



SHG NEWS

SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

Issue 80 April 2018

This is What We Do!

Advocacy in Social History Museums & Beyond

Also inside this edition:

Revealing Loans

The National Trust for Scotland's collection

Bringing out stories

REME museum redesign

Care of photographs

Review of preventative care of photographs.



It's always nice to find a theme running through each edition of SHCG News. This time around, I am struck by the many inventory and documentation projects going on, a testament to the hard work that happens 'behind the scenes' in so many organisations.

Of course, this is the kind of work that many of do on a regular basis, but bringing attention to it in this way helps to underline its value and

Welcome to Issue 80 of SHCG News

importance, laying the groundwork for the more obviously public facing work that is seen in exhibitions and programming. All of this ties in well with Spectrum 5.0, launched last year, and no doubt already making its effects felt.

This runs parallel to a sector currently asking big questions of itself. In March I attended the Museums Association's *Future of Museums: Collections* conference at which they launched 'Collections 2030': 'a major research project looking at the long-term purpose, use and management of museum collections.' Many of the speakers at the conference alongside this were considering their museums' identities and purposes and emphasised the importance of being brave and positive in the face of uncertainty.

These are common questions for curators and museum practitioners, whether at a big conference or just in the office over coffee. In a connected way, these are things we in SHCG have been considering deeply. What kind of group do we want to be? What does social history curatorship mean today? The interview with Michael Terwey and our recent seminar on advocacy are just two examples of these things being addressed - hopefully many more discussions of this kind (and others) will take place at our 2018 conference, which takes place in July. We look forward to seeing many of you there!

 **Jessie Petheram**

Editor, SHCG News

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Please contact SHCG Marketing & Partnership Officer Leah Mellors to discuss options and prices:

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Front cover image

Lady Kennedy's dressing case, © National Trust for Scotland

SHCG Conference 2018

Join us for SHCG's 2018 conference

A True Reflection? Displays, Stories and Exhibitions

**Thursday 20th July at Beamish and
Friday 21st July at the Great North Museum: Hancock.**

This year's conference includes interactive workshops, tours and presentations on a wide range of themes including interpretation, community engagement and representation.

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.

You can get a 10% discount on the full conference package when you book with our early bird offer (discount available up to 5pm on Friday 4th May).

Bookings close on Friday 8th June at 5pm. To book, and for more information including terms and conditions, please visit: www.shcg.org.uk/conf18

 **Rebecca Lucas and Nick Sturgess**

SHCG Conference Organisers

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Join SHCG?

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

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Write an article for SHCG News?

You can write an article for the News on any subject that you feel would be interesting to the museum 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: 7th September 2018

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 must be high resolution and can be submitted via an online transfer site, email or, if necessary, USB.

Send all contributions to:

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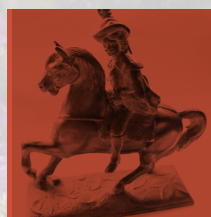
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Background image: Science and Media Museum, Bradford, Courtesy of Michael Terwey

SHCG Elections 2018

Are you a professional working in a museum or heritage site? Are you looking to enhance your skills or find new opportunities to do something different? Or do you simply want to explore your love of social history? SHCG is looking for new Trustees this year and you may be who we are looking for. There are a variety of posts available and opportunities to get involved with SHCG's core activities and contribute to our work supporting social history in museums.

SHCG is actively seeking to increase diversity within the organisation so please spread the word to your colleagues and wider networks. You do not have to be a Social History Curator to be a member or Trustee of SHCG! We welcome anyone working with social history in museums.

All you need for a role on committee is solid organisational and communication skills.

For the full role descriptions please visit www.shcg.org.uk/committee

Fantastic CPD opportunities await! Make a difference to the museum sector!

What some previous committee members have said...

"Ultimately it led to my current job, looking after social history collections"

"It has given me new skills and networking opportunities"

"It gave me increased confidence in organising events"

New committee members are appointed at AGM each year in June as part of the SHCG conference – this year's AGM will be held in Newcastle on **Thursday 19 July 2018**.

To apply, please fill out the nomination form which can be found on the SHCG website, alongside further information. If you have any questions, please get in touch.

We are looking to fill the following roles this year:

- Conference Organiser x 2
- Membership Secretary x 1
- Seminar Organiser x 1
- Chair Elect (to become Chair in 2019 for a 2-year term) x 1

You can nominate yourself this year, so all you need to do is find a Proposer. Your Proposer can be your line manager, a colleague, a current member of the Board of Trustees, your AMA Mentor or another suitably competent museum professional.

All nominees and proposers must be an individual or institutional member of SHCG.

If you are not already a member, it is really easy to become a member and submit your nomination. Please contact Adam Bell (adam.bell@twmuseums.org.uk), our membership secretary, for details.

This year's nominations need to be submitted by **4pm on FRIDAY 22nd JUNE** please email your form to VeritySmith@barnsley.gov.uk

If you wish to submit a nomination after this date, then the nominee and their Proposer will need to be present at AGM in Newcastle on Thursday 19 July

You do not have to attend AGM to be considered for election, but you do need to get your form to Verity by **FRIDAY 22nd JUNE**.

Expand your networks as a member of SHCG Board of Trustees! You won't regret it!

 **Verity Smith**

Secretary, Social History Curators Group

Spectrum 5.0

As anyone who has ever tried to deaccession an object, write an accurate catalogue entry, or even search for an item in a database knows, good documentation about your collection is vital.

Important as it is, managing a collection can feel like a daunting task for museums with many objects, few members of staff, or a backlog of incomplete records. Spectrum 5.0, the Collections Trust's newly updated standard with guidance was released in September 2017. It is designed to help museums to tackle these issues and maintain a good standard of collections documentation.

Spectrum is the UK's collections management standard and, since the first edition in 1994, has been at the heart of the Collections Trust's mission to help museums capture and share information about their collections. However, feedback from recent editions indicated that users found aspects of the text confusing and difficult to use.

In response, the Collections Trust began a comprehensive consultation. Through online working groups, consultations on drafts, and discussions at outreach sessions, museum professionals from across the UK and the world gave feedback on what they wanted to see in the next edition.

As a standard that all museums in the UK must meet to become accredited, many readers will already be familiar with the primary procedures of Spectrum, but one of the clearest messages from the consultation was that there was widespread confusion about which parts were mandatory and which were advisory. Spectrum 5.0 aims to make a clearer distinction between the Spectrum standard, and 'suggested procedures' or 'guidance notes'.

Other improvements include placing all the primary procedures together at the start of the text; including text and workflow diagrams for each of the twenty-one procedures, and using a clearer style of writing throughout: for example, the procedures 'Loans in' and 'Loans out' became 'Loans in (borrowing objects)' and 'Loans out (lending objects)'. Information about why each requirement is important was also added, giving a clearer sense of the benefits of following the standards. 'Reproduction' was also reintroduced as a procedure in its own right, to reflect the growing importance of digital asset management.


The consultation also revealed that many people found the Collections Trust's website difficult to use, so the team worked to make it easier to navigate and in late 2016 the website was relaunched. With the help of Arts Council England, the Spectrum Partners, and the many museum



Spectrum 5.0. © Collections Trust

professionals consulted, Spectrum 5.0 was released in September 2017, with a print version available to buy online and each procedure available to download free of charge from the Collection's Trust website. It has since received positive feedback from users, and been used by Spectrum Partners to develop Spectrum-compliant software for museums. It will soon be used by museums around the world, with French, Dutch, Swedish and Polish translations planned.

Whether your collection is large or small, deals in fine art or industrial history, uses paper-based or digital documentation, and whether you are a board member voting on budgets or a volunteer deciding where to store a new artefact, we hope that Spectrum 5.0 will help you make the most of your collection.

 **Sophie Lealan**

Communications Officer,
Collections Trust

Revealing Loans

Project Reveal is a nation-wide collections inventory and digitisation project. It will result in an updated database with high quality images and unique object numbers for every item in the National Trust for Scotland's material culture collections. Six regionally based project teams have been working across all of our properties to complete the inventory since July 2017.

The National Trust for Scotland was founded in 1931, and now has over 120 properties with collections open to the public, and many more available as holiday lets. We estimate that there are over 100,000 objects displayed or stored in these properties. In addition to the inventory team, I have been employed since October 2017 as Loans Officer to work alongside the regional teams: investigating historic loans to the National Trust for Scotland; tracking down objects in properties; contacting owners or their heirs; renewing paperwork where necessary and, where possible, returning material that no longer meets our collecting policy.

Most museums have sticky historic loans issues that are often extremely time consuming and complicated to sort out. The dreaded phrases "permanent loan" and "gentleman's agreement" are used far more commonly than we would like - and who was "Mr Smith, London" and which "white china ornament" was his?!

When the NTS acquired properties, often it did not acquire the contents in their entirety: portions of the original contents remained on loan from the donor families. Alongside these sorts of loans, there are a large number of smaller loans from individual lenders to supplement original contents or properties across the country, some dating back to the acquisition of our first country house, Culzean Castle, in 1945. Tracking down lenders for these early loans can be extremely time consuming; it involves a lot of research, Googling, checking archives and legal records, talking to property staff and long term volunteers, writing a lot of tentative letters, asking favours and often, a stroke of luck! Then, if I am lucky enough to track down the lender, we enter into an unusual period of discussion to reach an agreement that is suitable to both the owner and the borrower. Resolving historic loans can also be an unexpectedly expensive business - the cost of research is often overlooked, objects may need conservation before returning, and transport costs can build up quickly, as we all know.

Toilet Service, 1871, Culzean Castle. © National Trust for Scotland





Project Reveal team at work. © National Trust for Scotland

So why is the NTS investing in this work now? The Trust is taking the opportunity that Project Reveal is offering to get these historic arrangements up to date, and bring them more in line with modern practices. This not only means that we can share them with more people in real life and via photographs, but that we know more about their history and can enhance the stories told at our properties. A lot of these objects were borrowed in a different time, a time without collecting policies or interpretation plans, leading to collections of objects with low potential for interpretation or engagement today. To put it simply, resolving our historic loans will free up resources, allow us to work more efficiently and confidently, and open up new opportunities for engaging with our audiences.

Over the last four months I have been working mostly in our Edinburgh and the East properties, and it's been hugely satisfying returning objects back to families to give them a new life. For example, a pair of children's chairs on loan since the 1980s to Kellie Castle have been returned to the grand children of the original lender - they have now started their own families who can enjoy the chairs again.

Another occasional, unexpected outcome is that a lender might want to donate the objects to the NTS. One such object was an outrageously beautiful toilet set on display in Culzean Castle. The 63-piece, silver, ivory, glass and coral toilet set was a gift to Lady Evelyn Blantyre by her husband-to-be, the 3rd Marquis of Ailsa, Archibald Kennedy, on the occasion of their marriage on 7th March 1871. Originally loaned in 1945 by Lady Kilmaine, this object has been inherited in turn by numerous generations

of the family. Once the current owner had been identified and contacted, they were delighted to learn that it had been enjoyed for almost 75 years and offered to it to us as a gift, securing the public enjoyment of the object for the next 75 years and beyond.

SHC Jennifer Jones

Loans Officer, National Trust for Scotland

Follow Project Reveal's progress and find out about more fantastic discoveries here:
www.nts.org.uk/Search/



Toilet Service, 1871, Culzean Castle. © National Trust for Scotland

“Even though you’re on a wagon doing a fix, in your head you’re still waiting for someone to attack you.”

Corporal Mark Andison



3 Armoured Company in Afghanistan, 2010-2011, photo taken by Warrant Officer Class 1 Lee Brown © Crown Copyright

Bringing Out Stories REME Museum Redesign

In June 2017, REME Museum opened its doors to the public following relocation and an extensive redesign project.

The Museum represents the history of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, a Corps of the British Army which is responsible for fixing and maintaining the vast majority of the Army’s equipment, from tanks to weapons, helicopters to radios. The Corps was formed in 1942 during World War II, and so is relatively young in relation to other Regiments and Corps of the British Army.

Originally located in Arborfield, Berkshire, next to the garrison, the Museum relocated with the Corps to its new home in Lyneham, Wiltshire, moving in at the end of 2015 into a former RAF Officers Mess. Over the next 18 months, work was undertaken to convert the former Mess into a Museum.

A key aim of the redesign was that we wanted those serving and those who had served to feel a sense of ownership and pride in the Museum. Through interviews

and focus groups, it was clear that we needed to acknowledge the past, but that we also needed to represent the present. Soldiers told us that they wanted somewhere they could bring their families, to show them what was happening in the here and now, and those who had served before wanted their role and sacrifice acknowledged as they had helped to form the Corps as it exists today.

Another factor which the Museum had to work with is that a number of military personnel we spoke to informed us, very honestly, that they would ‘only ever visit a Museum if forced’. With our aim of wanting the Corps to feel pride in their history, if we could get them involved, then we would know we were on the right track.

And so began an extensive timetable of interviews and focus groups. The REME currently have eight trades which a person can choose to train in, ranging from Armourer through to Metalsmith. We set up focus groups with each of these trades, asking them what they wanted visitors to know about their work by the time they left the

Museum. We asked their opinions on the early designs which our designers provided for us and about the key messages which the Museum should aim to convey to the visitor.

The groups were usually made up of people who were 'voluntold' rather than volunteered, but by the end, they were often enthusiastic, seeing that their ideas were being considered and could influence the direction which the design would take.

As a result of working so closely with the men and women of the Corps, we ended up with two galleries which were very heavily influenced by their input. The first was our Trades gallery. As would be expected, there is a lot of competition between the trades, with each thinking that they are the best and a lot of pride in the work which they do. Therefore we gave them the chance to show it off. While the Museum had the final say over the actual design, it was the members of the trade focus group which made the decision on photographs, text and quotes. They wanted to show their trade at its best, and they wanted to make sure their display looked better than the other trades.

Another gallery which was developed based on their feedback was our Soldier First gallery. Museum staff had taken the approach that it was the trades which made REME unique and so this is what we wanted to focus on. But after showing the designs to the focus groups and explaining the different galleries, the feedback was that while REME have trades, they are soldiers first. They work side by side with the infantry and with specialist regiments such as the SAS and Royal Marines; they undertake the same training and can face the same situations. The key message from this is that while they might be, for example, a REME vehicle mechanic, they didn't want the public to think of them as a vehicle mechanic in a Kwik Fit shop. As a result, the Soldier First gallery was developed to show all the training that REME go through, the same as any other unit of the British Army.

Finally, the voices of those who had come before needed to be represented. We spent many hours going through oral histories, identifying former REME who were willing to be interviewed and recording their experiences.

The result is that the voices of REME over the past 76 years are represented in the Museum. As we have gone for a thematic approach rather than chronological, visitors can find themselves reading a quote about a soldier's experience in Afghanistan, and then about a soldier's experience in Korea. Civilians who have never experienced service get the information direct from someone who has, while a new soldier just joining the Corps can learn about the experience of those who have gone before and also those who he or she might end up serving next to.

Another key aspect is that all voices have the opportunity to be heard. We included quotes from Corporals through to Colonels, each with their own perspective, some after years of experience and some at the very beginning of that experience.

This extended into the images which we used for the displays. We didn't separate historical images from modern, so a 1950s image of REME playing football exists alongside a 2017 image

of REME playing football. This has directly tapped into helping to create an esprit de Corps throughout the Corps itself, but also between the different generations which have served.

We have had fantastic feedback from both military and civilian visitors. Civilians enjoy being able to engage with the military experience on a human level rather than through the formality of military jargon, while the military enjoy spotting if they recognise someone, or in the case of one contributor, having his photo taken next to his quote so he could show it off to his family.

The relationships which we developed through these interviews and from involving the Corps from such an early stage has continued now that the museum is open. We have identified displays which we would like to develop, and already have a list of names of people keen to help out and provide their stories, experiences and objects. We've also found that with the awareness that this is 'their' Museum, they aren't shy about coming forward and telling us what we should include or what we've missed - a victory in our eyes considering two years previously they would only come if forced.



Final gallery of REME Museum, showing REME soldiers at work in Afghanistan (left) and REME soldiers at work in Korea © Crown Copyright



Interview Michael Terwey

Michael Terwey is Head of Collections and Exhibitions at the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford, part of the Science Museum Group (SMG) and home to over 3 million objects and archives relating to the science and history of image and sound.

He has worked at the NSMM since 2009 and previously worked for the National Maritime Museum, Historic Scotland, and Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums. SHCG News spoke to him about social history, museums and the Social History Curators Group, for which he was Journal Editor and Chair.



SHCG: How did you start working in museums and social history?

MT: I did a history degree, I'd always been fascinated by history, visited a lot of castles and museums when I was growing up. I really felt like what I wanted to do was help bring the past to life for people, which is something I don't think academic historians often get a chance to; I was more interested in how you can do that in museums and heritage sites and I was always very interested in social



State of JB Priestley in front of Science and Media Museum, Bradford, Courtesy of Michael Tervey

history in what I studied, so it was quite natural for me to end up in a social history role, although that was also as much by accident as design - the first jobs I got were working with social history collections and that gave me a bit of a start in that area, but I always found it really interesting thinking about the lives of people and social history curatorship as an approach was very much in line with my own interests and values.

SHCG: What is a working day or week is like for you?

MT: I work with my team who do the exhibitions, collections management and acquisitions, enabling their jobs by ensuring there's good processes in place and keeping an eye on the quality of what we do to make sure it's really brilliant for our visitors. Today and last week I had visitors and I'll often be showing stakeholders and guests around the museum, explaining about our current exhibitions and galleries, our plans for future developments and I'll take people around the stores of the museum. I also do a certain amount of travelling and going to other places and museums. Most recently I've been going to conferences and I was at a workshop a couple of weeks ago in Sweden hearing about a research project where people are trying to work out how to collect social media photography - so it's a mixture of showing people around, doing stakeholder engagement, trying to make sure my team are able to do their work and occasionally some fun stuff like thinking about the challenges of future collecting.

SHCG: How did you first get involved with the Social History Curators Group?

MT: In my first few jobs my managers were very keen to support my professional development and a few of them were people who were involved in SHCG. It was in the culture of these institutions that SHCG was the community of practice, these were your people. I became more seriously involved when I moved a little bit out of museums and went to Historic Scotland. I'd been a member of SHCG for a while, but I started to take a more active role in joining the committee when I was working in institutions which were a little bit less committed to some of the ethos and values of SHCG and it felt quite important to me that I had a network of support and peers beyond my institution who believed in a lot of the things that I did.

SHCG: How long have you been involved in SHCG and what roles did you hold?

MT: I probably joined in 2002, something like that, during my first job in museums and I've been a member continuously since then. I was on the committee for five or six years and I was Journal Editor, Chair Elect and then Chair. Journal Editor was fascinating because it gave me an opportunity to do lots of reading and think about research and how we can share good practice, but also how we can challenge ourselves and be a little bit self-critical. As Chair it was more about strategy, thinking about making ourselves a sustainable organisation so

it was a different challenge there about how we could increase membership, how do we give members what they want, and how are we able to keep functioning as an organisation doing what we're doing.

SHCG: Do you think that experience fed into what you then went onto do, or what you do now?

MT: Absolutely. I think it was really great for me to have the opportunity to learn about communication, about working with people, about building relationships, how you influence people. I think it's a really great way of trying out those soft skills, which now as a manager and a senior manager I use on a regular basis. And to have the space to think about what museums are for, and what we're about and that's become really important to me in what I do at the moment, trying to think about what my museum is for and how we can shape it for the future. So I definitely think it helped me develop lots of the skills that I use everyday now. And I also built a network of people who I'm still in touch with and I think we have a shared sense of what we're trying to do.

SHCG: Do you think social history in museums has changed?

MT: Yes. One of the interesting things is that a lot of what social history curators were trying to do in the 80s, 90s and early 2000s is now mainstream, so ideas of community co-curation, working with people and that kind of museum practice. It's about saying you don't have a monopoly on knowledge, so you need to work with people who will know things that you don't. What I think has changed quite a lot is that most curators are now generalists, working across wider collections of materials. Which I don't think is necessarily a bad thing, because you can bring that approach to lots of different areas. The challenges of contemporary collecting and digital collecting are ones which we haven't yet got to grips with, but there is an understanding that we need to do that if we are going to represent everyday life in museums. I think the most extraordinary thing is how these things that seemed like fringe practices that social history curators were doing, going out and talking to groups of people or doing oral history interviews, they are just so mainstream in what most curators or social history curators do.

SHCG: Leading on from that, what do you think is the future for social history collections and museums more generally?

MT: I've argued for a while that I don't think social history curators should be defined by the kinds of collections that they curate. I think it is to be defined by the approach you take to material culture. I work in a museum of science and technology but I see so much social history curatorial practice in what my colleagues do on a daily basis. And it's because of that ethos that history is made by lots of different people and it's not just the great inventors and the people in white lab coats, it's also the people who

manufactured the glass which made glass plates for photography or the people who made the lenses. We have to think about who is represented in our collections and who isn't represented, but in a changing world that isn't a fixed thing - different museums and people will take different approaches to it, but as long as we have that ethos, that value of everyday life matters, most people's lives don't get valued in museum collections and they should be, I think there's lots of scope for people coming up with new ways of collecting and interpreting material in museums.

SHCG: Is the role of the curator changing along with that?

MT: The role of the curator is very different things in different institutions. But I think we should rethink very broadly who curators are. There's danger in us being gatekeeper-y about the profession and saying 'this is what curators do and this is not what curators do'. If you think of curatorship very, very, broadly as what we do in museums where we bring objects and people together through exhibitions or research or processes of collecting, then I think that's really important. It should have that breadth to the practice, because when it becomes narrow then you lose this very important relationship between working with people and working with collections, which is when we're at our best.

SHCG: Do you have a favourite museum?

MT: Yes, absolutely, it's the first museum I ever really visited as I was growing up, the Scottish Fisheries Museums in Anstruther in Fife and I love it because it's got boats and social history objects and photographs and items of technology and lots of great things in it. It's an independent museum, curated by people who clearly have a lot of passion and expertise, not just for the subject, but also for the place that the museum is in. They don't have loads of money, they don't do whizzy, interactive displays, but they have wonderful stories which they tell it with a lot of passion. Also it's home and where I first started to think that museums were these special and magical places. And it did used to have some absolutely terrifying mannequins, which is a good thing.

SHCG: Is there anything else you want to add?

MT: When I first started in social history collections, I kind of thought that my career path would be from collections assistant to assistant curator to curator, and I've been really lucky that I've moved between different organisations and different subjects. You don't need to be working in a social history museum to be a social history curator. People should see the group as being this community of practice and interest, but you could be working in any different sort of organisation and still find a home in SHCG.

Interview conducted by Jessie Petheram on behalf of SHCG News.

Buffalo Bill, from zero to hero

Until 2000 *Oldham Museum and Art Gallery*, as the organisation was then known, contained a reconstructed street featuring a variety of 'shops' and 'interiors' reflecting commercial life in the town in the early 1900s. When this display was dismantled following the creation of the new *Gallery Oldham* it left an enormous residue of largely un-accessioned material, mainly amassed in the 1970s and '80s. Over the last 12 months, one of my jobs has been to assess this material and consider what deserves to be kept and what needs to be disposed of to give the museum the space to reorganise and grow its social history collection in a new off-site store.



Buffalo Bill statuette 'found in stores' at Gallery Oldham © Gallery Oldham

As well as the more obvious items related to local industry and things like clog making, chemists shops and pubs, there were a lot of mysteries; objects that we just got used to seeing on the 'possible disposal' shelves. One such item was an equestrian figurine. Viewing it from afar, I imagined it to be a knight, a king or perhaps some mythical figure. In other words, given that it had no entry form or marking, it was an object which would have been hard to sanction retaining. However, when I finally got round to looking at it properly there was something about the distinctive facial hair that struck me...could it be Buffalo Bill?

A trawl of the internet confirmed my suspicion and suddenly the object had a life. The horseman, made of spelter, was one of thousands of Buffalo Bill souvenirs sold while the

showman took his Wild West circus across Europe and North America between the 1870s and the 1900s. A visit to our local studies library revealed still more. Buffalo Bill, real name William Frederick Cody, toured Great Britain extensively in 1903-4 and visited Oldham on October 7th 1904.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders, to give the show its full title, began to arrive at Oldham Mumps station at 1.30am on the morning of the performance. The tour required three separate trains, made up of 49 carriages and wagons in total; all required to convey no less than 780 men and 80 horses. A showground was established on the edge of the town with an arena lit by electricity, as the troop even carried its own generator.

As well as bucking broncos and 'Red Indians' riding bareback, Buffalo Bill presented Cossacks, South American Gauchos and Arab, Japanese and Mexican horsemen. The whole, colourful extravaganza was topped off with a raucous re-enactment of Custer's last stand with Cody himself playing the doomed General.

Although the figure still has no definite provenance, we can at least imagine it being bought locally, as a souvenir of the amazing day when the Wild West came to town. It certainly now has the power to unlock a fascinating story and importantly, it has taught me that it is always worth taking a second or even third look at what is at the back of the store.

Working Up an Appetite: Lab Snacks

The collections move project at Oxford University's Museum of the History of Science has been full of surprises. While the project team has been kept busy for the best part of a year with the documentation, photography and packing of the Museum's (and Oxford-based Royal Microscopical Society's) vast array of sixteenth to twentieth century microscopes, we have found numerous quirky and unusual objects, often with intriguing histories.

Our reserve collections and archives are currently stored off-site in one of the city's old industrial areas and are being relocated to facilities that will be better suited to the needs of the objects. In April 2017, one of the more unusual and eye-catching objects was found by the project team. 'Cardboard Box for "Lab Snacks", Early 21st Century' represents healthy living and the human side of science and industry, even if illustrated with an anthropomorphic green dog.

"Lab Snacks" are given to the staff and customers of Thorlabs, a New Jersey-based manufacturer of scientific instruments. The company specialises in optical and fibre-optic tools and issues this product as a free promotional gift to encourage healthy eating, personal fitness and wellbeing. A "Lab Snacks" recipient can expect to tuck in to nuts, granola bars and dried fruit after a hard day's work in the laboratory. Thorlabs' website has illustrations of the product range and refers to "famished grad students who depend on the Lab Snacks for an occasional meal"¹.

On close inspection of the box and inner packaging of the "Lab Snacks" in our collection however, we discovered that the food had been removed and presumably eaten. We do not know at which point in the object's history the contents was likely consumed or by whom. Nevertheless, it is probably just as well that the edible



'Lab Snacks' inner packaging. Courtesy of Oxford University Museums

components are no longer present, as food in a store full of historic objects is not a sensible arrangement. The shape of the inner packaging suggests that our "Lab Snacks" contained a fast food-type sweet pie, rather than dried fruit and nuts.

The shoebox-sized container displays an example of an innovative marketing technique. The graphics were designed by Steven R. Fine, an employee of Thorlabs,² although nothing is known about the design process or why the dog presenting the product is green. However it is a curious item and an example of the museum's creative and forward-looking approach to contemporary collecting.

This object was initially loaned to the Museum of the History of Science by the Ultrafast Physics Group at Oxford University for a "Time Machines" exhibition. It subsequently became part of the permanent collection when accessioned in 2012. Over the course of the collections move project, we have had the opportunity to ascertain the extent of the museum's collecting output beyond the principal disciplines of astronomy, history of medicine, microscopy, radio technology and early mathematical instruments. One of the outcomes will be further exhibitions of curiosities from the reserve collections, with "Lab Snacks" likely to be on the menu. Other notable objects can be viewed on the MHS Twitter and Instagram pages.

 **Jack Ord**

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'Lab Snacks' outer packaging. Courtesy of Oxford University Museums

¹ Thorlabs. 2018. A Message from Alex [Online]. US: Thorlabs. Available at: https://www.thorlabs.com/about_us.cfm [Accessed: 13/02/2018]

² Justia Trademarks. 2018. Lab Snacks a Treat for Humans [online]. US: Justia Trademarks. Available at: <https://trademarks.justia.com/778/40/lab-snacks-a-treat-for-77840030.html> [Accessed: 13/02/2018]

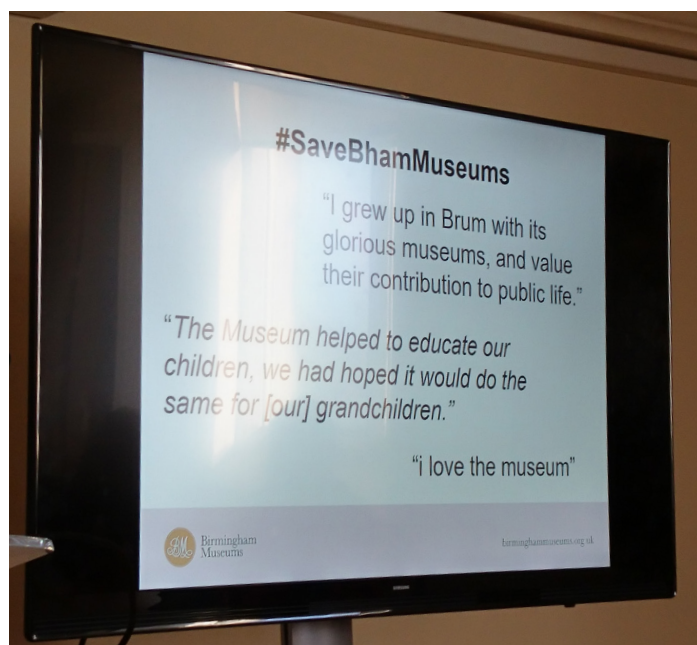


This is What We Do! Advocacy in Social History Museums & Beyond

I was the lucky recipient of a free ticket to this seminar, held at Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery, on 6 November 2017. It was the first time I had been to a SHCG event and it was great to meet some of its members.

The first part of the seminar for me was trotting as fast as I could from the station car park, up the hill to Nottingham Castle Museum. As I got stuck in traffic on my way to Nottingham, I came in late and missed half of the first talk. Luckily I still got to hear the end of Rachel Cockett's talk, which focussed on the Birmingham Museums' advocacy campaign, #supportbhammuseums. Rachel spoke about how at Birmingham Museums, staff inform visitors about how the museum raises money and where necessary funding comes from. The Museum puts out good-news stories to the public, they connect with local companies and staff and volunteers share museum related stories on social media.

Birmingham Museums have printed advocacy material; their annual report, seven-year plan and business cards. These are given to new donors, benefactors, sponsors etc. as a token and for extra information about the Museum. One of Rachel's tips: Whatever the budget



you are working with, make sure your material looks professional; for example, so that a potential donor will trust and want to invest in your organisation.

In the short discussion after Rachel's talk we discussed how some people were prevented from talking to anyone about the council's budget and staff cuts which affected the museum. In Birmingham's case the Friends of the Museum group stepped in as they could speak out and the museum could still have their voice heard through them. Other museums were told that there is a fine line between giving out information and lobbying. Appealing to stakeholders, such as councillors or local businesses, can be done through special events such as behind the scenes tours.

The second talk was planned to be conducted by Bev Baker from the National Justice Museum, but unfortunately she could not be there. The seminar's



organiser, Holly Trubshawe, stood in for her and we still got to hear what Bev had prepared for us. The Nottingham Heritage Forum was an important part of this presentation. The forum, nottsheritage.co.uk, was set up in 2011 and Bev chairs the committee. The first aims of the forum are to promote, support, develop and represent its members within the County of Nottinghamshire.

The Forum has resulted in awards, funding and a great network.

Part two was about the Crime and Punishment Collections Network (CaP). This network is looking to go international, which speaks volumes about its success. It provides better access to collections and sites. There was a stronger 'together' feel to this talk, with a sense of museums and other organisations uniting and showing councils, stakeholders, possible benefactors, donors and other interested parties that they are more than just one museum.

Simon Brown from Newstead Abbey was the third speaker, focussing on the Museum Association's advocacy work. Simon showed several key documents published by the MA that will help museum professionals with their advocacy, including Museums Change Lives, the MA's Code of Ethics and their new Salary Guidelines 2017 (these and other documents are all available on the MA website). Simon urged us to remember that the MA is there to help museums with any advocacy related issues or questions.

After our lunch break we continued with a presentation from Victoria Rogers from The Cardiff Story Museum. Victoria spoke about how the museum had faced several setbacks shortly after opening in 2011, such as large budget cuts and projects being cancelled. Victoria pressed the message that advocacy needs to be a priority, a constant part of our jobs and that it is important to blow our own trumpets! Victoria had some practical tips on how to advocate: to have a well thought out message;

to know who you are addressing; to get people to the museum and show them what you are doing. Twitter worked very well for Victoria as it gave her a platform on which she was on equal terms with those normally above her in hierarchy. And her final message was this: stay positive as nobody reacts well to negativity.

The day ended in a practical session. First we had a good look at Barnsley Museums' Education "This is what we do" booklet. We had a group discussion to see what parts work and what may need tweaking. Discussion went into problems with quality of photography, photography permissions and statistics. In the second half of the practical we discussed in small teams what we think will be our forward plan after the seminar, what we will take away with us and what we will implement at work.

For me it was certainly the attitude of shouting about our work. The collections team I work with and I will have to work on this, and we have to realise that even the relatively small things are worth shouting about. We should not assume people will know what we do, as some might be quite surprised with the variety of our work. Some councillors, (potential) donors and visitors will be surprised with what we have in the collections, how many objects there are, how these objects get used and how we take care of them.

We ended the day with a tour of Nottingham Castle, conducted by Simon Brown who previously worked at the Castle. The view from the castle over Nottingham is stunning. I really enjoyed our visit to the Paintings Gallery too. A short discussion with some members of the group, on our views on the way the paintings were presented, ended the day.

 **Eveline van Breemen**

Collections Assistant for Social History,
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Care of Photographs

The Care of Photographs seminar organised in collaboration with the Social History Curators Group and the Photographic Collections Network was an informative guide of the history of photographic processes with practical recommendations on the preventative care of photographs.

Susie Clark, Photograph Conservator, led the seminar and started the day looking at the development of historical photographic processes throughout the 19th century. Knowledge of the differences in processes can assist curators to identify the types of photographs in their collections, which in turn helps to prescribe how to best store photographs and treat any issues. With photographic collections, understanding the chemistry behind how materials behave is key and helps to extend the life of a photograph.

Susie explained how the first experiments with photography go back earlier than one might expect. In the early 1800s Thomas Wedgwood, son of Josiah Wedgwood, was the first person to conduct experiments to capture an image using light sensitive material, in his case using silver salts on paper.

Nicéphore Niépce however created the first permanent images in France in the 1820s. He used bitumen and lavender oil, which hardened on exposure to light. The images produced were very crude and the exposure time could take days, so it was not until the 1830s that photography became more widely used, when Niépce's associate Louis Daguerre developed the first practical process. Daguerre recognised the potential for photography to replace miniature painting and created the daguerreotype process.



Daguerreotype of a young girl. Courtesy of Danielle Patten



Albumen print of a man. Courtesy of Danielle Patten

This process used a silver-coated plate made light sensitive by exposing it to iodine and fixing the image with sodium sulphate. This meant that areas un-exposed to light remained silver, thus making daguerreotypes quite easy to identify by their silver hue. They can also have the recognisable trait of appearing in negative rather than positive when tilted towards a light source. Daguerreotypes were popular in the 1840s and 1850s; it was an expensive process and therefore mostly only reserved for wealthy sitters. As the exposure times were still long, the sitters were often clamped into position, which goes some way to explaining their rather austere facial expressions.

Around the same time, there were developments in photographic processes taking place in England, with Henry Fox Talbot developing the calotype process in the 1840s. A calotype print is identifiable as the silver image was developed onto a paper support giving it a watercolour type quality with paper fibres visible. The calotype did not displace the daguerreotypes, despite being an advanced process. However, the methods invented by Fox Talbot, such as producing a negative, would go on to set the foundations of modern photography.

The identification of photographic processes can shed a light onto the social standing of the sitter and photographer, as the method used would be dictated by the time and money they had available to spend.

Susie showed this through the popularity of various cheaper printing processes in the 1850s. For example, ambrotype prints were cheaper to produce than many

previous processes, so were popular with the middle classes - as such they can often be found in family history collections. They are distinctive by the way the emulsion appears to float on top of the backing and does not show as a negative when tilted, as is the case with the daguerreotype.

Another example Susie gave was the popularity of the tintype process from the 1850s through to the 1930s. The prevalence of the tintype, typically brown in tone due to the use of iron in the process, coincided with the popularity of visits to English seaside resorts amongst the working classes. Commercially minded photographers set up this cheap and easy to use process in public places, most typically in seaside towns, for sitters to have their portrait taken for a small fee. These photographs, full of naïve charm, could be taken home as a memento of an excursion and were often put into family albums.



Tintype print with fading facial features.
Courtesy of Danielle Patten

In the last section of the seminar, Susie focused on some key conservation problems and solutions. It was comforting to hear about the work on preserving photographs in the 19th century by the Royal Photographic Society, to know that the struggle curators face today to prolong the life of photographs is not a new one.

Susie talked through the common causes of deterioration, which can vary greatly depending on the process used. For example, silver print images are prone to silver oxidation, which fades the image in a halo effect as the edges have greater exposure to the air and deteriorate first.



Albumen print of a woman showing damage.
Courtesy of Danielle Patten

The materials around the photograph, often originally intended as a form of protection, can also cause damage. For example, when glass, found in frames and cases, deteriorates it reacts with the image and causes green areas or crystals. The paper used in family albums, envelopes, plastic and wooden boxes used to store photographs can also cause damage, so in some cases it may be best to decant photographs into a more suitable container.

A key tip from Susie on displaying photographs was not to put them on display near any new wood or in recently painted rooms, as the gases omitted can fade the image. Due to the light sensitive nature of photographs, it is crucial that they are not displayed in direct light or exposed to light levels exceeding 50 lux.

As most damage is irreversible, prevention is key. Cold storage with a stable RH is advisable to halt deterioration. Ideal conditions vary depending on the type of photograph so Susie suggested good resources to consult are *A Guide to the Preventive Conservation of Photograph Collections* by Bertrand Lavédrine and *Standards in the Museum Care of Photographic Collections* that can be downloaded on the Collections Trust website.

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