



SHCG NEWS

SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

Issue 76 May 2016

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The Only Way Is Ethics!

SHCG Conference 2016

Folklore in Museums

Traditions and Beliefs

Leeds Queer Stories

LGBT*Q Social History



Welcome...

...to a new year for the Social History Curators Group and another issue of SHCG News.

In the following pages, you can hear about two interesting projects in Leeds: a successful new exhibition

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Front cover image
Leeds Queer Stories A display about local LGBT*Q Social History.

'Crime and Punishment' at Abbey House Museum and 'Leeds Queer Stories' at the City museum, where they are leading the way in social media.

We also find out more about the new Code of Ethics, voted in at the Museum Association's conference in 2015: for me, it really sums up what museums, and in particular, social history, is all about: tackling issues such as the public role of museums and our responsibility to create inspirational, safe spaces to examine our joint and varied histories.

As museum practitioners we make ethical decisions every day, whether it's around conservation, rationalisation, contemporary collecting, charging entry, workforce and training, diversity, censorship, donations, disposal or a multitude of other concerns. This year SHCG's conference - The Only Way is Ethics! - will share and discuss how we have been responding to these

ethical challenges in responsive and engaging ways.

SHCG conference is always a fun and engaging experience but it also gives us a chance to share and discuss our successes, fears and, most importantly, hopes. SHCG is your community and it relies on the input, dedication and inspiration of its members, in particular our past and present Trustees. We hear from some of them towards the end of this issue and hope that some of you avid readers might feel inspired to become trustees yourself and continue to support and nurture this community.

Read on to find out more...

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Re-imagining Challenging History

The second Challenging History Conference will be hosted by Cardiff University and Amguedda Cymru - National Museum Wales, 29-30 June 2016. The conference is sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council World War One Engagement Centre: Voices of War and Peace.

The conference will include keynotes, workshops, tours and performances in some surprising and unique locations. Some of the themes will explore why and how challenging histories maintain their relevance and will hear from individuals and organisations who are re-imagining work in this area whilst going through a time of unprecedented change, pressure and evolution for museums. Some bursaries will be available.

Booking opens soon

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CHALLENGING
HISTORY

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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: Friday 2nd September 2016

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).

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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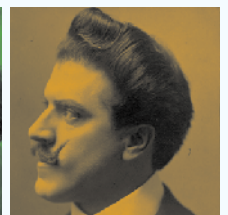
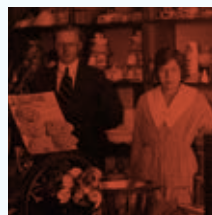
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Crime and Punishment – An arresting subject for museum’s new exhibition

Putting plant pots on your windowsill or swapping the latest gossip with friends might not seem like activities that could land you in trouble with the law.

But believe it or not, the bye-laws of the past meant these were just some of offences which could have seen people in Leeds branded criminals.

Now a new exhibition at Kirkstall’s Abbey House Museum is inviting history-lovers to take a walk through more than 350 years of fearful and fascinating facts and stories, covering everything from murder and poisoning to detectives and dodgy dealers.

Crime and Punishment explores the history of law and order in Leeds and the rest of the UK from the 1650s to today. Here are just some of the fascinating facts from the exhibition:

- In 1839 four boys were caught stealing turnips from a field on Roundhay Road. The boys’ parents agreed to their sons being flogged rather than sent to the Wakefield House of Correction.
- In 1859 Mrs Martha Penny was accused of defrauding the public with her “Wheel of Fortune” lottery on Kirkgate. She was sent to gaol for six months for deception.
- The Leeds Police numbered 93 men in 1836. The first woman police constable was recruited in 1918. By 1936 there were 731 men and women in the Leeds Police.
- In 1770 Willaim Matthews was convicted of the murder of Mr Cook of Normanby and three of his family by poisoning them. He mixed arsenic in with their butter. He was sentenced to death and executed on 5 March 1770, aged 22.
- In 1920 Arthur Dunn was convicted at Leeds City Police Court on 10 February. He was charged with theft of dead rabbits from Wellington station. He was sentenced to one month imprisonment with hard labour.

The exhibition includes a display on Victorian street crime and fraud as well as looking at how prison and policing have evolved over the centuries.

Visitors can also learn about crime fiction as well as seeing some of the city’s collection of gruesome artefacts including deadly poisons that used to be available over the counter and vicious-looking man traps that were used to protect private property.

And as part of a programme of activities and workshops linked to the exhibition, young sleuths can even help solve their very own historic murder mystery using Victorian science and policing techniques.

As part of Crime and Punishment, a series of talks will also take place, given by local crime authors and experts. They include a talk by local novelist Frances Brody who will talk about her Kate Shakleton mysteries on September 13.

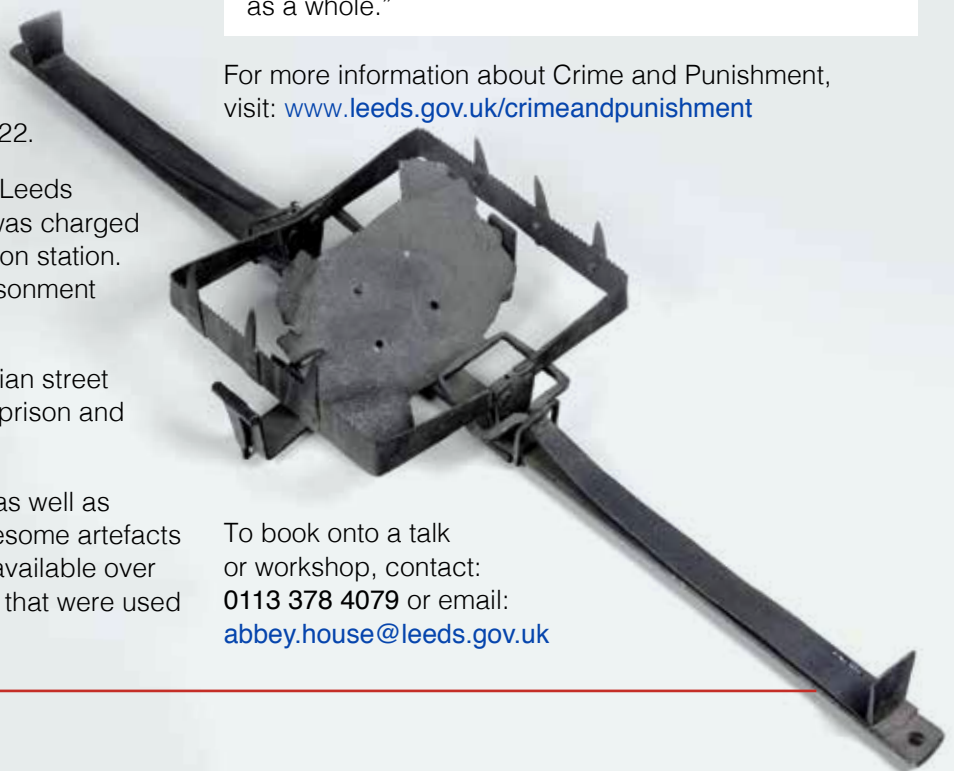
Kitty Ross, Curator of Social History, who has been putting the displays together, said: “The exhibition gives an overview of how crime and punishment have evolved over the centuries, including some of the darker episodes from the city’s past like several riots, executions and some historical murders.

“But we also look at some of the more light-hearted aspects, like the list of misdemeanors you could be fined for, some of which sound silly to us today but are mostly common sense rules about health and safety and consideration for your neighbours. For example, it was illegal to keep a pigsty in front of your house, carry a plank carelessly along the pavement or play annoying games in the street.

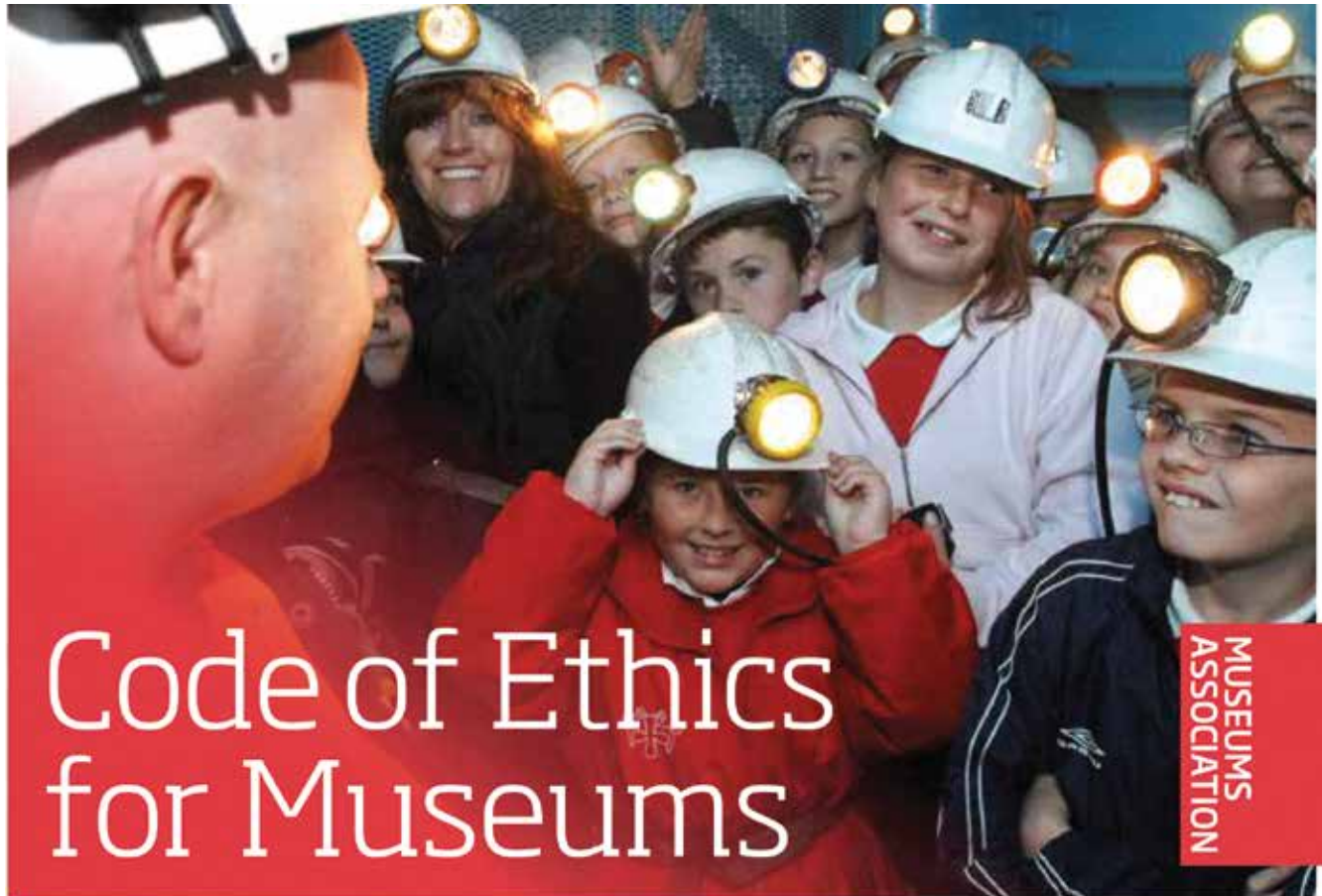
She added: “We’ve also got a fantastic array of objects on display, which illustrate how policing, prison and punishment have changed, including police memorabilia and several grisly pieces relating to capital punishment.

“We hope visitors will get an insight into how people’s relationship with the law has developed and the integral role crime and punishment play in society as a whole.”

For more information about Crime and Punishment, visit: www.leeds.gov.uk/crimeandpunishment



To book onto a talk or workshop, contact: **0113 378 4079** or email: abbey.house@leeds.gov.uk



New Code of Ethics for Museums Launched

The Museums Association has published a new Code of Ethics, along with supporting guidance and case studies after agreeing the text of the new Code of Ethics in a unanimous vote at the MA's AGM in Birmingham in November 2015.

The new Code of Ethics replaces the previous Code which had been drafted in 2002 and amended in 2007. It focuses on three key principles of museum ethics: Public Benefit and Engagement; Stewardship of Collections; and Individual and Institutional Integrity. It aims to support museums and those who work in them to reach ethical decisions by reference to these principles.

The code retains much of what has traditionally been considered as core museum ethics – the stewardship and protection of museum collections, the presumption against financially motivated disposal and the need for clear provenance in acquisitions.

The code also extends far beyond this sphere, encouraging us to look at all areas of museum work through an ethical lens. The public role of the museum is a key focus. There are new standards to guarantee the museum as a place of freedom of speech, and to protect

the museum's own editorial integrity. Sponsorship of museums also comes under the spotlight, while issues like safety and digital ethics are addressed in the more in-depth online guidance and case studies on the MA website.

More fundamentally, the new code is designed to be easy to use, making it less a document of last resort and more a document of first principle, instilling a proactive approach to ethics that will set the sector in good stead for the future.

The new Code of Ethics and Guidance are available here: www.museumsassociation.org/ethics

Hard copies of the Code of Ethics will be distributed with all copies of Museums Journal in February and will also be available at MA Events and Member Meetings.



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Historic Shops Tour – Uncovering Letchworth’s shopping past

When Letchworth was established as the world’s first Garden City in 1903 it attracted many influential members of the Socialist, vegetarian and Arts and Crafts movements who hoped to build their own utopia. To an extent this had an effect on the types of shops and industries that were established, for example, a ‘Simple Life Hotel’ opened down Leys Avenue, where one could eat vegetarian food and partake in dress reform. Other examples included a crockery shop that only sold leadless glazed pottery and a weaving works that used traditional hand looms to produce beautiful silk fabrics.

In keeping with its utopian spirit, Letchworth’s main shopping street included a Co-Operative store. Initially opening shop in 1913, the Co-operative expanded throughout the decades, culminating in the 1960s with an ultra-efficient supermarket.

As well as playing host to these quirky businesses, Letchworth had shops you would find in any other town, for example; butchers, bakers and drapers. Contrary to the popular notion that high streets did not have chains in the past, there were a fair few, including Boots and W. H. Smith, which set up shop in Letchworth in 1907 and are still in the same premises today!

We launched the ‘Historic Shops Tour’ in June last year as a way to explore Letchworth’s shopping past and to engage with local shop keepers about the history of their shops. Initially we began searching through early Letchworth directories to uncover key information about when and where businesses were established. After compiling a comprehensive list of shops, we were then able to search for related images and trawl for further information in the archives.


In undertaking this project we hoped to engage with a new audience and encourage a greater use of our online collections as we do not have a dedicated museum space. We were really keen to try something digital and so discovered Whitepoint online as a useful tool where it is possible to create heritage-related tours. By uploading a map of the town centre, you can add ‘Whitepoints’ or areas of interest and onto the map. When you click on a ‘Whitepoint’ it reveals a short history of the shop which is illustrated by images from our archives. The tour is currently available to view via Android and IOS and also through the Whitepoint website on a desktop computer. For the less ‘tech-savvy’ a printed leaflet is available via the Letchworth Tourist Information Centre.



Top two images Co-operative Shop.
Bottom image Notts Bakery.

We approached a selection of Letchworth businesses in the hope that they would want to participate and we received positive feedback, with ten out of eleven shops agreeing to display an A2 window vinyl illustrating the history of their shop building, complete with instructions on how to access the full tour on the Whitepoint app.

Throughout the process of putting the tour together we learned more about Letchworth’s shopping history, including the types of produce sold, the families who owned the shops and the architects who designed the shops. In conclusion it has so far been a beneficial community project providing opportunities to liaise with local shop owners and to share the history of their shop buildings.

 **Gemma Leader**

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The Only Way Is Ethics! – SHCG Conference 2016

Join us for SHCG's 2016 conference, The Only Way is Ethics: Social History and the 21st Century Museum on Thursday 23rd June at the Cathedral Conference Centre and Friday 24 June at The Collection, Lincoln. This year's conference includes interactive workshops, tours and presentations on a wide range of themes including collections vs. disposal and community voices vs. curatorial authority. New for 2016 is The Ethics Quick-Fire Round!

Conference is a great opportunity to hear about the experiences and learning from a range of institutions across the country, to take part in valuable knowledge building workshops, and to have the opportunity to network with others in the sector.

Bookings close on Friday 20 May at 5pm. To book, and for more information including terms and conditions, please visit: www.shcg.org.uk/conf16

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Photos from SHCG Conference 2015.



Wrapped, Packed and Ready to Go

Closing a museum is often the end of an era, a sad time for reflection on earlier glory and success. However, for St Albans, it was a necessary part of our planned redevelopment; we are moving to a different building, more centrally located. The decision to close the existing museum ahead of schedule was a risky one - we hadn't yet heard whether we had been successful at Round 2 with our HLF major grant application.

We chanced causing disquiet locally about closing the museum and not replacing it immediately. Despite this, the museum did close in September 2015 and several months on, having had time to reflect, I believe that the way we went about it has been one of the most positive experiences of our museum service in recent years.

The Museum of St Albans, often overshadowed by our better-known Roman museum, Verulamium, was a typical local history museum. Its permanent displays hadn't been updated in years and it suffered from declining visitor numbers, despite the best efforts of staff and a variety of temporary exhibitions. For the council, under increasing financial pressure, the building was becoming hard to justify in its current form, despite huge local support for a social history museum. A plan was formed that, for the museum to survive, it needed to relocate more centrally and work in a new, more flexible way.

With this in mind, the decision was made to close the museum and allow staff to focus on planning the new building. With a short time-scale and a small team of staff, it was clear that to pack all the collections, we needed help. I devised a process for closure, involving many volunteers, which combined collections documentation, repacking, audience engagement and volunteer training and development. However, rather than pack behind the scenes, we would do it in public. We obtained funding from the Arts Council's Grants for the Arts scheme to employ an artist-in-residence to work with us through the transition. As we packed collections away and emptied cases, the artist would take over the spaces and transform them into new installations to mark the museum's closure.

I built up a team of about 40 volunteers who had all registered interest in being involved. Some were regular volunteers. Many were encountering the collections for the first time after responding to pleas for help on our website and via our mailing lists. Some joined once they saw the project in action. I trained them in object handling and how to document collections. The frequency and intensity of the volunteering, as well as copious amounts of tea and biscuits, meant that the volunteers soon settled in, supported each other and became experts in what they were doing.



One of our volunteers, Lizzie, documenting part of the collection in our public exhibition.

Over three months, we opened our exhibition gallery up as a packing space. We documented, photographed and packed over 15,000 objects, and as we did this, we talked to and engaged with thousands of visitors. A few who were unhappy about the closure were able to discuss their views with staff directly. We could listen to their concerns and show the ways in which the move, rather than hindering, would help us do things we had wanted to achieve for years.

Our artist-in-residence, Lyndall Phelps, with a long experience of working with museum collections and a research-based approach to her work, quickly became knowledgeable about St Albans history. As we removed objects, Lyndall repainted the spaces and re-envisioned the way our collections could be displayed - choosing a few key pieces to tell a story and supplementing it with work of her own. Regular visitors suddenly started noticing new things in a gallery that hadn't changed since 1989! It was a good test of public reactions to new ways of exhibiting objects ahead of the redeveloped museum.



Volunteer training involved how to document and pack collections.

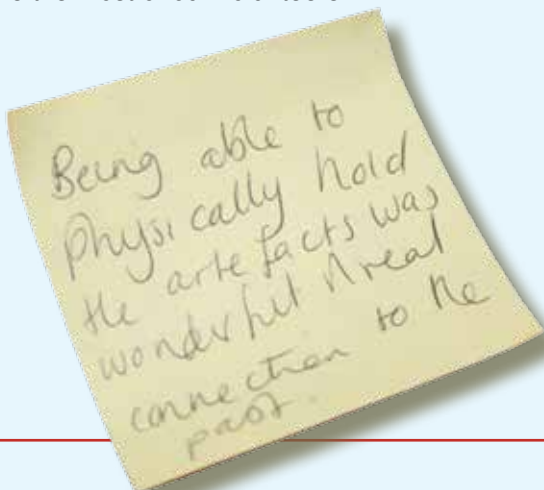
So what did we learn from the project and where do we go from here?

- The whole project was very intensive. I would never recommend decanting an entire museum in just three months but it did have the benefit that the intensity (and stress) was relatively short-lived. Added to this, I was simultaneously supporting our artist, Lyndall. Thankfully, she was capable and independent but this might not have been the case with someone else. If I were to do the whole project again, I would extend the timescale.
- Volunteers are amazing - in terms of extra pairs of hands, local knowledge, acting as ambassadors and bringing endless positivity. However, it's important not to underestimate the time required to manage them, to ensure that they and the museum use their time effectively. Also, it is important to show them their help is appreciated. (Hosting some summer picnics and the aforementioned tea and biscuits worked well for this.)

"My experience at the museum was friendly and rewarding. I learnt much about my now local town and its varied history. I learnt new skills and the other volunteers were lovely as we could swap knowledge and experiences of St Albans."

- Documentation work is interesting! The majority of our visitors enjoyed being able to see objects up close and learning more about the processes that usually go on behind the scenes.
- Go out on a high. For us, it definitely helped, both internally with our senior council managers and externally with members of the public, to go out with a bang and not with a whimper. Combining the packing with Lyndall's fantastic installation Abundance ensured a high profile for the project. It also did what I'd hoped and created a celebration, a grand finale for the museum.

We're now working hard behind the scenes to prepare for the new museum. We were successful at round 2 with the HLF so the development of the new building continues apace. Meanwhile, we've tried to take forward our learning from the museum-closing project and continue to make the most of our volunteers.



In January, we held a pop-up event in the Old Town Hall, the future location for the museum, again involving volunteers researching and documenting objects. Taking our inspiration from Argos, "Objects on Demand" involved a catalogue of 70 objects and an ordering system. The public arrived, browsed our catalogue of objects and made a selection. A volunteer who had researched and photographed the object then brought it out and showed it up close. In two days, we had over 1,000 people pop in to see us - a massive success for a museum that is currently closed.

Meanwhile, Lyndall's residency continues. She will contribute to one of our pop-up events, as well as exhibit in the new museum when it opens. This framing of the transition phase provides a continuity to the project, as well as an injection of energy and excitement.

In many ways and for many other museums, this project would not be considered revolutionary but, for us, it was transformational and has kick-started a process of working completely differently, both with our volunteers and with artists.



Section of Lyndall Phelps' installation Abundance inspired by our Ryders' Seeds collection.



Volunteers showing objects to members of the public at our "Objects on Demand" event.

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Folklore in Museums

If the role of Social History in museums is to explore, present and interpret the way of life of diverse communities, there should also be a role for the presentation of the traditions and beliefs of those communities, that is, their Folklore. However, this can be problematical, as much of the folklore is intangible and passed on orally with few or no physical artefacts. In addition, folklore has sometimes been used and manipulated commercially and politically which can distort and manipulate 'tradition' and belief¹.

The word 'Folklore' was coined by William Thom in 1846 and the Folklore Society in Britain was established in 1877 for 'the purpose of preserving and collecting Popular Fictions and Traditions, Legendary Ballads, Local Proverbial Sayings, Superstitions and Old Customs'². To the early founders of the Folklore Society folklore was something of the, usually, rural past and associated with the 'primitive' or the thoughts and culture of the 'uneducated'.

In the latter part of the twentieth century however, folklore scholars and collectors began to understand the subject of folklore in a much wider cultural context, realising that we all carry our own lore and customary practices, but which we do not always identify as 'folklore'.



Lucky Wisp of Hay and accompanying letter.

Several years ago, whilst carrying out research into pre-marriage customs³ in the industrial/workplace context I wrote a letter of enquiry to several local newspapers. I received this reply from the editor of the Leicester Advertiser:

Occasionally girls are dressed up in paper streamers and tied to a lamp post by their workmates as a sort of pre-wedding prank but this is not considered either a ceremony or a regular custom⁴.

This editor, as an occasional observer of the practice, had no idea of the importance of this ceremony to the participants and their peer group.

Perhaps a useful definition of 'folklore' may be as suggested by Gillian Bennett:

Folklore... a body of beliefs, activities, ways of doing things, saying things and making things that are acquired 'through the skin', as it were, by talking to, watching, socializing and communicating with other people. Folklore is a form of culture – an informal almost spontaneous, culture that can be distinguished from popular culture because nobody makes money out of it, and from 'high' culture because it is never taught in schools⁵.

Unfortunately for museums there is not a great deal of material culture solely associated with folklore; many folkloric objects may appear everyday or inconsequential,



Replica Corps Creadh

but may have traditions, beliefs and superstitions put upon them, so that they become 'folkloric' by association. For example, The Folklore Society has a small collection of objects⁶ which includes a 'lucky Wisp of Hay' (basically a knot of dried grass) – its interest and significance is highlighted in an accompanying letter explaining its context as part of a News Years Custom where the wisp of hay was given in exchange for a coin by children going from house to house in Co. Down, Northern Ireland.

Similarly, the Lovett collection of charms at the Cuming Museum, Southwark, includes many items such as pincushions which, taken at face value, appear to be simply attractive or interesting objects – it is the intangible context which makes the object important or interesting in the folkloric sense.

Sometimes objects may attract some belief or significance which is not obvious; for example, an old Suffolk farmhand at the Museum of East Anglian Life pointed to a Smythe Drill and told me that if the drill missed a row then a death was portended. Similarly lucky mascots or charms which a student takes into an exam may be an everyday object or specific toy or pen.

Some items with folkloric associations are ephemeral: a clay human figure, in which pins had been stuck, known as a Corps Creadh, in the Folklore Society's collection is a replica made specifically for the collector because, to be effective and to make the curse work, the figure would have been placed in running water to be gradually worn away⁷. Obviously, a Corps Creadh which had been created and used in anger would not exist.

Sometimes, some form of ritual or folkloric attribution may be wrongly applied to an item. An example is the Cross in a Bottle found in many museum collections – a wooden cross, carved wooden nails, hammer, and maybe a spear, - arranged in a bottle filled with water (which is often discoloured slightly yellow and thus thought to be urine) and sealed. These are sometimes described as 'Witch Bottles'. However, these are simply examples of 'folk Art' sometimes produced by prisoners of war, and which may have Catholic associations. However, these are not witch bottles nor do they have any ritual or protective qualities⁸.

Obviously, there are elements of custom and tradition which can easily be presented in a museum – notably calendar customs – for which there are representations, images, costume and artefacts associated with the customs or tradition.

The material culture of folklore often needs a great deal of context to make it meaningful, consequently when it comes to presenting folklore and traditions in museums, social history curators, who may not be the original collector and may have little knowledge of context, may be left with trying to present something ordinary as extraordinary and interpret the intangible in a meaningful way.



Straw Boy headdress. Straw Boys appeared at weddings in Ireland as a form of luck bringer.

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¹ Newall, Venetia (1987) *The Adaption of Folklore and Tradition (Folklorismus)*. Presidential address to the Folklore Society, March 1987 published in *Folklore* 98 ii pp.131-151.

² FLS Minute Books 19th December 1877. Cowdell, P. 2013 *Birth of the Folklore Society FLS News* 71. (November) p.1. The Folklore Society is now based at The Warburg Institute, University College London.

³ Monger, George. 1971. "A Note on Wedding Customs in Industry Today." *Folklore* 82, no. 4: 314-316.

———. 1975. "Further Notes on Wedding Customs in Industry." *Folklore* 86, no.1 (spring): 50-61.

———. 1996. "Pre-Marriage Ceremonies: A Study of Custom and Function." *Lore and Language* 14: 143-155

⁴ Letter from the editor of the *Leicester Advertiser* 5/1/73.

⁵ Bennett, Gillian. 1987. *Traditions of Belief: Women and the Supernatural*. Penguin Books Ltd., London. p.9

⁶ Housed at the Museum of Cambridge (formerly the Cambridge and County Folk Museum)

⁷ Maclagan, R.C. (1895) *Notes on Folklore Objects Collected in Argyleshire Folklore* V i p144-161

⁸ These objects were the subject of a correspondence discussion in *FLS News* 34 June 2001 & 35 November 2001.



Leeds Queer Stories: A display about local LGBT*Q Social History

3 November 2015 – 15 May 2016, Leeds City Museum

Leeds City Museum's collections are displayed over four floors in the grand building of the former Leeds Institute. The displays on the second floor, *The Leeds Story*, focus on the city's history from the ancient past to the present day. The final sections of the gallery are devoted to changing co-curated community exhibitions reflecting the lives of Leeds residents today. The current exhibition, Leeds Queer Stories, highlights the city's LGBT*Q (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer) history and heritage through object rich displays supplemented with audio-visual material.

The introductory material includes a short contemporary dance film by Jamie Fletcher that explores historically significant locations for LGBT*Q communities in Leeds, bringing the city into the museum. The exhibition's spine is provided by five large cases each of which explores a main theme: Health and Well Being; Equality and Justice; Social Change; Connecting; and Art, Culture and Sport

These sections stand alone and so can be viewed in any order, but collectively they complement each other to offer a bigger picture.

The interpretation explains that the exhibition is a collaboration, 'co-curated by community groups with

support from the museum's curatorial team' drawing on lent items, objects from the Museum's own collection and newly created material. The nature of the objects – t-shirts, posters, photographs, badges – foreground people and campaigns for equality (image 1).

Social Change, for example, highlights the interconnections between groups and political movements that have campaigned to address inequality in society, including issues such as poverty, racism and disability. A strength of this approach is that personal stories emerge particularly strongly and that the display has a distinctive personality.

Arts, Culture & Sport (image 2) is the most dramatic and colourful of the displays, reflecting the vibrant contribution of LGBT*Q communities to the city through Pride and club nights (represented elsewhere through a series of photographs). The Carnival style Pride costume made by Hughbon Condor from 2015's Pride brings the display right up to date.

There are far more objects than labels, an approach that encourages active exploration by encouraging the visitor to look and think rather than read. The general tone of the display's text is people focussed. For example, there is



a thank you to those individuals who've lent objects and contributed to the displays, and an invitation for visitors to contribute their own thoughts, ideas or suggestions. The text acknowledges the exhibition's limitations, that inevitably it can only reflect a small number of a much larger quantity of stories and perspectives.

Most incidental visitors will come across the exhibition as the end of their visit to the Leeds Story. Their experience is likely to differ from those who have come specifically to see it and who start with the exhibition whilst still fresh and energetic. Acronyms can be a barrier for those who are unfamiliar with them so it is helpful that each of the main text panels carries a clear definition and concise explanation of LGBT*Q.

Museums have – of course - a long history of omitting LGBT*Q histories and perspectives. The number of initiatives addressing the lacuna has grown significantly in recent years. Leeds Queer Stories, like the recent Hidden Voices exhibition at Reading Museum or Brighton Museum & Art Gallery's LGBTQ trail, offers another interesting and inspiring community-focussed model for integrating LGBT*Q perspectives into existing museum displays.

Leeds Queer Stories gives LGBT*Q themes and subjects prominence in displays that seek to represent the city and its diversity meaningfully. The inclusion of both positive stories and negative experiences presents a nuanced narrative, and the exhibition's reminder that equality rights for all LGBT*Q people is a goal still to be achieved is clearly an important message to articulate to a wide audience.



Image 1: objects in the Equality and Justice case, Leeds Queer Stories exhibition, Leeds City Museum



Image 2: the Arts, Culture & Sport display, Leeds Queer Stories exhibition, Leeds City Museum.

Find Out More

Leeds City Museum
www.leeds.gov.uk/citymuseum

Reading Museum
www.lgbthiddenvoices.org.uk

Brighton Museum & Art Gallery
www.brightonmuseums.org.uk/brighton/what-to-see/lgbtq-museum-trail/

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 British Museum.

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Beyond The Hashtag – A review of SHCG's latest seminar

With the title *Beyond The Hashtag*, I expected big things – especially since hashtags are such an integral part of sharing content on the various social networks which museums use! Safe to say, the seminar exceeded my expectations and I learnt a lot of new things!

First up were *Leeds Museums (LM)* themselves – their talk focused on blogging, twitter and Instagram. Their staff have a good social media presence, especially on Twitter with many of the curators having their own accounts on which they share insights from collections and the funny, startling and rewarding moments from their jobs, bringing the day-to-day experience of being a curator that much closer to their followers. They also spoke of branching out into Instagram – a good way to engage with visitors and gain a new perspective on exhibitions. What I found to be particularly interesting was the way in which LM continue to keep track of new developments in the world of social media, consistently engaging with new platforms such as Periscope.



The Horniman Museum followed up LM, giving an insight into the different ways that they use social media. It was clear from the outset that the tone they set out to use on social media – fun and exciting, an infectious sort of enthusiasm – was certainly a reflection of the museum. Social media has enabled them to give different voices to the many people (and objects!) in their organisation. At a basic level they use social media to communicate events and to encourage visitors but further to this, they link exhibitions to their curators, bringing them to life and offering the chance to ask questions with Q&A videos. They also involve other museums, linking up objects with a wider context of national events. I found the *Horniman's* talk to be incredibly engaging and it has definitely inspired me to have a lot more fun with social media in a museum setting!

no matter how different they might seem at first. Using different textiles to illustrate the 'Cornish Word of the Day' highlights two fantastic archives which might not first come to mind when thinking of either place. It gets people talking and gives each place a visual voice which is very important.


To wrap the seminar up, the room applied themselves to different social media based dilemmas and came up with a variety of solutions. From using HistoryPin and Pinterest to help identify local bands from archive photos to exhibitions hosted entirely on Twitter with virtual loans and guest curators from all over the UK, the solutions were creative and fun!

I had a great time at the *Beyond the Hashtag* seminar – meeting new people and finding new depths to social media, realising the power of images and collaboration and the



The final talk was between two heritage organisations – *Falmouth University Archives* and *Bradford Textile Archives*. Separated by many miles, this collaborative friendship had been entirely twitter based until the day of the seminar! It was interesting to see how two collections can be used to complement the other,

importance of tone in the posts we create. After all, social media is there to be... well, social – right?!

 **Laura Varley**
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The Great Wizards of Aberdeen

If you were asked what the famous sons of Aberdeen were known for, I doubt your first thought would turn to magic. However, over the past six months whilst working on an exciting new learning project at Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums, one remarkable story that kept popping up led me to discover an intriguing magical trilogy. It all began with the famous non-Scotsman Harry Houdini. The escapologist visited Aberdeen on tour in 1909 and jumped into the harbour waters whilst shackled to promote his show at the Palace Theatre. However, it was his personal reasons for visiting and further relationship to the Granite City that revealed a marvelous connection and it came down to one simple thing: wizards!

In St Nicholas churchyard, not far from the harbour, is a gravestone whose appearance belies its age, it's preservation down to Houdini. For there rested the showman's idol: John Henry Anderson, otherwise known as "The Great Wizard of the North".

Anderson, born 1814, was a magician renowned for his showmanship, his flair for publicity and bringing magic performance from the streets into the theatres.

His ingenuous ways of promoting his shows, as well as his love for philanthropy made him famous and popular with the higher classes. He travelled the world performing for Lords and Czars, even performing for Queen Victoria in London, where he owned the New Strand Theatre. It was here that he would perform some of his most famous tricks, including rabbit out of the hat, the inexhaustible bottle and the bullet catch illusion. His fame led to his friend Sir Walter Scott, christening him "The Great Wizard of the North".

Although Anderson died the year Houdini was born, Harry revered his study of illusion, philanthropic work and shrewd self-promotion. This was quite evident when whilst paying his respects in 1909, Houdini made sure it was no quiet affair, meeting

Anderson's relatives and being photographed next to his idols gravestone.

Around this time Houdini would have heard of, if not already become acquainted with, another Aberdeen showman known as "The Electrical Wizard". A showman whose enemies labeled a quack, an imposter and a charlatan and yet during Houdini's time, was one of the highest paid entertainers in the world. Even Charlie Chaplin impersonated him in his act!

Dr Walford Bodie M.D born 1869, performed magic, hypnotism, ventriloquism and comedy. However, it was his electric chair act that made his name across the world and ultimately landed him in hot water!

Originally a telephone engineer, Bodie had seen controversial headlines concerning America and their introduction of the death penalty using electrocution. Electricity was not in the majority of households at the time and Walford seized upon the chance to literally shock his audience whilst making his name. Using a switch that swapped amps to volts he designed a mock chair that resembled something out of Victor Frankenstein's lab.

In his act he would shock his assistant La Belle Electra with safe static electricity that sent out sparks, making the hair of the front row audience stand on end. He would then take volunteers from the audience, hypnotize them, strap them into the chair and switching the switch, give them a short sharp shock before bringing them back to life with some hearty slapping.

The climax of course was when Bodie would strap himself in afterwards and withstand up to 30,000 volts, illuminating handheld light bulbs in the process!

As his fame grew however, Bodie started to claim he could cure ailments with electricity through 'bloodless surgery', declaring 'Send me your Cripples!'. This unfortunately resulted in personal attacks and court



cases over his use of M.D; which Walford, in true showman style claimed stood for 'Merry Devil'.

With Bodie falling out of favour, Houdini who had become firm friends with the Granite City's electrical wizard stepped forward to help him secure important shows both in London and abroad, even sending Bodie the real electric chair from Sing Sing Prison as a gift to use in his touring show.

Regularly writing to Walford at his home in Macduff, right up to his early death in 1926, Houdini held the city's influence in high regard and had a life long fondness for the wizards it had produced. I hope this fascinating and surprising story about Houdini's esteem for Aberdeen's magical heritage helps to make the Granite City become known for just that.

Using my research I am featuring Walford Bodie's amazing story in a new learning resource, designed to go out to local community groups as well as looking to gain objects related to the area's magical past and present for Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums collections.

If anyone has any pertinent information please contact me on the details below.

 **Adam Murray**

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SHCG owes a debt of gratitude to the many people over the years who have served on committee

As we approach AGM and the election of new Trustees, here are some reflections from past and present incumbents...



Name: Jill Holmen

On committee: 2003 -2009
(Conference Organiser, Chair)

Why did you decide to stand for committee?

There was an element of persuasion. I'd been a member of SHCG for some years and became a regular attendee at conference and events, so felt like I should be 'doing my bit' to help repay what I'd gained.

What are your best and worst memories?

All memories good. The only 'bad' thing that comes to mind was a mix-up in the self-catering accommodation at one of the conferences but this was resolved by having breakfast available in a number of rooms, making it all much friendlier in the end.

How did your experience on committee help you professionally?

Ultimately led to my current job, with responsibility for actual Social History Collections!

Now that SHCG is a charity, what do you think the future holds for SHCG?

It opens up a lot of opportunities for the group to develop in all manner of new directions.



Name: Verity Smith

On committee: since 2014
(Conference organiser)

Why did you decide to stand for committee?

I saw it as an opportunity to assist in the work of the SHCG, and to be more involved in an area of museum work that I'm interested in.

What are your best and worst memories?

Best memory - My first conference in Belfast - it felt great to be among like-minded people who made me feel very welcome. Worst moment so far – Organising Conference 2015 was a bit more challenging than expected!

How has your experience on committee help you professionally?

It has given me new skills and provided networking opportunities. I think it has also helped me be a bit better at time management!

Now that SHCG is a charity, what do you think the future holds for SHCG?

Charity status of the organisation has opened up channels through which to support museums.



Name: Kay Jones

On committee: 2008-2011
(Conference Organiser, Membership Secretary)

Why did you decide to stand for committee?

Broadening my experience and professional development. There may have been some 'encouragement' from committee members also...

What are your best and worst memories?

Worst was dealing with the very temperamental membership database. Conference mail outs were not fun! (Before it underwent a much needed overhaul). Best was meeting other like-minded people from social history museums across the country.

How did your experience on committee help you professionally?

Improved contacts and knowledge. You can often get caught up in your own organisation and the way things are done. SHCG always helped gave good external perspectives.

Now that SHCG is a charity, what do you think the future holds for SHCG?

Hopefully it will continue to be a good place to share knowledge and support, and act as a strong advocate for social history; especially in increasingly tough times.



Name: Christine Johnstone

On committee: 1980s

Why did you decide to stand for committee?

I first became interested when in SHCG when it morphed from the Group for Regional Studies in Museums. I was asked to stand for the committee by someone who was already on it, after I asked lots of questions at an SHCG seminar.

What are your best and worst memories?

Best memories – meeting lots of new and interesting people from other museums; being part of bouncing ideas about within the committee and into other committees and other organisations.

How did your experience on committee help you professionally?

Gave me more confidence and better networks. Encouraged me to serve on the Museum Professional Group's committee, and on the Museums Association Council. Improved my team working skills.

Now that SHCG is a charity, what do you think the future holds for SHCG?

I wish it well. Make sure you get good trustees who understand their role.

Being Chair for two years has made me a more confident decision maker in my day job.

Now that SHCG is a charity, what do you think the future holds for SHCG?

Ultimately I also hope that SHCG will grow large enough to have regional representation responding to the specific social history needs of that geographical area.



Name: Hannah Crowdy

On committee: 2007-2011
(Seminars Organiser,
Conference Organiser)

Why did you decide to stand for committee?

I was working in a local museum and the only one working in social history. It was quite isolating, and I wanted to learn more and connect with like-minded people.

What are your best and worst memories?

The best memories are from the end of a successful seminar or conference, when you receive positive feedback from delegates that they have enjoyed the experience and benefitted from it.

How did your experience on committee help you professionally?

I feel it has been a valuable addition to my CV. I can call many fellow SHCGers friends, and continue to value their help, advice and inspiration!

Now that SHCG is a charity, what do you think the future holds for SHCG?

The changes in SHCG have encouraged the organisation to take a good hard look at itself, re-configure itself for the current climate and in response to its members. This is a positive process, and I believe will help make SHCG a more resilient and relevant professional organisation.



Name: Michelle Lees

On committee: 2008-2016
(Conference Organiser, Chair,
Secretary)

Why did you decide to stand for committee?

I wanted to do more for social history as a discipline and to meet more people who worked with social history around the country too.

What are your best and worst memories?

The committee are always so supportive of each other that any issues get straightened out pretty fast. My best memories are always around conference. I get to say hello to the stalwarts and the new faces; it's like a family gathering!

How did your experience on committee help you professionally?

It's been invaluable really. It made me realise how much I enjoyed organising which helped me step up my career.



Name: Briony Hudson

On committee: 2001-2006
(Seminars organiser,
Conference organiser and Chair)

Why did you decide to stand for committee?

I saw it as a CPD opportunity in a group that I thought was friendly and dynamic.

(Briony Hudson continued)

What are your best and worst memories?

Best memory: getting funding for firstBASE from Collections Trust (then MDA).

Worst memory: having to chair AGMs, especially where the unexpected happened - difficult questions, and even an election at the last minute. As chair you have to be prepared for all eventualities!

How did your experience on committee help you professionally?

It gave me increased confidence in organising events, chairing meetings and negotiating with other organisations. It expanded my networks enormously.

Now that SHCG is a charity, what do you think the future holds for SHCG?

I'm hopeful that SHCG continues to stand firm on its foundations: an important and credible voice to be heard in the wider museums community, and a friendly and responsive relationship with the membership.



Name: **Jack Kirby**

On committee: 2003-2006
(Seminar organiser,
Conference organiser)

Why did you decide to stand for committee?

I was a lucky recipient of a free place at conference in 2003. I had a fantastic, educational and somewhat alcohol-soaked three days. With a vacancy on committee, I said, 'I'll give it a go', was proposed and seconded before I had time to change my mind, and the rest is history.

What are your best and worst memories?

Best: Working as a lone curator in the Ragged School Museum in East London and wanting to be able to have discussions with other curators, I was inspired to create SHCG-LIST. Worst: Also the email list - the time I ignored the warning message I'd carefully set up to be on every email, and replied with a personal message to 300 people. The friend involved forgave me, which was more than I deserved.

How did your experience on committee help you

professionally?

It gave me a national profile and network of contacts that continues to come in useful today.

Now that SHCG is a charity, what do you think the future holds for SHCG?

The current economic pressures will continue for several years yet. In this climate, SHCG will become more vital than ever as a forum to share skills, knowledge and innovative practice. SHCG must be a catalyst and conduit for our new thoughts and actions.



Name: **Lydia Saul**

On committee: 2006-2010
(SHCG News Editor)

Why did you decide to stand for committee?

I was interested in being better connected with the professional museum community and know more about issues affecting social history curators nationally.

What are your best and worst memories?

Best memory: Getting the SHCG News from black and white into colour!

Worst Memory – The committee realising at the conference at Greenwich that there was no breakfast facilities at the halls we were staying at!

How did your experience on committee help you professionally?

During my time on Committee I felt more valued and confident in my own ideas and development as a professional than if I had not put myself forward in this way.

Now that SHCG is a charity, what do you think the future holds for SHCG?

There is still a need and a lot of good work to be done to support Social History Curators, and to promote the importance of preserving objects that represent that history.



THERE ARE A NUMBER OF TRUSTEE POSITIONS OPEN THIS YEAR WHICH ARE ALWAYS INTERESTING, CAREER ENHANCING ROLES

If you're interested in standing as a Trustee in this year's elections, please contact Michelle Lees on michelle.lees@rochestercathedral.org or 01634 810064. Nominations for Trustees and items for the Annual General Meeting must be received by **5.00 pm on 30 May 2016**.

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