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EDITORIAL

This last News of 1984 is a little early, because I am about to depart for Leicester for my Diploma 'B' Course, so my seasonal greeting to members might be irritatingly premature. Still, Good Cheer! It will be rather strange when 1984 is in the past after waiting so long for it to arrive.

The theme of the 1985 SHCG Annual Study Weekend in Sunderland is 'Ten Years of Social History'. It is appropriate, then, that in this News our Chairperson should write of what he sees as the aims of SHCG, which is that they remain essentially the same as those of our former incarnation, the Group for Regional Studies in Museums, which was founded about ten years ago. It is probable that the role of SHCG in the latter half of the 1980s will be discussed at some length in Sunderland, and the News is no place for extensive debate. Nevertheless, I offer a few thoughts on the subject, if only for the information of those members, the majority of current membership, who like myself were never members of GRSM.

I fully agree with Stuart Davies that SHCG is, in essence, a medium for information exchange, and that the organisation of seminars and the production of publications are fundamentally important activities in improving the standards of social history in museums. I very much doubt, though, whether, as Stuart fears, he and I are members of a dwindling band who believe this. On the contrary, I feel sure that most Group members see these aims as exactly right, and I include in this those members of Committee and others, such as the WHAM! Working Party, who work so hard in pursuing them. The past twelve months have seen an extremely varied programme of SHCG seminars and meetings, the proceedings of one of which is being sent to those members who have not already received a copy, with this News; the proceedings of another of which (20th Century Collecting I) are to be published in next June's Museums Journal. Other seminar papers will be submitted to the editor of our own Journal for publication in 1985. I would expect that a Manual for Social History Curators might well form a logical extension of this policy.

However, I do feel that SHCG has additional obligations to fulfil in the cause of social history in museums. I agree once more with Stuart that we should, as a Group, leave what he calls 'political' concerns and "wider museological issues" to such as MPG, if by this we mean matters like the definition of a museum, or the overall structure of museum training, or the 'national' museums issue. But, if the Group closes its eyes to the fact that social history provision in museums is often inadequate because of external, rather than purely curatorial factors, then we are not serving the cause of the subject. The Group can help to create an improved climate for social history, in just the same way as other specialist groups such as the Group for Education in Museums, strive to do for their own disciplines. Members can try to do this individually by improving our service to the public, through displays, exhibitions, publications, lectures and other educational programmes, and in the care and docu-

mentation of collections; but we can also try to do it collectively, through SHCG, by projecting social history to a wider public, which includes governing bodies - this was exactly my motive in suggesting to York Castle Museum that we strive for media coverage of the 20th Century Collecting seminar last month. The seminar's success, and that of the WHAM! conference, in attracting the media can only help the cause of social history in museums in the long run (despite The Guardian's jejune report of the York meeting) - did anyone else catch the debate on feminism and museums on Radio 4's 'Poles Apart' the other day? I wonder where they got the idea from?

We do not yet have an articulate professional body at national level which can shoulder this kind of responsibility in promoting our cause, unlike, for example, the medical, legal or teaching professions. If the Museums Association were more capable of adopting this role then perhaps Lord Montagu's peculiar fears of proliferating

cont.



* * * COMING EVENTS * * *

- Nov 24: Images of Women - WHAM! (Yorkshire) seminar at Huddersfield (contact Patsy Bailes, 0484-41455).
- Dec 14: Recording Oral History - Yorks. & Humb. Fed./MAGSYH seminar at York (contact James Nunney, 0532-462462).
- Feb 2-3: Mills Weekend - Towner A.G. & M. meeting at Eastbourne (contact Patricia Andrew, 0323-21635/25112).
- Feb 8-24: Exploring Living Memory Exhibition and Festival - at Royal Festival Hall, London (contact Rodney Mace, Mona or Gemma, 01-8318871/4059704).
- Feb 20: 20th Century Collecting in Social History II - SHCG seminar at I.W.M., London (contact Oliver Green, 01-3796344; see enclosed Preview).
- Feb 20: The Care and Storage of Photographs - AMSSEE seminar at B.M. (Nat.Hist.), London (contact Gwen Boggild, 0908-563997/563922).
- March 21: Pigs Can Fly! Documenting Social History Collections - SHCG Training Seminar at Leicester (see enclosed Preview and booking form).
- March 29: Films and Museums - GSTMC seminar at Bristol (contact John Burnett, 01-5893456).
- March 31: An Introduction to Vernacular Architecture - Friends of Chiltern Open Air Museum meeting at Chalfont St. Giles (contact Jeanette Marsh, 02407-2250).
- April 11-14: The Roles of a Museum of Photography in the World Today - European Society for the History of Photography conference at Bradford (contact Adrian Budge, 0274-727488).
- April 12-13: Oral History and Museums - Oral History Society Annual Conference at I.W.M., London (contact Sian Jones, 0703-832277 or Rodney Mace, 01-8318871).
- April 22-23: Objects as Evidence - Leicester University seminar at Leicester (contact Gaynor Kavanagh, 0533-553560).
- July 25-28: Ten Years of Social History - SHCG Annual Study Weekend at Sunderland (contact Rosie Crook, 0783-41235).

specialist groups might be allayed. As it is, we have to try to help ourselves as best we can, and we should not, I feel, turn our backs on such avenues. We owe it to our museums, our collections and our successors, surely, to be prepared to respond to changes which affect us. In short, introversion is, in the present climate, an abdication of one of SHCG's responsibilities.

There is no need for discord within SHCG - there are plenty of people knocking museums and their curators without joining in ourselves (and in this connection I hope sincerely that the problems at the AGM in Norwich were the result of the misunderstanding explained by John Shaw in SHCG News 6, and did not arise because of a feeling that SHCG should not be discussing women's history in museums). There is room for all shades of opinion, honestly held and amiably expressed, in the Group, and regular assessment of, and debate on our aims and priorities is a sign of life, not morbidity. I welcome Stuart's comment, therefore, and I share with him the hope that SHCG members, still growing in numbers, will continue to think about why they joined the Group.

Appeal for Papers - in order to help stimulate debate about the importance of collecting twentieth century material, June's Museums Journal will publish, in addition to the papers delivered at the York seminar on 11 October, short contributions from curators who are prepared to discuss and assess their twentieth century social history collecting policies, with particular emphasis on the period since the Second World War. The intention is to cover as broad a spectrum as possible of types of collection and of museum. We would like to see, for example, papers on ceramics, costume, transport, agricultural and other industrial material, photographs, and tape recordings, as well as general social history collections. SHCG will, on behalf of the Museums Journal, be collating these contributions, which should be 500-1,000 words in length, and which should be sent to the News editor at the latest by the end of January 1985. They should be typed and double-spaced, please. While we cannot promise to use all papers sent, we will endeavour to include as many as space permits, without excess duplication. Approaches will be made individually if this appeal fails to secure sufficient material.

Footnote: a cri de coeur from our industrious Treasurer, who is no longer known as Sherri Brown, and is now Sherri Steel. She sounds more like an aperitif than ever!

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Committee met at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry on 10th September 1984. Reports were received from all officers.

Treasurer - she submitted a revised report for the year ended 15th July 1984; accounts for the WHAM! Conference, for the publication of the Conference Report, and for the 1984 Annual Study Weekend; a balance sheet dated 31st August 1984; and an estimate of income and expenditure over the coming year.

Forthcoming Journal (12) - will be sent out very shortly, and will contain twenty social history bibliographies as well as other items. Contributions are invited for Journal 13, due out in autumn 1985.

Training - the Group's Working Party has been asked to continue in its work. Its members are Helen Clark, David Fleming, Jenny Mattingly, Suella Postles and Mark Suggitt.

Annual Study Weekend - the theme is to be 'Ten Years of Social History' in museums, an assessment of progress and developments in our discipline since local government reorganisation. It will be held in Sunderland, with accommodation at the Polytechnic, and is being organised by Rosie Crook. Details will be announced in SHCG News 8 in April.

Proposed Manual of Social History Curatorship, and Survey of Social History Museum Provision - it was agreed that discussion on the proposed manual be deferred until committee had considered the

Museum Association's Manual of Curatorship. The Secretary is to write to the proposed Survey co-ordinators (in the ten major cities of the U.K.) to confirm that they are willing to help with this project.

Postal Ballot (included in News 6) - Group members voted as to whether the following amendment should be made to the SHCG Constitution:

'All publications of the Group shall be distributed free to all members, unless permission otherwise is given at the AGM'.

Votes received as on 30th September 1984:

In favour	33
Not in favour	6

In view of the fact that there is a clear 2/3rds majority in favour this amendment now forms part of the Constitution.

WHAM! Report - Committee agreed to cover a shortfall of £22.50 on the Conference Report budget. It was also agreed that the Report should be sent free to all SHCG members, as, in fact, the WHAM! organisers had always intended, because the Group is now financially in a position to do so. It is hoped that we should soon be able to produce the enlarged WHAM! Resources List.

Films and Museums Seminar - GSTMC's meeting will be held at The Watershed, Bristol ("Britain's first media communications centre") on 29th March 1985. The provisional programme includes speakers on the history of the film industry, and from the Imperial War Museum and the British Film Institute. SHCG members are invited to attend at the same rate as GSTMC members i.e. £6 (non-members of either Group £10).

Sue Kirby. (Carlisle Museum & Art Gallery).



CHAIRPERSON'S COMMENT

It is perhaps not untypical of SHCG that a new Chairperson can be elected without being required to produce a manifesto outlining his/her objectives for the coming year. Maybe this is because it is assumed that the Chairperson will be incapable of coherent thought or, alternatively, that it might be better not to know how he/she views SHCG's future.

Undeterred by this observation, I feel that I ought to offer some statement of intent. I am one of that apparently dwindling band who believe that the aims of the Group for Regional Studies in Museums (of which SHCG is but an illegitimate descendant) still remain valid. The Group should work to enable historians to communicate with each other in the interest of furthering the development of their discipline within museums. This is best done through seminars on important issues, training sessions on techniques and, above all else, the publishing of relevant papers.

During my year in office I hope that SHCG's committee will give priority to these objectives and that less time will be spent on 'political' matters. These seem to me to be inappropriate for a Group which is essentially a medium for information exchange rather than a lobbying tool. SHCG is at its best when it sticks to its basic aims and at its most ineffective when it strays into 'wider museological issues'.

The discord over the WHAM publication at this year's AGM highlighted the importance of establishing proper priorities for SHCG. The enormous success in terms of attendance and media coverage of the York seminar of 'Twentieth-Century Collecting' reinforces my argument as to where these priorities should lie. Debate, communication and literature should be the guiding words in SHCG. The revised constitution outlines the aims of SHCG but it would be helpful if members could indicate where they feel priorities should lie. The Secretary would like to hear from you.

Stuart Davies (Kirklees Museums, Huddersfield).

 TWENTIETH CENTURY COLLECTING IN SOCIAL HISTORY I

 Report - Yuccas to Yorkies

"At a philosophical level, at the level of theory and at the level of the history of various practices, there is a process which I call the selective tradition: that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture, is always passed off as 'the tradition', 'the significant past'. But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings are neglected and excluded."

Raymond Williams

This seminar was previewed in SHCG News 6 with eight questions about the attitudes of social history curators to collecting (not 'recording') the 20th century. Number five was 'Do we suffer from a male bias?' and 60 curators met at York to hear lectures by - three males. Were the other questions tackled? - although some were raised, few were discussed in detail and perhaps more sadly hardly any solutions were offered.

Stuart Davies (chairing) introduced the day by posing two questions - 'Was the 20th century different from previous centuries? - if so, how', and 'Did objects have a declining significance?' Although both these key issues were raised the meeting did not produce a clear answer to either. Mark Suggitt began by describing some recent developments at York Castle Museum. A deliberate decision had been taken to update the existing sequence of displays by introducing new reconstructions such as a 'coronation (1953) living room' and a '1981 kitchen'. He looked in some detail at possible sources for such displays including i) Manufacturers'/shop catalogues ii) magazines iii) photographs (including the intriguing suggestion of estate agents' pictures) iv) television and film. It was not suggested that museums could or should do the recording for their own displays. The problems of these various sources were discussed and despite the obvious pitfalls were all obviously worth investigating by the social history curator. Within the traditional display technique of York Museum and the restrictions on resources and space, these new rooms seemed to be a success.

However, although such 'total reconstructions' are clearly popular with the public there must be major reservations about their suitability for communicating ideas about major causes and effects within society. The ubiquitousness of such displays has perhaps made curators insufficiently critical of their effect upon visitors. Oliver Green raised this problem in the ensuing discussion by pointing out the failure of both room reconstructions in communicating the real dynamics within society (e.g. rising real wages, introduction of Hire Purchase, cheap imports etc.) which made such interiors possible. Museums were often only concerned with showing effects and did not display (or often collect) the causes. The blank screen of the television set in the 'coronation room' made no comment about the crucial role of television since the war and the 'total reconstruction' reduced it to the same significance as the curtains. Room settings frequently only provide a series of 'film sets', mysteriously gliding in and out of the visitor's focus - coming from nowhere and disappearing into nowhere. Mark Suggitt also raised the danger of each decade being represented by one idea e.g. the 'Art Deco' '30s, 'utility' '40s, 'Festival of Britain' '50s, 'swinging' '60s' and 'stripped pine' '70s. Unfortunately, although there was a lively discussion at the end of Mark's talk it was mostly concerned with the minutiae of his approach rather than more general questions about the suitability of such displays.

Oliver Green then discussed the problems of recording the post-war era. Although museums were beginning to tackle the '20s and '30s, the last

forty years were virtually untouched. Oliver started by demolishing a variety of arguments used to justify not collecting recent items and then suggested a number of reasons why such activity was vital, especially with the growing ephemeral nature of material and the rapidity of change. The recent date of objects has never been seen by other branches of museums, e.g. natural history, ethnography and fine art as a bar to acquisition. The latter part of the talk consisted of pictures of a wide variety of contemporary scenes - railway stations, garages, supermarkets, fast food restaurants, punks etc., with three questions - should it be recorded?, is it being recorded? and finally, what is the best means of recording it? The images revealed the crucial importance of non-object recording since most of the scenes could only be partially preserved, if at all, by selecting 3D objects from them. Oliver said that every curator should spend one day a month, at a minimum, photographing their locality. This suggestion clearly met with universal approval but unfortunately there was no time to discuss this or other methods in more detail.

The afternoon began with Frank Atkinson glorying in being 'an unselective curator' since the 1950s. Since many people at the seminar were born after Frank started I suppose we ought to be recording it as history now! Much of the talk was a description of how material was collected rather than an analysis of what had been achieved at Beamish. Frank rightly stressed the importance of 'better rusty than gone' but was he happy with the results? In particular Beamish had acquired large numbers of books, photographs as well as film, in addition to 3D objects but no suggestions were given as to which were most effective in terms of 1) historical accuracy 2) efficiency of recording 3) storage costs 4) importance to public and researchers. Frank did however say that he felt the world of the North-East which he had set out to record had now largely gone, and that Beamish might need to stop at a certain chronological point - an interesting attitude compared with the policy at York Castle.

Turning to a different tack Frank then suggested that the future had to lay with a concerted national effort since so little could be achieved by individual museums operating by themselves. In particular a great deal of 3D material was of national or international character and resources must be geared to fit this pattern. The exact nature of this action was not defined but it was the first time long term strategy was mentioned at the seminar. Possible solutions included regional depositories supported by groups of museums. Unfortunately the nature of local authority museums tends to be inimical to such activity. Unfortunately time did not allow more discussion of this crucial issue but clearly SHCG has to lobby for decision, and resources at the top whether it be with the Museums Association, O.A.L. or elsewhere. Surprisingly the Swedish SAMDOK system was hardly mentioned since this at least provides a model of what can be achieved within a specific set of constraints and has the benefit of practical experience over a growing period of time.

The meeting then split into four groups to discuss - contemporary collecting, women and museums in concert. The writer was in the latter where discussion was fairly sterile since it failed to get to grips with the problem of "how". The 'report backs' suggested other sessions were more fruitful. In particular it was felt that the nature of women's experience in history was difficult to record in purely 3D objects and this was one reason why it figured so rarely in gallery displays. It was felt that other techniques were producing more effective and accurate results. A general discussion then followed which revealed two attitudes. These might be termed the 'Objectors' and the 'Recorders'. The 'Objectors' felt that museum collecting should be limited to the lines laid down in the Victorian period e.g. the preservation of 3D objects. The latter saw objects as increasingly playing a much more restricted role and being only one of several techniques used for recording. The 'Objectors' saw

these other activities (photography, video, tape recording etc.) as lying outside the scope of museum work and should be left to other reliable professions (the Fleet Street Press?). Many people felt that museums were already overstretching their limited resources and that there were enough local history/oral history groups etc. working now to supply museum needs in the future. Unfortunately the polarisation of the debate ignored the fact that many techniques e.g. film, photography and contemporary taping have ramifications beyond simply the amount of information they record. These methods have to be carried out when an event or activity is taking place unlike object collecting which may be carried out years after something has ceased to exist. These techniques, by forcing curators to become involved in contemporary events, will make museums begin to 'write' history rather than merely providing 'illustrations' of other people's views. Only when this happens will social history museums develop a proper methodology and be treated as significant historical institutions rather than refined versions of 19th century waxworks. Museums will then be able to move away from the nostalgia business, where most currently languish, and take on a new role.

As always, time ran out before the discussion reached Frank Atkinson's appeal for a national co-ordinated approach. Perhaps the demand for a National Archive of the 20th century will be successfully developed outside the profession as recent discussions in The Times have indicated, and will allow social history museums to be left with their horse-drawn ploughs and beam engines. It is difficult to be enthusiastic about the outcome of this seminar since the prevailing mood was so pessimistic. Moaning about lack of resources did not create York Castle Museum or Beamish. Perhaps Oliver Green isolated the real problem in questioning the quality of curators. Many have no interest in the present (or even the 20th century) and their job provides the perfect excuse to escape from it. Williams' quote is crucial - social history curators must analyse where their 'selective tradition' comes from, and its causes.

In 1938 Frank Pick (Director of London Transport), addressing the M.A. conference said:-

"A museum can only justify itself as it establishes relationships with current life. All the records of the past leads up to the present. All the achievements of the past find their value only as they stimulate achievement in the present. The museum must be linked up to current life. The last show-case in the museum must be read in conjunction with the shop windows in the town. Where is the courage that will strive to secure this, risking mistake or failure?"

Where indeed? - judging by recent developments largely in groups operating outside museums.

Geoff Marsh (Museum of London).

P.S. Please see the preview of the follow-up meeting to this seminar.

SHIC PROGRESS REPORT

The first 500 copies of SHIC have now been sold, and a reprint of the Index (originally only 500 copies were printed) is available from MDA, along with copies of the Classification itself. During 1984 successful user's seminars have been held in Leeds, Edinburgh, Bristol and Dudley, and more of these meetings will be held in 1985. The SHIC Working Party is currently revising the Index with a view to publishing an enlarged edition. Members of the Working Party would still be interested to receive comments on the Classification, particularly where problems are arising, so that they can be considered for future editions.

Michael Vanns (Ironbridge Gorge Museum)



Fast Food? No thanks.

TWENTIETH CENTURY COLLECTING IN SOCIAL HISTORY II

The success of the Twentieth Century Collecting seminar in York, which was heavily oversubscribed, has prompted SHCG to organise a follow-up session in London. This will take place at the Imperial War Museum on 20 February, 1985.

The York seminar only scratched the surface of a vast subject and at the London seminar we will be opening out some of the many issues which were raised in October. In particular we shall be looking at the work of groups and individuals outside museums who are researching and recording aspects of recent social history. Should museum curators be doing such work themselves or should we simply co-operate and liaise with people who may be better able to carry out such projects independently? Most community history and documentary recording projects of this kind are based almost exclusively on two-dimensional material: film, video, photographs, tape recordings and both written and printed evidence. Does this suffice for contemporary collecting, or are the three-dimensional objects, which museums have traditionally concentrated upon as their primary material, still an essential part of social history recording and interpretation? How can museums with limited funds and resources make a start in this area? Should SHCG initiate a rolling programme of seminars on the various aspects of this huge and varied theme?

The provisional programme for the February seminar includes four museum speakers, two 'outsiders' and workshop discussion sessions. Rodney Mace of London History Workshop will talk about community history projects. Steve Humphries and/or Gavin Weightman of London Weekend Television will introduce and show a programme from their recent series 'The Making of Modern London' (only screened in the LWT area so far). A speaker from the Imperial War Museum will talk about the collecting policies of the only national museum with an exclusively twentieth century collection. Elspeth King of the People's Palace will speak on the 'everyday rubbish' of modern Glasgow that her museum has collected on a shoestring budget. Mike Seaborne of the Museum of London will talk about the philosophy and practice of documentary photography projects. Val Bott of the Grange Museum will consider the continuing importance of collecting and using objects to interpret modern social history.

Booking forms are available from Oliver Green, London Transport Museum, Covent Garden, London WC2E 7BB (Tel.01-3796344). Only 70 places are available so please book early to avoid disappointment. Those people who have been informed that places will be held for them in the first instance should contact me as soon as possible to confirm their acceptance. The cost will be £3 to SHCG members, £4.50 to non-members.

Oliver Green (London Transport Museum).



RURAL HISTORY IN MUSEUMS

Report

The SHCG Training Working Party is to be congratulated on organising a most informative and stimulating seminar on rural history (8th November 1984) at The Yorkshire Museum of Farming. This was a well attended meeting with over thirty participants from twenty museums. The speakers were well chosen, providing a comprehensive coverage on the main debates in the subject today.

David Fleming in his talk "From Shepherds' Smocks to EEC: Interpretation in Farm Museums", deplored the trivialisation of history in museums, particularly the 'pleasuredome' approach, a form of turnstile consciousness "rooted in the balance sheet" forced on museums by economic pressures. He saw the care of collections as uppermost in the curator's tasks and cautioned against the indiscriminate use of original artefacts in demonstrations etc. He felt displays should attempt to communicate ideas and perform a genuine educational function, not just show pretty objects per se. In addition museums, he felt, do not show the scale and importance of agriculture as an industry particularly in the present-day and tend to romanticize rural life. Unlike many long-dead industries represented in museums, agriculture can be shown to have enormous continuing relevance in terms of the environment. He expressed his reserve about period farm museums, a pigeon-holing of the past, and of museums whose collecting and display policies stop short of the present day, which provide a too-truncated view. In this and his other themes (for example, regional museums to co-ordinate the preservation of farm buildings and their complexes etc), David supplied us with an admirable thesis bristling with quotes gleaned from diverse sources such as Marlowe and Wordsworth, through to Kenneth Hudson.

The talk was followed by a tour of The Yorkshire Museum of Farming with the appropriate seasonal backdrop of near horizontal rain, and a visit to the York Livestock Centre next door for lunch (note: not a place to mention one doesn't eat meat). I did wonder as I munched my cheese sandwich how museum visitors attending both the Museum and the Livestock Centre distinguished between the aims of the two organisations, but therein lies another seminar.

The afternoon talks were well-considered, with a high standard of delivery, although one noted the lack of bibliographies and hand-outs, even though this was billed as a "training" seminar.

John Gall began the session with a meaty informative discussion on "Farming collections: a Regional Museum's View". He pointed out that "farming things" in museums do not represent agriculture in reality: 50% of investment in agriculture is in land and buildings; 35% in livestock and crops and only 15% in the equipment. In museums we only collect a very small part of that 15%, and even that may not be representative of the area or the industry (freakish duplicates having a higher survival rate than much-used tools). The strict, research-orientated collecting policy at Beamish was based on a survey of six hundred published sale particulars in local newspapers, in a ten-year period up to 1930. The results of the survey were used to structure collecting and to rationalise collections so that items were truly representative of time, geography and industry. The need for research and documentation to delimit which areas to collect, to distinguish what is significant, was especially emphasized by John. He also felt strongly that there should be nationally articulated collecting policies to avoid gaps, and to cut down on duplicating items. He emphasized too, the importance of researching livestock and crops to supply information for preservation policies within the museum. Finally John outlined the three types of collections which have evolved at Beamish: the research collection (the only one to be formally accessioned); the 'use' or 'duplicates' collection and the 'spares' collection (parts of machinery which may be difficult to obtain in the future).

Roy Brigden in his talk "Towards 2000 - the Role of the Rural Life Museum" noted that the countryside is already well covered with a network of regional museums of rural history, all competing for the same market, and that restraint should now be called for. He felt that in many rural history museums things had gone flat after the heyday of this movement in the 1960s and 1970s with a, by now, well-tried and established formula of demonstrations, rallies and thematic displays. He too expressed reserve in the time-capsule period displays which cannot cater for the swings in fashion of public interest (previously, interest had been in Victorian to WWI aspects, now the emphasis had changed to the 1930s). However, he did see three potential areas of development: firstly, the need for a national museum of farming to explain the national story and to provide an overview which is lacking in the disparate regional museums. Secondly, he mentioned the debate in modern agriculture, with the organisation and practice of modern intensive farming being questioned, and a less intensive, less technologically fuel-based approach being advocated. By the turn of the century farming, he felt, will be very different, and the period we are in now will be viewed as a seminal time charting the fall of intensive farming, so it is even more important that museums collect post-WWII material systematically. Lastly, he noted that museums could have a central role in environmental consciousness, and could help in the current debates on what kind of countryside we want. Curators must go out to help interpret the countryside and even, he suggested, be viewed as environmental consultants. By presenting an understanding of the countryside based on the historical dimension, curators could become un-biased intermediaries in the conflicts between farming interests and the urbanised, leisured public. The historical perspective, the museological documenting, could include more consideration of agriculture science and agricultural processes (the development of breeds etc.); the recording of the historic landscape, farm buildings and their lay-outs; and in the presenting of systematic countryside interpretation (as in the work of the Norfolk Heritage Project); and finally in active education putting across the historical perspective for schools etc. in conjunction with visits to farms and agricultural colleges.

In the open session after an admirable summing up by John Shaw, several of the day's themes were chewed over, for example the curator as environmental consultant (should s/he be doing this or were there others better qualified?); the sepia-tinted, romanticized view of the past (should museums document this view and by implication condone this mythologising, or should they debunk the view?); what is the 'minimum' geographical area for a regional museum?; would a national museum of farming mean that national industries and vested interests would fund the displays?; and finally, the consensus that SHCG should act as a forum to prevent duplication in collections and to foster interaction between the various regional museums.

Lastly, one or two reviewer's quibbles: the lack of our friends and colleagues from several major regional museums who could have contributed much at the open forum, and the strangely low number noted by one examiner present, of diploma students at this training seminar. And, finally, on a day in which we were urged to consider the environment and our surroundings, it was a pity more thought had not been given to the background noise of hammering, and the constant pall of cigarette smoke during talks and tea. Both impaired one's enjoyment of an otherwise excellent day.

Jennifer Stewart. (Museum of East Anglian Life, Stowmarket).

P.S. Next one in the series is Pigs Can Fly! Documenting Social History Collections on 21 March (see Preview and booking form).

PIGS CAN FLY! DOCUMENTING SOCIAL HISTORY
COLLECTIONS

The next SHCG Training Seminar will be held at the Leicestershire Museum & Art Gallery, New Walk, Leicester, on Thursday 21 March 1985. It is aimed at everyone involved with social history material, and especially at curators who are dissatisfied with their present documentation and those only contemplating computerization, as well as those in the throes of grappling with computers.

We are all too aware that a collection which is poorly documented is virtually useless. What many of us do not really grasp is the wide and exciting range of documentation options from which we can choose. This meeting should encourage us to consider the precise uses and information we want from our collections, institutions and collecting area, thus helping us to develop a system tailor-made to our individual needs, and avoiding those all too common mistakes which are so expensive in time and money.

The meeting will not attempt to cover superficially the entire subject of documentation, but will compare and contrast two types of computer application to the problem of documenting social history material. We can expect a useful exploration of the often painful range of decisions that a large department must make before beginning to document their collections for the computer, and some exciting and innovative suggestions about the extension of computer use into fieldwork and research. Basic questions will be tackled as well. For example, we will expect answers to such questions as why use a computer and how best can we exploit it? Why bother with the MDA, and has it really fulfilled expectations?

There will be time for discussion and inspection of some index and catalogue print-outs produced by various social history departments. Please see enclosed booking form.

Suella Postles (Brewhouse Yard Museum, Nottingham) on behalf of SHCG Training Working Party.

MAKING SOUNDINGS: AN APPEAL FOR INFORMATION ON
SOUND COLLECTIONS

Although the advent of video is exciting and widespread, sound recordings still represent a valuable resource to which there is only limited access. In many fields the tape-recorder is still the least intrusive, most effective means of capturing the essence of an event. Despite the apparent dominance of visual images, sound remains the most efficient, transportable, and exciting of the media for communication.

Many public and private organizations in Britain have collections of sound recordings containing valuable material, and many museum curators are becoming aware of the potential for such material to enliven their displays. But the fact remains that too few people know about the existence of recorded sound collections or have access to them. As a result, in this country, a valuable cultural resource is going to waste. The National Sound Archive (formerly The British Institute of Recorded Sound, and now a department of the British Library) is taking action to prevent such waste by bringing to public attention the value, potential and availability of recorded sound.

One way of achieving this is through the production of a National Directory of Recorded Sound Collections. A very large number of museums, libraries, clubs and societies, hold collections of sound recordings on an equally large number of subjects. We are interested in hearing about the existence of these holdings, of all sizes and durations, whether on tape or on disc, in all subject areas (e.g. oral history, wildlife sounds, industro-mechanical sound, folklore, dialect, and so on). Clearly we are more interested in original material, rather than that which is available commercially. But if you, or your organization, possess any recorded sound material,

or you know where such material is located, (even if you don't regard it as a 'collection') please let us have details as soon as possible. If more people know about your sound collection - more people will know about the rest of your activities. Please send your information to Jeremy Silver, Research Officer, The National Sound Archive, 29 Exhibition Road, London, SW7 2AS.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Colour Souvenir of over 200 years of Brewing History. (The Bass Museum, 1984, .80p, 16pp). A small booklet, with colour illustrations, which looks briefly at brewing since the eighteenth century, and particularly at the history of Bass P.L.C. It has been prepared as a guide to the museum, and includes sections on Making the Beer, Moving the Beer, The Bass Shires and The Museum Services. Available from the Bass Museum of Brewing, Burton upon Trent.

The Gentlewoman's Kitchen: Great Food in Yorkshire 1650-1750 by Peter Brears (Wakefield Historical Publications, 1984, £9.75, 210 pp). During the seventeenth century great changes were seen at all levels of society. The gentry and aristocracy adopted new house plans, introduced new forms of interior decoration, furnishings and tableware, and ate new dishes in new dining rooms. This book contains many illustrations by the author, and features period recipes as well as analysis of these developments. Available from booksellers or Wakefield Historical Publications, Seckar House, Seckar Lane, Woolley, Wakefield, at £9.75 plus £1.80 p & p.

The Local Museum: notes for amateur curators (AMSSEE, 1984, £5, 72pp). This booklet has been prepared for the benefit of those groups of individuals who wish to provide their community with a local museum. It has two main aims: to make the museum's proposers think long and hard about the responsibilities they are taking on before they make a final decision, and to inform them about sources of help and advice once they decide to go ahead. The book considers museum planning and management, collecting, documentation and conservation, security, display, exhibitions and events, and includes the Code of Practice for Museum authorities and the Code of Conduct for museum curators. Available from AMSSEE, 34 Burners Lane, Kiln Farm, Milton Keynes, at £5 including p & p.

EXHIBITION NOTICES

Dec 22 - Feb 10: The English Mill - at Towner Art Gallery and Local History Museum, Eastbourne. In this exhibition the Towner aims to illustrate the history of all aspects of the English mill through objects from the mills, working models, paintings, photographs and diagrams. The exhibition brings the story of mills right into the 1980s by showing methods of grinding wheat and corn in factory roller mills, and by illustrating the current uses of wind power in the vast 4 megawatt wind generators proposed by the C.E.G.B.

Feb 8 - 24: Exploring Living Memory Exhibition and Festival 1985 - at the Royal Festival Hall, London. This exhibition brings together the work of groups and individuals from the London area working in the field of people's history and reminiscence and includes photographs, video/sound recordings, events and publications.

Nov 2 - Dec 31: Heraldry, A Yorkshire Tribute on the Quincentenary of the College of Arms - at Leeds City Museum. The exhibition commences with an introduction to heraldry, featuring the 16th century Henry Clifford in full armour and heraldic accessories, then proceeding to outline the development of the College of Arms, Royal, civic, corporate and personal heraldry, with over 160 exhibits drawn from local sources. Catalogue available price £1.50 from Leeds City Museum, Calverley Street, Leeds LS1 3AA.