

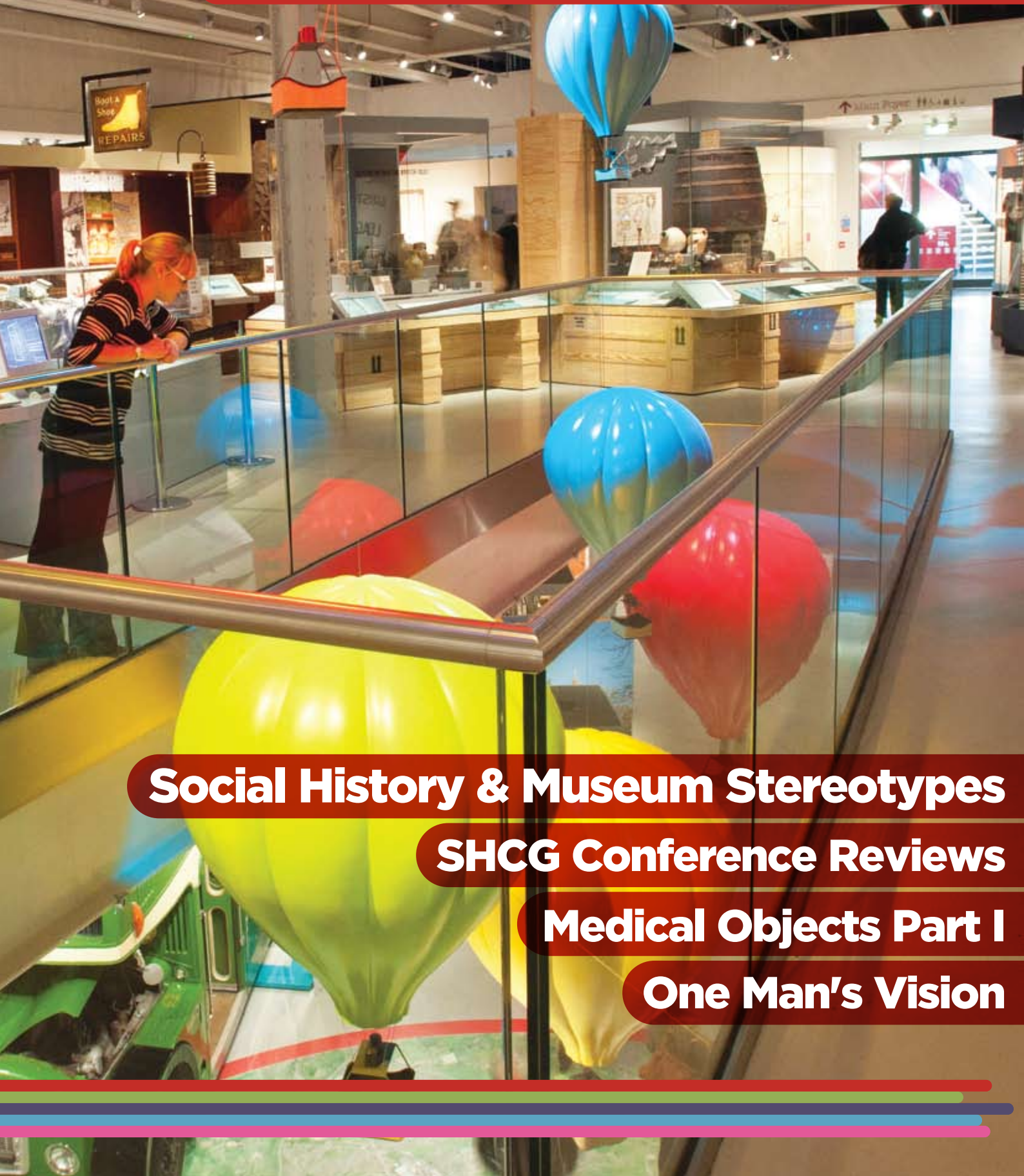
**Issue 70**

**Dec 2012**

**SHCG**

**news**

**THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP**



**Social History & Museum Stereotypes**

**SHCG Conference Reviews**

**Medical Objects Part I**

**One Man's Vision**

## Join SHCG?

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

**Laura Briggs**  
Freelance Curator  
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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 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:**  
**19 April 2013**

*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 *News* are wide ranging and do not necessarily express the views of the SHCG committee or SHCG, unless otherwise stated.

The suggested word count for submissions is: Bulletin Board 100-300 words, Theory & Practice 900-1,000 words, Reviews and Object Focus 400-500 words (one page) or 900-1,000 words (two pages), Tea Break 200-300 words. Please submit your article by e-mail, saved as a Word file (Arial 12 point). Images can be e-mailed or, if high resolution, submitted on a CD (high resolution preferred). Images should be accompanied by a brief caption and credit details.

Alternative formats:  
Electronic copies and alternative formats are available on request.

Send all contributions to:

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Front Cover: Bristol People Gallery.  
M Shed, Bristol, pp. 16 -19

Image © Neil Phillips Photography



## Welcome to Issue 70

In June 2012 Chelmsford born artist Grayson Perry's three part series *All in the Best Possible Taste* aired on Channel 4. The series set out to investigate the notion of 'taste' as held by working, middle and upper class people in modern Britain, culminating in the production of six tapestries, designed by Grayson, with imagery inspired from his experiences in places as diverse as Sunderland and Royal Tunbridge Wells. Referring to the detail in the tapestry illustrations, the Turner Prize winning artist was asked, "Where do you get it all from Grayson?" to which the artist replied, "Google is the great tool of the modern artist!"

I have often reflected that Google is the great tool of the modern curator, so this made me chuckle; where would we be without it? Having said that, Google (other search providers are, of course, available, hehe) while being tremendously useful, cannot provide the answer to all curatorial queries. This is where the SHCG e-mail list and the all new and improved firstBASE really come into their own, and I would urge members to take full advantage of these excellent resources.

Despite my Jubilympics humbug in the editorial accompanying issue 69, I must admit, I did eventually get into the Olympic spirit and enjoyed seeing the Olympic Torch Relay in Newcastle upon Tyne, the highlight of which was watching *Man vs. Wild* TV star Bear Grylls transporting the flame from the top of the Tyne Bridge, over the River Tyne to the Gateshead quayside, by zip wire. I did also tune in to see the Olympic opening ceremony on TV, noting with interest the part played by World Wide Web inventor Sir Tim Berners-Lee, who appeared alongside a NeXT computer workstation, as used by him when the Web was born in 1990.

2012 will certainly be remembered by many as a great year for sporting achievement, and the theme is continued in this issue through news of sport themed exhibitions around the country. Other highlights to be found within include Elanor Cowland's part one of a 'Top Ten' rundown of medical objects in social history collections (in addition to Elanor's list of online resources, I would also recommend visiting [www.antiquusmorbus.com/English/English.htm](http://www.antiquusmorbus.com/English/English.htm) for a fascinating list of archaic medical terms, diseases and causes of death), and SHCG stalwart Briony Hudson treats us to a delightfully off the wall exploration of stereotypes surrounding social history museums. I'm off to play now with my Peppa Pig Museum Deluxe playset, see you again in issue 71 ;-)

Adam G. Bell

Editor, *SHCG News*



20. Medical Objects in Social History Collections: Part I

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## SHCG Matters

Coming soon...

### What is it? Identifying Mystery Objects

#### FREE study days Bristol, Liverpool and Newcastle

SHCG has been awarded Arts Council England funding to run three free study days; one in Bristol, one in Liverpool and one in Newcastle. We'll be looking at how to identify mystery objects in your collections.

The study days will run along the lines of our popular 'Whatchamacallits' seminars. There'll be two speakers, a chance to handle objects and identify them and learn more about a difficult to identify material such as plastics or silver or costume.

The study days are FREE to attend. No travel budget? No problem... we have a small bursary available to anyone who needs help with travel expenses either in full or part.

If you're truly unable to attend but you really want to, you can still share in the day. We are making three 'How to...' films which can be viewed on firstBASE and the Collections Link website.

The call to sign up is coming soon. Watch out for it on SHCG's e-mail list, where it will be advertised first!

Michelle Lees

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## All new firstBASE

firstBASE, SHCG's online database of resources for history curators, was launched at conference in Newcastle in 2002. It seems fitting then that this year, ten years on, SHCG has launched an all new and improved version of firstBASE.

Thanks to funding from the Museums Association Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, firstBASE has been completely re-vamped, bringing it into the 21st century and ensuring it remains a useful resource for all those working with social and local history collections.

The ethos of firstBASE remains: it holds records, weblinks and signposts to a wealth of resources (books, articles, websites, significant collections, museums and organisations) that can help museum professionals develop their

**interpretation**, and improve their **identification**, of social history objects.

The underlying purpose of firstBASE has always been to be your first port of call when given an exhibition title to research, or when a public enquiry or object identification presents itself. It shows the useful resources you could use, the key reference books you could read. firstBASE's USP is that the database is managed, and all resources on it are peer reviewed, by the firstBASE editorial committee. So, in contrast with only using search engines for research, you can be sure that the resources listed on firstBASE are worthwhile.

Thanks to the evaluation conducted over the past three years, the results of which have fed into the redesign, firstBASE is

now easier to:

- search
- update
- contribute and add to

In addition, much work has been done to expand the content on the site – not only in the amount of resources listed, but also so that the content is much more immediate. The new version has a great deal more downloadable resources and weblinks.

Find out more about the all new firstBASE by logging on to [www.shcg.org.uk/firstbase](http://www.shcg.org.uk/firstbase) or from the flier included with this copy of *SHCG News*, which provides a step by step overview.

Victoria Rogers

SHCG committee  
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## Connect with us

To find out more about SHCG, please visit our website [www.shcg.org.uk](http://www.shcg.org.uk) or connect with us via our Facebook page (search for "social history curators group") or Twitter @SHCG1



## SHCG e-mail list has a new home

In the last SHCG membership survey, the e-mail list came out as one of the most popular aspects of SHCG membership with its mix of engaging debate and intriguing identifications. So when our list provider recently told us that they were ceasing business in December, we knew we would need to find an alternative!

Those of you who were already subscribed should have been switched to the new list with (hopefully) little inconvenience. The new e-mail list is very similar to the

old one and apart from a change to the list e-mail address when you want to post a message (it's now [SHCG-LIST@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:SHCG-LIST@jiscmail.ac.uk)) you'll hardly notice the difference. The archive has also been transferred so if you want to search through older posts to check whether a topic has already been covered, you can

do so here: [www.jiscmail.ac.uk/SHCG-LIST](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/SHCG-LIST)

Recent posts to the e-mail list have included those relating to upcoming exhibitions, particularly requests for suggested resources on children's TV shows and 1930s Christmas shop displays. Conservation issues have also been covered with an interesting discussion surrounding glass fire extinguisher grenades and their potentially toxic contents. And of course there has been the usual smattering of mystery object identifications. One enquiry showed that several SHCG members lead an alternative life as budding handwriting analysts, helping to decipher a surname.

If you feel like you're missing out and would like to be added as a subscriber to the list, please e-mail [shcg-list-request@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:shcg-list-request@jiscmail.ac.uk) stating your name and type of membership.

Catherine Newley

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An example of a glass fire grenade, as discussed on the list  
Image courtesy of St Albans Museums

# The Panacea Museum

A new museum has just opened its doors in Bedford. The Panacea Museum is owned and run by the Panacea Charitable Trust, formerly known as the Panacea Society. The museum provides the public with first hand access to the history and practices of this former religious community which came into existence in 1919.



**The Panacea Museum**

Image courtesy of Panacea Charitable Trust

The Panacea Society believed in a line of modern prophets starting in the late 1700s up to the Society's founder, and 8th prophet, Mabel Barltrop, who became known as Octavia. The Society came about through Mabel's interest in getting Joanna Southcott's sealed box of prophecies opened during the First World War. The conditions for opening the box demand that it be opened by 24 Church of England bishops at a time of national danger. Over time a group evolved, mainly of women, all with this

shared purpose and from these beginnings grew the Panacea Society. They campaigned through leaflets and posters for the opening of the box and, after 1923, also used the box to advertise their panacea 'Healing for All' discovered by Octavia.

The Society flourished in Bedford until the 1950s and continued its campaign to open Joanna Southcott's box of prophecies long beyond that time with a diminishing membership. The healing 'panacea' that they offered only ceased in 2012 with the death of the last resident member.

The museum is housed in a large Victorian building within Bedford's Cultural Quarter – across the road from the Higgins Art Gallery & Museum and the John Bunyan Museum. This building was purchased by the Society in the 1930s and prepared for the bishops to open the box of prophecies. It has been completely refurbished with track lights for the exhibitions room and a lift installed. Two floors are given over to telling the story of the Society, and its historical context, through exhibitions and room settings. These include exhibition rooms which also set in historical context the line of modern prophets.

Outside there are gardens and other places to visit: a chapel with a further exhibition space, the 'wireless room' plus access to the founder's house, no 12 Albany Road.

The museum will be free to visit by booked appointment and will have regular opening days starting in Spring 2013.

Lucinda Middleton

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# New police museum

A new museum dedicated to the history of policing across the island of Ireland, from the foundation of formal uniformed policing in 1814, to the present day PSNI (Northern Ireland) and An Garda Síochána (Republic of Ireland), is to be built. Funded by the Treasury in Westminster, it will cost £5.5 million. The new museum will be built in the grounds of Police Headquarters at Knock in east Belfast, alongside the memorial to RUC officers who died in the line of duty.

A large collection of police artefacts, currently in storage due to a lack of space in the current museum – housed in one small room at Knock – will be put on display in the new museum - including uniforms, medals and documents relating to all aspects of policing.

An oral history project, which has to date recorded the experience of over 300 members of the RUC and the extended police family, will form an important part of the new museum's story.

It is expected that the new facility will be completed within the next two years and will be free to visit. The RUC George Cross Foundation, whose members, patrons and guides all work for free, will manage the museum.

Police Museum

[museum@psni.police.uk](mailto:museum@psni.police.uk)

# Sonic Wallpapers

The Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture (MoDA) is proud to announce its latest online exhibition, *Sonic Wallpapers*, an innovative and imaginative exploration of vintage wallpaper designs through sound. We asked sound artist, Dr Felicity Ford, 'What do wallpapers sound like?'. Felicity's response was to create audio pieces based on interviews and field recordings, inspired by wallpaper samples from MoDA's collections. In interviews people talked about homes they remembered from childhood; there is a dreamlike or fantasy dimension to some



MoDA Sonic Wallpapers - Image courtesy of MoDA

of their responses, ranging from "that would be great in a room with an indoor swimming pool" to "I would love to have a room just for making jam, and to put that paper in there". Felicity's unique sound pieces expand the way we think about wallpaper, drawing our ears to something which is generally discussed in visual terms. A book and accompanying CD containing

all the sound pieces is available from MoDA's online shop. Let us know what you think by tweeting #sonicwallpapers

[www.moda.mdx.ac.uk/exhibitions/sonic-wallpapers](http://www.moda.mdx.ac.uk/exhibitions/sonic-wallpapers)

MoDA

[moda@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:moda@mdx.ac.uk)

# North east sports at Discovery Museum

*Home & Away: North East Sports and the Olympics* celebrates the illustrious sporting history of Tyne & Wear, Northumberland, Durham and Teesside. Employing a variety of



Members of Darlington Quoits Club playing a game of quoits  
Image courtesy of Darlington Quoits Club

objects, images and forms of interpretation to match the scale of intrepid athletes that the region has produced, the exhibition features sports played and followed in North East England during the last two centuries. Team photos, trophies and original pieces of sports equipment are displayed alongside the stories of some of the local sports personalities who have competed at Olympic and Paralympic Games, both at home and away.

During the summer holidays, object handling sessions took place as part of the exhibition, giving visitors the chance to engage first hand with the North East's sporting heritage. Visitors of all ages were invited to feel the weight of a metal quoit, get an idea of the texture of a leather football, swing a Real Tennis racquet or play table-top quoits, while also sharing their sports experiences. Volunteers were on hand to answer questions and occasionally visitors knew

more about particular objects than the staff, which made for a rich exchange of knowledge between volunteers and visitors.

A popular feature of the exhibition is a 'jump-ometer', showing the length of Usain Bolt's stride when sprinting, to which visitors have compared their own stride length and lined up to have a go at long-jumping the same distance. I don't know if this was intended by the curators but it has nevertheless encouraged lively interactive engagement. Bringing together written, live and audio visual interpretation, *Home & Away* beautifully celebrates local pride, diversity, competition and the act of taking part. The exhibition continues at Newcastle's Discovery Museum until 14 January 2013.

Jack Ord

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# One Man's Vision

One of the UK's oldest charities, Henshaws Society for Blind People, is celebrated in a new multi sensory exhibition at Gallery Oldham, *Thomas Henshaw: One Man's Vision*, which traces the fascinating story behind the Society's 175 year history while also exploring the history of visual impairment.

The exhibition contains five key themes. **Thomas Henshaw** – his life and times, his will and the early days of Henshaws Asylum for the Blind. **Technology** – the development of technology for the education and training of visually impaired people. **Health** – the changes in causes of visual impairment and the scientific improvements in treating visually impaired people. **Society** – social attitudes towards visually impaired people and the rise of philanthropy in Britain over the past 200 years. **Art** – art makers from Henshaws Arts & Crafts Centre in Knaresborough have created original works for the exhibition, developed in response to the other four themes.

The exhibition also features two artistic responses to visual impairment, *I Dream in Colour* by Felix Elson (13:30) – an experimental documentary exploring how six people with different sight conditions perceive the world, and *Ways of Seeing: Blindness and Art* by Eric Fong (10:38) – a documentary showing how three visually impaired people experience an art exhibition, mediated through the words of a professional audio describer and the curator.

Visitors are invited to experiment with how they experience the exhibition, using their different senses to step into the shoes of the people Thomas Henshaw



**Thomas Henshaw**  
Image courtesy of Gallery Oldham

set out to help. The exhibition contains:

- An audio-tour with special audio-descriptions of all the exhibits
- Penfriend labelling (penfriend is a piece of portable hardware which is programmed to 'read' object captions by scanning barcoded labels)
- 3D tactile artworks
- Handling objects
- Document reader technology which allows visitors to magnify replicas of original documents relating to Henshaws' early history
- Oral histories and poetry available to listen to across the exhibition
- Tactile navigational signage
- Braille transcripts of all written information

- Text and audio scripted in clear language
- Interactive exhibits which will enable visitors to experience the most common visual impairments.

There is a red (one of the stronger colours seen by most visually impaired people) tactile/textured rail that meanders around the exhibition, acting as a guide for those with visual impairments as they navigate the gallery. In addition to audio clips playing poetry and sounds, there are smells too. Although an emphasis was placed on making the exhibition accessible for visually impaired people, the result is a heightened visiting experience for those that don't have a visual impairment.

*Thomas Henshaw: One Man's Vision* was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and developed with support from Henshaws volunteers and service users. The exhibition can be seen at Gallery Oldham until 5 January 2013, after which it will transfer in the spring of 2013 to the Thackeray Museum in Leeds and then on to Salford Museum and Art Gallery, and Southport Arts Centre.

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

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**Henshaws Asylum**



# Your Paintings

Your Paintings is a website which aims to show the entire UK national collection of oil paintings, the stories behind the paintings, and where to see them for real. It is made up of paintings from thousands of museums and other public institutions around the country.

There are an estimated 200,000 oil paintings in the UK's national collection. To give a sense of the scale of the collection, the National Gallery in London has around 2,300 oil paintings. So it's nearly one hundred times the size of that.

The collection includes works by some of the greatest painters of the last 700 years, as well as paintings by thousands of lesser known artists. It offers a remarkable insight into the history, landscape and culture of the United Kingdom.

<http://tagger.thepcf.org.uk/> will take you to Your Paintings Tagger. Without leaving your

desk you will be led on a digital tour of paintings around the country. You will be shown, at random, a sequence of paintings and asked to 'tag' them. All you need to do is to look closely at the painting and report what you see.

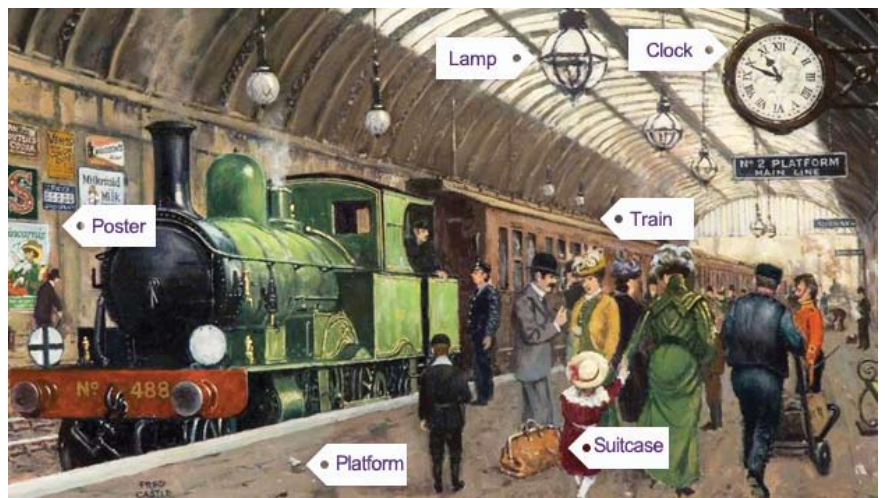
Tagging is easy and enormous fun. And don't worry, you don't need to be an art expert to tag – anyone can make a valuable contribution to this important

national project. Go on, have a go!

Your Paintings is a joint initiative between the BBC, the Public Catalogue Foundation and participating collections and museums from across the UK.

[www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/)

Your Paintings  
[yourpaintings@bbc.co.uk](mailto:yourpaintings@bbc.co.uk)



**Is this the Age of the Train? by Fred Castle, 1983**

Image courtesy of Your Paintings and Borough Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme

# Celebrating medals

The Library and Museum of Freemasonry in London has been awarded a grant of £72,100 by Arts Council England from the



**The Burnes medal**

Image courtesy of the Library and Museum of Freemasonry

Designation Development Fund to compile detailed catalogue records for its collection of nearly 2,000 art medals, which will then be the subject of a public programme of events to be called Medals Month towards the end of 2013. The grant also covers the cost of re-storing this medal collection in dedicated storage units and creating a medal display. The project creates temporary posts for two entry level professionals.

Diane Clements

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# Designation comes to Dudley

It has been a busy 2012 for the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley. Earlier this year, the Museum was delighted to receive Designated status, which recognised the quality and significance of its entire collections. The Museum has subsequently made a successful bid to the Designation Development Fund for £90,000. Part of the grant will fund a new and much needed collections management system, enhancing the management of the 67,000 objects in the Museum's collection and ultimately making them more accessible. The project, which is due for



completion in November 2013, will also see two temporary documentation assistants and a team of volunteers enhance the catalogue records for an important collection of local photographs.

In September, the Museum also published a new guide book, which is the most comprehensive ever produced for the open air site. The guide gives readers a detailed 73 page introduction to the Black Country, the historic buildings on site, and the satellite museum of the Locksmith's House in nearby Willenhall. It is fully illustrated with both modern day photographs of the open air site and images from the archives.

Jo Moody

Senior Curator  
Black Country Living Museum  
jo.moody@bclm.com

## Digital arts projects fund launched

A £7 million Digital R&D Fund to support projects which encourage collaboration and experimentation between the arts, digital technology providers and the research community has been launched following a pilot project last year. The money will be awarded for projects using digital technology to engage with audiences, widen access and explore new business models.

The three-year fund is run by Arts Council England (ACE), Nesta and the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Any organisations with an arts project based in England can apply including museums, but museums wanting to carry



Scanning a QR code at the Imperial War Museum

Image courtesy of IWM

out digital projects without an arts focus should apply to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) which is making free access to digital content a precondition of funding for all their projects.

Visit the Digital R&D website at [www.artsdigitalrnd.org.uk](http://www.artsdigitalrnd.org.uk) for further information.

Angela Pugh

Digital R&D Fund for the Arts  
[digital-rnd@nesta.org.uk](mailto:digital-rnd@nesta.org.uk)

## Mary Greg appeal

I am a PhD researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University, researching the dispersed collections of Mary Greg (née Hope), 1850-1949 [see *SHCG News* issue 66, Dec 2010]. Mary Greg was related by marriage to the Gregs of Quarry Bank Mill, although she and her husband Thomas Greg lived in Hertfordshire. In 1922, Mary Greg gave a large collection of domestic everyday objects including clothing, books, toys and amateur crafts to Manchester Art Gallery.

Initial research has shown that she also gave material to a wide number of museums throughout Britain, and I am trying to locate as much of it as possible. Archive material suggests there may be collections in the following locations:

V&A, British Museum, Canterbury, Liverpool, London Museum, Carisbrooke Castle Museum, Brighton, Fitzwilliam, Ipswich, Exeter, Brentford, Aylesbury, Manchester Museum, Edinburgh, Dorchester, Norwich (Stranger's Hall), Wellcome Historical Medical, Buxton, Winchester, Worcester,



Mary Greg by Hubert Herkomer, about 1885

Image courtesy of Manchester City Galleries

Letchworth, West Highland Museum, Fort William and the Herts Institute of Agriculture.

Do you have any objects in your collections that were donated by Mary Greg? In Manchester, her collection is categorised as decorative art, although it could just as easily be classified as social history. She was also a prolific letter writer and there is a considerable archive of correspondence on file at Manchester.

Please contact me if your museum has any material relating to Mary Greg.

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

Liz Mitchell

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# Briony Goes to the Museum: Social History and Museum Stereotypes

**In 2001-2002, I jointly led an audience development and contemporary collecting project whilst working as Assistant Keeper for Wakefield Museums and Arts. Titled Right Here, Right Now, we worked with a diverse range of community groups including Brownies, members of a local hockey club and a group of elderly people who met weekly for keep fit. Each group nominated objects to add to the museum's permanent collection to reflect their current life, while also taking part in workshops to understand how a museum works and to accession their objects. The project ended with a temporary exhibition which showcased their nominations. Nothing particularly revolutionary, and nothing particularly unusual came out of their choices.**

However, the project has remained in my thoughts ever since, because of the results that came out of the first workshop that we ran with each group. We wrote the word "museum" on the centre of a flip chart, and asked the group to brainstorm associated words. Every single group, from the seven years olds to the 87 year olds, came up with the old favourites – brown, dusty, quiet, fossils, "don't touch", statues, Egypt... And yet, when we asked them which museums that they had visited, they talked in excited tones about the Eureka Children's Museum

and its interactive exhibits, the beautiful dresses at the V&A, and the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester. What has stayed with me is the seemingly inexplicable mismatch between the stereotypes that they all held in their heads and the real experiences that they had of interactive, lively, "do touch" museums.

This was particularly striking for the younger age groups who had had less time to build up the stereotype from experience, and experienced more visits to real interactive museums that did not fit the stereotype. And now as a mother, I continue to ponder where the museum stereotype is coming from, and how it is being reinforced? These are only personal thoughts, but I think they are worth sharing for the impact that they surely have on all of our visitors and therefore all of our public work.

If you begin to investigate museums in popular culture, particularly that aimed at children, the stereotypical images continue. Charlie and Lola take their fossils to a "white cube" museum with single geological exhibits in a

*"the tweed-wearing bespectacled grey-haired curator is completely at odds with the predominantly female make-up of the current museum profession"*

series of cases. You can buy a Peppa Pig Museum Deluxe (no less) playset which features two dinosaurs, a playground (?) and a museum building which has a portico, columns and a relief above the door. Meanwhile the Bob the Builder museum playset has a similar building, a male curator wearing a jacket and tie, and a large amphora as its prime exhibit.

You might argue that the fact that museum playsets exist at all is a good thing, and I would



**Peppa Pig Museum Deluxe playset**  
Image courtesy of Character Group PLC

agree. However, there are also a wide range of books written for children that take place in museums, explored in 2010 by the Kids in Museums campaign. The museums in children's books are nearly always art galleries (visited by Miffy the rabbit, for example) or full of dinosaurs (as visited by Maisie the mouse). *The Museum's Secret* by Henry Chancellor (2009) looks like a really exciting read, but its tag line, "An irresistible adventure in a world full of dust, insects, magic potions, missing jewels and stuffed animals" makes my point.

You can even buy a game for your Wii called *Raving Rabbits Travel in Time* set in a museum that is populated by Ancient Egyptians, Cavemen, Knights, Romans, Vikings and statues. Not perhaps a million miles away from the popular *Night at the Museum* films which are packed full of dioramas, dinosaurs, Egyptians, stuffed animals and the Great and the Good from American history. *The Simpsons*, clearly in its usual satirical vein, has featured five museums to date, including the Palace of Fine Arts, the Stamp Museum and the Knowledgeum Science Centre. The Mount Swartzwelder Historic Cider Mill seems to slightly buck the stereotypical trend.



**Bob the Builder museum playset**  
Image courtesy of Character Group PLC



**Museum road sign featuring a portico** - Image courtesy of Adam Bell

Clearly the use and re-use of the neo-classical dinosaur-filled museum has currency because, like every stereotype, it instantly means something to people, but continuing to use it reinforces the stereotype. As we all know, the brown sign for a generic museum is a neo-classical building. Nothing wrong with that you might say, as many museums do have neo-classical frontages. The brown sign is a short-cut to an understanding of what the visitor might expect, but I know for a fact from nine years as Keeper of a museum set within a 1970s office block, that it doesn't always help with navigation or expectations of an actual visit! Similarly, the tweed-wearing bespectacled grey-haired curator is completely

at odds with the predominantly female make-up of the current museum profession, or at least the members of staff whom the visitor is most likely to encounter.

So does it matter? I would say that the fact that social history museums appear to be completely absent from the stereotype portrayed in popular culture should at least exercise our thoughts. Encouraging new visitors through our doors, promoting contemporary (or historical) exhibitions, or inducing people to donate to our collections requires them to engage with what we do at some level. A clever marketing campaign, or audience development programme, might be able to knock down the stereotype to our advantage, but if the person we are trying to connect with is expecting an elderly man to preach to them about fossils and instead meets a woman in her 20s who wants to discuss 1980s shopping centres, there is a greater gap to close before the communication gets meaningful. And if a three year old only wants to visit a museum that has dinosaurs in it, because that's what Woolly and Tig did on Cbeebies last night, our work as social history curators is just that little bit harder. What do you think?

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# On Yer Bike: Cycle Storage in Museums

The Post Office (and later Royal Mail Group) have utilised cycles of various types for the delivery of letters, parcels and telegrams since the late nineteenth century. For many years, Royal Mail operated one of the largest cycle fleets in existence, totalling 36,000 in 2006. Not only bicycles, but tricycles were also used in large numbers, enabling postmen to deliver a higher weight and volume of items more easily. There was even a short-lived trial with pentacycles in 1882. Initially postmen used their own bicycles to deliver mail and were paid an allowance for their maintenance. By 1929 a standard issue GPO cycle was adopted and this design remained largely unchanged until 1992. The use of bicycles began to be increasingly phased out in 2010, despite a brief and final period of experimentation with electric cycles.

To represent this aspect of postal history, The British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) hold some 30 cycles in their collection with various numbers of wheels and in varied condition. Many of these have been researched and exhibited over the years, though for much of their time they remain in storage at the museum's large object store in Essex.

As with many other social history and transport collections, the long



Freestanding cycle storage including bicycles, two tricycles, and an electric bicycle at the BPMA store.

Image courtesy of BPMA

term storage of cycles presents a number of challenges. A key factor is the weight of the item; this can make storage at height impractical or necessitate more than one person to manoeuvre. The combination of the height and/or angle of the seat, handle bars with various levers, cables, horns, bells, and porous or missing tyres and tubes that are prone to hardening with age prevent a 'one-size-fits-all' solution. Differing numbers and configurations of wheels also add to the problem. Due to the difficulty in providing sympathetic storage, there is an increased risk to the object, both through pressure or abrasion and the handling of often unbalanced, unwieldy objects that frequently seem to have a mind of their own!

When the BPMA moved their entire large object collection to the current facility a decade ago, curators approached the British Cycling Museum, Camelford, as to

how their collection of some 400 cycles was stored (the Museum subsequently closed in 2009). The great majority were permanently on display, utilising the stand that came with the cycle or a variety of bespoke metal and wooden axle and frame stands. Some were simply on raised shelves and leant against a wall.

It was difficult to provide large bespoke stands at the BPMA store due to time constraints and the physical limitations of the available space; frequent problems for any institution. Instead, large mobile racking was utilised which ensured all-round protection to the objects and lessened the risk of knocks and toppling. Cycle stands or multiple unit cycle racks were also employed. Where appropriate, some cycles were stood 'on their head' so that no damage could occur to levers or ancillaries. This also removed weight from wheels and tyres. However, moving

the item into position remains a task that frequently entails two people. Another consideration is the reduction in visibility and access for visitors on the popular store tours held throughout the year. To address this issue, representative examples from the collection are stored outside of the mobile racking, using frame mounted cycle stands or small, commercially available axle stands.

There also remains the responsibility to protect not only the object, but also visitors as unstable cycles are easily knocked over. Most available solutions are more appropriate to display than long term storage. These include the display case (an expensive option, particularly for the larger collection), displays mounted at height (for instance the bicycle 'velodrome' at Glasgow's Riverside Museum), stapling to a wall or bracket (an effective but expensive bespoke option) or tiered racking (again expensive, with a potentially 'industrial' appearance, but an effective use of space -for example 'Cyclopaedia' at Coventry Transport Museum).

Recently, curators at the BPMA decided to attempt to review their

cycle storage via an extension of the initial benchmarking. Glenn Morgan, a long term BPMA volunteer was tasked with the role of approaching a small, select number of social and transport collections within the heritage sector and producing a report. Appropriate collections were identified primarily via the Museum and Galleries Handbook. This was combined with web research and in-house curatorial knowledge. The response was varied; some institutions declined to respond, a minority held no cycle collection of significance, others simply utilised the stands on the object. Some collections had simply stacked cycles or hung them from a scaffold tube through their frame, a decision often made in resignation due to a lack of funds.

Of the major collections, the National Cycle Collection at Llandrindod Wells advised that their storage of bicycles did not differ greatly from the BPMA. The Museum of London had chosen to hang the bicycles on the walls to provide both a point of interest in the stores as well as freeing up aisle space. This was achieved using commercial bicycle hangers and hooks if additional support was required. Templates for



**Wall mounted storage using wall brackets at M Shed's object store.**  
Image courtesy of BPMA

hanging were created for each individual bicycle. The heaviest items were hung close to ground level for additional safety and custom-made mounts were created for items which did not fit on the hangers. While this method takes time and effort to achieve, the space saved was deemed worthwhile and resulted in favourable public feedback on the visual effect. Bristol's M Shed also utilises a similar method for the majority of the cycle collection. In this case brackets were made and fitted by M Shed volunteers.

Although not exhaustive, the report into cycle storage concluded that the BPMA was utilising storage methods similar to those adopted by other institutions with social and transport collections and in line with current best practice. Should the BPMA collection subsequently move to alternative premises where a greater wall space is provided, the option of wall hanging shall be explored more thoroughly.



**Multiple cycle storage using the large mobile racking system at the BPMA store.**  
Image courtesy of BPMA

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# Sporting Harrogate District: A Touring Exhibition Project

During this year of sporting excitement, fuelled by the London Olympic and Paralympic Games, Harrogate Museums and Arts worked with local sports clubs to produce a sport themed touring exhibition. *Sporting Harrogate District* presented audio extracts of stories captured during interviews with members of these clubs, reaching new audiences in the community venues in which it was exhibited. The project was the first of its kind for the museum and has opened the door for future community exhibition work.

Over the course of six weeks I interviewed a number of people from each of the seven sports clubs I arranged to work with. The clubs involved in the project were tennis, swimming, rugby, hockey, sailing and two cricket clubs. They were approached because they represented a range of different sports from across the museum's district.

The aim of the interview process was to find stories about the history and present day experience of the clubs from the project participants, which ranged from children to retired club members. The interviews were recorded on a digital device and all the participants signed a consent agreement, allowing excerpts to feature in the exhibition as well as the depositing of the whole recording in a sound archive.

The interviews worked well, although I had to adapt to each participant's approach to



Harrogate Cricket Club 1st team, 1920 - Image courtesy of Harrogate Cricket Club

the interview process. Some interviewees were happy just to talk and reminisce, which was great and every so often I put another question to them to ensure that there was focus on the areas I was seeking information on. In contrast, often in the case of the younger participants, more prompting was required to try and draw out extended answers.

The outcome of the process was some very interesting stories. These included: a thorough outline of a club's chronology; reminiscence of a favourite match or season; the social side of sports club membership and a detailed and humorous recollection of the day a sailing club member got lost on the lake in the fog!

At the end of the interview stage, I listened to all the recordings and selected extracts to represent each club, ensuring that I also

fairly represented both genders and all the age groups who had taken part. I was careful to manage expectations from the start, and all the interviewees knew that not everyone's contributions would be used in the final exhibition. Following the selection of extracts I carried out a rough edit of the chosen stories, before sending them to a professional editing company to produce the finished pieces for exhibition.

The costs for the audio listening station in the exhibition needed to be kept as low as possible. Therefore, rather than purchase a ready made listening post, we bought a digital audio player device with a memory card to store the recordings on and separate headsets and selection buttons. We also asked a carpenter to make a plinth to house the equipment, which would be resilient enough to be moved

around frequently and left in venues unattended. I then wired all of the buttons and the two headsets into the audio player and had a panel designed to fit on top of the plinth and hold the buttons, giving details of each of the twelve audio extracts for selection.

The audio accounts were supported in the exhibition by two pull-up banners. These gave a brief textual history of each of the sports clubs. We deliberately kept the panel text light, as we did not want to detract from the audio element and, due to the nature of the exhibition venues, it was anticipated that visitors would not want to stop for a long time and read lots of information. The sports clubs also provided historic and modern images from their collections, which we were able to scan and include on the banners.

As a thank you for their contributions, everyone involved in the project was invited to a launch event, where they could have a first look at (and listen to) the finished exhibition before it began its tour. Local press were also

The sites that the exhibition was shown at were sports centres, community centres, the council office reception and a library. These venues were used due to the fact that they are, for the most part, not traditional locations for museum exhibitions and the intention was that the exhibition should reach a new, non-traditional audience.

The exhibition project has been received well by both visitors and the sports club members that contributed to it. Visitor feedback comments have included “very interesting, brought back memories” and “very good, loved the swimming”. Feedback from sports club members was gathered through an evaluation survey I sent to them. Their comments include “the whole process was enjoyable, from researching the history to taking part in the presentations” and that a positive outcome was the fact the project “made club members, other sports clubs and the general public aware of the club’s history”. Another thing that came out of the feedback survey was that clubs

ourselves and staff at the sites could not attend the exhibition continuously while they had their own jobs to do. So, even though venue staff were able to let us know that they saw the exhibition being used, we have no recorded statistics for this.

Also, while positive comments were entered in the visitors’ book and the feedback questionnaires left with the exhibition, I would like to have received more written feedback from visitors than we did. I think this is perhaps due to the nature of the venues. Visitors were generally there for another purpose and, while they took the time to use the exhibition, not everyone then took the extra time to give their feedback. I would, therefore, need to look at using a different system for requesting and recording feedback if I were to do a similar project again.

Aside from this, the project has been very successful. During the interviews an intriguing answer I was given a number of times was, “What goes on tour stays on tour”. However, in the case of this touring exhibition, I am happy to say that the positive results will extend beyond the tour itself. We have created an archive of recorded information about each of the seven sports clubs, both the museum and the club members themselves have been able to find out a lot more about the history of the clubs and the sports and we have reached new audiences in new venues.

To any other museums thinking about working on a community based oral history project, I would say that it is definitely something worth doing. The audio interviews were a great way of both recording and presenting information, and working with different groups in the community resulted in enjoyable and productive working relationships that could well extend into future projects.



**Ripon Sailing Club's old clubhouse at Langthorpe.**

Image courtesy of Ripon Sailing Club

invited to the launch event to see the exhibition and speak to the participants, which led to some very good publicity for the project and the clubs themselves. One of the sports club members and I also took part in a live interview on Radio York to promote the exhibition.

The exhibition began its six month tour around community venues in the district in April.

would be interested in working with the museum again on another project. It is a great outcome to have created links for future joint work with sports clubs in the district.

Something that was difficult to achieve with this exhibition was the accurate recording of the numbers of people that visited it. As it was located off site, we were not able to monitor numbers

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# Do We Always Get it Right? Interpreting Our Social History Collections

SHCG Annual Conference 2012, Cardiff and Bristol

## *Review Part I*

**The SHCG conference opened in the Cardiff Story Museum, with registration and a lovely selection of pastries from 10am. What was instantly apparent was the friendliness of the delegates. I do not think I saw anyone standing on their own, every single person was chatting to someone about everything from the impact of the museum cuts on the sector, to the weather and their families. It was a relaxed and welcoming start to a day which would turn out to be insightful, fun and.... wet.**

After a short introduction from Victoria Rogers, SHCG committee member and Museum Officer of the Cardiff Story, the conference kicked off. It started with a lively talk from Zelda Baveystock, who spoke about her time as Acting Director for the Museum of Liverpool. Elaborating on the title of her talk "Where are the dinosaurs?", we learnt that it was in fact a quote from a dishevelled mother, overheard by Zelda in the Museum of Liverpool on the day it opened (the unexpurgated version actually contained a lot more colourful language!). Zelda claimed it really made her think... 'What do people really expect from a history museum?'. The talk revolved around Zelda's analysis of the comments book, in which she found that between phases 1 and 2 of the museum development, positive



**Alexia Clark**  
Image courtesy of Michael Terwey

comments jumped from 51% to 76%. There was of course no answer for Zelda's question, 'What do people really expect from a history museum?', but she made the valid observation that the negative comments are often well thought out because something in particular has annoyed the visitor, and in contrast the positive comments tend to be ones of general enjoyment and leave no space for proper analysis.

The next talk was by Ciara Canning, who worked for Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service. Ciara gave an inspiring and heartfelt talk on the work she had undertaken challenging people's perceptions of homelessness. Ciara took us through the steps of the Esmée Fairbairn funded project which involved taking the interpretation outside the museum and into the streets, the place where she so rightly said, homeless people

tend to be the most invisible. To me, Ciara's work was an excellent example of a community project which inspired the imagination of its participants. Sited outside Hollytrees Museum, the 'Bedsit Garden' installation resulted in some hilarious ideas such as growing leeks in toilets, marigolds in the sink, creating a bed of roses and a couch of potatoes! An independent evaluation of the project followed, though due to financial constraints it was done some time after the project ended and provided more of a summary than an in depth evaluation of the benefits it had on individuals.

The third talk of the morning was by Alexia Clark and Kate Andrew from Herefordshire Heritage Service. The talk was based around their work with blind and visually impaired museums users, which has been a focus of their service since 1998. Kate began by talking about the service and how they had been funded. What the service has done for visually impaired visitors is fantastic, but Alexia admitted herself that a lot of money has been spent and that technology goes defunct quite quickly. I was interested to hear that both Alexia and Kate agreed that for the smaller museum, investing in staff training is the best use of money. This talk provided delegates with an



**Delegates on day one**  
Image courtesy of Michael Terwey



excellent overview of what was available for museums, but left me worried that other visitors in Hereford may have been a bit left out. Despite that, an impressive amount of work had been done for a quite often poorly catered for museum audience.

The morning session finished, having touched upon evaluation of a large phased museum development, an impressive community exploration project and an example of a museum investing a lot in a sometimes ignored audience. Delegates enjoyed more pastries and tea before starting the afternoon session with a talk from Victoria Rogers. Victoria explained how the Cardiff Story started their new museum with no baggage and could ensure that the Cardiff community had a very tangible and practical involvement in it from the start. The museum was able to start as it meant to go on and create relationships for the long term, as there was no previous museum or museum audience in Cardiff to grow from. We were then invited to explore the museum and come back for questions before lunch. From what I can gather, people became too engrossed in the museum to come back and ask questions, so we went straight to lunch.



**Voting in the debate**

Image courtesy of Michael Terwey



**Cardiff in Context gallery, Cardiff Story Museum**

© Redman Design

*"Sited outside Hollytrees Museum, the 'Bedsit Garden' installation resulted in some hilarious ideas such as growing leeks in toilets, marigolds in the sink, creating a bed of roses and a couch of potatoes!"*

After lunch came the debate about visitors being the new curators. Both sides gave interesting views on the idea and a separate debate over the didactic nature of the museum began, however, the debate eventually came to an end with three people agreeing that visitors should be the new curators and everyone else disagreeing completely. This marked the end of the first day of the conference and the start of AGM which was followed by the wet part of the day...

Bill Jones, a well known Cardiff historian, was booked to lead a walking tour of the city's infamous 'Tiger Bay' docklands area, however, the weather intervened. In true Welsh fashion it rained,

it was cold and umbrellas were blown inside out. Despite this, Bill soldiered on and gave a fascinating insight to the buildings and grandeur of the docks area, now a ghost of what it used to be.

By eight o'clock everyone from the tour was in thorough need of warming up, drying out and of course food and wine. A lovely Welsh meal was had at Ffresh and a chance for delegates to relax, chat about the day and plan day two at Bristol's M Shed.

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## Review Part II

On day two of the conference we arrived in Bristol to a lovely sunny morning. Hannah Crowdy from National Museums Northern Ireland kicked off with some reflections on interpretation techniques. She considered whether social history curators are leading the field or falling behind, when compared with colleagues in other disciplines. She suggested that one area in which we are setting an example for others is in the use of social media for interpretation rather than simply for marketing. The ground-breaking work being done at the Imperial War Museum is a good example of this (find out more on their blog at <http://blogs.iwm.org.uk/social-interpretation/>). Crowdy sounded a note of caution, however, questioning our assumption that visitors want to contribute their own comments and opinions – have we established that this is the case?

Highlighting an area in which we need to up our game, Crowdy asked 'Where are the social history blockbuster exhibitions?' She charged the discipline with focusing on the small, local scale when we could be addressing the broader human

experience. While this may be true of temporary exhibitions, I would argue that several of the permanent galleries which have drawn hundreds of thousands of visitors over the last decade owe much of their popularity to their social history emphasis. The Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool and the Galleries of Modern London at the Museum of London meet Crowdy's definition of blockbuster exhibitions as those which 'touch a nerve and capture the imagination,' through their focus on the stories of ordinary people and the power of personal testimony. Perhaps the question is how we can harness the impact of such displays in smaller exhibitions without the time and budget behind a major redisplay.

Next, Jenny Broadbent from Rochdale Pioneers Museum considered the changes in interpretation techniques over the last 25 years, using three social history museums as case studies. She charted a reduction in the amount of text, the inclusion of different voices and the development of interactives which cater to different learning styles. Looking to the future, Broadbent suggested that curators and exhibition designers are still too focused on text panels and need

*"permanent galleries are a hard copy Encyclopaedia Britannica, out of date the moment it is published, when we actually want an element of Wikipedia, being constantly updated"*

to think more creatively about spaces and consider the overall visitor experience.

There followed an un-conference style session on the direction we should take in interpreting social history collections over the next five to ten years, chaired by Maurice Davies. This was perhaps less successful than might have been hoped as the crush of chairs made sustaining a conversation or debate difficult. However, some interesting points were raised.

Catherine Littlejohns highlighted M Shed's success with inviting comments from visitors, which are displayed in the galleries with very little editing. Lots of interesting comments have been left, the familiar technology seemingly giving people the confidence to contribute. In contrast, Zelda Baveystock questioned the legitimacy of this desire to record visitors' responses and the memories evoked by displays. Why is it not sufficient for people to have stimulating conversations during their visit, why are we trying to capture and keep their memories?

Maurice Davies, drawing on the Museums Association's Museums 2020 consultation, asked whether permanent galleries are not a poor vehicle for a lot of the



**M Shed, Bristol**  
© Quintin Lake Photography



**Maurice Davies chairing a session** - Image courtesy of Michael Terwey

things museums aim to do with collections. They require years of work and a large budget, and then quickly need changing. Ciara Canning proposed the useful metaphor that permanent galleries are a hard copy Encyclopaedia Britannica, out of date the moment it is published, when we actually want an element of Wikipedia, being constantly updated. It would be interesting to analyse the extent to which the galleries I earlier identified as 'blockbuster exhibitions' have been updated – how have these managed to continue to draw crowds over several years?



**Delegates on day two**  
Image courtesy of Michael Terwey

After coffee, Victoria Rogers and Steph Mastoris introduced the new version of firstBASE, an online searchable database of resources for interpretation and identification of social history collections. The site looks impressive and as though it will make research easier and more reliable. Its effectiveness will depend on how much it is used, so we should all try to make a habit of using this as our first port of call for research, and updating it with any interesting resources we come across.

After an excellent lunch and further discussion of the MA's Museums 2020 consultation, I opted for a tour of M Shed. Catherine Littlejohns provided an interesting insight into the ways in which curators chose to handle sensitive subjects and the unexpected reactions of visitors – far greater objection to the display of tobacco than of human remains!

My second workshop session was led by Aileen Strachan and Lyndsey McKay of St Mungo's Museum in Glasgow. We had an interesting discussion on how and to what extent to record, preserve and use the outputs of collaborative interpretation projects conducted with community groups.

Following this, Rebecca Lodge of Burgh House and Hampstead Museum discussed what she has learnt about effective

interpretation through creating small temporary exhibitions. She advised choosing themes which draw on the strengths of the collection, highlighted the greater impact of displays which correspond with local or national events, and advocated evaluating exhibitions for continual improvement.

In the last session, Steph Gillett discussed the ongoing major refurbishment of West Berkshire Museum. This is a very innovative plan, answering Jenny Broadbent's call for the creative use of space and Maurice Davies' criticisms of permanent galleries. All spaces will be flexible, with a planned 20 to 25% annual change of displays, and interpretation will be themed around visitors' motivations. I hope that Steph will return to Conference to share visitors' responses.

Overall, I very much enjoyed my first SHCG conference. It was a pleasure to be among like-minded people doing fascinating work, and to be made to feel so welcome. I went away with lots of new ideas and feeling inspired by the innovative work being carried out. I am also very pleased to have been elected to the SHCG committee, and look forward to my first year as Journal Editor.

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# Medical Objects in Social History Collections

## Part I

**Objects associated with medicine and health care are often found in social history collections. With such a range of types and materials, from bottles and jars of unknown substances to nasty looking surgical instruments, it is easy to understand why these objects can be seen as problematic.**

In a previous role, as Keeper of Community History for St Albans Museums, I undertook a documentation project on around 150 hitherto undocumented objects associated with medicine and health. Through this project I discovered a range of resources and became fascinated with these objects, which provide a unique insight into both local history and the history of medicine.

So, here is the first instalment of my medical object 'Top Ten'. It's not based on any quantitative research, purely my own observations as a generalist. The objects are pretty much all nineteenth century, and are things that you are likely to come across when working with a social history collection, although you will inevitably encounter older and rarer objects, too.

I have included reference to some further reading and online resources and there is a great deal of expertise in specialist museums across the UK. The UK Medical Collections Group is a helpful and active Subject Specialist Network. There are also many publications on the history of medicine, the most comprehensive (and weighty) is Roy Porter's *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (Fontana Press, 1999).

### 1. Bleeding equipment

Bleeding was used as a cure for thousands of years. It persisted through changing ideas about the causes of disease and continued well into the nineteenth century. Many methods were used so there are various objects associated with the practice including: storage jars for live leeches; lancets (small blades for making an incision into a vein); bleeding bowls to catch the blood and measure the amount; scarificators (mechanical tools for making several small shallow cuts at once); spherical glass cups which create a vacuum when heated and applied over the wounds; and mechanical leeches, which act like a syringe to draw blood from an incision. Needless to say some of these objects present a sharp hazard!



**Set of folding lancets with tortoiseshell handles and a silver case, about 1800**

Image courtesy of Thackray Museum, Leeds

Dating can be difficult as simple designs often stay the same for centuries. However, tools may have a hallmark or maker's mark which might help to identify them further and materials and decoration can also give some idea of date.

### 2. Nelson Inhaler

The Nelson Inhaler was made by S Maw & Son from 1865 and was incredibly popular. This example dates from 1870-1901 when John Thompson was a partner in the firm.

Inhalation therapy for respiratory illness has a long history. It is a fast and efficient way to get a drug into the lungs. This steam inhaler was designed to be filled with a mixture of boiling water and one of several accepted treatments of the period. The medicated steam was then inhaled through a glass tube which is missing from this image (a large cork with a glass tube mouthpiece would have been placed in the top once the inhaler was full). The spout at the side meant that the air could flow through and the vapours could be effectively inhaled. In the Victorian period a session of inhalation therapy could be administered by a pharmacist in a shop, and was also widely practised at home for a variety of ailments that could affect the respiratory system. There are resources on various subjects available online from collectors and enthusiasts, sometimes health professionals with an interest in the history of their area of specialism. For example, for further reading on the history of inhalation therapy see Mark Sanders' *Inhalation Therapy: An Historical Review* in the Primary Care Respiratory Journal ([www.thepcrj.org](http://www.thepcrj.org)), and Mark Sanders' website of associated objects at: [www.inhalatorium.com](http://www.inhalatorium.com)



**Dr Nelson's Inhaler (incomplete), post 1870**

Image courtesy of St Albans Museums

### 3. Monaural stethoscope

Before 1800 a doctor might make a diagnosis without touching the patient. At most, the patient's urine would be examined. The nineteenth century is known as the period of diagnostic medicine. Doctors were developing new means of examining and diagnosing patients, and drawing on the similarities in symptoms to understand disease. The stethoscope was invented in 1816 by René Laennec (1781-1826) and discovered to be an effective form of auscultation (listening



#### Monaural Stethoscope

Image courtesy of St Albans Museums

to a patient's body sounds). The original Laennec stethoscopes are rare. They are monaural devices (designed to be used with one ear), cylindrical turned wood with a removable conical end piece. Later monaural stethoscopes are more common and can be made from various materials; this one has a brass shaft and tortoiseshell ends. The more familiar binaural stethoscopes were gradually developed and replaced monaural types from the 1850s onwards. The monaural form was retained for obstetric examination.

### 4. Laryngoscope

The Laryngoscope was another addition to a growing range of diagnostic tools developed during the 1800s. It is popularly attributed to Manuel Garcia (1805-1906), a singer and voice coach who used mirrors and natural light to view his own larynx (voice box) in 1854. There had, however,



#### Laryngoscope, later nineteenth century

Image courtesy of St Albans Museums

been previous attempts to view the larynx and from the mid 1800s specialists were investigating ways to use sets of mirrors and various light sources. This particular laryngoscope consists of an adjustable headband, a large mirror and several small dental mirrors. The larger mirror attaches to the headband and is worn by the physician, reflecting what light is available on to the subject. The smaller mirrors enable an indirect view of the larynx. Laryngoscopes became more elaborate during the later 1800s and early 1900s.

### 5. Vapo-Cresolene lamp

In the late nineteenth century the germ theory of disease was generally accepted by the medical profession and public alike. Since Joseph Lister's (1827-1912) initial experiments with antiseptics in the 1860s, many domestic antiseptic diffusers had become available.



#### Vapo-Cresolene lamp and container, early twentieth century

Image courtesy of Museum of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society

The Vapo-Cresolene lamp was produced from 1875 (the early lamp design was the same as this example) and became the most common brand, manufactured into the 1950s. Early packaging specifically cites germ theory and the product was recommended for diphtheria, whooping cough and bronchitis, common illnesses until well into the twentieth century. The bowl at the top was filled with Vapo-Cresolene liquid and the lamp underneath was filled with paraffin and lit. Instructions were to leave the lamp burning at a patient's bedside all night. The warming fumes would penetrate the room, breathed in by the patient as a form of inhalation therapy and also, it was claimed, disinfect the space. The main ingredient in Vapo-Cresolene was Cresol, a derivative of coal tar.

Various online resources for material culture associated with medicine and healthcare:

Royal Pharmaceutical Society Museum: [www.rpharms.com/museum](http://www.rpharms.com/museum)

Science Museum history of medicine webpages: [www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife](http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife)

Wellcome Library and Wellcome Images: [www.wellcome.ac.uk](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk)

UK Medical Collections Group

SSN: [www.thackraymuseum.org/ukmcg](http://www.thackraymuseum.org/ukmcg)

A website for all London medical museums: [www.medicalmuseums.org](http://www.medicalmuseums.org)

I would like to express my warmest thanks to Alan Humphries at the Thackray Museum and Catherine Newley at St Albans Museums, for their kind assistance in the preparation of this article. Look out for part II in the next issue of *SHCG News*...

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# My Best Wishes by Post

## Xmas greetings postcard Dec 1907

It is fitting that this yuletide greeting should feature a pillar box, as it was the introduction of the Uniform Penny Post in 1840 which was to herald the advent of the Christmas card. Instead of the previous system, which charged 4d for delivery within 15 miles, 5d within 20 miles, 6d within 30 miles, 7d within 50 miles, 8d within 80 miles and 1s within 300 miles, with double rate applicable if an envelope was used, the Uniform Penny Post established a standard rate of just 1d per half ounce, for carriage and delivery between any two places in the British Isles.

The very first Christmas card was designed in 1843 by John Calcott Horsley. A hand coloured lithograph, fewer than 1,000 copies of the card were sold at 1s each. The central image of the world's first xmas card depicted a happy family group, raising their glasses for a toast. The spirit of Christmas charity was also represented, by images depicting the feeding and clothing of the poor.

Other privately printed cards followed in quick succession and by the early 1860s Messrs Goodall, playing card manufacturers of Camden Town, were turning out commercial Christmas cards on an industrial scale. Like many fashions of the Victorian era, the personal approval of the Queen guaranteed success. *Home Chat* recorded of the Queen in 1895, "Not only does she procure at great expense cards for all her royal relatives – and we know how numerous they are – but she buys not less than thousands to send to her neighbours at Windsor and Osborne".

The emergence and popularity of the Christmas card was certainly a by product of affordable postal communication, but it was the development of new colour



Image courtesy of Andrew Morley

printing processes by George Baxter and his followers that would see the phenomenon flourish.

The pillar box depicted on this card, sent to Ivy Pratt at The Orphanage, Spring Bank, Hull, is based on the classic Victorian Penfold. Although the cypher illustrated is that of Edward VII, only New Zealand Penfolds bear that cypher, all others displaying the VR cypher of Queen Victoria.

### Recommended reading:

*Christmas Cards* by Michelle Higgs, 1999  
*Greetings from Christmas Past* by Bevis Hillier, 1982  
*The History of the Christmas Card* by George Buday, 1954

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# SHCG Committee 2012-13



1852



1853



1854



1855



1856



1856



1856



1857



1857



1857



1863



1872



1879



1887



1904

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