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Editor's Foreword

This special issue of *Social History in Museums* focuses on contemporary collecting. Taking the theme broadly, the articles explore different aspects of collecting and exhibiting contemporary material.

The issue begins with a provocative piece from Michael Terwey which aims to prompt discussion and debate. Terwey contextualises contemporary collecting by assessing the state of Social History curatorship today and questioning the values which support our collecting decisions and the discipline itself.

A selection of papers follows which shares innovative recent practice, in the hope of inspiring discussion and new ideas.

Halima Khanom, Georgina Young and Beatrice Behlen detail the development of a recent project at the Museum of London to collect modern Muslim dress. The project engaged with questions of identity and how clothing represents us to the outside world. The paper presents this work in the broader context of contemporary collecting at the museum.

Jennifer Kavanagh writes about collecting to represent difficult contemporary histories, through detailing the London Transport Museum's engagement with the 7/7 terrorist attacks. She discusses the challenges faced by curators who were reacting to the events both as museum professionals and as Londoners.

Sarah Kirkham and Nazeea Elahi explore collecting to document the more light-hearted subject of the Wimbledon tennis championships. This paper details the selection of objects to represent the tournament from internationally famous players to Murray Mount and The Queue.

In a very practical and useful article, George Monger provides hints and tips on the conservation issues to be considered when collecting contemporary objects. He discusses the difficulties presented by synthetic materials, and provides a succinct bibliography of further resources.

Stuart Frost shares a fascinating exploration of the curatorial decision-making and unexpected public reactions around a recent exhibition of sexually explicit material. He examines historical and contemporary collecting practice in this area, and challenges museums to be brave in prompting and engaging in debate.

Brendan Carr meditates on changing cityscapes and shares lessons learned from Reading Museum's recent Happy Museum project in using social history collections to engage people with contemporary social issues.

Finally, Charlene Price reviews an exhibition at Bletchley Park which charts the making of the recent hit film *The Imitation Game*, prompting questions about the layering of different histories at a site.

I hope this issue inspires you to be brave in your collecting and to try something new!

Helen McConnell Simpson

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Social History Curatorship in Crisis

Michael Terwey is Head of Collections and Exhibitions at the National Media Museum and a former Chair of SHCG. In this provocative piece, he questions whether there is still a need for Social History Curators and interrogates the values for which we should stand.

Social History Curators are different from other curators. We see material culture in a different way from other curators, we have a different relationship with audiences and the public whom we serve than other curators, and we understand that expertise in our area cannot be held in the head of one person but must be distributed democratically through the knowledge and experiences of that public. Not better than other curators, perhaps, but certainly different: the legacy of our SHCG forebears in the '80s and '90s who established the idea of social history curatorship very consciously in opposition to other, more traditional, more conservative, forms of curatorial practice.

And yet I believe that our current failure to recognise and confidently embrace our difference has resulted in a peculiar angst among the dwindling band of museum professionals for whom the label "social history curator" best fits our sense of what we do – regardless of what the job title actually says. Social History Curators seem to find themselves isolated within their own institutions, alienated from their managers and directors, and often from their curatorial colleagues in other disciplines and, unable to act as strong advocates for the value of their work, they lose out in the ever more desperate competition for the vital resources of time, cash and space for storage and display.

Furthermore I think this is a symptom of a more significant malaise, and that Social History Curatorship is perhaps experiencing an existential crisis as a result of a number of powerful trends in the sector. In order to survive, Social History Curatorship, and by extension SHCG, needs to reimagine itself as a community defined not by the kinds of collection we care for or the topics we know about, but rather one animated by shared values and a distinctive approach to our practice. As Crispin Paine said at the SHCG conference in 2008 'We've lost our way because we have no underlying principles on which to base our work.' (Paine, SHIM, 2008). In this article I want to provide an analysis of this crisis, and begin to identify some of the principles or values that may form the basis of a constructive way forward for Social History Curatorship.

There are many reasons why we find ourselves facing this crisis. Perhaps the most notable and surprising of which is the apparent total victory of our ideas. Many of the values and practices that were championed and pioneered by social history curators have been adopted by other museum functions and activities: community engagement has become the province of the old Education department; participatory practice the buzz word for artists and art curators, who are also keen on using 'vernacular' photography and 'found' objects; oral history is commonplace; and contemporary collecting is undertaken by all curatorial disciplines. And the guerilla leaders from our days in the jungle have captured the commanding heights of the profession; and the Museum Association now boldly proclaims that *Museums Change Lives*.

However, I'm highly skeptical about how total the victory of our ideas actually is. Early in my career I worked on a project where we explicitly used a social history approach to an industrial heritage site, because our market research indicated we were more likely to achieve our visitor targets if we appealed not to the male industrial history enthusiasts who would visit anyway, but rather to the mothers in family groups who were identified as the decision makers for day trips. In this case social history was being used for an instrumental purpose, to attract an audience. The adoption of the instrumental benefits of Social History Curatorship for audience development, for the recoding of provenance using oral history, for the development of policy documents

which seek to demonstrate the value of museums to successive governments, does not tell us that the values and purpose that underpinned those techniques of curatorship have been accepted, it tells us that others see tactical benefits in using those techniques.

And yet at the same time this apparent success masks the gradual disintegration of our movement. Social History Curators always lacked institutional support outside the museum – unlike the vast art history/art market/arts council establishment or the nexus of government/industry/universities that support science and technology curatorship – and created it for ourselves through SHCG and the network of museums¹ whose culture and leadership aligned with ours. And since 2010 it is these museums that have suffered hardest from the successive waves of spending cuts from government, leaving once thriving services struggling for survival. Our fellow travellers in academia – the ranks of radical scholars of social and local history, notably at Leicester but also at practically every redbrick university in the country – have been decimated by comfortably remunerated retirement while changes in intellectual fashion has reduced the intake of young researchers into this decidedly uncool field of study. Even SHCG itself has struggled in recent years to maintain its membership and financial health.

I became even more convinced of the difficulty we find ourselves in by a small piece of research I conducted back in autumn 2012, which involved a short survey of contemporary collecting practice among SHCG members in order to generate some data that would form the basis of my contribution on behalf of the group to a workshop arranged by Zelda Baveystock and Owain Rhys at the Museum of London. A longer version of the paper was later published as 'A Question of Value: Issues in Contemporary Collecting Practice' in *Collecting the Contemporary* (Museums Etc., 2014). The research identified a number of challenges that curators were experiencing as they attempted to undertake what they considered to be "contemporary collecting" in their institutions, but what struck me was not the inevitable technical challenges, or the inevitable problem of "lack of resources", but rather the palpable absence of a clear set of values or principles to underpin the activity. Many respondents did not seem to be able to articulate why they were undertaking contemporary collecting, how it was different from other forms of collecting, and, crucially, unable to present strong arguments to their colleague, their managers, their governing bodies, for its value.

Do We Still Need Social History Curators?

In the face of these powerful forces, what's the point in maintaining a claim to the distinctiveness of what Social History Curators do? We could accept that the war is over, that we won, and disband, like the army of conscripts at demobilization. We could return to the traditional labels and disciplinary sub-divisions, become curators of costume and decorative arts, of domestic life, of industry. We could run our contemporary collecting projects, reach out to diverse communities, lend the oral history recording equipment to our colleagues when they need it, and fully support the local authority's strategic objectives for "health and wellbeing", all without the need to call ourselves Social History Curators.

We really could. And we need to ask ourselves very seriously whether we would be worse off than we are now if that happened.

But I think we would be worse off. As I argued in my introduction, I think we're different from other groups of curators, a more purposeful and outward looking bunch, united by shared values rather than common collections. SHCG needs to maintain its core purpose as a 'community of interest'² based on shared values and a commonality of approach, rather than become yet another "Subject Specialist Network" intent on nothing more ambitious than providing training in basic object identification and a proving ground for bright young museum professionals.

To me, Social History Curatorship is fundamentally about socially-engaged curatorial practice, collecting, researching and exhibiting material culture that is drawn from the everyday lived experiences of people, with a particular emphasis on those people who are not usually represented in the historical record.³ And at a time when the world is changing rapidly through the forces of globalization and technological innovation, it feels more than ever essential that collecting institutions reflect these changes and museums help people make sense of them. And while we may share these some common concerns with other museum activities and disciplines (community engagement, contemporary collecting, oral history), the distinctiveness of SHCG is in that we are engaged with the practice of curatorship – building, researching and interpreting collections.

Our Values

In a museum sector that is also changing quickly and perhaps fundamentally through the challenges of government funding cuts, an increasingly diverse ecosystem of museum governance models and, again, technological developments, it seems to me essential that Social History Curatorship finds ways of adapting to different environments and situations. And this is where a definition of our values is essential. Values remain constant while the world changes around us, and they can provide a set of principles to guide curators whose institutional situations are usually highly specific contexts. I also think they can help us build common cause with our colleagues across different museum functions, and build meaningful collaborations beyond the institution without the risk of having our practices co-opted for other institutional purposes.

But what might these values consist of? How might they be usefully defined? Mark O’Neill has defined SHCG as a community of practice characterized by ‘empathy and rigour’. For me these are useful ways of thinking about our relationship with the world and with our own practice. Social History Curators should be concerned with those in our country who are poor, with diverse and minority cultures, with those whose histories have not been collected and whose stories have not been told. Social History Curators should be rigorous in the application of our values to our work, and in the hard and complicated work of thinking about what we collect and how we interpret it.

Building on this, and for the sake of argument, I’m going to tentatively suggest three areas where we might find some common values for our work: working with people; recognizing knowledge as distributed and contingent; and the balance of significance between object and provenance.

Elsewhere I have argued that the value of contemporary collecting for social history curators is less in the material culture that is brought into the museum as a consequence, but rather in the dialogue with communities, companies, enthusiasts, that are an integral part of the process of contemporary collecting. But this can be taken further than contemporary collecting, and I think it should be the first of our values. Social History Curatorship requires us to actively work with people, to break down the barriers between institution and community and between professional and audience.

Building on this, we need to establish a second principle that knowledge in Social History Curatorship cannot be fixed in the head of the curator or the records of the institution, but it is a living thing – dispersed between many people, contingent, specific. That does not mean that it is without rigour or foundation⁴, but rather than we accept that there are many inputs to a body of knowledge, and that they should all be treated equally respectfully and critically, regardless of the source.

Thirdly, we need to reaffirm the value that in Social History Curatorship provenance and context are more important to the significance of an object than in other disciplines.

To quote David Fleming back in 1987,

The old antiquarian, anecdotal approach to history by museum-based local historians has shifted...away from objects as displays towards objects as evidence, objects in context, objects as illustrations of social themes and social history.
(Fleming, 1987)

At times, perhaps most of the time, we are fundamentally more interested in the story than in the materiality of the thing itself. In other disciplines that very idea is anathema – you're using the object *illustratively* – as if the intrinsic, material, artistic value of a chipped souvenir silver jubilee mug was more important than the story of the woman who bought it in 1977 to give to her first grandchild, and who in turn has donated it to the museum. The problem is that if the intrinsic value of the object is primary, then almost all of the material culture that is part of everyday life is consigned not to the archive but to the rubbish heap, and with it the lived experience of practically everybody in the history of this country except for a small elite. In order to collect that mug, we need to be able to take on this argument and its implications.

To conclude, Social History Curatorship is at a crossroads. We can go gently into the good night, or we can reaffirm our purpose, reestablish our credo and set about the hard work of creating social history collections and exhibitions that will serve our museums and our communities for years to come. What we can't do is continue to muddle through, hoping that resources, leadership and purpose will return to us – we need to do it ourselves.

References:

- 1 Tyne and Wear Museums, Beamish, Leicester City Museums, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, the Museum of Croydon, to name but a few.
- 2 In an argument which is heavily influenced by Mark O'Neill's article in *Social History in Museums Vol 34 'SHCG: A community of practice based on empathy and rigour'* (SHCG: 2010).
- 3 As memorably put by EP Thompson in his *The Making of the English Working Class* '...the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the "obsolete" hand-loom weaver, the "utopian" artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott' (Thompson, 1980: 12).
- 4 I'm very much aware that younger curators, new to the profession and in relatively junior roles, are anxious about how to live up to the expectations of colleagues and the public to not only be knowledgeable about their collections but experts in them, and in a whole range of related areas. But, to me, that is an impossible and undesirable task. One could spend an entire career seeking to "know" a collection, and fill ones' head and documentation system with fact after fact after fact, but that isn't curatorship, it's not social history; it's antiquarianism. Social History Curators should not see their role as being about providing answers, but about living in the debate. Can, *should* institutions be the places that exclusively hold these histories? I don't think they can, and I don't think they should.

What Muslims Wear. Reflections on a Recent Project at the Museum of London

Halima Khanom was the Community Collaboration Assistant at the Museum of London from 2012 to 2014. Here she reflects on a contemporary collecting project aimed at addressing a gap in the Museum's dress and textile holdings through a collaborative project. The other team members, Georgina Young, Senior Curator, Contemporary History, and Beatrice Behlen, Senior Curator, Fashion & Decorative Arts, provide a fascinating glimpse into the wider context of the Museum of London's history and current practice.

The History of Contemporary Collecting of Dress at the Museum of London

Beatrice Behlen

In early 1911, the three newly appointed Trustees of the projected London Museum stated their wish 'to exhibit many things which would find no place at the British or Victoria and Albert Museum but which, nevertheless, are of value and cannot fail to appeal to Londoners and visitors to the metropolis' (Harcourt 1911: 8). Guy Laking, the first Keeper of the Museum, seemed to realise the usefulness of clothing for bringing the past to life and soon added collections of 'historical costumes' assembled by two painters to the stash of 'Tudor cloth caps found in the London Ditch' (Harcourt 1911: 8). It was claimed that the trustees were also interested in clothing 'down to the present day' (The Times 1911: 6) but when the Museum finally opened in April 1912, most objects relating to the then-contemporary were confined to 'Royal costumes or other relics'. It was noted that Laking followed the principle that 'every relic of very early times is interesting', but when it came to contemporary objects, one had 'to differentiate with some severity' (The Times 1912: 6). More than 100 years later, the London Museum's acquisitions sit within Museum of London's dress and textile collection of around 23,000 objects. The *What Muslims Wear* project made me want to find out when and how contemporary collecting had shaped these holdings in the past.

In the first years of the London Museum, textile and dress items purchased or donated generally date to the period before 1850. The first clothing objects entered into the register seem to be a late 17th century wooden clog overshoe (A957), followed by a pair of child's pattens from around 1800 (A1113a-b), a top hat from the reign of William IV (A1127) and a woman's parasol from around 1840 (A1817). Exceptions to this focus on the more distant past include the fancy dress outfits of Lady Tweeddale and her page, who attended the Duchess of Devonshire Ball in 1897 (A14522a-b and A14553a-e), and a cuirass worn by the actor Henry Irving on the stage around 15 years earlier (A14973).

The first notable, "proper" contemporary collecting project was undertaken by Laking during the First World War. He wrote to a large number of companies employing women to ask for their workwear, which led to the acquisition of nineteen uniforms (Behlen 2011). For the next twenty-five years or so, only the odd contemporary item crept through, such as the wedding dress of Angela Brett donated in the same month she married Major Kenneth Marcus Thornton in 1934 (34.68/1a-d). It probably helped that Angela was the grand-daughter of Reginald Brett, 2nd Viscount Esher, one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the London Museum. Only the next war sparked off another round of contemporary collecting. In 1945, the Museum asked for extra coupons from the Board of Trade so that clothing related to rationing could be bought from various London shops and department stores (see also Reynolds 1999: 136 and 142).

From the 1950s onwards, the number of contemporary dress items collected seems to increase each decade. They begin to fall into categories, some objects pertaining to more than one. Royal events still feature heavily, the 1953 coronation as well as the royal weddings of 1981, 1986 (Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson, in case you are wondering) and the more recent 2011 are all represented. Celebrity clothing also often enters into the collection swiftly, something that might have started with the costume worn by the wonderfully named Conchita Supervia in one of her signature roles at Covent Garden in 1934 (36.206). There are objects relating to the composer and actor Ivor Novello (51.68), the Bay City rollers (76.1) and Glenda Jackson in her role as Elizabeth I (78.236).

Designers, manufacturers and shops also frequently feature and we are pleased to have in our collection 12 packets of disposable paper underpants acquired directly from the manufacturers (69.110), a group of men's clothing used in a City branch of Austin Reed to mark a company anniversary (80.468), as well as a large group of clothing and other objects from Mothercare (83.679). Sometimes acquisitions were made when a company was dissolved, such as a group donated by Biba Ltd when their large store on Kensington High Street closed (74.420). Designer clothing was also donated as part of exhibitions, including *Mary Quant's London*, the last display at Kensington Palace before the London Museum was amalgamated into the Museum of London (74.330), and objects given by Hardy Amies on the occasion of the exhibition *A couture house at work* in 1989 (89.265 group). Similarly, clothing incorporating fur, fake or real, was bought for *Stolen Skins? Fur in Fashion* in 2000/2001, and, in the run-up to the 2005 major fashion exhibition *The London Look*, many designer and high-street items were added to the collection.

Possibly more intriguing and moving are private gifts, such as the 1964 wedding dress and veil, never worn (68.68). Museum staff and dress historians in particular seem to have been aware of the value of everyday dress and donated many garments throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, including 1977 'pop sox' (79.307) and a 'red cotton snuff handkerchief' to be used in the Museum workshop (82.290). Youth and subcultural styles were collected from the 1960s onwards (sadly we do not have an original Teddy Boy suit), beginning with two dresses made to dance the twist (62.142, 65.124), as well as purchases from Carnaby and Kensington High Street and Notting Hill Gate.

The Museum seems to have undertaken contemporary and collaborative dress and textile collecting specifically addressing different London communities only in more recent years. In 1993/94, the Museum staged *The Peopling of London* exhibition, highly praised by one reviewer as the first instance of 'a major museum in London' addressing 'the truly multicultural history of London' (Collicott 1994: 261). This led to the acquisition of a sari from Deluxe Fashions in Brick Lane and a tie-dyed child's outfit made in Nigeria and bought in Ridley Road in Hackney (94.94). In the run-up to the millennium, the HLF-funded Collecting 2000 project was aimed at 'London groups, clubs and societies' who were asked to donate 'one item, object, image or recording' that, for them, summarised who they were at the start of a new century (Reynolds 2000: 6). The objects included T-shirts, football shirts and 'flat textiles' such as a crocheted table mat made by a member of the Arachne Greek Cypriot Women's group (2000.39).

Many, if not most, of the objects collected "rapidly" were unworn, which is one of the characteristics that distinguishes the *What Muslims Wear* project from previous attempts. This is unsurprising as systematically acquiring worn clothing can be more difficult and time-consuming than going to shops, something I realised when trying to get hold of a worn cycle courier outfit for our Galleries of Modern London (2009.91 group). The gaps in the museum's dress and textile holdings relating to many London communities had been well-known to a succession of curators, but we lacked the

means and the time to address them. I am pleased that we have started to re-dress the balance, albeit on a small scale, and hope this project heralds many more to come.

Rethinking Contemporary Collecting at the Museum of London

Georgina Young

Contemporary collecting is far from a new phenomenon at the Museum of London, as Beatrice Behlen's summary of dress and textile collecting demonstrates. I was well aware of the pedigree when I joined as Senior Curator of Contemporary History in 2012. A century ago, the London Museum collected objects relating to the impact of the First World War on the city as it happened. Before I was born, Colin Sorenson was bluntly making the case for allocating space to contemporary material at the new London Wall site: 'If you haven't got an object, you either go out and get one, or you find another way of dealing with the subject – you do not just ignore or exclude it' (Sheppard 1991: 173). A long history does not mean, however, that there is not new ground to break and *What Muslims Wear* is one of a series of recent experimental projects aimed at disturbing the surface, reflecting on the findings, and identifying where future collecting might dig deeper.

One of the things that looking at the museum with a fresh pair of eyes revealed was that there appeared to be a divide – partly structural and often unconscious – between the work of the collaboration team and the work of the curatorial departments. This seemed to have both prevented the curators from capitalising on collecting opportunities within collaboration programmes and blocked the collaboration team from contributing to collecting where their involvement might have offered a richer result. There were notable exceptions, but still I recognised a familiar barrier from past experience of participatory work in museums. The rewards for breaking down this divide – especially in relation to contemporary collecting, where the experiential knowledge of Londoners is equally as important as the propositional knowledge of experts – appeared compelling.

The seeds of *What Muslims Wear* were further sewn as part of planning a proposed new contemporary East London gallery, titled 'Many East Ends', at the Museum of London Docklands. As our ideas developed, the context underlying the project changed. Internally, there was a new director and a new strategic plan. Beyond the Museum, there was a new political landscape and widespread financial retrenchment. It became apparent that this was not the moment to deliver a new gallery, but it was equally obvious that the research and development work already undertaken remained valuable. It had focussed attention on areas where our collections were lacking and where there was interest (critically both curatorial and public) in developing them. On the basis of this evidence, a modest budget to continue with experimental contemporary collecting projects following on from Many East Ends was allocated, and the pieces of *What Muslims Wear* began to fall into place.

Within these experimental projects, I was keen to push contemporary collecting beyond its most familiar home alongside the oral history collection. Museum of London is fortunate to have a range of specialists, not only in dress and textiles but also in disciplines ranging from art to archaeology. Attempts at exploring the interplay between these specialisms have taken place largely in a display context, while collecting frameworks have often remained independent of one another except in instances of catastrophe (for example, the two World Wars) or opportunity (for example, the millennium). We had not maximised the potential inherent in having so many distinctly-trained, well-practiced and inventive collecting brains within 100 metres of one another. While reading each of the collecting frameworks and exploring ideas for connections with colleagues, I learned of the long-standing wish to collect Islamic fashion. This knitted with the public desire for us to explore the global East End – particularly fashion

and textiles and migration – established during the Many East Ends research and development phase. It was from that starting point that discussions with Beatrice Behlen and Halima Khanom about *What Muslims Wear* began in earnest.

Halima Khanom

The Project

What Muslims Wear sought to address the issue of underrepresentation of Muslims in the Museum of London's dress collection. Muslims make up more than one tenth of the capital's population (Office for National Statistics 2012), but their clothing practices were not well represented in either the stored holdings or in the galleries. One single outfit, a traditional hijab comprising a long black dress, black face covering and cream headscarf, nominated by the Asian Women's Advisory Service (2000.206), which had been acquired as part of the Collecting 2000 project mentioned above, is shown in the Galleries of Modern London.¹

Though still relevant for many, having one outfit to encapsulate such a diverse community in London seemed unjustifiably reductionist, and complicating this picture was a touchstone of the *What Muslims Wear* project. Due to the nature of visibly Muslim dress – a topic which is often hotly debated at a national level without the voices of those who have direct experience of wearing it – the involvement of Muslim Londoners in collecting contemporary examples of Muslim dress was critical to the integrity of the collection and to capturing the subtlety and multiplicity of Muslim dress in the city. As Hannah, one of the participants, put it, 'We talk about Islamic fashion as if it's a monolith and it's so not, especially in 21st century London' (Museum of London 2014: 14).

As well as establishing a participatory approach from the beginning, *What Muslims Wear* also had a physical constraint: the capsule collection arising from the project was limited to six full outfits. The rationale for this decision was partly down to limitations on resources (staff time and storage space), but it was also intended to make the boundaries of the task clear and to help structure decision making for everyone who we hoped would become involved.

The project integrated several opportunities for Muslim Londoners to inform the collecting of objects. The core collaborative approach sought to engage a group of young Muslim Londoners over a period of three months to ensure that the acquisition of contemporary examples of Muslim dress styles in London was rooted in their experiences. The group of young Muslim Londoners that the project engaged were between 16 and 30 years old and from a diverse range of backgrounds. Despite being open to men and women, the project attracted an overwhelmingly female participant group. The gender imbalance was not necessarily particular to the subject matter of this project – it is also reflected in longstanding patterns of donation to dress collections and in sign-up for youth participation projects – but certainly influenced the development and outcomes of *What Muslims Wear*.

The project was not an attempt to collect a comprehensive range of Muslim dress styles in London. Instead, the objects collected were rooted in the individual testimonies and contextual interviews provided by donors, based on their own personal reflections on being visibly Muslim in London. Their experiences reflected how clothing choices of female Muslim Londoners have been informed by a wide range of experiences, including family histories of migration, conversion to Islam, and moving to a multicultural urban environment such as London (Tarlo 2010). These were used to update and question the Hijab display, which at that time stood in for all expressions of being visibly Muslim in the Museum of London, whether it resembled the female Muslim visitors and participants or not.



Heiba as "Grace". © Museum of London

The Process

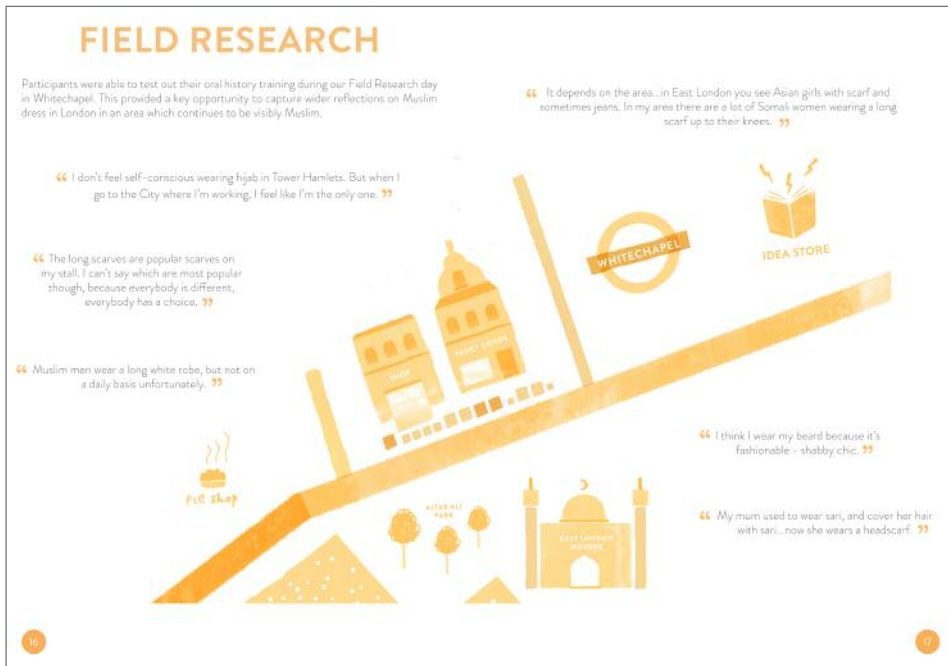
The initial stages of the project involved two pilot workshops delivered by museum staff members, intended to gauge a sense of the need for and interest in the project. Based on these, a further six creative workshops were designed by artists Fourth Wall Creations to work with participants to decide what the new collection must reflect. All of the workshops were observed and captured by illustrators from One of My Kind. The use of illustration responded specifically to the sensitivity of using photography and film with this particular group, allowing for partial anonymity and greater frankness in discussions. One sample illustration, that was also used for the cover of the booklet discussed below, shows Heiba dressing up as fictional character "Grace" during the first workshop and exploring the links between dress, perception and identity.

Alongside these workshops, there were two further ways in which Muslim Londoners were involved within the project. Firstly, the 'What is Islamic Fashion?' panel discussion invited various "experts" in the business of representing Muslims to enter into conversation with the participants. These included visual artists, fashion designers, a performance artist and a journalist. This discussion began to frame the collecting rationale, highlighting overarching themes that should be reflected in the outfits collected. Participants and panellists alike stressed the need to clarify terminology, addressing what "Islamic" fashion is within the context of London.

Participants felt that focusing on "Islamic" clothing predisposed collecting decisions to "traditional" expressions of Muslim dress, based on what participants felt were "Arabised" expressions of what it means to be visibly Muslim. This could overwhelm more individualised expressions of being visibly Muslim in London, which draw inspiration from Arab styles, but may also be fused with other influences: cultural background, profession, accessibility of retailers, as well as more specific details such as chosen activity and context, mood and the weather. As a result, "Muslim dress" was settled upon as a more appropriate label for the collection, as it emphasises individual responses to modest dress, where the onus is on the Muslim subject rather than interpretation of Islamic ideology. Religious prescriptions about dress are considered important information to be referenced by Muslims, but do not dictate what they wear, which is subject to many other factors, as mentioned. (Tarlo 2010).

Secondly, beyond the Museum of London space, participants attempted to engage with an existing "visibly Muslim" space through a "Field Research" session by exploring Whitechapel, an area in London which is an example of a visibly Muslim community. This involved doing a series of vox pop interviews in Whitechapel Market, engaging with Muslims in the process of sourcing their dress, as well as talking to stall holders (image on next page). Here, the contributions were less "expert", but were enlightening in different ways. For instance, highlighting the particularity of different areas of London, 'I don't feel self-conscious wearing hijab in Tower Hamlets. But when

I go to the City where I'm working, I feel like I'm the only one,' or transitions over time or between generations, 'My mum used to wear sari, and cover her hair with sari ... now she wears a headscarf' (Museum of London 2014: 16-17).



Map of Whitechapel High Street with quotes from vox pop interviews. © Museum of London

What We Collected

The project highlighted the spiritual, practical and experimental motivations of the dress styles of young Muslim Londoners, as well as the impact young Muslims have had on the British high street and how the experience of living in London has affected Muslim dress. At first, it was difficult for participants to decide what specific outfits should be collected. Instead, there were several suggestions of how the collecting rationale should be framed. Initially, the collection was to be organised so that it traced the evolution of Muslim dress from first to second and third generation migrants. This was in response to research in Whitechapel which articulated this shift. One participant from a Muslim convert background pointed out that focusing on migrant expressions of being visibly Muslim did not account for the sizeable Muslim convert community in London, which was recognised by all participants as a key story. Participants also looked at the Muslim family as a structural device, but came up against huge differences in family make-up and life.

It became useful to link a hypothetical family member to an activity they were engaged in, and it was this context-specific approach, paying attention to the specific situation for which an outfit was selected, that began to feel right. This really helped hone in on what Muslims might wear to the mosque, on special occasions or during prayer. All of this was rooted in the participants' own memories and experiences. Based on this, participants started thinking of who they knew, and what they might ask them to contribute to the collection, focusing particularly on people they had already met through the project.

For *What Muslims Wear*, we collected full outfits, including accessories worn by donors on a specific occasion. The physical objects were contextualised through interviews undertaken at the point of donation. All contributors linked their deposited outfit to a specific memory or day, which focused and personalised their contribution. All objects were collected through people who had interacted with the project, from panellists, to participants and contributors.

The new collection reflects the diverse influences on London Muslim dress. Outfits range from Yasmin Khatun's sleeveless black abaya and sweater outfit, not complete without her Micheal Kors watch and "mushroom" hijab, to Saif Osmani's Eid outfit sourced between Mumbai in India and London's Oxford Street, providing a unique insight into his experience of celebrating Eid in East London. Hiba Mohamed describes her look as 'urban' but modest, to suit her first day at the London College of Fashion. Muneera Rashida's outfit encapsulates her international reputation as part of hip hop duo Poetic Pilgrimage, with her "kente" cloth dress from South Africa, jeans from Primark and "One Love" hoodie from Statement boutique, completed with her "Peace" and "Love" earrings from Indeska, Sweden. There was a strong theme of bespoke clothing as illustrated by Zinia Khan's navy blue evening dress, designed by Zinia herself to be worn on various special occasions including Eid. By way of contrast, Fiona Cross Chowdhury's outfit reflects her journey of converting to Islam and how she adjusted to everyday modest wear after her conversion.



Double page spread showing Fiona's and Zina's outfits. © Museum of London

The involvement of Muslim Londoners in gathering examples of visibly Muslim dress was an attempt to ensure that the new collection was rooted in the experience of being a visibly Muslim Londoner. The formal acquisition of the dress items into the Museum of London collection provides a long term legacy for these experiences in the museum. The group of clothing will also enable the museum to update the existing display of Muslim dress in the Galleries of Modern London, creating a more informed and nuanced representation of Muslim Londoners. The project also has its own record, a 30-page booklet, from which the images for this article were taken, which includes stories from the process with photos of the outfits collected, capturing the collaborative

essence of the project. The illustrations featured in the booklet are live illustrations of workshops and discussions amongst artists and participants. The content and design of the publication was also developed collaboratively between the participants and designers, to ensure that the collaborative essence of the project was captured.

Personal Reflections

Beatrice Behlen

I could only briefly dip into some of the workshops but even those short attendances changed my views about Muslim dress in London. I was particularly interested in the aspect of adaptation, using high-street purchases to conform to the standards of modest dressing. I particularly like having the booklet, which seems to make the project much more concrete. On a very narrow-focused, dress-curatorial point, I am pleased that we could try out a new way of photographing dress objects in the collection. After some discussion we decided to photograph the clothes “flat”, not on a mannequin, and put the individual outfits together on one page as in a fashion spread. This replicates the way high-street clothes are represented, and seemed more apt than a more traditional way of capturing the clothes.

Georgina Young

Beyond the physical outputs, *What Muslims Wear* has opened up a fruitful dialogue between Museum of London specialisms and divisions that has further to go. The transparency and shared investment in the collecting process embedded in the project structure has heightened awareness of acts of collecting often shrouded in mystery, even within the institution. The involvement of Muslim Londoners was demonstrably conceptually necessary, not simply window dressing. The project also represents the active involvement of the museum in a politically sensitive area, not simply addressing immediate headlines but generating a long term legacy.

While *What Muslims Wear* experimented with project structures and interdisciplinary working, Museum of London was simultaneously evolving its new Content Framework, focussing in on what London cares about and where the Museum has the opportunity to make a difference. With both a strategic intent and strong project models in place, the Museum of London is in a position not only to follow up on this project in terms of a continuity of interest in Muslim dress and representation, but also to refine its rationale and scale up its ambition for contemporary collecting.

Halima Khanom

For me, our findings highlight the agency and creativity of the London Muslim community in articulating a visibly Muslim identity, which has overcome many barriers. These include the difficulties in sourcing modest dress in London, the widespread perception of Muslim dress as being “oppressive” and alien to the London context, and national debates surrounding the role of modest dress in the public sphere. I am pleased that the new collection and contextual interviews capture the dynamism of the British Muslim community, as consumers and producers on the British high street as well as the confidence of young Muslim Londoners in being both a “Muslim” and a “Londoner”. I had always known that this confidence was there, but felt that it was not being articulated, as characterised by the existing display of Muslim dress in the Galleries of Modern London.

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- 1 Further information and images of the hijab can be found here:
<http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/Online/object.aspx?objectID=object-530370>

Collecting Challenging Contemporary Histories: 7/7 Terrorist Attacks in London

Jennifer Kavanagh was Community Curator for London Transport Museum on a project conducted to collect material related to the 7/7 terrorist attacks, and has since worked for the Science Museum. Here, she discusses the issues considered and approach taken in collecting to represent such difficult recent events.

Museum collections are rich with stories. Objects are given context through their relationship with people, places, time and events. Museums are places of history, where people learn about the past, can sometimes reflect on today and consider the future. Museums should push boundaries and experiment with concepts, encouraging debate and dialogue. The decisions by curators as to what is displayed can be controversial, difficult and disapproved of by audiences. So how do museums collect difficult contemporary history? What role can museums play in helping to heal the wounds of those affected by significant negative events? And when is it appropriate for museums to publically exhibit these challenging subjects? There is an ever-growing expectation for museums to place themselves in the heart of their communities, and to play a part in enabling positive social change (see Thompson and Aked, 2011, and Brown, Wood and Salgado, 2009). The responsibility that museums take on when opening the floodgates to challenging and contentious subjects is shifting, with museum curators having to consider how best to collect objects and the context in which to tell these stories. The move from passive observation to active collecting by some institutions is key to ensuring museum collections are kept relevant and current, so what does that mean for museum practice?

The process of collecting contemporary material, particularly in relation to difficult recent histories, is often an emotive process for those contributing their stories and objects to a museum. We live in a time where information and the documentation of events are rife and where museums have the opportunity, should they choose, to capture a moment in time through the media which surrounds us every day. But it is the active process of initiating discussion with witnesses and people affected by these events, and seeking out objects which support a rich and powerful narrative, which might place museums in a difficult position.

The idea of museums as places for therapy has long been considered. Museums hold resources which encourage discussion and group-working to explore feelings, thoughts and ideas, which can then be conveyed artistically by participants through projects and activities. Significant consideration has been given to art therapy as a means of supporting dialogue, but the context of the objects and art itself may have no direct relationship with the person receiving the therapy; instead, they are tools for starting conversations (Silverman, 1989). Encountering a collection can be a powerful and enriching experience, offering new skills, confidence and a means of expressing feelings for those involved. In contrast, however, the process of collecting can result in a museum putting itself into a position where participants and contributors require emotional support when sharing difficult and personal stories. Like therapy, interviewing people for museum research involves giving someone the opportunity to tell us about their past and their own lives (Jones, 1998). When this involves conducting oral histories around traumatic events, it has been suggested that the therapeutic dimension of the interview process could be considered more important than the accuracy of the historical facts (Rickard, 1998), and therefore can't be a forgotten element of contemporary collecting. Museums are in a position where they must decide if they are equipped to deal with the possibility of emotional support being required, and to weigh up the value to their collection with the risk and their

safeguarding responsibility in initiating this contemporary collecting. It is a question of ethics, and having the confidence that the benefit of acquiring these new objects and stories is worthwhile for all involved – the museum, the participant, as well as current and future generations of museum visitors.

Objects have proven to be powerful tools for connecting audiences with historic events, particularly in the case of challenging subjects (see Leinhardt and Crowley, 2002). Objects can reveal stories and encourage discussion, as well as supporting the process of remembering. Reminiscence workshops delivered by museums are unlikely to exclude object handling, as the connection with the past is something unique which heritage organisations can offer. To mark the tenth anniversary of the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, the National Museum of American History (NMAH) offered visitors the opportunity to encounter a selection of objects salvaged from the World Trade Center site. David Allison, Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs at the NMAH described the opportunity as ‘an unforgettable experience’ for museum visitors (Allison, 2011). The significance of encountering real objects highlights the importance of ensuring museum collections contain a range of material, which can be used both to teach future generations, and also to support the remembering and sharing of experiences for those who were directly affected by major events.

Collecting an Emotive Contemporary London

On July 7th 2005, four co-ordinated suicide attacks struck central London. The targets of the attacks were commuters using the city’s public transport system during the morning rush hour. Four bombs were detonated, three in quick succession aboard London Underground trains across the capital followed by a fourth on a double-decker bus in Tavistock Square. Fifty-two civilians and the four bombers were killed in the attacks, with a further 700 people injured. As members of London’s community, museum curators and staff across the city were not prioritising the documentation of this event. Their thoughts were with the victims, their families, those who were directly involved. The “what if?”, “what next?” and the moving on dominated. In response to the attacks, the Museum of London opened a book of condolence to allow people to express their sorrow, and the public left messages and expressed their thoughts and emotions through memorials at sites across the city.

London Transport Museum, an affiliate of Transport for London, did not actively collect material related to the 7/7 bombings at the time, nor in the few years following the attacks. This year, in 2013, however, London Underground celebrates its 150th anniversary, referred to as LU150, offering an opportunity to consider the attacks for the first time. Sam Mullins, Director of London Transport Museum, is one of the contributors to the latest publication on the Underground’s history. Mullins comments that ‘LU150 placed the museum into a very positive strategic relationship with Transport for London. Presenting the organisation with its history over 150 years, and particularly of the last 10 or 20 years, through which many senior people had lived and worked, suddenly allowed the organisation to see where 7/7 fitted into that long continuum, which was quite powerful’ (Mullins, 2013). LU150 provided a sense that the organisation had a history again – cultural and social, as well as technological. The contemporary period of this history came into the spotlight, with gaps in the museum’s collection being identified and prioritised, including the events of 7/7. Research was conducted by Mullins for the publication, including reading transcripts from the inquiry which followed the attacks, which further highlighted the significance of the Underground’s recent and difficult history. Mullins noted that it was identified early on that 7/7 was a moment when London’s relationship with its Underground was tested, and that capturing this was important, albeit complex.

One concern was how the museum could place itself, both as a collecting body, but also as a partner with Transport for London. Colleagues across the organisation had

been directly involved with the events on 7/7, with many being praised for the role they played in helping those injured on the Underground. Approaching members of staff and asking them to share their experiences with the museum, or to contribute objects related to their version of the day, opened up a number of complexities. It might be considered the museum's role to ask the questions, but how prepared were colleagues to deal with what might be shared? What support might our peers have needed when tackling memories which they might not have recalled to date? And when was the appropriate time to do this collecting? The expectation to document the events has been discussed, but the approach to conducting this collecting in a sensitive and thoughtful way was unclear.

Since 7/7 at London Transport Museum

To support the LU150 programme at London Transport Museum, a contemporary collecting project ran throughout 2011-12. Aiming to capture a diverse view of the Underground, an innovative series of projects were developed and delivered, resulting in a "time capsule" of the Tube being added to the museum's permanent collection. Consultation with museum colleagues, as well as Transport for London staff, created a list of themes to explore, but 7/7 was scarcely mentioned. Instead, the project was to examine the culture of commuting, the position of women, staff stories – the everyday occurrences and contributions which get overlooked. As the contemporary collecting projects were part of a wider celebration of the network, there was some nervousness when it came to examining the controversial. Strikes, breakages, suicides, terrorist attacks; these weren't the priority. But to collect a recent history means being honest and authentic about the reality of the times, which in itself poses numerous challenges. In many ways, social history museums have organisational and documentation practices that cater for collecting processes based on past histories rather than the contemporary, resulting in the research techniques required to tackle this subject not being in place. Nevertheless, the story of 7/7 sat within the significant contemporary story of London's transport and needed addressing.

However, one problem the museum faced was that there wasn't an obvious amount of physical material available to collect. The London Metropolitan Archive was offered a number of items collected by the Greater London Authority, including 166 books of condolence from around the world and 41 boxes of items from London's memorial gardens. From the city's transport perspective though, it was difficult to know what the touchstone objects were which the stories could feed off. Some of the strongest images from the events brought their own collecting challenges – such as the pictures taken on camera phones in the tunnels following the attacks, or the media images of the aftermath of the bus bombing – with copyright and ownership creating issues. So the question remained – how could London Transport Museum initiate an effective collecting project on such a challenging subject?

Aware of the nervousness felt by colleagues, the challenge for the Community Curators was to identify how the museum could deliver an effective and thought-provoking collecting project which engaged those affected by the attacks, without launching a programme that the museum didn't have the resource to support, and which addressed the hesitation and nerves felt. Conducting oral history interviews with Transport for London staff felt too ambitious, considering the time, staff and budget with which the museum had to deliver the contemporary collecting work in its entirety.¹ Asking colleagues to recall the events of 7/7 would have been a huge undertaking, with support from across the organisation required to ensure everyone involved was prepared for the potential enormity of beginning these conversations. With that in mind, however, the project outcomes did need to sit within the collecting remit of London Transport Museum – conserving and explaining the capital city's transport heritage. The focus therefore had to remain on the Underground itself, rather than the wider social

implications of the events. The scale and significance of 7/7 as a subject far outweighed that of any of the other collecting projects being developed, so a decision was made to keep the idea small and to deliver a piece of work which would test the waters with regards to Transport for London and the general public's reaction.

Consensus from peers at the museum was to work with an external organisation to facilitate the collecting, and to focus on London's commuter population as the target audience, thus maintaining some neutrality. The Original Ranch² had built a relationship with the museum through a partnership for the 2012 Cultural Olympiad programme, and Olivia Bellas, Director, was experienced in engaging people with powerful concepts, using social media as a tool. Bellas interpreted the museum's needs and identified an approach for capturing a sense of how the 7/7 bombings had changed Londoners' views on the Tube. Through a blog channel, participants were invited to reflect and contribute by being asked:

What is your security blanket? We all have that something we carry in our wallet, the song we play, that feeling or act that makes it all the more comfortable. Since 7/7, travel on the London Underground might feel different to you. What is your security blanket?

The project was launched on July 7th 2011. Over 50 people responded over the course of a couple of weeks, with a range of responses from the philosophical to the cynical. No one reacted negatively or shared their concerns about discussing a subject as emotive as 7/7. Instead, the responses were considered and hopeful, illustrating a "life goes on" attitude. Bellas worked with the Museum to select seven of the responses, and then commissioned photographer Francisco Serrano to interpret these responses as photographs.

The response to the images by peers at London Transport Museum was positive, with the seven photographs now featuring as part of the permanent collection, as well as being displayed online. The project merely scratched the surface with regards to collecting 7/7 at the museum, but it proved a valuable exercise in determining how the museum could broach the subject, and also to ensure that such an important moment was captured and documented. Despite the positive response from a collections perspective, however, 7/7 remained a subject too great to consider when the LU150 programme focussed on new physical displays and interventions within the museum's galleries. Collecting the contemporary for history and telling these stories today hold very different challenges.

Displaying 7/7

2014 marks the ninth anniversary of the July 7th 2005 bombings. Over those nine years, London has witnessed a huge array of moments to add to its rich contemporary history, from the uplifting Queen's Golden Jubilee and the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, to the controversial shootings of Jean Charles de Menezes and James Duggan, and the riots of August 2011. Museum curators have the ongoing challenge of identifying what to collect and finding an appropriate methodology for obtaining material, with the additional complexity of deciding on the timing and format for displaying this content. The distance between the rawness of emotion felt directly after the event and the reflective position of today provides something of a buffer for museums and their visitors, and offers museum curators time to present the content in a considered and relevant way, although this gap also results in that rawness being lost through the objects collected. For an organisation such as London Transport Museum, contextualising a subject such as 7/7 is theoretically straightforward. Any presentation of material would sit within the Museum's overall story, which essentially examines the impact the bombings had on London Underground. But the story is so much more than this – the political context as to why the attacks happened, the effect the events had on those who were injured and the



The seven 'Since 7/7' images by The Original Ranch and Francisco Serrano for London Transport Museum. © Transport for London - collection of London Transport Museum.

families of those who died, the crackdown on extremism that ensued. All of this adds to how an institution would choose to display such material, and requires consultation and partnerships with those whose stories are being told.

The Science Museum in London also considered collecting testimony and material around 7/7 for display, as part of a new gallery project which explores modern communications technology. A proposal to tell the story as a moment when many people realised their reliance on a mobile phone network that had stopped working in London was suggested. The story was also framed in the context of how much of the documenting of the day was conducted by "citizen journalists", such as individuals using camera phones to record what was happening on the Underground and across the city. Annika Joy, Audience Research Manager at the Science Museum at the time, was nervous about what this story would become once the collecting process was launched. Joy commented in 2011:

It will be vital to share our ideas with bodies such as Transport for London, the emergency services, the solicitors for the families and the Muslim Council of Great Britain, but I believe we ought to do this as a consultation process, with an open mind. It will be hard to keep the focus on the story the Museum wants to tell about "citizen journalism" when the frame it's in is so tricky. (Joy, 2011)

Much like London Transport Museum's dilemma, there was the concern that exploring the story and conducting extensive participation with those affected would lead to the story becoming the bombings, rather than the use of the mobile phone, and therefore be detached from the central narrative of the gallery. This would not only pose challenges for the gallery's content team, but also for managing expectations of those who had shared their stories as part of the collecting process. If these conversations were to be had, the reason for collecting the accounts needed to be determined and communicated from the outset, therefore reducing the possibility for disappointment from those willing to participate.



The seven 'Since 7/7' images by The Original Ranch and Francisco Serrano for London Transport Museum. © Transport for London - collection of London Transport Museum.

Looking to the future, displaying the story of 7/7 will require consideration not only for those who were affected and who contributed towards the collecting of material, but also for visitors to the museum. The timing and context need to be appropriate and relevant, reducing the risk of challenges from the public, although it remains difficult to know when the right time would be. Perhaps it is the role of museums to consult and reflect, remaining active within their communities and therefore allowing themselves to be better judges of how subjects would be received. With the tenth anniversary approaching, organisations such as London Transport Museum may begin to look to other institutions, including those in New York City with collections related to 9/11, for advice and best practice when handling the display of sensitive histories.

Conclusion

Contemporary collecting and telling contemporary stories requires curators to explore new methodologies in their practice and to consider the value of objects and stories for a collection in a context which may not be suitable for display in the present. A shift is required from being a passive curator to an active curator, responding to events and supporting the museum to place itself as a pillar within its community and at the heart of the collection's environment, such as London's transport history for example. The process of being an active collector of the contemporary is full of challenges, particularly from a moral and ethical perspective, as discussed. Consideration also needs to be made as to how contemporary this collecting should be. In an age where the media are reacting to events within minutes of something happening, museums need to take care that they don't jump on the media bandwagon, presenting themselves as intrusive, insensitive and ruthless for the sake of capturing a moment in history in a raw and authentic form. Ideally, museums need to take a bracketed approach to this collecting, covering both the immediate and the reflective, and therefore allowing for a full picture to be captured without placing themselves in a perilous position which does more harm than good.



The seven 'Since 7/7' images by The Original Ranch and Francisco Serrano for London Transport Museum. © Transport for London - collection of London Transport Museum.

Sophisticated armoury is required when having conversations about events such as 7/7 and 9/11, both for the interviewer and the interviewee. To a certain extent, museums enter this territory with all oral histories – 'oral history offers the possibility of both affirming and destabilising your own personal narrative' (Rickard, 1998). Interviewing members of the public about something emotive and private puts a museum in a very privileged position that comes with some obligation (Mullins, 2013), one which the media perhaps doesn't consider with the same weight which museum curators should. Similarly, when acquiring a new object for a collection, the history of the object is key to ensuring its value and relevance is logged for the future, even if this proves challenging. Stumm agrees that:

when collecting anything contemporary, gathering as much information during the acquisition process as possible is important to correctly document the provenance of an object and its story. It can be difficult to ask some questions of donors who have an attachment to an object that has personal value but finding the right questions to ask is imperative. (Stumm, 2013)

Maintaining the balance of collecting the immediate versus collecting the reflective can have an impact on what museums choose to acquire into their collections, and can result in a more thoughtful collecting policy. At London Transport Museum for example, new considerations are now being made as to what objects and stories could further strengthen the 7/7 presence within the permanent collection. Mullins observes:

Due to the distance from the event, if someone now offered us part of the Tube carriage or bus, I think I would say yes – it would be nice to have something material. Not something necessarily very large, but something that shows the twist and the force of the event, the aggression, would be quite helpful. But it seemed wrong at the time, it was too traumatic. (Mullins, 2013).

Taking that step back, even for just a short period of time, removes some of the raw emotion and has implications on the suitability of some objects, allowing for a more informed decision to be made, resulting in objects with powerful storytelling potential to be acquired.

Contemporary collecting is essential for museums to stay relevant and to place themselves within the framework of their communities. Indeed, 'museums have a responsibility to bear witness to the past, however difficult that past may be' (Kavanagh, 2002), and the more prepared a museum is to adopt new methods in their collecting practices, the more effective these processes will be. It is the responsibility of museums to ensure that the artefacts linked to these events exist and aren't discarded through the process of moving on, along with their personal context and the stories associated with them. The symbolic nature of objects and their direct link to these significant moments in time and place hold the power to support reminiscence, reflection and learning, for not only those affected but for future generations as well. As Meriam Lobel of the 9/11 Tribute Center comments:

We hope that the museum galleries help people understand the sorrow and tragedy of 9/11, as well as the generosity of the response – the great outpouring of selflessness, the thousands of people who volunteered to help in whatever ways they could, the embracing of positive endeavours to strengthen their communities by many of those most deeply affected. We think this will help the visitors to understand how to move forward, with hope. (Lobel, 2013)

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Thank you to London Transport Museum for allowing the reproduction of the *Since 7/7* images for this publication. To see all seven images, go to <http://www.ltmcollection.org/photos/index.html>.

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- 1 One Community Curator (Kavanagh) worked on the project from April 2011 to June 2012. The post and project costs were funded as part of the final round of Renaissance in the Regions through the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA).
- 2 For more information visit <http://www.theoriginalranch.co.uk>

Keeping Ahead of the Game: Contemporary Collecting at the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum

Sarah Kirkham and Nazeea Elahi, Cataloguing Assistants at the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum, discuss the museum's recent work in contemporary collecting.

Introduction

Sport is dynamic. It is about the fastest, the first, the longest and the setting of records. It is continually changing and evolving. As a museum specialising in sport, it is paramount that our collection is kept up to date in order to reflect these changes in the tennis world and to provide a collection to which our visitors can relate.

According to Simon Knell, 'contemporary collecting is one of the most difficult of practices because of its overwhelming and multifaceted nature' (Knell, 2004, p34). However, if we are to keep abreast in this ever-changing field, this difficult practice must be tackled. Here at the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum, we ensure that contemporary collecting is included within our collecting policy. By collecting contemporary objects and interweaving them with the historical, we are able to convey the growing popularity and history of tennis.

So how do we go about collecting the contemporary? Our peak time of contemporary collecting occurs once a year during The Championships.

The Championships

The Championships are well documented each year with press reports, IBM collated statistics, official photographs and the many hours of BBC footage. Our aim at the museum is to contribute to this by capturing the essence of Wimbledon through objects.

Contemporary collecting of The Championships began in 2000. At first the museum collected everything it came across from spectators, The Queue, players and the All England Lawn Tennis Club (AELTC). However, as we have now been collecting for over a decade, our core Championships collection is established. This means that the museum is now more discerning in the objects it collects, focussing on items which are unusual or new and so keeping our collection up to date.

An important task for the museum during Wimbledon is researching, planning and compiling a list of objects we would like to acquire. This is mainly done by keeping a lookout to see what players are wearing, the banners fans are holding, signage posted by the Club and carrying out field collection from The Queue. Honor Godfrey, former curator of the museum, described this as follows:

I probably watch tennis in a very different way to everyone else...At the end of a match I'm always thinking, there's a wristband they've thrown into the crowd, that's something we're not going to get...you are trying to be a collector...you actually need to see what's happening everywhere. It's just keeping your eye open to the opportunities. (Tennishead, 2014)

A vital factor in collecting is making use of our relationships with various departments in the Club. This is of great assistance in helping us to secure objects, such as the tennis balls used in each year's finals and the clothing worn by players.

The All England Lawn Tennis Club

Objects used by the AELTC form a large part of our contemporary collecting during The Championships. These objects help tell the story of each year's Championships and cover a number of angles, from Club members, staff and spectators to the players.

From the AELTC members, we collect objects such as menus and the badges they wear to denote their membership. From staff, we collect objects like accreditation passes and instructions. These objects are supplemented with items such as vests worn by the press and uniforms worn by the ball boys/girls. In 2013, our collection was enhanced with the acquisition of the hood and ID card belonging to one prominent staff member, Rufus the Hawk! He has the important task of keeping the local bird population away, thus preventing them from getting in the way of the players and television cameras.

In large part, however, our objects collected from the Club are those concerning spectators and players. The former category includes wristbands issued to those in The Queue and stickers announcing that an attendee has queued in the rain/sun. We also collect objects that are given as gifts to visitors to the Royal Box, such as bespoke chocolates.

From the perspective of the players, we collect signage, for example signs advertising the availability of physiotherapists, instructions on which drinks are allowed on court and signs listing the television channels available in the players' areas. Taken together they help to portray some of the rules and services that are essential for a player at Wimbledon, and thus help to depict the behind the scenes story of a player's time at The Championships.

Our collecting strategy is enhanced by daily scanning of newspaper cuttings during The Championships to see what has caught the attention of the press. For example, in 2014 we were able to establish that one of the changes trending was the opening of a nail salon bar for the players. This led us to speak to The Championships' nail technician, from whom we were able to collect some of the salon's tools of the trade, including a red colour nail polish which was the most popular choice amongst the players. We felt that these objects helped to highlight the pressure of being on tour, which allows players little time to frequent external salons. They also show how increasingly important it is for tennis players (and sports stars in general) to be conscious of their image; after all, those hands will be on public display worldwide gripping a racket!

The Queue

Each year spectators who do not already have a ticket for The Championships, and wish to enter the grounds, have the opportunity to purchase tickets on the day via The Queue. The Queue is a traditional Wimbledon experience. People queue for hours, sometimes overnight, in the hope of purchasing a ticket. As part of Wimbledon's heritage, it is imperative to document this active and ever-changing history.

Since we began to build our Queue collection, we have amassed a variety of objects ranging from Queue cards (a numbered ticket issued to members of The Queue), supplier memorabilia, to anything handed out to those in The Queue. This has resulted in a rich and eclectic collection. In order for us to collect these objects, we actively go out to peruse amongst the stalls by The Queue. This allows us to immerse ourselves within the atmosphere, giving us a better understanding of the origin of each object and its connection to The Championships. By collecting these objects we are able to record a culture that often gets overshadowed by the primary event.

Some would view the objects we collect as insignificant – particularly with reference to objects such as food packaging. However, these objects are just as important as our other contemporary items as they each tell a story connected to The Championships. For example, a major moment occurred during The Championships, 2013. For the first time in 77 years, a British player won the Gentlemen's Singles Final – Andy Murray. During the Championships, a wave of 'Murray Mania' swept through the tournament. As a result, an abundance of Murray inspired objects were distributed in The Queue – including the replica of his famous blue wristbands worn during the 2012 London

Olympics. What if objects from The Queue had not been collected during that year's Championships? How would we have documented this wave of suspense and excitement? It is through these objects collected throughout the event that we can gain a full picture.



Sample of the items collected from The Queue and spectators
©Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum

Collecting from The Queue allows us to show another dimension to The Championships; its growing commercialisation and popularity. Some of the objects we collect are unofficial objects, in that they are not distributed by our official suppliers. By collecting the unofficial we are able to document a complete picture of The Championships.

As the collection has grown since its conception, so too has its use. In 2011 we had a temporary exhibition in order to highlight The Queue culture. This allowed us to delve deeper into this area with personal stories and photographs of individual experiences. The backbone, and primary focus of this exhibition, involved a number of objects from the collection. Annually, we put objects from this collection on temporary display within our Recent Championships showcase, with the remaining objects going into storage – ready to be put on display when the need arises. Until then, they serve as a testament to the growing popularity of The Championships. Without contemporary collecting, this would merely be documented through facts, figures and photographs.

The Players

A large part of our contemporary collecting is to actively collect objects from the players themselves – ranging from rackets to clothing. By including players in our collecting, we are able to capture moments in sporting history which can be viewed in a more personalised way.

One such occasion, as any avid tennis fan would tell you, is the longest match ever to have been recorded in Grand Slam history – lasting 11 hours and 5 minutes, and played between John Isner and Nicolas Mahut during The Championships, 2010. Due to our active commitment to contemporary collecting, we were able to acquire one of the rackets used during this match and so have a tangible reminder of this historic event.

However, our main collection of player-related objects centres on clothing. Players' clothing has long been a highlight at Wimbledon. By collecting these items at the time they were worn, we keep the collection up-to-date, continually moving forwards as the sport does. For example, in 2001, we collected Venus Williams' Championships outfit – which she personalised herself by adding a pink and diamante design. The outfit included her jacket, dress and shoes, all worn during that year's Championships. This is not only an example of the changing designs of sportswear, but also gives an insight into a player's creative side both on and off the court. These designs show an early side to Venus' personalised design attempts ahead of her own sports fashion brand.



Nicolas Mahut and Rafael Nadal posing with their donations to the museum
©Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum

Additionally, not only can we track a player's choice of clothing, but also the changing rules and regulations of the AELTC. Recently, the decision was made to enforce more tightly the 'Almost Entirely White' clothing rule. In 2014, this rule asserted that players' clothing should be entirely white with colour not exceeding more than 1cm in thickness. This change in ruling has obviously had an effect on the style of clothing the players choose to compete in.

If clothing is deemed unsuitable then players will have to purchase suitable clothing from a pre-selected range chosen by AELTC officials. In order to capture this change, we asked the players' dressing rooms to donate samples of the authorised clothing to our collection. They also included a white marker pen used to 'white out' areas of significant colour on players' clothing. This reflects the extent to which players had to abide by the ruling. The French player Gilles Simon, for instance, had to use such a pen to 'white-out' his shoes which had been deemed unsuitable. These shoes, along with the marker, went on display in the museum.

Olympic Games

In 2012 the tennis event of the Olympic Games was held at Wimbledon. In recognition of this, the museum held a temporary exhibition: 'A Golden Opportunity', charting the story of tennis in the Olympic Games. It was unique compared to previous exhibitions because it evolved, reflecting the progress of our collecting prior to and after the event.

Before the games, our collecting consisted of purchasing officially commissioned items that were on sale to the general public. This included badges, stamps and other tennis related products. Some of these items went on display and as the exhibition took shape the museum team reflected that it was a shame we had no objects from when Wimbledon had last hosted the Olympic tennis event, in 1908. This was to partially influence our collecting policy during the Games, with the aim that in the future there would be a plethora of objects to choose from.

We sought to obtain objects that would tell a comprehensive story of the 2012 tennis event at Wimbledon. In doing this, we were aided by our experience in contemporary collecting during The Championships; we knew we wanted to gain objects from a variety of sources. Whilst the event was taking place, we supplemented our purchased items with new additions that were sold exclusively on-site such as t-shirts and towels.

After the event, our collecting switched from purchasing objects to requesting donations and collecting items no longer in use. As soon as the finals were completed and the public began to leave the grounds, members of the museum team made their way to Centre Court and The Hill to gather objects left behind by spectators, mainly flags and home-made banners.

However, the greater bulk of objects collected were those commissioned by the event organisers. From members of staff we received the complete uniform worn by a tennis official and accreditation passes. We also obtained a quantity of ground fixtures, including signs indicating press seats, name plates for the Order of Play and Results boards and the metal Olympic Rings used to decorate the tennis nets. Many of these items then went on display, bringing our exhibition 'A Golden Opportunity' up to date.

Forward planning and looking out for objects of possible interest helped us to form an idea of what to collect and gave us time to make the necessary requests and seek the relevant permissions. In addition our Championships' practice of collecting from players was of great help in acquiring a certain object; Andy Murray's outfit worn when he won the gold medal. Thanks to our Championships collecting, the dressing room attendants and the player were already aware that the museum would like to collect the winning outfit.

When contemporary collecting, it is difficult to predict if an object will be regarded as important in the future and therefore worth collecting. However, the significance of our acquisition of a victory podium from the 2012 Olympic Games was soon evident. This particular podium was used in Centre Court to award the medals at the conclusion of the tennis event, before going to the Stratford Olympic site for the Wheelchair Tennis game. Acquiring the podium therefore required logistical planning in order to retrieve it once it had gone off-site.

Our decision to collect the podium turned out to be an important one. Of the 40 podiums built for the 2012 Olympic Games, the only one now surviving in this country is the one in our collection. If it had not been for our contemporary collecting policy this unique object from a momentous event would now be lost to British sporting heritage.

Things to consider

There are some practicalities to think about when contemporary collecting, with the principal consideration being the issue of storage space. This year we have had to reorganise our museum store in order to accommodate our fast-growing Championships collection. Whilst this has solved the problem for now, we recognise that in the future we will need to address this matter with a more long-term solution in mind.

Another consideration is the longevity of objects made from modern day materials, in particular plastic. Overtime, plastic objects start to degrade with some plastics deteriorating quicker than others, as we realised when we took down our Olympics exhibition. Despite

being on display for only six-months in a climate and light controlled environment, a foam finger (used by Games Makers to indicate the direction of the AELTC to those walking to the venue) had started to fade in colour and had become brittle.

With this in mind, why have a policy of contemporary collecting?

Contemporary collecting is an important and worthwhile task for any museum. In our case it is of relatively low cost to obtain an object now rather than later when we may well have to compete at auction. Furthermore, contemporary collecting allows for an abundance of examples to choose from, enabling a museum to select an object that is in a better condition. Another benefit is that collections can be brought up to date and enable comparisons. For example, recently we have collected the new Babolat smart racket designed with technological software that, amongst other features, maps a player's serve and how they use the racket. By collecting this and displaying it alongside other rackets in the collection, we are able to show how the racket has evolved over time. Without contemporary collecting, we would not be able to make this comparison.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper we have sought to demonstrate the importance of contemporary collecting for the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum. When the subject matter of your museum is continually changing and developing, it is paramount that your collection is kept up-to-date and relevant in order to reflect this. As a museum specialising in sport, contemporary collecting is crucial.

Although we undertake contemporary collecting throughout the year, our peak time is during The Championships. Years of collecting during this time has enabled us to develop a policy of now collecting those objects which we deem new or unusual. To do this we make use of all available resources, from press reports, keeping an eye out during the event to utilising our relationships with other departments within the AELTC. Our contemporary collecting enables a complete picture of The Championships to emerge, covering the staff, Club Members, spectators and the players.

Skills and experience gained in collecting The Championships were successfully applied to the 2012 Olympic Games tennis event. Our acquisition of the victory podium soon revealed itself to be an example of why museums should contemporary collect.

Overall, for the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum, contemporary collecting ensures that we keep ahead of the game!

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Conservation and Care of Contemporary Artefacts

George Monger is a freelance Conservator and Museum Consultant. Here, he considers the issues presented by collecting contemporary material and offers some tips on caring for contemporary objects.

Contemporary collecting is obviously very important for the continual development of social history collections to record and tell the continuing story of our society; however there may be inherent conservation and preservation problems within items collected.

Industry does not produce items for the long term – if anything, built in obsolescence is good for the manufacturer. Very few manufactured items are ever produced with an eye to posterity and what we in the heritage sector consider the long term. They are usually produced for the present and the immediate future – even art works are made for their contemporary society. Much of what is held in museums is a fortuitous survival due largely to the resilience of the constituent materials and of being in conditions which are not conducive to the deterioration of the materials.

The industry definition of a lifetime is 25 years but some modern objects – such as telephones and computers – are only really produced for the short term because the technology is continually developing. Also, in an environmentally conscious society, contemporary goods may be produced with the intention that they can be recycled (and sold at a cost which provides little or no incentive to repair).

There is, too, an additional issue which sometimes needs to be considered, concerning what is being preserved. A mobile phone, computer or other electronic gadget is basically a plastic box with a load of electrical components inside, but should we be considering preserving the function? How can this be preserved? There is a similar discussion regarding magnetic tape – what is the important part of the tape, the physical object or the information contained on the tape? However, in this case, the answer depends on the context and the collecting institution.

But whilst many contemporary items being collected will be composed of “traditional” materials – wood, brass, steel, copper etc. – there are likely to be components made from materials considered to be “modern”. Plastics and rubber are the materials which usually come to mind in this context; however, these have been around a long time and some of the problems and agents of deterioration have been studied and identified (but not necessarily cured).

A major problem with plastics is the wide range of synthetic polymers which have been developed and are still being developed. The polymers in themselves may have some long-term stability (in industry terms); however, plastic components and objects are rarely pure plastic polymer but will include plasticizers and colourants which can migrate from the object.

The earlier plastics, cellulose acetate plastics and acrylics, for example, are quite prone to degradation through breakdown of the polymer and/or loss of plasticizer. However, as with rubber, this breakdown is not predictable. For example, in recent years I have seen a ‘Rosebud’ doll, from the 1950s (made from cellulose acetate plastic) which was cracking up with a white deposit on the limbs (migrating plasticizer) and more recently another ‘Rosebud’ doll on display at the Norris Museum, St Ives, Cambridgeshire, in apparently good condition. Many social history collections will have several Second World War gas masks, some of which will be degrading whilst others will be in perfect condition.

Foam rubber, which has been used in padding, and is sometimes an integral part of an item (such as an experimental modem in the Whipple Museum of the History of Science, Cambridge), will embrittle and crumble. In the 1960s, there were fashion raincoats (which were probably only shower proof anyway – many fashion shoes are not designed or made to be worn in wet weather!) lined with foam rubber which will degrade.

Many synthetic fabrics, such as polyester, are unlikely to be troubled with the usual museum insect pests but may fail due to mechanical stress, mould growth (which could lead to accidental insect pest damage), deterioration of the fibres through chemical degradation, light damage, degradation or chemical breakdown of dyes and migration of plasticizers.

However, it is not just the synthetic materials which need consideration, there are also new metal alloys being produced, some of which may be more resilient than the traditional metals. There are, for example, a range of light weight aluminium alloys used in such industries as the aerospace industry. Again, the development of resilient alloys is not a new phenomenon. In the mid 19th Century, for example, a copper/aluminium bronze was developed which is resistant to corrosion and seems to have been used in scientific instruments.¹ However, it is not always easy to identify an alloy without proper analysis.

Apart from the materials comprising an object, there are sometimes inbuilt preservation problems, the major one being batteries. The “traditional” battery is not a particular problem as they can easily be removed (although they are often overlooked and it is not unusual to find leaking batteries in an objects). But some items, such as mobile phones, may have a sealed battery unit which can degrade and cause damage to the object. These units should be stored separated from the main object and isolated within the store.

Over the years, conservation science has determined the agents of deterioration and we can predict how “traditional” materials will react. Many objects collected in any contemporary collecting project will be composed of materials which are considered to be well-understood.

There are some guidelines concerning the housing of modern materials and many of the guidelines are generic for most museum objects. However, because the breakdown of polymers is unpredictable and sometimes the degradation products may be damaging to other materials, extra care needs to be taken.

For example, wrapping in acid-free tissue paper may not be best for some plastics and rubber; if they degrade and become sticky, obviously the tissue paper will stick to the object. In some composite objects, most of the material may be relatively stable but they may contain unstable polymeric material which could break down and cause problems within the object and to adjacent objects.

So, recommendations for the housing of contemporary artefacts:

- First be aware of the materials which comprise the object.
- Remove or separate from the object any batteries, battery packs or easily removable polymeric components (such as rubber drive belts).
- Boxing with plastic or plastazote dividers between objects should help to reduce any cross deterioration between objects.
- A steady temperature and relative humidity is desirable. Lower temperatures will reduce the likelihood of internal chemical degradation (freezing, however, may cause embrittlement).

- Low light levels are desirable. Not only will high light levels cause fading of any colours but may cause embrittlement of polymeric material.
- Lastly, vigilance and regular inspection are necessary. Although it is often not possible to prevent degradation of some modern materials, specifically polymeric materials, potential damage to adjacent artefacts can be mitigated.

However, the care and preventative conservation parameters, such as housing temperature and relative humidity, are continually under scrutiny and often revised. Research is continuing and advice may change over time. Indeed, in September 2014 IIC- ICOM issued a *Declaration of Environmental Guideline* which provides a revised standard for environments in museums. Moving away from the prescribed environmental parameters usually set for heritage sites, the guidelines move towards the concept of appropriate parameters.²

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- 1 In around 1857, a Colonel Strange, an ex surveyor, prepared the drawings and specifications for a new Ramsden Theodolite which was commissioned from makers Troughton & Simms. This took ten years to make, and was presented to the Royal Society in 1867. Strange became acquainted with aluminium bronze at the 1862 Great Exhibition and experiments with this new material formed part of the reason for the delay in production.
- 2 Environmental Guidelines – IIC and ICOM-CC Declaration, Hong Kong, September 2014:

Bizot Interim Guidelines for Hygroscopic Materials

For many classes of object[s] containing hygroscopic material (such as canvas paintings, textiles, ethnographic objects or animal glue) a stable relative humidity (RH) is required in the range of 40–60% and a stable temperature in the range 16–25°C with fluctuations of no more than $\pm 10\%$ RH per 24 hours within this range.

More sensitive objects will require specific and tighter RH control, depending on the materials, condition, and history of the work of art. A conservator's evaluation is essential in establishing the appropriate environmental conditions for works of art requested for loan.

The AICCM recommended Interim Temperature and Relative Humidity Guidelines for acceptable storage and display conditions of general collection material are:

Temperature – between 15–25°C with allowable fluctuations of +/-4°C per 24 hr

Relative Humidity – between 45-55% with an allowable fluctuation of +/- 5% per 24 hr

Where storage and display environments experience seasonal drift, RH change to be managed gradually across a wider range limited to 40% – 60%

Temperature and Relative Humidity parameters for preservation of cultural materials will differ according to their material, construction and condition, but stable conditions maintained within the parameters above are generally acceptable for most objects.

AIC Interim Guidelines endorsed by the Association of Art Museum Directors:

For the majority of cultural materials, a set point in the range of 45-55% relative humidity with an allowable drift of +/-5%, yielding a total annual range of 40% minimum to 60% maximum and a temperature range of 59-77°F (15-25°C), is acceptable.

- Fluctuations must be minimized.
- Some cultural materials require different environmental conditions for their preservation.
- Loan requirements for all objects should be determined in consultation with conservation professionals.

Collecting and Displaying *Shunga* at the British Museum: Changing Attitudes to Sexually-Explicit Art

Stuart Frost, Head of Interpretation and Volunteers at the British Museum, examines public and professional responses to the collection and display of historic and contemporary sexually-explicit material in the context of a recent exhibition of Japanese art.

Introduction

The British Museum's recent exhibition, *Shunga: sex and pleasure in Japanese art* (3 October 2013 – 5 January 2014), was the first major show dedicated to a unique phenomenon (Clark et al, 2013). Between 1600 and 1900, sexually explicit paintings, prints, and illustrated books known as *shunga* ("spring pictures") were produced in Japan in considerable quantities (Screech, 2009). Woodblock printing allowed shunga works to be produced on a mass scale at a cost that was affordable for many.

Shunga portrays sex of all kinds in varied contexts, often in domestic settings with husbands and wives, in a manner that usually emphasises mutuality of pleasure. Scenes of male same-sex lovemaking are also common. *Shunga* fulfilled multiple functions and were viewed by men and women of all classes and used for a variety of purposes including entertainment, sex education, seduction, arousal and masturbation. *Shunga* was produced by many of Japan's most celebrated artists and its high aesthetic qualities are a distinctive feature of the genre. *Shunga* was tolerated by the authorities and only rarely actively suppressed in Japan before the country opened up to the modern world. It began to be collected by westerners in both Japan and Europe from the 1860s onwards (Bru, 2013).

This article focuses on changing attitudes to *shunga*, and sexually explicit art, and traces the history of the collecting and display of this category of material at the British Museum. That *Shunga: sex and pleasure in Japanese art* could take place at the British Museum would have been inconceivable to the staff of the museum in 1865 when the first *shunga* was acquired, and that arguably remained the case until the early 1970s.



Kitagawa Utamaro, *Poem of the Pillow*, 1788. The scene emphasises mutual pleasure and is set in a bedchamber © Trustees of the British Museum

The Era of the Secret Museum

A restricted collection or secret museum for sexually graphic material (Gaimster, 2000 & 2001) is known to have existed at the British Museum from at least the 1830s. The acquisition of Dr. George Witt's (1804-1869) collection of sex-related material by the British Museum in 1865 led to the formalisation of this "Museum Secretum". Witt's collection consisted of hundreds of objects, mostly related to phallic worship, and nine leather-bound scrapbooks, two of which contained around 120 *shunga*. Although the Trustees accepted Witt's collection, a recognition of its value, there was no question of the objects being displayed publically. Access was carefully restricted with written applications being carefully scrutinised before admission was granted.

The creation of a separate restricted collection for sexually explicit or "obscene" works is not unique to the British Museum (Wallace, Kemp, Bernstein, 2007). A similar arrangement, probably predating the British Museum, existed at what is now the National Archaeological Museum, Naples (de Caro, 2000) and is also paralleled at museums and libraries elsewhere (Frost, 2008). The formation of secret museums and private cabinets (Cross, 1991) reflects a wider anxiety about public morality and the impact of obscene works on society.

From Secret Museum to Special Exhibition

Objects were confined to secret museums and private cases because they were considered to be obscene or pornographic, regardless of how the works were understood in their own culture or time. Although *shunga* was only a small proportion of the British Museum's Secret Museum, its presence there was significant. *Shunga* was associated with obscenity, regarded as pornographic, and inevitably this hindered serious study.

In 1939 some objects left the Secret Museum to be integrated with the main collection, an indication perhaps that attitudes were starting to change. The last deposits to the Secret Museum were made in 1953. From this point onwards any sexually explicit acquisitions went directly to the relevant curatorial department. The growth of the museum's *shunga* collection after the first acquisitions in 1865 is difficult to trace. It is likely the Secret Museum contained any *shunga* acquired between 1865 and 1953 but, as acquisitions were not registered, concrete evidence is hard to find. The first official acquisition records for *shunga* date from 1972 when nineteen items were registered as part of a larger bequest received that year. It was only in 1974 that the *shunga* that had already been in the museum for a significant period of time was finally officially accessioned, the result of a museum-wide audit that required Keepers to catalogue all unregistered items.

The 1960s and 1970s saw a significant liberalisation in attitudes towards sex and sexuality in the United Kingdom. From the 1960s onwards, *shunga* began to receive serious academic attention. The gradual liberalisation of attitudes to sex and sexuality, the slow demise of the secret museum, and a growing body of scholarship, created a climate where the public exhibition of sexually explicit work, including *shunga*, had begun to become possible institutionally by the early 1970s. *The Floating World: Japanese popular prints 1700-1900* exhibition at the V&A in 1973 included a small number of explicit *shunga* prints (V&A 1973). The British Museum loaned works to the exhibition, but it would only be some years later that *shunga* would be exhibited at Bloomsbury.

The first major high-profile inclusion of *shunga* in a large-scale exhibition at the British Museum was *The Passionate Art of Kitagawa Utamaro* in 1995 (Shūgō, 1995). Utamaro is considered one of the masters of Japanese art but his explicit *shunga* have often been excluded from exhibitions of his work. The exhibition travelled subsequently to Chiba City Museum where the *shunga* were excluded from both the display and the

catalogue, a reflection of *shunga*'s enduring taboo status in 20th century Japan. From around 2000 onwards, Timothy Clark, Head of Japanese Collections, regularly included small numbers of *shunga* in a number of special exhibitions at the British Museum, including temporary displays in The Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries (Rooms 92-94). The most recent of these was an exhibition of woodblock prints by Utamaro in 2011, co-curated by the artist Julian Opie and Timothy Clark, and shown previously at Birmingham's Ikon Gallery (Watkins, 2010).

Shunga: Sex and Pleasure in Japanese Art

Although *shunga* had been exhibited internationally previously at other museums, and as part of bigger shows in England, *Shunga: sex and pleasure in Japanese art* was the first major exhibition devoted to the subject in the UK (Clark et al, 2013). It was the last outcome of a major international research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust and was shaped by the latest scholarship. The sexually explicit nature of the material posed display challenges and this was something that the exhibition project team was keen to explore with the public to help inform the show's development.

An agency was commissioned to undertake formative evaluation. The main aims were to explore visitors' responses to *shunga*, the proposed structure of the exhibition, and to test exhibition titles and marketing images. Five focus groups were held over February and March 2013. Two groups were divided by gender to try and ensure that participants could speak freely, and one group was mixed. Two further mixed groups were held with participants who had either been involved in the earlier sessions, or who already had some familiarity with the explicit nature of the material.

The final report reveals that participants agreed with the curatorial team's proposition that *shunga* had high aesthetic merit and that the majority felt comfortable with the idea of viewing it in a museum (TWRResearch, 2013). The aspect of *shunga* that generated greatest interest and debate was not the explicitness of the scenes or the humour, but the apparent mutuality of sexual pleasure in the selection of images that were shown. Female participants, in particular, were surprised by images which depicted women enjoying sex:

The women in the images appeared very strong, not in any way the victims of a sex industry. I didn't feel concerned about the sexual exploitation of the women, which surprised me. (Female participant)

The exhibition curator Timothy Clark describes *shunga* as a chatty art form because inscriptions representing dialogue between the participants are common. However the language in the inscriptions proved to be more provocative than the images. For example, one print of a couple having sex was accompanied by the following exchange:

Man: If I don't do it even for half a day, I lose my appetite. This is the ninth time today. Let's sleep for a bit, then do it seven or eight times more.

Woman: Ah! It feels like I'm going to faint. Really. Even deeper, up there... That's it. I'm going to come again! Ah! Oh!

In this instance, participants found the words more problematic than the image. In response to the dialogue above for example, visitors remarked:

'It's far more shocking. I thought the print was beautiful. I find that distasteful' (Female participant)

'[It] makes it more vulgar ... It makes it more male dominated.' (Female participant)

The participants' overwhelmingly positive response to *shunga* gave the project team reassurance that the exhibition's broad approach was correct. It was clear from the

evaluation that for the vast majority of people, *shunga* was a completely new phenomenon. One of the most influential aspects of the evaluation was the discussion of humour in the genre, something that was initially considered to be helpful to include in the exhibition title, putting potential visitors at ease. In fact, the mutuality of pleasure in *shunga* generated the greatest interest, and this conclusion influenced the nuancing of the approach, the exhibition title and the marketing campaign.

Developing the Exhibition

The exhibition drew on a large number of international loans from Japan, Denmark, Holland and the USA, as well as the British Museum's own collection of over 300 works (Buckland, 2010). A number of key acquisitions were made in the period leading up to the exhibition. A handscroll made in the 1800s, a faithful copy of a work dated 1321 preserved at Sanbō-in, Daigoji temple, Kyoto, was a particularly significant acquisition. The handscroll known as the *Book of Acolytes*, depicts sexual relations between mature Buddhist priests and adolescent trainees, relationships that were relatively common and accepted during the medieval period in Japan. The original handscroll is of great historical and cultural importance.

Another handscroll depicting twelve erotic scenes, painted by an unknown artist in the early 1600s, represented another major acquisition (Image below). The remarkably fine painting uses high-quality pigments, including gold and silver, and was produced for a high-ranking patron. It was produced by a painter of the Kano school working in Kyoto, a point of great art-historical importance. It is a rare survival by one of the most talented painters of the era, predating the printed erotic books that begin to appear in the 1650s.



Detail from a handscroll with twelve erotic scenes, early 1600s, unknown artist. A samurai and a young man embrace whilst a woman adjusts the bedding. © Trustees of the British Museum

Shunga depicts a broad range of sexual subjects. The majority illustrate heterosexual scenes, often in domestic contexts, usually characterised by an emphasis on mutual pleasure (see first image). Representations of male-male lovemaking are also common, a reflection of societal acceptance of sexual relationships between older and younger men in Japan during this period. Approximately 17 works in the show, around 10% of the total, addressed same-sex relationships in some way. Only one of

these depicted female-female sex, and probably represents a male fantasy rather than a true lesbian encounter. The project team decided to integrate same-sex scenes throughout the exhibition, rather than to create a separate discrete section. However, the texts that accompanied these works collectively contextualised and explained same-sex relations in Japan during this period.

Two categories of *shunga* images, works that depict violent coercion and scenes of adult sex in the presence of children, were the subject of considerable debate amongst the project team. The curatorial team wanted to represent *shunga* accurately and to

avoid an over-sanitised or unproblematic view of the genre. Scenes of violent coercion are rare and appear late in the *shunga* tradition. They are not typical but inevitably have a strong impact on modern viewers. One work depicting a rape was included in the exhibition, acknowledging the existence of this type of image. Grotesque images were included too, but detailed exploration of violent and grotesque *shunga* took place in the exhibition catalogue rather than the show itself (Aki & Kazutaka, 2013). When children are shown in *shunga* it is usually in the background of scenes, not as participants, but as a realistic depiction of lived experience reflecting a different concept of privacy in pre-modern Japan. Sometimes children represent the outcome of conjugal sex, or domestic servants. Nevertheless given current sensitivities, and the Coroners and Justice Act of 2009 which theoretically prohibits such images, the decision was taken to minimise the display of works where children were present. Again, the subject of children in *shunga* was explored fully in an essay in the catalogue (Yano, 2013).

The exhibition was divided into five sections, beginning with a concise introduction, then looking at *shunga's* origins, its masterpieces, legality, functions and finally its decline. These sections were spread across two rooms (Room 90 & 91), each of which is usually used to hold a discrete free-admission exhibition in its own right. Both of the spaces had existing cases which had to be utilised, resulting in an exhibition that included more works than would probably have otherwise been the case. Over 175 works were displayed and the length and type of label texts for these were varied to provide pacing and to reduce visitor fatigue. The text aimed to strike a balance between aesthetics, contextual comments and frank discussions of the scenes. The labels and text panels did clearly acknowledge the use of *shunga* for arousal and masturbation but did not use the word "pornography", to avoid its unhelpful and anachronistic connotations. The use of words such as "sex workers", "masturbation" and "erection", reflected a desire to avoid coy, obscure or euphemistic terms used in museums in the past. Despite the negative response from focus group participants, carefully selected translations of inscriptions were included to contextualise the works honestly and meaningfully. As this example illustrates, the team did not shy away from robust language or direct translations:

Man: How is it? Chymeigan has a terrific effect, doesn't it? I want to spunk all night until I'm dry.

Woman: Yes really! I just keep coming, I felt like I was going to pass out. Ooh! Aah! Do that again. I can't ever remember having such a good time.

The museum took legal advice and guidelines were produced to guide the development of the exhibition and its associated programme. The exhibition was accompanied by an advisory statement: 'Parental guidance advised for under 16s.' Additionally, a book of representative images was provided on the ticket desk so that visitors could check that they were comfortable with the show's contents before purchasing a ticket. For the marketing campaign, a representative print was selected but carefully cropped, to ensure that the sexual content was communicated effectively but in an appropriate way.

Contemporary Japanese Art in the Permanent Galleries

Timothy Clark has regularly used the museum's permanent Japan gallery (Rooms 92-94) to display contemporary art and to showcase recent acquisitions. Two recently acquired contemporary artworks with resonant themes were put on display to coincide with the *Shunga* exhibition: *Erotic Ukiyo-e Projections* by Hosoe Eikoh and *Rainbow Hokusai* by Ay-O.

Erotic Ukiyo-e Projections was a photobook produced by the artist in 2004, containing images created between 2002 and 2003; Hosoe arranged compositions where erotic *shunga* and paintings were projected onto the posed bodies of dancers and then photographed. *Rainbow Hokusai*, a brightly coloured print made in 1970, was inspired by a 19th century *shunga* work. Both pieces represented contemporary Japanese

responses to the *shunga* tradition. The works were not included in the main exhibition itself because they fell outside its thematic and chronological scope; the exhibition argued that the historic *shunga* came to an end around 1900.

Rainbow Hokusai reproduces the abstracted silhouette of a heterosexual couple making love taken from a *shunga* print believed to be by Hokusai at the time of production but subsequently reattributed to another artist. The work consists of 54 cards, each printed with a separate part of the colourful design. This referenced an occasion when a Japanese friend sent Ay-O reproductions of two *shunga* works through the post to the United States (Kubo, 1979). To avoid any issues with Customs, the photos were cut into smaller segments and sent in several packages. The process of reassembling the cards to reveal the image of lovemaking inspired *Rainbow Hokusai*.

When exhibited at the Tokyo International Print Biennale in 1970, *Rainbow Hokusai* was displayed in two sets: one with the 54 cards arranged in random order; in the other the cards were arranged to reveal the whole image but with the cards showing the genitals removed. Displaying the whole image with the genitals was impossible in Japan in 1970, as would probably have been the case in the British Museum at the time. However on acquisition in 2011, *Rainbow Hokusai* was placed on display in the permanent galleries at the museum, and again in October 2013 to coincide with the *Shunga* exhibition. On both occasions the set was arranged to reveal the complete image, rather than to replicate the censored versions displayed in Tokyo. The print that inspired *Rainbow Hokusai* was included in the *Shunga* exhibition as part of the Masterpieces section there.

There was no advisory statement or disclaimer to accompany either of the contemporary works in the permanent gallery, and as there were no complaints, this approach appears to have been justified.

Summative Evaluation: Visitors' Responses

The *Shunga: sex and pleasure in Japanese art* exhibition attracted around 90,000 visitors, more than double the original target. A comprehensive summative evaluation was undertaken by the interpretation team, to explore visitors' reactions to the show. Over 200 exit questionnaires, fourteen post-visit depth interviews and observations in the exhibition space were carried out throughout the show's run. Space permits only a short summary here, but this data will be analysed rigorously and published elsewhere.



Shunga: sex and pleasure in Japanese art, view of the exhibition.

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The questionnaire provided quantitative data about the audience profile, the visitor experience and visitors' thoughts about *shunga*. The overall findings were extremely positive, indeed, 95% of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the show, and 96% said it met or exceeded their expectations. Given the high number of visitors, the number of negative comment cards that were completed was remarkably low, and the few that were focussed on crowding rather than the sexual content.

Visitor feedback suggests that society's attitudes to sex and sexuality have changed significantly over the last 10-15 years and many felt that an exhibition like *Shunga* at the British Museum was overdue. A number of people commented on the atmosphere in the show. Although one visitor described the experience as 'communal voyeurism', the vast majority were positive:

'Lots of people are in the exhibition and nobody is uncomfortable, there is a good atmosphere.' (Female respondent)

'...everyone seems a lot more interested and relaxed than I thought they would be...there were lots of quiet conversations.' (Female respondent)

Visitors felt it was important that the museum acknowledged the importance of sex and sexuality to human experience, a finding that is reflected in other exhibition evaluations. They were also positive about the depiction of sex in *shunga* using words such as "mature", "tender", "tasteful", and "unashamed" to describe it. When discussing the exhibition, humour was something that was also frequently commented upon. For example,

'[We] were hugely entertained by the depiction of the penis-measuring – very funny – and the farting competition.' (Male respondent)

However the aesthetic qualities of *shunga*, the difference between Japanese and western attitudes to sex, and the mutuality of pleasure between partners were more frequently discussed. The following quotes are arguably more representative:

'...the sheer gorgeousness of the drawings, the vibrancy, the detail, the tenderness...I found this to be the most exciting thing really.' (Female respondent)

'I was surprised at the strong homoerotic side of it and the way that seemed totally accepted.' (Male respondent)

'A lovely sense of mutuality about it...The way it was depicted was all about mutuality.' (Male respondent)

Conclusion

In 1865, the first *shunga* to enter the British Museum's collection was immediately confined to the Museum Secretum. Although the Secretum ceased to operate actively in the 1950s, it was only in the early 1970s that attitudes had changed to the extent that it became possible for *shunga* to begin to be exhibited publicly. It was from around 1995 that *shunga* began to be displayed regularly at the British Museum in the permanent galleries or as part of special exhibitions exploring broader themes.

The evaluation of *Shunga: sex and pleasure in Japanese art* confirms that visitors accepted the curatorial argument that *shunga* has strong aesthetic qualities and cultural value. Some attendees spoke of their difficulty in categorising *shunga* but, however they labelled it, it was perceived positively, encouraged discussion, and frequently inspired laughter. The evaluation indicates conclusively that the public felt *shunga* should be exhibited, and that the way the museum had presented it was appropriate.

The display of contemporary works by Japanese artists inspired by *shunga* in the permanent galleries at the museum did not attract any controversy or complaint either.

The history of the collecting and display of *shunga* and contemporary works like *Rainbow Hokusai* at the British Museum serves as a reminder that attitudes and categorisations change, particularly to sex, sexuality and gender. What is regarded today as problematic or undisplayable may well be seen very differently a hundred years or more into the future. Without the collecting endeavours of previous generations of individuals and institutions, the museum's recent exhibition would have been impossible. Meaningful histories of sex and sexuality have often been neglected by museums (Liddiard, 1996), but their importance means that museums have an obligation to collect representative material now for the benefit of future generations and to use it to generate discussion and debate.

Acknowledgements

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Can Social History Make us Happy?

Brendan Carr, Community Engagement Curator at Reading Museum & Town Hall, shares his experience of attempting to combat contemporary social issues through engaging local people with social history, as part of Reading Museum's Happy Museum project.

During the course of my working life I often experience eudemonic flow, a state of well-being derived from captivating activity which can lift everyday troubles from one's consciousness¹. It occurred to me recently when accessioning a set of 19th century photographs of Reading's Oxford Road area. These were donated by a descendant of John Powell, a chemist of St Marys Butts. The donor's family tradition, that their ancestor became a pioneer of the new technology as a result of a business relationship with William Fox-Talbot, makes sense, since we know that Fox-Talbot's assistant was viewed with suspicion in the town due to the volume of chemical he was seen purchasing and transporting to the studios in nearby Baker Street.

As I took my magnifying glass to the calotypes to observe details for inclusion in the database's content field, my imagination was carried away to a bygone age. The shape of the track out towards Pangbourne is recognisable, but the Fox pub on the corner and the business opposite have long since been swept aside, by buildings preceding today's shopping centre and bank. The place appears ramshackle, at a time just before the town's biscuit factory, brick making and seed supply really took off with enterprise to create conditions for capital investment that saw Reading expand beyond recognition during the later part of Queen Victoria's reign. I travel out along the gravel track, past fields of malt and grazing sheep and reach the strategically placed turnpike house which stopped those sneaky travellers who fancied their chances of avoiding a toll by entering the town via this quieter route.



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Today, the old turnpike is a Grade II listed building, housing one of the many letting agents in the area who provide single occupancy accommodation in the terracotta town houses and terraces that sprang up in the decades that followed. The property speculators of the time capitalised on the housing needs of an army of migrants from the West Country and Wales seeking a better life as another pair of hands in the town's factories. As I looked at the picture, I wondered about the figures in the foreground; what would life have been like before the industrial boom? Did they fear the changes on the horizon? What would they make of the newcomers?

The phone rings and an email pings to bring me back to the reality of time pressure. I need to leave my own little day dreams aside and make sure the documentation is completed and means something in the future. I must ignore the distractions and get on with the data entry. These moments of eudemonic flow are important to hold on to, especially given the words of warning contained in Ealasaid Munro's recently published research into the dangers of emotional burnout amongst those seeking to use museum collections to promote social justice.² Certainly if we do not find joy in our privileged access to material culture then it is probably time to find another occupation through which to achieve our vision of a more equitable future.

Eudemonic flow is a component of all five ways to health and well-being prescribed by the New Economics Foundation. It is, according to this Think Tank, when we connect, take notice, become active, keep learning and give, that we are happy. It was upon the principle that museums are well placed to provide opportunity for people to pursue all of these that the Happy Museum Project was founded in 2011. Conceived by former social history curator Tony Butler, the project is providing leadership within the UK museum sector by commissioning a series of micro-projects which 're-imagine museums for a changing world'.³ In August 2012 Reading Museum was a recipient of one such commission for a project we called 'Nag, Nag Nag to Reveal Reading's Hidden History'.

Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) have been commended by Thames Valley Police and local politicians for their work in assisting to deliver a 17.5% decrease in the level of reported crime in the Oxford Road, Newtown and Norcot districts of Reading. These neighbourhoods have suffered disproportionately from high levels of inter-generational unemployment, anti-social behaviour and the criminal activity of a small number of persistent offenders. This has had a negative impact upon the urban environment, leading to social problems such as feelings of loneliness and isolation amongst older generations and disillusionment and low aspiration amongst younger people growing up in poverty in neighbourhoods with bad reputations. Well-being, self esteem, career aspiration, skills, numeracy, literacy, diet, life expectations and life expectancy are all detrimentally impacted. Thus levels of happiness among members of these communities are greatly diminished in comparison to other parts of town.

The work of Reading's NAGs offers reason for hope and the opportunity to work in partnership through the Happy Museum project coincided with Reading Museum's own wish to focus our community engagement work in neighbourhoods which score poorly in national indices of social deprivation. In so doing our work responds to and aligns itself with the local authority's corporate priority towards the vulnerable sectors of society. By virtue of this we add value and social return on the council's investment. The premise for the project was that within any community, each individual's happiness is connected to their sense of self-worth and aspiration in life; that this is bound up with identity, which is in turn attached to the history of their locality.

In the case of these neighbourhoods, alternative narratives about the area's heritage is hidden, overshadowed by the constant reminders disseminated in the local press and through urban myth that these are undesirable homes which deserve their reputation. If we peel back the layers of time and disregard contemporary perceptions, we soon discover plenty of evidence to the contrary: Oxford Road has, in recent times, produced an Oscar-winning actress and an England cricket captain. The iron-rich clay and geological resources of Norcot built red brick towns across the South East, and in the last century, Newtown was home to the men and women who supplied a whole empire with Huntley & Palmers biscuits and cakes.

These locations have been inhabited since prehistory and so, by working with NAGs, the project sought to build bridges into these communities. We wanted to help make the future better by encouraging a wide group of local residents to become active and

take notice of their hidden heritage. The idea was that we could use heritage to go some way towards countering social problems that can be connected to misrepresented identity. As well as this, and through the enriching nature of connecting, taking notice, being active, learning and giving, we hoped that the project would offer participants a sense of well-being.

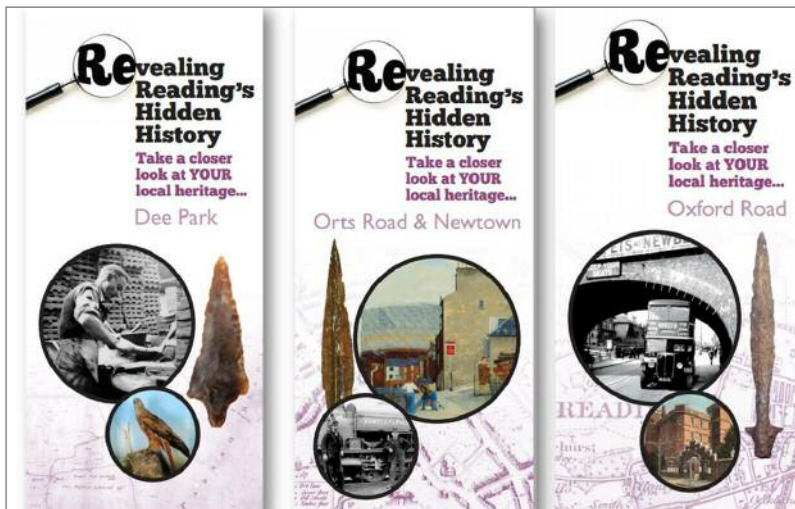
Happy Museum methodology uses a "Story of Change" planning technique which has a vision statement as its starting point. Ours was:

To create something that the community can be proud of, something community guided and high quality; revealing hidden history, recognising the present and imagining the future.

The Happy Museum project prioritises "outcome" over "output" in a process of "action research" which assesses success by "measuring what matters", i.e the positive bearing a museum can have upon people's well-being and the environment. Therefore, as well as 'creating something to be proud of', we were looking for evidence that the activity promoted attitudinal change amongst participants and the wider community.

During a period of five months, over 60 residents from each of the neighbourhoods were recruited through contact made via the NAGs. Participants were supported in conducting historical research through regular work shops, library visits and behind-the-scenes access to the museum stores. Local history talks and informal social gatherings were organised in pubs and community centres and, by working together, groups in each neighbourhood were able to produce accounts of a wide range of themes running through their social history. We also shared views and opinions about the problems that the areas face today and discussed ideas about alternative futures. All this information was then gathered together to form the basis of the project's output.

Through discussion and negotiation, group members were all given a say in developing a consensus about how the funding that came with the Happy Museum commission would be used to most effectively disseminate our findings. In the end it was decided to produce pocket leaflets containing an illustrated potted history of each area, including a synopsis of their current situations and some reasons we identified to be hopeful about the future. The leaflets were then distributed locally in what was felt would be the best antidote to the headlines carried in the free newspapers which drop through letter boxes each week.



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With the money left over, it was agreed to also purchase a branded gazebo, allowing the museum to “pop-up” whenever and wherever it likes in the future, for instance at community events such as the Oxford Road Fun Day and the East Reading Carnival in Newtown. In the end, 15,000 leaflets were given away for free in the neighbourhoods. We placed them in doctor’s surgeries, launderettes, pubs, tattoo parlours, letting agents, primary schools, church halls and in branch libraries; wherever we could think of that the wider community might find them. In the Dee Park estate in Norcot we were able to develop a good working relationship with the housing association, who agreed to match fund and distribute a leaflet to every household.



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How successful we were in promoting widespread community well-being through social history is difficult to measure convincingly. It is entirely possible that the work has had no effect at all in this regard, and producing the leaflets and pop up museum was no more than an end in itself. Nevertheless in evaluating the project we did deploy a number of tools in an attempt to monitor any signs of impact and attitudinal change.

Narrative evaluation involved observing participant interactions to look for indications of well-being and, for me, one of the most gratifying outcomes of the project was to be able to report back that laughter was shared and new friendships were formed. We also saw some of the local residents become actively engaged in the local development framework, with a delegation from the Oxford Road meeting with the ward councillor to discuss their views on how Section 106 funds, arising from the construction of a Tesco hypermarket, could be invested in bringing ramshackle properties into greater community use, as they had been in the past.

The Newtown group recorded their views on the value of the project with the following statement:

As a community, undertaking research into the history of this area has empowered us to see the area with a new perspective. Households have much of what they need for achieving a greater sense of well-being and happiness and all that is lacking is social support and shared activity. There was a sense that when drug dealing was at its worst, residents felt the need to keep themselves to themselves. We minded our own business. The Happy Museum activities have brought some residents out and perhaps this could be a starting point.

We also conducted a longitudinal survey, asking participants at the outset to choose from a selection of positive and negative signifying words and phrases which might best describe their current perspective on their neighbourhood. We repeated this exercise after the leaflets had been published and analysed any differences. In all, 31 participants took part in this process. From a list of 40 words, between them the participants chose a total of 126 in the first visit, whilst 120 were selected from the second. Of the 126 signifying words chosen originally, 58 (43.06%) remained the same in the second round, indicating that, as a group, participants had gained a somewhat different outlook on their local area. While there was a small increase in the proportion of positive signifying words being chosen, overall the most common words across areas remained similar, with "drug users" being the most common, chosen by individual participants on both occasions a total of 11 times. The next most popular word was "diverse" which was selected on both occasions by 8 participants. Clearly drug use is seen as a big issue in these areas which were also predominantly perceived as being "Working Class".

The experimental nature of a Happy Museum commission to pursue action research re-imagining the sector's role means that some consequences of the work can be unforeseen.⁴ In our case, the museum has acquired an increased sphere of influence within an area of public policy it might not have previously been considered relevant to. Earlier this year, as a direct result of 'Nag,Nag,Nag to Reveal Reading's Hidden History', the museum was invited to contribute to 'Reading 2050: Revealing Reading's Potential'. This multi-agency initiative, which is part of central government's *Foresight Future of Cities* programme, aims to take the first steps towards developing a smart and sustainable vision for Reading. It seeks to influence how Reading plans to deal with environmental and socio-economic issues arising from its economic growth whilst also complying with the Climate Change Act that commits the UK to an 80% reduction of greenhouse gas emission by the year 2050.⁵

This unpredicted development from 'Revealing Reading's History' has presented an opportunity for the museum to engage with the other key motivator behind the Happy Museum Project, namely the reimagining of museums as part of the solution in the transition to a low carbon world. The planet we live on faces critical issues, with depleting resources leading to acute polarisation of equality of opportunity for happiness amongst its population. This is aggravated by an international focus on perpetual economic growth, where securing happiness is lost in the drive to consume. Like many English towns and cities, Reading faces pressing internal issues: its population has increased by 9% in the last decade and is projected to grow by 25% by the year 2050. Creating an environment in which the town's people can flourish economically and lead happy lives in a manner that does not cost the earth is a huge challenge, yet limited communities of people within the town are aware of current debates or active in finding solutions. Decisions made in the here and now will determine whether the future in Reading is one where inequities become more or less acute. Decisions about how an increased population can be sustained will have an effect on Reading's urban and natural environment.

That museums might have a part to play in finding creative solutions to these pressures may seem a lofty ideal, but on a simple level there is scope within social history collections to take us back to the future, with the evidence they contain of the transitions that took place in the past and how communities were sustained without burning gas and electricity as if there was no tomorrow. The museum service within Reading Borough Council is well placed to generate wider debate because of its social history collection and its strategic role in promoting active citizenship and community engagement. We were therefore very pleased to recently receive a second commission from the Happy Museum Project to support us in a further programme of action research in which we have a vision to be 'a trusted advocate and influential agency through which communities are active in shaping public policies that advance well-being within a sustainable environment'.

This project, which is currently in the planning stage, will engage our audiences with issues that affect the future, and it is our idea to reflect their responses back to the Reading 2050 project through museum productions. One idea is to encourage participants to send postcards from the year 2050, describing what the town looks like from there, outlining the solutions that were found to the pressures facing us in the here and now. We plan to collect and preserve the results of the process so that, just like visions of the past contained in old photographs, pictures of the future will be captivating for successive curators at Reading Museum!

As described above, the data set collected during our first Happy Museum project is not in itself sufficient to conclude that social history makes us happy. Much more compelling evidence of this can be found in a report commissioned by the Happy Museum Project in 2013. Economist Daniel Fujiwara's *Museums and Happiness, the Value of participating in Museums and the Arts* analyses the 'Taking Part' data set collected since 2005 from a national sample of 14,500 interviews.⁶ Chief amongst the headlines is that if happiness was considered as a currency, along the same lines as Gross Domestic Product, then the individual wellbeing value of museum visits would equate to over £3,000 a year. The report also identifies what makes people more likely to visit museums, finding that participation is 60% higher amongst those brought to museums as a child by family. Therefore, as a parent, you invest in your child's prospects of happiness in adulthood through the simple act of bringing them to a museum. By multiplying visitor figures by individual well-being value, funding bodies would also discover that they achieve a significant surplus return on their investment. If only more policy makers thought as Robert Kennedy did:

Gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.⁷

Reading Museum is just one of 22 institutions to have successfully applied for a Happy Museum commission and become part of a "community of practice" which is pursuing the philosophies driving the scheme. It is well worth visiting the Happy Museum's website, which contains case studies arising from the whole variety of projects that have taken place up and down the UK. By the sum of these parts, the Happy Museum project is showing that, with imagination, museums can be places where eudemonia flows.

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- 1 Mihalyi Csikszentmihályi describes the experience of flow in *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. People are happiest when they are in a state of *flow* – a state of concentration or complete absorption with the activity at hand. For them, time stops.
- 2 Munro, Ealasaid, 'Doing emotion work in museum: Reconceptualising the role of community engagement practitioners', *Museum & Society*, March 2014, 12(1) 44-60.
- 3 Tony Butler was appointed Executive Director of Derby Museums Trust in 2014, following his Directorship of the Museum of East Anglian Life.
- 4 The Happy Museum, 'Re-imaging Museums for a Changing World. Learning and Evaluation Report', 2013.
- 5 See: <https://futureofcities.blog.gov.uk/2014/10/13/reading-2050/>
- 6 See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/taking-part>
- 7 University of Kansas, March 18, 1968.

The Imitation Game, the Exhibition

Bletchley Park,

10th November 2014 – 1st November 2015

Charlene Price, HLF Skills for the Future Social History Curatorial Trainee at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, shares her impressions of the current exhibition at Bletchley Park which documents the making of The Imitation Game, a recent film starring Benedict Cumberbatch as Alan Turing.

This exhibition raises interesting questions about the role of contemporary collecting. The exhibition is based on a contemporary film, *The Imitation Game*, while the film itself interprets historical events; and most of the objects in the exhibition are props from the film.

The exhibition as a whole is at first glance very visually striking. It is situated in the Ballroom and Billiard Room of the Bletchley Park mansion – ornate, impressive rooms in themselves. The two rooms have been dressed with plush red carpets and red curtains, and red and gold ropes and stands for the cordoned-off areas, which complement the grandeur of the rooms. The red carpets in particular are fitting for an exhibition based on a film. Sarah Kay, Digitisation and Exhibition Officer at Bletchley Park, described her vision for the exhibition:

I really wanted visitors to walk through the door and feel like they were viewing something that was exciting and behind the scenes. I wanted them to feel like they were stars and they were being invited into this spectacular film and the excitement of everything that happened here from the war years to the filming of The Imitation Game.¹

Many of the objects are on open display, and arranged to look like a film set, but there are also a number of smaller cased objects. There is a genuine Enigma machine on display in one of the cases, like the one used in the film, which helps to connect the film with the history of Bletchley Park. I also found the choice to display some of the unused film canisters that were left behind interesting, as it highlights the creative and technical processes behind the film.

The interpretation mainly concentrates on how the film was made and includes many quotes from filmmakers, cast members and staff from Bletchley Park who were involved with the filming. Although many of the interpretation boards have quite a lot of text on them, the quotes help to make the text accessible and engaging, and help to give it a personal feel. It also seems to fit in well with the interpretation in the rest of Bletchley Park, where quotes from oral history are used fairly extensively.

It was interesting to learn about how the film was made and also how some of the props were made and used within the film. For example, there is a case which displays a number of replica documents. The label in the case explains that these were copied from original documents in the Bletchley Park archives. This highlights the amount of research and attention to detail that went into the film: it is unlikely that many of the documents would have been seen on screen in close-up, but there are many replica letters, secret documents and even a copy of the famous crossword puzzle which had originally been published in *The Telegraph*.



Alan Turing's desk, recreated for the film, *The Imitation Game*. Image courtesy of Charlene Price

The interpretation does mention the Bletchley Park story as it relates to the film at times, but it also acknowledges that elements of the film were dramatised. Sarah Kay explained that she had to be careful with the wording of the interpretation in order to discuss the film positively without misrepresenting Bletchley Park's history.² Some of the interpretation panels also point to where you can see originals of props. For example, there is a replica of Commander Deniston's desk which was used in the film. The accompanying interpretation panel explains where in the mansion you can see Deniston's real desk, providing a link between the film and the history of Bletchley Park.

There is one audio-visual display in the form of a TV screen in the Billiard Room, which shows a five-minute video consisting of clips from the film interspersed with interviews with the cast and crew. The video feels a little like a slightly long trailer for the film, but it also helps to put the exhibition in context, and it is appropriate for an exhibition of this nature. I found it particularly interesting to hear the cast and crew talking about their research visits to Bletchley Park and their experiences of filming there.

This is obviously not a traditional historical exhibition. It shows a different part of Bletchley Park's history from the rest of the site: the fact that parts of *The Imitation Game* were filmed on site means that the filming and the film itself is now also part of Bletchley Park's history.

This exhibition could prove a good introduction to the Bletchley Park story. Those who have seen the film, but did not previously know much about the history of Alan Turing and the codebreakers at Bletchley, may be encouraged to visit the exhibition and as a result the rest of the Bletchley Park site. An exhibition such as this which displays contemporary objects representing both a contemporary event (the filming of *The Imitation Game*) and historical events (the events on which the film is based) can help to attract new visitors. Sarah Kay acknowledges that the exhibition has helped them to reach new audiences and that the film itself has helped the story of Bletchley Park to reach a worldwide audience.³ The exhibition perhaps also provides existing audiences and season ticket holders with something new and different to maintain their interest – a reason perhaps for a return visit. It is an enjoyable and illuminating exhibition and one that will clearly have a wide appeal amongst film fans and history buffs alike.

Sarah Kay explained that many of the objects currently on display have been donated by the film company,⁴ including the replica Bombe that had been specially built for the film. It will be interesting to see how these objects are used once the exhibition closes, and whether any will make it on to permanent display as part of the interpretation of Bletchley Park's history.

References

- 1 Personal correspondence with Sarah Kay, Digitisation and Exhibition Officer at Bletchley Park, 22/01/2015
- 2 Personal correspondence with Sarah Kay, Digitisation and Exhibition Officer at Bletchley Park, 22/01/2015
- 3 Personal correspondence with Sarah Kay, Digitisation and Exhibition Officer at Bletchley Park, 22/01/2015
- 4 Personal correspondence with Sarah Kay, Digitisation and Exhibition Officer at Bletchley Park, 22/01/2015

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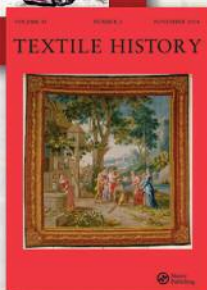
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