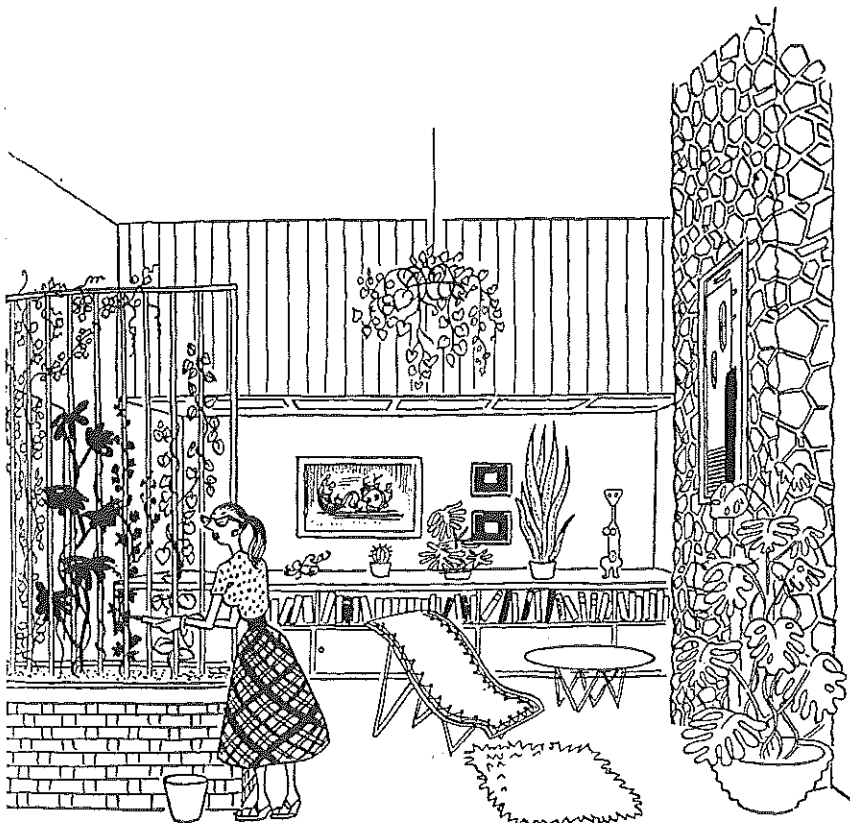


Social
History
Curators
Group



Journal 14 (1986-87)



THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

SHCG is the largest of the specialist museum groups. Founded in the mid-1970s as the Group for Regional Studies in Museums, the diversity of interests of its membership was clearly recognised in 1982 by the Group's change in name, and its subsequent growth.

In common with other specialist groups, SHCG's primary role is helping to raise standards of curatorship. A *News* is issued three times a year. This includes reviews of meetings and exhibitions, opinions on current issues, and items of news. *SHCG Journal* is issued annually, and features articles on various aspects of social history, on research, collecting, recording and interpretation. As well as the regular publications the Group has also produced, free to members, the proceedings of the Women, Heritage and Museums conference (organised by SHCG), out of which sprang the WHAM specialist group. Another special publication produced by SHCG, in association with the Society for the Study of Labour History, is the proceedings of a meeting on Labour History held at Congress House. A special edition of the *Museums Journal* (June 1985) was produced at the Group's urging, and featured articles arising out of an SHCG meeting, with others, on twentieth century collecting. Currently in preparation is a *Manual of Social History Curatorship*.

The Group organises several meetings a year which cover a wide range of subjects and themes, from practical seminars on materials such as iron, glass and plastics, to major discussions on Twentieth Century Collecting and the Disposal of Museum Collections. A programme of training seminars is currently in progress. In addition, the annual study weekend provides a forum for fuller analysis of major subjects such as Museums and the Media, or Interpretation in Social History.

SHCG is a point of contact for other organisations as well as its own members. It has a voice in Museums Association affairs, and represents the interests and concerns of members by liaising with Area Councils, Federations, the Museums and Galleries Commission and other bodies. Its role will continue to reflect those interests and concerns as the importance of museums, and the relevance of social history, grow.

Backnumbers of the *SHCG Journal* are available from the Editor.

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The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the Editor or the contributors and are not necessarily the views or policy of SHCG.

The Editor welcomes articles and notes of work in progress for inclusion in the next issue of *SHCG Journal*. The copy date is the 4th January 1988. Contributions should be typed, double spaced, on one side of A4 paper and may be accompanied by line or monochrome illustrations (no slides). All reviews should give full details of cost, postage and packing, date and place of publication. All contributions should be addressed to the Editor, Steph Matoris, Brewhouse Yard Museum, Castle Boulevard, Nottingham, NG7 1FB (0602-411881). Thanks are due to John Murray (Publishers) Ltd for permission to reproduce several illustrations from the late Osbert Lancaster's *A Cartoon History of Architecture*, and to Lynne Matoris for much help in preparing this edition of *SHCG Journal* for the printers.

COVER ILLUSTRATION: Contrasting domestic interiors by Osbert Lancaster; the 'Earnest Eighties' and the 'Jungle-Jungle' periods. Printed by permission from *A Cartoon History of Architecture* by Osbert Lancaster, published by John Murray.

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Editor:

S.N.Mastoris

Nottingham City Museums

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Gaynor Kavanagh

The Society for Folk Life Studies invited me to present a paper on Folk Life Museums in England to their 25th Conference held in Kingussie in September 1985; this I did. The paper was revised and presented to the staff and invited guests at the Welsh Folk Museum in December 1985. It has been further, though slightly, revised for this publication.

Being asked to discuss 'Folk Life Museums in England' was by no means as straightforward a brief as it might seem. It raised a number of important questions. After all, what is 'folk life'? Hence, what really is a 'folk life' museum? Have these questions ever been answered satisfactorily? Should Herbert John Fleure's advice, that Peate endorsed, be accepted, that it's people that matter and that these questions are better left alone?¹ I would like to argue that they are still worth asking and there are others too which take the parameters of this paper outside of the geography of England, such as: how have museums devoted to the study of the past (call it folk life or what you will) developed? What were their origins and influences? Can museums be considered in isolation from other media and museums in other countries? How can the present stage of museum development be described?

A lot of questions perhaps, and ones which I find increasingly difficult to resolve without coming up with yet more questions, and no doubt in this paper I will fail even to begin to explore them adequately. But I open them up nevertheless. I would like to side with Fleure and be able to say it is 'people that matter', and that curators should get on with the research, the writing, the exhibition and leave it at that. But I cannot: it just isn't that simple. Without the willingness to criticise, occasionally and constructively, what museums have done and are doing; to question what is the nature and methods of museum curatorship; to stop and look at what is going on around and outside museums; museums and indeed folk life studies would be condemned to a tepid backwater, where they could remain mushy and fetid until they disappeared, silently.

Terms and Perspectives

Firstly, the terms available are problematic, both in their definitions and their uses. A search through the standard literature on the subject will provide a clutch of well used and oft repeated standards on what is meant by the term 'folk life', although its academic counter-part 'ethnology' is well defined. The definition supplied by the Swedish ethnologist, Sigurd Erixon is most useful. He described ethnology as 'comparative cultural research on a regional basis, with a sociological and historical orientation with certain psychological implications'.² Ethnology in Swedish universities remains a lively and exciting discipline, particularly well suited to the museum field. The relationship between museums and departments of ethnology in Sweden gives museum practice there a sharp intellectual edge which in turn enhances the quality of much museum provision.

In Britain, so strongly influenced in museum terms by Swedish school of thought (sometimes it must also be said by rough and inaccurate interpretations of it), the definition has been honed-down to an 'ecological approach' summed up in Higgs' definition of folk life as 'the study of mankind in relation to the environment in which he lives'.³ Except for the use of the usual sexist generic term, this is a useful definition. Even more so when it is applied in studies which acknowledge implicitly that environments other than (or alongside) the natural exist, and which come to terms with peculiar problems some studies have: notions of change, influences other than the local and regional, and concepts of time. Higgs attempted to apply Swedish ideas of ethnology to a definition of a folk life museum. In doing this, he had to concede that 'the scope of folk museums is so wide that no one term really covers the subject, for such museums must inevitably deal with ethnology, archaeology, anthropology, and sociology, not to mention history'.⁴ This would require that curators, as a matter of course, be skilled and well trained; that is women and men who could study aspects of a region using the skills and awareness demanded in each of the disciplines mentioned and also come up with the wherewithal to document and collect what was truly relevant, representative or symbolic, and not just old or redundant. It might be argued that the possession of these skills, coupled with those of good communication and management, separate the exceptional curator and exceptional museum from the rest.

But even with Higgs' wise advice and with the careful counselling of Dr Geraint Jenkins and others over the years, it hasn't been like that, well not as far as many folk life museums are concerned, try as they may. There is not a first degree course in British universities that has a parallel with the ethnology courses available in Sweden, through which their museums benefit enormously. So curators have

come into museums with a wide variety of academic backgrounds. It could be suggested that not often enough do curators have the combination of social science or historical geography background and the active, enquiring mind and visual awareness, that is so required. In-service special subject training has been poor and patchy; evidence, if any were needed, of the lack of a central, solid core of thinking on the purposes, methods and philosophy of what it is that curators are doing in museums.

These two elements have a number of effects which frequently confront my optimism about museums and their curators. Can I express it thus? I would like to believe that Diploma students in large history departments in museums don't put on exhibitions on laundrying or baking or whatever using solely as reference the relevant Shire guide and without asking one local soul for their views or experiences - but they do and I get them as projects. I would like to believe that museum curators know that if a set of tools needs identifying, a local person who would have used them should be sought and asked, instead people write to me or phone up a colleague for a directory on plumbers' tools or whatever. I would like to believe that I have never received a call from someone who should have known better asking me for a list of objects needed to found a history museum (the basic kit if you like), but I have. If these people are learning their curatorial skill with Nelly, then Nelly must have got it wrong in the first place. I would also like to believe that curators, in such privileged positions for local research, and with such a history of good intentions towards 'the people who matter' would be in the vanguard of the terrific activity in the history field and in publishing peoples' history, but there is a curious and I think an embarrassing silence from some curators. Some even seem to doubt that there is anything to be taught about history curatorship.

Those of you still with me on this will notice my lapse in the use of the term 'folk life' and the intrusion of the term 'history'. Whereas the term 'folk life' might be well understood in Wales and by the Society for Folk Life Studies, it gives rise to distinct problems elsewhere. Certainly, as far as common understanding is concerned, the term 'folk' is a burden. Museums appear to avoid it. Thus there are now museums of social history, local history, some sort of life, and industrial museums (which, I would argue, have the responsibility to record the social aspects of work, whereas science museums do not). Also there are categories such as ecomuseums, site museums and open-air museums. To be fair and accurate the use of these terms implies different and distinct approaches from the museums. Indeed it is possible to detect a variety of trends and approaches, some of which I have suggested elsewhere.

As far as popular usage of 'folk' is concerned, it is best summed up in a wonderful description from Dr Jenkins:

a picture of woollen-stocking, black-cloaked, brogue-shod women chasing fairies through glens and men with bells around their knees dancing merrily on the village green.⁵

Of course it is recognised that it isn't that simple. That a lot of the work has been concerned with recording the last vestiges of generations that had either common experiences or ways of living, perhaps only details, that originated not decades but centuries before. Much of the *bona fide* work in folk life studies has concentrated on recording how before the post-1870 literate age, ordinary people expressed themselves, their hopes and indeed protests in their ways of living and believing.

One of the best examples of this is given by Bob Bushaway in the introduction to his excellent book *By Rite*.⁶ In this he referred to an extract from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* where Hardy characterised cultural change and difference in the comparison of Tess and her mother. This was clearly more in terms of centuries than a single generation:

Between the mother, with her fast-perishing number of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect and orally-transmitted ballads, and the daughter with her trained National teaching and standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed.⁷

Even so folk life and folk life museums are left with a reputation that is more *Bramley Hedge than Bread and Blood*. Thus museums appear to avoid the term, 'folk life', that is unless they are well-established and respected in their discipline, such as, of course, the Welsh Folk Museum, St Fagans. The Department of Museum Studies at Leicester has plumped for the term 'history' to describe the option course available to post-graduate students, but I'm still not so sure that is the appropriate description. The Americans are developing extremely active and interesting courses and research programmes in what they term 'material culture studies', (a

considerable influence on which are the Winterthur seminars and publications, and the work of Thomas Schlereth). The professional curatorial group in this field has also avoided the term folk life and first called themselves the Group for Regional Studies in Museums and now the Social History Curators Group. (There is an argument to be made here that they have moved from a museum-relevant term to a museum-irrelevant term, depending on your view of what social history actually is as an academic discipline). Finally, the Museums Association has changed the name of the specialism, as far as the Diploma exams are concerned, from folk life to social history. The scope and nature of the exams is much if not exactly the same, although the change in terms I would argue requires intellectually a different approach from the student. But at least it stops students fretting that their practical will be about brogue-shod women and gents waving handkerchiefs, which in spite of at least two years work in museums and, one would hope, reading of the standard texts, many still seemed to come to expect.

A Backward Glance

There are historic reasons for the nature of museums in our field in England being as they now are - that is immensely varied (for reasons other than regional variation) and inconsistent in standards of curatorship and care. I am very pleased to say that there is active and detailed research being done by Geoffrey Marsh (Museum of London), on the development of history museums in England, paying particular attention to the influences on them and the forms they have taken. My work on the historical background to museum development in Britain and abroad, with the exception of the First World War period, has not been as thorough as it might be and I am therefore open to challenge. The following is of course my own interpretation: other views may well be held elsewhere.

In many respects history/folk life is the junior of the disciplines to be found in museums in England. There are historical reasons for this. With the founding of the great national and provincial museums in England last century the emphasis was on improvement through knowledge and the sort of knowledge that was allowable was that which emphasised the power and glory of Britain and her Empire. Classical archaeology, the respected elements of the natural sciences and ethnographic collections trowled from the Colonies were adequate to show visitors the perceived sophistication and cultured nature of the British race as a force for good. Curious and weird objects were occasionally allowed to stand alongside the great and learned, if nothing else then at least to titillate and encourage the visitors.

In the meanwhile, the ways of life of the people in Britain were changing and were going unrecorded or acknowledged by museums. But perhaps this was typical of the then held view of the past and the present and how they should be seen and studied. Indeed history was taught then (as it is still being taught now in some places) that is all about great men and great events. The local, regional, popular or common were seemingly of no relevance. But in the 1860s and 1870s people's history re-surfaced and expressed itself in a self-conscious literary and intellectual practice notably with such writers as Goldwin Smith, J. R. Green and others.⁸ Not that it ever disappeared as such. Much that was of importance to the people from whom it had derived had been kept alive through oral testimony and tradition. But middle class, intellectual involvement at this stage ensured that the testimony and much that constituted peoples' history had wider recognition as being of value. Also important detail was recorded which would otherwise have been lost through the movements in population and huge shifts in values which accompanied the last century.

This middle class involvement showed itself in a variety of ways. The fascination with *notes and queries* demonstrated and stimulated an interest in local history, drawing attention to places and features locally. As the century wore on, local antiquaries published more about their towns and demonstrated an interest in some aspects of oral testimony. County and regional glossaries followed as did the formation of societies, in particular the English Dialect Society and the Folklore Society. *Folklore Record* was first published in 1873 (a significant year for museums as this was the year Nordiska Museet in Stockholm was founded).⁹ New and romantic ideas of craftsmanship and the nobility of labour were generated by the romantic movements towards the end of the century. The most well known led by William Morris. Meanwhile anthropologists, a new, young and enthusiastic breed of academics turned their attention overseas. Even so the methods they employed should be noted; A. C. Haddon used the very latest technologies on his 1898 expedition, including cinefilm and cylinder recording.¹⁰

By the early years of the 20th Century, there was much evidence of radical and liberal activity and interest in the features and characteristics of the history of people and places. This activity and interest was not however induced in museums. The new century brought

with it stouter, jingoistic notions of nationhood, buttressed and symbolised by whatever historic emblem or motif best suited. It is no coincidence that calls for a national folk life museum for England came in 1912, two years before the outbreak of the First World War and that it should take the form of proposals for reconstructed houses, room settings and the like. Calls for the National Folk Museum to be sited at Crystal Palace, by then a rotting hulk at Sydenham which would have been the most unsuitable of buildings, were repeated up to the outbreak of war and in the early years of it.

The standard explanation for the form the proposals for a National Folk Museum (and many subsequent history museums) took, given time and time again, is the influence of developments in Scandinavia. Certainly, the work of Hazelius in Sweden was known to curators; although it would appear that from this they could only perceive of folk museums as national, as opposed to local, in possibility and scope. There is another explanation which may be more pertinent, that is that in London from the 1880s there had been a number of quite spectacular exhibitions on a number of different themes. The techniques of reconstruction and demonstration were used extensively. For example, in the Franco-British Exhibition 1908 a reconstructed Irish village was on display. These exhibitions attracted audiences as large as the exhibitions were spectacular.¹¹ It seems unlikely that the idea of reconstructions and all else in museums could not be linked in some way to this.

Sadly there were few curators at the time who were prepared to take note of the methods being employed by museums in Scandinavia and to collect in any sense to record the history of the present of their area. One man who did was Sir Guy Laking, curator of the London Museum, who was extremely astute about the collecting of recent and modern material. During the years of the Great War he was the only curator I found records of who was prepared to actively and purposefully collect for his museum objects which would record the experiences of the people of London during the First World War.¹²

Something quite extraordinary happened in the Great War which could have had quite profound implications for the nature and style of curatorship in this country, had curators taken any notice of what was going on. The Imperial War Museum, founded in March 1917, possibly as part of a concerted effort to galvanise war mood in the wake of the reverses and tragedies of 1916, set about the task of collecting by dividing responsibilities between a number of specialist committees of men and women experienced and indeed well connected in their fields. The first meeting of the National War Museum Committee (as it was first called) established sub-committees with responsibility for recording and collecting objects to represent women's work, munitions, Red Cross, War Office, Admiralty and Records and Literature. Later, sub-committees for Air Services and the Dominions were added.

The committees of the IWM, aided by 1918 by two collectors in the field, were highly successful and although some of the material was disposed of in the post-war years or redeployed in 1939, this is more evidence of the dramatic changes in attitude to the war in the 1920s and 1930s and the implications that held for this museum of the war, than any failings of the museum and its collecting methodologies. The fact remains the museum's collections for this period are excellent and perhaps the most comprehensive of any museum for a specific period of time and experience. It is recognised internationally as a major research resource.¹³ The example of the contemporary documentation programme in Sweden, SAMDOK, established 60 years later bears comparison.¹⁴

In the post-war years curators rejected both the many opportunities offered them in the spirit of reconstruction and the lessons that community involvement during the war years held out. In his report to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, published in 1928, Miers made quite clear his dismay at shoddy standards of curatorship.¹⁵ The beginning of training for curators was partly a response to his remarks. In his report Miers also called again for an English Folk Museum. But by the outbreak of the Second World War, it still had not materialised, whereas in Wales and Scotland plans were well underway and in the Scandinavian countries folk museums had seen at least one generation of curators. Why should this be? It would be too simplistic to explain it in terms of lack of site and finance. Museums have always existed in now-is-not-the-time conditions of funding. The years before 1914 could easily have seen a folk museum produced, all the ingredients were there; bolstered national ego, romanticism about the past. The fact that it didn't come to pass then or in the early years of the thirties, when it was considered but rejected, may lie in a number of factors.

Firstly, it might be said that England has never conceived of itself in the way that Wales and Scotland and Ireland have and do.¹⁶ The Celts, through an inherited identity seem to have a powerful and terrible enchantment with themselves which expresses and confirms

itself in symbols of nationhood, and expressions which denote belonging. Englishness is a notion that is strong and potent but maybe not in the same way as Welshness or whatever. Those English with power and control happily refer to Great Britain as England and say England when they usually mean London. The view is imperial. Also England has such varied and distinct regions that unity of purpose, unity in consciousness where and when it mattered has not been available. This unity of consciousness in a shared identity is fundamental to the founding of such a museum. Instead what can be found is a regional chauvinism experienced, for example, by George Ewart Evans and others in their attempts to found a museum of East Anglian life in the mid-1960s.¹⁷ It continues to show itself in a multitude of ways, not least the North/South divide in economic prosperity and social conditions seen today.

In the mid-war years there were a number of local or regional initiatives to form museums which also may have militated against, although to a limited degree, a national museum plan. These initiatives, which met with varying degrees of success, were mainly inspired by private individuals, the most influential and well-known being of course the Yorkshireman, Dr. Kirk.¹⁸ There are a number of views on whether these private collectors had a positive or negative influence on the subsequent development of history museums and history curatorship. Higgs identifies Kirk as one of a number of enthusiasts at this time who did much good work, but 'failed to understand the essential and vital difference between simply collecting specimens and making a record of daily life and work.'¹⁹ My own theory about Kirk, based I must add on no original research whatsoever, is that although in 1910 he travelled to Sweden and saw Nordiska Museet and Skansen, he totally misunderstood the essential purposes and philosophy of these museums and came away with notions of museums as shop displays or stage dressing, the legacy of which we still live with today. That being said, why should he have been concerned to take his collecting further into social documentation at this time? He was after all a doctor who also happened to be a collector, a pursuit that was by no means uncommon then. His was a gentleman's pastime and passion. He was not a curator, but by force of circumstances became one in later life. That his style of collecting and the form of museum founded on his collection are still influencing curatorship, perhaps speaks more eloquently of the direction curators have chosen themselves to take rather than any undue influence from Dr. Kirk's ideas.

Other individuals besides Kirk contributed to the establishment of museums and collections in Britain before the Second World War. Thomas Bagshawe must be acknowledged for his contribution to the formation of collections at Luton and Cambridge, as must Isobel Grant for the collections at the Highland Folk Museum and Charles Wade for the collections at Snowhill, Gloucestershire. In the 1930s there was a trickle of museums or collections being established in many parts of Britain. They were formed by societies, more often by individuals and occasionally by established museums, embarrassed by the size of their bygone collections. It is perhaps important to consider the geographical spread of these inter-war years local museums. Some areas with very strong folk life traditions and with even stronger notions of local or regional identity, I am thinking particularly here of the West Country, showed few signs of forming collections of any significance and produced few proper museums to that end. One can only suggest possible reasons for this. In Cornwall, I have always felt that the natural and historic environments and oral tradition and testimony at this time were so strong and relatively unthreatened that the consciousness required to form systematic collections before the war was absent. There are other theories too, which are a little uncharitable, so perhaps this speculation ought to be left here.

One of the common denominators why museums were slow to materialise in some areas may have been that in these places objects long since superseded elsewhere were still in common use. So perhaps another theory about history museums and collections is appropriate here. That is, that in England at least, but I suspect elsewhere too, there was and is a direct correlation between the point at which local trades or agricultural practices (or whatever) became redundant and the formation of collections. Hence the terrific number of wheelwrights' shops etc, in museums. In turn this has profound implications for styles of curatorship. Museum collecting easily becomes a passive activity when hosts of redundant material flood in and save the curator the bother of active research and the agony of deciding what was truly of social and economic significance locally. I am not saying that donations are or ever have been a bad thing, but the growth of collections through redundancy has bolstered the lazy curator, resulting in the primacy of the object and the handiness of Shire guides. Think of this. If mid-wives, dentists, secretaries, bank managers, teachers and ministers of religion had gone totally out of business across the length and breadth of England, and the poor wheelwright had gone from

strength to strength and prospered, our museum collections from the 1930s onwards would have been dominated by totally different types of objects and displays. Another factor of these mid-war years has to be taken into account and that is the absence of specialist curators in our field, or any related aspect of it. Their time had not yet come. Indeed there may be an argument to be made, although not fully here, that history curatorship is a post-war development.

After the Second World War the official spirit was forward-looking, new thinking, that which praised the old was not part of this. But by the early 1950s things were beginning to move again, most notably with the founding of the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), the closest England has got to a national museum for folk life. It was also the first museum of standing in the field to be firmly linked to a university. Higgs described what a colossal task there was in the early years of the MERL, collecting especially in those areas which had seen rapid change and where the local museum simply had not bothered.²⁰ However, impetus from MERL and from the example of what was happening at the Welsh Folk Museum, St Fagans and abroad was such that many museums began to expand gradually their local collections.

And was this not such an important, indeed crucial time for recording folk life? The 1950s and early 1960s held opportunities to make records of a generation, in many areas the last generation, that knew and could tell of ways of living at the end of the last century which provided links back to previous generations and indeed previous centuries. The same may not be true now, although this in no way should mean that subsequent documentation of later generations has a lesser value. But there was something special in the documenting task then. It would be hard if not impossible to repeat much of it now.

Radical expansion was in the wind for museums by the mid-1960s. Growing consciousness of the historic environment and its staggering losses in the years since the war; the influence of W. G. Hoskins in drawing attention to the nature of historic topography, and the school of historians he inspired; the beginnings of legitimisation of the use of oral testimony in historical research, which owes much to George Ewart Evans; and a growing enthusiasm for and awareness of industrial monuments and detail, fast disappearing as Britain entertained new industries and began to run down the industries that had supported her for at least 100 years: all added to the climate in which history collections were garnered at this time. There were other factors too which were as important as these. In particular the impact made by TV dramas and films in the 1960s, not least the *Forsyte Sagas*, which expanded popular awareness of the historic, social detail objects could provide. It is perhaps no surprise that the expansion of museums in this climate was also accompanied by an expansion in the antique market. It is difficult to say with any certainty whether the terrific vitality in the social history and peoples history field, largely generated from Ruskin College, Oxford and *History Workshop*, had any effect on museums at this time. I am inclined to the view that it did not.

Changes in the Charity Laws in 1960, coupled with the effects of reorganisation in local government in 1974, led to the biggest increase in museums this country has seen since the high-days of the late Victorian years. Changes in leisure patterns, better communications through the motorways, considerable historic consciousness amongst the public, happily fuelled by more TV drama and by the advertising barons, has brought us to our present position. A selective national past is now an important salve and credential in a declining and divided Britain.

So What Now?

How can the present state of history museums be described? The answer depends on individually held views of what the history museum actually is and what curatorship is all about.

In general terms, museums can be seen as an integral part of leisure provision in Britain; a position they have reached by dealing with aspects of the sight and substance of human experience, that is something to which visitors can relate at least in part personally, to some degree. However, because the dual triggers of memory and experience make access to history museums easier than to say art galleries, the comfortable route has too often been taken by museums, particularly in exhibitions. Highly simplistic views of the past, uncritical and raising no questions are provided too frequently. In these the past is seen as over and done with, terminated, without hinge or contact with the present. To quote Patrick Wright 'where there was active historicity, there is now decoration and display: in the place of memory, amnesia swaggers out in fancy-dress.'²¹

At worst these uncritical views of the past offered by museums are typified by the reconstructed Victorian parlour, timeless, dateless, and with little regard for local relevance or accuracy. If this is fair

comment then perhaps this state of affairs is due in part to the fact that it is so easy for people to assume that all that it takes to form a museum is sufficient material to recreate an Edwardian kitchen or a wheelwright's shop. There is a proliferation of such museums in both the public and private sector that toss a few things together to form an exhibition. The public rarely complain because all too seldom they have been led to expect anything better and when they do they vote with their feet.

Museums are already reaping a bitter harvest from this. It is assumed that any old building will do for a history museum, when patently often it won't. It is assumed that history museums or exhibitions can be opened at ridiculously short notice, because the amount of time it takes to thoroughly research and collect material is radically underestimated. Particularly damning is that museums are more often than not ignored as sources of information and advice by those researching or simply seeking advice. It is perhaps telling that in the host of books on local and social history methodologies and sources, from Hoskins to Rogers, museums are rarely if ever mentioned with any seriousness. The Blake Report reviewing local history in England, gave museums only the very briefest of mentions. Curators are sometimes assumed to be part of the problem; I recall one article by Miles Kington warning against 'young fogie' curators.

I know all too well that it is very easy, too easy, to come up with a set of criticisms of museums as institutions that seek to convey and interpret the past. It is my experience that it's part of a student's rite of passage at the Department of Museum Studies to rehearse and explore all of them, and any new angle they can come up with. Those worth their salt will come out the other side of this experience with fresh and stimulating ideas, indeed convictions, about what are the possibilities for museums. I can well understand their need to go through this process of questioning and criticism. Equally, I can understand why at least one of my respected historian colleagues at the University believes that museums are simply ahistorical and are not to be taken seriously.

The fact is that many museums in this country are very poor indeed and their reputation affects all of us. But there is a convincing case to be made that the museum as an institution is an exciting medium for the recording and explanation of the material and social aspects of a lived past. There are a number of very good examples: I would particularly cite in England, Somerset Rural Life Museum, the Museum of Oxford, the Museum of London and the Museum of Lincolnshire Life, which for different reasons prove what room there is for solid, creative and intelligent work in museums, which need be neither boring nor simplistic or inaccessible. A substantial part of the problem is that curators are dealing in a very difficult medium indeed. Museum work is centred on objects and other documents collected and held in trust for others - society, call it what you will. But objects tell us very little. Curators acknowledge repeatedly that as far as research, acquisition and interpretation is concerned, it is the context that is important. The context curators are concerned about is as much a human as it is a physical one.²² However, to work in terms of 'contexts' requires broad knowledge, of the kind clearly identified in Erixon's definition of ethnology cited earlier. Without that broad knowledge and the skill it requires, history curatorship becomes a haphazard and *ad hoc* affair. In this situation, the explanation and representation of the personal, the human, the animate through the impersonal, the inhuman and the inanimate becomes a near impossible task. Furthermore, it is in a museum's underlying philosophy and to the extent it is prepared to be a community service (a centre for study, a data-bank or just a good afternoon out) plus the very dynamics of a museum as a system of communication that the task of curatorship becomes a confident reality. It should be the amalgamation of the academic, archive and communication functions that enhance and consolidate the position of museums as an integral part not just of leisure but of *social* provision in Britain today. If this is not done, indeed if it is not being done now, the case for museums, particularly in respect of funding, will be tenuous and increasingly difficult to argue. Especially so if the well-briefed and canny leisure industry continues at its present rate of progress in the private sector. The essential difference will always be (I hope) that museums have responsibilities to both document and serve 'the people that matter'. When the flash, bang, whallop of the leisure industry have faded, these responsibilities will remain, hopefully intact. The investment for museums now should be in terms of initiative and critical awareness of the nature of the work and the dynamics of the media. It's such an exciting prospect.

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EVERY HOME SHOULD HAVE ONE ?

THE GADGET REVOLUTION

Mark Suggitt

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. I intend to look at the problems facing museums beginning to consider the history of technology in the home and how York Castle Museum approached the subject, by exhibition and publication. The exhibition is 'Every Home Should Have One', which opened in April 1985. A year and a half later the museum is publishing *York Memories at Home* in co-operation with the York Oral History Project, whose interviews form the bulk of the book. This will hopefully be a happy marriage, bringing back together the artefacts and the memories of the people who actually used them, the workers of the 'Industrial Revolution in the Home'.

First of all, a cautionary note. Museums are communication media and when planning an exhibition (your approach to the interior, perhaps?) you need to know what you are capable of doing. I'll quote myself here and say that exhibitions are not books.¹ Exhibitions are far closer to television programmes than books. Both are trying to reach a wide audience, an audience that has very little time to take things in. The language, the word, has to be easily digested and the visual presentation, although loaded with symbols, has to be exciting. Exhibitions can be simplistic but they can put over an argument or put forward ideas. At York Castle Museum our approach was informed by the fact that the museum is both a local museum and a national tourist attraction. That fact does not lend to a pandering to cheap 'tourist' thrills but to realizing what are and facing up to it. The museum gets well over half a million visitors a year. A lot of people! Those people walk up and down a lot of stairs and are funnelled through a rigid circulation pattern, designed to contain people rather than liberate them, thanks to the fire officer and the fact that the buildings were built as prisons. In other words long labels were right out! No-one reads them anyway.

That's one point then. What's the other under consideration? – Gadgets! – Don'tcha just love 'em! We all have them. Don't they make life easy for us? A moulinex, a micro-wave and a Birds Eye menu-master and the world's your oyster . . . or is it? (We will return to this later). Gadgets! Museums are full of them, from bottle jacks to raisin stoners, kitchen ranges, large and small, from York to Beamish via Brighton and back again. The domestic world of home fires burning. The burnt out ends of Empire Days?

In 1983 this museum had a chance to come out of the kitchen and by-pass the street. York Castle Museum possesses a superb collection of domestic artefacts, many of which were in store. What was on display was confined by the time capsule of its famous set piece displays, Kirkgate and Half Moon Court. Both streets contained domestic material that was displayed as trade items for sale, and could not be interpreted. The same was true for reconstructed rooms, be they eighteenth century or twentieth century. 1983 gave us the chance to re-vamp an old gallery that had changed piecemeal over the years. The museum's capital programme gave us £45,000 to do something new with the largest gallery in the museum. It gave us the chance to move forward and tell a different story, and bring it up to date at the same time. It had positive benefits, bringing material out of store and allowing us to collect more twentieth century material in a logical way for a specific project.

We felt that the recent developments in household technology and their effects on people were suitable subjects, and would fit in very well with the aims of the museum as a recorder of everyday life. All very well. Just put the gadgets on display, explain how they developed, the usual objectcentric museum stuff. After all, the world's got better, hasn't it? No more rotten old dolly pegs and lots of electricity. Great eh? But life's not like this is it? There's a problem and we need to look at this now. Here's the problem. Have the gadgets that claim to have made our lives easier really liberated our lives? Or, if we're really honest, the lives of many women. Women *do* do more work in the home than men. That work is not just housework but includes the bringing up of children and out-work. Space means I must concentrate on housework and gadgets. In doing so I am informed by Cynthia Cockburn in her book *'Machinery of Dominance'*. She quotes contemporary couples and their attitude to housework. Although many claim to share 'down the middle' she comments

Normally women use utensils and implements - the dishwasher, vacuum cleaner, car. They don't use tools. The utensils and implements are in their way tools of course and they are used by women with skills (making food, sewing clothes) certainly equal to the male skills of their husbands. But women cannot fix these implements when they go wrong. It is men on the whole who are in control of women's domestic machinery and domestic environment. Women depend on men, husbands or

tradesmen for the completion of many physical tasks.²

Well, how did we get here? Is there a model for this current situation. Indeed there is and it is summed up beautifully by Ruth Schwartz Cowan in her article 'The Domestic Revolution in the Home' republished in the Leicester bible – *Material Culture Studies in America*. It goes like this.

Before industrialization the family was the basic social unit. Most families were rural, large, and self-sustaining; they produced and processed almost everything that was needed for their own support and for trading in the marketplace, while at the same time performing a host of other functions ranging from mutual protection to entertainment. In these pre-industrial families women (adult women, that is) had a lot to do and their time was almost entirely absorbed by household tasks. Under industrialization the family is much less important. The household is no longer the focus of production; production for the marketplace and production for sustenance have been removed to other locations. Families are smaller and they are urban rather than rural. The number of social functions they perform is much reduced until almost all that remains is consumption, socialization of small children, and tension management. As their functions diminished, families became atomized; the social bonds that had held them together were loosened. In these post-industrial families women have very little to do, and the tasks with which they fill their time have lost the social utility that they once possessed. Modern women are in trouble, the analysis goes, because modern families are in trouble; and modern families are in trouble because industrial technology has either eliminated or eased almost all their former functions, but modern ideologies have not kept pace with the change. The results of this time lag are several; some women suffer from role anxiety, others land in the divorce courts, some enter the labour market, and others take to burning their brassieres and demanding liberation.

This sociological analysis is a cultural artifact of vast importance. Many Americans believe that it is true and act upon that belief in various ways: some hope to reestablish family solidarity by relearning lost productive crafts, such as baking bread, tending a vegetable garden; others dismiss the women's liberation movement as 'simply a bunch of affluent housewives who have nothing better to do with their time'. As disparate as they may seem, these reactions have a common ideological source - the standard sociological analysis of the impact of technological change on family life.³

This is an American analysis but it can work for Britain today. Our social behaviour is greatly influenced by America, and as far as household technology goes we are still catching up. Remember the kitchens in all those lovely old Cary Grant comedies? Dishwashers and fridges all over the place. Cowan acknowledges that the model I quoted does not always hold, she also acknowledges that the evidence to challenge the theory is not as abundant as it could be. It can break down, for example, - a middle class Victorian woman may have had lots of time on her hands if she had servants, a 1960s middle class woman may have had an army of gadgets, if she could afford them, but she had to do the work herself and she was subject to a host of other pressures.

The rise of gadgets and mass marketing have gone hand in glove. Advertisers could well be called ideologues, encouraging social changes in the house. The discovery of germs in the twentieth century and the manipulative use of guilt helped build up the pressure on the 'housewife'. Cowan noted that in America,

After the war housework changed; it was no longer a trial and a chore but something quite different - an emotional 'trip'. Laundering was not just laundering, but an expression of love; the housewife who truly loved her family would protect them from the embarrassment of tattletale gray. Feeding the family was not just feeding the family but a way to express the housewife's artistic inclinations and a way to encourage feelings of family loyalty and affection. Diapering the baby was not just diapering but a time to build the baby's sense of security and love for the mother. Cleaning the bathroom sink was not just cleaning but an exercise of protective maternal instincts, providing a way for the housewife to keep her family safe from disease. Tasks of this emotional magnitude could not possibly be delegated to servants, even assuming that qualified servants could be found.

Women who failed at these new household tasks were bound to feel guilt about their failure. If I had to choose one word to characterize the temper of the women's magazines during the 1920s, it would be 'guilt'. Readers of the better-quality women's magazines are portrayed as feeling guilty a good lot of the time, and when they are not guilty they are

embarrassed: guilty if their infants have not gained enough weight, embarrassed if their drains are clogged, guilty if their children go to school in soiled clothes, guilty if all the germs behind the bathroom sink are not eradicated, guilty if they fail to notice the first signs of an oncoming cold, embarrassed if accused of having body odour, guilty if their sons go to school without good breakfasts, guilty if their daughters are unpopular because of old-fashioned, or unironed, or - heaven forbid - dirty dresses. In earlier times women were made to feel guilty if they abandoned their children or were too free with their affections. In the years after World War I, American women were made to feel guilty about sending their children to school in scuffed shoes. Between the two kinds of guilt there is a world of difference.⁴

The advertisers' role in this was enormous and they knew it. An American advertising executive was quoted as saying

If you tell the housewife that by using your washing machine, drier or dishwasher, she can be left free to play bridge, you're dead! . . . Instead you should emphasize that the appliances free her to have more time with her children and to be a better mother.⁵

The machinery of dominance, no less. I believe this to be the case in Britain also. It happened later but it has happened. The work of Erik Arnold and Wendy Faulkner has backed this up, they relate it to what we are all concerned with - objects and their interpretation. They pose important questions.⁶ Household tasks are basically manual work and mechanization means that the worker has to tend machines. Much work in the home is isolated, involves monitoring several machines at once and has many emotional burdens which are not subject to rationalization or mechanization, as we have seen. All this may limit the degree to which technology can ease housework. Modern types of domestic technology tend to reinforce the home system keeping women economically marginal to the larger society. They note the growth of 'white goods', kitchen durables, consistently painted white. Their whiteness at once promoted the ideas of cleanliness and efficiency. It also made them difficult to keep visibly clean. This practice has continued with the take over of plastics. They realistically acknowledge that gadgets do save time in the home, or rather they save effort. As someone who has spent far too long in laundrettes, few of them beautiful, I acknowledge the convenience of the automatic washing machine purring away in the kitchen. But they also make the point that 'labour' saving devices only save labour if used to do the same amount of work as before. Cowan notes this also. So, one conclusion is that housework expands to fill the time allocated to it and contracts when time is set aside for other things, such as paid work. Much more work has

to be done, especially on the society that produces and uses these things. Non-technical change has to be considered, the largest impact on housework has come from non-technical changes, such as reductions in household size. It is in this area that museums have the potential to explore.

I have given these arguments a brief thumbnail sketch and I fear I have not done justice to them. The fact is that the study of the interior is central to the recent revision of women's role in history. The effects of the Industrial Revolution in the home are far from over. It is something we will all have to consider when we review our domestic life displays. Which brings me back to the Castle Museum and our recent displays. I now want to discuss the philosophy behind them, such as it is, and also the practical design problems. We started with an idea, based on the arguments I've outlined. This had to be simplified, maybe trivialised. The visitor enters the new gallery, walks down the stairs and is confronted by a very large but short label. It says

Running a home can be hard work, even with the help of labour-saving machines. The ancestors of our modern machines first appeared as eccentric luxuries. Today they are taken for granted. They give us time to relax and enjoy a wide range of home entertainments.

Here we look at the domestic revolution of the past century. But these gadgets continue to develop, through research and design, spurred on by built in obsolescence and changing tastes.

This informs the visitor about what he or she is about to experience and is a combination of information and interpretation. Because visitors have a lot to take in that label is short, but hopefully leaves the thought that these gadgets have a history and that history is still developing.

Onto the exhibition itself. I said that we had come out of the kitchen and by-passed the streets but we ended up, quite deliberately in the shop. This is the latest re-constructed shop at York Castle Museum. It's a modern one displaying old objects as a modern department store (Plates 1 and 2). We decided to do this for two reasons. Firstly we felt it was relevant to the consumerist theme, it created a comfortable atmosphere that was simple and allowed the objects to stand out. We wanted visitors to feel as though they were in a Department store and just looking. It is also polished and stylish, I hope. Museums and shops are fairly close, as noted by Stephen Bayley on the Radio 4 Museum phone in.

The old 19th century museum was somewhat like a shop, somewhere you go and look at values and ideas and I think shopping really is becoming one of the great cultural



Plate 1: The sanitation section of York Castle Museum's new domestic appliance gallery.



Plate 2: The heating section of York Castle Museum's new domestic appliance gallery.

experiences of the late twentieth century. British consumers are getting more and more sophisticated and more and more educated and shops are beginning to respond. That's happening on the one side and on the other side museums are going to have to become much more commercial to survive.

Although not wishing to follow Bayley all the way into the capitalist fantasy that Docklands will probably become he is right to notice that people are becoming more visually literate and will demand a high standard of finish, although style should not predominate over substance. As a result the displays reflect the techniques of the shop display. Raised and open, using wood stain and carpeting. We also chose simple headings for each section. The gallery has a simple introduction and each section is complementary to it but can be seen and understood on its own; a series of short stories with a unifying theme. The main headings were like a simple classification, covering the main areas - Heating, Cleaning, Lighting, Bathrooms, Laundry, Toilets, Hobbies, Music and Radio and Television. Where is the Kitchen I hear you say? That follows on in a separate gallery that concentrates on that large and under-interpreted subject.

The text looks at the development of the hardware and its effect on the society that used it. The main storyline is always at an angle at the base of the display unit. Individual object labels back up the story. Again, each can be read independently of the storyline and make sense. It's the 'Rupert Book' approach to museum labelling!

The shop approach was a useful design device. It allowed us to present the artefacts in an abstract way, allowing visitors the chance to look at them in a new way, on different levels. It also allowed us to reconstruct an Edwardian bathroom without it appearing as an intrusion. Department Stores use this technique. When planning the style, the designer, Steve Moore and myself toured the London shops picking up ideas. We were delighted to find that the new Fenwicks Store in York used a similar type of grey wood stain to the one we had chosen. The lighting section was straight out of British Home Stores, lots of pendant fittings hanging down from a grid. We felt we were on the right track when one of our attendants remarked that it looked like B.H.S. Another put it another way. 'It looks just like bloody Habitat!'

Turning to background two dimensional material we again chose a two-tier system. The large images were all contemporary adverts taken from various sources, including the museum reserve collections. These were bright and colourful and reinforced the shop feel. They perform the function of putting over the advertisers and retailers point of view which is often in opposition to the interpretation. The storyline panels contain other evidence, be it verbal or visual. The cosy 'Sunlight' adverts above the washing machines contrast with the labels that tell of the hard work involved and the prohibitive price tags of most early machines.

The section that presented the greatest challenge to us was that of Radio and Television, both in terms of collection and interpretation (Plate 3). We knew that we had to do something on radio and television but found the existing collections sadly lacking, especially in television. We had two and one was on display in another display. Clearly some active collecting was needed. We were lucky. I was informed by a colleague that Cussins and Light, a local electrical retailer had a collection of appliances that they were keen to pass on to the museum, which had already accepted a few pieces. I made an appointment and went to see them. The result was we ended up with a collection built up over the years by people who understood the industry. They had retained redundant models with the eye of a connoisseur, from Philco Peoples sets to Bush TV 12s. Virtually all we took is on display.

Now, what to do with all this furniture with knobs on? The panels tell of their development and their effect.⁷ After all, the effect is far more important than the technology that enables the drive, the profound, the shocking and the horror of human existence to come crashing into your living room. The photographs we used backed this up. An image of Vietnam. The first rock n' roll TV war brought home every night on the 6 o'clock news. An image that has to allow the visitor to make their own choices because the 'reading' of images can be so complex.⁸ Because television is so obviously visual we felt we had to have moving images. We selected a Bush TV 12 and removed the old cathode ray tube and speaker. The whole thing is mounted on a chassis and comes out easily. This now sits in store and has been replaced by a black and white video monitor which replays old programmes in glorious black and white via a Sony U-Matic video player. We have a 25 minute programme and a five minute programme depending on visitor numbers. The clips date from the 1930s to early Coronation Street, which provides a link with the present. It also shows how soft-centred and unreal this particular series has become. The real Coronation Street went in the 1960s. We also have Bill and Ben, Quatermass, Your Life in their Hands, Esso adverts, the birth of the M1 and Bevan telling Muggidge that the Tories are selling the Health Service down the river in the 1950s. It is very popular with visitors, who definitely feel it is part of the history of the home.

To conclusions, I hope I have sketched our approach and given reasons why we need to think very seriously about the domestic world. It is not as simple as we think. How did this museum fare? Well I think we did O.K. The whole project was completed within 18 months, from conception through research and conservation to opening in 1985. In between we opened two other galleries and moved into a new store. In short it was a rush job, don't blame me, blame the time it takes to reappoint staff and an inflexible capital programme. We started a year behind schedule. As a result I am the first to admit we didn't have enough time to think about the subject. We could have looked at it from a different angle, we could have used graphics in another way, who knows? In his review of the exhibition David Stockdale commented that we occasionally fell into an 'Ideal Home approach to history'. In terms of style and presentation I accept that, but I do feel we have gone beyond that in our interpretation. David finished his review by saying,

Perhaps there is scope for further research on the reception and ownership of such machinery in the local area which would supplement the outline offered by 'Every Home Should Have One'.⁹

This has now been achieved by co-operating with the York Oral History Project to produce the book I mentioned earlier. When the gallery was completed I hoped to begin an oral history project on domestic life but dropped the idea when I found that the Project was doing the same thing. Instead we pooled our resources. From the museum's point of view this was crucial, despite its size and popularity the Castle Museum's budgets are mean, as are its staffing levels, and I suspect that much crucial backroom work would have been lost if we had attempted our own project. The Project needed us as well, for we could offer to publish it!

I will conclude with a couple of relevant extracts which illustrate how the exhibition and the book should complement each other. Ironing, which is represented in the gallery is discussed. Irons are important, being one of the first cheap electrical appliances to sell well.

Well, we had one of those flat-irons and a piece of emery paper . . . because it got sooted and dirtied . . . Every time you ironed you cleaned it with this emery board and, of course, you had a shuttle service backwards and forwards - one hotting while the other was being used . . .

And how did you know whether you'd got the right temperature?

That was the professional part about it: you spat on it to know if it was ready. It's something that comes with use; we had



Plate 3: The radio and television section of York Castle Museum's new domestic appliance gallery.

those knitted squares, you know, that you put over the handle, and then you just tested it.

Another woman recalled the change from flat irons to electric ones.

Mum had an electric iron before I left home and since I was married we never used flat-irons - that was more when I was a child really. There again, electric irons have improved such a lot, haven't they? There's the one that just heated, now it's steam and all these other things. And, of course, using an electric iron, as opposed to the flat-irons, was much better and quicker 'cause you weren't heating them up all the time on the fire or gas; and they kept constant heat whereas you start getting cold and you had to swap - you usually had two flat-irons so that was a bit time consuming as well, you know.

Another remembered her mother getting her first vacuum cleaner and also makes the point that labour is only saved if accompanied by a change of attitude.

Yes, she was quite excited by it. I suppose now, when you think about it, we've not had to wait 'till we're as old as they were. What would she be? Probably early forties before she ever had an electric vacuum.

Was she happy with it - did she feel it did the job as well?

Oh yes, there again I think it might be just the way they were brought up that you still did the spring cleaning. Today we don't seem to make such a big issue of it because we're able to Hoover each week.

A lot of words there. To get back to the beginning, exhibitions are not books, but we will have the book to back it up. A final thought then, I'm pleased we did it. It has allowed us to change our approach and try to do it an exciting way, without falling back on the rosy glow of nostalgia or too much surface gloss. I think the book and the exhibition will complement each other, both bringing entertainment and education through preservation. Three words familiar to all of us, preservation, education and entertainment, almost a holy trinity for museums and certainly a good place to finish at.

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THE DECORATION OF THE SMALL SUBURBAN HOUSE 1880-1940

Mark Turner

A few years ago we mounted an exhibition at our local museum in North London to show the history of the decoration of the small suburban house. It was by far the most popular exhibition we have ever done, before or since. It gave the Silver Studio Collection a good deal of publicity and resulted in a number of reviews in the colour supplements of the Sunday papers. It proved the extent of interest by the general public in the history of the domestic interior. Everyone liked seeing the cheap rugs and elaborately patterned linoleums that they remembered from childhood, or early married life. And they particularly enjoyed seeing these once-familiar materials presented as museum objects and given a slot in decorating history. However, one of the objects of the exhibition was to encourage a greater appreciation of suburban domestic architecture of the 1920s and 1930s. It has to be said that in this area we were much less successful. In London at any rate, inter-war suburbia is still seen as the most non-U of places in which to live. While the middle classes clamour to restore Victorian terraced houses to what is fondly, but usually quite incorrectly, seen as their former glory, awful things are being done to the humble, inoffensive 30s semi in the name of modernisation. With the aid of the ubiquitous Magnet Joinery brochure and the destruction of countless rain forests to provide the unseasoned mahogany the denizens of Edgware and Bexley-heath spend every weekend making their houses resemble a set for *Dynasty*.

When I was a child in the 1950s, it was quite usual to come across an untouched late 19th century interior. I can recall three with great clarity. My great aunt's house in Dulwich - which had gilded pier glasses, crystal lustres and cabinets of oriental porcelain. Then there was a house in South Kensington which was inhabited by an old woman who made loose covers and curtains - she had an elaborate overmantel, a plush tablecloth with a bobble fringe, gas lighting and what seemed to be hundreds of small china ornaments. Most vivid of all was the dentist's waiting room, which was an untouched mid nineteenth century parlour - complete with a marble topped chiffonier and a rosewood circular table piled with old copies of *Country Life*. Sadly, no-one took colour photographs of interiors such as these, which now would have saved so much research work - perhaps the hardest part of re-creating any interior from the nineteenth century is getting the colours right.

The Silver Studio Collection is at present running a very successful Manpower Services Project based at Middlesex Polytechnic. It involves the preparation of an exhibition tracing the development of north London suburbia from 1850 onwards. As well as collecting as much oral information as possible (most people who bought their houses in the 1920s and 1930s are now in their 80s, so this is an essential thing to do), we are also photographing houses that have survived intact from the 1930s or earlier. Sadly, these dark varnished interiors, formerly so common, are rarely to be met with now. Fortunately, the Silver Studio Collection is comprehensive enough to provide a uniquely detailed record of how small British houses were furnished and decorated from the late nineteenth century onwards. Arthur Silver, who founded the Studio in 1880 and his sons, Rex and Harry, were responsible for the production of many thousands of designs for the wallpapers, fabrics, linoleums and carpets which were subsequently bought by the ordinary householder. Over 40,000 designs are in the Silver Studio Collection, as well as the biggest collection of early twentieth century British wallpapers in the country. There are also 5,000 furnishing textiles covering the period 1880 to 1950 and a good reference library of periodicals and books on design, decoration and architecture. The designs, wallpapers and textiles for the earlier period of the Studio's history are invaluable for identifying popular decorating colours at a time when contemporary illustrations in books and journals are invariably in black and white and artists concentrated on depicting either grand houses or country cottages in their paintings.

Arthur Silver opened his studio of designs in 1880, at a time of great changes in attitudes to home decoration. Prior to the late nineteenth century it was not considered good form to take much interest in how one's house was furnished. Prices of all household goods had been extremely high. Increased foreign competition and more mechanized production resulted in considerably cheaper wallpapers, textiles and furniture in the 1870s and 80s. If we look at prints and particulars of middle class interiors of the 1860s and 70s most look positively spartan by modern standards - thereby giving the lie to the popular theory that Victorian houses were very cluttered. Even in prosperous middle class houses it was unusual to find a sitting room with more than a fitted Brussels carpet, a sideboard, circular table, sofa, two armchairs and a few upright chairs. Over the chimney piece would be the ubiquitous gilt pier glass, on the walls

water-colour sketches and framed needlework. Ornaments tended to be kept to a minimum - a conch shell or peacock feather on the chimney piece, perhaps a glass case containing ferns. As we all know, each generation despises the taste of the generation which has gone before, and by 1880 a total reaction had set in against mid-Victorian taste. Interior decoration became one of the most popular of middle class interests. This, of course, was of the greatest benefit to designers such as Arthur Silver, and to manufacturers of wallpapers and textiles. During the 1880s and 90s many magazine articles and books were written for the middle classes on how to do up their houses. The authors were usually women, and this reflected the gradual development of home decoration as a largely feminine occupation. Prior to the 1880s, the cost of carpets, wallpapers, furniture and curtains was so great that their purchase was usually a family decision, made carefully after long consultation with the upholsterer. With rapidly-increasing incomes and lower prices in the late nineteenth century, and with the advent of department stores which offered a much greater choice, it became the custom for the housewife to choose how the home should be decorated. Indeed, for many middle class women, this was virtually the only outlet for their creative talents.

It is difficult to avoid generalizations in this brief article, but here are some of the major decorative innovations that occurred during the 1880s and 90s and which had a lasting impact on suburban house decoration. Perhaps the most important was the division of the wall into three separate horizontal areas: the dado which was three feet high from the wainskirting and was marked by a horizontal dado or chair rail; the filling which was four feet or more in height from the dado and was finished with the picture rail, and above this the area known as the frieze, between the picture rail and ceiling. These areas could be given quite separate treatments or papered with relating wallpapers. The picture rail and dado rail were to survive in the most modest of suburban houses until the late 1930s, particularly in halls and staircases and dining rooms.

Another important change was the increased informality of room layouts, particularly of the sitting room and dining room. It gradually became fashionable to make these rooms much less formal and altogether more comfortable and cosy. This was done by filling them with upholstered furniture, bookcases, small tables, plants, flowers, pictures and ornaments. Readers of books on home decoration were encouraged to visit the new department stores and spend five pounds on drawing room ornaments. Visitors from abroad were enchanted by the riot of clutter and pattern that characterized the small late Victorian house. Prosperous suburban residents bought Venetian glass, Oriental porcelain and silk velvet curtains. Skilled factory workers bought garish German china and brightly coloured chenille tablecloths and curtains, but the overall effect was quite similar.

A particularly lasting innovation of late nineteenth century suburban decoration was the use of dark colour schemes. The late Victorian middle classes preferred dark colour schemes for the rich enclosed effect they produced, and for the fashionable contrast with the arsenic greens and coal-tar crimsons of the mid-nineteenth century. The owners of suburban houses found dark brown paint and grained woodwork the most practical antidote to the dirt caused by incessant coal fires, so as late as 1935 it was still standard practice to brush-grain all interior woodwork. (In the north west of England it was to be met with in the 1960s and even later). Finally, it was in the 1880s and 90s that it became fashionable to furnish in a 'period' style - Queen Anne, Sheraton, Chippendale or Jacobean. The exteriors of some suburban houses were beginning to look 'olde Worlde' with such rustic features as tile hung gables and latticed casement windows, and interior decoration very gradually began to reflect this development.

The period from 1900 until the First World War saw a continuation of the demand by large numbers of city-dwellers for a small villa with a decent garden within easy reach of their office or shop. Most are surrounded by Edwardian villas of varying sizes and which still reflect quite a marked regional variation in the materials from which they are constructed. However, they are united in their use of all sorts of architectural features which the speculative builder employed to tempt the prospective purchaser from his drab mid-nineteenth century terraced house. These include such charming details as stained glass panels to the front door and Minton tiling in the hall. We know far more about the furnishings and decorations of modest houses of the early twentieth century than those of the late nineteenth century. This is partly because more houses have survived relatively unchanged, and the period is still within living memory. In addition, the Silver Studio Collection has a considerable amount of material relating to this period in the form of shop catalogues, wallpapers, fabrics and designs. Many of the shop catalogues in the collection are those of firms such as Waring & Gillow which catered for the middle classes. These catalogues are

illustrated with colour pictures of idealised interiors. It is obvious that many people buying their first house, were dependant on these furniture stores for advice on how to do up their new home. Wallpaper catalogues of the period also show colour illustrations of interiors to aid customers in their choice.

During the period 1900 to 1910 most of the Silver Studio's production was of elegant stylised art nouveau designs for wallpapers and fabrics. However, it would seem that this was not a style that had a universal appeal. In the collection is a very useful wallpaper album from 1913. This contains a selection of middle priced wallpapers from the well-known firm of Heffer Scott. Although a concession is made to art nouveau in a few stylised two-colour patterns, the majority are of designs which would have been perfectly acceptable fifty years earlier. These include papers printed to imitate watered silk, in pastel colours, and many traditional bird, vine and flower chintz patterns, not dissimilar from those produced by Laura Ashley today. Yet others reproduce rococo ornament in the form of scrolls and swags as elaborate 18th century styles had been revived in the 1870s and 80s and were now filtering down the social scale.

Probably the most noticeable feature of the period is that interiors were gradually becoming simpler. By present day standards they were still very dark, but it would seem that at least some of the plants and ornaments were being removed. The vogue for reproduction Sheraton and Hepplewhite furniture meant that although the respectable suburban houseowner was expected to have large matching suites of sitting room, dining room and bedroom furniture, the style was altogether lighter. Even the reproduction Jacobean furniture of the period was adapted in an attenuated manner so that it appeared to be thin and delicate.

Writers on home decoration were often quite specific about which historical style was suitable for any particular room, and the furniture stores would describe their products (usually quite inaccurately) as 'William and Mary' or 'Louis Quinze'. Some of the better firms such as Heals had ranges of modern furniture, strongly influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement. These pieces were constructed from oak or stained deal, with beaten copper or wrought iron hinges, handles and escutcheons. But it was reproduction furniture that seems to have been the most popular, particularly the 'Queen Anne', 'Adam' and 'Sheraton' styles. To make the purchase of new furniture less of a strain on an already over-taxed budget, the owner of a new suburban house was encouraged to buy on the instalment plan. The better stores such as Harrods and Schoolbreds discreetly mentioned this facility at the back of their catalogues, while the cheaper firms such as the Hackney Furnishing Company made HP the basis of their selling technique.

The aesthetic movement practice of dividing the walls into three horizontal bands of dado, filling and frieze had become the universal treatment for rooms which received a lot of use, in particular the hall and dining room. The dado was invariably treated with either an imitation wood paper such as Lincrusta or painted and varnished to resemble wood. Graining was still the commonest treatment of all internal woodwork although gloss paint (then known as enamel paint) was used by the more design conscious. To hide wear and tear and dirt, the hall and dining room (usually the family's sitting room as well) were always decorated in dark colours.

As well as a grained dado, the dining room might well have had a decorative wallpaper frieze. The frieze which was originally introduced in the 1880s and for which Arthur Silver produced some magnificent designs, became one of the most ubiquitous fashions of the early twentieth century house. Every wallpaper catalogue contained a wide range of them. Landscape friezes were the most popular, but other motifs such as roses and ribbons or stylised flowers were common.

Most of the purchasers of new houses in the outer suburbs were of humble origin and were anxiously seeking an improvement in social status. One way of achieving this was to have an immaculate sitting room kept only for Sundays and special occasions. These rooms would be hung with a delicate watered silk paper and have brocade curtains at the window. Suites of drawing room furniture were sold at this time, consisting of a sofa, two armchairs and two or three matching upright chairs. It was also possible to purchase occasional tables and china cabinets to match. Carpet squares with elaborate neo-eighteenth century designs were sold to complete the room.

The dining room, as in the nineteenth century, was dominated by a massive sideboard and, as well as the dining table and chairs, there would be armchairs and often a bookcase and desk. The dining room always had a dado rail to prevent chairs from being pushed against the wall and damaging the paper. The family could save money on fires by using this room as a sitting room, with the added advantage of knowing that the sitting room at the front of the house

was preserved in good order.

The nineteenth century tradition of using velvet, brocade and damask for curtains for the sitting room and drawing room continued, as it has today. Cheaper fabrics such as chintz would be used for the bedrooms but would be lined in the same colour as the downstairs curtains, so that the exterior would produce a unified effect. Wooden venetian blinds were nearly always installed as a standard fitting in new houses and no window was considered complete without a pair of tied-back Nottingham lace curtains in an elaborate design.

Although a shortage of labour and materials resulted in a temporary slowing down of suburban home building after the First World War, more people than ever before were in a position to buy a house of their own. In the 1930s, particularly, estate developers were able to arrange high mortgages with building societies, thus enabling houses to be bought with a very small deposit. To keep costs to a minimum, room sizes were reduced and the standard of construction often lower than before the war. For most people, a new home in the suburbs meant two rooms and a kitchen downstairs and two bedrooms, bathroom, W.C. and box room upstairs. The hall was reduced to a mere passage and the kitchen often was very small indeed.

Despite the low purchase price, furnishing and decorating the new suburban house was very difficult for most people. It has become clear from conversations with local residents who set up home in the 1930s that it was all a matter of making do with what furniture was available. This usually meant cast-off Victorian sideboards and wardrobes, touches of modernity being provided by linoleums, wallpapers and cheap modernist rugs. Very few suburban parlours were the riot of Art Deco that some museums would have us believe. As far as wallpaper and paint were concerned, the purchaser was often at the mercy of the builder. Most new house buyers were given some sort of choice as far as wallpaper was concerned, but often it was from a collection of old stock wallpapers which the builder had bought cheaply. Woodwork throughout the house was either painted brown or cream or brush-grained - usually in imitation of light or dark oak. Wallpaper patterns varied enormously, though on the whole those of the 1920s were in much brighter colours than those of the 1930s. In the 1920s many people used wallpapers with exotic landscape designs in rich reds and blues. In the 1930s plain wallpapers were more usual, often in cream or brown, but rendered more interesting by a brightly-patterned cut-out border.

The textiles used in modest houses underwent a dramatic change during the 1920s and 1930s. The impecunious suburban resident was often confronted by large expanses of window to be curtained, quite unlike the narrow vertical sash windows of the 19th century terrace house. The large bay windows of the inter-war semi meant a considerable expenditure if one was to use the traditional method of blinds, lace curtains and heavy, lined, inner curtains. Women's magazines of the 1920s and 1930s gave many suggestions for dealing with this problem, and the one most often adopted, and ideal for the cottagey appearance of these houses, was the use of casement curtains. Casement curtains were thin, unlined curtains of a variety of materials, such as rayon, cotton, linen, silk or combinations of these materials. They were hung close together so that they fulfilled the purpose of lace curtains during the day, and when closed, of ordinary curtains at night. They were invariably accompanied by a frilled valance to enhance the cottagey appearance. It was still the custom to give sofas and armchairs a removable cover of chintz or cretonne. One of the first things the owner of a new house would do would be to purchase linoleum or floorcloth for every room in the house. It could be bought locally or from a big department store. Typical patterns would be imitation parquet for the sitting room, imitation Turkey carpet for the dining room. If at all possible, a carpet square would be purchased for each room - sometimes a traditional Persian design, but frequently a modernist pattern. Indeed, carpets and wallpapers were two areas where the suburban resident made a concession to modern design. Even in the late 1930s, much new furniture was still marketed under the guise of a period style, such as Jacobean or Queen Anne. Speculative builders sold the 1920s or 1930s semi-detached suburban house on the appeal of its cottagey charm. It was the nearest most people could afford to a country cottage - casement windows, half-timbering and a decent garden, with the advantage of hot and cold water and electric lighting. Not surprisingly, the owners of these houses wanted furnishings and furniture that would reflect this cottage ideal. This explains the lasting popularity of oak graining in the suburban house, and the fact that dark oak remained much the most popular wood for furniture until long after World War II.

The Silver Studio Collection is housed at Middlesex Polytechnic, Bounds Green Road, London, N11 2NQ (tel. 01-368 1299). The nearest tube station in Bounds Green (Piccadilly Line). Visitors are

most welcome from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday (except bank holidays), though an appointment would be much appreciated.

RAVENSWORTH TERRACE:

RESEARCH, RECONSTRUCTION AND INTERPRETATION

Rosemary E. Allan

Here I want to discuss research, reconstruction and interpretation of the domestic interior. I have chosen Ravensworth Terrace, a row of houses, Georgian in style, though dating between 1830 and 1845, for particular study. These houses, built originally between these dates, have been rebuilt as part of the town complex at Beamish Museum and have been furnished and fitted out as they might have been in the mid 1920s.

Beamish is a rather different type of museum from the average; it is about people and for people, aiming to tell the story of how the people of the northern region lived and worked. Beamish also stands for 'Better Environmental Awareness through a Museum for the Interpretation of Social History!' The 260 acre site is divided into areas each representing a part of North Eastern life. The history of the Town areas at the museum goes back to the early 1970s when a small working party was brought together to discuss a town plan, incorporating typical features. The first phase of the town would incorporate a large Co-operative store, public house and brewery stables, printers and stationers, park and bandstand as well as terrace of town houses.

We needed a row of houses preferably built for artisans of about early-mid 19th century which could be used to explain something of town life at that time. Having carried out surveys throughout the region on town houses, the museum decided on Ravensworth Terrace, a row of houses dating originally between 1830 and 1845, as being best able to tell the story (Plate 1). The aim of the museum was 'to show houses built for middle class professional people and tradesmen and how the houses were used'. Originally these houses had been built on the outskirts of Gateshead, and we felt that their siting was an important factor at Beamish.

It remained for the museum to research the terrace, fund-raise for the project and commence the development involving careful dismantling, rebuilding, fitting out and furnishing. A considerable amount of research work had to be completed before the museum could plan any developments. We looked at the early history of Gateshead and the development of housing. We used census returns, maps, wills, inventories and Medical Officers of Health reports as well as many other sources.



An 'Edwardian' interior from Osbert Lancaster's *A Cartoon History of Architecture*.



Plate 1: The houses of Ravensworth Terrace at their original site in Gateshead.

An exodus from the overcrowded conditions of the homes around the riverside in Gateshead, commenced from the 1820s onwards. Ravensworth Terrace was built in open fields on the outskirts of Gateshead by a group of men who got together to form the Gateshead Friendly Building Society. The first houses of the terrace were shown on an early map by John Bell of 1835 and subsequent directories indicated that the terrace was completed by about 1845. There were early connections between Beamish and Gateshead. Two of the original shareholders were Thomas and John Foster who were probably employed by William Hawk's foundry established in Gateshead about 1747. Hawk's also owned forges in the Beamish Valley. It was useful to ascertain the occupations of the other shareholders in order to complete an overall picture of the terrace and its occupants. In 1833 Alexander Ihler's directory lists John Wilson Carmichael, the landscape and seascape painter, and also William Collard, the engraver.

At this time Ravensworth Terrace would have been a fashionable terrace, in open countryside overlooking Ravensworth Castle and Estate. Whilst built mostly in the Victorian period, the houses are rather more Georgian in style. Brick was becoming a fashionable building material at the time, and was, therefore, used for the front-ages, whilst stone, which was going out of fashion was used for the backs of the houses. Later, by 1896 many more terraces and Tyne-side flats had been built and Ravensworth Terrace was surrounded by street after street. It ceased to be a fashionable area even though people such as Alexander Gillies, mayor of Gateshead occupied one of the houses.

Having undertaken as much research as possible on the background history of the houses and the people who lived there, without which we could have no full understanding, we had yet to research interior furnishing and fittings and decide on the story we were to tell to our visitor. A number of newspaper advertisements were located which listed in considerable detail, auctions of contents and furnishings, dating back to the 1850s and 1860s. Bills of sale produced some fascinating details on which to base our information. Photographs proved to be an invaluable source of information, although notoriously difficult to find. We did manage to find interior photographs of some similar houses.

Interpretation was our next problem. As the main date of the Town street at Beamish had been fixed for the 1920s, we had to work within certain limitations. Although the interiors of the houses were to be furnished as they could well have been seen in the 1920s, this did not mean that all the furnishings would be of that period. The story we were to tell, was to illustrate the life and work of a solicitor, a dentist, a music teacher and a private resident living in the houses.

The music teacher, Miss Florence Smith, was an old lady, still occupying 2 Ravensworth Terrace in the 1920s. The house interior is therefore very old fashioned and represents largely an earlier period. The museum managed to collect and photograph the complete contents of a middle class house belonging to an old lady aged 106 years. This certainly gave an insight into the furnishings and fittings that would have been appropriate. Photographs of interiors going back to the 1890s are comparatively easier to obtain and are a very useful source of information. A series of photos dating back to c.1896 provided invaluable detailed information on fireplace details, draperies, wallpapers, borders and friezes as well the ephemera of the period (Plate 2). For a house of this type it is the detail which makes the interior convincing. Accuracy of information is important. Styles of wallpapers, different styles of hanging



Plate 2: Adomestic interior c. 1900.

pictures, lighting details and costume worn all contribute to the overall effect. Many wallpapers were used continuously with merely an extra coat of varnish being added each year. Other papers were covered and recovered, and as demolition sites have proved, old houses are a classic source for details of paper styles. In researching the houses, we were able to interview and tape-record a number of the past occupants. Although these generally related to a later period, than the period of study to be represented, they did provide some useful information.

3 Ravensworth Terrace was to be the Dental Surgery belonging to Mr. J. Jones - a typical dentist's practice as it could have been seen in the 1920s when most were situated in the dentists' own homes. With considerable help from the North of England College of Odontologists and memories of many older dentists from within the region, we reconstructed a typical waiting room, comfortably furnished though with old fashioned furniture probably well pre-dating the 1920s. A staircase lined with old fashioned prints led

upstairs to the main surgery and dental technician's room. Archive photos came into their own in illustrating the kind of facilities typical of the period (Plate 3). The lack of electricity apparatus was noticeable. In the 1920s electricity was only just being introduced and in the surgery only the lights were modified. All other apparatus in use was traditionally manually operated or operated by foot. In setting up this display, we had to be aware of, and know how the surgery worked, and how the instruments were used. Bringing such a display alive is more difficult! Beamish experimented with the use of tape recording in the period area, and also in providing appropriate smells in the form of oil of cloves which proved very effective. Having completed the exhibit, we invited dentists along to make comments or suggestions, as though they would be using the surgery themselves. This was essential and most productive.

4 Ravensworth Terrace was reconstructed as the home of the dentist. Here we compromised by making a link between the two houses, in order to provide a good circulation for visitors, as well as a route approved by the Safety Officer. The house would have been much more up to date and set in the 1920s. We were most fortunate in being able to save many original features from the original terrace, including most of the Georgian style fireplaces, cupboards, glass and door furniture, as well as some examples of plaster mouldings, and most doors. Trade catalogues came into their own in indicating 1920s style furniture and in this house we used a reproduction Edwardian Sheraton style. More modern kitchen gadgets, electrical appliances and gas cooker all give a suggestion of modern national trends being introduced at the time, with particular regional examples. The houses would all have employed servants and in this house, we attempt to portray life from the servant's point of view as well.

5 Ravensworth Terrace illustrates the office of J. & R. S. Watson, Solicitors. The office at Beamish is based on research carried out in several of the older practices still existing in the region. As legal practices were notoriously old fashioned in the 1920s, we tried to reflect the Dickensian qualities by installing no modern contrivances such as telephones or typewriters - (speaking tube still being in operation). Smells are also very appropriate in such a musty, fusty area and we again used suitable essences to create this atmosphere.

It goes without saying that in all the houses, we keep as many fires burning in the hearths, gas lamps lit where appropriate and have staff shortly to be attired in period costume to help interpret the exhibit which we had gone to so much trouble to create. We feel that thorough background research is essential to create an exhibit of quality and accuracy which can be enjoyed and experienced by



Plate 3: Interior of a dentist's surgery c. 1915.

the visitor. In the last resort, it is the attention to detail which contributes to the whole experience.

**IN THE KITCHEN:
A CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTARY PROJECT¹**

Gareth Griffiths

In 1982 a 'time capsule' was buried at Castle Howard where it is to remain for two thousand years. The committee whose brief was to select material, to represent the social history of Britain over the past hundred years, met with the same difficulties which many of us today meet within the field of contemporary collecting. The overall problem was outlined by a member of the committee as being

an absolutely fundamental question of the representativeness of the input . . . we should have some things in the capsule which give some indication of the point we've reached today?²

In order to achieve their aim the full range of recording media were represented in the capsule - video, sound recordings, microfilm, photographs and artefacts. Against a background of statistical information provided by *Social Trends* the pace of social change in Britain was illustrated through photographs, recordings, artefacts etc. The material was selected in order to provide illustrations of certain areas of life: the home and the family; leisure; entertainment and sport; education and work; shopping and the consumer. This range of past and present human activity was preserved in a steel cylinder 600 cms in depth and 500 cms in diameter!

Over the past six months at Gunnersbury Park we have been addressing some of the difficulties met by the above committee, though fortunately the scale of our problem was more limited. Faced with the task of covering some 42 square miles of West London and the need to determine which areas of social activity to document, there was clearly the prerequisite to construct a strong, coherent approach to the retrospective and contemporary areas of our work. In order to clarify in our minds the priorities for research and the allocation of resources overall, the requirement to organise our collecting/documentation activities effectively and select areas of study relevant to West London was particularly acute. Most decisively, it was obvious that we needed ways of viewing our field of study and of selecting areas of research and the appropriate means of documenting them. It was clear that if within a museum we do not determine our own central directions of work we shall be pulled hither and thither by outside demands. What was required was a particular kind of defining activity: one which reviewed existing collecting/documentary approaches; identified their characteristic objectives and strengths as well as their limits of competence. Following this process is the question of reforming the elements of the different approaches in their relations to each other and formulating a coherent strategy to the areas of contemporary study and the means by which they are to be recorded.

The first stage of this construct of an approach was a detailed analysis of the social history collections held by Gunnersbury Park. The range of material collected in the areas of working life, personal life etc., was looked at; analysed for what was collected; when collected; the date of the material, how it was acquired by the museum and the quality of the accompanying documentation. This research stage was a vital one, for not only did it indicate the strengths and weaknesses of the collections in detail but it also provided a means by which past collecting and recording approaches, mostly passive, could be evaluated from the standpoint of the requirements of a social history museum today.

The results may be summarised as follows: the past reliance upon a passive approach to collecting and recording resulted in discursive patterns of activity. The material acquired was poorly supported by the accompanying documentation, with the consequence that material was distanced from its original context. In museums the well-trodden route of passive collecting seems to be a form of alchemy for producing useful knowledge and has in the past resulted in establishing a very conservative agenda for social history museums. Figure 1 summarises some of the collecting patterns revealed. For each category a more detailed breakdown exposes the weaknesses further. Figure 2 details some of the costume collection statistics.

As this survey of collections was being carried out the photographic archive was catalogued under the SHIC system. This permitted the contribution of the archive as a record to be assessed and broadly speaking the range of collecting patterns revealed within the collections of material culture were mirrored by the photographic archive.

In order to explore new ways of approaching the documentation of the social history of West London, Gunnersbury Park has established a five year documentation programme. Under this system a major contemporary research project will be undertaken each year employing the widest possible range of recording

Fig. 1: Breakdown of Social History Collections by the date of material and the date collected (% refer to the % in each category)

Domestic Life				
a) Date of Material				
Pre 1800	1800-50	1851-1900	1901-50	1951 -
5%	6%	60%	21%	5%
b) Date of Acquisition				
1930-50	1951-69	1970-79	1980 -	
38%	31%	13%	15%	

Law and Order				
a) Date of Material				
Pre 1800	1800-50	1851-1900	1901-50	1951 -
-	25%	50%	25%	-
b) Date of Acquisition				
1930-50	1951-69	1970-79	1980 -	
35%	30%	25%	10%	

Unemployment: Only 3 items, collected 1980.

Health and Medicine				
a) Date of Material				
Pre 1800	1801-50	1851-1900	1901-50	1851 -
1%	6%	30%	51%	8%
b) Date of Acquisition				
1930-50	1951-69	1970-79	1980 -	
-	22%	51%	25%	

Fig. 2: Costume Collection statistics

Women's clothing: Date of material as a percentage of the total.

Pre 1850	1850-1899	1900-1949	1950 -
18%	39%	37%	4%

Breakdown of women's costume into categories, figures represent the number of items in the collection:

Category:	Pre 1850	1850-1899	1900-1949	1950 -
Dresses:	7	26	20	2
Evening dresses:	2	2	22	8
Wedding dresses:	-	13	4	1
Trousers:	-	-	-	1
Bodices/Blouses:	4	17	29	7
Nightwear:	-	20	14	1
Footwear:	11	3	19	2
Headwear:	24	24	12	3
Sportswear:	-	1	3	-

techniques. The detailed documentation accompanying each project will establish an interpretative framework which will make the evidence generated intelligible and permit each recording technique to be assessed. It must be emphasised that this is not a collecting policy; the areas of social activity which are to be recorded are selected first and the appropriate means to document them are then chosen. For the year 1986/87 the clothing industry in West London is being recorded. Sponsorship for a documentary photographer has been won and the project is already producing a broad range of exciting material. Other areas of research in future years include, Political Life, Law and Order, and Health.

The 'In the Kitchen' project is a smaller contemporary recording project which is running alongside the detailed documentation of the clothing industry. The kitchen was selected as an area of study partly because Gunnersbury possesses a fine Victorian kitchen in situ which could be used for comparative purposes and partly because the project was obviously going to be heavily dependent upon volunteers for the recording work and the kitchen provided a convenient accessible research area for everyone. In addition, our research into the collection had indicated that the whole area of how the home functioned had largely gone unrecorded despite extensive domestic life collections.

Since a wide range of recording media were being employed, largely by volunteers, a detailed documentation framework was established to support all the material generated and to enable it to be usefully interpreted and assessed in the future. The groups involved, to date, include two local photographic societies, a women's photographic group, a local history group run by the WEA, an oral history group and a woman artist who specialises in painting views of kitchen interiors! All participants were asked to complete a basic questionnaire which gave the museum background information to the kitchen being recorded and the household in which it was situated; this information was essential in assessing the bias of the sample being collected. Personal details were deliberately left out from the form in order to encourage the volunteer to complete it - later, details about the use of the kitchen, routines, who worked in the kitchen etc., would be obtained from the informant through interviews (Figure 3).

Fig. 3: Questionnaire on the use of the kitchen sent out by Gunnersbury Park Museum as part of the 'In the Kitchen' project.

a. Background information

1. Is your home
 - (a) Purpose built flat
 - (b) Converted self contained flat
 - (c) Flat not self contained
 - (d) House
2. Household tenure

Is your home

 - (a) Owner occupied
 - (b) Council or Housing Assoc. rented
 - (c) Privately rented-unfurnished
 - (d) Privately rented-furnished
3. Which area of the Borough is your home
4. When was the house built
5. Household size
 - 1 person
 - 2 persons
 - 3-5 persons
 - 6 persons
6. How many children (under 16) are there in the household.
7. How many rooms are there in your house

b. Use of Kitchen

1. Do you have a separate kitchen
2. Do you share your kitchen with anyone
3. Which appliances do you have

	In Kitchen	Elsewhere
Gas Cooker		
Electric cooker		
Microwave		
Refrigerator		
Freezer		
Dishwasher		
Washing machine		
Drier		
Iron/Ironing Board		
4. Was your kitchen planned
5. Did you fit your kitchen yourself
6. Is there a separate larder
7. Do you dry clothes in your kitchen
8. What source of heating is there in the kitchen
9. Do you have:
 - (a) a cooked breakfast
 - (b) a cooked lunch
 - (c) a cooked tea/dinner
10. What percentage of your meals are bought prepared
11. Is there a television or radio in the kitchen
12. Which meals are eaten in the kitchen
13. When not cooking etc. do you sit in the kitchen
14. Is there a kitchen table
15. What would you like to change in your kitchen
16. Please draw a plan of your kitchen

How representative the sample being generated is, may be assessed by comparing the categories of information contained within the questionnaire with the Borough Statistics. For example, Figure 4 details the households in the Borough of Hounslow by form of tenure and by the type of housing stock held. When these statistics are compared with the comparable information contained within the questionnaires it is apparent that our sample obtained to date is skewed towards the owner occupied, semi-detached home. On the completion of the project using volunteer groups the full sample can be assessed and attempts be made to reduce the bias through recording areas which have been neglected. It is likely that the staff will themselves have to record, for example, local authority flats and those flats which are not self-contained as these are categories which are so far unrepresented in our sample. Similarly, we shall have to examine quite closely household composition and the level of representation of ethnic minorities.

Fig. 4: Households in the Borough of Hounslow by form of tenure and type of household space; 1985

Owner occupied:	54%	Purpose built flats	16%
Local Authority	28%	Houses	55%
Housing Associations	4%	Converted self contained flats	17%
Private unfurnished/rented	6%	Other flats not self contained	12%
Private furnished/rented	7%		

This use of statistics coupled with other forms of recording media dates back to the earliest social surveys. Charles Booth noted that the statistical method was needed to give bearing to the results of personal observation and life to statistics: the figures or the facts may be correct enough in themselves - but they mislead from want of due proportion or from lack of colour.³

Having considered the bias of the sample obtained the future interpretation of this sample is aided by being accompanied by detailed documentation. A series of record sheets were given to all those involved in the research project. The need for these to be completed was emphasised and to date everyone has returned meticulously filled in sheets, which supply full details to the record being produced. Figure 5 shows the site record sheet which was completed by the photographers involved in the project.⁴

Fig. 5: Photographic Record Sheet: Site Record

Film Contract No.	Acc. No.
Date:	
Time:	
Location:	
Photographer:	
Camera:	
Format:	35mm
	6 x 6 cm
Film:	BW
	Col. Type:
Lens:	
Developing Process:	
Photographer accompanied by:	
Details of accompanying material:	
Frame.	Summary Description of Photographs.
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
etc.	

The details supplied through such record sheets as the above go some way to establishing an interpretative framework which will make the evidence generated intelligible and its future interpretation easier and more accurate than has been the case in the past. We can never recapture the authentic flavour of a historical moment as it was experienced by people at the time but through such contemporary documentation projects as 'In the Kitchen' the range and richness of the record produced is far superior to that acquired through passive retrospective collecting. In addition, by including volunteer groups the museum is gaining an additional layer of interpretation - they record and interpret the area of social activity under study as they see fit, for example the approach of the women's photographic group and the record they are producing is very different from that being produced by one of the local photographic societies. This differing interpretation and viewpoint is a valuable addition to the record and through the detailed backup provided by the record sheets etc. is one which in the future may be assessed and evaluated.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, the 'In the Kitchen' project is part of a programme which is deliberately experimental in nature. It is anticipated that a full assessment of the techniques of recording employed, their documentation and the organisation of the project, will be carried out. Through such a process of evaluation a stronger and more coherent approach to the production of social history material in museums may be produced. It is important to recognise the specific origins of the methods which social history museums have adopted to record and interpret our societies today and to acknowledge the problems of transformation that are involved. To date, in our recording and interpretation of the complexities of the society we live in we are still largely applying techniques which have their basis founded in archaeology and antiquarianism and are inadequate to deal with the modern forms of a culturally rich social history.

Notes and References

1. The 'In the Kitchen' project and this article (which covers the early stages of the work) are very much a joint effort between Phil Philo and myself. I am very happy to acknowledge his ideas and support throughout this work, without which the project would have remained dormant.
2. A. Moncrieff, *Messages to the Future*, London, 1984.
3. B. Norman-Butler, *Victorian Aspirations - The Life and Labour of Charles and Mary Booth*, London, 1972, p86.
4. I am very grateful to Mike Seaborne of the Museum of London for discussing the problems of constructing an adequate record sheet and this sheet is based upon the one he devised for the Museum of London.

A READING LIST ON DOMESTIC INTERIORS

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Yvonne Hayhurst

Many curators approach recording workshops with no pre-determined plan of attack and have to tackle such projects from first principles. As a result one is always wiser after the event. The luxury of a well thought-out and formulated plan is denied most curators since they are usually called in at the last minute while the bulldozers stand at the door. The urgency of last-minute recording and collecting can mean that valuable and irreplaceable information and material are lost and there is rarely a second chance. This paper briefly discusses some methods of recording a workshop and collecting its contents, as well as providing an outline of the sources used for researching its history. This is only a preliminary study which aims to promote discussion on the problems of recording such workplaces.

Much of what follows is based upon personal experience gained in recording the workshop of the Nottingham firm of J.E. Morris which produced bottlebrushes from 1913 until 1985. This was the last bottlebrush-making workshop in Nottingham (and probably one of the last in the country) which had been producing brushes for the dairy, brewing and mineral water trades. The workshop was brought to the attention of Sueila Postles, the Curator of Brewhouse Yard Museum, in 1985 after the last brushmaker had died. The family firm of J.E. Morris had been making bottlebrushes since the 1890s and lasted three generations. The business had started in a workshop in a city centre courtyard but in 1913 was moved to the then rural suburb of Carlton on the north-east of the town. Here J.E. Morris had two houses built for himself and his family along with a workshop and a small market garden. The workshop found in 1985 was substantially that of 1913 with only a few additional tools and machines. The rarity of such a business and the completeness of the workshop made accurate and full recording imperative. As might be expected this opportunity was eagerly taken up by Sueila Postles, who offered the task to me as a subject for my three week attachment from the Leicester Course during the Easter of 1986. The entire process of recording and moving the workshop took the whole three weeks, and since then much time has been spent researching the trade and the family. The project aimed at not just recording the modern workshop, but also the living time capsule which had been developing from the 1890s.

Why Record the Workshop?

Before the first photograph is taken or the first object moved it is necessary to define the basic reasons for recording a workplace. Without well defined aims and objectives valuable information can be lost during the recording process. Also by defining and thinking through these objectives any omissions can become obvious. Recording can easily become little more than a salvage operation with a few photographs, some objects thrown in a box and a brief note on the outside hinting at their origins. It is necessary to consider how the material is going to be used in the future and its value as meaningful historical evidence. Furthermore the following questions should be considered: is the aim of the project the recording of a technological process or is it to look through the machinery, raw materials and products to the people who made the process work? All too often curators forget that they are social historians when confronted by a machine ('let the technologists get their hands dirty shifting it; I'm not technologically minded anyway'), or forget the individuals who operated the machine. The machines themselves are of a limited importance and their main value is as a pointer to the people behind them. The ultimate use of an object as a means of getting back to the 'real' people (individuals not anonymous stereotypes) is lost or obscured by the study of objects for their own intrinsic value.

Methods of Recording the Workshop

A photographic survey is the most basic form of recording. Early decisions on the future use of the photographs will determine the form of the survey. Possible uses could include: accurate photographic record, display, audio - visual show and lecture slides. These different uses require different types of pictures, such as black and white, colour or slide. Slides can be made up later from prints, but it is easier to anticipate such a need and take an extra camera along in the first place. The survey should include general interior and exterior views of the workshop and then a systematic series of detailed shots of the interior. If possible the detailed shots should show the position of objects on the benches and the division of the workshop into workstations with specific tools and processes related to the particular areas. A large, complex workshop is easier to conceptualise and to record if it has been divided into manageable units related to the individual stages of the production process.

If time is not available to list all the objects and their location prior to moving them, then detailed photographs can be used to identify where the material came from once it is in the museum. In the same way as using photographs as a substitute for collecting it may be a pragmatic solution if not an entirely satisfactory one to a problem. Photographs provide a visual record of the physical relationships of objects in situ once one is back in the museum. They may be used in producing accurate workshop reconstructions or analysing the relationship of objects on a bench. Relationships and patterns which were not obvious whilst recording, especially if rushed, may be identified with analysis of the detailed shots.¹

Video equipment and its use is an expensive and specialised resource often seen as beyond the means of most museums. But its benefits are immense when used in conjunction with photography and oral testimony. First one needs to decide why one wants to use video and how the end product will be used. For example, to record a work process (machinery in motion and techniques), record the maintenance and repair procedures for individual machines, training video of techniques for future practitioners, and provide a 'living' element in an exhibition. A moving, colour picture can record and convey more information than words and two-dimensional images alone. The use of video need not be an expensive exercise or one demanding great expertise from the curator. Rather it involves utilising the resources and skills already available in the outside community. Local F.E. colleges and Polytechnics usually possess video equipment and run courses on its use and potential. Centres for the unemployed and neighbourhood centres can be another source for video equipment. A joint project between such institutions and a museum has benefits for all concerned with the students acquiring experience in producing a short documentary and the museum having a video to use for display, education and/or archives. The museum would need to work in close collaboration and maintain strict editorial control as well as state exactly what is required of the film.

Oral testimony should be collected in conjunction with documentary research since the two complement each other. The topics discussed in the interviews can then be pursued in the primary and secondary sources and literature where the interview material can either be confirmed or shown to be misleading. Whilst most people are unlikely to lie in an interview, faulty memories and false assumptions still need to be checked. Additional research provides a useful double check and also information and themes to be followed up in subsequent interviews. Input from the interviewer can work as a trigger for the informant to help remember more topics which in turn can be followed up in the research. Objects from the workshop can also be used as memory triggers in an interview. Topics to be covered in an interview should include: Education and family background; Training and early career structure; Description of machinery and industrial process (technical terms and regional/slang terminology); Structure of the firm and workforce; Sources of raw materials.²

Surveying the workshop takes place at two different levels. One is the workshop itself and the position of workstations, power points and large pieces of machinery within it. At a more detailed level the position of material on and around the workbench is considered. Careful measuring and recording of materials show the range of objects found in each workstation and provide each object with a context in the work place. It is not always enough to know only the macro environment (workshop) of an object. It is also important to know the micro environment (position on bench and relationship to other objects) to understand fully its use and significance. Although time is a very precious commodity, the extra care taken in recording can produce ample rewards. The accumulated rubbish and waste material underneath and at the back of the bench will indicate the type of work carried on there. One may even find in cross-section that the material is stratified and that the older (lower) materials are different to that on top. Even the rubbish on the floor can tell a story. There is also a likelihood that submerged in the waste material one will find old discarded objects and ephemera that did not survive in the rest of the workshop. The darker recesses which have been seldom if at all cleaned should be combed for any such discoveries.³

Collecting the Workshop Artefacts

There are decisions to be taken about what, if anything, to collect. This can range from a few select samples to the entire workshop, fittings and all. The choice depends on what museum resources are available in terms of storage and money and on the eventual use of the objects. Assuming a large proportion of the workshop is going to be moved there are ways of making this process slightly easier.

- a. Produce a written list of the objects to be moved and then allocate each object a number. The number can be hierarchical

in form, e.g. 1.0 for workstation 1, 1.1 for the first object there and 1.1(a) for the first part of that object.

- b. Produce rough sketches of each workstation with the position of the numbered objects shown.
- c. Fill in a tie-on luggage label with a description and the number for the object.
- d. Attach labels to objects.
- e. Dismantle objects and put into boxes where appropriate for transit back to the museum.
- f. After or during the dismantling process produce a technical drawing of the machine and all its component parts showing how it all fits together.

This may seem far too detailed but it is all too easy to end up with a heap of scrap metal and no idea of how it should be assembled or to which machine all the bits belong. In general the less mass-produced a piece of machinery is the harder it is going to be to put it back together. The production of a list of objects and their labels and actually attaching the labels to the objects is easier done as separate jobs or by different people. Otherwise oily fingerprints end up all over the list (documentation) and the labels.

Researching the Workshop

Documentary research provides a framework in which to interpret the workshop. The emphasis should move from the workshop to the family business and the people who ran it. The following sources can relate to the firm's history and/or the family history. But all can mesh together to help extract the people from behind the machines and workshop.

Commercial Directories are useful to check the development of a firm over the years. They may list someone under a variety of headings: by name, street, or occupation. This last type of entry needs great care because some people may be listed under two occupational headings. Also the classification of jobs tends to be rather vague. A small or no entry does not provide irrefutable proof that the firm was inconsequential or did not exist. It may have been involved with specialised or non-local products which did not merit advertising in a local directory. Here it is more profitable to track down trade journals and catalogues.

The decennial *Census Enumeration Schedules* from 1841 to 1881 provide the bare bones of the family structure of a firm. These will reveal the names of people in the household, their ages, occupations, relationships to the head of the household and place of birth. But beware of people lying to the enumerator, mistakes made by him and part of the family being away from home on census night.⁴ *Electoral Registers* are printed annually from 1832. They provide a way of finding out whether a property was rented or owned by the family. Women usually only appear in the registers from 1918 onwards. As registers are organised according to electoral ward and then by address beware of the constant changes in ward boundaries.⁵

Parish Registers are most useful due to the amount of information they contain on baptisms, marriages and burials. However it is necessary to find out the parish in which the family lived and it is probably also necessary to check surrounding parishes. A map showing parish boundaries is a starting point for this, but it must be remembered that these boundaries changed dramatically in urban areas through the nineteenth century. Remember also that the registers are evidence of religious (Anglican) ceremonies and not of birth and death themselves. The records of *Civil Registration* of births, deaths and marriages are housed at St Catherine's House, (Aldwych, London). These are organised by quarters of each year and then alphabetically. To acquire the complete certificate for an entry costs £5. However, by scanning the quarter-yearly volumes for a particular person it is possible to pinpoint an event to within three months, so that the search can be continued within the local parish registers.⁶

Obituaries of important or wealthy people are often found in local newspapers and these will give a brief summary of the person's life and business activities which may be unobtainable elsewhere. However, obituaries suffer from the same problems as oral testimony where surviving relatives try to describe someone else's life history. *Wills* have been proved at the Principal Probate Registry and District Registries since 1858. There is a national index to the wills giving the date of death, occupation, age, the estate bequeathed and the beneficiaries. This can be useful in gauging the size of the business and the assets at a given time.⁷

Title Deeds will provide the names and occupations of the owners and occupiers of the workshop, together with a description of the structure and possibly a plan. The deeds may also contain a

summary of the past ownership of the property and this can be of particular use if the earlier deeds are missing.⁸ *Building Plans* submitted to civic authorities start in 1848 in response to local public health acts. They are available in many towns only from the 1870s. These plans show the internal layout of a property together with an elevation. The associated documentation will state whether it was erected by a builder for a specific client or as part of a speculative development. There may also be subsequent plans for extensions and alterations to a property or if the earlier ones had been rejected. Large scale *Ordnance Survey plans* are useful for studying the wider environment of a workshop's location. They can also provide useful information on the external layout of properties if building plans do not survive. The 1:500 plans were first produced in the 1880s for a limited number of urban areas.⁹ Another cartographic source of similar detail are the *Good Fire Insurance Plans*. These maps provide information on the internal layout and building materials of business districts in urban areas so that the insurance companies could assess the potential risk of a site and its environs. These plans date from the 1880s until the 1960s.¹⁰

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BEYOND A COLLECTING POLICY: PROJECTS AS POLICY AT THE HARBOROUGH MUSEUM

Sam Mullins

As a medium of communication, the museum exhibition offers an unrivalled canvas for a harlequin-like range of images and artefacts - documentary, photographic, oral, material, archaeological - to be brought to bear on the interpretation and popularisation of a historical theme. It is this opportunity, and the eclectic skills it demands, which is the attraction for many of us of working in a museum. Being a museum curator involves, of course, far more than historical scholarship; we are also concerned with the fabric of the building, security, adult education and work with schools, advice on planning applications, work with the elderly etc, etc. Indeed working for such small organisations as museums, with little scope for delegation or specialisation, museum work can involve marshalling a breadth of skills not far removed from the competence of Leonardo da Vinci. Even within the field of social history, we face a plethora of conflicting demands on our time and enthusiasm. The micro-chip has launched many of us into the more effective documentation of our collections, the MSC ply us with employment programmes, the tourist industry beckons us into the livelier presentation and marketing of our institutions, while colleagues urge us to make oral recordings before it is too late, to record our contemporary surroundings for posterity and even collect the contents of our own dustbins.

The difficulty with this role as 'renaissance man' is the tendency to be always skating across the surface rather than plumbing the depths. In the not so distant past our predecessors in the museum business hid in the stores for much of the time and with a few notable exceptions produced extraordinarily dull exhibitions and publications on eccentric and ephemeral subjects. Today few of us can afford that luxury, even if we had the inclination. Too much of what we do, however, is dictated not by our own perceived priorities but by what arrives in the 'in-tray' or is 'suggested' by external pressures. Our collecting policies are rarely any help in seeing through the miasma of possibilities. Most such policies limit us to 'merely' collecting all of human life across several hundred square miles and many generations. This has led to our collections being essentially passive in their accumulation and progressively less and less representative of their society of origin. In the circumstances, it is important for social historians to establish priorities and to work as far as possible towards specific objectives, be they exhibition, book or tape-slide show. One solution is to make an annual project the engine of your collecting, research and exhibition policy.

The 'Change in the Inner City' projects convinced me that this was the way to organise the museum's work. Undertaken by the local history department at Birmingham Museum as part of the Inner City Partnership programme from 1982-5, 'Change in the Inner City' examined a series of topics related to the recent history of the inner city. These projects were opportunistic to a degree in that the topics were chosen or at least suggested by the interests and qualities of the scheme's researchers. And yet, under the guidance of a well-established local history department, large quantities of information and material were collected relating to a range of topics otherwise poorly represented in the museum's collection; the gun-making quarter, childhood, eating out, washing baths, the jewellery quarter. Each subject dictated a different balance between artefacts, photographs and oral recordings and each was significantly shaped by the enthusiasm and approaches of the researchers. The stated objective was within the six-month or year-long project to produce a book, a travelling exhibition and listening tapes for the central library. The publications and exhibitions resulting from the ICPP projects were the major output of the local history department during this period.¹ 'Change in the Inner City' faded away as the climate within the local history department regrettably changed. The results however convinced me that this approach, not necessarily allied to MSC or similar funding, had a lot to offer social history museums. The vigorous pursuit of a series of well-defined topics can give us several slices across our community's past and present, each at a different angle, coinciding here and there, and feeding off each other. Bringing the chosen topic up to the present day lends a vital historical perspective to the problem of how to record the contemporary scene. Without that perspective, I fear much contemporary recording is a shot in the dark, leaving our successors scratching around to understand the 1980s in just the same way as we approach the 1930s.

Project work has become the means by which the museum at Market Harborough pushes forwards its collections and exhibitions on limited resources of time and money. Two projects have been undertaken at Harborough so far, each taking about a year, and a

third is currently well-advanced. The Harborough Museum was opened in 1983 and by 1984 was established firmly enough to begin to look beyond the known, document-based, history of the town. The first project, 'Hidden Harborough', was undertaken with the essential assistance of Michael Glasson, then 'resting' after a year at Museum Studies in Leicester. 'Hidden Harborough' was a modest project, illustrating the history of this small market town through the role of the medieval burghage plots, from their laying-out in the mid-twelfth century to the demolition in the 1930s of the crowded housing which had been built on them (Plate 1). The project established the use of three contrasting but coincident sources; interviews with former residents suggested the quality of life in the yards between the Wars, an exceptional photographic archive illustrated the buildings and conventional documentary sources underpinned the other.²

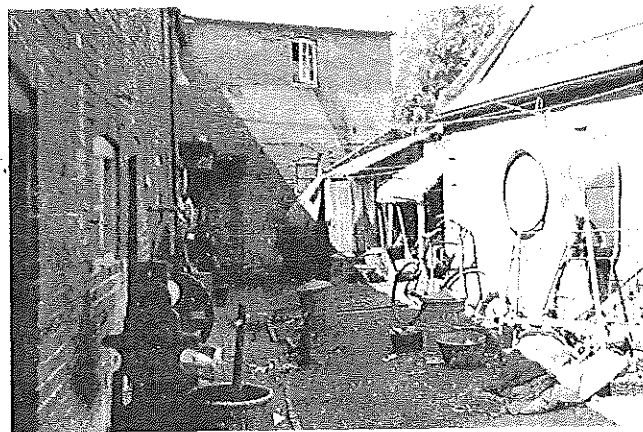


Plate 1: The back yard of King's Head Place, Market Harborough, photographed in 1933 by the local authority's Sanitary Inspector. Eight cottages in the row shared two taps.

Three months of full-time voluntary work proved just how much material could be gathered by someone working exclusively on a single topic, and proved it not only to me, but, more important, to museum management when the budget for the following year was allotted. In 1985 the Harborough Museum's budget included, for the first time, a small sum to employ a short-contract research assistant (£600, later revised to £1,100). Gareth Griffiths, on finishing the Leicester Museum Studies course, was employed, on the domestic service project, 'Cap and Apron', which was worked up as a book, special exhibition and tape-slide presentation. 'Cap and Apron' relied more heavily on oral evidence, which gave a personal and local dimension to the essentially national picture offered in most secondary accounts of the domestic service (Plate 2). Half the book was devoted to 'oral autobiographies' of different types of servant, using re-ordered transcriptions of tape-recordings to illustrate contrasting career patterns, daily work, attitudes to employers etc. A glossary related objects associated with domestic service - black-lead brushes, water cans, housemaids' boxes - to the work described by former servants and to more general sources such as household manuals and hardware catalogues.³

Again in 1986, funding was forthcoming (£1,300) for our current project, 'Shops and Shopkeepers'. David Stockdale, also just out of Leicester, turned out a prodigious quantity of work on the retail trades in the town over the past hundred years. In the case of the Harborough Museum, it has only been through the employment of a research assistant that such projects can be realised. Three months intensive work on a single subject gives the project a flying start, a single-minded exploration of the theme which most curators would find very difficult to square with their other commitments. I have to confess that the small budgetary allocation, spread over three months, ran to wage rates which were a poor competitor to the offerings of the DHSS. But the projects did give three unemployed social historians some valuable experience, a useful addition to their C.V's, a publication to their name, and hopefully helped them in their job applications. I trust they would all agree that both sides were the winner by this arrangement. I do hope that now the practice is established, more adequate funding will be provided. By the time this article is published, we shall know whether we will have a contract on offer in August for three months work on Welland Valley Agriculture, 1880-1987, at £3 an hour.

I could not pretend that these Harborough projects have been planned systematically from the start. With limited resources, it is important to respond with flexibility to opportunities as they present themselves, to give scope for the talented volunteer's offer of help, the Museum Studies graduate or the local history group looking for a role. The project that was to become 'Hidden Harborough' was not taken up by local volunteers when proffered,

Oct. 24th 33.

DINGLEY HALL,
MARKET HARBOROUGH.

Mrs Opie.

I am very pleased to recommend Ruby Knight. She is strong, very willing and obliging, also a good ringer, and honest. She does her work well, and has a nice appearance. Ruby has always got on well with her fellow servants. I myself am very sorry to part with her. Yes, faithfully.

J. Grindley.
Housekeeper to
Carl & Beatty.

Plate 2: The reference given to Ruby Knight, fifth housemaid at Dingley Hall, Northants, by the housekeeper.

but it was ideally suited to Michael Glasson's MA in Local History when he offered his time as a volunteer. 'Hidden Harborough' had concentrated on the town, so in 1985 a subject was sought that would take us out into the fifty or so parishes around Market Harborough. Domestic service suggested itself as a subject ideally suited to oral history and, despite being a major employment for women in rural areas, it had hitherto been largely neglected. Gareth Griffiths also brought some prior knowledge and an interest in the subject. Last year we chose to return to a topic based squarely on the town and 'Shops and Shopkeepers' has attracted by far the strongest material of the three projects to date. In the autumn, funding permitting, we hope to return to a rural subject, looking at agriculture in South Leicestershire since the First World War. There is a large gap in our collections of farming material, we have a small group including several farmers keen to help and the results should coincide with British Food and Farming Year.

The 'Shops and Shopkeepers' project depends strongly on material derived from oral recordings. Although documentary and photographic sources are of crucial importance, a twentieth century subject gains so much from oral history, both in terms of information unobtainable from other sources and for the pithy quotation or anecdote which can summarise a whole paragraph of earnest prose. The gathering and processing of oral material is time-consuming but well worth the effort. Respondents were attracted through features in the local paper and by recommendation by other interviewees. We found our leaflet outlining the project very useful in overcoming any uncertainty about our motives amongst potential informants. Many of the best recordings were made following a hand-written letter and leaflet to someone recommended by a friend or former working colleague. The retail trade is a very large subject, certainly larger than we had anticipated at the start. To date we have recorded nearly fifty interviews for this project, amounting to at least 150 hours of tape. Transcription work has been undertaken by both staff and volunteers. We have gradually moved towards making as full a transcription as the quality of information on the recording demands.⁴ Some balance among interviews between the various trades and between managers and workers, proprietors and employees, has been attempted, as well as across the period; our earliest respondent started work as a shop boy in a grocer's shop in 1906, while our most recent is the current manager of Tesco's supermarket, between which is a reasonable spread of respondents across the last eighty years. Tapes made originally for 'Hidden Harborough' were also being quarried for 'Shops...'. The earlier work concentrated on life between the Wars in the back yards and rows of Market Harborough. Descriptions of shopping and diet were useful starting points for the new work. Several respondents whom we had met first in 1984 for 'Hidden Harborough' were interviewed again for 'Shops and Shopkeepers' or suggested possible contacts for new interviews. In general, being such a broad subject, it has proved easier to find people willing to talk about working in shops and doing the shopping, than it was to

find sources for the previous more closely-defined projects.

The Harborough Museum has only a small collection of artefacts, but it does have a particular strength in historic photographs, mostly of Market Harborough itself. Street scenes, showing shop fronts and fittings were frequently reproduced as postcards. Family businesses often had photographs taken of the proud proprietor standing on the shop step. Views of multiple stores have proved harder to find. In general, it is much easier to find useful photographs from before the last War than from the subsequent period (Plates 3 and 4). A photograph has become a more ephemeral item at a time when cheap photography is widely available. A photograph has become something that is taken casually by an amateur, with little regard for composition or thought of permanent record, unlike the posed and treasured products of the legion of professional photographers of the first half of the century. All photographs are copied onto a large format 5 x 4 black and white negative by the Service's photographic studio. A 35mm transparency, on Agfa Dia-Direkt (black and white) film, is usually taken at the museum, for lecture and reference purposes, before the original goes to the studio.



Plate 3: Market Harborough Co-operative Society's provisions counter, Central Market Harborough store, c. 1905.

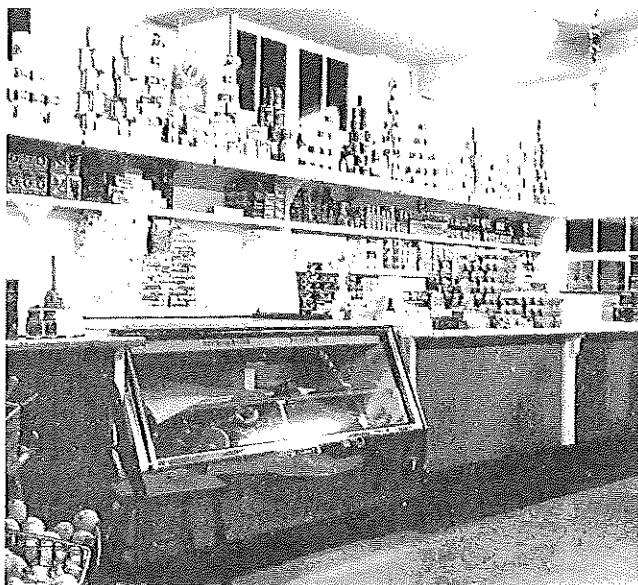


Plate 4: Provisions counter at Market Harborough Co-operative store, probably Lutterworth, c. 1960.

The records of the local authority planning department have proved an unexpectedly rich source of information. Plans for new buildings and alterations to existing structures and fronts were submitted for the approval of the Local Board from 1880, later constituted as the Market Harborough Urban District Council. The original plans have been deposited in the Leicestershire Record Office, but the authority has retained microfiche copies. Indexed by street, they give easy access to plans showing the internal layout of shops and the shopkeeper's living quarters, date alterations and new developments, and illustrate the arrival of multiple stores and their standardised shop fronts. Survival is patchy and dependent on permission for changes being at some time required, but combined with oral recordings and photographs they give a well-rounded record of particular shops and will make excellent exhibition material.

Local newspapers have proved an immensely useful and graphic

source of local information. Up until around the time of the last War, the local newspaper was still largely a paper of record. Not much of local importance escaped the *Market Harborough Advertiser* or the *Midland Mail*. It is particularly useful on the rise and fall of businesses, on those shops which disappeared in between editions of local trade directories, reporting bankruptcy proceedings, sudden deaths and midnight flits. Almost all shops in the town advertised regularly in the local newspaper and their advertisements give a useful indication of the type of trade being practised, the goods stocked and prices changed. Reports can often be found, especially early in the century, of the shops' preparations for Christmas. At the turn of the century the paper listed, for example, the stock offered in Christmas week by each of the independent butchers, describing on which farm the beasts were raised and whether they had won a prize at any local shows. The Christmas stock of most other shops was also summarised, an invaluable source for characterising the simple directory listing and apochryphal advertisement.

As well as making a number of oral recordings of contemporary shopkeepers, a photographic record of the town's shops at Christmas 1986 was made. Printed bags and carriers were begged from every shop in the town and promotional material and press cuttings have been collected to follow on from similar items in the 'historic' past. A simple shopping questionnaire is currently being distributed as widely across the community as possible, concentrating on finding out where people shop and for which goods in 1987. After contacting head office, we were given permission not only to interview the current manager of Tesco's at length on tape, but also to take a photographic survey of his store, both front of house and behind the scenes and take some video footage for use in the eventual exhibition. A similar exercise was also undertaken at a Co-op 'All Hours' shop, the Leicestershire Co-op's new late-opening concept for their village and neighbouring stores (Plate 5).



Plate 5: Provisions counter at Leicestershire Co-op's 'All Hours' store at Great Glen, October 1986.

Based on the context of our work on retailing in the town over the last 100 years, we hope that we are better able to pick what will be of interest in our own times for our successors. The project has at least encouraged this museum to undertake more contemporary recording work than ever before and I believe it will be more effective by being considered as a part of a historical perspective. I would not wish to pretend there is anything new about this method of working. Museum work is frequently project-orientated with exhibitions planned for local anniversaries, the opening of new museums or galleries, for publications or temporary exhibitions. I am suggesting this could be taken a stage further, with regular projects on a fixed time-scale being undertaken to fill identifiable gaps in the knowledge and collections of our locality. Project-based work focuses the process of collecting and research. It not only provides opportunities for effective use of MSC initiatives and contract researchers in general, it may also be attractive to commercial sponsorship. One example is the series of temporary exhibitions, each with an information sheet, mounted at Slough Museum, which have attracted modest but essential financial help from firms based in Slough. A final observation is the poor publications record of museum-based social historians. I would argue strongly against undertaking any extended piece of research without the specific intention of publication in some permanent form. Hiding in the store and feeding the filing cabinet are an unaffordable luxury, however large the museum. The museum exhibition and related publication is a medium too good to neglect, so if you are nurturing thoughts of writing the last word on bakelite bathroom fittings of the 1930s, do at least ensure that you not only collect memories of their use and social origins, but also relate them to national social trends, local peculiarities of use and make sure

your valuable work sees the light of day in published form.

References

1. A detailed account of the programme can be found in S. Davies, 'Change in the Inner City', *S.H.C.G. Journal* 11, 1983-1984; see also 'Museums and Oral History', *Museums Journal*, 84/1, 1984, pp25-27.
2. S. Mullins & M. Glasson, *Hidden Harborough: the making of the townscape of Market Harborough*, Leicestershire Museums, 1985.
3. S. Mullins & G. Griffiths, 'Cap and Apron': domestic service in the Shires, 1880-1950, Leicestershire Museums, 1986.
4. I should extend recognition and thanks for the transcription work undertaken by Jan Gough as both volunteer and contract worker, and Deborah Boden our graduate trainee.

COLLECTING CONTEMPORARY DOMESTIC PACKAGING

Steph Mastoris

Active collecting of contemporary artefacts is a luxury denied to most history museums; labour, purchasing fund, time and storage space all being at a premium. In addition, some curators argue that such acquisition methods do not allow the hindsight provided by the passage of time to show which artefacts are worthy of inclusion in museum collections. These practical and philosophical considerations have combined to make the collections of most history museums in Britain lack any systematic representation of the material culture and social history of the past 30 to 40 years. The project described here was intended to provide the Social History Section of Nottingham City Museums with an up-to-date collection of contemporary domestic packaging, by carrying out an active, planned and thoroughly documented acquisition programme.

This project arose out of several considerations. First, the social history of most societies can be usefully studied by analysis of their waste, and contemporary British society is no exception. The increased dependence of the economy upon domestic consumer spending and the elaboration in the technology of food processing and retailing suggest that the detritus of our lives today provides a very detailed picture of the nature of our material and social culture. It has been calculated recently that one third of domestic rubbish in Britain today is made up of packaging.¹ Compared with a generation ago domestic packaging is now a far more integral part of the foods and other goods we consume. In addition, it can represent well some of the major changes which have taken place in the British consumer society over the past 30 years. The present mass retailing of most foods and the advances in manufacturing technology have resulted in radical changes in the form and nature of goods brought into the home. Never before has the quantity and diversity of products been so great.

Second, the existing social history collections of Nottingham City Museums (at Brewhouse Yard Museum) are most representative of local domestic, personal and working life during the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the Second World War. The years from the 1950s onwards are represented very patchily, with very little for the 1980s. Although several donations of contemporary domestic packaging had been made to the museum in the past five years, they lacked any indication of comprehensiveness for the period during which they were collected and lacked any detailed documentary provenance, apart from the names and addresses of the donors. There was, therefore, a real need to up-date the existing collections by the active acquisition of well documented contemporary material. A final consideration was that used packages are, by their very nature, freely available and in abundant supply. This was an important fact given the increasing demands made on the museum purchase fund by recent expansions in the service and the effects of inflation. Furthermore, although the packaging required rigorous cleansing before entering the museum, it needed no remedial conservation and could be stored easily.

The packaging which was to be acquired was defined as any wrapping or container for disposal by the collection household over a period of 15 days. Duplicates were not to be acquired. Originally, three households were to be used consisting of a single person, a childless couple and a family with children. However, it proved difficult to find a family to act as a collection household so only the other two types were used for this project. A museum colleague who lives alone agreed to act as one collector and my wife and myself acted as the second household. Fifteen days was considered to be a convenient and representative length of time to undertake the collection and my wife and I commenced on the 3rd March 1986 and continued until the 17th of that month. My colleague's collection ran from 7th to 21st April 1986. A total of 166 items were available for disposal, of which 132 items were retained for collection by the museum.

The documentation of the packaging collected aimed at recording not just what items were saved and what duplicates were disposed of, but also the daily consumption of the collecting household. In this way the quantity and nature of the packaging collection could be examined in the context of the domestic economy. As soon as any packaging was to be thrown away, it was compared with that already retained and only disposed of if it was an exact duplicate. The items for collection were then thoroughly cleansed and stored ready for documentation. This process was carried out in three stages. First, a proforma Day Sheet was used to record the daily consumption of the household and the packaging which it had available for disposal (figure 1). In this latter section of the form each item retained was marked with an 'R' in parentheses. Second,

NOTTINGHAM MUSEUMS		Packaging Survey - Day Sheet	
Duration of survey 7.4.1986 to 21.4.1986		Ref. EDGAR/1986/1	
Date 15.4.1986	Day of the week TUESDAY		
Material consumed			
Breakfast: Muesli + milk + sugar, 2 cups tea + milk			
Lunch: out			
Dinner: Home made Steak + kidney pie, Baked potatoes, Broccoli (Steak + kidney, mushrooms, onions)			
Glass water			
Pot of Tea			
Also: Soap Toothpaste Tissues Kee Paper Washing up liquid Matches Deodorant			
Packaging for disposal (R = retained for collection):			
Coop Steak + kidney Tray + wrapper (R)			
1 paper bag (mushrooms) (R)			
1 milk bottle			

Fig. 1: Documentation for Nottingham contemporary packaging collection; for daily household consumption.

another proforma Summary Sheet was used at the end of the 15 day collection period to list day by day all the items of packaging retained, along with the address of the collection household and the names and professions of the occupants (figure 2). Each collection was given a reference code consisting of the surname of the person(s) in the household, the year and a distinguishing number to be used for any future collections carried out by the same household. The final stage of the documentation procedure took place after the items had been moved to the museum. The material was checked for cleanliness and accessioned. The accession number of each item was entered upon the Summary Sheets and these bound up with the Day Sheets and deposited in an History File which related to the whole collection of one household. Some difficulty was experienced in marking many of the items with their accession number. The drawing ink from the technical pen (the usual marking tool used in the museum for non-paper items) left a poor trace on the surface of the plastic objects and also took a long time to dry. After some experiments with several alternatives, the Stabilo Overhead Projection pen, with the 'superfine' fibre tip and permanent ink was found to provide a consistently solid and thin line on these polished surfaces which dried on impact and was both difficult to remove and impervious to fading when exposed to sunlight.

The accessioning of both the ephemera and the packaging highlighted a lack of an adequate terminology for many of the objects collected. Furthermore, glossaries such as the *Hertfordshire Simple Name List* lacked the degree of lexical precision required to distinguish between different items which in everyday speech are often given two or more names. For example, the terms 'tin' and 'can' or 'tin' and 'box' are often interchangeable. Such ambiguity is of little use when attempting the documentation of museum collections which will eventually be computerised to generate detailed subject indices (as in the case of Nottingham Museums). Therefore, in collaboration with the museum's Documentation Assistant, Judith Edgar, a catalogue was compiled which listed and described all the terms evolved during the accessioning of the collection. To date, this catalogue contains 42 terms and is reproduced as a supplement with this copy of the Journal.

The packaging caused some initial conservation problems. By their very nature, many of the items had been in close contact with organic material and it was essential that a rigorous cleansing regime was adopted by the collecting households. At the end of each day

MUSEUMS RECORDS		CAREFUL WASHING	
MATERIAL OF SAILED 7.4.1986 to 21.4.1986		REF. EDGAR/1986/1	
Name	Occupation	No.	
JUDITH EDGAR	Records Assistant - NOTTINGHAM MUSEUMS	26	
Address			
53 LEES HILL STREET, SNEINTON, NOTTINGHAM, NG2 4JT			
Packaging collected:			
Date	Packaging	Ref. No.	
16.4.1986	1 Heinz Mayonaise Jar	NCH 1986-485	
16.4.1986	1 Danish Curpack Butter Wrapper	NCH 1986-486	
16.4.1986	1 Penguin Bookshop bag + wrapper	NCH 1986-487	
15.4.1986	1 Cap steel + riding bag + wrapper	NCH 1986-488	
15.4.1986	1 Paper bag	NCH 1986-489	
16.4.1986	1 Boots Sandaloch packet	NCH 1986-490	
16.4.1986	1 Boots Wholmeal Loaf wrapper	NCH 1986-491	
16.4.1986	1 Boots plastic bag	NCH 1986-492	
16.4.1986	1 Wrapper (sheet of paper) from bunch of daffodils	NCH 1986-493	
17.4.1986	1 Nabisco "Shreddies" box	NCH 1986-494	
17.4.1986	1 Utada wash mangle sleeve	NCH 1986-495	
17.4.1986	1 Boots large white tissue box	NCH 1986-496	
18.4.1986	1 Sainsbury's Assam Blend Tea Packet	NCH 1986-497	
18.4.1986	1 Twinings English Breakfast Tea	NCH 1986-498	
18.4.1986	1 Tate + Lyle Granulated Sugar bag	NCH 1986-499	
19.4.1986	1 Caster Sugar Box	NCH 1986-500	
19.4.1986	1 Sainsbury's whipping cream carton	NCH 1986-501	
19.4.1986	1 Heinz Baked bean tin	NCH 1986-502	
19.4.1986	1 High Gate Italian peeled tomatoes tin	NCH 1986-503	
19.4.1986	1 Sainsbury's Italian Garlic Box	NCH 1986-504	
19.4.1986	1 Café Du Monde Wine Bottle + cork	NCH 1986-505	
19.4.1986	1 Rioja Tinto Wine Bottle + cork	NCH 1986-506	
19.4.1986	1 Sainsbury's green pepper plastic bag	NCH 1986-507	
19.4.1986	1 Sainsbury's bag + wrapper from mixed loaf	NCH 1986-508	
19.4.1986	2 BHS Cheese plastic bags	NCH 1986-509	
19.4.1986	1 Sainsbury's banana bag	NCH 1986-510	
19.4.1986	1 Sainsbury's cos apple bag	NCH 1986-511	
19.4.1986	1 Sainsbury's pear bag	NCH 1986-512	
19.4.1986	1 Sheet tissue paper	NCH 1986-513	
20.4.1986	1 Carlton Sainsbury's pure apple juice	NCH 1986-514	
20.4.1986	1 Robertsons Golden Shred marmalade jar	NCH 1986-515	
21.4.1986	1 Cherry Bottom Shed polish (mattress) tin	NCH 1986-516	
21.4.1986	1 Rose's Lime Juice Cardinal Bottle	NCH 1986-517	

Fig. 2: Documentation for Nottingham contemporary packaging collection; proforma for summary of packaging for disposal.

all the items which were to be retained were either vacuumed or carefully washed in warm water to which a few drops of 'Synperonic N.D.B.' (an non-ionic detergent) had been added. On delivery to the museum the packaging was again checked for cleanliness before being placed in a temporary store. Although the items in the collection ranged from a single sheet of tissue paper to glass wine bottles, there were few problems with the permanent storage. All the three-dimensional items were placed in polythene bags and then boxed according to size and sturdiness. Two boxes of low-acid card, measuring 61 by 42 by 24 cms, held these items, one for plastic and card objects and another for the more robust packages made from glass and metal. A box of low-acid card measuring 40 by 27 by 11 cms was sufficient to hold all the two-dimensional items.

The collection of domestic packaging represented a wide range of food and other household items (figure 3). Of the 166 objects for disposal, 132 were retained for inclusion in the museum collection. The two-person household (B), had for disposal only 7% more packaging than the single-person household (A), and most of this consisted of duplicate items which were not retained. Of the packaging for disposal, over 78% was for food and drink, with another 13% being for items of domestic and personal hygiene (figure 4). The remaining 9% consisted of packaging for stationery, clothing and gifts. The proportion contributed to these categories by each household was almost identical. The material from which the packaging was made showed the dominance of plastics and paper or card over the more traditional glass and metal (figure 5). Of the packaging for disposal in both households, 44% was made from some form of plastic, 32.5% of paper or card, with only 13.3% being composed of glass, and 5.4% of metal. However, it should be noted that the proportions contributed by each household were not equal: 'A' consumed three times more glass than 'B', while 'B' consumed the same proportion more plastic and paper or card than 'A'.

Several types of packaging developed recently were present in the collection (Plate 1). Perhaps the most noticeable were the blown 'P.E.T.' bottles for soft drinks and aerated water which were introduced in 1978. There was also an example of the moulded plastic and foil container for contraceptive pills and the wedge-shaped covering for commercially made sandwiches. In addition, expanded polystyrene was found to be replacing moulded card or papier mache as a base for packed meat and vegetables. Several innovations

Fig. 3: Nottingham contemporary packaging collections, analysis of packaging for disposal, by subject.

Subject Group	Goods	Household		Total
		'A'	'B'	
Food & Drink	Milk	12	8	20
	Vegetables	6	8	14
	Meat	5	3	8
	Bread	4	3	7
	Cheese	3	3	6
	Wine	2	4	6
	Fruit	4	1	5
	Tea	4	1	5
	Bottled Water	—	5	5
	Lemonade	—	4	4
	Coffee	1	2	3
	Confectionary	2	1	3
	Yoghurt	2	1	3
	Eggs	—	2	2
	Sugar	2	—	2
	Canned Tomatoes	1	1	2
	Nuts	1	1	2
	Cream	1	1	2
	Baked Beans	1	1	2
	Lard	1	—	1
	Drinking Chocolate	1	—	1
	Canned Pasta	1	—	1
	Spice	1	—	1
	Mayonnaise	1	—	1
	Butter	1	—	1
	Sandwiches	1	—	1
	Breakfast Cereal	1	—	1
	Fruit Juice	1	—	1
	Marmalade	1	—	1
	Fruit Drink	1	—	1
	Garlic	1	—	1
	Salt	—	1	1
	Olive Oil	—	1	1
Tomato Puree	—	1	1	
Rice	—	1	1	
Stuffing Mix	—	1	1	
Biscuits	—	1	1	
Canned Fish	—	1	1	
Margarine	—	1	1	
Muesli	—	1	1	
Sunflower Oil	—	1	1	
Pitta Bread	—	1	1	
Personal Hygiene	Toilet Roll	—	3	3
	Paper Tissues	1	2	3
	Contraceptives	—	1	1
	Liquid Toilet Soap	1	—	1
	Sanitary Towels	—	1	1
Domestic Cleaning	Shampoo	1	—	1
	Soap	—	1	1
	Washing Powder	1	1	2
	Matches	—	1	1
	Paint Stripper	1	—	1
	Pan Scourer	—	1	1
	Rubber Gloves	1	—	1
	Shoe Polish	1	—	1
	Washing Liquid	—	1	1
	Washing Up Liquid	—	1	1
Stationery	Waste Bin Liners	—	1	1
	Wire Wool	1	—	1
	Greetings Card	2	2	4
Clothing	Wrapping Paper	—	3	3
	Shoe Insoles	—	2	2
Miscellaneous	Jeans	1	—	1
	Tights	—	1	1
	Carrier Bags	1	5	6
Wrapping for Flowers	1	1	2	
Book	1	—	1	

Fig. 4: Nottingham contemporary packaging collection; analysis of packaging for disposal, by subject group.

Subject Groups of Items for Disposal	Household		Total
	'A'	'B'	
Food & Drink	63	61	124
Personal Hygiene	3	8	11
Domestic Cleaning	5	6	11
Stationery	2	5	7
Clothing	1	3	4
Miscellaneous	3	6	9
Total Number of Items for Disposal	77	89	166
Total Number of Items Retained	65	67	132

Fig. 5: Nottingham contemporary packaging collection; analysis of packaging for disposal, by material.

Main Materials of Items for Disposal	Household		Total
	'A'	'B'	
Plastics	30	43	73
Paper or Card	21	34	55
Glass	17	5	22
Metal	6	3	9
Plastics & Paper or Card	1	3	4
Metal & Paper or Card	2	-	2
Plastics & Metal	-	1	1
Total Number of Items for Disposal	77	89	166
Total Number of Items Retained	65	67	132

in packaging correspond to the advent of new products for domestic consumption. The best examples in the collection were the plunger-dispenser bottle for liquid toilet soap and the shallow tub for low-fat spreads and soft margarine. The collection also possessed items of packaging whose basic design and constituent material have remained unchanged for generations (Plate 2). The steel can for processed vegetables and the wine bottles were perhaps the best examples of these. Other items which can be considered in this way were the glass milk bottle with conical neck and the shoe polish tin.

The documentation of household consumption also showed the presence of foods and eating habits which have found favour or wide availability within the last few decades. Yoghurt and muesli, risottos and pizzas and other continental dishes are now consumed by large numbers of the population, while exotic vegetables such as avocado pears and red and green peppers are relatively cheap and easy to buy all year. The presence here of free range eggs, low-fat foods, wholemeal bread and vegetable cooking oils pointed to the popularity of healthy and less processed foods.



Plate 1: Nottingham contemporary packaging collection; recent methods of packaging.

Generally, the high quality of packaging design found in the collection stressed the importance manufacturers place upon this as a means of selling their product: 'shelf appeal' is essential when most shops are self-service and sell several brands of the same product. The dominance of food retailing by national chains of shops was also reflected by the collection. A considerable proportion of products were actually produced by companies such as Sainsbury, Tesco and Boots while many other 'brand named' products were purchased through these outlets. The competition these national retailers pose the local shops is to some extent epitomised by the design of paper and plastic bags in the collection (Plate 3). Many small, local retailers still have bags printed with a clutter of names,



Plate 2: Nottingham contemporary packaging collection; traditional methods of packaging.

addresses, epigrammatic statements about quality and service and even illustrations of the goods available. On the other hand, the national retailers have captured the consumers' confidence sufficiently to require no more than a trademark or short slogan to appear on their bags.



Plate 3: Nottingham contemporary packaging collection; bags from national and local retailers.

Generally, the project can be regarded as a success. A substantial collection of domestic packaging items was acquired for the museum. In addition extensive documentation was generated which provided a detailed provenance for each item, together with an interpretable context for the whole collection. These artefacts have complemented and extended the existing museum collections of domestic packaging. The documentation has already allowed some basic analysis to take place showing recent innovations in packaging methods and materials, the changes in eating habits and the patterns of retail marketing. However, a degree of cultural bias must be recognised in the project. The packaging acquired to date represents the consumption of two households of white, middle class people with no children. Such households are not totally representative of those within the collecting area of Nottingham City Museums! These are problems which can only be solved by increasing the number of collection points and selecting them with regard to their cultural background, class and constituent members. However, this is easier said than done. The present project has shown that it is very difficult to find households willing to put up with the inconvenience of cleaning and meticulously documenting 'rubbish' on a daily basis for even a few weeks, or providing 'personal' details of domestic consumption.

The project demonstrates that the extensive documentation which active contemporary collecting allows invests even the most mundane objects with considerable museological and historical significance. In this the project was similar to the ongoing collection of contemporary advertising ephemera which Brewhouse Yard Museum commenced in 1983 and which was reported in the last volume of this journal.² Both projects demonstrate that if the collection of a group of contemporary artefacts is undertaken in a planned way from a chosen location, then not only are the items provided with a detailed provenance but also the groups which they form can be analysed empirically for more general information and observations on our contemporary material and social culture. Finally, the intrinsic worthlessness of the items collected in this project stresses the importance of contemporary collecting. If most of these objects had not been acquired at the time of the disposal, few would have survived to enter the museum even a decade later (when the passage of time would have given them at least some

curiosity value). The few surviving this test of time could never be provided with as complete a cultural context as the items acquired through a project such as this. In the 'throwaway society' the history curator cannot wait for the archaeologist.

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I am grateful to Judith Edgar and Suella Postles of Brewhouse Yard Museum, and my wife Lynne for their help and advice in this project.

MEMORY LANE:

MUSEUMS AND THE PRACTICE OF ORAL HISTORY¹

Gareth Griffiths

Pa said, 'S'pose he's telling the truth - that fella?' The preacher answered 'He's tellin' the truth, awright. The truth for him. He wasn't makin' nothin' up!' 'How about us?' Tom demanded. 'Is that the truth for us?' 'I don't know,' said Casey.²

A survey of contemporary collecting and documentation in London had revealed that whilst most social history museums have at some stage been involved with oral history, the range and quality of the work produced has been variable.³ Seemingly regretting the constraints of the artefact, museums plunge too frequently into oral history with little regard either for the inherent limitations of the technique or the applications to which the resulting work is to be applied. Over the past decade a substantial body of literature has been produced on the technical aspects of oral recordings and the organisation of an oral history project. There has, however, been little attention given to the internal mechanics of the technique. Most oral historians have tended to be sanguine about the trustworthiness of the material they obtain. This uncritical interest is a danger to the value of the material obtained. As an adjunct of traditional historiography we have very little knowledge of the efficacy of oral history and accordingly a strong methodology is required as well as closer collaboration with disciplines which are also involved with the autobiographical memory.

In questioning the reliability and usefulness of oral history, critics have focussed upon the fallibility of human memory and so questioned both the reliability and validity of the data collected. Since Paul Thompson's pioneering studies little attention has been applied to the problems of long-term memory. Thompson argued that the credibility and usefulness of any particular source must be assessed in the light of existing professional knowledge: 'An experienced historian will already have learnt enough from contemporary sources about the time, place and social class, from which an interviewer comes to know, even if a specific detail is unconfirmable, whether as a whole it rings true'.⁴ Thompson's argument founders however when the interview is engaging wide areas for which traditional sources are lacking. It is argued that one of the attractions of oral history is its ability to 'articulate the experiences of people who, historically speaking, would otherwise remain inarticulate'; accordingly, any assessment of oral history must therefore involve a consideration of long-term memory construction.

While a large body of research exists examining the processes of short-term memory, surprisingly little work on long-term memory has taken place. Today, most psychologists accept the theory of memory put forward by Sir Frank Bartlett in the 1930s. Bartlett suggested that a person's knowledge of the world plays an intimate part in learning and remembering - that is, it is not possible to isolate the memory system from the rest of cognition. Bartlett's work provides a vital starting point for an understanding of the processes which are at work when an interview is taking place:

Remembering is not the re-excitation of innumerable fixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is an imaginative reconstruction, or construction, built out of the relation of our attitudes towards a whole active mass of organised past relations or experience, and to a little outstanding detail which commonly appears in image or language form. It is thus hardly ever really exact even in the most rudimentary of rote recapitulation.⁵

It is evident from Bartlett's research that we do not reproduce the past, we reconstruct it in accord with how we perceive ourselves in the present. Autobiographical memory reflects not only our past but also our personalities and beliefs about ourselves today. The process of recalling an event or episode from the past is therefore essentially one of reconstruction.

Indications to the rates and forms of memory loss are provided by work recently completed by Marigold Linton.⁶ Over a twelve year period Linton studied her memory using diary cards to test her recall. Since what is remembered is affected by how memory is studied Linton applied a variety of techniques to examine the contents and organisation of her memory and how they changed over time. With the passage of time it was found that autobiographical memories became less detailed, harder to recall, less responsive to memory jogs and were less accurately recognised and dated. For events recorded two to six years previously, each year added a six percent loss to her ability to recall events described in her diary cards. Linton found that the organisation of her autobiographical memory also changed, in part because events were later re-interpreted. That is, autobiographical memories for events in one time were altered by the perception and memory of later events. Further,

it was found that with time distinct events fused and new categories evolved.

A smaller study by David Musto provides the oral historian with some indications as to the relative reliability of different forms of information provided by the memory.⁷ Musto examined the official medical histories of children and then interviewed their parents. It was found that when the parents' memories were compared with the official records the quantitative data provided by the parents - baby's birth weight etc., were fairly reliable, whereas the qualitative information recalled was far less reliable. This variation in the kind of questions which can be most usefully asked in oral history projects has been noted by Thompson. In *The Voice of the Past*, Thompson provided a series of model questions and emphasised the factual type as being the one which would prompt an intrinsically more reliable response and which he claimed has the advantage of being more amenable to cross-checking and comparison.⁸ Questions of attitude Thompson advised, were to be generally avoided. This factual form of questioning predominates in museum-based oral history projects, indeed as it does outside museums, the subjective areas of experience being normally excluded. Thompson's conception of memory as essentially an extrapolation backwards into the past has provided the basis for most of the oral history work carried out in Britain to date. The assumption has been made that if an individual relates in a certain way to the present, then she or he must have had a similar relation to past reality. Somehow, this past relation is preserved in a form which makes it directly available in the present - that is memory. Such an approach will not suffice, for not only is memory highly selective and discards much material, but also it is subjected to subtle social pressures. The positivistic approach to oral history, in the past, has not permitted the application of a critique of the technique based upon a scientific understanding of memory. As a consequence the potential of the technique in this country has been limited.

That the memory trace may suffer distortions and its recall may be influenced by subsequent changes in norms and values is acknowledged by Thompson. This retrospective bias is a difficult problem as it may occur in forms which the historian is unable to identify and so minimise. Thompson's solution is to minimise the problem: 'the intervention of retrospective assessment needs to be identified. But this is less difficult than might be imagined, since it is quite often conscious, and when it is not, may be identified through anachronisms with which it's conveyed'.⁹ This is clearly an unconvincing reponse to what is a serious objection to oral history as a technique of recording history. Where occasions have arisen when what is remembered may be checked against a contemporary record, the impact of later social influences and experiences have been clearly revealed as distorting the remembered view of the past. Such a process was noted by Tom Harrison when he interviewed witnesses to the bombing of Coventry and who had deposited contemporary records in the Mass Observation Archive.¹⁰ In spite of the catastrophic nature of the event, two observers could hardly recall being there and many significant details were lost while other accounts were 'adjusted' to match a popular view of those nights of air-raids. The outraged reactions of the citizens of Coventry and Plymouth were equally interesting, when the contemporary accounts detailing the disorganisation and panic which followed the bombing of their cities were published thirty years later. All suggestions of feelings of helplessness and fear were strongly rebuffed - the later 'glossification' of war had clearly altered the memories of those days. Accepting that the contemporary diarists were also influenced by social bias etc. at the time of writing, this does not affect the overall impression that a significant 'shifting' in memories was revealed in this small sample. A second example is provided by a BBC radio programme 'Second Generation' which re-interviewed people about their attitudes to immigrants and immigration after a gap of twenty years.¹¹ Many of those who contributed to the programme were amazed by their previously held racist views and were unable to recall holding such views even when they had their earlier interviews replayed to them. These two examples serve to highlight the complicated process whereby memory is produced as a result of a process which reworks its material under the impact of fresh social influences and experiences. Stephen Koss emphasised this point in his review of Thompson's *Edwardians*; his 'Edwardians' . . . have lived on to become 'Georgians' and now 'Elizabethans'. Over the years, certain memories may have faded or at the very least, may have been influenced by subsequent experience.¹²

What at first glance may seem a fatal flaw in the armoury of oral history, is in reality one of the most interesting areas of opportunity. Accepting that the construction of memory is a social process, we may consider that individual memory is derived from a collective social memory - the earlier Coventry example is an excellent illustration of this process. What is fascinating is not so much that thirty years after the event memories were at odds with the contemporary record and so should be discounted, but that

present memories reveal the collective social memory. The selective nature of recollections can contribute to an understanding of the past and subsequent events. The erroneous or misguided recollections in their errors may provoke understanding and insight into the way this collective social memory is formed. The opportunity therefore, to examine the range of representations of the past which have, and still do influence the processes of social remembrance. A research project following these lines of enquiry would enable some understanding of the complex cultural processes by which social groups draw upon their existing cultural materials in order to make sense of their collective experience and in so doing, produce the individual's subjectivity and memory. Accordingly, this insight into the flawed nature of memory need not be viewed as a threat to the oral historian. From it, the oral historian can develop an understanding of how collective and individual remembrance changes and the bearing this has upon memory.

The oral historian is frequently guided to 'known reminiscers', either through contacts in the community or through the respondent's own actions and willingness to be interviewed. This process whereby a project may interview a large number of regular reminiscers may have a significant influence upon the record collected. Although to date the relationship between reminiscence and the re-fabrication of memories is not clear, there are sufficient indications to suggest that frequent reminiscence about episodes from the past may insulate them from the adaptive process of re-fabrication. American research examining the survivors of the 1920 Expeditionary Force to Siberia has produced interesting results.¹³ Noticeable structural similarities were found between the accounts of veterans who reminisced frequently, although they did not meet each other. The relative accuracy of their accounts when compared with contemporary records was markedly lower than those provided by veterans who rarely recounted their experiences. A similar process has been noted by Studs Terkel in his oral history of World War II when interviewing veterans who belonged to veterans clubs - identical anecdotes and wording were noted to occur.¹⁴

The whole array of stimuli given out by an interviewer - age, appearance, manner of speech, actions, preparations and credentials will determine how the interviewer is perceived by the interviewee. This in turn will affect the content, style and quality of interview obtained. It is obvious that the way the interview is conducted is a vital factor in affecting its progression and the information received - each party has a direct effect upon each other. The oral history project on Domestic Service at the Harborough Museum allowed an opportunity to assess some of the effects of different interviewers and techniques.¹⁵ The nature of the research topic resulted in the overwhelming majority of informants being women. Two of the interviewees were men and one a woman. Several of the informants were interviewed by all three and others by two of the interviewers, permitting some comparisons to be made. As may be expected the majority of informants were noticeably more at ease with an interviewer of their own sex, producing interviews which were more conversational in style and qualitative in content. The informants happily discussed areas such as sex education, health matters and employer/employee relationships etc., with the female interviewer; whereas these were to a greater degree 'taboo' topics for both parties when a male interviewer was conducting the interview. In addition to the expected differences in the range of topics covered, the relaxed nature of the female interviewer's sessions does seem to have resulted in more subjective information being produced. An interesting point noted by a number of oral historians is that male interviewees when interviewed by women frequently go into more detail and explanation than when interviewed by another male who they assume has a full knowledge of technical processes etc. Another example of varying results generated by different interviewers was a study carried out in America using white and black interviewers who, using the same questionnaire, obtained startlingly different results.

It is clear that the memory is by no means yet fully understood, nor are we able to work out what kind of bias we may expect for different kinds of information obtained in different contexts. Despite these difficulties, the majority of those involved in oral history simply move from one project to another with apparent little theoretical concern about how they are practising their craft. The many factors which affect the record produced need to be more clearly identified and understood; in order to achieve this a comprehensive record detailing the background of the project, approach adopted etc., needs to be generated. Such a record will permit future assessment of the record and the various influences which produced it. In addition, some oral history projects need to incorporate into their schedules an element of experimental work, which would allow autobiographical memory and the range of factors which would mould the record produced to be better understood. Such project work will aid the oral historian to anticipate what kind of bias may be expected for different forms of

information and in differing contexts. We cannot eliminate the impact the interviewer has upon a respondent but this influence needs to be documented and more fully understood. Derived from roots within quantitative sociology oral history has neglected the vigorous methodology which was initially applied.

In order to generate a 'representative' picture of Edwardian England a quota sample of informants was sought by Paul Thompson - a group as representative as far as possible of the Edwardian population as a whole.¹⁶ A respondent was a representative both of a class group and an occupational group. The responses of the informant were then cross-checked not only with other sources but also with other interviewees within the same category. Today almost none of the multitude of projects being run within museums adopt such a strong methodology; as a consequence the quality and accuracy of the picture of the past obtained is suspect.

Finally, oral history has for many years been regarded as a liberating influence within the field of history - allowing people to make their own history. Such an influence has been accepted by museums as a potential means of broadening the accessibility of their collections and interpretation. Oral history promised a sense of place and community accessible to ordinary people, while at the same time illuminating the broader features of social history. However, there are difficulties with the generally held view of oral history as 'democratic' knowledge. Far from transforming the social relations of research, oral history in museums has reinforced the power relations involved within it. Throughout the process of producing a historical account the curator remains in control - the historian controls the interview, defines what counts as 'historically useful information' and makes the decisions on how and in what form the information eventually appears in the public realm. The process by which the curator transforms the recorded interview into a historical account involves significant alterations, as the memories are placed within a framework established by the curator and within which the memories acquire new meanings. Such a process moves in opposition to the original claims of oral history to give history back to the people in their own words. In the future, oral history is likely to become less important as historic verite and to increasingly extend its role in examining the construction of popular historical consciousness. It can be most usefully directed towards examining how a sense of the past is produced 'through public representations and private memory', examining not only the past but also the past/present relation - the voice of the past is inescapably the voice of the present too.¹⁷

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1. I am grateful to many people for their help in producing this article which is part of a larger work examining the production of history. Professor Bernard Crick and Dr. Vernon Gregg discussed various aspects of memory with me. Sam Mullins of the Harborough Museum generously supplied me with copies of tapes. Finally, I am happy to acknowledge the wide ranging discussions I have had with Geoff Marsh on this and allied subjects; many of the ideas included within this work are his and I would wish him to be regarded as a co-author.
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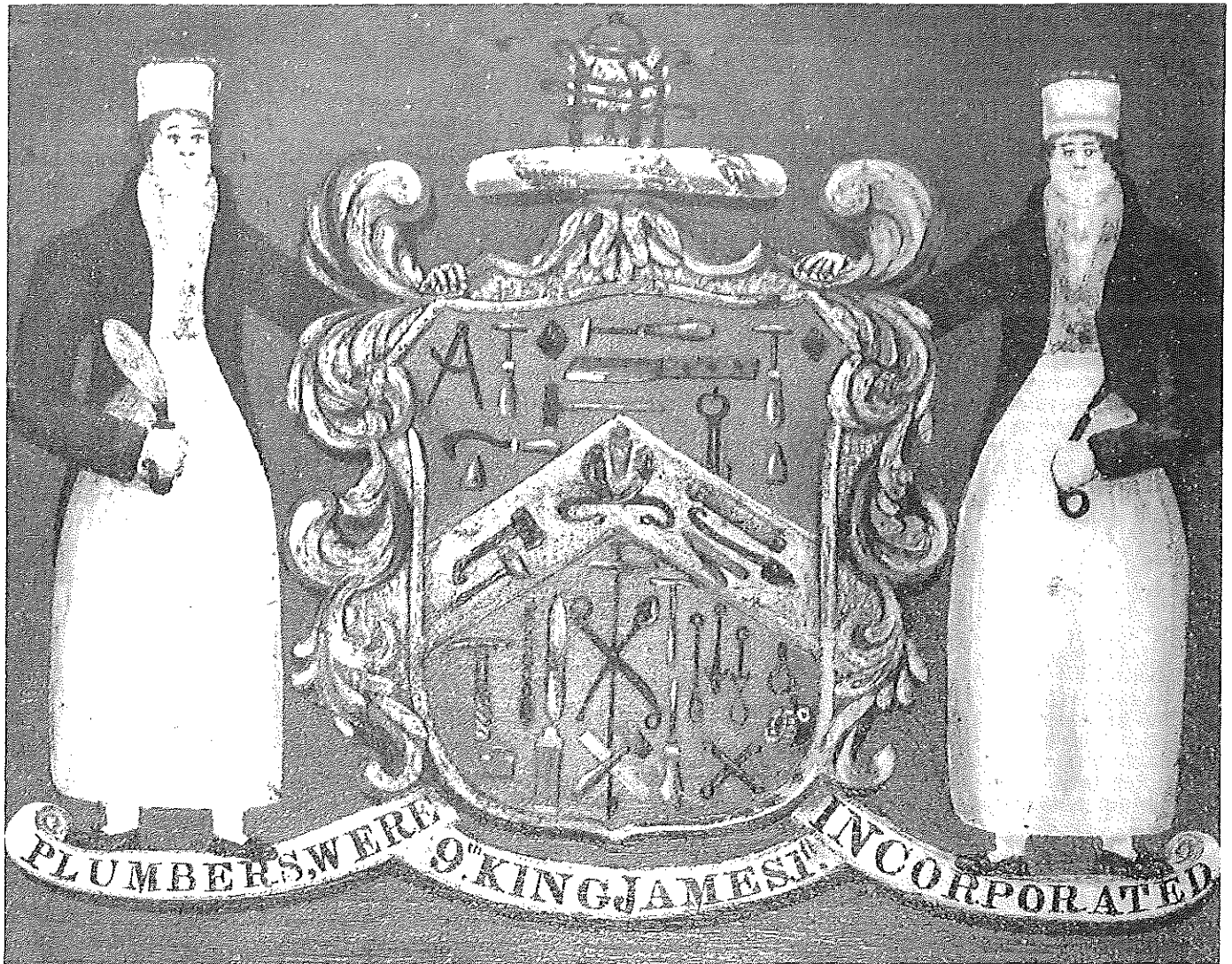


Plate 1: The Norwich Plumbers' Emblem, at the Bridewell Museum, Norwich.

THE NORWICH PLUMBERS' EMBLEM

Nick Mansfield

When I used to work in the building trade I was always pleased to find and read inscriptions made by painters in the past and hidden under layers of wallpaper. They usually consist of names, dates, famous events of the time, and (most importantly) rate per hour for the job. I must confess to having added a few myself. It is an attempt by working men to communicate with the past and the future, and to pass on the traditional culture of the building trade. Now, as a museum curator, I sometimes come across objects that have passed on this culture in a more sophisticated way. Occasionally, something sends a shiver down my spine, such is its power to share the feelings of people who lived and struggled to exist and organise in a dangerous world which we can only begin to imagine.

In 1981 I was putting together a room at the Norfolk Rural Life Museum at Gressenhall on buildings and the building trade. One advantage of a County set-up is the comparative ease of access to the stores of other museums within the service. Looking through a store at the Bridewell Museum in Norwich I found a small flat parcel at the back of a section on plumbing tools. On unwrapping, it contained an oil painting of a coat of arms, in a wooden frame about 11 ins by 13 ins (Plate 1). It was the bright yellow waistcoats of the two supporters that I noticed first. These were men in their Sunday best with blue formal frock-coats, and with what looked like spats on their feet. But they wore long white aprons and white caps and held what might have looked like truncheons, but I knew to be old fashioned soldering irons, firmly in one hand. In the other, they gripped a pale blue shield with a yellow chevron, and the whole was surmounted by a blazing brazier. On the shield itself the tools of the plumbing trade were shown in meticulous detail. I was pleased to recognise tools that I had used myself, such as round and square shavehooks, putty knife, and a leather handled hacking knife. The motto at the bottom records the foundation of the Plumbers Livery Company in London in 1611, and is typical of the way that 'the good of the trade' was traced back to the old guild system by a

workers' organisation. For this was something special; the emblem of a plumbers trade society, which probably hung in a club room in a pub used by plumbers in the early nineteenth century.

Trade societies combined trade union and friendly society, and often included those small masters who accepted the journeymen's view that 'the good of the trade' was served by keeping apprenticeship tightly controlled, by opposing technical innovations and by accepting custom and practice as the basis of wages and workloads. Regular contributions were paid in, and benefits were paid out to sick, injured or unemployed workmates who were 'on the club'. Trade societies existed in nearly every skilled manual occupation and although they were essentially local organisations, they often formed loose national confederations. Thus in times of hardship or strikes there existed a network of 'houses of call' which were safe havens within a hostile world where the tramping journeyman could expect (if he had the correct blank or membership card), fellowship and practical help.

Attendance at trade society meetings was usually compulsory. Ritual and regalia were used in gatherings which were to bind together members in a common brotherhood which would carry over in the workplace. After business, a certain amount of beer was consumed, served by one member, chosen by lot, from a jug decorated with the symbols of the trade. He was literally 'carrying the can'.¹ Trade societies were democratic organisations where politics were discussed. It is no accident that journeymen were active in the leadership of every radical movement from the 'Jacobins' of the 1790s to the Chartists. Indeed their own world was often threatened by the Industrial Revolution as much as was the world of the factory workers, by technological changes, by the abolition of apprenticeship regulations, and by the introduction of sweated female and juvenile labour. As reactionary governments regarded trade societies as seditious organisations, meetings took place in an atmosphere of secrecy. The ritual was reinforced by the slang of the trade which hopefully no infiltrating spy could understand.

Some of the specific aspects of the trade society survived into recent

times; an old workmate of my brother's (both members of the same bookbinders 'chapel'), tramped in the 1920s. A jargon is still used in building trades, particularly at break times, which may originate in that used to confuse bosses and spies! (Robert Tressell's book *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* gives a good account of this, as it does of so much of a building operative's working life; see for example, his description of washing off ceiling distemper with cold water - that man had done it!).

Journeyman in the building trades faced additional obstacles in their working lives. Firstly they often had to move around anyway to follow their work. There were exceptions to this; tradesmen who lived in London and other big cities, and those who lived in cathedral cities or University towns. Cambridge, my home town, had 15% of its adult male work force engaged in building trades at the turn of the century, three times the national average. Secondly, some of the builders, plumbers and painters in particular, were regarded as noxious trades because of the substances with which they worked. When my father started work in 1927, paint was still lead based and the pigments had to be ground up with a muller and slab. Many died young of 'painters colic' - lead poisoning. The situation was even worse in the plumbing trade. Lead was the whole basis of the pre central heating trade, used extensively on roofs, cisterns, gullies and drainpipes.² Lead work tended to be mainly on large houses, so in the provinces plumbers also did glazing, painting and pump repair work. R. W. Postgate in *The Builders History* wrote: 'The effects on the operative plumber had always been deadly; the average age at death of a union member in 1890 was only thirty seven years'. The *Book of English Trades* (Philips 1824), stated that 'The health of the men is often injured by the fumes of the lead' and gave this health and safety advice to apprentices: 'We recommend earnestly to lads . . . that they cultivate cleanliness and strict sobriety, and that they never, on any account, eat their meals, or retire to rest at night, before they have well washed their hands and face'. So, plumbers and painters were not an attractive actuarial proposition. Other building workers excluded them from their trade societies, thereby decreasing the chances of a larger building workers union. The painters and plumbers societies remained small, embattled and unstable throughout the nineteenth century.³

The emblem had, of course, no accession number, but by searching in registers, it became apparent that this was certainly a 'framed oil painting of the Plumbers Arms' which had been donated with two cistern heads and a pump by a Mr. T. A. King of Prince of Wales Road, Norwich in 1927. Trade directories recorded T. A. King as a plumbing firm between 1896 and 1929, and his father, T. C. King was operating from the same premises as early as 1868. There was also a plumbing firm called J. J. King in Princes Street, Norwich who may have been related to the other firm. In their advertisement in Kelly's 1910 Directory, they claim to have been established in 1798, and as well as painting work they also offered 'silk banners for Trade Societies'! However, the most amazing discovery was the existence of a pub called the Plumbers Arms on Princes Street. This is recorded in directories between 1845 and 1896, and Plumbers Arms Alley is given as a thoroughfare right until 1937. A visit to the site found the alley with signboard still in place, and what had been the pub turned into part of a smart restaurant. The emblem is too small to have been a pub sign, so it probably hung in the club room of the Plumbers Arms, which was probably so named because the Norwich Plumbers trade society met there. It was just round the corner from James King's yard and within easy reach of Thomas King's premises on Prince of Wales Road. But there was no proof of all this, and no records of any of the firms have survived.

Might there be any clue in the object itself? The costume of the supporters dated from the early nineteenth century, but it could have been a later copy of an earlier emblem. The tools, too, did not vary much throughout the early nineteenth century. But it did give the impression of being old. I showed a photograph to R. A. Leeson (author of *United We Stand and Travelling Brothers*). He thought a date c.1830 was right and suggested that it had been painted by a society member. Despite its naive style the unknown painter has managed to portray the pride, workmanship and self-reliance of his own organisation.

R. W. Postgate in his classic account *The Builders History* (1923), found the first evidence of a 'national' plumbers union in 1831, with the existence of the Operative Plumbers and Glaziers. This was a small body, about a thousand strong, centred mainly on Manchester and the North. Two new factors were affecting building workers in the early 1830s. Firstly, there was the growth of general contracting. Instead of journeymen being employed directly by master tradesmen of their own trade, in the building boom in the cities, a new breed of general housing contractor arose. These were often not tradesmen themselves, and worse, were prepared to give jobs to non-time served, men, who could undercut the tradesmen and be prepared to accept skimping and shoddy workmanship.

Secondly, the political radicalism which had been typical of tradesmen for a generation or more, was now fused with the millenarian socialism of Robert Owen. The authoritarian aspects of Owenism were replaced with the democracy of the workshop and building site, to form an almost syndicalist philosophy. In 1832 an Operative Builders Union was created by a young Birmingham house-painter called James Morrison. He was clearly a charismatic character, as he succeeded in bringing in lodges of rival trades. Stonemasons, painters, plasterers, carpenters, bricklayers, slaters and the Operative Plumbers and Glaziers joined together in a 'Builders Parliament'. Ritual and 'making of members' was important to the new union. In November 1833, the Manchester Branch spent £5 2s. on regalia - eight months' total income. There were a series of strikes against general contracting, often with the support of the small masters, and co-operative production was pushed forward as builders dreamed of taking over their own industry. The union submitted its own tenders, (Birmingham Grammar School, for example,) and with Robert Owen's help instituted its own Labour Exchanges, where notes were issued stamped with the number of hours worked. Morrison himself edited a weekly newspaper for the O.B.U., *The Pioneer*, which achieved weekly sales of 20,000 copies. He also drew up plans (literally) for a grand union 'Guildhall' in Birmingham. Such plans should not be regarded in retrospect as unrealistic - in such a small place as Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, the local Owenites built and ran a Hall of the People in 1837. Owen himself, now seeing the millenium in terms of a grand union, threw open the doors of the O.B.U. to all workers, and in February 1834 formed a Grand National Consolidated Trade Union. The rest is history, and collapse, with the Tolpuddle Martyrs etc. The building trades themselves suffered a defeat from which it took them a generation to recover, their funds were exhausted from the rolling strikes, and the big contractors were able to force out the activities with 'the document', and bring in dilution, and lower wages and standards.

Now it was my hunch that the emblem might have some connection with the Owenite tidal wave; the date, for example, was probably about right. So I made a careful search in the local press for any mention of union activity in Norwich c.1834. Unfortunately, despite the total anathema with which both Tory and Whig press regarded trade unionism at this time, and their willingness to print union horror stories from other parts of the country, there was nothing from Norwich itself. This is remarkable considering Norwich's radical tradition from the 1790s, but it also must be remembered that the backbone of this radicalism, the well organised hand loom weavers, were undergoing terminal decline. Grand National activities in Northampton were detailed and lodges of bricklayers, plasterers, carpenters, masons and painters were mentioned as active in Cambridge in an account of a Tolpuddle-type prosecution of a shoemakers strike.⁴ But there was no confirmation of a plumbers lodge of the Operative Builders Union meeting in the Plumbers Arms in Princes Street. Nationally, the plumbers themselves survived Owenism, and in 1865 formed a National Plumbers Society, still based mainly in the North. Not until a new wave of trade unionism had broken did a Norwich plumbers lodge appear, in December 1889.

The dead end is still there, despite a host of letters written to libraries, archives, building trade employers associations and the E.E.P.T.U. R.A. Leeson accepts my theory, but perhaps both he and I have too romantic a view of the 'travelling brothers'. But I believe that this naive painting, an emblem of so much of artisan culture is the only surviving evidence of a branch of the plumbers trade society in Norwich in the early 1830s. The emblem itself consciously symbolises the values of artisan culture, and was a sophisticated attempt to explain this to posterity, just as painters still crudely scrawl inscriptions on bare walls before hanging wallpaper. I like to think of it looking down in the back room of an obscure East Anglian pub on a group of artisans scheming to change the structure of their working lives, or at least trying to extend their own natural lives beyond the brief span which their stock in trade allowed them. I have no doubt that they would have shared the views of the Operative Plumbers and Glaziers rulebook: - 'How often do we see the poor but honest working man, he whose hand produces all we boast of beyond a savage state pining in sickness or distress with his family starving amidst the wealth he has been instrumental in creating.'

Notes for Further Reading

Many museums have trade society material; regalia, emblems, blanks etc., but may not recognise them. R. A. Leeson *United We Stand*, (Adams and Dart) 1971, is still the best book for identification. He has more material in *Travelling Brothers* (George Allen and Unwin Ltd.) 1979, which sets the trade societies in context. The culture, institutions and politics of the trade societies are covered in

Iorwerth Prothero *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth Century London*. (Dawson) 1979. William Kiddier *The Old Trade Unions* (London) 1931, is an account written by an elderly member of the brushmakers. For shoemakers organisation see my own 'John Brown: A Shoemaker in Place's London' History Workshop Journal No. 8, Autumn 1979. E. J. Hobsbawm's classic essay 'The Tramping Artisan' is re-printed in *Labouring Men* (Weldenfeld and Nicholson) 1964. John Gorman's *Images of Labour* (Scorpion) 1985 looks at some trade society material in the collection of the National Museum of Labour History, and his excellent *Banner Bright* (Penguin) 1973 & 1986, is the standard work on banners.

References

1. The Bridewell Museum has examples belonging to Bricklayers and Tilers, Carpenters and Joiners, and Woolcombers.
2. Names in the building trade vary from area to area. Drainpipes are called downpipes in Cambridge, and 'trowing' in Norfolk. I once heard a Norfolk man say, in almost Shakespearean style: 'We'd better get that trowing up or do we get a tempest'. Another informant, a retired bricklayer who did a lot of well-sinking, had two names for the specialist tools he used in this sub-trade, one set he had learned as an apprentice with a Norwich firm, and another used with the Wymondham firm (9 miles away), where he had spent most of his working life.
3. Not all noxious trades were in building - hatters suffered from mercury poisoning, giving rise to the proverbial doubts on their sanity, and typefounders rarely made old bones.
4. See Nick Mansfield, 'A Branch of the "Grand National" in Cambridge', *Cambridgeshire Local History Society Bulletin* No. 40, 1985.



'The Plumbers' in Philips, Book of English Trades, 1824.

HULL'S SLOUGH:

A REVIEW OF THE NEW SLOUGH MUSEUM

Sam Mullins

If it always rains in Manchester and if Skegness is so bracing, if Pontefract is liquorice, Kendal mintcake and Coventry motor cars and if Watford is the boundary between civilisation and the North, then what is Slough? Perhaps the rightful home of the national museum of topographical stereotypes, for Slough has an unequalled dismal notoriety, the archetype of undesirability, a place with which everywhere else can be favourably compared:

Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough,
It isn't fit for humans now,

Although John Betjeman wrote this in the 1930s, Slough still stands today in the popular imagination as a hell-on-earth of faceless housing and soulless industry, a paradigm of twentieth century grot. As with all such generalisations, this image is potent, even deserved, but essentially unhelpful in understanding what Slough is.

Karen Hull, the curator and entire professional staff of Slough Museum, does know what Slough is and her museum is setting out to relate the principal strands of the town's brief, if mercurial, history. One of the social history museum's most important functions is to collect, interpret and exhibit material to answer the question, 'what sort of place is this and how did it come to be so?'. Perhaps nowhere is this more strikingly necessary than for new communities, whether formed as new towns, boom towns or by migrant influx. In Slough today residents struggle to address their homes by any name other than Slough; Langley, Chalvey, Cippenham, Upton are all part of Slough yet jealously distinct.

Karen has taken on the bravest job in British museums. She has been charged by her local authority with the task of making Slough, past and present, interesting to its residents. If there is still a frontier of culture, Slough is it . . . an odd place to start anything, let alone a town for people to live in (Henry Porter, *A Tale of Two Museums*, *Sunday Times*, 24th November, 1985).

Well all this makes good copy, going on as it does to vaguely compare the curator of Slough Museum's problems with those of Sir Roy Strong at the V & A. After all, Slough is a widely shared joke. Yet people do actually live and work there, go to church, do the shopping, join the local history society and get involved in oral history, and a steadily rising number visit the newly-opened museum. Until May 1986, Slough was probably the largest conurbation in the country (population 100,000) without the benefit of a museum. What fertile ground for the new museum, the only repository, the ark of the covenant, for this large and important community's unrecorded, little regarded and fast-changing story.

Slough Museum is situated within a three-bedroom mock-Tudor detached house, on the busy A4, right next to the massive offices of the Slough Borough Council, and with an address on the Bath Road shared at various times by some of the country's best known industrial names: Panasonic, Johnson and Johnson, Aspro Nicholas, Citroen UK, Bestobell.

By contrast with the bright and lively exhibitions within, the museum's exterior is a little apologetic, a small domestic house in need of a coat of paint competing with acres of offices and traffic. Some bolder statement of the museum's presence through signposting or a fascia board, perhaps using the excellent museum logo, is required. Nor is it really made clear whether the museum visitor may park unmolested in the council car-park or on the slip road.

On entering the door, the visitor is faced with a large aerial view of the crossroads in 1935 on which the town is based, an image reinforced by an attractive information sheet, 'The Great Crossroads', sponsored by local giant Johnson and Johnson Ltd, at the small information and sales point. Although the range of locally-based publications is as yet small, this point is well-provided with cheaply-produced but effective leaflets, including one in Gujarati, describing the aims of the new museum and its forthcoming events. The offset-litho information sheets are bright and well-designed, and headed by a most effective logo based on a modern stylised panorama of the town.

If having taken on Slough was not task enough, the curator intends not to start with a permanent exhibition as such, but to assemble material towards one over the first two years of the museum's life. This is a most laudable aim, giving an ever-changing (roughly every four months) aspect to the museum, but very demanding on a slim budget and volunteer help, with little breathing space for outreach. My suspicion is that visitor figures are not really high enough to warrant such frequent change, but time will tell. The exhibition

reviewed here has thus already been dismantled, to be replaced by a four-month show on Sir William Herschel, the eighteenth century astronomer who first discovered Uranus and a notable resident of Slough in more placid times.

When I visited Slough in June 1986, the opening exhibition, 'Slough in the Thirties', was in place. The first room in the exhibition was particularly striking. Turning a corner, I found myself standing behind the sofa in a 1930s drawing room (Plate 1). The effect was quite disarming, as one looked across a laden tea trolley to the house's original timbered thirties fireplace, flanked by an art deco glass cabinet and period phonograph. Piped popular music of the Thirties completed the mood. The Thirties were of course Slough's period of boom, when settlers came from the depressed areas of Britain's heavy industry to the new town where unemployment was only 1%.

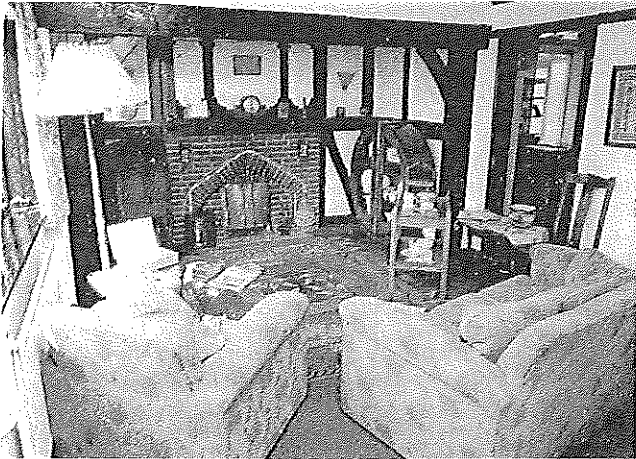


Plate 1: A 1930s drawing room recreated in Slough Museum's opening exhibition, 'Slough in the Thirties'.

Moving into the next room, the exhibition illustrated the development of the Slough Trading Estate between the wars, looking at the companies which provided the work which attracted 'settlers' from all over the country during the years of the Depression. The AMSSEE case and panel system is used to divide a small room and show a mixture of photographs, printed ephemera and the products of Black & Decker, Gillette, Mars and Citroen UK. Being a temporary exhibition, the texts were simply xerox-enlarged typewriter and tended to be a little small. The use of coloured copying paper might have reduced the black and white impression, although I understand the black-and-white scheme was deliberate, regarded as in keeping with the period. The simple but effective device of an art deco corner motif gave the exhibition continuity from room to room and reminded one of the Thirties theme running through the exhibition.

The third room returned to home life, displaying a small selection of domestic objects redolent of the period; toaster, electric fire, hoovers, electric kettle etc. In the corner the visitor once again found himself intruding on a small domestic scene. This time you were looking across an ironing board, through a rack of drying 'smalls' at the corner of a kitchen. Not a full-blown reconstruction of a room of the period, but again a skillful and effective assemblage, a kitchen cupboard, sink and gas cooker, just enough to convey a suggestion of the typical. For its purpose, supported as it was by a mass observer's account of life in Slough in 1938 and a comparison of the standard of living in Slough in 1935 and 1985, this was the equal of any meticulously-researched period room setting.

The final section of the Thirties exhibition illustrated public life in the growing town through a mixture of cases and panels on Leisure, Public Life and Royal Visits, culminating in the town's grant of corporate status in 1938. The theme of celebration, and surely civic pride is a difficult concept in Slough, was effectively dramatised by bunting and flags overhanging the exhibition.

Returning through the sales area, the museum's temporary exhibitions are housed in a 'Terrapin', a temporary extension to the original house. This area is used flexibly and has a regularly changing series of small features and exhibitions; travelling exhibitions from other museum services, a display on dating old photographs, a three-month artist-in-residence sponsored by Rank Xerox, photographs of contemporary Slough by Langley College students and a computer-based local history quiz to name but a few attractions.

By the time of a second visit to the museum, 'Slough in the Thirties' had been replaced by the second exhibition in the programme on the life and work of astronomer William Herschel. The Thirties

drawing room had been transformed into the corner of an eighteenth century room, with a case and panel treatment of his life. The second room displayed Herschel's pioneering of mirror manufacture for large telescopes and included models of the 50 inch instrument with which he first discovered Uranus and its 40 inch forerunner. The 'scullery' at the far end of the museum now housed a general astronomical exhibition, supplemented by a video.

While for me the Thirties exhibition was particularly effective in its clever use of the house's period features, the Herschel display demonstrates the flexibility of the AMSSEE case and panel system even in small domestic-sized rooms, forming both exhibition surfaces with display cases, and irregular and interesting dividers and partitions.

It is still early days for Slough Museum and the attraction of local support and financial sponsorship remains a considerable challenge, necessarily running in tandem with the practice of frequent and complete changes in displays. One of the few sound judgements in the *Sunday Times* article was that 'the museum's greatest asset is Karen Hull'. Thus is it always so in the smaller museum, where the all-singing-all-dancing curator is obliged to paper over so many cracks by commitment, inspiration and dedication. The curator of Slough Museum took on a job that was regarded by most contemporaries as an unwanted, even unwarranted, challenge and has risen to it with great style, laying a firm foundation both in the back room and front-of-house. Slough Museum certainly changed my perception of the town and in time may have a significant effect in stimulating a more positive sense of place and of community. This is one of the most effective small museums in the country and should be looked at by all involved in the running of local history museums. The principles on which it is run are a model and on such limited resources the exhibitions are a remarkable example of the shoestrapping passing itself off as the designer gallery.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION. *The Antiques Roadshow Book of Do's and Don'ts: A simple guide to the storage, cleaning and preservation of antiques and works of art.* B.B.C. Bristol, 1987. £1.00.

There are really more *don'ts* than *do's* in this short booklet produced to accompany the BBC's highly popular TV series 'Antiques Roadshow.' 'If in doubt - don't. Consult an expert.' says the Introduction, adding 'Most museums have conservation departments and should be willing to give advice.' which came as a surprise to me! The bias of the TV series towards pre-1914 fine and decorative arts is reflected in the materials dealt with here. This is not the place to look up strange inter-war plastics, but then this is intended to be a simple guide to help the general public and its possessions. In 28 pages it gives brief and fairly sensible advice on what to do with grandmother's ceramics and metalwork, jewellery, clocks and watches, furniture and painting (and grandfather's arms and armour) once it has all been dragged out of the proverbial dusty attic. The accent is on restraint with admonishments on every page: do not use abrasive cleaners on brass, do not put oil on clock wheels and pinions, never wash enamels, do not attempt to carry out repairs on stumpwork or gold embroidery without consulting your local museum and so on. Some of the suggestions, such as treating the woodwormed stretchers of paintings with a 'proprietary fluid', bring visions of disaster, but in general the cautious approach dispels fears that the show's 14 million viewers will be encouraged to practice the sellotape, superglue and gloss paint school of conservation. Acid-free storage materials and light, humidity and temperature controls are also recommended. The point of this stress on caution is not due of course to some high-minded museological concern with the integrity of the object but rather the need to conserve the financial value of the material. These are not objects with a social history but 'Antiques' which are, according to the logic of the whole 'Roadshow' extravaganza and its troupe of auction house 'experts', bound inevitably for the auction room and the car boot sale. It is after all the valuations provided by the show, most spectacularly with the recent discovery of a £100,000 Richard Dadd painting (which the ecstatic owners subsequently decided to sell), which accounts for its enormous audience. We can hear echoes of the gasps of delight and surprise from Roadshow guests in another of TV's more popular, if tackier, programmes - 'The Price is Right.'

Here the price is all, so that in the list of 'Useful Addresses' at the back the Tate, V&A, National Gallery and UKIC are mixed in with the British Antique Dealers Association, the Fine Art Trade Guild, the Incorporated Society of Valuers and Auctioneers and other 'trade' organisations. We should not be too surprised at this. In our culture of the consumer and the object, those areas of our inherited material culture that are considered 'worth' preserving (what is called an 'Alternative Investment' in the 'more serious Sunday newspaper') inevitably becomes a commodity as well as a potential museum piece. On this basis of commodity rather than museum culture the Roadshow creates great excitement amongst all kinds of people about materials which museums and galleries have been trying to make interesting and exciting for years, and if the TV 'experts' glaze over on the rare occasions when an owner is allowed to recount anecdotes and social histories relating to their object during valuable airtime this is because it interferes with the show's proven formula for success - the obsessive focus on the price tag.

The booklet will not become a standard work in the conservation departments which 'most museums have', nor will it be recommended for future Diploma students. Yet it is worth reading to see just how the public are being encouraged to treat objects which may, should they escape the saleroom, end up in a museum one day.

Peter Jenkinson

ECO, Umberto (Translated by William Weaver). *Faith in Fakes.* Secker and Warburg. £15.00.

Umberto Eco, medievalist, semiotician, commentator on cultural phenomena, professor at the University of Bologna and writer of the internationally best selling novel *The Name of the Rose* presents here a series of his essays and newspaper articles written between 1967 and 1984 which are a total treat to read. As a semiotician Eco's main project is to unravel and analyse the meanings of the phenomena of everyday life and to make us think or see differently. For us in museums, involved in the interpretation and analysis of historical and cultural material, this book is essential reading. Eco is no ordinary academic, and is as happy talking about the significance of denim jeans as he is about the intricacies of a remote medieval philosophical dispute. Taking in subjects as diverse as Disneyland, the World Cup, St Thomas Aquinas and Superman, the Bishop of Hippo and the Red Brigade, *Faith in Fakes* is a funny and

stimulating romp through the minefield of signs and their messages that assault us in our everyday lives. His opening essay 'Travels in Hyperreality' is of most relevance here. We are taken on a whirlwind tour of the kitsch and freakish monuments of California, the wax museums and fairytale castles, Disneyland, cemeteries and zoos, as Eco illustrates how, in the absence of any 'real' history to celebrate, Americans are forced to invent, steal or fantasise a history for themselves. They demand 'the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake.' Eco's descriptions of these weird and wonderful 'New World' memorials make us feel both fascinated and slightly repulsed. Thus he suggests of the Madonna Inn, carved out of the side of the mountain, 'Let's say that Albert Speer, while leafing through a book on Gaudi, swallowed an over-generous dose of LSD and began to build a nuptial catacomb for Liza Minnelli . . .' These are more than jokey tales of tasteless phenomena. *Faith in Fakes* is full of sudden brilliant insights into the political and social implications of our varying relations to the past. The book has to be read, even if only to find an explanation for the current obsessive pre-occupation of Dynasty's Alexis with the plans for her 'noo mooseum.'

Peter Jenkinson

EVELEIGH, David. *Candlelighting.* Shire Publications, 1985, £1.25.

EVELEIGH, David. *Old Cooking Utensils.* Shire Publications, 1985, £1.25.

The past 10-15 years have seen a considerable increase in the number of curatorial staff employed in social history museums. It should therefore be expected that there should have been a commensurate rise in the output of good social history exhibitions, catalogues of collections, and informative publications, along with higher standards of expertise within this most interesting yet vastly under-developed discipline. Regrettably this has not been the case, as any examiner for the Diploma Practical examinations can testify. Instead, many of the younger members of the profession prefer to put their energies into the totally sterile field of pseudo-politics as a means of self-promotion. Personally I have no time for those who state that you don't *have* to be a Marxist to be a social historian (implying just the opposite), while remaining incapable of dealing with the average public identification or enquiry.

Against this background it is particularly refreshing to find a member of this group who is actually producing sound yet popular publications on aspects of material culture. In *Candlelighting* David Eveleigh presents an interesting description of the post-medieval development of his subject, starting with rush lights, and proceeding via tallow, beeswax and spermaceti candles to those made of the improved waxes introduced from the mid 19th century. The latter section is particularly useful, since it traces the scientific and commercial development of the fatty acid chemical industries, which became established in many of our larger towns. A further chapter deals with candle holders, ranging from simple prickets through to candlesticks, chambersticks and lanterns. Considering its size, this booklet gives a remarkably full and comprehensive account of its subject. It is well researched, and eminently readable, with over 50 photographs and drawings illustrating the processes of manufacture, relevant examples of lighting equipment, and specialist lacemaking lighting in use. Obvious care has been taken in selecting these, either from contemporary publications such as the *Book of Trades* or from provenanced museum specimens wherever possible. There are, however, a number of notable omissions. It is regrettable that Randall Monier-Williams' *The Tallow Chandlers of London* is not mentioned in the bibliography, but even more surprising, there is no reference to the only completely original tallow chandler's workshop to be preserved in this country. As part of the Kirk Collection, it has been displayed at the York Castle Museum for almost 50 years, and should have been well-known to the author. With these exceptions, however, the booklet fulfils its purpose in providing a good general introduction to candlelighting.

In *Old Cooking Utensils* the author describes the innumerable devices used to dress food for the table over the past 200 years. In chapters on storing and preserving, preparation, boiling, stewing and frying, roasting, broiling and toasting, baking and cold sweets, he succeeds in covering the origins, regional distribution, and use of most English cooking utensils. Useful quotations are provided from appropriate documentary sources, such as inventories etc., while the illustrations, mainly in the form of photographs, are largely taken from provenanced examples. As with most Shire Albums, this work will prove to be an extremely useful source of basic information, ideal for the enthusiastic collector or cook. It is unfortunate, however, that a number of misleading elements have been included. A wafer iron is illustrated and described as a waffle iron; a bookbinder's tool appears as a pastry jigger, while an apple scoop (used especially by people with poor teeth to scoop out the pulp and convey it into the mouth) is captioned as a corer. Even

though some errors have crept in, they do not detract substantially from the overall good quality of the text, illustrations and general standard of production. Both booklets will make attractive additions to any museum bookshop, although considering the state of knowledge of many members of this group, they should find a useful and informative place on the curatorial bookshelf too.

Peter C. D. Brears

FORTY, Adrian. *Objects of Desire: Design and Society 1750-1980*. Thames and Hudson, 1986. £7.95.

Design . . . not again! It's everywhere these days. Designer pasta, designer kettles, designer Doc Marten's. Too much? Can't take it seriously any more? But wait, here it comes, over the matt black horizon, a really good book on design, and not before time. This is a book that should be on the shelf of every self respecting Social Historian in the country. Its first two sentences immediately draw you in. How's this for relevance?

Nearly every object we use, most of the clothes we wear and many of the things we eat have been designed. Since design seems to be so much a part of everyday life, we are justified in asking what it is, what it does and how it came into existence.

Museums are the preservers of those objects, they too should be thinking along these lines, but that's another story; back to the book. Forty takes a fresh look at the history of design, moving away from the 'Design as Art' approach. He argues that this method, from Pevsner to Bayley, has obscured the fact that design came into being at a particular stage in the history of capitalism and played a vital role in the creation of industrial wealth. It still does. He moves on to produce an overview of the mass produced products of the past two hundred years, linking them to the systems, ideologies and desires of the people who produced and consumed them. For example, he links Wedgwood's use of neo-classical forms to the cutting of production costs as much, if not more than aesthetics. He challenges the belief that machines were bad for design (the curse of William Morris?) using the garment and furniture trades as examples. It was not that the machines themselves brought about changes in design but the use of machinery under specific economic and social conditions. This thesis is carried through the following chapters on the Home, the Office, Hygiene, Electricity, Labour Saving Devices and Corporate Identity. All essential stuff, incorporating the 'external' factors of advertising, target marketing, management science, consumerism and desire into the design process.

Objects of Desire is a superb book, outstanding because it interprets objects in relation to the society that produced them. There is not a whiff of object fetishism on any of its pages. It is a history of design that is not a list of the 'great men of design' which elevates designers while ultimately degrading design by severing it from society. In short, it's a Social History book, one of the best of 1986. By the time this journal comes out you should have a new book budget. Why not do your museum a favour and invest in a copy of *Objects of Desire*?

Mark Suggitt

GLASSON, Michael. *City Children: Birmingham children at work and play 1900-1930*. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 1985, £0.95.

HULL, Karen and JENKINSON, Peter. *A Taste of Change: Some aspects of eating in the Inner City, Birmingham 1939-1985*. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 1985. £1.25.

The 'Change in the Inner City' project, based in the Local History Department of Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, provided some of the brightest applications of the recent upsurge of interest in twentieth century history and contemporary recording amongst social history curators. Funded by the Inner City Partnership Programme and sponsored jointly by the Museum and by Birmingham Reference Library, the several projects grouped under this title pioneered a museum approach to both the recording and presentation of the recent past. These two publications were the last to emerge from the project. They are very different in both format and approach. Michael Glasson's 24-page illustrated booklet describes through text and quotations from oral recordings the experience of childhood in the terraces and back-to-back courts of Birmingham early in this century. The topics covered include household chores, working for money, street games and starting work. Effective use is made of photographic evidence and material from the museum's collections such as the button cards sewn by child outworkers and street toys such as a tip-cat bat and 'cat'. The author makes an interesting plea for the value of family photographs as historical evidence, an often under-rated source and yet a regular spin-off of the oral history interview. The booklet provides an effective and attractive introduction to the social history of city

children and it is to be hoped that it will encourage others to record their own memories or those of relatives and neighbours. A logical future step would be to bring the story closer to our own time much as the other publication *A Taste of Change* has done. Karen Hull and Peter Jenkinson's work is of a very different type. The subject of changing attitudes to food and eating is potentially enormous and one which touches on a broad range of social issues. This publication consists of a brightly-coloured A4 folder enclosing nine cards, each illustrating a strand within the broad theme of food in Birmingham; take-away, pub food, school dinners, the spice revolution, food at work and so on. The text of each card is a mixture of historical background and quotations from interviews, and each topic is illustrated by several photographs. This novel format is clearly an attempt to get away from an academic treatment towards something more journalistic and 'popular'. This promising idea might have been pursued further to its logical conclusion; a graphic tabloid approach might have been adopted, giving in effect a series of cards not unlike exhibition panels. Within this rather ephemeral format the material is actually presented in a conventional manner as regards typeface, layout and type size. This tends to dominate the bright and readable style of the text.

Oral sources are difficult to use in a written form. It is also hard to assess the force or context of such quotations when no idea of the age, class or occupation of the informant is given. This might tend to weigh down the text with footnotes or credits but I would find it useful in assessing the weight of each extract. In the 'Attitudes' card for example, it would be useful to know just whose opinion is being quoted; is the quotation from a restaurateur or publican with 40 years' experience of serving food in the city or is this an opinion casually expressed by someone in no position to judge? These two publications illustrate well the principal problem in collecting recent or contemporary material. *A Taste of Change* traces trends in Birmingham's eating habits from the Second World War right up to the present day. *City Children*, however, deals with a period long enough ago, the first 30 years of the century, for the crucial issues and their point of change to be readily identified. They are distant enough and possess a secondary literature enabling them to be fitted into the broad picture of English social history and interpreted in a narrative book. The format of *Taste of Change* certainly precludes this, but perhaps the very proximity of the issues it illuminates also makes such generalisation at the very least premature. This is the problem facing curators concerned to document the contemporary scene in their locality. Where do you start, how do you choose? Looking at the social history of childhood from 1900 to 1930 is a matter of searching out suitable sources; oral, photographic, documentary, material. The choice admittedly is essentially made for you by what has survived. With contemporary collecting everything is a potential survival, waiting to be collected, photographed, interviewed or otherwise recorded. The choice is that of the museum curator and it is the difficulty of establishing criteria for that choice, the contemporary collecting policy, which fuels the current debate.

Taste of Change leaves the broad interpretation to the future in the taped interviews and photographs gathered for the project. All such material from the project was intended to be deposited and made accessible in the Birmingham Central Library. Each of the projects completed were also shown as touring exhibitions in city and suburban libraries in Birmingham. *Taste of Change* is a rare example of published recent history and sparkles with the insights, the nuggets so characteristic of oral sources ('The peas don't taste the same'; 'It was bash, bash, bash - really it was thrown at them but they used to love it'). It offers a host of issues and attitudes to be followed up in the future. Anyone interested in the twentieth century history of their parish should find ideas for presentation and avenues to explore in these two excellent publications. It is a great pity that they mark the end of 'Change in the Inner City'. Perhaps it is an even more remarkable achievement for a museum to have sponsored such a project at all. Another achievement is that each of the social history curators employed on the project is now in a permanent museum post. ICPP and MSC projects of this sort are of lasting value only when closely associated with an outgoing museum department and it is only by association with that real world of museums that they can provide genuine training as a stepping stone into employment. We look forward eagerly to the further fruits of 'Change in the Inner City', at Walsall, Weybridge and Slough.

I have deliberately refrained from quoting the charges made by the shop at Birmingham Museum for postage and packing on these items as they seem extortionate. It is suggested that members wishing to buy these publications by post include an appropriate amount to cover this service. *SHCG Journal* No.12 was far bulkier than either and cost 28p and a manilla envelope to dispatch.

Sam Mullins

HARRISON, S. (ed.). *100 Years of Heritage: The work of the Manx Museum and National Trust*. Manx Museum and National Trust, 1986, £12.95.

I have to admit that until recently my knowledge of the Isle of Man was scrappy to say the least. Geographically, I would have placed it somewhat vaguely in the sea between the islands of Lundy and Arran. Cats, tax-havens, motor-bike races, Summerland, Nigel Mansell and Chernobyl fall-out might have rung some distant bells. As for museums, I have to confess that I knew something of Cregneash and the Folk Life Survey, but, as this book makes clear to me, not much.

This remarkable and lavishly illustrated book has been produced to celebrate one hundred years of consistent and quite frankly inspired museum activity on the Isle of Man. The Museums and Ancient Monuments Trustees were established in the Isle of Man by Act of Tynwald in 1886. One of its first and major activities was the preservation of the Island's ancient monuments. Since then the service has grown to the extent that it now has a fairly comprehensive and indeed enviable role in the care and consciousness of things Manx. The book is a carefully devised series of essays on the various strands that now make up the Manx Museum and National Trust. The authors write with depth of knowledge and a commitment to their themes. Each essay is aptly and beautifully illustrated and they are ordered, more or less, in line with their subject's emergence as a museum activity and responsibility.

Thus J. B. Caine outlines the context from which the museum sprang and the personalities involved. A. M. Cubbon, former Director, discusses the Museum's past and continuing work in recording and interpreting the archaeology of the Island. S. Harrison, the current Director, discusses how Cregneash became the first publicly owned 'open-air' museum when it was opened to the public in 1938. Harrison goes on to discuss the Nautical Museum in Castletown and the remarkable rediscovery of the *Peggy* (a schooner-rigged armed yacht, built in 1791) in a boat cellar in 1935. He also describes how the Grove Museum came into the Museum's care. This Victorian house, originally owned by a Liverpool shipping merchant, Duncan Gibb, and still containing much of his furniture, in the best ethnological tradition allows the Museum service, through its branch museums, to compare and contrast different standards of living on the Island and their expression through material culture. There is an essay also from Harrison on the National Art Gallery and its commitment to collect the works of Manx artists, past and present. On the evidence of this book, this has ensured that the Gallery holds a collection of interest, quality and variety. L. S. Garrad outlines the work of the museum service in the recording and conservation of Manx wildlife, native breeds and natural environments. The work and scope of the Manx Museum's Library, which includes responsibility for the nation's archives, are described by A. M. Harrison. The Manx National Trust was established in 1951: L. S. Garrad discusses the sites now cared for by the Trust and their environmental significance. The final essay is called 'Voice of the People. The work of the Folk Life Survey'. This too is by S. Harrison and it discusses the ways in which Manx life has been recorded. Of particular interest is the work undertaken in the late 1940s by the Irish Folk Lore Commission. A nice touch here is a piece of oral history, that lovely man Kevin Danaher recalling (in 1984) his involvement with the Commission's survey. The work of recording Manx life continues. The book impresses throughout. It traces the development of a national museum, and the ideas and opportunities that have been open to it. It is a service that has been prepared both to set and work to high standards of curatorship and scholarship. Moreover here is a museum that has been open to and indeed has encouraged overseas scholars and experts to advise and participate in their work. It is not a museum service that has been xenophobic or precious in its ideas or performance. The book charts this well and leaves the reader wanting to learn more.

In my view, the book should have concluded with an essay on the present and future work of the Museum. This would seem to be a major omission. What is the point of looking at the past if it is not seen fully related and hinged to the present? Although the current work of the museum is implicit in much of the text, it should really have been explicit in conclusion. Also in such a lavishly illustrated volume, there should have been some photographs of the present staff at work, there are many of previous curators and directors. My other criticism concerns the title *100 Years of Heritage*. I am not doubting for one moment that the title was not carefully thought out and meant. Reading the text makes clear that the heritage referred to is specifically Manx. However I have long ago moved to the conclusion that the poor and slap-happy way the term 'heritage' has been used, particularly to refer to anything about the past that is commercially viable, has called its use by museum professionals into question. Rarely would it seem to be used to refer genuinely

to 'that which is inherited', as unfortunately that would force an admission that inheritances are not always about 'good things'. There are a few minor irritations, such as the caption accompanying a photograph of a man and woman threshing (p65) which reads 'Corn was stored in the *thurans* until the winter months when the men gathered in small groups to undertake the laborious task of threshing with flails'. Perhaps the author could not believe the evidence of his own eyes. (On threshing, read Emile Zola *The Earth* Penguin, 1980).

This then is a history of a national museum service that in 1986 celebrated its centenary. Founded to record the people and island of Man, it continues to do so today. The final comment should come from the text and perhaps reflects the pride taken in the Manx Museum. At the opening of the new (converted) museum building in 1922, the Lieutenant Governor, Sir William Fry said:

Everyone who calls himself a true Manxman and Manxwoman is, I am sure, delighted that this museum has been established at last, because it is more essential now than it ever was for all people who desire to preserve their nationality and their own character that they should have a storehouse for the antiquities and the history of the past. (Hear, hear).

Gaynor Kavanagh

LITTLEWOODS. *Littlewoods Mail Order Catalogues 1932-1980*. Ormande Publishing Ltd., 1986. £4,170 (ex V.A.T.), Vol. I (1932-59) £1,775, Vol. II (1960-80) £3,415.

Catalogues are invaluable documents for Social History Museums. Every museum ought to have at least a copy of the 1907 Army and Navy Stores reprint on its bookshelves. Over the past few years this venerable volume has had to put up with some rather brash and noisy new neighbours, the Grattans, the Mills, the Moores and the Littlewoods. Many of us have seen the value of collecting modern mail order catalogues. Like the Army and Navy, they do not tell you what life was like but they do illustrate an enormous range of goods. They help us to price, identify and date artefacts and can act as indicators of taste and aspiration. As reference books they can get worn and torn, which is where this collection comes in, a microfiche collection of Littlewoods catalogues, 600 fiches in all, with indexes. They have been taken from the company archives. Overall the quality is good, but there are occasional missing pages due to the regular use of the originals. There is also some curvature in the centre of the pages due to tight binding. Despite this the advantage of having a complete run cannot be overstated. My own museum is fortunate in having a run of Grattans from 1949, which is in almost daily use.

So, if their value is self evident, what else is there? Firstly the development of these catalogues could be a study in itself. The Littlewoods catalogues of the 1930s come as a bit of a surprise to those raised on the Army and Navy Stores. Aimed at a larger market they appear brasher and more consumerist. A bicycle is illustrated with the caption: 'A value that cannot be beaten. Just look at this model! Consider the illustration, details and price.' Consider indeed, on your bike for £3-0-0, including tools, pump, bag and clips. Some forgotten pieces of mail order also appear, the 1944 catalogue boasts this bit of wartime tack; 'A Magnificent Scroll of Honour Portrait.' Send off a photograph of the loved one in uniform and he/she will return slapped up in front of a V sign with ships, planes and tanks cavorting overhead. All this and a passe partout frame for 35 shillings! As the pages flash across the fiche reader you get an instant view of other changes. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the range of goods for sale increases but the accompanying copy becomes more refined. Luxuries become necessities? Parallel to this is the style of presentation, drawings give way to colour photographs, real people appear wearing the clothes and underwear although they continue to strike similar poses. Earlier copy and content can sometimes appear amusing, given the changing meanings and standards of the English language and society. A page from the 1956 catalogue heralds 'Men Go Gay This Summer in Colourful Shirts.' Below we see a bunch of outdoor hunks in check shirts enjoying a healthy outdoor cigarette. As a 'mainstream' catalogue it is also a useful correction to the dating of artefacts from style alone. The 1952 catalogue contains many household goods that are pure 1930s in style. Evidence that mass market Britain couldn't redesign it, let alone make it after 1946.

There is a tremendous amount of information in this collection, but, could you afford it? Its high cost puts it out of the reach of most of us. Perhaps an Area Service could purchase a copy, perhaps a museum and library service could band together. Perhaps the prohibitive price tag will make us all the more diligent in collecting the modern ones while they are still going free.

Mark Suggitt

MULLINS, Samuel and GRIFFITHS, Gareth. *Cap and Apron: An oral history of domestic service in the Shires 1880-1950*. (The Harborough Series No. 2). Leicestershire Museums, Art Galleries and Records Service, 1986.

This second publication resulting from oral history project work by staff at the Harborough Museum, Market Harborough, attempts to bring to life the workings of the households from which so many of our museums collections originate. It looks at the training, recruitment, working conditions and, most fascinating of all, attitudes of the domestic staff who worked in what the authors describe as the major occupation of women until after the First World War. Certainly this was the case in rural and semi-rural areas. A fact which emerges early in this book is that over 80 per cent of those employed in domestic service in Leicestershire at the end of the nineteenth century worked in households employing only one or two servants. This is a far cry from the images projected by the cinema and television, wherein servants tend to outnumber the rest of the household. Service was very largely women's work: in 1891, 95 per cent of the almost 1.5 million indoor servants were women, nearly half of them aged under 20. Indeed, the general movement of young women towards domestic service in towns actually caused an imbalance between the sexes in rural areas. Many women seem to have regarded the opportunity to leave home as a welcome one before the First World War, although thereafter the variety of available work increased and the numbers in service dropped. The Second World War in turn caused an even greater fall in the numbers of women in service, and in many ways the changing nature of the domestic service industry mirrors very accurately changing perceptions of women in society. Among the many insights provided into the lives of domestic servants is the degree of moral supervision exercised by employers over their staff, some of whom seem to have been treated like personal chattles. Behind the facade of gentility lay the fact that workhouse girls were often too small to find employment in households where the decorative function of servants was important. During the 1930s Depression there was a movement of women from Wales and the North to the South as they sought relief from unemployment and poverty - a grimly familiar image.

Constant use is made in the book of extracts from recorded interviews, and much of it consists of lengthy 'oral biographies'. As with all oral testimony there is humour here. Particularly memorable is the young girl who on her first appointment expected to be met at the railway station by a Rolls-Royce, and instead found the gardener with a wheelbarrow. Another 14 year old was asked to dress a chicken, and she did so by decorating it with pie frills. The book is well illustrated with photographs, and with advertisements from magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Weekly Illustrated* and *Woman's Journal*. The authors admit that there is a bias towards the larger households brought about by the survival of written and photographic records, and also by an apparent unwillingness to come forward for interview among servants from small households, presumably because they feel that their work is of no interest. Nevertheless, there are constant reminders of the contrasts between large and small households. More difficult to remedy have been the gaps caused by the interviewing of women by men: health and sexual matters, for example, have been regarded as taboo subjects, as the authors point out. This is a salutary reminder to all who pursue oral history projects.

Like its predecessor, *Hidden Harborough*, this book was published as part of a finite project by the Harborough Museum. It is readable and instructive, and it does not suffer from overambition in attempting to rewrite the history of the working classes in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire at one go. Rather, it forms part of a series which promises to become the definitive social history of twentieth century Market Harborough: considering that this will have been instigated and executed by the local museum service, and that each stage will have been marked by a collecting/recording initiative and an exhibition; the project work being undertaken at Harborough comprises a model for other services to emulate.

David Fleming

SALAMAN, R. A. *Dictionary of Leather-Working Tools c.1700-1950*. George Allen and Unwin, 1986. £50.00.

The author is of course well known for his invaluable *Dictionary of Woodworking Tools*, which he worked on for a near-lifetime. As soon as it was completed in 1975, he began work on the tools of the leather trades. There followed many visits to Northampton and other leather centres to talk to people in the trade, which was followed by considerable correspondence. He did his best to learn the use of tools, mainly by persistence, and his research was as thorough as it could be, given his previous lack of knowledge of, for instance, shoemaking, the largest section of the book (167 pages).

There are another ten pages on clogmaking, and a brief look at last- and tree-making. The next largest section is harness and saddlery, but one could have wished for more on tanning itself, which deserves a more thorough study and publication than it has hitherto received. Other associated trades, bookbinder, furrier, glovemaker, handbags, hats, whips are treated briefly. Was it necessary to include the taxidermist?

For all his thoroughness, errors have crept in. The pages from the Timmins catalogue are dated in the main text as c.1800, but c.1850 in the Bibliography. (Roberts' *Tools for the Trades & Crafts* gives the earliest Timmins catalogue as 1826, and includes Salaman's fig. 2:7 as his plate 21, 1845). It is obvious that some plates, such as fig. 2:8, have had additional tools added to the original plates (the peg rasp would not be required until the pegged construction was taken up in this country in the 1840s). The invention of parchment is given as 2nd century AD on p.1 and 400 BC on p.330 (much more likely). Much work has been done to explain to the layman the use of tools, but a number of entries still use such words as 'probably' and 'it is not clear what this tool was used for'. Since publication much correspondence has again flowed for inclusion in a second edition, for which this is a marvellous foundation, and indeed for others with a deeper knowledge of the trades to build on. It is of course a boon to curators, which will for ever put us in his debt, to have so many excellent illustrations together in one volume. And it is worth noting that the commencing date could have been given as 1688, as there are many reference to Randle Holme's *Academie of Armoury and Blazon* from that year.

June Swann

TURNER, S. and YATES, B. (eds.). *Taken into Care: The conservation of social and industrial history items*. A.M.S.S.E., 1986, £3.00.

This is as worthy an attempt, as it is possible to make, in 28 pages, to describe the conservation of social and industrial history objects. Confined by its ambitions (the written proceedings of a one-day conference) it inevitably sinks into an informal sea of insipid generalisations. The subject of social and industrial object conservation is vast. It permanently hovers between the ethical heights of archaeological conservation and the depressing reality of the constant repainting of the Forth Road Bridge. At this time the subject lacks a good textbook and financial resources. The vast majority of British museums house large volumes of Social History material, but their time, energy, staff and resources are largely occupied with the nineteenth century preoccupations of 'art', 'archaeology', 'treasures', 'costume', 'natural history', etc. Like the old bicycles, sewing machines and old school desks this publication will be ignored by most museums, or quickly read and forgotten, to be thrown into a dusty corner with the other Social History items. 95% of social and industrial history items merely require 'good' storage in order to survive, a point stressed by all authors in this booklet. What they do not reveal, indeed what social and industrial history lacks, is the knowledge of how to obtain the money and power needed to create the 'good' storage that we know is required for these items, but which we patently have not got. This useful, but sadly slim, volume will definitely help, but it is woefully short of the Heavy Handed, Hard Selling, Hell Raising, Hype and Crying, Headlining Hype, that is required.

Chris Caple

YORK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT and YORK CASTLE MUSEUM *York Memories at Home: Personal accounts of domestic life in York 1900-1960*. York Oral History Project, c/o Community House, 10 Priory Street, York, 1987. £1.50.

This booklet is intended primarily to help 'recreate the social world from which recognisable aspects of contemporary life in York have evolved'. The introduction sets the scene for the local, non-specialist reader by emphasising the importance of the history of 'ordinary' people and the work done by the York Oral History Project. This well produced booklet continues the useful trend of linking photographs and edited oral evidence, this time specifically in a York context. It combines the work of 18 editors (one from the museum) in presenting the evidence of 15 local interviewees. There are nine chapters covering primarily aspects of women's involvement in the home and its related activities. The photographs are more widely selected than the oral evidence, coming from a number of private and institutional sources. The publication is a natural follow-on and addition to the recently opened Domestic Gallery at York Castle Museum. It provides a useful background to the actual usage and social milieu of much of the material already on display. Many more of our galleries should be enhanced by work of this nature.

The work, whilst specifically focussed on York, has much to offer

curators of other local museums. Those informants who provided detailed information about the names of household items provided a basis for comparison with our own local names. Is the use of the term 'ponch' or 'posser', 'peggy stick' or 'dolly peg' reflective of the geographical origin of the donor rather than purely local usage? How about the location of the copper? How common was the siting of this outside in our own areas? Another interesting description is that of the use of the step-stone, and reference to the shape of the patterns made with it.

One caveat for curators using or recording such 'close to home' material. Good oral recording work depends on the skill and prior knowledge of the recorder. Here evidence is presented which is contradicted by the terms already given, and as I understand them. This is likely to have been picked up by the interviewer at some stage in the proceedings. Was Mrs. Armstrong's memory of her mother's washing machine accurate - 'it was a posser type, you moved backwards and forwards'? Taken in isolation this could be misleading for the uninformed reader.

Overall however this is a very useful and interesting booklet which is well produced and reasonably priced. It will not only be fascinating to its local readers, but presents evidence of attitudes and practices which we can all compare with our own local evidence. The Castle Museum is to be congratulated for combining with the York Oral History Project.

Suella Postles

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