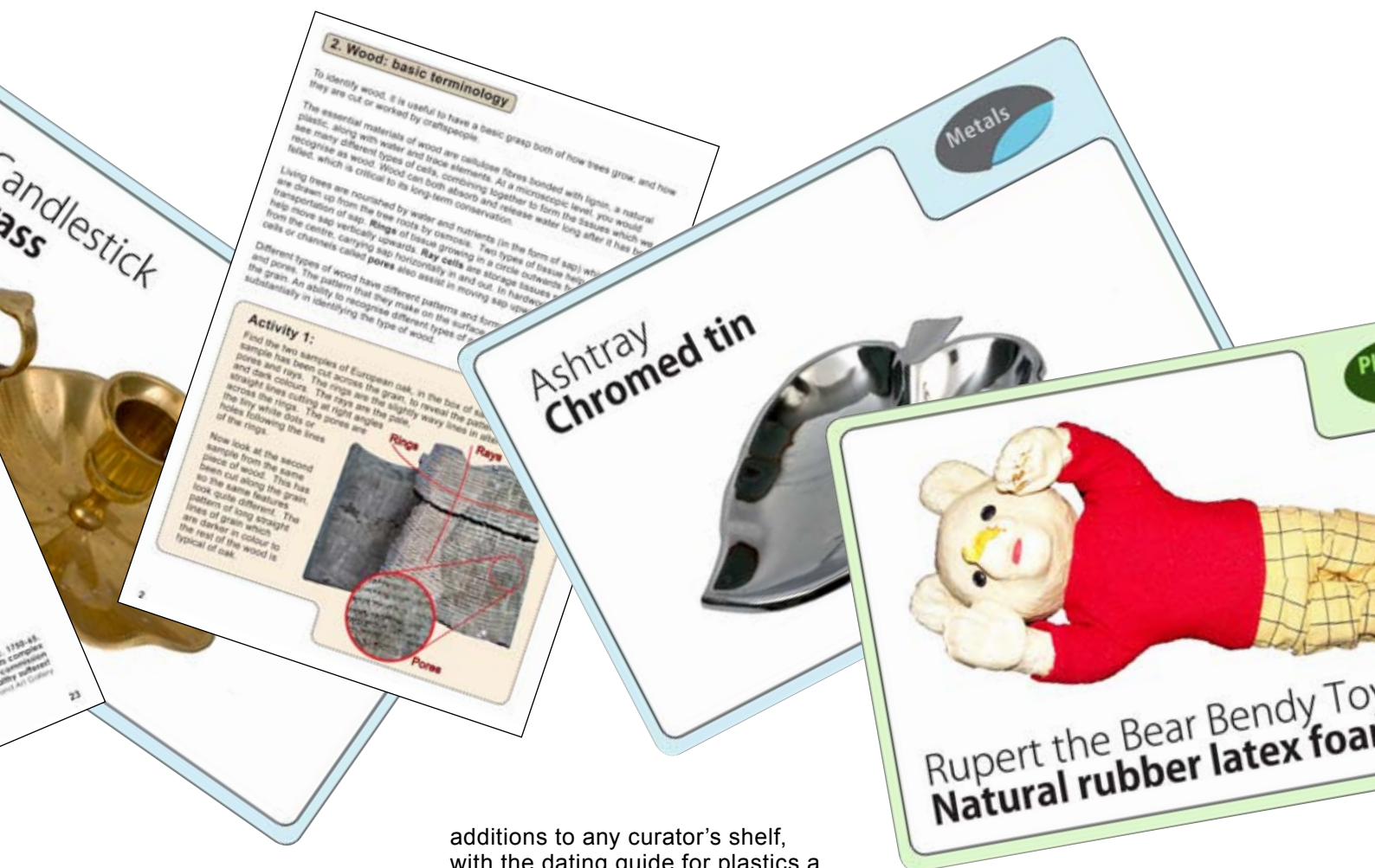
Green are your Plastics?’ meant that I could draw on information learnt there for the Plastics session.

We found there was sufficient time to study all three boxes in a day, with break times included. Our approach to each box was that the lead on the box would talk through the main introductory parts of the booklet, giving an overview of the main points. We would then lay out the objects and ask people to guess what they were made of just by looking at them. With no knowledge of the materials, this seemed counter intuitive, but did mean that everybody closely examined the objects and started thinking about their materials. Once this uneducated Guess What? game finished, we would then start working through the booklet to correctly identify the materials. With our newfound knowledge, we then found some

objects in store and tried to identify their composition too.

We started with the Metals box, the most simple and quickest to use. The flow chart in approaching identification in this particular booklet was of great help, with more detailed notes also available on each metal. We all felt confident we could identify major metal types after this session. The Woods box followed, with a close look at pores and grain. Here our confidence faded somewhat as we realised how difficult it was with our objects in store to closely examine their structure, due to paint, varnishes etc.

After lunch, we looked at the Plastics box, which I found both the most interesting, and the most difficult to use. I led this session, and having spoken to plastics experts who still struggle to identify material, I quickly realised



additions to any curator's shelf, with the dating guide for plastics a particularly good reference.

that it would not be possible to learn how to identify plastics within a few hours. Instead, my focus was on identifying and understanding how to manage the four problem plastics. I gave an overview of the history of plastics, combining the information in the booklet with what I had learnt on the course. After trying to guess the plastic, we used the booklet to help identify the material, and tried not to get too confused about the names! Whilst interesting to learn about plastics and their issues, none of us could positively identify a plastic after using the box.

Overall, the feedback was that the Object Lessons boxes were definitely an interesting and useful resource. It was really good to be able to see and handle the materials, and the group discussion approach was liked. The metals box in particular was excellent, with well selected examples of materials which helped reinforce learning. The accompanying booklets are useful

The boxes proved a cost-effective way of undertaking practical professional development work. The boxes are free to loan, with just transport to arrange - just under £80. Nine people attended the session, including Curatorial and Collections staff, some undertaking the AMA, as well as a Collections volunteer. That worked out at £8.89 per person!

Our only criticisms are intended to improve the resources. The kits varied in ease of use, although I suspect that had more to do with the complexity of the materials being assessed. Metal was the easiest, wood was trickier and plastics practically impossible! The latter two we considered more an introduction to the subject than actually enabling you to identify objects confidently afterwards.

The object selection in the boxes could be revised, in particular the plastics box had objects made with composite materials. Whilst a good example of how objects in collections can be made up

of multiple materials, it did make the initial learning process of trying to identify what the material looked like more confusing. The identification steps in the booklets might need tweaking to make sure they are 'idiot proof' as we did at times reach a different conclusion about an object's make-up following the identification steps! Additionally, the plastics box may be more useful if it pulled together a section on problem plastics and how to approach them rather than concentrating on identification.

For further information about Object Lessons, including booking arrangements, contact Jennifer Broadbent: E-mail j.broadbent@wlct.org Tel. 01942 827594

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A closer look at **A Winter's Day in St. James' Park** by John Ritchie, 1858

When the British Institution's annual contemporary art exhibition opened in London in February 1858, it generated a considerable amount of press attention. Among the paintings on display at number 52 Pall Mall were two oil paintings by a little known Victorian artist called John Ritchie.

A Winter's Day in St. James' Park was exhibited along with its companion piece, *A Summer's Day in Hyde Park*. The exhibition, which lasted for several months, was largely praised by contemporary newspapers for surpassing the British Institution's exhibitions that had recently preceded it. Ritchie's two paintings were particularly well documented in *The Illustrated London News*, a weekly newspaper which dedicated a lengthy paragraph to their description. According to an article which appeared in *The Illustrated London News* shortly after the exhibition opened, the paintings by Ritchie were among 'the works which most struck us [the reviewers] on our first visit to the gallery'. Why would the artist's portrayals of visitors to London's public spaces have been so striking for a mid 19th century audience? As I seek to answer this question, I will concentrate primarily on *A Winter's Day in St. James' Park*, a painting which has received little in-depth analysis compared to its companion piece. For the purposes of this concise article, I will be looking at the ways in

which Ritchie offered a reassuring image of cohesive Victorian society during a troublesome period marked by class and gender inequalities, an ineffectual legal system and threat to British rule abroad.

In *A Winter's Day in St. James' Park* an eclectic range of individuals, united by the extreme winter conditions, have gathered on and around the frozen lake in the painting's middle ground. Men, women, children and animals are shown navigating their way around the ice with varying degrees of success. A man in the painting's right corner is being fitted with skates while a man on the picture's left is profiting from the cold weather by selling food to a captive audience. At the centre of the painting is an unstable triangle of children: several boys have fallen on the ice, including a young fruit seller who has slipped and dropped a basket of oranges. Depictions of Londoners enjoying themselves on the frozen river and lakes of the capital have a long history. During the 17th century, a number of artists painted views of London's frost fairs, popular occasions when the Thames froze over and stalls were set up on the ice to capitalise on the novelty of the event. Skating on the Serpentine in Hyde Park was a documented pastime during the coldest winters, an event which was parodied by the satirical artist Thomas Rowlandson in the 18th century. While Ritchie's paintings of Londoners enjoying the extreme winter weather followed in this artistic tradition, they offered visitors to the British Institution's 1858 exhibition something new.

Ritchie's artistic output was

closely affiliated with the work of William Powell Frith, an artist who enjoyed phenomenal success during the 1850s and 1860s with his panoramic paintings, including *Ramsgate Sands* which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1854 and subsequently purchased by the Queen. The similarities between Ritchie's paintings and those by Frith were not lost on the press who described the former as 'a comparatively new artist, in which the inspiration of Frith is too apparent to be mistaken'. Certainly there are the obvious similarities: both men focused on recreational urban pastimes and presented the viewer with a visual cross-section of individuals comprising Victorian society. Their panoramic views included men, women and children ranging from the most affluent to the poverty-stricken, who were depicted inhabiting the same public spaces. While their close proximity served to emphasise the contrast in their wealth and social position, members of different social groups were portrayed by both artists as happily co-existing. Although the similarities between Frith and Ritchie are clearly evident and well documented, it does Ritchie a disservice to dismiss him simply as an imitator of Frith. Ritchie's paintings of visitors to public parks in the capital are worthy of analysis as a pair of images which engage with topical mid 19th century subjects.

During the 1800s, working-class antagonism towards the ruling elite was epitomised by the industrial strikes which took place in the mid 19th century. The Chartist Movement, which gained momentum throughout the 1840s, sought to change the British political system in favour of the



A Winter's Day in St. James' Park by John Ritchie, c.1858 (oil on canvas). Private collection, image © Museum of London



A Summer's Day in Hyde Park by John Ritchie, 1858 (oil on canvas). Museum of London, image © Museum of London.

labouring classes. The growing discontentment among industry workers was addressed in the literature of the period, notably by the novels of Elizabeth Gaskell, including *North and South* which was published a few years before the British Institution's exhibition of 1858. Despite on-going class tensions, *A Winter's Day in St. James' Park* presents the viewer with a harmonious image in which individuals from divergent sections of society come together to form a diverse yet cohesive group. There are clear discrepancies in wealth, most notably in the right corner of the painting where a well-dressed man is being fitted for skates. Together with the women at his side, this figure provides a strong visual contrast to the man kneeling at his feet and the young girl carrying a broom nearby, who is loosely disguising her begging with legitimate work. Although social inequalities are pronounced in the contrast between these figures, they are portrayed in such a way as to appeal to the viewer's sympathy. This response is encapsulated by the well-dressed woman who is withdrawing a coin from her purse to give to the young beggar. Although poor members of society are shown mingling with affluent men and women, in *A Winter's Day in St. James' Park* there is no hint of danger as social contrasts are accepted, not challenged.

The microcosm of London portrayed by Ritchie in *A Winter's Day in St. James' Park* provides a reassuring image of harmonious urban society: where inequalities exist, they are viewed with sympathy and not as a threat to social order. In addition, traditional Victorian gender roles are also upheld in Ritchie's painting. With the exception of a small number of women being pushed on sledges, including an elderly woman in the foreground, women are shown taking a less active role in the festivities compared to the men and boys depicted. During the 19th century, women were expected to adopt a more

central role in the house than in the public sphere, which was dominated by men. It is significant that the majority of women are shown around the fringes of the lake while their male counterparts are immersed in the activity and are portrayed skating on the ice, for the most part, with nonchalant ease. As opposed to active participants, the women in Ritchie's painting are portrayed as spectators in the public arena of the park and - by extension - in public life in general.

Ritchie's paintings of scenes in St. James' Park and Hyde Park include visual clues to topical events, which readers of contemporary newspapers and visitors to the British Institution's exhibition would have been fully aware of. In *A Summer's Day in Hyde Park* a gentleman on the extreme left of the painting is depicted reading a newspaper with an account of the Indian Mutiny, or the First Indian War of Independence as it came to be known, which began in 1857 and lasted until 1858. The same edition of *The Illustrated London News* which included a detailed account of Ritchie's two paintings also provided an update on the war with India, which was thoroughly documented in contemporary newspapers and addressed by a number of 19th century artists. While Ritchie's painting of an idyllic summer's day in one of London's famous parks includes a reference to war abroad and threat to British rule, his depiction of a winter's day in the capital focuses on an issue closer to home, with particular resonance for London.

In *A Winter's Day in St. James' Park* the man wearing a top hat on the extreme left of the picture is the visual counterpart of the literate man portrayed in its sister painting. As opposed to a newspaper, this gentleman is depicted with documents relating to a 'suit of chancery' under his arm. The High Court of Chancery, which dealt with civil cases such as disputes over estates and wills, was heavily criticised by the 19th century novelist Charles Dickens in *Bleak House*, which was first published in

installments between March 1852 and September 1853. Described in Dickens' novel as the 'most pestilent of hoary sinners', the judicial system was also attacked in contemporary newspapers and criticised by the 19th century writer and philosopher Thomas Carlyle. The Chancery was a topical and contentious subject for Ritchie to address in 1858, the same year that the Chancery Amendment Act was passed. The presence of a man connected to a Chancery case introduces a note of disquiet into an otherwise tranquil winter scene, in the same way that a reference to the Indian Mutiny disturbs the idyllic picture portrayed in *A Summer's Day in Hyde Park*.

Better known for his imaginary scenes depicting 17th and 18th century life, Ritchie chose to focus on the past-times of Londoners during extreme seasonal weather for his pair of paintings. *A Summer's Day in Hyde Park* and *A Winter's Day in St. James' Park* mark a significant departure for the artist, whose career has long been overshadowed by the success of his contemporaries, most notably Frith. This article has attempted to shed new light on a little known painting by an equally little known artist and focus on *A Winter's Day in St. James' Park* in the context of the topical events of 1858 and – more broadly – mid 19th century subjects. While Ritchie's paintings engage with a number of contemporary topics, they present a reassuring image of unified Victorian society, in which individuals of different ages and from contrasting backgrounds are depicted enjoying the same leisure pursuits. This may go some way to explain why the writer for *The Illustrated London News* was so struck by Ritchie's pair of paintings during a visit to the British Institution's 1858 exhibition.

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Victorian 'Fancy Work' Pin Cushion



Upper and middle class Victorian ladies were not allowed to work outside the home. Indeed, what they could do inside the home was very restricted. All the domestic chores, cooking, cleaning and even child rearing were done by servants. So these ladies filled a large part of their time doing what was known as 'fancy work'.

This inevitably produced highly elaborate and often heavily over decorated objects which demonstrated the lady of the house's 'accomplishments' but which had very little practical use. At first glance this pin cushion seems to be one of those objects!

The pin cushion is very large and stuffed with sawdust. It is

rectangular in shape and made of dark olive green, woollen cloth. It is decorated on the top with red silk hearts, diamonds and circles. The circles hold smaller ones in red, yellow and blue silk plaid. The top is also heavily decorated in geometric patterns made with pins. The pins are threaded through coloured glass beads or have white glass heads. The pin cushion also has a deep wool fringe in red, green and yellow with tassels in the same colours.

The base of the pin cushion is worn and protected by a piece of beige felt. The red silk is faded. The fringe is damaged and worn.

This fabulous object which must have taken many 'woman' hours

to make was used as a doorstep! This can be plainly seen by the wear on the base and the fringing! With its red silk hearts it may even have been given as a Valentine's Day present. We can only hope the recipient was suitably impressed by the lady's abilities!

Size: 13.5 x 26 x 22 cm
Donated by Mrs Alberta Goadby, Ibstock

Further reading: *Pincushions* by Averil Colby, 1975

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The Pillars of a Gin Shop, 1833

Hand-coloured etching, by George Cruikshank (1792-1878)

The young Cruikshank was no stranger to strong liquor. George and his brother Robert were raised in the heavy-drinking culture of their day, finding inspiration in their rambles and sprees through the Metropolis: from tavern to theatre to cock-fight, from swish assembly rooms in the West, to dingy gin-cellar in the East. Their father, Isaac, a heavy whisky drinker, lost his life in 1811 after winning a drinking match. In 1821 George's publisher William Hone counselled the young artist, to 'forswear late hours, blue ruin [gin] and dollies', if he wanted to get on in business.

In 1825 the cost of a spirits licence was cut, making gin once again the tipple of choice for the working classes. Splendidly ornamented 'gin-palaces' sprang up throughout the capital to lure the unwary. Here a gin-wrecked couple are seen propping up the Corinthian pilasters of a gin shop (a sly reference to the 'swells' or 'Corinthians' of a decade before). The wife's face is bruised and swollen; a gleeful demon squats by a moon-faced still. A little girl sits crying (she is echoed by a tiny remarque of a girl brushing her hair to the right of the father.) A ragged boy stands alert, eyes averted.

The gin-shops of London, remarks Dickens in *Sketches by Boz*, were 'numerous and splendid in precise proportion to the dirt and poverty of the surrounding neighbourhood ... You turn the corner. What a change! All is light and brilliancy ... the gay building with the fantastically ornamented parapet, the illuminated clock, the plate-



glass windows surrounded by stucco rosettes, and its profusion of gas lights in richly-gilt burners, is perfectly dazzling when contrasted with the darkness and dirt we have just left ...'

The Pillars of a Gin Shop can be seen in the exhibition *Ink and the Bottle: Drunken Cartoonists and Drink in Cartoons* at the Cartoon Museum, 35 Little Russell Street, London (24 November 2010 to 13

February 2011). The exhibition features works by Hogarth and Cruikshank, right up to contemporary cartoonists such as Steve Bell and Dish.

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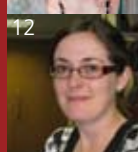
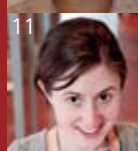
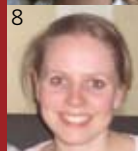
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