

Social History in Museums

Volume 41



Social History in Museums

Special issue: Collecting, interpreting and displaying LGBTQ histories

Guest edited by Stuart Frost, Head of Interpretation & Volunteers,
The British Museum

Co-edited by Helen McConnell Simpson and Verity Smith

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Editor's Foreword

Fifty years ago, on 27 July 1967, the Sexual Offences Act received royal assent. This important legislation partially decriminalised homosexuality in England and Wales; it represents an important milestone in the struggle for equality and subsequent campaigns. This volume of the SHCG journal has an LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer) theme to coincide with this anniversary.¹

LGBTQ histories have, of course, traditionally been overlooked or underrepresented in museums. Although there were some exceptional projects and displays before 2000, it is only after this point that exhibitions, displays and projects began to become more frequent. The extent to which LGBTQ histories are meaningfully integrated with permanent displays across the museum sector as a whole is still, arguably, variable and uneven. Some LGBTQ perspectives and experiences are better represented than others. The anniversary provides an opportunity for us to reflect on where we are as a sector with regard to LGBTQ histories, and where we would like to be.

The articles brought together in this volume highlight recent exhibitions, projects or interpretative approaches. Geographically the contributions represent museums or archives in Berlin, Brighton, Edinburgh, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Norwich, Plymouth and Reading; they form a rich body of case studies. Although varied, they collectively highlight the need for - and benefits of - collaboration between institutions and LGBTQ communities and individuals. Catherine O'Donnell, for example, describes inspirational work at the People's History Museum, Manchester that is completely community driven; Matt Exley's article about identifying and collecting LGBTQ objects and histories at National Museums Liverpool similarly demonstrates the unique value of community knowledge.

The anniversary of the passing of the Sexual Offences Act has provided additional impetus to LGBTQ programming during 2017; It is probable that more LGBTQ projects will take place over the next twelve months than in any previous year to date. It is to be hoped that many of these initiatives will leave a lasting legacy and that they - like the projects described in the articles brought together here - will provide plenty of inspiration to stimulate debate and generate new approaches.

'On behalf of the editorial team I'd like to. I'd like to thank all of the authors who have contributed to this edition by generously sharing their experiences and giving of their time. I'd also like to thank Helen McConnell Simpson and Verity Smith - the SHCG's editorial team - without whom this volume wouldn't have happened; we all hope you enjoy reading it.

Stuart Frost

Guest Editor

¹ I have opted to use LGBTQ in this introduction, but other many of the projects described in the journal have adopted other acronyms. We have, of course, retained each author's preferred terminology; usage in each article is consistent, in the volume as a whole it is not.

The two final reviews in this volume don't have a direct LGBTQ connection, but as there was space to accommodate them we took the opportunity to do so.

Get out of the closet and the stores!: How the Museum of Liverpool is uncovering LGBTQI stories and objects from its existing collections in their Pride and Prejudice project

Matt Exley

Matt Exley, Researcher at National Museums Liverpool, shares his experiences of working collaboratively to identify and interpret objects of LGBTQI significance as part of the Pride and Prejudice project.

Let's start at the very beginning...

A major aim of the Pride and Prejudice project is to uncover objects which pertained to, or had significance for Liverpool's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex (LGBTQI) community from our urban history collections at the Museum of Liverpool and fine and decorative art collections at the Walker, Lady Lever and Sudley House Art Galleries. With tens of thousands of objects in these collections the museum believed that hundreds, if not thousands of them would have been made by, used by, or affected LGBTQI communities and individuals. The task we had was discovering them. This paper will focus on the work undertaken at the Museum of Liverpool to discover and record these objects and their significance.

The Museum of Liverpool had done some work with LGBTQI communities in delivering exhibitions such as April Ashley: *Portrait of a Lady, Now + Then: three decades of HIV in Merseyside*, a display of Yankel Feather's Wheel of Fortune for LGBT History Month 2014, as well as hosting the Unstraight Museum Conference in 2014. Through working on these projects we had made a start, but realised that a lot of the Museum of Liverpool's LGBTQI collections were still poorly understood.

An initial collections overview was provided by Kay Jones, curator of urban community history at the start of the project, including items relating to Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Brian Epstein and other well-known LGBTQI individuals from Liverpool. Evident was a lack of known objects representing the stories of non-famous LGBTQI people and communities within the collection and that generally LGBTQI significance had not been entered in to collections records at the time of accessioning.

To give one example of some of the issues I was facing as a researcher, I searched the collections database for objects with 'Garlands' in the object description. Garlands was the first after-hours gay club in the city and over 20 years later is still going strong. After discounting garlands used in religious ceremonies and a few other anomalies I discovered several flyers and a ticket for the nightclub. The documentation recorded the date of the night each flyer was for with the not-so-useful description, "Garlands is a nightclub in Liverpool City Centre." There was no mention of Garlands' significance to Liverpool's LGBTQI scene. As I conducted more searches within the collections database, I discovered other objects which had inadequate documentation. The issue was therefore not a lack of objects, but rather of uncovering their stories. This paper will include examples of how exactly we uncovered these stories.

Reviewing oral history collections

I hoped that with thorough research and an understanding of the full history of Liverpool's LGBTQI communities it would be possible to uncover more objects from the collection. After much searching online, through books, community archives and other sources, it became evident that there was no single resource available which outlined the history of LGBTQI people in Liverpool and that the information we needed to thoroughly research the collection would have to come from a number of different sources.

Within the Museum of Liverpool's collection are oral histories collected as part of the 800 lives project, an oral history project begun in 2007. A number of LGBTQI individuals had been recorded and from this I knew it would be possible to gather a wealth of information about Liverpool's LGBTQI communities within the living memory.

I was also aware that a number of oral history projects had taken place in Liverpool with the LGBTQI community so I utilised oral history testimonies collected as part of the following:

- Our Story Liverpool - a local community history project managed by the Unity Theatre and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Liverpool Culture Company.
- Pink Past and Present - an oral history led documentary of Liverpool's gay scene.
- Our Stories – a collection of oral histories collected from trans people as part of the April Ashley heritage project run by Homotopia with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to support the *April Ashley: Portrait of a Lady exhibition at the Museum of Liverpool*.
- Mapping Memories – a project run in partnership between National Museums Liverpool, the University of Liverpool, Re-Dock and the Arts and Humanities Research Council to collect memories of Liverpool's changing waterfront from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Reviewing oral history testimonies from these collections enabled me to list a number of venues, places, people, and events from which I could hang more targeted searches of the urban history collections.

Two oral history testimonies, from Our Story Liverpool, led to the discovery of one of the oldest objects to be added to our LGBTQI collection, reflecting a time before the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967.

The first testimony described the scene in Liverpool in the late 1950s and 1960s -

'There was a good scene in Liverpool; this was before the clubs started. There were about 5 different gay bars altogether. There was the Stork Hotel in Queen Square that was pulled down in the early sixties and there was a really good bar in there, [...] then the Royal Court Bar which was good' – George, speaking in 2007 as part of the Our Story Liverpool project.

This oral history led me to search for objects relating to the Royal Court Theatre and bar, of which we had a few, many of them from later periods. I did, however, find a programme from the 1956 production of 'The Bohemian Girl.' Inside the programme

were adverts for the Royal Court Bar but also, on the facing page for the Stork Hotel which had been mentioned in George's testimony as a popular gay meeting place in the 1950s and 60s. Above this advert was a much larger advert, for the Adelphi Hotel. Seeing this reminded me of the oral history of a different man from Our Story Liverpool's collection -

'We used to go to the Adelphi because a pot of coffee cost half a crown and you could get three cups out of it so we used to sit on these settees. We'd probably miss the orchestra, the palm court bit, because they'd finish by 10 o'clock but we could go on still talking to each other. The waiters used to totter about, they were equally as camp.' – Brian S, speaking in 2007 as part of the Our Story Liverpool project.

Through the review of these two oral history testimonies I had uncovered an object which represented 3 important venues to the city's LGBTQI history. The Stork Hotel had long been demolished and today the Adelphi Hotel and Royal Court Bar are not the gay meeting-places they were 50 or 60 years ago. The stories contained within this theatre programme, and its coded adverts for LGBTQI hotspots in a time prior to decriminalisation of homosexuality, would have been lost to history if a detailed and thorough review of local oral histories had not been conducted.



Royal Court Theatre Programme (1956). Photograph, National Museums Liverpool

New oral history collection

As the review of the oral history collection took place and more objects were uncovered from the collection, it became clear that although objects had been identified, little information had been recorded at the time of accessioning. For the objects to be useable and well documented it was necessary to find out more information.

By conducting targeted interviews with members of Liverpool's LGBTIQ communities I found not only much of the information I needed, but also that each person I spoke to had their own stories, anecdotes, and opinions which were fascinating and from a research perspective, incredibly useful. The collation of new oral histories underpinned a lot of the information already gathered from existing oral histories as well as providing a permanent record of the vast amount of new information that was being offered to us by the local community.

One such interview came about because of the chance finding of a programme. Whilst searching for the Royal Court Theatre programme described above, I found another programme in the stores from a 2008 production called *Drama Queen*. Its title and shocking pink colour begged further investigation. It had been staged as part of Homotopia, a local queer arts festival, in 2008 during Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture. Researching the writer of the play, Shaun Duggan, I discovered that he had also written the famous scene in *Brookside*, a soap opera set in Liverpool, where two female characters share a kiss, the first pre-watershed lesbian kiss in UK television history. In order to find out more about *Drama Queen* it was going to be important to talk to Shaun. I contacted Shaun through his literary agent and we arranged to meet up. Like many other people we had contacted, Shaun was surprised that a museum would want to collect his story but no less eager to share his experiences.

Shaun's oral history filled in most of the questions I'd had about *Drama Queen*, he explained that he had written it –

'...about going to Garlands and that whole world and the after parties and basically write something about Mark Jenkins, who was the promoter and is Liverpool's answer to Andy Warhol' – Shaun Duggan, speaking in 2015 as part of Liverpool Voices.

This oral history made links to really important moments in national LGBTIQ history (the *Brookside* kiss) and also placed objects in the collection in a wider LGBTIQ context. Collecting new oral histories formed links and networks between the LGBTIQ objects we had thus far identified, and it helped the Museum of Liverpool to identify more objects within the collection that pertained to LGBTIQ lives, stories, and culture.

Utilising formal networks

Pride and Prejudice is not the first LGBTIQ-related project that has been run at National Museums Liverpool. Through the delivery of several exhibitions we have developed a network of organisations and individuals representing Liverpool's LGBTIQ communities. These networks have proved invaluable in helping us to uncover the stories of objects in our collections relating to the LGBTIQ community.

Whilst discussing the project with Andrew Dineley, who designed much of the health promotion material for Liverpool in the 1990s and 2000s and has worked to design exhibitions at the museum, we mentioned two flyers in our collection of examples of

objects we had uncovered but still had little information about. The flyers were for an event that had taken place in 1992 called *'In Lesbian Hands.'* The two flyers had been collected in the 1990s and retrospectively accessioned in 2014 with very little supplementary information. As soon as we mentioned the event to Andrew he, in surprise, told us that he had helped to design the flyer and that he was still in contact with many of the women who had put the event together in 1992.

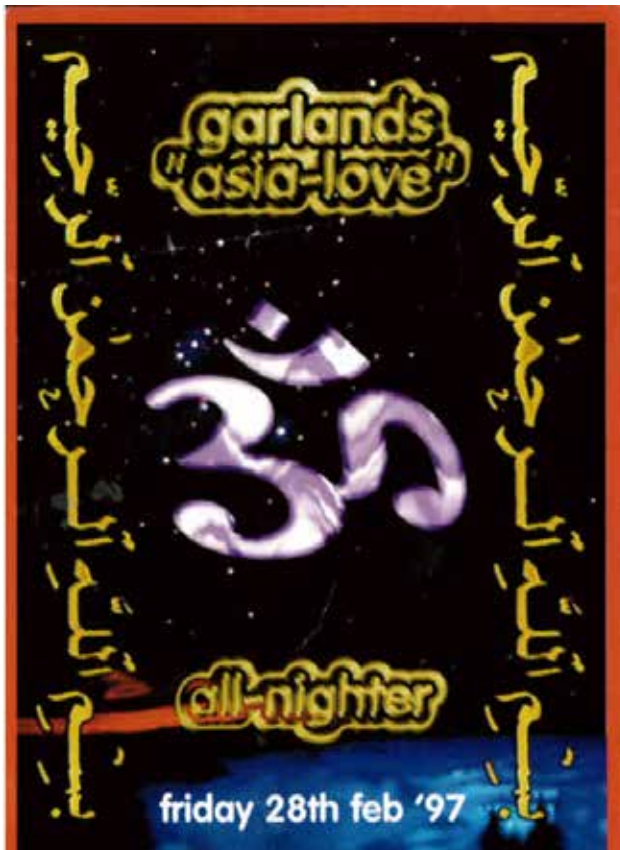


Flyer, *In Lesbian Hands* (1992). Photograph, National Museums Liverpool

Andrew gave one of the leaders of the group our contact details and within a couple of weeks I met with her and a few of the other participants to discuss the event. Memories were shared and the event was contextualised properly. 'In Lesbian Hands' had been part of a wider programme of events and research to better understand the health needs of lesbians, bisexual women, and women who have sex with women in the Merseyside and Cheshire area. Grindl Dockery, our initial point of contact, donated the report which was produced as a result of the events and research conducted in the early 1990s to the museum's permanent collection, contextualising 'In Lesbian Hands' and providing the full story of the group as well as providing the Museum of Liverpool with a new acquisition.

With many of the more recently accessioned objects, it was also possible to make contact with the original donors quite easily, and to ask specific questions about the objects they'd donated.

John McLoughlin had donated a collection of flyers and posters from club nights he'd run or DJ'd at in the 1990s and 2000s. One of these caught my eye; the museum has a good collection of Garlands' promotional material and much of it has quite a distinct style. One flyer though looked markedly different from all of the rest, a black flyer for an 'Asia-Love' night in February 1997.



Flyer, Asia-Love (1997). Photograph, National Museums Liverpool

I met with John and when I mentioned the black, Asia-Love flyer he immediately exclaimed, *'Oh no, not the black flyer! That was cursed that was.'*

That night fused the club music that Garlands was becoming famous for with Asian music. Garlands was, at that time, still predominantly a gay club and on the day that Asia-Love was due to take place the club received a number of threatening phone calls from Combat 18, a violent neo-Nazi group. Although Combat 18 threatened to forcibly shut down the night for 'promoting gay and Asian lifestyles', the club paid for extra security on the doors and the night passed without incident.

The Asia-Love flyer was the first Garlands flyer to have a black background; after the threats, the club promoter and long-time performer Mark Jenkins believed it was cursed and Garlands has not produced a black flyer since.

It is not possible to contact the majority of the people who have donated to our collection as people move, telephone numbers change, or the object has been collected through fieldwork by staff that have since moved on. Had I not made contact with John, this story would never have been told and in time this story would have been eventually lost.

Community Consultancy

An important part of the research process still to come will be utilising consultancy groups in formal work to help uncover objects that have been missed during the initial research phases. Understanding that Liverpool's LGBTQI communities are amazingly diverse it is crucial to the success of the project to ensure that they have the opportunity to view our collections and let us know if there are objects which speak to them but are not included in our list of LGBTQI collections.

As the project has progressed we have put together a list of people who are interested in participating in reminiscence work and walk-rounds of the museum's collections. By engaging with a wide group of people we aim to draw out the diverse stories we would otherwise have missed and make sure that the identified objects represent as many from Liverpool's LGBTQI communities as possible.

In July 2016 National Museums Liverpool were officially represented at Liverpool Pride. We produced a large number of images of our LGBTQI collections and invited members of the public to share their stories, thoughts, and opinions on the objects and stories we had already identified. This information was collated and imbedded in to the object databases for future curatorial reference. By attending Liverpool Pride we were able to reach out to a wider community rather than expecting them to come to us, giving us access to a more varied and representative group of people.

On 10 December 2016 we will be holding the first of our internal community consultation events within the Museum of Liverpool. This will take the form of a structured discussion in which people are invited to feedback on what we have done so far, accessing our online collections pages and adding to our current understanding of our LGBTQI collections. We will also lead the group on a tour of the museum, inviting people to highlight objects of personal significance that we might not have identified as part of the research. This will give us the opportunity to better understand the collections on display from the perspective of LGBTQI visitors, and to help us to identify which objects on display have significance to those visitors. This information can be recorded, collated, and used to update labelling and provide a different perspective on how our collections are received.

Informal Networks

In a city as diverse as Liverpool, I know many people who have been part of LGBTQI communities in this city for decades. When researching delicate stories or themes it was often far easier to consult with friends and people I know personally than to reach out to more formal networks for information.

One particularly difficult area to research was that of the public sex environments which have been an important part of LGBTQI culture since at least the seventeenth century. Researching public sex is an extremely difficult matter. Our internal internet security bans websites which discuss public sex, pornography, and sex education so using that resource was impossible. In reviewing oral history testimony and the experience of those in our formal networks there was a noticeable reluctance to discuss personal matters, especially relating to sex. Very little information has been put in to print analysing the practical side of cruising for public sex in Liverpool.

By utilising informal networks it was possible for me to collect information about personal experiences of public sex environments, allowing me to identify a number of places that had been used on and off since at least the 1950s. With locations and rough dates it was possible to search for objects within the collection representing these places. By utilising informal networks it was possible to collect and collate information on a very sensitive subject without having people put their name alongside their testimony. This information has been fed in to research files, history files, and into our growing searchable online catalogue.

Documentation and Research Legacy

So that this research is accessible and can be utilised beyond the life of the project, we have added this extra information in the notes field in MIMSY XG as well as making sure that the Social History and Industrial Classification numbers have been recorded. Written copies of research have been added to the history files of associated objects and we are putting as much material online as possible to form an online collections portal for our LGBTQI collections.

This will be a major and lasting legacy of the project ensuring that in time, as displays are changed or added, we will be able to better integrate stories from Liverpool's LGBTQI communities with relative ease. Imbedding this thorough research into our documentation gives the Museum of Liverpool the confidence and the competence to represent LGBTQI stories throughout the museum for years to come. The legacy of this research project will be to make the museum a more representative place, ensuring that Liverpool's LGBTQI histories are far from hidden, and are therefore readily accessible and celebrated in the city's museum. Whilst there are no immediate plans for Pride and Prejudice to feed in to a new temporary exhibition, as permanent displays change in time the stories and information gathered through the various means outlined above will be integrated in to the Museum of Liverpool. This will provide Liverpool's LGBTQI communities with permanent representation within their museum and not just a temporary spotlight on their communities, stories, histories, and achievements.

Speak Out London Diversity City: London Metropolitan Archives

Tom Furber, Development Officer at London Metropolitan Archives focuses on the Speak Out London Diversity City project. This initiative has resulted in the creation of a community archive and a recent exhibition (May - August 2016).

Introduction

London Metropolitan Archives' purpose is to acquire, preserve and make accessible collections relating to the history of London and Londoners. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer+ (LGBTQ+) people have always been part of the fabric of London yet their histories have been marginalised. Archives reflect this marginalisation with collections that often cast LGBTQ+ people as criminal, immoral or ill (Greenblatt, 2010, p. 123). Speak Out London Diversity City, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) Our Heritage funding stream, has started to directly address the marginalisation of this part of London's history. This project is an example of how archives can pro-actively identify gaps in their collections and take steps to fill them.

Since 2014, Speak Out volunteers supported by LMA have created a community archive using oral histories and community records to complement and, where necessary, challenge more formal collections held at LMA. Over the last two years we have interviewed over 50 people and digitised new and existing collections. Between May and August 2016, the new collections featured in an LGBTQ+ history exhibition at LMA and are now accessible in our Mediatheque and online at www.speakoutlondon.org.uk.

London Metropolitan Archives

LMA is based in Clerkenwell and is the largest local authority record office in the United Kingdom. It has over 100 km of holdings including records of local government, churches, hospitals, prisons, businesses as well as records of individuals and communities. The collections are in a variety of formats including documents, books, maps, sound recordings, films and photographs. The archive is free to use and open to all.

The Bid

The initial bid was written by LMA's development and collections teams in consultation with oral historian Clare Summerskill and several other prominent LGBTQ+ historians and community groups. It drew on a long background of work by LMA in this field including: the annual LGBTQ+ History and Archives Conference (2003-present); LGBTQ+ History Club (2011-present); a presence on community project steering committees; presenting and networking at a range of external events including LGBT History Month activities, the International Conference on LGBTQI History, Pride (London); supporting and sharing skills with other institutions; and membership of the LGBTQ Heritage Network. The grant provided funding for two years and support for the website for 5 years.

LGBTQ+ People in the historical record

Archival collections reflect the prevailing attitudes and power structures of the societies that create them (Schwartz and Cook, 2002 p4). Documents in LMA's collections date back to 1067 and for most of this period LGBTQ+ people and their experiences have been marginalised. LGBTQ+ people have been variously depicted as criminal, ill or immoral with prosecution, medical intervention and moral judgement the results. Official bodies' records (such as courts, hospitals and churches) which support and further these depictions reliably make their way into archives whilst accounts from the perspective of the marginalised do not. Consequently, the historical record relating to LGBTQ+ lives is often not a record of the lives themselves but other people's judgements on those lives (Greenblatt, 2010, p.123).

There are important and notable exceptions to this pattern in LMA's collection and in other archives across the country. In LMA's collection, deposits by Peter Tatchell, Kenric, ruckus! and others offer a community perspective on LGBTQ+ history. These collections show the wealth of potential material available to archives and challenge institutions to take an active role in its acquisition.

The initial impetus for the Speak Out project was to record the oral histories of older members of the LGBTQ+ community. This generation's stories are often undocumented and without action we would lose them as people become frail and pass away. The hope was to create a collection of oral histories that could grow over time. The successful HLF bid provided the funds not only to gather oral histories but also to create a digital community archive and revisit existing collections.

Community Involvement

Since the project was addressing the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ histories, it was essential that it had members of these communities at its core. This allowed LMA to listen to the needs of community members especially those underrepresented in the collections such as those from BAME, transgender and bisexual backgrounds.

LMA is an established presence in the field of LGBTQ+ history and this provided a strong network of contacts through which we could advertise for volunteers. Over the life of the project we worked with around seventy volunteers who, by contributing to the project, were able to develop skills in many areas including oral history interviewing, cataloguing, archival research, events management, web design as well as exhibition planning and production. Equipped with these skills volunteers with support from LMA staff embarked on the process of gathering oral histories, building a community archive and revisiting collections.

This community involvement was vital to the eventual success of the project but was not without its challenges. The first of these was that to ensure the widest possible volunteer involvement, meetings and training sessions took place in evenings and weekends. This placed extra demands on LMA staff that were required to work outside of their standard office hours.

A further challenge was balancing and negotiating the demands and opinions of this large and diverse group of volunteers. The strong commitment that volunteers had to the project and issues around LGBTQ+ history in general meant that equally strong opinions were held and put forward at project meetings. Although robust debate was welcome and encouraged, skilful chairing of meetings was required at times to ensure a respectful and open atmosphere was preserved.

Gathering Oral histories

Oral history provides a way of reaching histories that are often inaccessible or overlooked by archival sources. The different approach offered by oral histories is valuable in a range of contexts but is especially so for LGBTQ+ histories. This is because for much of history the activities of LGBTQ+ people were taboo and in some cases illegal. As a consequence, central aspects of sexual, romantic and social relationships often do not exist on paper as to record them was to risk persecution and prosecution. Thus many of the usual archival documents that we use to understand people's lives are of limited use. Gathering oral histories allows people to speak about those very experiences that are otherwise likely to go undocumented.

For the Speak Out project, volunteers were trained in how to gather oral histories by experienced historian Clare Summerskill. They attended a one day workshop in which principles of oral history in general and those pertaining to LGBTQ+ history in particular, were introduced and discussed. Participants then had the chance to practise what they had learnt by interviewing each other and to refine their technique by sharing their experiences.

Over 50 interviews were eventually conducted and transcribed over a two year period starting in August 2014. We sought in these recordings to capture the widest range of LGBTQ+ experiences possible. Participants were recruited by issuing call outs through the project staff's and volunteers' professional and personal networks as well as through stalls at community events held at LMA and elsewhere. It was explained to all participants that their interviews would be publicly available online and in the archive, and were asked to sign a release form to show their understanding of this. In light of this, some interviewees preferred to remain anonymous by adopting a pseudonym. All interviewees were also asked to agree to their interviews being placed under a creative commons licence.

Stories vary from the personal to the political, the tragic to the comic, and all things in between. They include accounts of cruising in post-war Leicester Square; older transgender people getting changed in cars before visiting a Fulham restaurant; the first meeting of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) at the London School of Economics; the setting up of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre; the schisms within the Women's Movement; and the devastation caused by the arrival of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. These oral histories not only record LGBTQ+ people speaking in their own voice against and about their marginalisation but also add new dimensions and nuances to our existing collections. Over the coming years, we will continue to grow this thriving collection so it can make a major contribution to British LGBTQ+ oral history.

Building a Community Archive

Although the archival record for LGBTQ+ history is incomplete it is not non-existent. Records of spaces, groups and personal lives exist, especially after 1967. The challenge here is that the forms that these records take can be difficult for institutions to work with and for individuals to let go. The clearest example of this is ephemera. Ephemera includes receipts, tickets, flyers, newsletters and posters, items that were designed to serve a specific purpose and then discarded after use. These items can be challenging to catalogue because they often stand alone; LMA in common with the majority of archive uses ISAD (G) as its cataloguing standard. A further challenge is that ephemera often has emotional value to its owners. The items in question may be mementos of happy or important times and people are understandably reluctant to part with them.

We met this challenge by inviting people to bring us any items in their personal collections relating to LGBTQ+ history to digitisation sessions at LMA. Once digitised, items were returned to their owners. These sessions were sometimes stand-alone but more often took place in the background of Speak Out and LMA LGBTQ+ history events. This approach allowed digitised items to be grouped together as a single collection and meant the people did not have to part with valued items. In this way we were able to add over two thousand new items to the collection. Highlights included magazines such as bi-monthly, anti-clause 28 posters and early GLF materials.

This digitisation process also establishes a relationship and trust with people which has led to more formal acquisitions, with more planned for the future. One depositor, after working with the project, has deposited a personal collection which includes an excellent selection of London Pride photographs stretching back twenty years. These photographs are now one of the most comprehensive visual records of London Pride in LMA's holdings.

Revisiting Our Collection

This digital archive also incorporates items from LMA's existing holdings. A full time catalogue editor was employed for six months. They compiled an exhaustive list of LGBTQ+ items already existing at LMA which were also digitised, taking the Speak Out archive to over thirty thousand items. This comprehensive list was also used to produce an updated information leaflet to inform readers about the LGBTQ+ collections held at LMA.

This process of revisiting the collection also provided an opportunity for catalogue descriptions to be reviewed and new descriptions added. This was necessary because the most reliable way to find many records relating to LGBTQ+ lives was to use archaic and legal terms such as 'immorality', 'gross indecency' or 'unnatural misdemeanours.' Such terms are problematic because they are potentially offensive to readers and as they are no longer in common use, they require a degree of specialist knowledge in order to locate records.

The solution to this problem was not to remove these descriptions entirely but to add a new level of description to them. The archaic terms are themselves part of the historical record and to remove them would be to destroy historical evidence. The new level of description includes more familiar tags such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans. Such descriptions risk anachronism as they may not have been used when the records were created and the people that the record were about may not have identified in that way. The view was taken however that inaccessibility was a greater evil than anachronism and that researchers' historical judgment could be trusted to place the terms used in their proper context.

Accessing the Digital Archive

The digital archive created for the Speak Out project, including the oral histories, is accessible in LMA's Mediatheque area. The Mediatheque at LMA has both a large screen and single terminals. This allows both groups and individuals to access the archive on demand without prior appointment. The content is arranged so it is easily searchable but also so it can be browsed. The ability to easily browse the archive is an important way to improve accessibility as it allows people with a general interest in the subject area a way in without the need for a specific research agenda or specialist knowledge. In addition to the Mediatheque, the Speak Out archive is being made available online at www.speakoutlondon.org.uk. At the time of writing, a selection of

the oral histories and digital archive has been made available and more will be added by project volunteers in the coming months.

Exhibition

LMA has a small exhibition space which is used to display and draw attention to its collections. To celebrate and promote the Speak Out project, a four-month temporary exhibition was curated using materials from the collection. As with all aspects of the project, the community was involved in all decisions and they decided on the key message of the exhibition and its themes. They also wrote text and were consulted on design concepts. The resulting exhibition was framed as a discussion between old and new collections, and the archive and its users about themes that emerged from the oral histories: progress, place, relationships, health and identity. Its aesthetic drew heavily from the colourful and often DIY character of the ephemera we collected.



Speak Out Exhibition at London Metropolitan Archives
London Metropolitan Archives: City of London

Graffiti Wall

The theme of identity was one of most challenging to present in the exhibition. Much thought was given to how to offer a discussion of identity that was neither trite nor reduced people to stereotypes. Another factor to consider was the mixed audience the exhibition would attract which included members of the LGBTQ+ communities, schools groups and readers to the archive. We wanted to offer some basic definitions to people not familiar with the LGBTQ+ acronym but at the same time we were aware of the contested and changing nature of the words people use to identify themselves. It was in the spirit of the exhibition and the project to make the archive a place that initiates conversations rather than presents conclusions.

With these considerations in mind we settled on the idea of a “graffiti wall” displaying posters defining the acronym LGBTQ+ and the words Lesbian Gay Bisexual, Transgender Queer and the plus symbol. Visitors were invited to use pens to offer new definitions, dispute existing definitions and share anything else that they wanted. By the end of the exhibition the wall was covered with graffiti. Contributions included alternative acronyms (QUILT BAG), greetings from foreign visitors and expressions of surprise that after nearly four months there were no phallic symbols anywhere on the board. All of these comments and more have been recorded and also form part of the Speak Out archive.



Graffiti Wall
London Metropolitan Archives: City of London

Map Wall

A repeating theme that appeared in our oral histories and group discussions was place. Places are a focus for people’s memories and experiences. The disappearance of many queer spaces as the result of gentrification is a source of much regret and activism in the LGBTQ+ community.

This need to display memories of place led naturally to the creation of an interactive element of the exhibition based around a London map. After several iterations a simple design was settled on. The only geographical feature was the Thames which was represented with fragments of text selected from the oral histories and arranged into a found poem. On this facsimiles of documents from the collection were attached with magnets. People were encouraged to bring their own ephemera and attach it to the map. Offerings included tickets from the drag star Jinx Monsoon’s latest show, membership for a motorsport club, and articles about famous venues alongside more poignant items relating to the Admiral Duncan bombing and the killing of Ian Baynham.

People were also encouraged to attach small pieces of paper to the wall which contained descriptions of their memories of places. People shared the locations of bars and clubs, some still existing and others closed, as well as memories of isolation and connections - physical, romantic and social - both fleeting and enduring.



Map Wall

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The Future of *Speak Out*

The *Speak Out* exhibition closed in August 2016, which marked the end of the first phase of the project. Looking to the future, *Speak Out* volunteers supported by LMA will continue to grow the *Speak Out* archive by gathering new oral histories and digitising community archives. More of this material will be put online at www.speakoutlondon.org.uk. This work is sustainable as it is giving direction and shape to LMA's existing acquisitions policy and outreach programming. As well as growing the archive, we will continue working with groups who will be able to use LMA as a queer space in which they can collect, preserve and explore their history.

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The LGBTQ Trail: Brighton Museum & Art Gallery Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove

Kelly Boddington and Robert White

Kelly Boddington (Assistant Buyer) and Robert White (Bookings Assistant and Performance Support Officer) at Brighton Royal Pavilion and Museums describe the origins, evolution and impact of Brighton Museum's current object-focussed LGBTQ trail.

Background

In January 2013, as part of an Arts Council funded programme aimed at improving diversity in the workforce, non-curatorial 'front of house' staff at Royal Pavilion & Museums (RPM) were given the opportunity to curate a temporary trail on the theme of colour.

The broad nature of this brief coupled with what seemed to us, as lay-people, to be a lack of LGBTQ representation at RPM, led to our decision to 'queer the brief'. By linking 'colour' to the rainbow flag and diversity we used this opportunity to reinterpret the displayed permanent collections at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery revealing their hidden LGBTQ stories. Our work on the trail and its subsequent legacy activities can be seen as evidence of a shift in the way some museums are working at all levels in response to both unprecedented economic pressures and to the movement of equalities and diversity 'from the margins to the core' of museums practice (Sandell, R.; Nightingale, E. 2012).

The trail was part of the *Out of the Blue-Woad* (Waide) project funded by the Interreg IVA Channel programme (partly funded by the European Regional Development Fund). The aim of Waide was for a number of galleries and arts practitioners in Brighton and Amiens in France to build a program of exhibitions and installations across their cities in line with the theme of colour. Our brief for the Brighton Museum strand was to curate a trail that would remain on display for 4 months.

We were encouraged by curatorial staff to interpret the theme imaginatively, using it as an opportunity to tackle subject matter that we and audiences could readily identify with. As LGBTQ identified staff members, we chose to address the apparent gap between the local demand for LGBTQ representation and the museum's provision of it. That 'gap' was highlighted by visitor feedback explicitly requesting events and programing; by the apparently small number of the museum's relationships to LGBTQ organisations in a town with a multiplicity of them; and by our own personal feeling that the existing representation was not reflective of the large, established, and politically dynamic groups that we, as residents ourselves, knew inhabited Brighton.

Brighton is argued by some to be the unofficial 'gay capital' of the UK and has a huge estimated proportion of LGBTQ residents (Local Authority snapshots in 2014 & 2015 estimated around 15% of the adult population identified as LGB and 0.9%-1.6% as trans*). The unusual size of our population (second only to London's) is seemingly due to Brighton's enduring reputation as a 'gay town' which consolidated in the interwar years around an underground social scene of gay and lesbian bars, pubs, ladies-only tea dances, and same-sex-couple friendly hotels. Criminal reports and oral histories deposited at The Keep archive and history centre by Brighton Ourstory attest to an LGBTQ history in Brighton dating back to the early 18th century.

The influences of George IV's patronage of the town, its strategic military importance, and its popular perception (especially in nearby London) as an escape from everyday morality into a realm of pleasure, seemingly combined to create the ideal conditions for 'dirty weekends' and queer sexual encounters.



Start of March Hove Town Hall Brighton Pride 1991.
Photograph, Kate Wildblood (1991).

We have a history of LGBTQ political activism by disparate and often antagonistic rights groups dating back to 1970 (the town even boasted its own chapters of the Gay Liberation Front and the Campaign for Homosexual Equality). The communities of Brighton & Hove have, in recent times, tended to be framed as a single political entity who engage vocally with the local authorities and are highly active and visible in the town's current economic and cultural life. Brighton's annual Pride (which began in 1991 as the unified response of its rights groups to Section 28) is the largest in the UK attracting an estimated 160,000 visitors in 2016. Arguably the 'LGBTQ communities' constitute a large part of the city's perceived identity and tourism 'brand' (Browne K.; Bakshi L. 2016).

Opened in 2002, Brighton Museum's permanent display 'Lesbian & Gay Brighton' was developed with local LGBTQ history groups including Brighton Ourstory Project. It featured oral histories and images about resident's lives from the 1940's to the 1990's. While I now know it was highly progressive for a local authority run museum prior to the repeal of Section 28 to have such a display (or, sadly, for any museum even to the present day to include LGBTQ stories in their permanent displays) 'Lesbian & Gay Brighton' was, to our eyes, after 11 years dated and dilapidated.

By 2013 the community groups that RPM had previously worked with to produce displays and events in the 1990s and early 2000s had disbanded, causing

considerable issues of access, ownership, and sustainability for the representation of LGBTQ history in Brighton.

A 'hands off' approach to the acquisition of LGBTQ objects, intended to empower and enable local community groups such as Brighton Ourstory Project to collect their own histories, meant that no collections policy for this material had been developed. When Brighton Ourstory Project, the primary group collecting these objects, disbanded in 2012, their object collections were returned to their donors with some of the 2D collections deposited at the Keep archive (a partnership between the East Sussex Record Office, RPM, and the special collections of the University of Sussex). The majority of material is currently inaccessible. These events left the museum without the resources and relationships needed to approach representation in a meaningful way.

Creating the Trail

When we began to develop the trail in February 2013, we looked to a sector, still reacting to a seismic legal shift, for similar projects and best practice around LGBTQ representation. We found it strangely quiet and lacking in authoritative voices (not realising that we ourselves were part of a movement rushing in to fill the vacuum). We found that the British Museum had built on the themes of their Warren Cup exhibition to develop the thematic web trail 'Desire and Diversity' in 2009, and the book, *A little Gay History: Desire and Diversity across the World* (2013). Their interpretive approach - informed by collections spanning thousands of years and a myriad of cultures - looked at the idea of same sex desire and diversity of gender to encompass a range of human experiences and identities for which the application of Western, politicised, contemporary labels would be completely meaningless. (Parkinson R. 2013).

We looked at the curatorial approach of *Queering the Museum* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (2010-11). Matt Smith, a 'hybrid artist curator and historian' produced the exhibition with a subversive approach informed by the ideas of Queer Theory. Original ceramic works (Artistic Interventions) were displayed in conversation with the existing collections. This subtly foregrounded queer stories and perspectives while drawing attention to the museum itself as an apparatus that reinforces ideas of heteronormativity and patriarchy (Institutional Critique). *Queering the Museum* made statements that were powerful but subtle, disrupting the conventions of the museum without actually having to change very much physically (Smith M.2016).

In early 2014, the LGBTQ trail's significance was acknowledged by RPM and it was decided that, after a redesign and the addition of digital content, it would be reinstalled as a permanent feature. 'Queering' interventions and trails are a low cost, flexible and effective strategy for improving minority representation with limited time and resources but could be seen as tokenistic or shallow gestures that are easily swept away. We considered integrating the trail into the standard object labels or interpretation but decided that simply signposting visitors to LGBTQ objects and stories using the trail format was most appropriate at that point. We wanted the trail to be accessible to the public in a variety of ways to remove geographic, physical, mental or financial barriers to access as much as possible. All of our content was looked at by our Access Advisory Group (a group that advises RPM on issues of access that may be faced by service users with physical, sensory or, learning disabilities) and the LGBTQ Trail is available in multiple formats. A leaflet is available in Brighton Museum and a large print version is available to download on the RPM website along with videos of us discussing the objects in more detail. A free downloadable audio tour is also currently in development.

During the early stages of our collections research we found that our collection management system lacked information on LGBTQ items which made identifying relevant objects for the trail much harder. Knowledge about an object's LGBTQ provenance or allusions was seemingly passed down like an oral history from staff member to staff member; in the past, such associations would have been seen variously as scandalous or irrelevant and the contemporary museum did not have the inputs or resources to review collections and document it. Realising this we added this information to the object records of the 10 items featured on the 2013 trail (there are only 9 in the current version). Research time, digitisation of records and the documentation of history and associations at the object level will be key to continuing to build on LGBTQ audience engagement in a sustainable way.

We wanted the objects included in the trail to represent a diverse range of artists, historical figures, and stories that challenged gender norms or had LGBTQ connections ranging from the very clear to the historically obscure by way of the rumoured and imagined.

We felt some objects had very obvious contemporary LGBTQ connections that would be immediately apparent either because the artist was addressing particular themes in their work, like Grayson Perry (the nation's favourite transvestite potter), or they were famously homosexual like the late, great Alexander McQueen. We chose to include an overview of Brighton's LGBTQ social history and to chart the development of Pride as a 'festival of LGBTQ+ diversity' starting with the Stonewall Riots of 1969.

It felt important to highlight historically 'identified' artists like Gluck (1895 -1978) and Glyn Philpot (1884 -1937), whose stories would not be known by most visitors, and to include stories referring to historical and contemporary rumours around historical figures (William III and his successor Queen Anne). We felt this helped to highlight differences between contemporary and past identities and the issues around the requirement for 'proof' (by cultural institutions) of queer relationships. Also included was a Rene Lalique vase that read visually as 'homoerotic', providing a useful starting point to talk about the construction of male sexuality in antiquity and the significance of such art to homosexuals in the 18th and 19th centuries. The calling card of a local trans* sex-worker was sadly the only piece of trans* representation we could find on display in the museum at the time (although this has since been addressed by the addition of a display produced in partnership with local LGBTU+ youth group ALLSORTS).

LGBTQ Representation in Museums

As residents we were very aware of the importance of LGBTQ people to the town but, effectively as lay-people, we lacked an appreciation of the context and history of minority representation in museums. Through our work on representation at RPM since developing the trail, we have come to appreciate how sector practice has evolved in relation to law, societal changes and the museum's own particular institutional baggage. Beginning in the 1980s and informed by the political climate of activism and the ideas of Cultural Studies, these changes represent the impact on the sector of what Richard Sandell has called the 'rights revolution' (Sandell; Nightingale 2012).

Section 28's positioning of LGBTQ subject matter as inappropriate for family audiences (and the museums' traditionally problematic relationship with sex) had an enduring legacy of squeamishness and self-censorship. This, combined with the dominant view that it was inappropriate for a museum to promote any particular

political or social agenda, created an environment in which it was difficult for museums to collect, frame or interpret the lives of LGBTQ people meaningfully (Gilbert J. 2007; Frost S. 2011).

A few pioneering museums had notable temporary exhibitions before the introduction of the Equality Act (2010). The Museum of London's *Pride and Prejudice: Lesbian and Gay London* (1999) and *Queer is Here* (2006); British Museum's *The Warren Cup: Sexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome* (2006); Merseyside Maritime Museum's touring exhibition *Hello Sailor!* (2006-2011); and the National Portrait Gallery's very high profile *Gay Icons* (2009). But these had been exceptional examples.

The introduction of the Equality Act (2010) left many in the sector uncertain of how best to respond to their new responsibility to, 'tackle prejudice and promote understanding' of LGBTQ people; after all, in the space of 7 years telling their stories had gone from being a de-facto prosecutable offence (although more of a taboo in practice) to a legal obligation and requirement of accreditation.

Equitable Practice and LGBTQ Staff Networks

We as a sector are already well beyond the point of debating whether we have role in constructing societal ideas about the normal and the natural in relation to race, gender and sexuality. Museums are now understood to shape normative concepts of difference and power relations between groups. Museums and the people who work in them now widely accept that there are societal benefits to acting as centres for social justice by addressing inequality and prejudice (Sandell; Nightingale 2012).

The legacy of the of old guard thinking is still present in the voices of a few who continue to insist that museums should operate outside of societal and political concerns (O'Neil 2002; Sandell 2002) and in the traditional structure or composition of our organisations, workforces and interpretive practice. Museums are however, very much in the process of learning and imagining what equitable practice and operation might look like. The primacy of the curator's role as the author of meaning and the concept of the museum as an intellectual authority continues to erode as museums experiment with community partnership, consultation, and co-production. Museums are also examining the diversity of their workforce; seeking to become more reflective of their communities and to address the historical inequalities that may have kept marginalised groups from jobs previously. Some like RPM are also shifting towards less hierarchical, more fluid working practices internally.



Difficult Background, Grayson Perry (2001) Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove.

Museums are being encouraged to draw on the community networks of their workforce to embed their collections making them more relevant to their local communities and, by extension more resilient to change (read financial pressure). At RPM any member of staff may submit a proposal for exhibitions or events programming regardless of their seniority, professional or academic background. This practice of working in a fluid, less hierarchical fashion and looking at less traditional networks also has the potential to make museums more representative of marginalised groups by drawing on workforce diversity.

As LGBTQ identified staff we have acted as representatives of the museum in our community networks and as representatives of our communities within the museum institution helping to create events that non-LGBTQ staff may not have the, desire, resources or confidence to undertake otherwise.

To celebrate the trail's completion and raise its profile locally, we programmed an evening Pride event (Out Late). Since then, Pride related events programmed by us and other LGBTQ staff from across the organisation (with support and funding from Training, Programming, and Community Engagement budgets) have become a regular feature. These are sometimes exhibition related, like the 2016 screening of

Nest Collective's, *Stories of Our Lives*, foregrounding the significant LGBTQ activism of a creative collective featured in the *Fashion Cities Africa* (April 2016- Jan 2017) exhibition that would otherwise be completely overlooked. We organised events for Pride Film and Arts Festival 2015, going from general representatives of the LGBTQ communities within RPM to actual liaisons with local organisations.

Through our work on the trail and its subsequent legacy activities, we came to know about and network with similar staff led initiatives at the V&A and in the broader London area. The V&A's LGBTQ Working Group, established in 2007 as group that organised LGBT History Month activities, is an inclusive group open to all staff across the museum with an interest in using their collections and resources to explore issues of gender, sexuality and identity. It represents a diagonal slice across the organisation with people from Learning, Collections, Exhibitions & Loans and Visitor Services at different levels of seniority associated. This group is collected to a wider LGBT Network of London museums and has been highly effective in using their connections (personal and professional) to provide LGBTQ programming, events and interpretation at the V&A. They have also curated a trail which was made permanent in an expanded form as 'Out on Display' in 2015 and in the same year they established a free monthly LGBTQ tour. LGBTQ staff 'groups' such as these, focused on representational activities rather than worker's rights, are forming in many institutions and may represent an emerging model of equitable practice around diversity and representation.



'Out Late' publicity image. Photograph, Dominic Evans (2013), Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove.

The Legacy of the LGBTQ Trail project

LGBTQ people have become increasingly aware of the importance of having their histories, histories that they have long had to research, collect and care for using their own scant resources, acknowledged by wider society (due mainly to initiatives like LGBT History month). Even the most traditional and prestigious heritage organisations are now responding to this demand to collect, frame and interpret LGBTQ lives meaningfully.

Historic England gave listed status based on a building's LGBT history for the time first in 2015 - to the queer performance venue Royal Vauxhall Tavern - and in 2016 launched *Pride of Place*, a digital initiative to identify the locations associated with England's LGBTQ heritage through crowdsourcing. At the 2016 International LGBTQ Archives, Libraries, Museums, and Special Collections Conference, the National Trust announced its intention to deliver a programme of national activity that would explore and celebrate the 'hidden LGBTQ+ heritage of their sites' in 2017 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act 1967.

We have reached a position where, as a sector, we are trying to address the absence of this 'hidden heritage' from our institutions, drawing on the resources of local LGBT heritage groups, artists, and communities (including the LGBTQ 'museum professional' community) to address these 'gaps' in our collections.

The LGBTQ trail has been a point of entry into RPM's collections for many different groups; we have led guided tours of the trail for the public, researchers, students, gallery education specialists (Engage), Secondary school art teachers, the local authority LGBT Worker's Forum; and the Museums Association (there was even discussion about taking it to Lewes Prison for educational outreach). Our activities have resulted in on-going partnerships with other organisations. In Spring 2017, RPM will partner with Sussex University's School of Art History to deliver a module for MA students '*Art History's Queer Stories*' challenging students to develop their own critical framework for questioning the way in which art history and institutions like galleries, museums and archives, 'reproduce normative discourses about gender and sexual orientation.'

National Museums Liverpool (NML), an organisation with a stated commitment to 'social justice and equality for all' are leading the country in the scope of their investment in collections review, research, digitisation and in the active collection of LGBT objects through their 'Pride and Prejudice' project.

Building on the success of exhibitions *Hello Sailor!* (2006-2011) which examined the lives of gay and trans* people in the Merchant Navy, and *April Ashley: Portrait of a Lady* (2013 - 2015) about the life of the trailblazing former model and trans* rights campaigner, NML received a significant Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund grant to support work on LGBT collection development in its art galleries and local social history museum. Some of the project's outputs are being developed with the assistance of Royal Pavilion & Museums- a decision based on the accessibility of our LGBTQ representation (the digital trail) and Brighton's reputation as a 'gay village.' NML will produce a series of online research, terminology and evaluation 'toolkits' for other museums and galleries interested in developing their own LGBT work.

The true legacy of the LGBTQ Trail at Brighton Museum has not demonstrated a measurable increase in the diversity of our audiences (since such data is not captured for evaluation), a succession of LGBTQ events, or even our development

into motivated advocates of our organisation within the local communities. The lasting legacy seems to be the embedding of LGBTQ narratives and the addition of easily accessible 'content' that can be used and developed, year on year as a resource by the whole organisation and by a plurality of audiences: researchers, teachers, students, community groups, artists, other institutions, and even the odd museum visitor.

It is our hope that these developments are not simply the impact of another big anniversary in the cultural calendar, 'The Year of Queer.' I hope they are part of a 'snowball effect' caused by the embedding of LGBTQ historical narratives into society and of a real awakening to the idea that representing those on the 'margins' in heritage and culture extends beyond interpretive themes or temporary exhibitions.

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Other Words, Other Worlds: An Exploratory Case Study into the Use of Gender-Neutral Language in Museums

Joanna Munholland

Joanna Munholland, Curator and Archivist at the Sam Waller Museum, Manitoba, investigates the potential for museums to use gender neutral text to promote inclusivity, avoid gender bias and challenge engrained assumptions. She uses the British Museum as a case study.

The use of language in museums is inescapable. Studies have shown the the extent to which text read in museums has an impact on visitors (Sandell, 2007). With this in mind, attention should be given not only to the objects displayed but also the language used to interpret objects. Feminists from the 1960s onwards have critiqued and examined language (Cameron, 1992), and through this work gender-neutral language (GNL) has emerged to combat linguistic sexism (Pauwels, 1998). Though some disagree with the necessity of GNL (Mills & Mullany, 2011, Pauwels, 2005), and others question the effectiveness of GNL to combat sexism (Cameron, 1992), GNL can impact those exposed to it (Pauwels, 1998). After examining the power of GNL and museums to shape perspectives, this article explores whether museums are using GNL in their exhibitions, and if so, why.

It is important to consider the power of language because it is a main method of communication and influences the information shared. David Birch (1989) explains, '[t]he view of language as determining, not simply reflecting, reality, is an important one... Language is not a neutral instrument: it is biased in a thousand different ways'. Serious consideration must be given to the construction of text, as words are not free from history and politics and may offer biased world-views unintentional to the museum. Schulz (2000) posits, '[t]here is no doubt... a language reflects the thoughts, attitudes, and culture of the people who make it and use it'. Thus, the words a museum uses mirrors its world-view to its visitors.

Museums are hugely trusted institutions (Museums Association, 2013), and the stories they present and construct are incredibly influential (Sandell, 2007). Combined with specific GNL choices, museums can impact gender equality (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell and Laakso, 2011; Sandell, 2007; McManus, 1991). It should be stated Helen Coxall created guidelines, based on *The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing for Writers, Editors and Speakers* (1980), which appeared in the November 1990 edition of *Museums*. Coxall's guidelines were further quoted in Museum Provision and Professionalism edited. by Gaynor Kavanagh (1994). Additionally, within Coxall's PhD thesis (1995) is some discussion on language and the representation of women in museums. As of yet, the discussion of *why* using GNL within museums should be best practice has been missing from conversation and requires further attention.

Methodology

The primary research for this article was done through an exploratory case study chiefly with analysis of interviews with three staff members at the British Museum, supported by an examination of different policies and guidelines used by this institution. As will be discussed below, this case study will be grounded in research and an overview into current theories of feminist language criticism and GNL, as

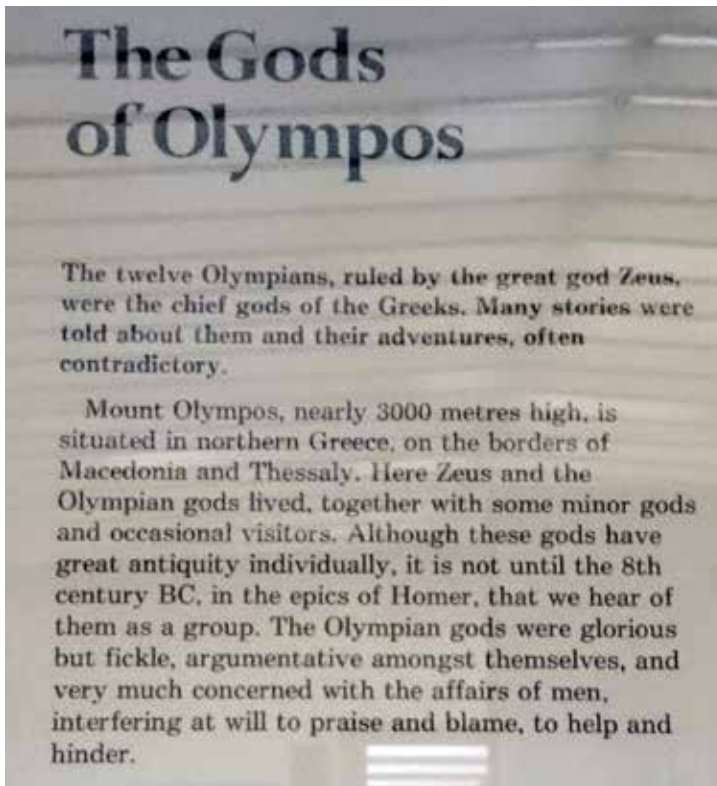
well as research into the power of museum text. The choice was made to look at the creation of exhibition text as it is traditionally positioned around the gallery and available to the public in ways other information sources are not.

The case study enabled investigation into the context in which text is created and what factors shape word choices via discussion with those responsible for text creation at the British Museum. The various interviews and documents were analysed using direct interpretation on both the verbal responses given and the documents provided to build an explanation as to why GNL may or may not be used in museums. This is an exploratory study and therefore does not present definitive answers.

Gender(ed/-Neutral) Language

GNL is an attempt to combat sexism in language by being 'a form of language which tries not to make unnecessary reference to gender' (Mills, 1995). A gatekeeper is 'a person... that controls access to something, or that monitors and selects information,' used here with reference to language and language use (Oxford English Dictionary, 2003). While Sara Mills defines gatekeepers as, 'those institutions which often prevent change from occurring,' (1995) this author suggests they select which changes occur, acknowledging they may be biased. Also important is *codification*, '[t]he technical term for [the] engraving of linguistic norms' (Cameron, 1992). Finally, gendered language is defined as a form of language that does make unnecessary reference to gender, such as male generic pronouns. It is important to examine the effects of gendered and GNL to begin to understand its importance in museums.

One of the effects of 'neutral' gendered language is 'cognitive confusion' (Martyna, 1980). Using 'neutral' gendered words to include all people may leave audiences questioning who is included since gendered nouns may refer to specific peoples (Huber, cited by Martyna, 1980). For example, a text panel in Room 69 of the British Museum, 'Greek and Roman Life', and old permanent gallery display, partly reads, 'The Olympic gods were... concerned with the affairs of *men*, interfering at will' (British Museum). Someone reading this cannot know with certainty if men refers specifically to men or all people. For example, various Greek myths contain accounts of gods interfering with women (Apollo and Daphne, Apollo and Creusa, Zeus and Europa, Lefkowitz, 1985), thus it appears *men* includes everyone.



Section of 'The Gods of Olympus' Text Panel, Room 69, British Museum.
Photograph, Stratton Meyer. Edited.

Also in Room 69 another text panel reads, 'Men, women and children took part' (British Museum). This implies the use of *men* in the 'Gods of Olympus' panel referred exclusively to those identifying as male, rejecting others' experiences with Olympus gods within this text panel.

Importantly, gendered language has the potential to affect readers' world perspectives. Research, for example by Bem and Bem, or by Briere and Lanktree, cited by Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell and Laakso (2011) showed the use of gendered or GNL 'may influence women's desire to seek certain employment opportunities'. Another study 'investigated the use of masculine generic *Man* in chapter titles in educational text-books. They found... if the masculine generic *Man* titles were replaced with more gender-neutral titles, students were less likely to associate male-only mental imagery with the title' (Schneider and Hacker, cited by Pauwels, 1998). These studies begin to show the impact of gendered and GNL.

Although problems with GNL exist, the use of GNL as best practice has been one area where feminist language reformers have had success (Pauwels, 2005). As Cameron (2006) states, by using GNL writers 'can at least avoid the overt implication that males are the standard and norm of all humanity'. Users of language can choose any number of words to communicate - using GNL demonstrates a desire for an equal society while working within the constraints of language.

Museums, Language and Authority

While this article deals with the language museums use to communicate through exhibit text as opposed to the stories museums present, language shapes what is communicated to the audience. Museums must think carefully about the text used within their exhibitions because, 'communication... is largely about making meanings – constructing, sharing and interpreting a range of content, *attitudes and values*' (emphasis added, Ravelli, 2006). Thus, exhibition text explains narratives and discloses the museum's worldview to their audience. How information is presented will influence the public's understanding of an object, an exhibition and their world. Ravelli (2006) further writes, 'meaning is a valuable commodity... there are strongly vested interests in *controlling* the meanings which are made.' This statement reiterates the importance of gatekeepers in museums. It is imperative those creating text are aware of the power they hold and the various meanings possible when producing exhibition text. Freeman Tilden (2007) reflects, 'we should consider what place inscriptions... occupy in in the scheme of interpretation... [s]ome... visitors are going to receive – and many will unfortunately get their only – impressions from this source'. While this statement was written over fifty years ago, I believe text panels remain powerful information sources. Text panels are easy to access; traditionally placed near an artefact (no need to bring out a smart phone to get information) and viewing is 'included' with any admission fees (unlike some pamphlets and guides). But museum text can do more than share information.

The power of museums lending their voice to different peoples and groups is vast. Reviewing replies from participants who had seen their cultures represented in museum displays, Sandell (2007) suggests, '[these responses begin] hinting at the power and authority which museums hold to provide legitimacy and to confer respect and equality to those groups who seek and secure representation within them.' Constructivist learning theory suggests people, 'learn by constructing their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experience and reflecting upon that experience' (Harasim, 2011). This theory lends support to the power of museums to influence their patrons' worldviews. While the use of GNL is a subtle way to influence a person's outlook, consistently including all people in museum narratives may change people's perspectives by challenging preconceived notions, or may strengthen previously held opinions. While museums may not be able to influence the opinions of all visitors, this does not mean the museum cannot positively impact some through affirmative and inclusive displays.

Besides the importance of seeing one's self represented positively in museum exhibitions, positive self-identification in text should also be considered. Inclusive text must consistently use language that encompasses all visitors, regardless of gender identification, here specifically done through utilising GNL. Inclusive text allows everyone a place within museums' stories regardless of gender identity. As Social History museums commemorate people, this question of language and the use of GNL is a key issue. The vocabulary used will implicitly and explicitly change how the history that is presented is interpreted, shared and celebrated. GNL encourages sharing everyone's history. It is hoped all people will be able to find themselves equally and positively represented in museums, both through exhibition objects and inclusive text. How exhibitions are presented and discussed is also important – language frames the exhibition.

Museums have the ability to be agents of positive change around the world – they should not shirk this duty. A case study at the British Museum, described below, offers one examination of how GNL is now being incorporated into museum special exhibitions and new permanent displays.

Gatekeepers of Museum Language: a Case Study

As previously discussed, this case study is comprised of an examination of different policies and guidelines under which the British Museum operates and three staff interviews. Those interviewed were Stuart Frost, who since 2009 has been Head of Interpretation and Volunteers, Jill Cook, Deputy Keeper, Department of Prehistory and Europe who had been at the British Museum for twenty-eight years when interviewed, and Nicola Freeman, an Interpretation Manager at the time of the interview. All were interviewed in May 2015.

A 2009 job posting for Head of Interpretation's reads, '[t]he key responsibility will be to help **develop, define and implement** the Museum's interpretation strategy across the public spaces and exhibitions' (*Museum Insider*, 2009). The term *implement* indicates Frost and his fellow interpretation officers are key gatekeepers at the British Museum.

All interviewees were asked, 'Have you noticed GNL being given consideration or being discussed at the British Museum?' While wording varied, the consistent answer was, 'yes'. Freeman (2015) surmised, 'it's something we're always looking out for... it's definitely something... on everybody's radar... I have seen a change over the years in people... looking out for this much more'. Though not always an easy goal to work towards, GNL is being considered at the British Museum. It is positive Freeman can state with certainty she has seen more people become aware of gendered language – an understanding of gendered language and its problems must happen before it can be implemented (Cameron, 1992). The British Museum is aware of and attempting to create inclusive text for its audiences by including GNL.

When interviewees were asked, 'Do you think individual staff members might hold different views on [the issue of GNL]?' the unifying theme was people will follow the policies of the British Museum regarding GNL even if they do not feel its use is important. Frost (2015b) mused, 'I think everyone's aware of the issue... the past tends to have been viewed through a sort of heteronormative male lens... I would imagine... everyone curatorially is pretty sensitive and aware of those sorts of issues'. While Frost's answer suggests he hopes the curators writing the initial text are aware of the problems of past interpretations, more importantly it demonstrates that he is aware of it and as a gatekeeper of text, his awareness is crucial. This awareness ensures GNL is used in exhibition text at the British Museum.

Having considered employee attitudes toward GNL, it is time to contemplate how the exhibition text at the British Museum is constructed. A main task for the Interpretation Team is editing text going into the museum's exhibitions and galleries. As Frost (2015b) explains, 'we have a text guideline document, and part of [the Interpretation Team's] job is to ensure... the text guidelines are applied consistently so the interpretation officers... work with curators... and... ultimately, they edit everything that goes out into the public domain in... label format'. This statement reinforces the idea the Interpretation Team at the British Museum are the gatekeepers of language.

Regarding terminology, the Interpretation Team is guided by the document entitled, 'Practical Guidelines: Writing for galleries and exhibitions at the British Museum' (Learning, Volunteers and Audiences, 2014). Reading the guidelines updated in April 2014, it clearly states what the Interpretation Team is responsible for: 'Interpretation officers... act as the visitor advocate when developing gallery and exhibition narratives. They also have editorial responsibility for ensuring text is accessible, appropriate for the audience... and will suggest alternative text where necessary' (Learning, Volunteers and Audiences, 2014). This encoded document gives power to the Interpretation Team's decisions. GNL is included, though not explicitly. It is found

in a list of ten basic rules and reads '[a]void cultural and gender bias' (Learning, Volunteers and Audiences, 2014). GNL has been encoded in the British Museum through its inclusion in the guidelines.

Once the text has been edited, it 'is distributed by the interpretation officer to other agreed stakeholders, such as heads of department and, for larger exhibitions and galleries, the director' (Learning, Volunteers and Audiences, 2014). After all of the comments from the various stakeholders have been returned, 'the interpretation officer [sits] down with the curator and... they work through the list of comments... and then it goes to the director once everyone else has commented on it then the director comments and... that should be the final set of changes' (Frost, 2015b). With the multitude of checks and balances between the construction and final production of text and since the gatekeepers are mindful of GNL, the British Museum is well situated to identify and remove gendered language.

Documents and policies are examples of encoded power, but their power is lost if they are ignored. It seems, though, the British Museum is reliably following the documents they produce. This is because the interpretation officers are consistently using these guidelines. Freeman (2015) posited the practice of utilising guidelines is 'very well embedded here'. While curators may write whatever words they desire, the text, and thus the reality they create, is shaped by the Interpretation Team.

Though the British Museum has guidelines they are not static. The Museum is also continually thinking about the words they are using (Freeman, 2015). Nicola Freeman (2015) discussed this the most succinctly when she remarked, 'in terms of style guides... and word lists we'll be constantly updating... and reviewing them... we're challenged all the time... so we do need to... justify why we've used certain language so it's... a constantly evolving thing as language itself is'. The British Museum recognises the language used in exhibitions should not remain fixed. The Museum needs to be aware of, not only the information shared, but also the terminology used to convey it. This is likely one of reasons the British Museum has been thinking about GNL for a while, as it has gained greater acceptance as best practice. Continual questioning eliminates complacency and, as Freeman observed, demands those in charge of editing to justify their actions. Those who shape language use at the Museum are acutely aware of their word choices.

Permanent vs. temporary exhibitions

During the interview with Frost (2015), it was mentioned there were still some permanent galleries that had not been redone for approximately twenty years. He made the point, 'keeping the permanent galleries up to date is quite a big challenge. But the special exhibitions are a really important way of sharing new research, new thinking, new interpretation, new display strategies with the public, and the exhibitions generate a massive amount of media attention' (Frost, 2015b). While acknowledging some older galleries could be out of date, Frost's comments suggest that the British Museum is hopeful the public will judge them by the research presented in special exhibitions. Unfortunately it is unlikely all visitors to the Museum will pay to enter special exhibitions, especially when the British Museum is otherwise free to enter. The 'Writing for galleries and exhibitions at the British Museum' (Learning, Volunteers and Audiences, 2014) document conveys, '[r]esearch suggests... in permanent galleries labels are often the only thing people read because they are close to the objects'. This is problematic for museums without the resources to update all galleries regularly. Though not every gallery can be updated frequently, permanent galleries should be

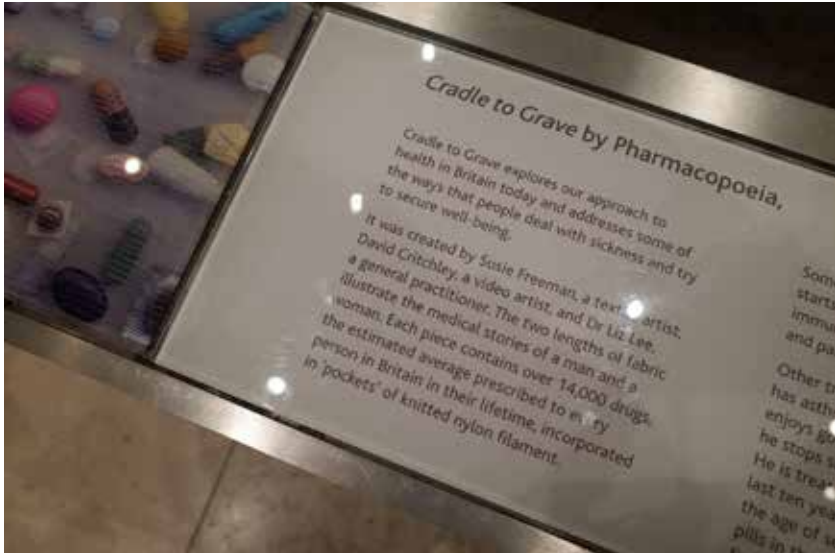
consistently examined for the messages they are presenting to the public with the possibility of replacing specifically problematic signs.

There is one other comparison to be made between permanent and temporary exhibitions. During his interview, Frost (2015b) remarked, “you can sort of look at the permanent galleries as... being a big dictionary and... people come and they dip in to particular parts and then the exhibitions are the stories...so you've got the text for the permanent galleries which is maybe more conservative, more object focused, less story based, and then the exhibitions texts are much more about narrative and taking people on an emotional, intellectual journey.”

This is an interesting comparison as dictionaries are examples of encoded power and are therefore also conservative, selective and often lagging behind word change (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014). If permanent galleries are dictionaries, a helpful comparison might be that special exhibitions are like periodicals. While dictionaries are slow to change and are formulaic, periodicals are flexible. They may play with their format and use new words and definitions, keeping up with public opinion and helping shape it. The gatekeepers of both are important – dictionaries make definitions indisputable, but periodicals help make new words and definitions common thus aiding new uses in gaining a permanent place in dictionaries. In museums, special exhibitions happen more frequently and may exercise more flexibility, while permanent galleries, seen for years, are by necessity conservative. As dictionaries give definitions power by encoding them, so too do permanent galleries encode practices within a museum. Temporary exhibitions have incredible power; like today's periodicals are a glimpse of tomorrow's dictionaries, today's temporary galleries reflect what tomorrow's permanent galleries may look like, and should be examined closely. While most visitors are more likely to see permanent galleries, this does not negate the importance of scrutinising special exhibitions as this is where new best practice will evolve from, which will be used in tomorrow's permanent galleries.

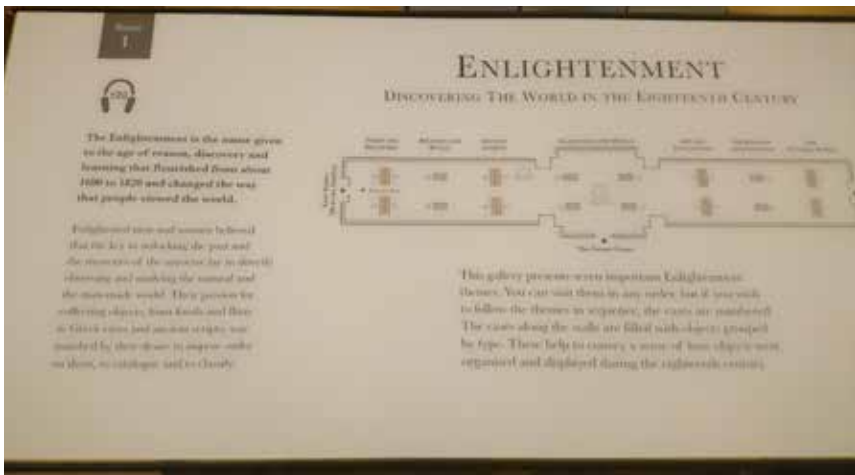
Outcomes at the British Museum

Previously in this article, research has been compiled and examined to suggest using GNL in museums makes a difference on visitors' perspectives. Freeman and Frost, both gatekeepers of language at the British Museum, understand how text creates and endorses the Museum's world-view to their audiences. This understanding by the Interpretation Team, paired with awareness of and commitment to using GNL, ensures its consistent use at the British Museum. Coxall (1995) suggests, 'the versions of history communicated by a museum will not only depend on the staff's attitude to history but will also be affected by the world views held by the staff responsible for the displays and their interpretation.' The Interpretation Team have a world view that is inclusive, and as gatekeepers of language at the British Museum, their overarching view of the world will influence what text is produced and endorsed by the institution. This does not mean there are no examples of gendered language at the British Museum. For example, in Room 1, a display that pre-dates the Interpretation Team, part of the text panel 'Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century' reads, "Enlightened men and women believed ... in directly observing and studying the natural and man-made world" (British Museum). This text panel is interesting because it explicitly includes men and women but uses the gendered term man-made. This panel demonstrates that GNL is not always simple to use; even when it appears editors made an effort to use GNL gendered terms may still be used. People must be aware to make consistent inclusive language choices.



Section of 'Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century' Text Panel, Room 1, British Museum. Photograph, Stratton Meyer. Edited.

However, to use GNL the British Museum may eschew grammar rules. On Room 24's text panel 'Cradle to Grave by Pharmacopoeia', it reads in part, 'every / person in Britain in their lifetime' (British Museum). Using their as a third person singular noun is not traditionally accepted yet the British Museum has chosen to use it this way. Although uneven throughout the permanent galleries, GNL is used at the British Museum. Ignoring traditional grammar rules is an indication the British Museum is making GNL a priority in the text they are producing and the practices they are encoding. While gendered language is present in older text panels, the presence of the Interpretation Team should prevent future occurrences.



Section of 'Cradle to Grave by Pharmacopoeia' Text Panel, Room 24, British Museum. Photograph, Stratton Meyer. Edited.

Though the British Museum has not previously used GNL consistently, today GNL is used reliably at the British Museum because its language gatekeepers, specifically the Interpretation Team, identify gendered language as an issue. Their decisions are directed and supported by guidelines and documents, sources of encoded power. At the British Museum, today's temporary exhibitions are a place for updated best practice, which will in turn feed into tomorrow's permanent galleries – GNL included.

Changing Language, History and Tomorrow

The use of GNL in museums alone cannot change the world. But it can contribute to positive self-image amongst its visitors, through use of inclusive text. To get GNL into museums, those standing between text creation and production, the gatekeepers of language within museum spaces, must be thinking about the use of GNL. While text guidelines are a good first step, having someone assigned to the job of ensuring consistency of voice, tone and language means the use of GNL, among other language choices, is *not left up to chance*. Undoubtedly it is possible GNL is already being used in museums that do not have these safeguards in place; however, GNL being used consistently in a museum is going to be increased by assigning one or more people the task of editing an institutions' language and the creation of text guidelines.

Finally, GNL is a relatively easy change for museums to make. In comparison to the representation of women and gender-queer people in museums' narratives GNL is the text used to create the narratives. Using GNL is about vigilant word choice. It is easier to make language changes than to change narratives – but *language choices shape the narratives told*. As Coxall (1990) surmises, '[t]he claim... language choice can cause [writers to create their] own version of history has disturbing implication [sic] for museum text writers'; not only is history not fixed, but something as simple as word choice may change it. The gatekeepers of the British Museum are actively pursuing GNL as they shape the history the institution encodes. The use of GNL in museums shapes the past, present and future histories the museum endorses and shares with its visitors – other words, other worlds.

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The Truth Will Out: Why the town of Reading is probably the most interesting centre for the study of LGBTQ+ heritage in the World!

Brendan Carr

Brendan Carr, Community Engagement Curator at Reading Museum discusses Reading's unique but often overlooked LGBTQ+ history and heritage. He describes work to develop new permanent displays and the recent Hidden Voices (2015) exhibition.

The rapidity with which museum interpretation and text becomes out-moded reveals how quickly a society's prevailing consensus can shift. For example, the 'Reading: People & Place Gallery' at Reading Museum, which was produced as recently as 1998, includes an A-Z of the town's story. Under 'O', we read about how the poet and playwright Oscar Wilde was detained in Reading Prison from 1895 for the crime, so the caption tells us (in inverted commas) of gross indecency. By enclosing the words gross and indecency within inverted commas (as if the definition of Wilde's sentence was not a matter of fact) visitors are being asked to question how late Victorian morality might compare to that of our own times; and yet there is no direct mention in the given narrative that Wilde was homosexual, that the sentence passed down was for what was then considered 'gross indecency with other male persons'. It was a love that dare not speak its name, even up to the last years of the 20th century when Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 was still yet to be repealed.¹

The interpretive text is instead focused on the great literary achievement at this bitter end to Wilde's career, the *Ballad of Reading Gaol* with its sorry tale of the true crime of passion committed by a heterosexual soldier. Aside from the incidental reference to the nature of Oscar Wilde's prison sentence, elsewhere in the gallery nothing implicit in the interpretation showed that people who are not 'straight' heterosexuals have ever lived in the town. This is despite the gallery's intended purpose to relate the history of Reading from its foundation, way back in the Anglo-Saxon age.

Things have rapidly moved on since the turn of the 20th century. An early opportunity for the Museum to achieve an increased level of historical accuracy and also be more inclusive arose in 2011 when conversations with representatives of the town's source minority communities were opened up in order to assess how well the 'Reading: People & Place Gallery' was serving its given purpose. In this article I will describe how the confraternity of LGBTQ+ residents who engaged with Reading Museum at this time helped to establish that their town is probably the most interesting centre for the study of LGBTQ+ history in the world.

Some museums changed lives for the better by pursuing programmes which shifted the consensus and challenged prejudice against gay people in the years before Section 28 was repealed. I will discuss these landmarks as well as argue that with their 'soft power' museums today have an important job to do in re-educating those who were brought up in the less enlightened times; when being gay was widely considered to be wrong.² I will also draw upon an interview I conducted with Professor Richard Sandell of the University of Leicester's School of Museum Studies to make some conclusions about how we can approach representation of LGBTQ+ communities today and make this a more central concern of our work as social history curators.³

An inconvenient truth

Reading's standing as the most important centre for LGBTQ+ history in the world was amplified recently when, as part of the town's homespun Year of Culture, the international arts collective, Artangel negotiated a deal with the Ministry of Justice to produce 'Inside: Artists and Writers in Reading Prison'.⁴ This installation features responses by leading contemporary artists and writers to the vacant spaces created by the closure of Reading Prison in 2013. A centre piece of the work is Jean-Michel Pancin's minimalist sculpture situated in the former prison's chapel. This consists of a concrete plinth, made in the same dimensions as a prison cubicle, with the door to Wilde's cell placed at one end. The incorporation of this breath-taking social history artefact into a work of art is innovative and visually compelling. Beyond this, the temporary repatriation of the third door of C wing's third landing represents an important chapter in the manner in which LGBTQ+ material culture has been presented in Reading.⁵ It is a work of art which starkly conveys Wilde's experience of incarceration, and the drastic effect it had upon him. It stands as a significant departure from the rather more timid way Oscar Wilde's story is interpreted in Reading Museum's local history gallery.

Artangel's installation at Reading Prison also offers a more up-front reflection of Inmate C.3.3's torment than the Oscar Wilde Memorial Gates which were installed alongside the prison walls in 2000, to mark the centenary of his death. This memorial undoubtedly offers passers-by a contemplative experience, situated as it is in the shadow of Reading Abbey's romantic ruin on the banks of the River Kennet, but it can also be easily criticised for completely skirting over the reality. It depicts Wilde at the height of his dandy pomp in the early 1880s, far from what he had become by the time he reached Reading; a disgraced celebrity convict who was suffering from acute depression and an onset of the meningoencephalitis which would shortly kill him. As a civic monument, the Oscar Wilde Memorial Gates artfully embrace the cultural legacy that his final works have bestowed upon the town, but until 'Inside' it was as if his homosexuality and consequential suffering was an inconvenient truth of the association. Much like black history, LGBTQ+ heritage is airbrushed out and left at the margins as we persist with a focus on the sunny side of history.⁶ If this is the case for such a celebrated figure as Oscar Wilde, then how much more are the true lives of 'ordinary' LGBTQ+ people overlooked in what museums are portraying?

In Living Memory

It was Lorna McArdle and Andrew Stonehill-Brooks who led the first delegation of LGBTQ+ activists to Reading Museum in 2011 with the intention of developing relevant content for display. They had been persuaded that time spent working with the museum would be of benefit to their wider campaigning work, which was then focused upon founding the charity, Support U. As well as providing confidential support and advice, this new charity would be working to promote equality and provide education about the difficulties facing LGBTQ+ people and their families in the Thames Valley area. During preliminary conversations we convinced Lorna, Andrew and other trustees that the museum's significant public profile - its 'platform' - could be used as a means by which Reading at large could be brought to greater understanding. Securing 'buy-in' from community leaders on the basis of our 'soft power' to amplify civic discourse and accelerate cultural change is a big part of the approach we have been taking at Reading Museum.⁷ We know that representatives of communities are always likely to politely assist with box ticking community engagement exercises but it is when there are shared goals, and clear possibilities for beneficial social returns on contributions that collaborations are most mutually empowering.

Feedback from the other community groups involved in consultation about the re-configuration of the 'Reading: People & Place Gallery' was almost unanimously negative about how the existing displays were relating Reading's social history since the end of the Second World War. The presentation was described with dreaded terms such as 'tokenistic' 'generic' and 'irrelevant'. The general feeling was that the museum was saying little about why or how the town's multi layered and complex society had evolved since the mid-20th century. It was on the basis of these results that a decision was made to invest in a programme of research and re-display for the 'Reading: People & Place Gallery' under the theme, 'Reading in Living Memory'. For Lorna and Andrew and their constituents, the shortfalls to report back to the museum were obvious and absolute; there was nothing on show to represent Reading's LGBTQ+ people, it was discrimination by omission.

Discrimination by Omission

As Professor and Programme Director of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, Richard Sandell has an overview of the UK's museum sector and, alongside a distinguished record of research and advocacy towards LGBTQ+ representation, he has been a key figure in a new museology seeking to position museums as agents for social change and justice⁸. I asked if he felt sufficient progress has been made towards fair LGBTQ+ representation in UK museums since 2011, when changes to the Equality Act came into effect to mean publicly funded museums have an obligation to engage and represent protected groups. His answer was an unequivocal no. "There are", he stated, "still far too many museums which find no place for LGBTQ+ content in their permanent offer. If you go into most city museums today you will be hard pressed to find anything".

These remarks represent evidence that Reading Museum has not been alone in struggling to live up to the expectation to talk about the variety of sexual orientation which occurs in humanity. Despite all the latest government directives, the social, economic and cultural conditions attached to living an LGBTQ+ existence seems to have attracted little interest or been of any pressing concern. Professor Sandell said he was heartened by 'great strides' over the last decade, with some excellent one-off museum projects to engage LGBTQ+ communities but he also felt troubled because very often these have not been translated into a permanent presence in museum displays. Not enough has been achieved to build upon the earlier landmarks such as Croydon Museum's 'Lifetime Gallery', which was amongst the first to showcase LGBTQ+ stories and artefacts in a major permanent display. Others to do similar have included museums in Glasgow, Nottingham, Liverpool, Brighton and London.⁹

Excuses, excuses, excuses

Professor Sandell pinpointed a number of converging factors causing museums to discriminate by omission. These may not necessarily be indicative of a conscious institutional prejudice against gay people, but it is vital that we seek to unpick the barriers that exist and challenge whether these are insurmountable or just being used as excuses.

One common reason for writing LGBTQ+ lives out of museums is the fact they have young family audiences and this makes any explicit featuring of sexuality inappropriate. Rightly so, but as Sandell argues, "when sexuality is conflated as the sole identifier of LGBTQ+ people so this lazy association will speak of the prejudice they encounter on an everyday basis". This is a view which chimes with the message

I received from Lorna McArdle when we began work to develop content for the 'Reading in Living Memory' display: "Do not sexualise us" she said, "just like straight people there is more to us than sex". This notion that LGBTQ+ lives should be treated in the same way as non-LGBTQ+ lives in museum presentations was something of a light bulb moment; separating sexual orientation from a diverse set of other defining human characteristics, such as endeavour and gaiety, would allow broader narrative to emerge.

Another common excuse for discriminating by omission discussed with Professor Sandell is the standard line, 'we don't have any gay and lesbian stuff in the collection.' This would seem to be an entirely plausible reason for ignoring gay social history. After all, museums do need material culture to tell stories and convey messages. Professor Sandell agreed that this problem is compounded by the difficulty of finding anything that might be present in existing collections because of past failure to attach LGBTQ+ terms to object records. There are straightforward solutions to this issue. For instance in setting about research for the 'Reading in Living Memory' project, a process of retrospective documentation was pursued to add content keywords and administrative categories where objects with LGBTQ+ connotation were identified. Entering into co-production activity with the local community also paved the way for making new acquisitions of material with clear LGBTQ+ properties. These have been recorded to Collection Trust SPECTRUM standards to mitigate the possibility of a future loss of context.

Contemporary collecting LGBTQ+ artefacts is obviously the most straightforward means of overcoming the shortfalls in existing collections and by following Lorna's advice to distinguish LGBTQ+ sexuality from broader narratives we were not restricted to collecting generic material that would not otherwise fit the criteria of Reading Museum's Acquisition Policy. In the end, two artefacts were selected for the final 'Reading in Living Memory' display; a 2010 General election rosette worn by an independent candidate for the Reading East seat who stood on a LGBTQ+ equality manifesto, and a poster from Reading's first Gay Pride event in 2004.

**A hand made, pink and white coloured 2010 General Election Rosette worn by Michael Turbeville, Independent Candidate for Reading East seat.
Image: Reading Museum**

Further consultation with all the community groups involved with the 'Reading in Living Memory' project led us to settle on a thematic and chronological arrangement for the new post war display. As a consequence, the only overtly LGBTQ+ materials now on permanent show in the 'Reading: People & Place Gallery' relate to the town's political and cultural life after the millennium. In a sense their appearance here is a reasonable and fitting



response since until the 2000s the community's presence in the town had been sidelined and hidden. Its placement in the chronology speaks of how the consensus has shifted in recent decades and how this time has witnessed an unprecedented move towards closer parity of civil rights. Much work to intertwine LGBTQ+ narratives within the rest of story remains undone.

Political Support

In Reading Borough Council, Reading Museum operates under a benign governance structure, and is at an advantage in terms of the freedom it has to engage with LGBTQ+ themes. One of its longest standing members, Cllr Tony Jones, is proud of the fact that in 1985 the Council was the first in the country to appoint a Community Liaison Officer after every household was issued with a government leaflet advising not to "Die of Ignorance" about AIDS.

Reading Council's claim to this notoriety surely adds to the case for the town to be considered probably the most interesting centre for LGBTQ+ heritage in the world. There are many more, as we were about to discover when, rather than acting in an 'empowerment-lite' fashion and discontinuing our relationship with Support U once the 'Reading in Living Memory' display was installed, we sought instead to devise further means for combining the museum's social agenda with the charity's campaigning priorities¹⁰. Fair treatment of LGBTQ+ residents is a central concern within Reading Borough Council's Equalities Policy with which the museum's own strategic plans must align. It was therefore relatively straightforward to gain senior management's sign off to support an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a partnership project with Support U called "Hidden Voices, Reading's LGBT Heritage - without labels."



The temporary 'Hidden Voices- without labels' display at Reading Museum, opened in 2015. Image: Reading Museum

Hidden Voices

With a sizeable HLF grant in place, Support U were able to recruit a Project Manager, Bobby Smith, who set about the task of organising volunteers in a programme of research to discover stories with specific LGBTQ+ association in Reading. During the year-long project, participants were involved in conducting oral history recordings under four themes:

1. Reading community. This covered the unique characteristics of the scene in Reading with detail of how people met and the secret passwords they used to gain access to underground clubs during the years that same sex relationships were outlawed.
2. Life experience. Testimonies of those who have been affected by bullying not only at school but also in adult life and how a lack of information about LGBTQ+ issues often made life more difficult.
3. Careers. The contrasting accounts of how individuals were treated within the work place. In some cases 'coming out' had a positive liberating effect while for others, such as those serving in the Armed Forces, being gay had to be kept a closely guarded secret.
4. Politics. The views of local politicians, educators and members of the LGBTQ+ fraternity who had been active in public life during the Section 28 era.

It is fair to say that an impression of the divisive and damaging effect of Section 28 legislation emerged from the set of recordings. In particular, Reading Borough Council Leader, Jo Lovelock's account evokes the feeling of the time. "I was a teacher as well as being a councillor and it made staff very wary of having open and honest conversations with young people who needed help and support, and not to be made to feel that they were somehow committing an offence."¹¹

Standard practices and long term influence

The guidance that Reading Museum was able to offer toward generating oral history recordings within standards recommended by the Oral History Society was an empowering influence over what was intended (and funded) to be an entirely community led initiative. We did not assume that participants would be aware of the documentation and ethical guidelines, but by using our knowledge and skills to provide basic training we were able to ensure the recordings were collected and deposited with transcriptions and appropriate copyright permissions, so that they will remain accessible¹².

Perhaps a much more profound long term influence that the museum has had in promoting positive messages about homosexuality, through our partnership with Support U, was reported back when I recently met up with Lorna McArdle to discuss possibilities for the future. Lorna told me that she had become emboldened as an active citizen because of her involvement with the museum. Simple things like being called upon to speak at the private view of the 'Hidden Voices' display at the museum had improved her confidence to communicate and advocate at civic level. Lorna described how the project had given her a far greater appreciation of the historical struggle for gay rights. This knowledge had heightened her recognition of the balance of power that exists in society in favour of the heterosexual, able bodied, middle class, educated and economically secure white male. An understanding which Lorna says has helped

her to empathise more closely and act collegiately with the representatives of the other protected groups she encounters in the context of her role as a director of the region's leading LGBTQ+ charity. Lorna also fed back that the 'Hidden Voices' display had sign-posted one young visitor to seek Support U's assistance; changing a life.



Reading LGBTQ+ Community Project leaders Lorna McArdle and Bobby Smith examine the Wolfenden Archive which is held at the University of Reading's Special Collections Library. Image: Reading Museum

The Truth will out

By now you must be wondering why I am insisting that Reading is the most important centre for the study of LGBTQ+ heritage in the world, when so far I have not even mentioned that the French symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud lived just a stone's throw away from Reading prison, at 165 Kings Road. It was here that he is thought to have written first drafts of his masterpiece, *Les Illuminations*, whilst working as a language tutor during the late summer of 1874.

How could I possibly make such a contentious claim about Reading without also mentioning that the Great War poet Wilfred Owen spent formative years as a lay assistant to the vicar of Dunsden Church where he wrote in his diary, 'Walked into Reading, went to Museum and joy of joys was shown all over Roman remains from Silchester. What a morning and what a museum!'¹³

Surely, in arguing the case for Reading it would be a glaring omission not to give an account of John Wolfenden who, before taking up his appointment as Director of the British Museum, was Vice Chancellor of Reading University. It was at this time that he chaired the Home Office Committee set up to debate changes to the laws relating to homosexuality. The Wolfenden Report which emerged from his rooms at the University

sixty years ago recommended decriminalisation of sexual acts between consenting adult men. As the Reading resident responsible for laying the ground for more liberal attitudes to sexuality, Wolfenden changed British society for ever.

In boasting about Reading's place in the world how could I also possibly not mention St Mary's Minster Church where in 2003, but for the controversy surrounding his relationship with another man, and his pronouncements on LGBTQ+ rights, Rev Dr. Jeffrey John might have gone through with his consecration as the first openly gay Anglican Bishop in the world.

The claims to fame continue with Reading hockey club's Helen and Kate Richardson-Walsh who made history in 2016 when by both representing Great Britain, they became the first married couple to play together on the same team at the Olympics. Now are you beginning to see how much more interesting Reading's history is when the gay bits are not omitted?

The truth is that social history is not about saints or scholars, queens and kings or even our great poets and sports stars. It is the study of the ordinary and normal way of life of everyday people and their stories. LGBTQ+ stories just as interesting as Reading's are out there to be found and told in every city, town and village but they will go untold without the intervention of social history curators who can support communities to develop and exhibit the narratives.

Conclusion

Through my recent work to help represent LGBTQ+ lives in Reading Museum I have come to the conclusion that it is the comparatively lower occurrence of non-heterosexual orientation amongst the general population that makes LGBTQ+ people seem different and as a result they have been victimised and oppressed for centuries. It is this 'difference', rather than any reason for questioning the ethics or morality of 'other' sexualities, that continues to give rise to a reticence to tell LGBTQ+ stories in museum productions.

A residual cultural effect of Section 28 is another factor that Professor Sandell identifies as an explanation for resistance. "It is" he said, "only a very recent memory that you would be breaking the law as a museum curator to talk about LGBTQ+ lives in any progressive and open ways." Similarly, even though the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 decriminalised most gay sex half a century ago, the world's major religions still promote a doctrine that sex outside heterosexual marriage is sinful. This sends a potent message which combined with the other factors ensures that featuring LGBTQ+ matters in museums remains a challenging territory for curators. Some will avoid deviating from heteronormative museum practices entirely; believing that to do otherwise would potentially damage their institution's reputation and cause offence to core sets of supporters and visitors¹⁴. Latest research into museum workforce diversity also indicates that while LGBTQ+ people are not under-represented, and rarely face personal discrimination in major museums, work to bring their perspective into mainstream museum programming often meets resistance¹⁵.

A lack of interest and concern for LGBTQ+ lives might be understandable amongst those who have had a general consensus drummed in at school, at church and in the home that this particular difference is wrong and unacceptable. It is now more than a decade after the repeal of Section 28 and sixty years since the Wolfenden Report was published. This does not leave much more time for social history curators still harbouring doubts to catch up and get re-educated. Any more excuses for their

exclusion of LGBTQ+ narratives in the social history they present to the public could be characterised as homophobic and there is no place for that in our practice; it is as deviant as racism. It is when we take an interest, reach out to open the dialogue and co-curate that we grow in confidence to include and more meaningfully work for the benefit of protected minority communities.

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¹ As it is governed by Reading Borough Council, Reading Museum was subject to Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 which stated that a local authority “shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality” or “promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship”.

² Lord, G & Blankenberg, N (2015) *Cities Museums and Soft Power* (American Alliance of Museums Press). Soft Power is defined as the exercise of influence through attraction, persuasion and agenda-setting rather than military or economic coercion. For an overview of its implication see: *‘How you can activate the soft power of your museum’*, a TEDxHamburg talk by Ngairé Blankenberg, available on YouTube.

³ Telephone Interview with Professor Richard Sandell – Conducted on 27th September 2016

⁴ See Daily Telegraph 1 September 2016. Sooke, Alistair *A powerful tribute to Oscar Wilde in Reading Prison review*.

⁵ The cell door was acquired by the Galleries of Justice Museum in 2005 and forms part of their HM Prison Service Collection. It will be returned to Nottingham in December 2016 before going on display at the museum in February 2017, following a £1 million Heritage Lottery Funded redevelopment project.

⁶ See The Guardian 7 October 2016 - Connelly, Kate *Britain’s view of its history ‘dangerous’, says former museum director*. Neil MacGregor, the former director of British Museum suggests Britain has a narrow view of its own history, focusing almost entirely on the “sunny side”. The Museums Association followed by creating a Twitter poll asking their followers if they too think that UK Museums focus too much on the sunny side of history, 66% agreed with MacGregor.

⁷ IBID Lord, G & Blankenberg, N

⁸ For details see: Sandell, R. (1998) *Museums as agents of social inclusion* (Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship 17 (4) Sandell, R (14 Feb 2000) *Means to an End* Arts Business; Sandell, R (2003) Social inclusion, the museum and the dynamics of sectoral change (Museums And Society (1) 2003)

⁹ For detail of these and other landmark LGBTQ+ collecting initiatives see: Vincent, John (2016) 1988-2003 *Backlash – and the end of the backlash* Chapter 5 of *LGBT People and the UK cultural Sector, The Response of Libraries, Museums & Heritage since 1950* (Routledge) Also see: Conlan A & Levin (2010), *A Museum Studies Text and Museum Subtexts*, Chapter 25 of Levin, A (Ed) *Gender, Sexuality and Museums* (Routledge 2010)

¹⁰ For summary of the perils of an 'Empowerment-Lite' approach to community engagement see Bienkowski, Piotr (2012): *No Pain No Gain*. Museums Journal, February 2012 p16.

¹¹ See Hidden Voices project website - www.lgbthiddenvoices.org.uk

¹² Besides Oral History Society training courses, the HLF has produced Best Practice Guidance which can be downloaded for their website:

http://closedprogrammes.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/goodpractice/Documents/Oral_History_good_practice_guidance.pdf

¹³ Owen, H; Bell, J (Ed) (1967) *Collected Letters of Wilfred Owen* p57 - Postcard to Susan Owen dated 31.12.1909. Oxford University Press (1967)

¹⁴ See: Frost, S (2008) *Secret Museums, Hidden Histories of Sex and Sexuality* in Fraser, J & Heinlich, J. E. (Ed) *Museum & Social Issues* 3:1 *Thematic Issue- Where is Queer?* 3:1 Spring 2008

¹⁵ Arts Council England (2015): *Diversity in the workforce and Governance of ACE Major partner museums*. Report from the Museum Consultancy (September 2015)

Proud City: Celebrating lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex and asexual people living and working in Edinburgh

Diana Morton

Diana Morton, Access and Outreach Manager at Edinburgh Museums and Galleries, focuses on the recent Proud City: LGBTQIA+ Edinburgh exhibition (30 April 2016 - 26 February 2017) at the People's Story Museum.

Proud City: LGBTQIA+ Edinburgh is an exhibition at the People's Story Museum (closed on 26th February 2017). We chose to use the term LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex and asexual, the + is to be inclusive of other identities) following consultation with partners. *Proud City* was developed working in partnership with local groups and provides an insight into LGBTQIA+ history and life in contemporary Edinburgh. It showcases museum collections alongside contemporary collecting. The centre-piece of the displays is a specially commissioned film with people discussing how life has changed in Edinburgh over the last 10 years.



Proud City, upstairs at the People's Story Museum. Photograph, Diana Morton.

The People's Story Museum opened in 1989 and tells the stories of the ordinary people of Edinburgh. It was developed following a range of community engagement work, with first-hand accounts such as oral history, reminiscence and written sources shaping the displays. Despite some updates however, the displays have remained fairly static since the museum was founded.

Proud City was developed as part of the Museums Association's Transformers scheme, which supports participants to develop new ways of working and bring about change within their organisations. This ethos shaped *Proud City* and enabled us to trial different approaches to our work. We wanted to explore how museums could promote acceptance and understanding in society.

Proud City was also designed to make the museum more relevant to the contemporary city. The project was intended to trial the use of temporary exhibitions within the museum. The concept was that these could quickly respond to contemporary topics and provide a space for an exploration of social justice issues. We also wanted to explore how the work of outreach and curatorial teams could be combined to create curatorial practice informed by community engagement approaches.

The LGBT+ collections held by the City of Edinburgh Council largely date from a project named *Remember When*, which began in 2002 as a small pilot run by the Living Memory Association and funded by the City of Edinburgh Council. Later a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund enabled the project to grow. The project collected oral history, photographs and other material to form the basis of a permanent LGBT archive within the City's collections and led to the development of the exhibition *Rainbow City: Stories from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Edinburgh* which was displayed at the City Art Centre (Galford E and Wilson K, 2006). Although some contemporary collecting took place over the following decade however, (most notably of materials relating to the campaign for equal marriage), no systematic collection of LGBTQIA+ material had taken place.

10 years after the opening of *Rainbow City*, *Proud City* was designed to update these collections for the 21st century and reflect how LGBTQIA+ experiences have changed since the original exhibition. We wanted to ensure that we involved LGBTQIA+ communities in the process. We did not want the exhibition to be an authoritative overview of LGBTQIA+ history, but to explore the personal lives and experiences of people living in Edinburgh in the 21st century. We were guided by initiatives such as 'Museums Change Lives' and 'Museums 2020' and spurred to action by articles such as, 'Why are Museums Scared of LGBT Stories' (Kendall, 2011) and previous projects such as, 'Queering the Museum' at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (Frost, 2011).

We knew that a topic exploring gender, identity and sexuality could be sensitive, so we worked closely with LGBTQIA+ groups for expert advice and support. In particular, we worked in partnership with LGBT Health and Wellbeing. This organisation was set up in 2003 to promote the health, wellbeing and equality of LGBT people in Scotland. It provides support, services and information to improve health and wellbeing, reduce social isolation and stimulate community development and volunteering (LGBT Health and Wellbeing, no date). They were incredibly supportive and helped with making connections to local people and other groups, advising on approaches to the community aspects of the project and on language and terminology. They also provided us with invaluable information sheets on language and identity, which we included within the exhibition.

The first community engagement event for the project was arranged with LGBT Health and Wellbeing. They promoted a visit to the Museum Collections Centre, our museum stores. On the day, we displayed the *Rainbow City* collections held in storage. We asked the community to choose items which they felt should be displayed and also to tell us what they felt was missing from the collections. These suggestions helped to shape the object list for the exhibition as well as providing leads for areas to explore contemporary collecting.

At the open day we also started interviewing participants for the exhibition film. We worked with No Middle Name Creative, a film maker who had previously assisted us with commissioned films such as *Recording the Referendum*, a film documenting the Scottish Independence Referendum, and a film for the Churchill Theatre 50th anniversary exhibition. The film of *Proud City* discussed contemporary LGBTQIA+ life in Edinburgh. This formed the centre-piece of the exhibition and humanised the displays by showing the stories of local people alongside the objects. In the film we were particularly interested in discussing what had changed in the last decade. How did the participants feel about equal marriage legislation? Did they think that changes to laws about adoption and fertility treatment had changed attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ families? How had the internet and social media changed their lives? We wanted to tell the stories of a wide range of experiences from many viewpoints, including people with disabilities and those from BAME backgrounds. We were also particularly interested in telling the stories of trans people, as this was an area which had been less fully explored in *Rainbow City*.

Carrying out filming did require planning and sensitivity. Due to confidentiality, we ensured that we had drawn up comprehensive guides for those taking part, explaining how the film would be used. We also ensured that we had completed consent forms for those appearing. We did find that, as with any group, some people were not happy to appear on film. Although we did manage to record several interviews on the open day, after the initial filming date, we found it more difficult to find participants. It was through local contacts that we managed to recruit more people to appear.

Despite some of the challenges, the finished film was a real highlight of the exhibition and provided a rich variety of stories and viewpoints on a range of topics. For example, when discussing equal marriage, a lot of positive stories emerged, but not without some reservations:

'In a way it's been a double edged sword for straight people's perceptions of the LGBT community, things like people saying, does homophobia still happen? And being really surprised when you tell them about that time you were walking down the street, holding hands with someone and people shouted things at you.'

Trans participants discussed their experiences of transitioning and the effect of social media:

'I think what I experienced transitioning, and it was quite a positive experience, I realise that it was because it was really about luck rather than a system that works and protects and keeps people safe. So social media is quite positive I think it really helps people share good and bad stories and it creates a movement that may not have existed before.'

Others discussed how new rights to adoption and fertility treatments affected their lives, but how negative attitudes still remain:

'Even those who don't see themselves as homophobic might actually be when it comes to thinking that gay people or lesbians or whoever are... should or shouldn't have children because of the whole idea that it should be a mother and a father and all that stuff still exists.'

Alongside the film, we started a programme of contemporary collecting. After the initial event at the Museum Collections Centre we found that people started approaching us with items and ideas for the exhibition. We found that word of mouth was particularly effective. On the suggestions of those involved, we also started contacting other groups and organisations asking if they had material they may be willing to loan or donate.

People were incredibly generous and loaned and donated a range of items. For example, a couple loaned photographs and the certificate from their wedding (the first religious same sex marriage in Scotland) and their civil partnership order of service. A local playwright and performer loaned props, flyers and copies of their play exploring trans identity. Cachín Cachán Cachunga! an independent Scottish arts company that produces art by trans, intersex and queer people with an emphasis on intersectionality (Cachín Cachán Cachunga!, no date), loaned photographs of their events, posters and braille programmes as well as advising on access and displays within the exhibition. Cartoonist Kate Charlesworth loaned a life-size cut-out of her Auntie Studs character. The Edinburgh Gay Men's Chorus donated T-shirts, music, flyers and a music stand. BLOGS (the University of Edinburgh's LGBT+ group) donated photos of events and campaigns and a membership card. One of the members loaned her Pride flag along with a photograph of the flag at a protest. The Scottish Transgender Alliance donated artworks depicting trans people and their loved ones. Even after the exhibition opened there was still continuing interest and manufacturer of LGBTQIA+ greetings cards donated some of their stock.



Items loaned by Edinburgh Gay Men's Chorus, BLOGS and Cachín Cachán Cachunga! Photograph, Diana Morton.

One of the most helpful things to come from the open day was the involvement of a volunteer with an in-depth knowledge and an interest in LGBTQIA+ history. She was incredibly supportive in forging links with local groups, suggesting contacts and providing material as well as proofreading and fact checking exhibition text. Her involvement in exhibition planning meetings helped us to make links and acquire material that would not have otherwise been possible. Other volunteers also supported the project and enabled us to develop a more polished final product. One volunteer photographed the museum collections; another assisted with the graphic design of the exhibition.

As the project progressed there were regular meetings for the team, which included outreach, curatorial and documentation staff as well as the volunteer. This team discussed some of the curatorial issues. These ranged from buildings issues, such as the lack of light in the exhibition space; discussions of collecting policies and documentation; to issues of censorship- was displaying good sex guides appropriate in a family venue? There was also the issue of how to display material which was largely paper based in an interesting way.

We also discussed the use of terminology, as we are aware that some of the language used could be new to those visiting the exhibition. Even the term LGBTQIA+ may need some explanation. After consulting with LGBT Health and Wellbeing we decided that rather than attempting to oversimplify the language in our interpretation, we wanted to use the correct terminology alongside explanations to inform the wider public. This led to the use of the term LGBTQIA+ rather than LGBT. We also asked them to check our interpretation to ensure we were using terminology correctly, in particular definitions of terms such as non-binary or genderqueer. Other terms required even more specialist advice, we had to check with the Scottish Transgender Alliance whether trans or trans* was the preferred term (we have used trans on their advice). It was in issues such as these that the help of our volunteer and partners was invaluable.

As the launch event drew nearer, the usual exhibition rush started, arranging framing, lights, mounts, paperwork and so on. In reality, many of the challenges which this exhibition presented were largely due to the use of a non-exhibition space for display, rather than due to the community aspects of the work. Issues such as lighting, AV equipment and walls not suited for hanging threw up some problems. There were however, certain things we wanted to ensure we got right to enable us to tell people's stories in a way they felt was representative. We ensured that all labels were approved by the person who loaned or donated the item and some donors dropped by to see how their items were displayed. Cachín Cachán Cachunga! in particular helped by giving suggestions on how to improve access to the exhibition, difficult in a building where part of the exhibition space was up a narrow spiral staircase. Although the top floor is not accessible, we did ensure that there were large print copies of the labels, a transcript of the film and that a box of handling material and photographs of objects was kept downstairs for anyone who was unable to climb the stairs.

The finished exhibition stretched over two floors. The start of the exhibition in the museum lobby provided an introduction to the topic as well as highlighting some of the contemporary collecting which had taken place. Upstairs we had converted the video room into an exhibition space. As there were a lot of stairs between the two halves of the exhibition we ensured that there was plenty of signage showing people how to access the second part of the display. The display upstairs aimed at giving more in-depth historical context, looking at LGBTQIA+ history from the 1950s onwards. Although the displays had a very specific Edinburgh context, we explored some of the larger legal changes with a visual timeline which highlighted how recently

some rights have been won. For example, although in 1967 The Sexual Offences Act decriminalised male homosexual acts between consenting adults above the age of 21 in England and Wales, it was only in 1980 that a successful amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill was put forward to bring Scottish law in line (Galford E and Wilson K, 2006)



Part of the display downstairs at the People's Story Museum. Photograph, Diana Morton.

The exhibition launched with a community event on 29th April 2016. For the event we ensured that we advertised the opening through LGBT Health and Wellbeing and sent invitations to all those who appeared in the film or loaned and donated items. At the event, there was a great sense of community as so many of those attending had been involved in the process of developing the exhibition.

Around the opening we ran briefings for the staff who regularly worked in the building, as we knew that some of the issues discussed in the exhibition could be sensitive. This was to ensure that they had a good knowledge of the exhibition, and to make sure that the museum space was welcoming to all.

In order to evaluate the exhibition we have ensured that there are opportunities for visitors to feedback via a comment book and through questionnaires facilitated by volunteers. Research so far (we are still collating this material) has shown that most of the visitors to the exhibition have been adults, often tourists from outside the UK, but with a number of local residents completing surveys too. This matches the visitor demographic shown by our previous audience research for that venue. Some LGBTQIA+ people have visited the exhibition but many of our visitors would not identify themselves in this way. These figures have not been recorded in previous surveys, so we have no benchmark to compare this to. However, almost all have expressed support for the People's Story offering more temporary exhibitions and

doing more social justice orientated work in future and many suggesting potential topics, with migration being the most suggested.

Feedback too has been overwhelmingly positive: 'Thank you for sharing the stories of our vibrant, proud community, very unexpected, informative visit. Cheers!', 'One of the most interesting museums ever. You cannot even imagine how touched I am to see the part on LGBTQIA+ people in Scotland. Thanks +++' and 'Fascinating exhibition. So pleased you've covered these issues. Life changing!! *****'. Other comments really show what recognition of LGBTQIA+ lives in our museums can mean to visitors: 'I wish someday soon my city, my country can call itself proud too like you.'

Taking part in the Transformers programme was an amazing opportunity and the support and funding offered enabled us to take calculated risks and try new approaches. The project also started closer working between engagement and curatorial teams, which have recently been combined into one team in our structure. Due to funding requirements, at times the project did feel hurried; we went from the first community event with LGBT Health and Wellbeing to the exhibition opening in just over 3 months!

The project and exhibition have enabled us to tell the stories of LGBTQIA+ communities in Edinburgh and build links with new audience groups, as well as carrying out contemporary collecting. We hope that the exhibition can tour community venues after it closes at the People's Story so it continues to be seen. The project has also led to the development of new work-streams on improving access. It has laid the ground for other social justice projects in future and for a practical application of the agenda of museums as instruments of social change.

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Homosexualität_en: Exhibiting a Contested History in Germany in 2015

Andrea Rottmann and Hannes Hacke

Andrea Rottmann (Doctoral student, University of Michigan) and Hannes Hacke (Schwules Museum, Berlin) focus on the recent Homosexuality_ies exhibition (2015) held at Berlin's Deutsches Historisches Museum and the Schwules Museum*, one of the largest and most ambitious LGBTQ exhibitions to date.*

If you found yourself moving through Berlin in the summer or autumn of 2015, at some point your eye almost certainly was arrested by a sparely clad, very white, very buff body that presented itself from advertising columns, train and bus stations, in cafés, bars, museums, and tourist information offices. Its muscular, naked torso was topped by an androgynous head, bright red lipstick expanding the contours of the lips. Letters in the same colour, positioned on an axis to the left and right of the mouth, and literally reaching around the shoulders, seemed to contain the body. "HOMO," they read. If your eye wandered down toward the navel, a second word appeared, printed in the same red but in smaller and thinner font: "SEXUALITÄT_EN."

The body was Canadian artist Heather Cassils', and it advertised the exhibition "Homosexualität_en," or "Homosexuality_ies," shown at the Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum) and the Schwules Museum* (Gay Museum*) in Berlin from June 26 to December 1, 2015.¹ The poster was striking, even irritating, in both image and text. From afar, it could be perceived as another perfect – young, strong, white, well-proportioned – male body, a poster boy of mainstream gay porn. But upon closer view, its integrity fell apart; it revealed scars, and the hairless chest, while proud, sported two breasts that looked soft rather than muscular. The script allowed for multiple readings; there was the slur, "HOMO," there was "SEXUALITÄT," sexuality, there were "SEXUALITÄT_EN," sexualities, and if you combined them, there were "HOMOSEXUALITÄT" and "HOMOSEXUALITÄT_EN," homosexuality and homosexualities. The poster screamed, "SEX," but the ambiguous body and the complex juxtaposition of image and words simultaneously promised that this wasn't going to be easy.

In this article, we discuss aspects of the exhibition, *Homosexualität_en*.² Boasting more than 700 objects in two museums, and telling myriad stories, it is impossible to do justice to the exhibition as a whole. In this short piece, we thus limit ourselves to introducing the two museums behind the exhibition, discussing how the curatorial team drew both on existing collections and created new collections, and pointing out challenges and solutions in museum education.

A Collaboration of Community and National History Museums

The exhibition was a collaboration between two museums, the Schwules Museum* (SMU*) and the German Historical Museum (DHM), both in Berlin. The DHM, housed in the representative *Zeughaus*, or armoury, on Unter den Linden boulevard, is Germany's national historical museum and was founded in 1987, its permanent displays not opening until 2006. Though one of the most popular museums in Berlin in terms of visitors, the museum has endured criticism from different quarters, most recently



The Academy of

Schwules Museum*

DEUTSCHES HISTORISCHES MUSEUM

Assessor geleitet von

KULTURSTIFTUNG DES BUNDES

KULTURSTIFTUNG DER LÄNDER

Advertisement: Homage to Benglis, part the larger body of work CUTS: A Traditional Sculpture, a six month durational performance, 2011

Photograph: Heather Cassils and Robin Black. Image courtesy of Heather Cassils and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. ©Heather Cassils and Robin Black 2011

for what critics find to be its too narrow focus on Germany and a general failure to generate debates through creative, surprising exhibitions.³ The museum has, however, recently partnered up with smaller institutions for a number of exhibitions – so possibly bringing in outside partners will help change the museum’s somewhat antiquated image.

The SMU* actually pre-dates the DHM by two years. It was founded by four gay men in 1985, in what was then West Berlin. Since its inception, gay men were at the focus of the museum’s mission and audience, rather than lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer people more broadly (LGBTIQ). Recently, however, the museum has extended its mission, including lesbian as well as transgender and queer histories in addition to male homosexuality. While this change has not led to a full-blown name change, the museum has added an asterisk to its name to signify its widening focus. In German, a heavily gendered language where male nouns are often still considered to simply include women, the asterisk has been adopted by people dedicated to using a language that is inclusive of individuals of all genders. This linguistic device is called the, “gender star”, or “gender gap.” Feminists, trans* and intersex advocates use it both to include women and to question the gender binary, creating the linguistic space for those who identify between or outside male and female, or outright reject gender identification.

The idea for the exhibition was conceived by the SMU*, who then partnered with the DHM and sought out an exhibition team.⁴ “Homosexualität_en” was the first exhibition about lesbian and gay histories in the DHM.⁵ Generous funding was provided by the Cultural Foundations of the Federal Government (Bund) and Federate States (Länder).⁶ The exhibition aimed at making an intervention into the national German historical narrative that has and continues to marginalize and exclude LGBTIQ people. The project began as a large scale exhibition on the history of lesbians and lesbian feminist activism in Germany.⁷ In negotiations with the funders and the DHM, the concept was altered to encompass a broader history.

A Contradictory Title

The exhibition’s title, “Homosexualität_en,”⁸ expresses an understanding of homosexuality as many things at different times, as historically changing. The plural points to the diversity of “homosexual” histories and communities. The title also features another instance of the, “gender gap,” here expressed through an underscore. It signals an awareness of current debates in gender and sexuality studies about the benefits and dangers of embracing stable identity concepts such as “gay” and “lesbian,” and about widening gay and lesbian politics to include people rejecting or not fitting these identifications, including, but not limited to, transgender people, queers, or intersexuals. In this his way, the gap makes visible how the concept of homosexuality is tied to a binary gender system and it marks the intersection of gender and sexuality as central for the exhibition of sexual histories.

At the same time, by choosing “homosexuality” as the exhibition’s central term, the curators continued a narrative that has been criticized by both queer and lesbian-feminist activists. The first pointed out its pathologising origins. The term “homosexuality” was coined in the 19th century and was disseminated through medical and psychological discourses that described queer people as sick and in need of healing. Lesbian-feminists found issue with the term’s androcentrism. At least in German, the word “homosexual” is often still equated with “gay male,” rather than describing lesbian women equally. The show’s title and poster thus contained contradictory notions of non-heteronormative sexualities. Though built around lesbian

and gay identities, it raised expectations that the exhibition would be attentive both to historically changing concepts of homosexuality, to queer sexualities beyond homosexuality and to gender variance and trans* identities.

Strategies of Exhibiting Queer History

How to exhibit the history of homosexuality and homosexualities? Practitioners of LGBTIQ history often find it difficult to find sources that speak to same-sex intimacy or non-normative gender behaviour and bodies. This has to do with the histories of persecution and prejudice, the taboo surrounding queer people and practices, and the long disinterest in these histories on part of museums, collectors and academic mainstream. How, then, did this exhibition tell this history? What strategies did it come up with to show what has long been described as a “hidden history?”⁹ The curatorial team drew on a number of different artefacts and collections:

- One emphasis was on *works of art* that express same-sex affection and desire or ambiguous gender performances.
- Many objects came from archival and museum collections that speak to the *state persecution* of homosexuals, or to their *study and treatment by medicine and psychology*.
- Perhaps more than of anything else, the exhibition was made of the *rich collections created by LGBTQ activists themselves*, especially since the 1970s, that record their social movements, their sexual subcultures, and their lives more generally.
- In addition, the exhibition team asked *queer people to speak for themselves*, and created two new audio visual collections.

Mining art history for displays of same-sex affection and non-normative gender identities

“Homosexualität_en” was split into a historical exhibition at the DHM and a contemporary one at the SMU*. At the DHM, a section titled “The Second Sex” showed portraits of women and female couples from different centuries by artists such as Tamara de Lempicka, Claude Cahun, Tanja Ostojic, Edouard Dubufe and Maria Lassnig.¹⁰ Some of the artworks were from the collection of the DHM itself. In the accompanying labels, the curators questioned the lack of visibility of ‘deviant’ desires and gender representations in art history. They interpreted this not only as a consequence of (self-) censorship; but also a result of the heteronormative order present in art history’s canonization and categorization. The intention was to open up questions about the order of representation and visibility; why is this work of art in the exhibition? Why do we even ask if an artwork is homosexual? Why do we usually start from the assumption that it is not? In this way, the section invited visitors as well as the DHM itself to question classification processes, and to examine collections anew.

Following “The Second Sex,” the section “Other Images” at the DHM presented a selection of the Sternweiler collection from the SMU* on the history of everyday gay life and homoerotic art. Sternweiler, who is an art historian, was one of the founders of the SMU*. Over a period of twenty-five years, visiting flea markets, antiquarian book stores, art dealers, and auctions, he has accumulated a collection of six thousand artefacts pertaining to the history of male homosexuality. The focus of his collection is on works of art from the Renaissance until the middle of the 20th century, but it also includes documents and books from the gay movements and photographs of

everyday gay life. The curators decided to hang the collection in narrow sequence and piled up row after row. Such a hanging references old picture galleries that sought to impress visitors not so much with the works of art themselves, as with the wealth of the collector. Similarly, in “Homosexualität_en,” the sheer mass of objects in the Sternweiler Collection served as evidence of the wealth of queer history, disputing any doubts as to whether such a history exists or deserves studying.

Close-up: Social History of Homosexuals

Within “Other Images,” the subsection titled, “Social History of Homosexuals” consisted of studio photographs of male couples (and the odd female couple, too) and snapshots depicting groups of male friends on weekend excursions, the photos ranging from the late 19th century into the 1930s. It is often impossible to determine who the people on these photos were and what, exactly, their relationship was. Whether they were just close friends or lovers, a queer reading allows for recognizing the possibility of same-sex relationships in the past. One of the strategies of queer collecting, then, is to look at existing collections through queer glasses, allowing for erotic potential in depictions of male or female “friends,” or being attentive to gender performances at odds with prevailing masculinities and femininities.



Private photographs from the “Social History of Homosexuals,” part of the section “Other Images.” Copyright Andrea Rottmann 2015.

Can't Find Queer History in the Books? Try the Archives

In another section at the DHM, "Savage Knowledge," the exhibitions team assembled an A to Z of the queer movements in Germany. The objects on view were lent from various movement archives in Berlin. They were predominantly from the second half of the twentieth century, and they included political leaflets, posters, gay magazines, photographs of activists and demonstrations, and documentary film clips, as well as objects such as drag outfits, a collection of dildos, a collection of leather boots, and a door from a public toilet used for gay sex. The material was presented on archival grid wall panels reminiscent of a museum store. Despite the collections created since the 1970s by queer people themselves in LGBTIQ as well as feminist archives, there has been little research on these histories. In its encyclopaedic order and its variety of objects, this section again suggested the wealth of queer history and the many histories it encompasses, from a history of political organizing to a history of sexual practices. In addition, the curatorial team made two further points in this section. By installing the archive in the museum, it refused to come up with a narrative that hasn't been written yet, to do the work that historians so far haven't done. The arbitrary alphabetical order allowed for new readings and connections between different communities, activism and discourses and stressed particularity, incompleteness and incoherence. At the same time, the lack of a story and the mass of objects made for a challenging experience for the visitors. Without a chronology or thematic order, they had to do the work of making sense of the arbitrarily assembled things all by themselves. Secondly, the focus in this section was deliberately put on the second half of the twentieth century because this period is particularly under-researched. The existing queer historiography about Germany and especially about Berlin has overwhelmingly dealt with queer life and activism in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the subsequent persecution under National Socialism.



"Savage Knowledge" showcased treasures from the archives of the LGBTIQ movement. Copyright Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2015.

Creating New Collections

Turning now to newly created collections in “Homosexualität_en”, the first was a collection of objects and stories of coming out. Situated at the very entrance to the exhibition at the DHM, it served as a highly subjective introduction to the topic. The objects and stories were collected during a weekend in November 2014, when the SMU* invited queer people to bring an object that they associated with the situation of their coming out, and recorded their stories on video and audio. Objects ranged from the highly personal, such as the coming-out letter that a gay man wrote to his father and the secret police files of a gay man who grew up in East Germany during Socialism, to mass-produced things such as a Ricky Martin CD. While most objects were returned to their owners once the exhibition ended, many participants agreed to have their stories archived at the SMU* for future reference, thus creating a new collection.

At the SMU*, another newly produced collection of videos titled “What’s Next?” familiarized visitors with current issues and projects in, and future prospects of Berlin’s LGBTIQ population. The videos included a gay immigrant from Lebanon talking about trying to make his place in the city, a professor of religion discussing religious philosophy as a means of empowerment for queer people, and a porn producer describing her work making queer porn films that break with the aesthetic conventions of straight as well as gay porn.

Displaying Explicit Sex

Speaking about porn, the question of how to display sexuality was answered differently in the two parts of the exhibition. German law does not define what pornography is, but at the same time, it does prohibit showing pornography in a place that can be accessed by those under eighteen, and more generally showing it to people without having been asked to do so. At the DHM, a panel situated near the exhibition’s entrance informed visitors of sexual content and nudity and recommended that children only visit in the company of adults. In addition, photos that showed erect penises or penetration were covered over with black bars in indicated places. The exhibit at the SMU*, by contrast, included an explicitly pornographic video. This made it more challenging to offer programming for high school students in this part of the exhibition.

Educational programme

The DHM and the SMU* worked together on planning an educational programme for different audiences at both museums. Besides the regular tours for adults, the DHM offered two different workshops for lower and upper secondary high school students. The SMU* offered one workshop for upper secondary high school students. The two institutions invited teachers and school administrators to an information event and partnered with the city’s Department for Education, Youth and Sport to reach out to all public schools in Berlin.¹¹ Initially, some of the staff and members of the city’s Department for Education were worried that the poster and flyer motif would lead to negative reactions from teachers and prevent them from visiting the exhibition with their pupils. The programme at the DHM proved to be very successful, though, and a lot of schools did book workshops and tours. By contrast, the programme at the SMU* did not have such a response, with very few school groups booking a workshop. Several factors may have played into this; one being that the DHM has a greater outreach than the SMU* and is an established place for teachers to visit with their pupils. Secondly, there may have been less inhibition to take a class to a

general historical museum rather than to an explicitly “gay” museum. And thirdly, the exhibition part at the DHM provided more connections with school curricula than the contemporary art display at the SMU*.

Conclusion

In what ways has “Homosexualität_en” made a difference? In our conclusion, we touch on changes in the participating museums and return to the exhibition poster, which turned out to create the most controversy. Through the exhibition, every employee at the DHM had to deal in some way or other with queer topics. The education department organised training on sexual and gender diversity for their entire staff, but unfortunately, this was not the case for the employees of other departments of the museum. Training and awareness raising for all employees such as registrars, curators, museum guards, custodians and the press department would have been an important step in creating a more diverse and discrimination aware institution. As things were, the exhibition opening at the museum right after “Homosexualität_en” completely omitted LGBTIQ people and histories.¹² The cooperation between the two institutions gave the SMU* a heightened visibility in Berlin and beyond and attracted a new audience that had not visited the museum before. Even though the museums offered an audio tour that connected both places, many visitors chose to only visit the DHM and not see the second part of the exhibition at the SMU* (visitors: DHM 85.000/SMU* 17.000).¹³ The balance might not have been as uneven had there been a combination ticket to see both exhibition parts for one admission price. What has been a great success at the institutional level, however, is the establishment of a network for gender and sexual diversity in museums in Berlin. A direct outcome of the exhibition, it seeks to create further dialogue between different museums across various departments (education, collections, and exhibitions) on these topics.

The exhibition was taken down in December 2015, but parts of it have since been reinstalled at the Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kultur (State Museum for Art and Culture, LWL) in the heavily Catholic city of Münster in North Rine-Westfalia. Leading up to the opening, the Deutsche Bahn AG (German Railway Company) refused to put up the poster featuring Heather Cassils’ queer body in its stations, despite its having done so in Berlin.¹⁴ The company found the image “sexualizing” and “sexist.”¹⁵ After protests and follow-up conversations with the museum, Deutsche Bahn did proceed to show the advertisement. The exhibition itself has engendered precious little controversy. A member of the museum’s PR department has described the public response as “almost boring.”¹⁶ The episode goes to show, we would like to suggest, that people are ready to see queerness exhibited in museums, and that they are not shy of complex examinations of genders, bodies, and sexualities, queer or not.

Acknowledgements

¹ The artwork’s title is “Advertisement: Homage to Benglis,” part of the larger body of work “CUTS: A Traditional Sculpture,” a six months durational performance.

² Andrea Rottmann is a doctoral student in German Studies at the University of Michigan. She interned with the exhibition team for three months during the fall of 2014 as part of her Museum Studies Certificate. Hannes Hacke is a trainee at the

Schwules Museum* and organised and coordinated the educational programme for the exhibition part at the Schwules Museum*.

³ Kilb, Andreas. "Kein neuer Wind im DHM: Ein Fall von Geschichtsvergessenheit." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 23, 2013. Accessed January 9, 2015. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunst/kein-neuer-wind-im-dhm-ein-fall-von-geschichtsv-ergessenheit-12540045.html>.

⁴ The curatorial team consisted of curators Birgit Bosold, Detlef Weitz and Dorothee Brill, and research assistants Sarah Bornhorst, Eylem Sengezer and Noemi Molitor. The gallery dedicated to victims of the Nazi persecution was curated by Klaus Mueller. Eva Meyer-Hermann contributed to the original concept.

⁵ The permanent exhibition of the DHM shows the historical development of Germany from the 5th century to the end of the 20th century. Of its more than 7000 historical exhibits, only five objects are marked as related to gay histories: four objects related to the persecution of gay men during the era of National Socialism and one poster of a film by the gay film maker Rosa von Praunheim. Lesbians, Bisexuals Trans* and intersex people are nowhere explicitly mentioned in the permanent displays.

⁶ The Cultural Foundation of the Federal Government contributed 850.000€, the Cultural Foundation of the Federate States 110.000€. "Bund fördert Ausstellung über Homosexualität(en)." *Queer.de*, Dec 11, 2013. Accessed Nov 30, 2016. http://www.queer.de/detail.php?article_id=20620.

⁷ Before "Homosexualität_en," there were two major exhibitions in Berlin on the history of homosexuality. The first, the 1984 exhibition "Eldorado" at the Berlin Museum, presented the history of gay men and lesbians in Berlin from 1850 to 1950. The second one, "Goodbye to Berlin? 100 Years of the Gay Movement" at the Academy of Arts in Berlin in 1997 focused solely on the history of gay men.

⁸ "Homosexualität" means "homosexuality", "Homosexualitäten" is the plural form, corresponding to "homosexualities."

⁹ See, for instance, the classic collection *Hidden from History*. Duberman, Martin Bauml, Vicinus, Martha, and George Chauncey Jr. (Eds.) *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*. New York: NAL Books 1989.

¹⁰ For a more complete list of the featured artists, see the catalogue. Bosold, Birgit, Brill, Dorothee, and Detlef Weitz (Eds.) *Homosexualität_en*. Dresden: Sandstein Verlag 2015.

¹¹ Since 2010 every public school in Berlin is called upon by the city to name a contact person for sexual and gender diversity.

¹² "Alltag Einheit" documented the time of transition in Germany after the reunification in 1990. The neglect of LGBTIQ history here was particularly striking as the 1994 abolishment of §175, the law that had criminalized gay men since the 19th century, was an important milestone in the reunification process.

¹³ Figure for the DHM provided by PR department. Email to Andrea Rottmann from Sonja Trautmann, Oct 21, 2016.

¹⁴ Feddersen, Jan. "Angeblich 'sexistisch.'" *taz* May 10, 2016. Online at <http://www.taz.de/15303549/>. Accessed Oct 23, 2016.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Koslowski, Anne. “Bürger dieser Stadt offener, als ihnen zugetraut wird.” *Münstersche Zeitung.de* August 4, 2016. Online at http://m.muensterschezeitung.de/Lokales/Staedte/Muenster/2482109-Ausstellung-Homosexualitaet_en-im-LWL-Museum-fuer-Kunst-und-Kultur-Buerger-dieser-Stadt-offener-als-ihnen-zugetraut-wird. Accessed Oct 23, 2016.

Never Going Underground: The fight for LGBT+ rights

Catherine O'Donnell

Catherine O'Donnell, Engagement & Events Officer, describes recent and on-going community-driven work to highlight the story of the campaign for LGBT+ rights at the People's History Museum, Manchester.

Introduction

People's History Museum (PHM) in Manchester is the national museum of democracy and the home of ideas worth fighting for. Over the past few years we have taken a community-focused, long-term approach to telling the story of the fight for LGBT+ rights. This approach has led to a greater understanding of LGBT+ issues across the organisation and ensured that the work is not just a one-off tokenistic project, but embedded within our core strategic work. Activity discussed includes the development of an LGBT+ history tour, doubling our collection of material relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and other gender and sexuality minority groups and updating the LGBT+ Rights section in our permanent galleries. I will also present work-in-progress findings from our current HLF-funded community-led *Never Going Underground* project, which will culminate in a major exhibition in 2017.

Prologue

In July 2013 I sat down to write a tour. A few months previously I had programmed an LGBT history tour of the museum, for Manchester Pride, knowing that the museum had a small Gay Rights display, and naively assuming that our collections and galleries would include lots of relevant material. Sat in the archive I started going through our collections. We had a couple of boxes of material from a surprisingly niche group called 'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners' (heart-warming story, someone should make a film about it, I thought...)¹ There were also some boxes of Peter Tatchell's OutRage! collection – a direct action queer rights group. As I looked at flyers advertising kiss ins, press releases outlining homophobic hate crime, violence and murders and leaflets telling schoolchildren that 'it's OK to be gay', I grew more and more shocked and saddened by this relatively recent history. As a young, straight, cis woman, with a relatively liberal upbringing I had little idea of the struggles that LGBT+ people had gone through, for things as simple as holding their partners' hand when walking down the street, or kissing in public, let alone marriage or equality within the law. Going through those boxes opened my eyes to another world of discrimination and hate – but also defiance and resistance. I realised pretty quickly that I wasn't the right person to be telling this story. No amount of archival research could compare to lived experience – lived experience that was right on my doorstep.

At this time, the PHM had just started a major project called *Play Your Part* (O'Donnell, 2016). The project aimed to research campaigns of the past and link them to campaigns of the present, in order to inspire activists of the future. It was experimental, participatory and we had the freedom to take risks and try out new approaches. I had just been appointed the project's Engagement & Events Officer and alongside my colleague Harriet Beeforth was trying to make sense of an excitingly open brief. We were focusing on campaigns within living memory, and settled on what was, with hindsight, an over-ambitious 'theme of the month' approach, using various co-production techniques to explore different areas of our collection.

The solution to my tour problem was therefore devastatingly simple. I'd work with members of the LGBT+ community in Manchester to co-produce a small display of LGBT+ history, using objects from our collection alongside some of their own. And do the tour about that. In less than a month's time.

Pride in Progress?

The key to the success of all the LGBT+ history work we have done at the PHM has been partnership working, developing relationships and networks, and focused community engagement. The first step in this journey was making initial contact with the LGBT Foundation (then known as the Lesbian and Gay Foundation), who were unfazed by our ideas and tight deadline, and were happy to get involved. They reached out via their networks and recruited a group of 13 participants, who attended two afternoon workshops at the museum. In the first workshop, the participants delved into our archives and connected with the collections: objects, such as photographs, badges and letters, were used as starting points for discussion, and their relevance and resonance with the participants was clear. This workshop was deliberately unstructured, as we wanted to give the participants time to get to know the collections and bring their own perspectives. We asked the group to select the key objects they would like to display and encouraged them to bring their own objects to the next workshop. The second session involved selecting objects for display (a mix of PHM's collections and the participants' own objects), writing labels, assembling a timeline and deciding on an exhibition title. This part proved the trickiest, and *Pride in Progress?* was chosen as the participants wanted to highlight the historical struggle for equality, yet question how far there is still to go.

The range of material that the participants brought along indicated the potential wealth of objects relating to LGBT+ history belonging to individuals and organisations. Items included photographs, t-shirts, ephemera, the archive of Out in the City (a group for older LGBT+ people in Manchester) and even a Communards picture disk. What was most significant were the personal stories attached to these objects. For example, the donor of the picture disk recollected how important Bronski Beat and the Communards were to him growing up gay in a rural area, and the particular resonance of *Smalltown Boy* in helping him to realise that it was 'ok to be gay'. Whilst PHM has some exciting collections, unfortunately there are many items with which the personal context hasn't been collected or recorded, and we want to ensure that this information is now always documented.



Pride in Progress? display. Copyright People's History Museum

Throughout this mini-project we were conscious that what we were doing was only a starting point and we had barely scratched the surface. A group of 13 people who had self-selected at very short notice was by no means representative all of LGBT+ people in Manchester. We made sure that we were very open and transparent about this and were clear that there was still a long way to go. What was obvious, however, was that there was an audience and appetite for LGBT+ history in Manchester. When I gave the LGBT history tour I had programmed for Manchester Pride (which became a tour of the *Pride in Progress?* display), it was oversubscribed with 20 attendees. This was more than double the visitor numbers for our usual public tours, as it was promoted as part of the Manchester Pride Fringe. The subject matter sparked discussion and debate, and visitors came because they wanted to do something a bit different to the traditional alcohol-fuelled festivities. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, however there was criticism that the person giving the tour didn't identify as LGBT+.

Developing PHM's LGBT+ History tour

During the first *Pride in Progress?* workshop some of the participants felt that not much happened in Manchester around LGBT History Month. As we recorded the workshops, I was caught on camera saying that I wanted to make PHM a hub for LGBT+ history in Manchester. We wanted to build on the success of the mini-project and, with more time, develop an LGBT+ History tour of our main galleries in time for LGBT History Month in February 2014. As we had very limited material on display, I worked on developing a tour that contextualised LGBT+ history within the story the museum tells, essentially placing the history of gender and sexuality within the framework of political and social change and the fight for equality. When

delivering the tour I was again very open about it being a work in progress and invited comments and suggestions to improve the tour and develop our work in this area.

Jeff Evans, one of the organisers of LGBT History Month and PhD researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University, had attended the tour and offered to be an academic advisor to develop it further. He was very helpful in identifying further content and signed us up as a hub venue for the first National Festival of LGBT History in 2015. When I ran the updated tour for Manchester Pride in August 2014 the feedback was generally positive, however there was too much of a focus on gay men and it needed more on lesbian, bisexual and trans* history.

In order to ensure that the final tour was as inclusive and representative as possible, I reached out to a number of LGBT+ community groups to test out the tour and incorporate their suggestions. One of the key learning points from this process was that there is no such thing as 'THE LGBT+ community'. People who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and other gender and sexuality minorities are all individuals with different experiences, outlooks and ideas. It's important to consult with a variety of groups in order to ensure representation from diverse communities. We also needed to bear in mind the internal politics of different organisations and be diplomatic in order to foster relationships with various groups without becoming embroiled in any infighting.

A significant challenge was the lack of LGBT+ history physically on display in the museum. PHM focuses on the history of fight for democracy for working class people, a story which is often overlooked, with material culture that has historically been undervalued and lost. Within this context, creativity was needed to include examples of an even more 'hidden' history – the legal persecution of gay men ensured that stories had been shrouded in secrecy, and the perceived 'invisibility' of lesbians, bisexual and trans* people posed even more of a challenge. The solution was to be honest about these limitations, highlighting the absence of objects to make an important point. For example, the museum has displays on two prominent thinkers of the 18th century – Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine. Wollstonecraft; regarded as the first feminist, who argued that women were sexual beings, and who had relationships with both men and women; is the starting point on the tour. Paine doesn't feature in the narrative of gender and sexuality, however he is referenced purely as a comparator for what material culture has been historically valued and collected. The museum displays his writing desk, a copy of *The Rights of Man*, a lock of his hair, and his death mask. Wollstonecraft is illustrated by a single portrait on loan from the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

The revamped tour was launched at the National Festival of LGBT History in February 2015 and continues to form a regular part of our public programme. It is also available for groups to book at any time. It is constantly evolving, and every time it is delivered there are new ideas and suggestions for examples to include.

Redisplaying equality

The fight for equality is a key part of PHM's story and has a dedicated section on our main galleries. Within this there was a section on 'Gay Rights', showcasing objects mainly from the latter part of the 20th century. When developing the tour, our historical advisor noted that there were some inaccuracies on the text panel. In addition, since the museum re-opened in 2010 after a major capital redevelopment, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act was passed in 2013, and therefore the information was out of date. We also wanted to ensure that the display was inclusive of all LGBT+ people and not just focus on lesbian and gay rights.



Original Gay Rights display. Copyright People's History Museum

When we ran the consultation workshops for the development of the tour, we also consulted on the redisplay of this section. We asked the groups what objects from our collection we should include, if they had any objects to donate, or if they could recommend places to source objects from. One of the biggest criticisms was that the LGBT+ rights section was too small – could we make the case bigger? Unfortunately this was impossible and it was a real challenge to explain that whilst the fight for LGBT+ rights was an important part of our story, it was just one of the many stories we need to tell in a finite amount of space. In the end, we managed to extend the display a bit further by including more framed objects. Whilst this is very positive in terms of this project, it does now mean that the equality section feels unbalanced, with more focus on LGBT+ equality than that of other marginalised groups. In the long term, we would like to repeat this process with other areas of our collection. We also need to consider highlighting LGBT+ history within the main galleries as a whole, as there is some there, but it's currently not mentioned.

One of the most challenging decisions was our use of terminology, specifically the language we would use on the permanent text panel, which previously said 'Gay Rights'. From consultation and research we found that some people didn't think that 'LGBT' was inclusive and we had alternative suggestions including 'LGBTQ+ rights' and 'Gender and Sexuality rights'. We wanted to use a term that is simple for visitors to understand (including visitors who do not have English as a first language) and a term that will have longevity (due to the difficulty and expense of replacing the text panel). I contacted representatives from the groups we had consulted with and organisations and individuals we had worked with on the project. As expected, they offered a range of conflicting opinions however, it generated a very interesting debate.

After considering all the responses, we decided on 'LGBT+ Rights' for the following reasons:

- Throughout the development of the project we used the term 'LGBT', as we felt it had the most common usage (e.g. LGBT History Month).
- We wanted to be consistent with the terminology we had previously used, but also take into account that this term does not reflect all gender identities and sexualities.
- We didn't want to exclude anyone, but we didn't want to confuse visitors with a long acronym (e.g. QUILTBAG)
- Therefore 'LGBT+' seemed to be the best compromise of inclusivity and understandability.

We understood that not everyone would be happy with the decision, so we were open and honest about the process and I wrote a blog post explaining our reasoning (O'Donnell, 2015).



Redeveloped LGBT+ Rights display. Copyright People's History Museum

We ran LGBT+ awareness training for staff and volunteers. This was key to ensuring that everyone within the organisation is aware of LGBT+ issues and can confidently talk to visitors about them. We also included more programming focusing on LGBT+ history, including performances, talks and the annual LGBT History Festival.

Collecting LGBT+ material

Throughout the projects we have actively collected material relating to the fight for LGBT+ rights. Before starting this work, most of our object collections fitted into 'Lesbian and Gay Box 1' (there was no record of there ever being a 'Lesbian and Gay Box 2', or any other numbers!). We therefore wanted to grow our collections and ensure that they are fully representative of all LGBT+ communities. The majority of recent acquisitions have come via *Pride in Progress?* and the consultation workshops we ran, and we focused on collecting trans* and bisexual material as they were major gaps in our collection. We actively asked participants if they had anything they'd like to donate, whilst being considerate that it would be a very personal decision. In one workshop, a transgender woman very generously whipped her Gender Recognition Certificate out of her handbag and handed it to me! One participant sent me a list of links to pronoun badges and non-binary patches, which we purchased very cheaply online.

We also went back through our catalogue and ensured that all relevant objects were tagged with the subject 'LGBT', so that members of the public searching our collections would be able to find material more easily.

Never Going Underground

Over the next four years the PHM will focus on a programme-led approach, with all services working on themed seasons. The first of these seasons, in 2017, will mark the 50th anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act 1967² and will explore the past, present and future of LGBT+ activism with a major community-led project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) (People's History Museum, 2016).

The project is process-driven and each area is co-produced to ensure that the final outputs are inclusive and representative of all LGBT+ communities. This includes:

- A major exhibition co-produced by a team of 11 volunteer Community Curators
- A formal learning programme co-produced with The Proud Trust, who work with LGBT+ young people in Greater Manchester (The Proud Trust, 2016)
- A family friendly programme co-produced with Proud 2b Parents, a service for LGBT parents and their children (Proud 2b Parents, 2016)
- Development of networks and partnerships, with the LGBT Foundation, a national charity delivering a wide range of services to LGBT communities (LGBT Foundation, 2016)
- An innovative events programme working with partners including Manchester Lesbian & Gay Chorus, one of the UK's largest LGBT+ choirs (Manchester Lesbian and Gay Chorus, 2016)
- Community engagement and consultation at every stage
- Three community exhibitions on LGBT+ themes, or by LGBT+ artists
- Development of our LGBT+ collections and greater subject knowledge

This ambitious project would not be possible without the solid foundations and relationships developed over the past few years. From a very small start, we have developed our LGBT+ collections, subject specialist knowledge, relationships with communities and participatory methodologies. This gradual process has informed the approach we are taking with *Never Going Underground* – ensuring that as many

voices will contribute to the final programme as possible. From as early as the initial *Pride in Progress?* workshop, we realised that working with LGBT+ histories and communities could not just be a one-off tokenistic project – it needed to be strategically embedded long-term in order to ensure that communities felt valued and LGBT+ history was fully represented within PHM's permanent collections and galleries, and not simply 'ghettoised' and presented in isolation from other stories and histories.

At the time of writing we are only around halfway through the project, and I can only present some interim reflections. The heart of the project is the major exhibition co-produced with the Community Curators. This will run from 25 February – 3 September 2017. The Community Curators were recruited in May and we have asked for a long-term commitment until the exhibition opens, with two meetings and a minimum of 10 volunteer hours per month. We appreciate this is a big ask, and we offered the opportunity as a learning process, with full training and support provided. We asked for no prior experience, just an interest in LGBT+ history and a desire to develop their knowledge and skills. The team have a diverse range of backgrounds, with a mix of sexualities, gender identities, age and experience. They are very passionate and engaged, and are responsible for research, object selection, text writing and much more! We have appointed designers and the exhibition will be to our same professional quality.

The project is very much driven by a participatory approach. The process is just as important as the product and we are ensuring that there is community consultation at every stage so the exhibition will be as diverse and representative as possible. The Community Curators' networks have been crucial – we have reached out further than PHM could alone. Working with partners that we've already established relationships with has allowed us to hit the ground running and use the project to develop new partnerships.

Whilst the museum was very conscious that the project was community-led, we failed to involve partners and community members in the initial conception and planning stages of the project. The project would have benefitted from greater control-sharing at the goal setting stage and will be a consideration for future similar projects.

Working collaboratively with and learning from other cultural organisations doing similar work has been essential. The Greater Manchester LGBT Histories and Cultures Network was formed following the first National Festival of LGBT History in 2015. The HLF funding has allowed us to formalise this network and we have created close links with organisations such as Queer Contact (Contact Theatre, 2016). Nationally, we have developed links with other institutions marking the anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act in 2017, in order to foster shared promotion and cross-fertilisation of ideas. We have learned from museums who have developed work on representing LGBT+ narratives, including National Museums Liverpool's *Pride and Prejudice project* (National Museums Liverpool, 2016), London Metropolitan Archives' *Speak Out London – Diversity City* (London Metropolitan Archives, 2014) and the V&A's LGBTQ tour (Vo, 2015).

We have found that LGBT+ audiences are very engaged, so we are now working with our partners to connect with harder to reach groups, for example older people in care homes, and start thinking about non-LGBT+ audiences. Internally, we are able to do this work due to organisational and management buy-in. The fight for equality is central to our story. However, this is the first year of the new way of working within the staff team, so there have been some teething problems with inter-departmental communication as we all adapt to the new approach.

Long term, it is crucial to ensure that the legacy of *Never Going Underground* is embedded into the wider museum. Learning from the project will be fed back into our collections management system, and object labels throughout our permanent galleries will be rewritten to highlight their queer history, making explicit that LGBT+ history is woven into the narrative.

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Plymouth: A 'gay and gallant' place

Dr Alan Butler and Tony Davey

Dr Alan Butler (Research Fellow, Plymouth University) and Tony Davey (Leaning Development Officer, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery) focus on Plymouth's Pride in Our Past (2012) project to record local LGBT people's memories.

Background

It was suggested, at the end of the 20th century, that “gay and lesbian history is tangible today because lesbians and gay men had the will and determination to constitute and reclaim histories by writing books and building presses, and by establishing community-based archives and history projects.”¹ Yet, despite this, LGBT community archives in the United Kingdom remained limited at the start of the new millennium; despite some notable exceptions including the LGBT archives at Manchester Archives and Local Studies, the Bishopsgate Institute, Brighton Ourstory community archive and the London School of Economics and Political Science. Collaborative endeavours between community and mainstream archives remained limited over the next few years, despite work towards the end of the naughties to “track down information about records of LGBT people in existing archives”² and the London Metropolitan Archive did not hold its first LGBTQ History and Archives conference until 2003. John Vincent also offered that, “archives may hold documents relating to specific events (such as court cases) which have involved LGBT but, unless they hold papers belonging to someone who is known or believed to be LGBT, these are not likely to be indexed.”³

When Paul Baker and Jo Stanley considered the history of gay seafarers, in 2003, their book (and subsequent exhibition) *Hello Sailor* focused on the merchant navy, and so cities such as Southampton and Liverpool featured very strongly. They had however been unable to uncover any stories from Plymouth. Planning for the 'Pride in Our Past' project began in 2010.. At this time, a local LGBT group had sought to deposit papers with the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office and conversations between them and Plymouth City Council's Arts and Heritage service led to the submission of a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. This was for a project designed to explore the LGBT experience in Plymouth which would culminate with a nine-week exhibition at the Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery. The tagline adopted for the project was, “Setting the Record Straight in Plymouth.”

The Heritage Lottery bid had the following aims:

- To record and compile the memories of older members of the LGBT communities.
- To create a permanent static and virtual archive of LGBT life within the city of Plymouth.
- To research the history of LGBT life within the city.
- To recruit and train members of the LGBT community to act as oral historians.
- To prepare and produce an exhibition of LGBT Plymouth based on the project activity. This exhibition had been agreed (at this time) by the

Plymouth City Council for January/February 2012 and would be hosted by the City Museum and Gallery.

- To promote intergenerational learning in terms of schools and other youth groups.⁴

Each of these were achieved during the duration of the project which was launched on 17th March 2011 although, due to programming, the actual dates of the exhibition transpired to be 28th April to 30th June 2012.

These aims and objectives were designed to ensure that the experiences and memories of LGBT people of Plymouth were recorded and preserved for their own heritage and empowerment, and as a tool of education and empowerment for the wider community. Volunteer oral historians would gain knowledge and interview skills while the interviewees would be given the opportunity to share their stories and contribute to LGBT heritage. Through preparation and production of an exhibition based on the project, volunteers had the opportunity to disseminate what they had uncovered and learn new skills in curation and presentation. The final aim was specific to the next generation of LGBT individuals and was designed to consider how heritage materials (or indeed lack of access to them) pertaining to sexual or gender identities might impact upon future generations.

Initial discussions between the LGBT community and Arts and Heritage Service had created a sense that the project was likely to be more impactful by framing the lives of Plymouth LGBT community most in relation to the city's place in history. Plymouth during the 1950s was a place of rebuilding. Its role as a significant port had made it a prime target for Germany during the Second World War resulting in widespread destruction. While the attacks were still taking place however, planning for the rebuilding began with "A Plan for Plymouth." This was created by the city engineer, J. Paton Watson, and Professor Patrick Abercrombie and was presented publicly in 1944. The introduction referred to Plymothians' spirit during the time of the blitz as a, "piece of gay and gallant defiance in the Elizabethan mood"⁵. The Union Street area of the city had been relatively less affected by the destruction brought by the blitz than the main city centre area and was a place which had already achieved a degree of international notoriety long before the war. Servicemen, particularly Royal Marines and Royal Naval ratings (matelots), would attempt to drink their way from one end and back again. Its primary attractions were referred to as "The 'Three P's' – Pubs, Prostitutes and the Paramount."⁶ The Paramount was a small first floor dance club on Union Street which was well supported by individuals from an array of social groups and backgrounds in the city.

In 1956, against the local backdrop of the city, Section 13 of the Sexual Offences Act was introduced. This led to a rise in police activity against homosexuals. In turn, this caused the creation of more secretive subcultures in spaces that were perceived as safe to signify sexualities that were contrary to dominant culture. In Plymouth, those spaces tended to cluster around the more colourful bars that already existed in the Union Street area. The gay communities interacted, on a nightly basis, with the various armed forces, local revellers and prostitutes who frequented these lively clubs and bars while managing to stay somewhat out of sight of the mainstream view of the wider community. While, the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 decriminalised homosexual acts between two consenting men over twenty one at that time, the enduring ban on openly LGBT individuals serving in the armed forces continued until the beginning of 2000. This combined with Plymouth's on-going role as a garrison town continued to make LGBT lives something not for open discussion in the city for many years to follow.

Nearly thirty years later a tragic event occurred forcing it into the public realm. On Tuesday 7th November 1995, the bodies of two men were found lying two hundred yards apart in the city's Central Park. One of the men, Terry Sweet, aged 64, died shortly after the police arrived. Sweet lived alone and was well known within Plymouth's gay community. The other man, Bernard Hawken, survived the attack, but had similar injuries which left him brain damaged and in a wheelchair for the remainder of his life.

In a national newspaper report two days after the incident, reporter Jason Bennetto wrote that this unwillingness to talk about its gay community was strange as, "Plymouth is not particularly squeamish about sex - it has a notorious red light district and a history of sex connected with its status as a garrison town for the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, and Army. Added to a population of about 270,000, it appears doubly strange that the gay community appears so timid."

The attack in the park was, up until the time of this project, the one occasion when Plymouth's LGBT community had been put under the spotlight. Instead Plymouth was a city where the LGBT community had traditionally prided itself on limiting its audience and had avoided drawing attention to itself in more traditional ways.

The Archive and the Exhibition

Over the thirteen month duration of the projection, until the time of the exhibition, a total of thirty-seven oral histories were collected from individuals who perceived themselves as part of the Plymouth LGBT community, and others who had been connected to this community through their work or familial connections. Twelve individuals from the community undertook the oral history training offered to fulfil the interviewer role. These interviews were transcribed and considered by a curation team consisting of the Arts and Heritage Learning Officers, members of the LGBT community, museum curators and their Social History and Fine Art departments, to identify themes which emerging from these interviews. In undertaking this process, four categories became clear and these were used to group and frame the materials in the exhibition.

Firstly, "*The Early Years*" which allowed for an introduction to long held beliefs around LGBT identity through history. We were fortunate to be offered the loan of The Warren Cup from the British Museum which provides one of the earliest representations of male same sex relations, so this theme served to ground that inclusion in the overall narrative.

The second theme highlighted through the interviews was the clear sense of "*The Underground Scene*" that quietly existed in the city during the 1950s and 1960s. In the post-war years, the back bar of The Lockyer Tavern became well known as a safe place for gay men (and later gay women) to drink and socialise. One interviewee recalls meeting, "some very positive gay people in there. Very butch and very in your face and slightly aggressive. Which kind of was refreshing. I met, I think it was on the first time I ever went there, a marine PTI (Physical Training Instructor). I suppose he met me really, because I was very green and I had a relationship with him for a year, wow, yeah a marine PTI, what a catch."⁷

One lady who worked as a barmaid in the back bar of the tavern, recalls, "where the toilets were situated they [gay men] would never have gone through the bar because the toilets were on either side. So it was really, "That's your part." There was a complete red line, went down through the middle. You know, you don't go over that line. And people didn't cross over. You would go that way and there was no way you could get through that bar. Which was sad."⁸

Another woman, who had only recently left the army in 1964 when she began visiting the Lockyer Tavern, recalls there being more tension in the back bar when she visited with other lesbians, “Well, you had the Lockyer, it was the favourite, it was to us, it was our pub, although only one floor level was ours, the rest were for what we called the straights, but the straights use to come up after a few beers at stand at the end of the bar, giving it this, stirring up trouble you know. We were targets really and you knew in the end that you were never going to win because straight people sort of seem to think that, you know, they’ve got the upper hand but we still went up there it didn’t stop us, we loved it. We felt at least we belonged somewhere.”⁹



Photograph from Union Street bar during the 1950s (Plymouth LGBT Archive)

The third theme related to “*Changing Times*” and focussed on how Plymouth’s LGBT community had been affected by the more national and international discourses affecting LGBT lives around such things as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Section 28 legislation and many conversations took place around the continued attitudes of the armed forces until the lifting of the ban in 2000. One ex-army interviewee recalled she was afraid to access any of the Plymouth gay scene until after she left the forces because she had to remain discrete. She recalls that, “you’d got to in the army if you want to stay. In those days you had to more or less pretend you were straight and you knew everybody else up there was carrying on.”¹⁰ She also recalls that the enforcement of acceptable sexuality was rigorously maintained. “The military police always going through a search and the scurry was to hide everything under the lino. All the letters and what have you. The Daily Mirror got hold of a story about a girl who was supposed to have been brow beaten into becoming a lesbian and now I think of it what a joke that is, now everything is out in the open, it’s all a waste of time really, isn’t it?”¹¹

The final theme related to the “*21st Century*” and explored the rapid changes which had happened in terms of legislation in the new millennium. This section also allowed for the inclusion of materials generated through the intergenerational aim of the project. Plymouth City Council’s Out Youth group was to contribute and respond to the archive in a manner which felt significant for them. The group is maintained by youth workers and provides a weekly meeting for thirteen to twenty five year olds who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning either their sexual or gender identity. It seemed important for the archive, and the exhibition, to celebrate and represent the past and the present with an eye to the future. The project provided a means to collect multiple stories which they otherwise may never have heard, and, it also offered them a platform to begin thinking about their own stories in relation to this heritage. At a weekend residential course, the group worked with local artists to make a series of photographs and paintings which would be included in the exhibition.¹² One young person shared at the exhibition opening that being part of the project made him feel as if he was ‘making history.’ He had been surprised by how empowered that had made him feel, showing how being able to voice one’s story and make it part of the historical discourse could engender a sense of pride and a sense of heritage and legitimacy.

The need for individuality to be respected is a theme that was included in much of the group’s contribution and the wider public seemed to respond to that message. One piece of audience feedback commented that, “The exhibition itself was well presented – a good variety – from written word, audio, photographs, books, clothes etc. It was good to see young people as well as adults included”¹³. The team installed two iPads which included all of the oral histories and images from the archive not included elsewhere so visitors could interact with the materials in their own way. A teacher who visited with a group of school children aged 9-10 shared that, “the exhibition gallery had a real buzz! It was fantastic there were pre-schoolers reading books with parents and grandparents, primary school children who just loved the pictures and oral histories on the iPads, secondary school students who were fascinated with the Out Youth Group art work and older visitors who studied the panels and exhibition cases in detail”¹⁴. She also wrote that her student group, “were very inquisitive and asked lots and lots of questions. They understood how people could be discriminated against and knew that it was wrong.”¹⁵

In 2006, Mills noted, “A significant discourse is emerging on the staging of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) history for the British public,”¹⁶ and further suggested that the repeal of Section 28 in 2003 may well have been a contributing factor for this level of interest. At the same time, he had warned that it was, “difficult for LGBT public cultures to resist coming out narratives” or “to avoid the temptations of what philosopher Michel Foucault called the ‘repressed hypothesis’ – the notion that Western cultures are characterized by a stiflingly Victorian attitude to sex that has been progressively unravelling since the 1960s.”¹⁷ In Plymouth, however, that narrative was affected by its location and its relation to the armed forces. The Times in December 1966 reported on the call by seaport towns to be excluded from the Sexual Offences bill to, “reassure those M.P.s from seaport towns to who have asked that the Merchant Navy, like the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, should be exempt from the changes envisaged in the bill”¹⁸. It was important that this exhibition specifically told the story of Plymouth’s LGBT communities. As Mills states, “those who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender have stories to tell about complex paths they’ve followed from desire to identity to community to political consciousness, and about the levels of silencing, victimization and hate they’ve endured along the way.”¹⁹

The narrative of oppression to acceptance was explored as part of the exhibition but the story of Plymouth's LGBT communities was far more complex than this; with that journey shifting and being reinterpreted for those who found it part of their experience. Interviews uncovered a sense of a community who had traditionally taken pride in the ability to remain relatively undetected by the wider Plymouth community and so to pass as, "ordinary", in their lives outside of this subculture. Interviewees spoke often about, "not making a fuss" or, "not drawing attention to themselves" and these comments were always accompanied with a sense of pride.

In the foreword for the Heritage Lottery Fund evaluation, Alan Butler shared, "during the course of this project I have witnessed a sense of community grow from amongst a group of people who did not realise they were a community. People have shared stories around what was often their most closely guarded secret and have been empowered through that process."²⁰ What has affected the specifically Plymouth experience however has been the involvement of the armed forces in the places where these communities were formed and performed. Some groups' more flexible approach to sexuality, on Union Street, transgressed invisible boundaries which were presumed to be in place and so instead created spaces where unconsidered rules of the game were not adhered to. While the overarching narratives do indeed chart a movement from discrimination to acceptance, this narrative may not always map as comfortably onto the lived experience of people in a particular place or time.

The LGBT communities of Plymouth came to perceive their history, and consequently their place within the city, as being validated and made significant through the project. Feedback sheets were submitted saying, "I think it's a real significant moment when Plymouth showed recognition for its LGBT" and "Very thought provoking. Powerful exhibition to be held in Plymouth and putting the LGBT history for the city on the map." One woman, when reflecting on the exhibition in a feedback form of her own confessed, "Still a bit hard to believe that it's here."²¹



Pride in Our Past Exhibition (Plymouth LGBT Archive)

When asked about the project for this article, Tony Davey, Learning Development Officer at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery stated, “The Pride in Our Past project provided Plymouth Arts and Heritage Service with an opportunity to support a local community to explore its often hidden history. In addition to acquiring a very rich archive of LGBT material, through the oral history accounts, the project provided the service with a platform for learning around handling, recording and dealing sensitively with contemporary, personal and social issues. The project challenged some staff members and traditional visitors whilst opening the door for new and previously disconnected audiences.”

Through enabling the Plymouth LGBT community to both acknowledge and celebrate its place in the city’s history the project has directly impacted upon that community’s sense of being part of the city’s past. Their stories were shared and retold through the lens of the city. This acknowledged the impact that they had on Plymouth as well as the impact that the city had on them as individuals and as a community. The archive remains a very important and on-going project for the Plymouth’s LGBT community and its Arts and Heritage service. In 2012, it was awarded the, “Most Inspirational Archive” title by the national Community Archives and Heritage group and is currently featuring strongly in the national ‘Queer Beyond London’ project. This is attempting to map the LGBTQ experience in those places in the United Kingdom not automatically associated with such histories.

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You Say You Want a Revolution? Records and Rebels 1966-1970

Katherine McAlpine

Katherine McAlpine (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich) reviews the V&A's recent major special exhibition, You Say You Want a Revolution? Records and Rebels 1966-1970 (10 September 2016 to 26 February 2017).

In the tumultuous world we currently find ourselves in, where the world we currently occupy is so different from even 6 months ago, an exhibition exploring how much things can change in just 5 years has never seemed more relevant.

There is so much to be said about this exhibition, but in this 50th anniversary year marking the de-criminalisation of homosexuality in 1967, I want to focus on the rise of LGBT rights as explored in this exhibition.

The exhibition explores revolution in its broadest sense: Fashion, Literature, Music, Politics, and the rise of consumerism. A showcase focusing on Dusty Springfield introduces the topic of LGBT rights. With her bouffant bleach blonde hair and heavy eyeliner, Springfield provides an excellent segway from the music and fashion of the previous sections, into the topic of civil unrest and social revolutions of this section. This section also features Black Power moments, anti-Vietnam War protests, the Paris riots of 1968 and Second Wave Feminism.

Screens above the visitor's head evoke the sense of civil unrest and protest, featuring footage from anti-Vietnam marches and protests, with the sound of helicopters, which does not feel too far removed from today's newsreels. Springfield's glitzy dress sits almost exactly opposite the uniform of the Campagnes Republicanes de Securite involved in the Paris '68 riots. The contrast of jeweled silk and helmet, boots and shield serves as a reminder that revolution can come in many guises.

Springfield's own experiences reflect that the decade of the 60s was actually a very conservative time. As the label reminds us, 'Despite some courageously open interview responses, Springfield was forced to keep her own same-sex relationships under wraps.' This raises the question which persists throughout the whole exhibition, revolution for who? The series of publications displayed alongside the Dusty Springfield objects (featuring the dress and three of her records) help to underline this point. Examples of LGBT produced publications alongside reflections of how broader society viewed the LGBT community at the same time. The publications also reflect the broad spectrum of approaches from within the LGBT community, with the overt sexuality of magazines like 'Freedom and Drum' - the former featured the first publication of full-frontal nude man in December 1965 - contrasted with the wholesome front cover of 'The Ladder: A Lesbian Review', which encouraged its readers to assimilate.

The Stonewall Riots feature heavily, for obvious reasons. The curators of the exhibition have however, taken care to ensure that the experience of members of the LGBT community is represented beyond unrest, riot and protest. The experiences of those like Dusty Springfield who felt unable to express their sexuality is contrasted with, in the words of the curators, the 'triumphant openness' of the 1970s, expressed by a portrait of a Mardi Gras celebrant dressed in a G-string.

For those who may be tempted to think that the story ends in the 1970s with Pride, this quote from Beverley Tillery, executive director of New York City Anti-Violence Project, is there to bring visitors back to reality with a crash:

'I hope 2016 is the year that our larger society understands we are far from achieving full equality and justice for LGBT people in the USA.'

Including such histories in blockbuster exhibitions at national museums like the V&A are an important step towards this equality and justice, but serve as important reminders that, no matter how far we've come, there's much further to go.

Exhibition Review: The Museum of Transology

Vyki Sparkes

Vyki Sparkes (Museum of London) reviews the Museum of Transology, a temporary exhibition at the London College of Fashion that adopts powerful, personal approaches to interpreting trans histories.

The *Museum of Transology* aims to collect trans objects and narratives to counter the hidden history of trans people (or 'transcestry'). On temporary display at the London College of Fashion until April 2017, this collection of 120 objects seeks a permanent home.

For a small exhibition it certainly has impact; I've since found myself discussing the issues it raised frequently with friends.

Letters and forms on clipboards show the bureaucracy, frustration, and medicalisation of the process of gender reassignment. The display of E-J's items related to his chest surgery - from bloodied chest binder down to the removed, tattooed, breast tissue preserved in jars - is alongside text which challenges the obsession with trans bodies, and the need for them to conform to our male/female binary genders. The 'wardrobe' display of bras, boxers, binders and clothes focuses on the shaping of the trans silhouette to the beauty ideals, whilst 'the bathroom' uses cosmetics and prosthetics to discuss intersexuality. This highlights the diversity of the trans community; from those who wish to 'pass' as their chosen gender, to those who want to define their own non-binary physiology. In the 'lounge room' a cabinet of curiosity houses everything from badges and zines to a My Little Pony, used to manage dysphoria.



Wardrobe display. Copyright Vyki Sparkes (2017).

Despite tackling the very real and difficult issues the trans community faces - isolation, despair, homelessness, poverty, mental health issues, stigma, rejection, hate crimes, depression - the exhibition conveys hope. A projected slide show of thousands of photographs of trans people shows an increasingly visible community. Music by trans bands and artists fills the space. Lipstick gifted by a sister signifies acceptance.

Most successful is the use of brown luggage labels, tied to each object, where the donor has written what that object means to them. The personal meaning of an object can be tricky for a museum to capture, both in their collections management system, and through an exhibition. Here, the luggage labels with their handwritten texts act like tongues, saying exactly what the former owner wanted you to hear. Many of the objects and the labels were displayed outside cases; the labels you could hold to read seemed to engage people the most. Ubiquitous objects are given deep personal meaning; I was most moved by a mass produced 'Best Son in the World' badge, given as part of the first birthday card received by this person from their mum after they transitioned. The labels particularly help to bring to life the drugs in the 'medical cabinet', highlighting self-medication, side effects, and the determination and hope associated with these hormones.



Medical cabinet. Copyright Vyki Sparkes (2017).

One minor criticism is that the AV is too long for an exhibition at over an hour, especially without subtitles, seating and only two headphones. The takeaway free catalogue is excellent, including every text panel and handwritten luggage label.

Continually busy throughout my visit, it is a rare exhibition where visitors read every word of the exhibition text. The *Museum of Transology* is literally making transcestry, and there are people eager to hear it.

Object in Focus: The Duvet of Love

Louise Turner

Louise Turner (Norfolk Museums Service) describes a new acquisition recently displayed in a Norwich Pride exhibition. The work by David Shenton provides a unique and individual record of LGBT+ history in Norwich during the 1970s and 80s.

In August 2016, Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) was kindly offered the donation of the Duvet of Love. On receiving the object, the curators were in no doubt as to its importance and significance for the Norwich social history collections.

The Duvet of Love is a full size black duvet cover (1950mm x 1890mm) pinned with 1000s of badges, sorted into colour groups, to make up a mosaic picture of an embracing couple. The badges are a combination of historic LGBT+ badges from the 1970s and 1980s, and badges of local and social historical relevance, especially to Norwich, from a similar period. Highlights of the collection include representations of Gay Pride (from as early as 1978), LGBT+ rights, HIV Awareness, Support the Miners, Norwich Theatre Royal pantos, Norwich Castle Museum, Button Moon, and David Cassidy.



The Duvet of Love, as exhibited at Pride Without Prejudice, with the maker and donor, David Shenton. Photograph, David Shenton (2016).

The donor, David Shenton, lived in Norwich between 1970 and 1990, working as a teacher of Graphic Design at Notre Dame High School. The badges were collected by David over this period, during a significant period for him politically, and given to him by friends. Originally displayed in a rainbow formation on the wall of David's home, the badges were arranged onto the duvet cover in the early 1990s for an exhibition in London, where he then lived and worked, most notably as an illustrator for the Gay Times. David returned to Norwich and, in 2016, the duvet was exhibited as part of the Norwich Pride arts exhibition 'Pride Without Prejudice', an open submission art exhibition celebrating the creative diversity of the City.

As a social history collection, it is important that the Costume and Textiles collection of Norfolk Museums Service continues to reflect the region's diverse communities and tells the story of societal changes. Indeed, its main strength lies in its breadth and variety. Norwich has a significant LGBT+ history and this continues today. In July 2016, over 6000 people took part in the Norwich Pride parade with many more joining in with associated events. These dynamic and prominent local communities are however, markedly under-represented in our collections and consequently their rich and important histories are not being told or shared. It is therefore vital that LGBT+ material culture is acquisitioned and integrated into the permanent collections of Norfolk's museums.

The acquisition of the Duvet of Love supports the process of making local LGBT+ narratives and histories more visible and facilitates the inclusion of such experiences into the story of Norwich as told by NMS. It is a vital step forward towards increased diversity, equality, and accessibility. The object itself places these communities at the heart of the local context through the amalgamation of the LGBT+ badges and the many button badges of local relevance.



Close up of the duvet. Courtesy of Norfolk Museums Service.

It is hoped, after some conservation work, that the object will be displayed periodically at the Museum of Norwich to mark key moments in LGBT+ history, such as the 50th anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act (1967), and during the celebratory occasions of LGBT History Month and Norwich Pride. We also actively encourage and facilitate frequent access to our stored collections, running a lively and varied programme of events; fundamental to which is meaningful engagement with objects. Consequently, the Duvet of Love will be embedded within the fabric of the main collection and encountered by a large and diverse audience, enabling those perhaps not familiar with the LGBT+ community to become acquainted.

Traces of Memory: A Contemporary Look at the Jewish Past in Poland

Jen Kavanagh

Jen Kavanagh is a freelance curator and oral historian, with an interest in contemporary collecting and community engagement. This review reflects on a recent visit to the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow - an impressive and moving contemporary photography exhibition.

The Galicia Jewish Museum, in the Kazimierz district of Krakow, Poland, takes a fresh and powerful approach to telling the story of the Jewish communities lost, in a region so deeply affected by the Holocaust. Situated a mere 60 kilometres from Auschwitz-Birkenau, the museum is at the heart of a once thriving district of synagogues, and Jewish shops, restaurants and schools. The museum's permanent exhibition, 'Traces of Memory', relies solely on contemporary photography to reveal the traces of the country's Jewish past and open a dialogue about what this means for Poland today.



Exterior of Galicia Jewish Museum. Copyright Jen Kavanagh (2017).

Opened in 2004 and refreshed in 2016, the exhibition derived from collaboration between academic Jason Webber and British photographer Chris Schwarz. Divided into five sections, the exhibition consists of 144 photographs, each accompanied by a sensitive and reflective caption written by Webber. As Webber states, "To avoid inappropriate, stereotyped generalisations, the exhibition...offers instead a multi-layered, multi-dimensional set of perspectives on the subject. This transferred into... five ways or moods in which the tragic Jewish absence after the Holocaust could be approached: sadness in confronting ruins; interest in the original culture; horror

at the process of destruction; and recognition of the problems in coping with the past, including both the erasure of memory and also the efforts to preserve and memorialise the traces of memory” (www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/).

Approaching the content in each of the sections, the significance and context of the colour images are often unclear at first glance. A closer look at a photograph of a field of green grass, for example, reveals the damaged remains of a tombstone: a Jewish cemetery destroyed, the stone from many of the headstones used by locals as building materials. A derelict rural building is exposed through the accompanying label to be the sight of a former synagogue, now abandoned. The simplicity of the images and the surprising history they reveal make for a moving visitor experience.



Interior of 'Traces of Memory' exhibition. Copyright Jen Kavanagh (2017).

Unlike many Jewish museums and Holocaust exhibitions, a deliberate decision was made to not feature people in the majority of the photographs. It is only when the visitor reaches the final section do faces appear, as a celebration to those in the community who are working to revive Jewish culture through new initiatives, both in Krakow and beyond. The refresh which took place in 2016 allowed for the museum to bring the exhibition up to date, and celebrates these new venues. Previously derelict synagogues have since been restored, and so new photographs by American Jason Francisco enabled this progress to be documented. In addition, new memorials have been erected, demonstrating a significant shift in how Poland is acknowledging its challenging recent past. These new photographs provide a welcome contrast to the difficult narratives explored elsewhere in the exhibition. It is hoped these will inspire the large number of school children who visit the exhibition annually to think differently about the role the Jewish community plays in the region. The simplicity of the content, and the personal approach to the interpretation, made for a memorable and impressive visit.

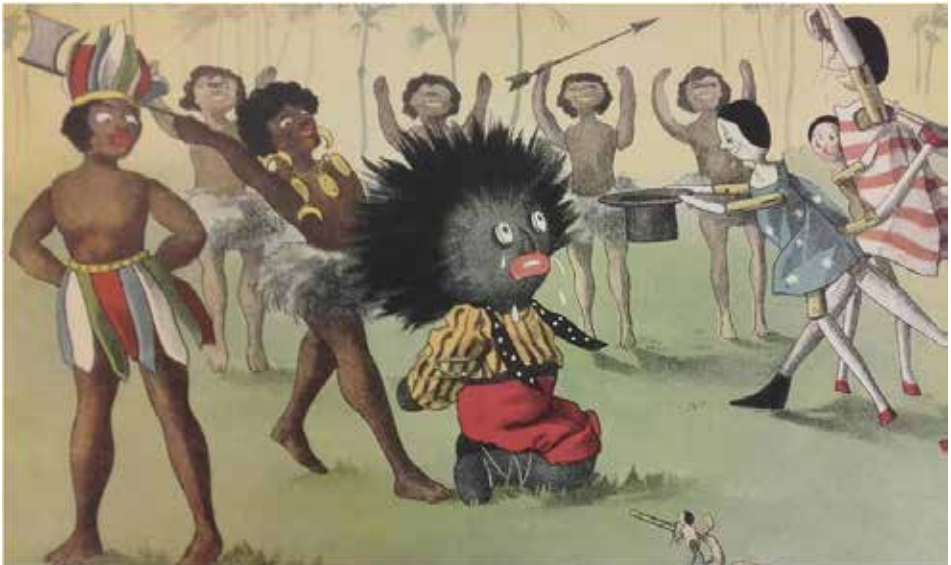
Understanding Jim Crow: Using Racist Memorabilia to Teach Tolerance and Promote Social Justice

Lyn Wall

Lyn Wall (Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh) reviews a book by David Pilgrim (2015) which captures one man's determination to confront racism and promote tolerance and respect by collecting, exhibiting and interpreting racist objects.

This book is, in many ways, the very personal story of the author David Pilgrim who founded the Jim Crow museum at the Ferris State University in Michigan USA in 1996. The museum's collection was based on Pilgrim's own collection, which he started when he was just 12 or 13. It is a collection of racist objects he found in stores across America that were part of everyday ephemera during the 19th and 20th Centuries, and can still be found today.

Something as innocuous as a salt shaker, cocktail stirrer or children's books and games were routinely turned into racist objects by the portrayal of black people as caricatures with exaggerated features, as ignorant simpletons or as sexual predators.



The Gollywogg's Bicycle Club, Florence K. Upton (1903). Courtesy of Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh

Pilgrim outlines in the book how he came to start collecting racist objects, an emotional reaction to seeing them for sale that turns to anger and then a determination to make sure they can be used in a positive way through the museum. Pilgrim describes how, after the abolition of slavery in America, black people were still oppressed and treated unequally through a series of laws that were known as the Jim Crow laws. These laws ensured black people were not given the same opportunities as whites, that society could be segregated, and that white people could use the law to dominate black people in every sphere of society. Pilgrim defines very specific

types of caricatures of black people that enabled the race to be oppressed by humiliation and fear; a fear of what was different.

Pilgrim strongly believes that by asking people to confront these racist objects in the museum, the collections can be used as a starting point for honest and open conversation. The museum can provide a safe space for people to talk enabling a better understanding and tolerance of others to be developed and nurtured.

'The Jim Crow museum was founded on the idea that objects of racial intolerance could be used to teach about race, race relations and racism, and that those lessons shared through painfully honest dialogues, would result in less racism.'



Little Black Sambo, Helen Bannerman (1899). Courtesy of Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh

The Jim Crow museum's mission of teaching tolerance and respect for all is an aspiration for all museums, regardless of the nature of the collections, audiences or location. It demonstrates that if we are honest about difficult subjects and allow the facilitation of difficult conversations, great things can happen through the use of museum collections.