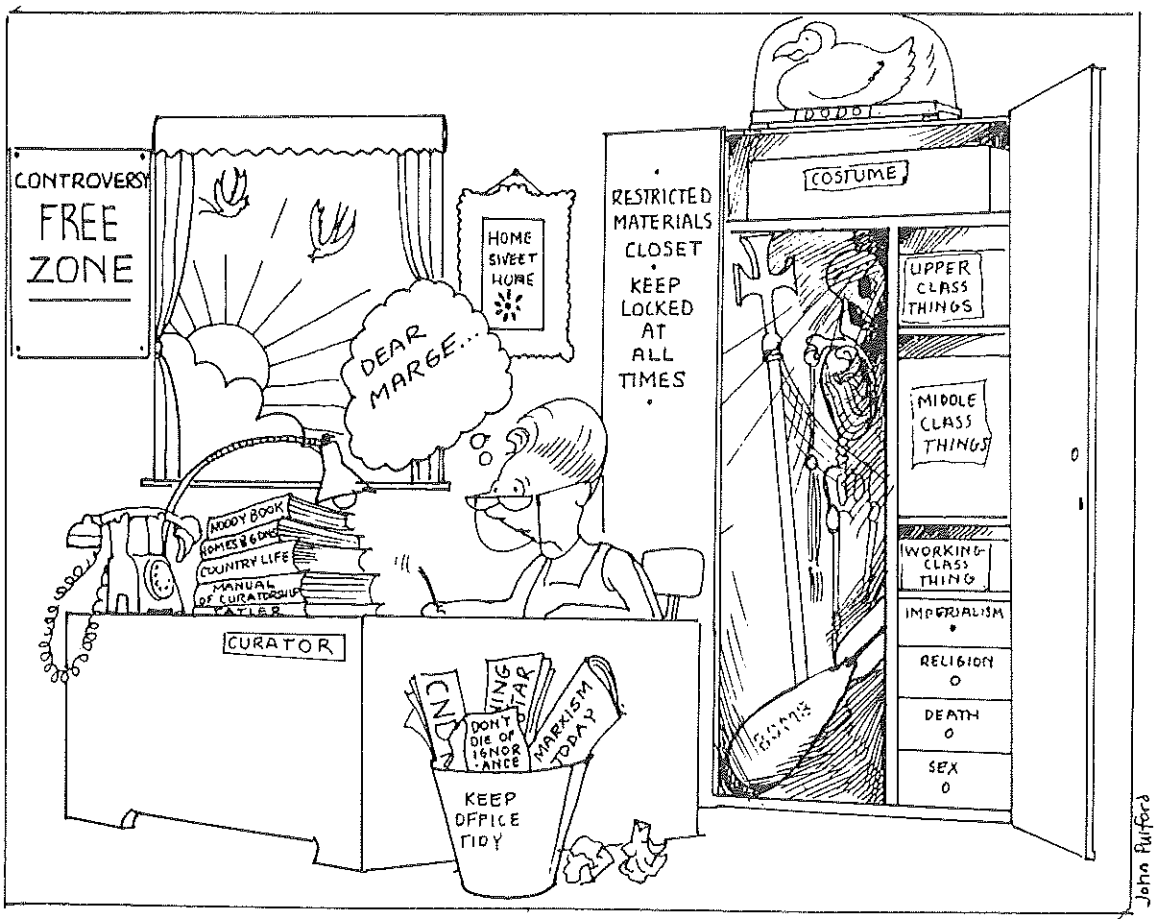
Social History Curators Group



Journal 15 (1987-88)

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.

COVER ILLUSTRATION: 'Problems of Interpretation in Social History Museums' by John Pulford. Keynote illustration of the brochure for the 1987 SHCG Annual Study Weekend at Nottingham.

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The Editor welcomes articles and notes of work in progress for inclusion in the next issue of *SHCG Journal.* The copy date is the end of December, 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 adressed to the Editor, Steph Mastoris, The Harborough Museum, Council Offices, Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 7LT, (0858-32468).

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Editor:
S.N.Mastoris
Leicestershire Museums

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Editorial

I make no apologies for the large amount of material in this issue of the *S.H.C.G. Journal.* One of the main aims of the group and its publications is to provide as full a forum as possible for discussion and the dissemination of ideas and information about social history in museums. My appreciation of this role has been enhanced over the past 18 months while studying for the Museums Association's Diploma and taking on a post with greater curatorial responsibility. More specifically my reading over this period has shown me how little has been published on interpretation and artefact analysis in history museums. Luckily both themes have figured large in the various events organised by the group in recent years. The 1987 annual study weekend looked closely at the problems of interpretation over a wide range of subject areas commonly found in history museums. The quality of the contributions and the depth of interest shown by those attending led to the inclusion here of most of the papers given. These form the first eight articles. Several of the excellent one-day seminars which the group organises to look at different materials and the artefacts made from them have also yielded a very useful clutch of papers. Short, general reading lists, based upon the hand-outs distributed at these events, have been prepared to compliment the more specific information in these papers. Together these form the final seven articles in this journal. The past year has also seen the publication of several important and thought provoking books, most of which have been listed in the *S.H.C.G. News.* A selection of these (too few for me) have been reviewed here. To make the *S.H.C.G. Journal's* coverage even more comprehensive in future issues it would be very useful to publish reports of curatorial 'work in progress' from our growing membership (both in this country and abroad). Such contributions need not be long or profound, but could keep members of the group informed about what is going on in front of, and behind, the scenes in many of the museums which they might not often have the occasion to visit. These items, along with all other articles and reviews for publication in *S.H.C.G. Journal* 16 should reach me by the end of December 1988.

Steph Mastoris

YOU *REALLY* CAN'T DO THAT?!

PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION IN SOCIAL HISTORY

David Fleming

The concept of the 1987 S.H.C.G. study weekend on this theme arose out of a suggestion to look at military history at the 1986 study weekend in Portsmouth. It was felt this would be insufficiently popular, so it was decided to add other unpopular subjects, and come up with a popular one! Not just unpopular, but *difficult* - let us look closely at the areas we deal with badly. In my introduction I thought I would try to put difficult subjects into a context by looking at 'easy' ones . . . and then it dawned that having excluded religion, war, art, design, industry, technology, race etc etc, there isn't much left. The plain truth is that there is no such thing as easy displays, or easy methods of interpretation. Good interpretation is extremely difficult to achieve whatever the subject, and requires great thought and effort,

There was a time when all that was required in a local history display was to do just that - display items, and perhaps describe them. As to interpreting the evidence, and using it to cast light upon human behaviour, little effort was made. This, traditionally, was the role of the material culturalist. A step forward is the period setting (especially the period shop) wherein the museum reassembles items in collections which may have had many different provenances, but which represent a single space at a single time. The degree of interpretation is minimal. The period room has a similar effect, although on view is a socially wider range of artefacts, and the relationship between the display and real human beings is closer. The addition of suitable period sounds and smells reinforces the sense of time, if not necessarily any other message.

The further addition of period people is also supposed to reinforce the sense of time, although this may confuse the message when the people indulge in social intercourse with the visitor - living anachronisms! I am reminded here of a visit last year to Morwellham Quay, and more recently to Wigan Pier, cringing away from the facsimile people who wished to prey upon me.

Increasingly today taxonomic arrangements of objects are being supplemented by other media of communication in attempts to increase the value of the experience - to stimulate and, therefore, hopefully, to educate. Museum Design is closely related to this trend, and the perceived necessity for professional design to enrich the visitor's experience has led generally to a reduction in the amount of real things on display. Furthermore, the tendency to *explain* collections more fully, to provide context and pursue themes, has led to the increasing use of texts in displays, and commentaries, which ultimately take up space, either physically or, as is intended, in the visitor's mind. In short, the continuing tendency is away from putting objects on view, towards greater context and *interpretation.*

There are several factors at play here, not necessarily conflicting ones. It is well known that objects - material culture - are being used increasingly by historians (or, at least, social historians) to illuminate patterns of social behaviour, past and present. This shift in emphasis away from the purely documentary evidence has taken place slowly and tortuously, and anyone who thinks that it is inevitable, or is already widely accepted, should try returning to any one of scores of university history departments, and their illusions will be shattered, at least by most of the staff there. Even in my own experience, having spent five years in Leicester University's Department of English Local History, using as sources the landscape, buildings, music, folklore, oral testimony, photographs, maps, drawings, as well as documents; having been instilled with the necessity to study local communities through the widest range of sources, the line was drawn at material culture (largely anyway) other than features in the landscape such as bridges, hedgerows, roads etc.

Conversely, the old antiquarian, anecdotal approach to history by museum-based local historians has shifted as well, away from objects as displays towards objects as evidence, objects in context, objects as illustrations of social themes and social history. No longer do the key to the Town Gaol, or the underpants of the world's fattest man, stand alone (or together) on display, as local history: now more likely is that they are used to illustrate patterns of social pathology, poverty, the rise of the police state, diet, the linen industry. Even this is now parody, because these items are unique, or nearly so, and not commonplace, and therefore they may find *no* place in the social history display. This could lead to a situation where the most interesting objects are condemned to a life in the store - the ultimate irony in the growth of the social history approach in museums. Objects in a museum can become like extras in a film, or characters in a novel, or the crowd-scene on stage -

adjuncts to the plot, except that in good displays they are main characters, not supporting. Displays should *derive* from material culture, not overwhelm it. You cannot portray a thousand years of landscape history by putting on display a lonely billhook! Another factor is the communicative power of real historical objects. I need not labour this point, but a museum with no objects and plenty of social historical discourse is not a museum, and visitors are not being stimulated, their imaginations are not being moved by real contact, physical contact with the past. There *is* a distinction between the object as a source of information, and the object as visual stimulus, and *both* are of major importance.

Finally, I'd like to wonder out-loud just what a social history curator is. In my own view, to be a social history curator is as much a state of mind as it is a job description: a social history curator is interested in material culture, and what it can tell us about the lives of people, particularly ordinary people, as opposed to extra-ordinary; the social history curator is concerned to relate the story of such lives through various media, using items of material culture to illustrate, to demonstrate, to prove, to disprove. The ideal social history curator is adept at synthesising information gleaned from disparate sources, including material culture, and relating patterns of social behaviour to a lay public, using those items of material culture in such a way that their visual appeal complements and supplements their role as evidence.

OBFUSCATION, IRRITATION OR OBLITERATION?

THE INTERPRETATION OF MILITARY COLLECTIONS IN BRITISH MUSEUMS OF THE 1980s.

Stephen Wood

The title of this paper is deliberately tripartite since I want to try and summarise what I feel are the three most usual reactions associated with the interpretation of military collections.

We have all seen the type of military museum display which is obfuscatory: bewildering all but the most obsessed of its visitors with the intensity of its arrangement and obscuring whatever message it has by a reliance upon captioning that is comprehensible only to the initiated few. Museums such as these quickly induce visual concussion in the placid visitor and produce the second of my effects, irritation, in the enquiring and demanding one. The irritation of military museum displays takes several forms. An irritation produced in the subjective analyst who believes that the subject itself is so uncompromisingly vile that no interpretation other than the outright condemnatory should be allowed, and that military museums probably shouldn't be allowed anyway. An irritation caused to the more objective, rational and realistic observer who accepts that military museums have a distinct role as social history museums but who fails to find one which fulfills the necessary criteria. A criterion which cannot be ignored in a post-Hiroshima world is, of course, the nuclear Sword of Damocles which hangs over all of us and which must colour our views of the interpretation of military history: the threat of obliteration. The capacity of mankind to destroy itself in an afternoon has changed the world so rapidly that the splitting of the atom and the harnessing of its destructive power may justifiably be compared, in terms of its effect upon our lives, to that which the invention of gunpowder had upon medieval Europe. Just as the prospect of being hanged concentrates the mind wonderfully, so our new capacity for total self-destruction makes us look at the business of war in a manner, I would submit, wholly different to that employed by previous generations. I want, now, to consider the relevance and function of military collections in a post-National Service Britain.

British military museums, as such, have a pedigree as long as many other types of museum, and longer than most. Military antiquities take many forms and if one includes what are now bracketed together as Arms and Armour under the heading of 'military antiquities' then it is easily seen that the collection and exhibition of the impediments of the warrior is no new, post-Imperial, obsession. If anything, the post-Imperial spirit is what has contributed to the repugnance for the material culture of the serviceman so often encountered today. The military museum collections in Britain now fall into five distinct categories. The national museums, the regimental museums, the collections resident in local authority museums, independent museums and the ephemera frequently used as decoration in the great houses of Britain. These last are not, of course, properly museums but are little differently regarded by the visiting public, except that they tend to be more popular.

What sets British national military museums apart from other British national museums is that the chief reason for their foundation was commemoration rather than instruction and education. What has kept them in a class apart is that too often they have not advanced beyond the stage of commemoration. Exacerbating this stunting of their development has been the view taken by these museums of their subject. One frequently gets the impression that they enjoy being guardians of a Mystery incomprehensible to mere mortals. Rather like the guardians of the Science of Heraldry perhaps.

The regimental museums, of course, have few crises of conscience. Theirs is a world of certainties, of facts, of unequivocal statements. The Regiment is All and the museum's function is of the Regiment, for the Regiment and by the Regiment. Should one criticise this? Do we criticise the right of people to decorate their houses as they wish? We may deplore their taste but have we the right to pass value-judgments upon it? No, we have not that right and therefore our right to pass similar judgments upon the museums of regimental families is likewise limited. But what limits it? Do we feel better able to judge regimental museums when they form part of a local authority museum and so are associated with 'proper' museums? Or is our confusion related to the fact that the catchword 'museum' is used in connection with what are actually not museums at all but rather collections exhibited in a sort of family shrine?

Which brings us to the local authority museums where, of course, military antiquities abound, all properly identified and plugged in to the social history context of the displays. Don't they? No, they don't. Why is that do you suppose? Ignorance? (What was the

Local Militia, was it the same as the Militia, when?) Indifference? (Oh, we don't collect *military* items you known, you'd better try the regimental museum). Embarrassment? (What are we going to do with all these horrid old guns under the stairs; would the police take them away do you think?). Positive hostility? (War is bad, soldiers fight wars, *ergo* soldiers are bad and museums are only about nice things, like wedding dresses and stuffed birds). Outside pressure? (The Council has decreed that this is a nuclear-free zone and so we won't show anything associated with the lives or deaths of pre-nuclear local servicemen in case it causes World War Three).

The independent military museums are probably the most frightening since they seem to be run by people whose motives have, immediately, to be questioned and who, one suspects, are sublimating the most horrifying fantasies by driving around in jeeps, dressed in uniforms. Here, playing at soldiers becomes distinctly sinister. Here too, one wonders whether the catchword 'museum' is entirely appropriate in what is all too often an adventure play-ground for people with the politics of Barry Goldwater (remember him?), the articulacy of The Duke of York and a penchant for Sylvester Stallone films.

Probably the most natural environment in which the detritus of the warrior's trade can be seen is in those places where he lived or worked. The use of weapons as decoration is not a Victorian foible, even in Scotland - the history of which was virtually re-invented during Victoria's reign, since the 'circles of pistols or bayonets' concept of wall decoration, at least in castles such as Windsor or houses like Littlecote, dates back to the seventeenth century. Few of the castles and great houses of Britain are without some relic of the martial nature of their previous occupants and some are filled with their impedimenta. Rarely, however, are the objects rationally displayed or even well interpreted: they just 'Are', and that is obviously felt to be adequate. Exceptions to this are the increasing number of military sites which have been refurbished, either as pure tourist sites - or 'heritage centres' - or as functioning barracks. We have one of the latter in Scotland at Fort George, twelve miles east of Inverness, where an eighteenth century fort of classic design and impressive dimensions has been completely overhauled. Now the Army may continue to use it to house an infantry battalion, but in standards of comfort that their predecessors could not even dream of. Accompanying these modern soldiers as they live and work in the Fort are tourists, who come to visit those parts of the complex where episodes in the lives of the soldiers who garrisoned the Fort for two centuries are recreated. Even allowing for the dead hand of the Scottish Historic Buildings and Monuments Directorate, who have produced reconstructions of barrack rooms unimaginable in their hygiene and with types of display that are pitifully anachronistic, the idea is a great step forward. I believe that it is being repeated in England too. Fort George comes closest to what I believe is, thus far, the most successful interpretation of a small part of military history. Its one great weakness is that it can only show the soldier as a being apart from his fellow man and it is that separation from civilians which I believe to be at the root of all the difficulties involved in the interpretation of military collections in this country.

The compartmentalisation of history is, of course, not confined to military history. This is because pigeon-holing subjects in watertight compartments is the easy option. It lends itself to the sort of display which involves curatorial specialisation and ignores the inextricable link which all parts of the past have with each other. It is especially easy to apply this to military history and its interpretation because soldiers, *once they become soldiers*, are separated from the civilian community by their capacity to use, or threaten to use, force if need be as an instrument of government policy. It is this association with political power, with governmental will, as what is used when negotiation fails (or is not even attempted) which makes military museums the most political of all museums. Let there be no doubt in your minds: soldiers do not make wars; politicians are guilty of that, their soldiers are the poor devils who have to fight them. Let me dispose of another misconception: military history is not solely the history of welfare. Large parts of every serviceman's life are spent in finding ways to avoid the serviceman's most constant enemy: boredom. Yet what do we see in those museums charged with the interpretation of the military history of this country? Wars, campaigns and skirmishes and very little about the periods when the British serviceman was not actually fighting anyone. We even have a national War Museum, as do other countries of the white Commonwealth, where commemoration has become anachronism.

Why is this? Is it that those people who make the display decisions in our national military museums are only really interested in combat? Or is it that subjects other than combat, like the recruitment, pay, health, diet, drinking habits and sexual proclivities of servicemen are too difficult (or less colourful) to illustrate? If the Army is the mirror of the nation, are the nation's national military museums the reflection of the Establishment view of the nation's military history? If so, dare they be otherwise - given that Government funds them, however inadequately? Would a change in display from combat history to the social side of military history really make these museums more popular or would they be both alienating what audience they already have and at the same time attracting suspicious glances from their peers elsewhere in the profession? Who are these peers? The art historian, who shudders with elegant distaste at the thought of paintings with military subjects while ignoring not only the iconography of the soldier and sailor but also the sponsorship that some of this country's greatest painters received from military sitters. The anthropologist, for whom the study of servicemen is unthinkable; yet they form a closed society with all the rules of behaviour which make less privileged (and darker-skinned) societies conveniently, if patronisingly, respectable. The natural historian, who studies the conflict between and within flora and fauna all the time yet who often fails to extend concepts of conflict to the species *homo sapiens*. The archaeologist, who thinks of soldiers and sailors as a modern species of horror yet who enthuses over the kit of warriors from societies where theirs was an honourable trade, and as necessary a one as that of the modern serviceman. The sociologist, intrigued to the point of obsession with the suffering of the exploited poor yet blind to one of the most often-followed escape routes from starvation and poverty; that offered by The King's Shilling, where exploitation was an art form with the added attractions of corporal punishment and a violent death.

I suspect, actually, that a general repugnance for things military is so firmly entrenched among the members of the museum profession that there is little that I can say which will weaken this prejudice. And it is prejudice: a judgment formed without due examination. Now, I am not an apologist for the study of military history and I am appalled by the disservice that the majority of military museums do to its interpretation. But I think, and it pains me to have to admit this, that there is little which can be done in either the national, regimental or independent museum sphere, given the people who are now in the driving seats of those museums. There is a great deal that could be done but I am seriously afraid that nothing will be. The greatest hope for the improvement of matters associated with military history lies I believe, within the power of the curators of the local authority museums; I will explain why.

I said earlier that the soldier's use, or threatened use, of force as a tool of government sets him apart from civilians. This is incontrovertible and it has ever been thus. What exacerbates the separation, and has done so since the end of the eighteenth century in England and Wales, but earlier in Scotland and Ireland, is that soldiers and sailors have been shut up in barracks or ships and so represent a massed threat to lives and liberties. Before the barrack-building campaign of the 1790s in England soldiers were part of the everyday life of most communities; they were certainly not separate from the community in the way that the growth of barracks and garrison towns has since made them. Sailors were, of course, an inseparable part of the scenery in most coastal towns and their status is little changed. Aside from the regular soldiers from the 1790s onwards were the various types of auxiliary soldier: part-timers who were members of local communities yet who volunteered, or were cajoled, to appear under arms to defend those communities in times of national emergency. No social study of any area of Britain can claim to be comprehensive if it ignores the very real part played in the life of that area by full-time and part-time servicemen. East Anglia, for instance, has lived with warriors from the Roman Legions, through Hereward the Wake, to Cromwell's Ironsides, to the R.A.F. and American Army Air Force bases of the last war and those of the 8th Air Force today. Association with service personnel is a constant thread there, as it is elsewhere in Britain, and it should not be ignored. Yet what makes it so difficult for the historical place of the serviceman or woman in the community to be interpreted? Is it that we really are not a martial nation? I don't believe that for a moment, and neither do many of my foreign friends who are better placed to observe us all objectively than I am. Has the passage of a quarter of a century since the ending of National Service meant that local museums are now in the hands of people with no military experience? Surely not. I do not believe in the validity of the 'National Service trauma' argument anyway since it was itself a very short-lived experiment against which most right-thinking people rebelled. Neither do I accept that an aspect of that rebellion was a conscious effort to react against perceived concepts of militarism by excluding them from local museum displays. It goes deeper than that; it doesn't even start in the 1960s, the beginning of the modern world. It is also nationally-oriented. Let me explain.

In Scotland, the place where I am privileged to live and work, the serviceman is more popular with the civilian population than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. This uniqueness is explained by

the fact that unemployment, the natural escape route of soldiering, is no new phenomenon. It is impossible to grow up in Scotland, as I did in rural Somerset, without seeing, knowing or being related to a soldier. Soldiering in Scotland has a respectability which is alien in the rest of the UK, where soldiers have always been regarded as a nuisance, and often a riotous, expensive and drunken one at that. This is not to say that Scottish soldiers are well-behaved, clean-living lads; they are as capable of being drunken, vicious louts as any other unsophisticated youths brutalised by poverty and honed to sinewy fitness by the Army. It is just that the tolerance threshold in Scotland is higher towards her soldiers and this has much to do with the wholly fraudulent invention of Scottish history during the nineteenth century and a little to do with the naturally aggressive spirit of the Scot. The Soldiers of the Queen, Kipling's 'thin red line of 'eroes', were lionised during the nineteenth century as long as they were stern, upstanding and, preferably, abroad. At home they were shunned, distrusted and feared - except in Scotland. Now, as a natural result of this you would expect, wouldn't you, that the local authority museums in Scotland would all have properly-arranged social history galleries where both the history of the local regiment (and there is always a local regiment, just as there is always a local football team) and the role of the auxiliary regiments figured as component parts in the local story. Either that or, at the very least, there would be a section devoted to the subject in one of the carefully-separated displays. No such luck, except in very rare instances. Why? Well, look at the recent election result. Consider Holy Loch, Faslane and Leuchars. Think, among yourselves, how many Conservative-voters you know who occupy positions of influence in local museums and then consider how many Conservative-controlled district councils Scotland has: 4 out of 53. The threat of obliteration hangs over Scotland - as it does over all of us in the UK, the largest aircraft-carrier in the United States Navy. The difference in Scotland is that, even without proportional representation, the majority of the active electorate would not have it that way, were the choice theirs. And, among the guardians of the public's museum-oriented education, this prejudice against military history because of its contemporary face persists, with educated yet blinkered local museum curators who should know better than to confuse the present with the past.

Now, I must be one of the few national military museum curators who does not, really, think of local authority curators as either hirsute, corduroy-clad, sandal-wearing pinkos or dungareed, crop-headed, whale-saving feminists. Indeed I have more sympathy with those lovable caricatures than I have with pin-striped, chinless sabrerattlers but I can assure those of you from local authority museums that the real future of the military historical interpretation where it counts, on the ground and in the communities, rests with you. Ditching it for modern feelings of revulsion is as bad as censorship; misinterpreting it is as bad as telling lies to a child. The cause of peace is done no good by ignoring its antithesis, since those who do not heed the mistakes of the past are condemned to repeat them. The cause of social history is harmed by ignoring a major component part of it. The Armed Services, and especially the Army, are Society in microcosm. In many cases, the pile of dusty old tat under the stairs which is now glorified with the generic title 'ethnography', but which embarrassed local museum curators for decades until it became fashionable with the discovery of the Third World, owes its very survival to having been looted from its original owners by some scion of Empire. Curious how an African mask or Maori axe is o.k. but a *pickelhaube* isn't; especially when they would have been lifted under the same conditions.

So let us not obfuscate our visitors in the national museums by intricately obtuse displays aimed at the initiated few but let us interpret wisely the lives and deaths of generations of servicemen who, for a variety of reasons, have acted as the tools of the cretins who governed them. Neither let us irritate each other by prejudice, misconception or half-formed historical theory. In the event of a nuclear cataclysm, museums, those most under-funded of all luxuries, will be the first to go and no-one will care anyway as obliteration looms. If, in interpretating the military collections of this country, we can help prevent Armageddon then we shall have achieved much more than we might by persisting in ignoring the realities of the past.

'A DELICIOUS PAGEANT OF WEDDING FASHION DOWN THE AGES': CLOTHES AND MUSEUMS

Sarah Levitt

In an article in *Costume* Jane Tozer described interpretation as 'the lucid and effective presentation of the materials of art and social history'[1] It usually means creating a thought provoking display, with a clearly expressed story line capable of raising fresh and stimulating ideas in the mind of the beholder. The museum worker is likely to be conscious of this type of interpretation, but other kinds go on whether we are aware of them or not. Some costume curators do not realise that they 'interpret' every time they fill a case, and many more do not stand back at the end of the process, work out the messages they have conveyed, and consider whether they wanted to convey them in the first place. As a result, costume is often regarded as the museum 'bete noire' - perhaps the real question I want to address is 'why are so many costume displays so awful?' Apart from my first example, showing how interpretation is apparent in the most basic presentations, I shall concentrate on costume displayed on dummies and as it is interpretated by museums on live models.

The Antiquarian Hotch-Potch

Throughout the country little displays of libraries, literary and philiosophical societies and country houses can be found in which all sorts of bits and pieces are put together. One of my favourites is at the Nicholson Institute in Leek, Staffordshire, to which over the years local worthies have presented their treasures. So we have a baby robe or two, a black silk mantle, a bit of Bonnie Prince Charlie's kilt, a marvellous piece of brocade, some locally made silk thread buttons and a Leek grammar school boy's cap circa 1850. Such indiscriminate juxtapositions, backed up by the style of display (Usually of the map-pin, sellotape and dead fly variety), and the labelling, ('Very old buttonhook given by Mrs Smith'), present costume as a curious but comparatively unimportant bye-way of life. Since the costume is shown alongside medals, old pipes, advertisements, tram tickets and trophies from India, a more interesting interpretation is also apparent - costume takes its place as part of the detritus of humanity, which I suppose it is.

The 'Ooh Aah - Fancy That' factor

Both naive and sophisticated displays are inevitably subject to this interpretation, whether it is intended or not. Costume is often beautiful, superbly made and designed to delight the senses. Most surviving garments were intimately related to specific, albeit anonymous, wearers and this direct link with the past makes them peculiarly thrilling. They appeal to our enjoyment of nostalgia and sentiment, and to our prurient curiosity. The comments overheard in any costume display show that most ordinary people see costume in this way. So too do many journalists - a whole vocabulary of 'purple prose' specially reserved for costume has evolved in the popular media. Costume displays rank highly in the museum popularity stakes, and although we might flinch from adopting a 'glorious cavalcade from yesteryear' approach, do we have any right to deny the public what it wants? Even more importantly, are we wise to deny the average councillor what he wants? While I was employed at Platt Hall Gallery of English Costume in Manchester, one factor in our decision to mount the 'Chic 1920-40' display which featured sumptuous evening clothes was the frequently mouthed opinion that 'So and So did herself a lot of good with her exhibition on wedding dresses/nightwear/baby clothes; and why didn't we do something similar?

The interpretation can lead to a dangerous trivialisation of costume. Continually dealing with the subject at a basic level means that there is little scope for serious discussion of underlying issues. Endless tableaux of promenades and tea-parties provide no alternative to the simplistic view of the past held by many visitors. By displaying pretty Victorian dresses in ways which give a rose-tinted picture of 'the olden days' we show implicit acceptance of the values of the society which made them. Such garments are usually presented without any mention of sexual stereotyping, rigid class systems, and the fact that they were worn by only a small minority of the population. The unthinking 'Oh how lovely' attitude is also responsible for the use of costume in fashion shows and carol concerts. By treating fragile objects as fancy dress, they are not only physically abused, but also interpreted as disposable and unimportant. Historical 'fashion shows' are usually put on by private collectors, but some museums are still guilty of them.

A fashionable veneer

Sometimes costume is presented from a modern point of view. This is another interpretation which creeps in to many kinds of display.

It can happen by accident, for example by using innappropriate shop mannequins, or it can be used deliberately, as at Platt Hall where 1920s jumpers are currently shown folded up' 'Benetton style' in a knitting exhibition. The latter is an understandable effort to make old things look attractive to modern eyes, but it could easily cloud the viewer's perception. While it is often desirable to give a historical 'look' to costume figures, this can be fraught with difficulty. It is impossible to escape completely from one's own time. In Quentin Bell's book *On Human Finery* he illustrates film costumes for *Birth of a Nation* of 1915, and *Gone With the Wind* of 1939 to show how closely the so-called 1860s ensembles reflected contemporary fashion.[2] One well-known designer is known to have shortened early 1960s dresses lent to an exhibition of her work held at the end of the decade in order to bring them up to date. Many museum publications show models wearing historical costume in a distinctly modern way. The Castle Howard slides and picture book, published in 1975, include a woman inappropriately posed without underwear in a 1920s sequinned dress. The new costume display at the V&A has been criticised for its modern veneer, even though attempts were made to make the faces look timeless. It should be remembered that costume displays have strong competition from fashionable shop window displays, and it is perhaps impossible to present then in an attractive, professional way without reflecting modern ideals of beauty and display techniques.

'And then this happened . . .'

When Anne Buck came to Platt Hall as its first keeper in 1947 she brought a new level of scholarship into costume display, presenting the development of clothing with a logical, educational approach. Changing styles were clearly explained in captions, with pictures and fashion plates backing up the garments. Dummies were headless and handless in order not to distract the viewer and only sufficient 'props' were used to capture the essential flavour of the period in question. Anne Buck's methods of interpretation have had considerable influence on costume curators throughout the world. The message is usually simple, and tends to concentrate on construction and style - sleeves go in and out, hems up and down, bustles grow and frills multiply. The end result can be thorough, and when combined with discussion of social causes underlying fashion changes, exemplary. However in some instances, this interpretation has led to an internalised view of the subject, obsession with minutiae and rather dull displays.

Plate 1: Tableau from the 'Fashion on Horseback' exhibition, produced by Anne Buck at Platt Hall Gallery of English Costume, Manchester in the 1960s.

The Room Setting Approach

Another interpretative approach is the Room Setting, in which costumes are presented as part of a general development of style and social conditions. The displays can include a few carefully chosen accessories, or a completely furnished room. Nottingham Museum of Costume and the Court Dress collection at Kensington Palace both reverse the usual pattern of public and display spaces, so that visitors walk through a glass screened area cut-off from the major part of the room. In both places the rooms were completely decorated and furnished for the costumes. In contrast at Warwick Castle, Christina Rowley of Madame Tussauds has used waxworks in carefully observed reproduction clothing to recreate an 1898 house-party, adding 'life' to stately interiors. A similar technique has been used, with real costume, at Killerton House in Devon. Room settings are undoubtedly effective, but they need space, money, and good collections to draw on. They also need to look like a 'slice of life' rather than a stage-set for an amateur dramatic production. The impact of the figures at Warwick Castle or the folk museum at Arnhem in Holland is due to sophisticated positioning of custom-made dummies. Whilst their uncanny realism may be found objectionable by some people, they are preferable to the more usual 'room-setting' inhabitants; mismatched assortments of improbably-posed shop-figures. Costume undoubtedly benefits from being shown in relation to other artefacts, but displays of costume on its own offer other interpretative possibilities, and it is a pity if these are not exploited. There is clearly a case for both types of display.

The special subject

While some recent exhibitions, for instance 'Great Grandmother's clothes', at Shambellie, have concentrated on particular periods, most have dealt with specific themes, such as the Fortuny exhibition at Brighton, Dior at Bath, ball-gowns at Preston, Russian costumes at the Barbican, and faces and cosmetics in the 'Let's Face It' exhibition recently held at the Museum of London. Although fascinating and extremely useful, their presentation was generally factual, concentrating on style. The same has been true of the temporary displays at the V&A, such as 'The Little Black Dress', 'The Paisley Shawl' and the display of Pirelli Calendar dresses.

Apart from displays on domestic dress-making, it is only in the last few years that any interest has been shown by museums in more technical aspects of costume. In 1982 staff of West Surrey College of Art and Design researched the exhibition 'Colour and the Calico Printer' which was shown at the college and at Quarry Bank Mill, Styal. Costume and textile history were brought together in a display of garments and pattern books c.1750-1850. Several exhibitions of knitting, for instance, 'Knitting, a Common Art', on show at the Crafts Council Gallery in 1986, have emphasised the craftsmanship of costume. However, I know of only Armley Mills in Leeds and the Manchester Jewish Museum where the history of clothing manufacture is considered in a permanent display, while there is currently a temporary exhibition on the subject at Gunnersbury Park Museum.

Few special subject exhibitions attempt to be provocative. Wildlife conservation aspects have occasionally been dealt with - both the Castle Museum York and Platt Hall have had 'Borrowed Plumage' displays, and costume was incorporated in Scunthorpe Museum's exhibition on rabbits. The fundamental issues behind clothing are rarely considered in exhibitions. One exception was 'Fashioning the Image', held last year at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry, which dealt with the ideal fashionable shape, and the things people did to themselves to obtain it. Very clever use was made of mirrors cut in various fashionable outlines, reflecting the viewer's contemporary shape in a historical silhouette. Next year, the Whitworth Art Gallery will be holding an exhibition called 'The Subversive Stitch' after Roszika Parker's book of the same name which discusses embroidery and ideals of femininity. It is significant that the organisers of both exhibitions have an interest in women's history. The lack of such exhibitions until now is perhaps explained by the fact that, even if museum staff have thought about the issues behind clothing, it is easier to put on straightforward displays about changing styles. Moreover, many curators are unaware of the writings of theorists such as Veblen, Flugel, Bell, Goffman and Laver.[3] In the past, specialist costume staff may have hesitated to deal with such a complex issue, and in any case reject many traditional theories about costume. The psychology of dress used to be a popular subject with costume historians like Cecil Willett Cunnington, whose writings include *The Perfect Lady; Feminine*

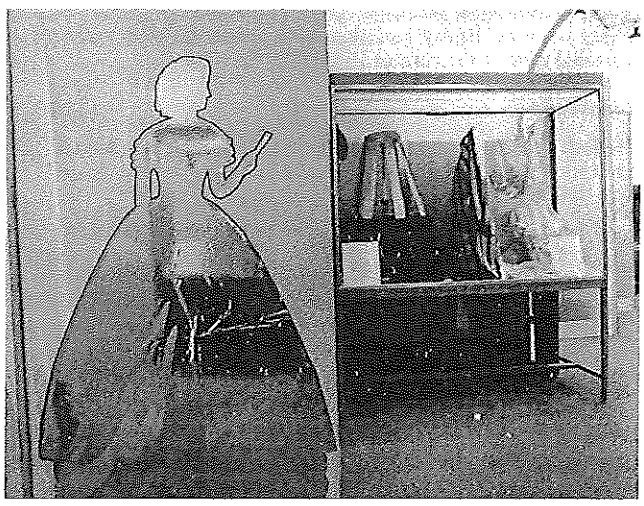

Plate 2: Part of the 'Fashioning the Image' exhibition at Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry, 1986.

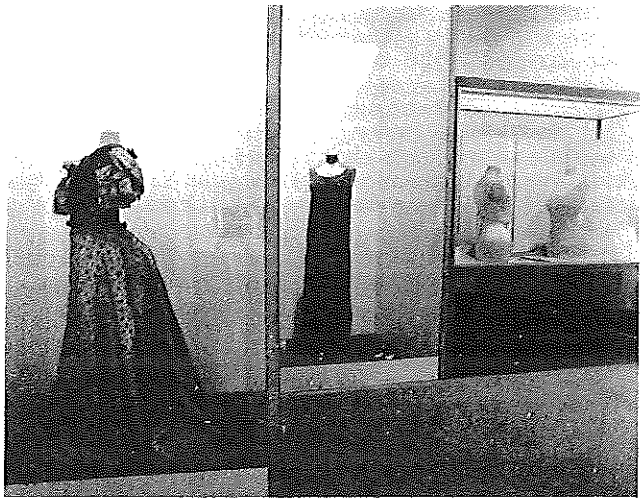

Plate 3: Part of the 'Fashioning the Image' exhibition at Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry, 1986.

Figleaves; Why Women Wear Clothes and *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century*.[4] To many people these now appear dated, amateurish, simplistic and sexist, as Jane Tozer demonstrated in her article in *Costume* on Cunnington's interpretation of dress. Most costume historians now steer clear of the types of theory that lay down immutable rules, largely based on male views of sexual attraction.[5] Recent ideas about constructions of femininity have given us fresh ground to explore. More exhibitions may be held in the future which will question the issues behind clothes-wearing by both sexes.

The problem of garment survival

Many of the difficulties associated with interpretating costume are due to the nature of surviving specimens. Since the Sunday-best of middle-class women survives in greater quantities than any other category of dress, it is very hard to give a balanced overview. It is much easier to concentrate on surviving garments than on those which have disappeared, hence the preponderance of wedding dress displays. An exhibition full of empty cases entitled 'Working class man c.1875' or 'Mackintosh, c.1830' would offer intriguing interpretative possibilities! In the absence of actual examples, photographs, paintings, documentary material and reproductions could be used to supplement surviving garments and present a broader picture.

Even when sufficient garments do survive to make a convincing presentation, costume display is difficult. Without detailed instructions from the wearer, curators make subjective decisions every time they dress a dummy. In the 'Chic 1920-40' display at Platt Hall, a sumptuous pink satin evening gown, with avant-garde cellophane flowers, was shown on an elegant dummy' - a photograph showed that the stylish effect bore no relation to its original appearance when worn by a homely matron in wire spectacles. The amount and shape of underwear, the use of matching or contrasting colours and chosen description all affect our perception of an outfit, let alone the possibility that it might be wrongly dated. The decision to use reproductions to complete an ensemble, the degree of conservation, or even, as at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, re-making of garments, all present problems of interpretation. Every costume display creates a myth about the past, based on the personal view of the curator.

Gloom and the conservator

Modern conservation requirements seriously affect the interpretation of all textile items. Stella Mary Newton wrote of the new displays in the V&A:

> What used to be glaring (and injurious) daylight has been replaced by a delicate twilight, immensely more becoming to our foremothers and fathers who are now gathered in an atmosphere of pensive suspension, waiting, one can now almost imagine, in a silent assembly, not in Dante's Purgatory but in the antechambers of some heavenly abode.[6]

Low light levels will always influence the visitor's perception of textiles in museums, making it hard for them to be recognised as everyday objects from the real world. Conservation requirements also lead to sedate dummies that hold their thin arms close to their sides. Fortunately, wild and frenzied postures were not a feature of polite Victorian society, but tight bodices, straining at the seams, are common in old photographs and necessarily absent from museum show cases.

'Poor Frozen Creatures' (Jake Thackeray)

Nothing acts as a greater barrier to effective interpretation than a bad dummy. Jake Thackeray's well-known song celebrates the pathetic shop window mannequins 'never endingly beguiling, forever gesticulating and waving and smiling at nobody at all'. The worn out shop dummies put to rest in museums impart to costume some very inappropriate airs. I have seen so-called ladies who are clearly too young, old, thin, acrobatic, drunk, made-up, wounded, suntanned or sexy for their clothes. Their wigs slip, their noses chip, their long false eyelashes fall off and no one seems to realise that they can be sent for a respray. I have seen, and been guilty of, some equally terrible home-made dummies of the type featuring polystyrene wig blocks for heads. Financial problems are usually blamed for poor presentation. Even at the Bath costume museum, one of the country's most popular tourist attractions, venerable old wax dummies could not be replaced in a recent refurbishment programme. The impact of some of its most rare and important pieces, like the late seventeenth century woman's dress, is lessened because they are shown on antiquated figures. It is easier to take a costume display seriously when it is beautifully presented an a lot of money goes a long way. The high quality dummies developed by Chris Owen and Derek Ryman, at the Museum of London, the V&A and the Court Dress Collection, and the figures at the Royal Scottish Museum, all cost several hundred pounds apiece. Equally lavish and expensive figures can be seen at the new Paris costume museum. Reproductions are used in most of these displays to complete ensembles. While they undoubtedly enhance most peoples' enjoyment of the costumes, they are, needless to say, extremely expensive.

The decision to use natural-looking models or more stylised ones may be financial, since it is easier to produce a good abstract face on a limited budget. However, it also relates to the way the costume is interpreted. If the sharp-featured local characters in the Welsh National Folk Museum at Saint Fagans, or V&A gentlemen who disconcertingly resemble Boris Karloff help us to see the garments they model as real clothes worn by ordinary people, do they interfere with our perception of them as representations of style? Highly lifelike dummies are undoubtedly popular with the public, as can be seen by the success of 'Gems' figures. This very popularity is often given as a reason for not using realistic models - the idea being that costume museums are waxwork side-shows. It is true that unless dummies are carefully presented, there is a risk that they will 'take over' and become the focus of attention. Moreover, in small cases they can easily look like prisoners. Headless figures are preferred by many curators, since they offer no distraction from the objects on show. The decision at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery to use them was taken because the costume gallery was part of the decorative art section and it was felt that complete people would be inappropriate. Nevertheless, their long white arms, truncated necks and club-like hands make a disturbing compromise with reality. Apart from the obvious fact that hats and hairdos cannot be shown, such dummies can be very macabre, resembling nothing so much as ghostly 'Quiet Women' who have momentarily put down their heads.

The choice of colour should also be carefully considered. While pale coloured dummies are used to suggest the fashionable complexion of past centuries, it might be worth considering the possible effect of a sea of white faces on a multi-ethnic public. The 'Chic 1920-40' exhibition at Platt Hall featured black dummies against black backgrounds, and it was interesting to note that some teachers of groups in which coloured children predominated commented favourably on them. While a token dark skinned figure in each display would be an obvious misrepresentation of history, perhaps more thought should be given to this problem.

Curatorial attitudes - 'Is it art?'

To some extent, the type of display will depend on whether costume is interpreted as applied art or social history. No art-form can be studied in isolation from its socio-economic context, but museums usually allocate subjects to different departments and curators fiercely guard their own territory. Costume is usually bestowed on either art or social history departments, but since it is confusingly related to so many aspects of our culture it is occasionally given a department of its own - a sort of non-aligned zone! Most large costume collections are either autonomous or housed within art departments. It is possible that where costume is cared for alongside general applied art, a curator who is primarily interested in ceramics or silver, for example, may be more likely to approach the subject in a stylistic way. Moreover, where costume is displayed in an art gallery, aesthetic considerations are necessarily of paramount importance. A national art museum, such as the V&A, actually has a duty to display clothing as an art-form. While by no means all specialist costume curators are trained art historians, an interest in art history is essential for them. In addition, many see

costume as an inseparable part of social, economic and industrial history. This is clearly shown in their published research, even if it is not always apparent in displays.

In contrast, I suspect that most costume collections in smaller, mixed museums are looked after by social historians whose interests, while by no means precluding art and costume history, are by definition as diverse as the S.H.I.C. classification system. In Scotland this problem has been overcome by the appointment of a specialist peripatetic costume curator for small museums. This happens in other subject areas, for instance the South West Area Museums Council employs a geology curator to advise on small collections. Its extension for costume collections could improve the quality of interpretation in many museums. The history of clothing manufacture clearly falls within the realm of the social historian rather than the art historian. While many different industries are now explored through displays, working exhibits and preserved buildings, it is only in recent years that any interest has been shown in the clothing trades. No mammoth engines or looms are left behind to celebrate their past greatness, or buildings to be considered worthy of restoration, but the material evidence survives in some quantity, and it is beginning to be interpreted by researchers.[7] Perhaps caring for the relics of heavy industry leaves many social history curators with no time to spare for the lighter trades.

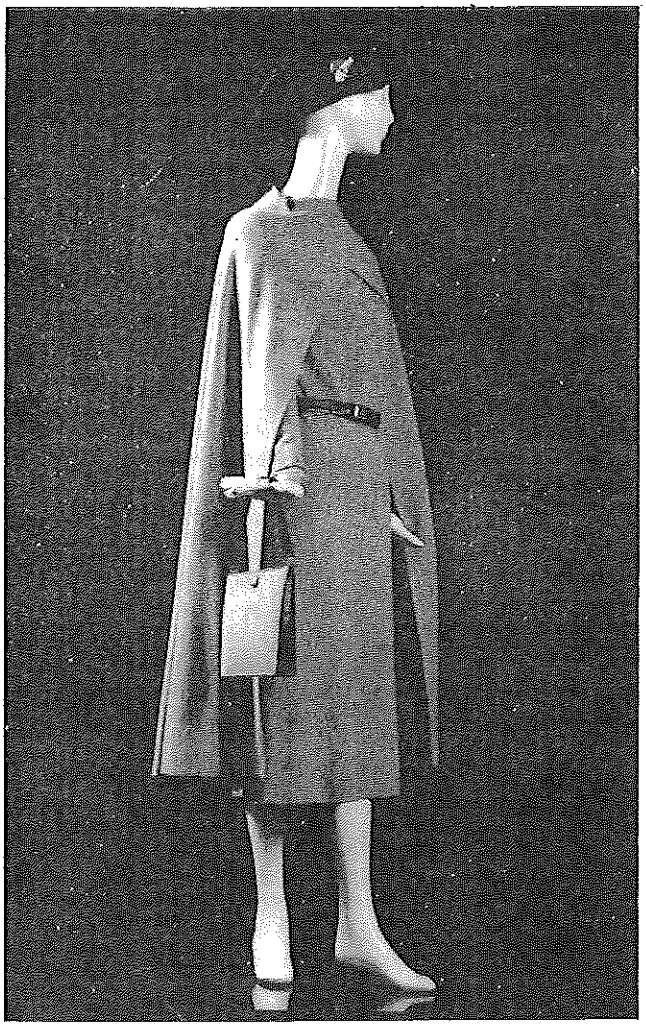

Plate 4: Figure from the Victoria and Albert Museum costume court, 1970s.

Curatorial attitudes - 'Costume, yeuch!'

The quality of a curator's understanding of and sympathy with a subject will always affect the quality of interpretation. Many curators dislike dealing with costume. This problem of individual feelings also affects other types of museum collection, but it is particularly noticeable in this area. Costume is a very intimate subject and many people find old garments belonging to dead people distasteful. A number of other factors are very important. Successful interpretation depends on the curator in all types of display, but particularly so in costume, where, because of the need to handle fragile objects, the curator, rather than the designer, usually mounts costume on dummies. A good costume curator therefore needs to be a mixture of Valerie Singleton, Constance Spry and Rambo. Unfortunately costume suffers in many museums because staff lack the necessary flair and dexterity and so lose interest.

There is another, more disturbing problem. Stephen Wood replied to my proposal (at the 1987 Annual Study Weekend) that military display could be made interesting to women by interpreting uniform in some displays as a branch of the clothing trade, that he was glad I had made the suggestion and not him! He seemed to think I was belittling women by assuming that they were particularly interested in dress. Far more women than men visit costume displays. Just as curators of military collections have a duty to make them attractive to female visitors, so costume displays ought to be made more interesting for men. This can be attempted in a number of ways, but success is unlikely as long as most male visitors and curators continue to regard costume as a second-rate, female subject. The majority of men are unwilling to delve too deeply into this 'woman-thing'. Two male curators confided to me a year ago that they would like to pass their entire costume collection over to another museum because they didn't know anything about it . . . Perhaps they didn't want to! The reasons why costume is regarded as a woman's subject, and therefore taboo for some male curators, include the traditional association of women with textiles and clothing production, the predominance of female garments and female curators in costume collections, costume's association with fashion, art and triviality, and cultural conditioning, which causes many men to think they ought not to be overtly interested in their own appearance or in appearances generally.

It must be said that the museum profession as a whole is not renowned for its snappy dressing and the last factors relate to some museum workers of both sexes, since academic and professional women often share these traditional male attitudes towards fashion. They might claim, like many men, to be uninterested in clothes and 'just grab the first thing in the wardrobe'. Other museum workers recognise and reject conventional fashion and social pressures in their own dress, and have little interest in surviving manifestations of such forces as they operated in the past. Large numbers of museum workers therefore feel uncomfortable working with costume collections. This applies to those who have to care for them, to staff in other departments and to the people in authority who 'hold the purse-strings'. The quality of display suffers, not only through failure to exploit interpretative possibilities, but also through neglect and lack of funding. It is very hard for many people to stand back from their own attitudes to clothing, and approach the subject with curiosity and objectivity. If they gave it some thought, they would realise the crucial role played by clothing in our perception of self and place in the community. Considerable personal choice is exercised, often subconsciously, by even the most conservative dressers and the extreme passion aroused by unusual forms of dress underlines its importance in all societies. They would recognise too that although cheap and disposable today, clothes used to rank among the most valued of personal possessions and that we should treat surviving garments as such. The throwaway nature of modern clothing should not prevent us from studying one of the country's largest industries, nor should we dismiss transient fashions without examining the social forces behind them. Costume can be beautiful, thrilling and fun and there is every reason to enjoy it as such, but if curators treat it solely as light entertainment then so will the museum visitor. Costume is a highly complex subject which reflects the most basic facets of human behaviour. It offers many interpretative possibilities if it is approached with an open mind - one that is curious and interested in other people, unhampered by prejudice, and able to recognise the sophisticated messages conveyed not only by clothing, but also by the way in which it is displayed.

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2. Quentin Bell, *On Human Finery*, the Hogarth Press (2nd Ed.) 1976, plates 15-16.
3. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* 1925; Bell, *Op.Cit.;* J.C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* 1930; Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* 1959; James Laver, *Taste and Fashion* 1945.
4. *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century*, Heinemann 1935; *Why Women Wear Clothes*, 1941; *Feminine Figleaves*, c.1945; *The Perfect Lady*, Max Parrish 1948; *The Art of English Costume*, Collins 1948.
5. *Op. Cit.* pp. 15-16.
6. Stella Mary Newton, quoted in 'The Dress Collection Unlocked . . . a collective comment' in *Costume* no.18 (1984) p.98.

7. Only feet from the Museum of London's walkway stands Little Britain, one of the last intact areas of City warehousing. Today it is derelict and contractors are demolishing the premises of Olney Amsden & Sons, a firm of haberdashery warehousemen founded in 1830. The museum will have recorded the appearance of these buildings, but I do not know whether the possibility of extending that walkway a few more feet and preserving some of the area as a memorial to the City's clothing trade was explored.

RELIGION AND MUSEUMS: A PECULIAR WELSH EXPERIENCE

Tecwyn Vaughan Jones

When I agreed to give this paper I had very little realisation of what was being asked of me. When I really think about it I find that I certainly have no definitive solutions to the 'problem' of interpreting, in a museum context, a debatably intractable or unaccommodating theme such as religion.

One of the two main stumbling blocks that I envisage in the interpretation of religion in museums is the puzzle of secularization. How does one approach a subject which had, until recent times, an immense social impact; whose different tenets in different societies and cultures controlled people's lives, but which, today, as a result of secularization, has been pushed to the periphery of society and of which the majority of the population have no cognition? How does one cope with such concepts as faith, conviction, salvation, prayer, providence and other eschatalogical notions - the very basics of any religion in a museum display situation? The 'decline of religion', and I use the phrase loosely - perhaps too loosely, has made these terms redundant in their religious sense in a general social context. How are people to grasp the significance of elements which constitute an alien world of meaning? Are we asking people to experience a religious world through the medium of other people's experience? If we are talking about interpretation - then whose interpretation?

> Clearly, conceptions of religiousness are not the same to all men - either in modern complex societies or even in the most homogeneous primitive communities. This simple fact scarcely needs documentation. The evidence that people disagree about how the 'religious person' ought to think, feel and act is all around us.
>
> Because of this great diversity, any investigation of the individual and his religion faces a formidable problem of definition - what shall we call religiousness and how shall we decide to classify persons in religious terms?[1]

Religion is a study in the nature of existence, it constitutes a belief system, all of us are susceptible to its influence and in different degrees. I suppose that an avowed methodological atheism is a secure device to employ by the researcher, or the one who is ideologically committed from allowing his own beliefs to influence his research. The researcher has to proceed beyond the exploitation of a particular religion and examine it in relation to its general social context. After this I get quite bogged down. If there is anything more difficult than having to organise an exhibition on religion or religious life it is actually having to think and write about it. The whole thing is an exercise in soul searching, and I still haven't solved anything.

But I suppose that I do have a story to tell. The story is possibly idiosyncratic but many of the thematic difficulties pose wider problems which are relevant outside my own specific experience. Inevitably I must take my own museum as a starting point. The theme is 'Religious Life in Wales in the Nineteenth Century' and the scene is a redundant Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in a small village, known as Tre'r-ddol, on the main road halfway between Aberystwyth and Machynlleth. The chapel became a local museum in the 1960s before becoming a branch museum of the Welsh Folk Museum. The fact that the museum building is a chapel with important historical connections is a compromising point in relation to the content of the proposed exhibits. If I may briefly follow this theme of the new chapel museums and their content.

It can be said that a building's survival depends on an assessment of its worth - it is not easy to evaluate a building which embodies the history of a community merely by relating to its architectural merits or more often it seems with chapels, to dismiss their design as being ugly or unworthy of serious concern - this seems to be a representative local authority sentiment. Many such buildings are sacrificed because there is no immediate use in prospect. Such has been the fate of hundreds of Nonconformist chapels all over Britain, particularly in the towns and cities. The South Wales valleys are littered with huge, graffiti covered, ambitious edifices, whose declining congregations have given up the fight 'to keep the doors open' as they say. Most of these will be demolished or be put to less hallowed usages. In recent years many towns and villages throughout Wales have lost their monumental landmarks of the local chapel. Ken Powell in his marvellous assessment of chapel architecture in the north of England - *The Fall of Zion* wrote:

> Architectural historians have been similarly reluctant to enter Zion and as a result the architecture of dissent is largely unappreciated, unexplored and unrecorded. The Victorian age was the great age of dissent, an age of unbounded confidence

> and seemingly infinite expansion. The present century has seen a general decline of organised religion: Zion has been pulled down or stands, forlorn, as a furniture repository.[2]

The process of secularization which is partly responsible for the decline of traditional chapel oriented religion needs to be appraised before one proceeds to a museum exhibition situation.

One of the more interesting usages, as far as we are concerned I suppose, that a few, very few indeed so far, of these chapels have been given is that of a museum whose aim is to interpret the local area's religious and cultural heritage. Over the last few years I've attended several inaugural meetings of local groups formed to provide such museums, mainly in the South Wales valleys, but increasingly such preparations are being made in some of the inner cities of England, particularly in London. The most successful of these chapel museums is the huge Tabernacle Chapel complex at Pontypridd, about twelve miles from Cardiff, which has recently been converted into a cultural and historical centre. Funding authorities are approached by the trustees and it seems that well provided agencies such as the Welsh Development Agency and the Welsh Tourist Board have on several occasions provided finance for such schemes. In converting Tabernacle into an exhibition centre, the character of the original chapel has been substantially preserved - it could be argued that the chapel itself is probably the most valuable of all the specimens being displayed. The gallery remains, the floor has been levelled to provide exhibition areas. The 'big seat', pulpit and organ have been refurbished and concealed spot-lights emphasize the richness of the woodwork and the ornate organ pipes. The panelled and painted ceiling has been restored.

The closing of chapels is guaranteed to touch the emotions of the local community and in a way it helps to raise the consciousness of the people to their 'religious' past. A chapel becomes the symbol of roots and continuity and when it closes a whole system of values disintegrates or seems to do so. The formation of an organisation in Wales known as *Capel* is the result of this 'awareness of disintegration'. It was formed last year with the substantial brief of recording, studying, and interpreting the architecture and archives of Nonconformity in Wales and to encourage their preservation. The architectural heritage of Welsh Nonconformity is disappearing rapidly - in some areas it is quite desperate and a great deal has been lost.

The history of Wales over the last 200 years has been the rise and fall in the power of Nonconformity:

> Different nonconformist influences, often from outside Wales - Puritanism from England, revivalism from North America - converged in Wales when Welsh society was ready for them and were then transformed into a distinctively Welsh way of life for close on two hundred years. Religion has deeply coloured most aspects of Welsh life since the mid nineteenth century, for example, conditioning the politics of radicalism, and, if the late Morgan Phillips was correct in saying that the British left owed more to Methodism than to Marx, Welsh nonconformity also influenced the rise of Labour in Wales. Even in the decline since 1920, church and chapel have had a considerable effect on Welsh life, and from time to time there have been movements of renewal, for example the vigorous force of Neo-Calvinist evangelism has led to the setting up of new nonconformist causes in recent years. But it would need more than the power of the revival of 1904-5 to return for Wales to see again a renaissance of the chapels.[3]

It is within this context of chapel museums that I would like to concentrate, such has been my peculiar experience in the Welsh Folk Museum. I would imagine that the basic notion of interpretation remains the same as in a conventional purpose built museum, although, as I've said compromises have to be made in relation to exhibition and display.

Yr Hen Gapel (*The Old Chapel*) is administered by the Welsh Folk Museum, until four years ago in the Department of Folklore, not that this fact in itself has any significance although religion and folklore do have overlapping features which cannot be avoided. It was opened in its present form in 1978 as a museum, whose theme, the museum authorities decided would be 'Religious Life in Wales in the Nineteenth Century'. The chapel is small, but on two floors. The upper floor measures around 55 by 35 feet and a third of this space is taken by the remaining pews, which are used for public lectures and events organised by local Friends of the Museum. The lower floor is much smaller and houses also a store room and a public toilet.

The chapel was bought in 1961 by a local character R. J. Thomas when its role as a Sunday schoolroom had declined and the chapel itself was put on the market. This older chapel had been replaced by a newer building as early as 1870 but its identity had been vehemently preserved by the local villagers because of its important historical connections. In fact it was these connections that saved it. Yr Hen Gapel, appropriately, was linked with the origins of the 1859 religious revival which had such far reaching effects on the social life of both rural and industrial Wales. Such connections could prove advantageous, on the other hand they could well compound any exhibition design in that these could not be ignored. It was expected that the 1859 revival would have a high profile in any forthcoming exhibition. As it happens, in this instance, a feature on religious revivals in Wales was indispensable since revivals have been the mainstay of the nonconformist denominations. The local museum which occupied the chapel from 1961 until the death of its owner in 1976 was ardently supported locally. Hundreds of specimens of an antiquarian and religious interest were donated - the ecclesiastical material was predictable - certificates, medals, books, commemorative china and communion plate. The number of similar specimens being offered has increased over the last few years as a direct consequence of chapel closures. None of the denominations have made any provisions regarding the content of the chapels under threat, and in most cases, all the chapel contents pass with the chapel into the hands of the contractors, usually to disappear for ever. The amount of ecclesiastical specimens going begging in Wales is far beyond the requirements of the principality's repositories.

The terms of the benefaction which transformed Yr Hen Gapel into the hands of the Welsh Folk Museum also brought nearly 2,000 specimens with it, all of which were formerly on display. The majority of these specimens were unsuitable for subsequent exhibitions. They could not be accessed into the Welsh Folk Museum collection as no inventory was found making provenance, donor or lender unidentifiable. This proved to be a major headache for future relations with the local population. When it became clear that future exhibitions were to be changed radically in accordance with the adoption of the religious life theme, people came to ask for the return of 'their property'. Since specimens could not be returned willy-nilly without some sort of 'proof', relations became very strained. Museum management was removed to Cardiff, but the greatest hostility was towards the museum's new theme - religion. Even before the museum had reopened a local spokesman claimed that no one would want to visit a museum specialising in religious life; that religion was not a museum subject in that it could not possibly be interesting. Subsequently they even claimed that our original exhibition proved them right, although we had compromised to some extent by providing a display of local artefacts. There has been no abating of the hostility to the museum's theme, even though the most vociferous protestors are regular chapel attenders and have family connections with Yr Hen Gapel. They reckoned that Yr Hen Gapel used to be the showpiece of the village, but now having adopted religion it has become a 'dull embarrassment', I was once told. This is an ongoing problem, and it seems that religion in museums, even chapel museums, is undermined by an unfavourable public attitude as to its appeal as a museum theme.

The whole exhibition in 1978 focussed on the changes which occurred in Wales in the wake of the 1859 revival. In this way it was envisaged that the cultural dichotomy which existed as a result of the gaining strength of nonconformity could be represented. This is rather a simplistic dichotomy, but very real and easily identifiable, which distinguished those who were of the chapel and related religious and cultural activities, and those who were 'of the world' (as it was called) who had a relatively secular existence and were outside the domain but not the influence of the dominant chapel/nonconformist value system. A chronological set of display panels provided the core of the exhibition and these portrayed various expressions of religious belief and their concomitant social and cultural outlook. The remaining exhibition areas contain specimens and static representations of some of the topics within the general theme - commemorative china, plate, religious customs (death customs), photographs, banners (adding colour to what could be a rather dismal scene - the chapel building itself inside is predominantly white - the only other colour is on the pitch pine which forms the big seat and the pews). Religious specimens and whatever relevant display material that was forthcoming proved colourless and various Sunday School teaching aids, such as colourful maps of Palestine were included merely to add colour. Even though most of the ministers showed amazing flamboyancy in their preaching and general behaviour - chapel furnishings were very modest and functional.

The chapel during the last two hundred years has been the most pervasive feature of Welsh life from the Methodist Revival onwards. It was not until the 1830s and 1840s that nonconformity triumphed - Wales became a nonconformist nation - and in this respect, the scope of religion became an intricate web of all kinds of activities affecting the sphere of existence of the majority of the

population of Wales. I don't really want to follow up these different aspects in detail but the magnitude of the theme, if it is to be fully representative, can be gauged to some extent from the following chronology. Wales, during the nineteenth century was convulsed with enthusiastic spiritual revivials culminating in the most extensive of all in 1904-05. The history of nonconformity is a history of revivals, enthusiasm peaking after each revival, and there then follows a period of indifference, then a growing concern over diminished spirituality and increasing materialism which eventually sparks off another revival. Revivals would therefore be an indispensable part of the interpretation of religion in this context.

One of the more perplexing aspects of nonconformity is the existence of four main denominations. In the nineteenth century there were theological differences in the form of denominational organisation and in the importance of the sacraments. There were long, complicated debates, often published in the national press which claimed supremacy of Armenianism over Calvinism and vice versa. In this century such differences, certainly as far as the ordinary members are concerned are no longer relevant to their denominational experience. Secularization has removed the theological divisions to the periphery and it is mainly tradition and the feeling of belonging which prolongs the denominational differences. In the 1830s and 40s, the nonconformist protestant tenet of each individual assuming responsibility for working out his own salvation through Biblical interpretation was paramount. To guide the individual, hundreds of commentaries were provided and these often went into several editions. One cannot underestimate the importance of personal salvation (to a person's religious and social outlook) in this period. One cannot really begin to understand religious life in Wales unless one has some understanding of these debates. Such debates are no longer relevant and therefore a committed chapel attender would have as much understanding of these debates as one who never frequents.

How does one represent these debates and denominational credos without writing a book on the wall and without piling related publications - which are the only visual representations - into glass cases? How does one conceptualise the religious values of this period to the contemporary, secularized public? The majority of specimens collected are related to the sacraments, but the lack of emphasis on ritual in a demonstrative sense, makes it difficult to represent it in a display situation. It would be possible to display the evolution of communion plate from the seventeenth century onwards for example, but that is not relevant to the theme adopted.

The Sunday Schools were utilised in most areas, before 1870, as a place where children could be taught to read and write. These were important institutions providing general education when there was no alternative. Children were taught to read the Bible and were imbibed with the fashionable religious thought of the day.

> The Sunday School was not a Welsh invention, but it had a unique significance in Wales. Thomas Charles of Bala was an Anglican cleric converted to Methodism in 1784 and it was he who adapted the methods of the circulating schools to the use of Methodism, building up an excellent network of teachers and classes for adults as well as children, until the Sunday School became an extremely popular institution and a remarkable instrument of popular literacy in the Welsh language.[4]

The Temperance Movement appeared in the 1830s and 40s - it became a social movement promoted by the nonconformist denominations. Not only did the nonconformists preach personal salvation but they were determined to change the whole social perspective of the Welsh people. The Forward Movement of the Methodists which concentrated its efforts in the industrial and inner city areas was a reaction against the challenge of secularism, - modern sports and entertainments and eventually music hall culture, spa and seaside holidays, even, (in fact the denominations withheld from allowing Sunday School annual trips to visit the seaside and all its temptations until the beginning of this century although it had become easily accessible by train years before). The Foreign Missions were also an obsession of nonconformity and each denomination would have its own missionary field. For example the Calvinistic Methodists would send missionaries to what is now Bangladesh, also to the Khasi Hills, Shillong and Assam in N. India. The Independents would send missionaries to the South Sea Islands. Associated names and locations would be very familiar to members and each one would have a missionary box which would be emptied annually. The colonial and racist tones of some of the missionary hymns of the nineteenth century rendered them obsolete in the latter half of the twentieth century - there is an obvious difference in interpretation of religious values between the present nonconformists and their counterparts 100 years ago.

One of the most apparent features of the social function of nonconformity was the proliferation of chapel-bound cultural activities. In the more populated areas there were chapel activities most evenings of the week and the status attributed to certain cultural events (chapel eisteddfodau, and chapel choirs), was unprecedented in the amount of coverage they obtained.

The Ministry itself was accorded great prestige and status and it was one of the most coveted posts for ambitious young men. The minister carried a great clout in social as well as religious affairs. The role and affairs of the many theological colleges became public concerns and great interest was shown in the appointments and dismissals in such institutions - they were registered as national events. It was from these colleges that theological debates often emanated which were given national coverage in Welsh newspapers and were avidly followed by nonconformists and Anglicans alike - these debates continued interminably to uncertain and confused conclusions. The satirical commentaries and asides made by uninvolved bystanders in response were often far more instructive as to the meaning of all this carrying on - whilst they are quite edifying to read, such events or publications do not lend themselves too easily to interpretation such as that envisaged in a museum.

Nonconformity came to influence Welsh politics, so that radical policies had to become subservient to the needs of nonconformity. Nonconformity and Liberalism went hand in hand:

> The growing involvement of the chapels in political life was a sign of growing confidence and power. The 1859 general election saw for the first time Tories and Liberals evenly balanced. The extension of the franchise in 1867 meant that in the general election of 1868 the nonconformist vote counted and a majority of Liberals (or radicals) was returned from Wales. By 1890 Wales had a considerable number of nonconformist MPs coupled with large numbers of nonconformists on the new county and parish councils.
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> One sign of the arrival of chapel power was the first piece of parliamentary legislation to treat Wales as a special national unit, the 1881 Welsh Sunday Closing Act, which neatly combined three concerns of the Welsh nonconformists, a sense of Welshness, teetotalism and sabbatarianism. Another sign of increasing chapel power was the growth of the movement to disestablish and disendow the Anglican church in Wales.[5]

Although this did not occur until 1920 it was in many ways the greatest political triumph of Welsh nonconformists. Religion and politics were indivisible.

Nonconformity flourished under the impact of the Industrial Revolution. It has been claimed that in England at least churches and chapels maintained and even accentuated the evidences of social differences. However, it is clear that in Wales it was the shape and structure of society which partly accounted for the remarkable attainments of religion and that, at a time and place when institutionalised religion was scarcely expected to flourish at all. When Engels claimed that 'the workers are not religious and do not attend church' he was certainly not referring to the industrial valleys of South Wales or the mining communities of north Wales.

A tradition of music making also came under the auspices of Nonconformity. The great hymn singing tradition instigated in the 1850s almost became a national pastime. Publications, I've already mentioned - hundreds of religious commentaries, novels, biographies and pamphlets which were read profusely and often contained the seeds of bitter theological wrangles. There were a large number of weekly and monthly periodicals in which theological debates were instigated and where religious concepts were meticulously defined.

> The Nonconformists came more and more to control the popular press, the teeming world of often short-lived periodicals forwarding sectarian aims.[6]

The Welsh nonconformist layman was incredibly well served by his religious masters. Throughout the nineteenth century chapels continued to spring up everywhere. They were continuously being expanded or rebuilt as the congregations grew larger and more prosperous. The Welsh language chapels rejected the Gothic architecture of the Anglicans and the English Methodists and they remained up until the end of the nineteenth century merely 'square preaching boxes' but with increasingly intricate facades. Very often denominations would compete on a local level with regard to these facades. Competitions of architectural merit and more secular debating points superseded the intense theological squabbling:

> The same stubborness was reflected in their loyalty to Puritan virtues and theology, almost unchanged until the late nineteenth century, with few divisions or heresies. As Professor I. G. Jones has observed: 'There was no demand for Primitive Methodism: Welsh Methodism was primitive enough.'[7]

Exhibitions of chapel architecture have been amongst the more successful staged by the National Museum in recent years and it seems that this aspect of religion is proving a popular attraction whenever exhibitions are staged. Is it something which a secularized Welsh public is able to empathise with when most of their religious heritage remains beyond their bounds of interest? The religious events of the nineteenth century were also tremendous crowd pullers. Such as the open air preaching festivals when national celebrities from the Welsh pulpit were asked to preach. These preachers were the nearest that Wales ever came to providing a National Theatre - they were actors and entertainers beyond compare. When we talk about religion we often think of it solely in spiritual terms but its social impact as in this instance is often interrelated. Religious beliefs often encourage people to organize groups, to engage in unique forms of expressive, economic and intellectual activity, to follow particular leaders, to engage in power struggles with political regimes, or to give them direct and indirect support and to establish control over educational institutions, although this was not sought in Wales by the Nonconformists, only by the Anglicans.

To some extent, this chronology of topics within the general theme is capricious because it requires cut-off points within which portions of a historical process can be analysed, and such analysis might lead to different interpretations if different portions of the religious history of the period were abstracted. To abstract in this way from the general context often leads to misinterpretation or misunderstanding.

There is increasingly the problem of deadlines in relation to museum exhibitions and often inadequate time is given to research and preparation. In fact even before the Tre'r-ddol exhibition had been researched, the museum bureaucracy had already organised the opening ceremony and invited celebrities had already been forewarned. In these days, when the Folk Museum, for example charges £2 a head per entry, we are told that the public expects more for its money. As a consequence there will be an inevitable increase in short term exhibitions, more deadlines, less research and the enlightenment and edification of the public will be undermined by an increasing emphasis on increasing profit margins. I realise that there is a much wider argument here, but if profit margins, public entertainment and gimmicks become the norms and that solely to attract more people and more money to the museums where is the need for interpretation? In fact the word itself develops a whole new meaning. You can forget about difficult subjects, such as religion and its interpretation, - certainly in the form of traditional display panels and glass cases. Three dimensional performing exhibitions would tend to fit more appropriately into this trend - one could invite ministers or preachers to perform traditional chapel services, invite local congregations to give a traditional hymn singing 'cymanfa' as it is called etc. etc. Such performances might attract visitors, but the problem of interpretation remains. In the Welsh Folk Museum, where buildings of architectural and historical importance are re-erected in the museum parkland - including an eighteenth century Unitarian chapel, there is an increased emphasis on enlivening and utilising these buildings by providing experts on various folk-life crafts to demonstrate their skills - traditional cooking methods in the farm-house kitchen, traditional children's games in the school yard and this in addition to demonstrations by skilled craftsmen employed by the museum. There is an increasing emphasis on interpretation by performance or public spectacle.

The persistence of the belief that certain religions and religious values are particular and proper to specific peoples compromises to some extent the nature of one's attempt at interpretation. On the other hand it could be used as a focal point - in this respect it is assuming that 'people' have a similar conceptualisation of religion as yourself. If this ideal were true then there would be no need to explain the nature of religion as a starting point and one could assume that the public is culturally in tune as to what constitutes religious behaviour. I think that we would all accept that our society has been to some degree religious. I wonder if it is possible to assume too much as to what constitutes religious behaviour? I have made a chronology, a subjective list of what *I* believe religion is all about in nineteenth century Wales. I take it for granted that secularization has resulted in fewer values from which certain religious preconceptions are made. Social cohesion owes its existence primarily to shared patterns of values, norms, conventions and orientations which are part of a particular socialization structure. One cannot suppose that these are any longer specifically religious, but, certainly in Wales, their origins and development owes much to religious conceptions of society of the past. Religious experience and ethnic identity appear to belong to the same mystical sphere of experience; they are both things that are known or felt but hard to put into words. There is always an emotive overlap of religion and ethnicity.

> The chapels which had for several generations served small, localised communities sometimes consisting of extended groupings of large families, with several generations living in close proximity, and with a high degree of intermarriage within the same chapel or same sect, found it hard to cope with modern social trends, with open communities, mobile populations and small, scattered families. The spread of mass media entertainments, such as the cinema, billiard hall and dance hall after 1920, greatly weakened the position of the chapel as the centre of cultural life.
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> The growing secularism of life, leisure and politics was of course a general European phenomenon in the twentieth century, but it struck particularly hard at the kind of religion of the Welsh chapels, which had depended heavily upon enthusiasm, personal conversion and revivalism, with little emphasis upon authority, structure, historical tradition or institutional forms. Since 1918 the chapels have experienced a slow decline in membership, aggravated greatly in some areas by rural depopulation, in others by industrial slump (as in many South Wales valleys), and in the urban and English border areas by the advance of the English language.[8]

The secular society of the present, in which religious thinking, practices and places of worship have but a small part is nonetheless, the inheritor of values, dispositions and orientations from a religious past, even though the vast majority of the public would not rationalize it in this way. One always assumes that there are qualities which are commonly shared by everyone, this being part of a peculiar cultural inheritance. In this instance an exhibition can be deemed a success if the viewing public receive a confirmation of what the mind was already attuned to receive and to respond to. Although effective cognition is established, the whole exercise leaves a great deal to be desired. If we are to assert in our traditional museum displays on religion that traditional institutional religion is declining then we are also assuming that there has been in the past a golden age, where religious values of some sort had a great meaning and influence on those who came under its direction and in some instances to those who bore no orthodox religious affiliation. In Wales, it has been claimed that the golden age of Nonconformity reached a glorious climax during the 1904-05 revival. By this time Nonconformity had reached all those parts of society that no other organized activity could reach. The problem created by putting together a number of criteria for assessing what is proper or real religion is that any change or deviation from such 'peaks' constitutes a form of secularization.

Wales is no longer a religious country - if one can gauge this according to the criteria of church membership and attendance. In fact attendance at places of worship is below the British average. More significantly, secularization has drained the religious content, without too radically affecting the form of the places of worship.

> When we cease to equate the religion of the churches with religion, *tout court*, a number of problems arise.
>
> The task in hand is that of studying the beliefs and practices found in a society which we may wish to designate as religious. This is a matter of intrinsic interest, but it is also a necessary task if we are to assess the claim that contemporary society is more secularized than it formerly was.
>
> It is essential to recognize how deeply embedded is the effect of the official teaching of the churches on popular ideas of religiousness. If we are to use the term 'religion' to connote something much wider than church religion, it almost becomes necessary to use it as a technical term, for its commonly restricted meaning is the one applied in popular usage.

Before attempting to interpret religious life to the general public one must have some preconception as to how they will relate to the theme. How does one transcend the posturing of a secularized public whose conception of a religious past is very often negative and critical?

There remains the problem of deciding the nature of interpretive religious statements or images which would contribute to the interest, education and entertainment of a largely secularized prospective audience. A couple of years ago the National Museum staged an exhibition on chapel architecture. As part of this exhibition a small model of an eighteenth century chapel was reconstructed which could accommodate around 15 people at a time, at balcony level. In the pulpit, which could be seen clearly from the gallery, stood a spotlighted model of a famous nineteenth century preacher, Christmas Evans. Onto his blank face was projected the animated face of an actor and his voice could be heard thundering hell and damnation sermons for about 5 minutes every quarter of an hour. Although this event was quite peripheral to the main thrust of the exhibition, it became the focal point as far as the

visiting public was concerned. It was quite realistic and people came in their thousands to see the preacher. Attendants would tell you that very few moved on to browse amongst the display panels which were intended to interpret chapel architecture. The gimmick attracted the visitors and because of this the exhibition was deemed a resounding success.

In a profit conscious museum situation the criteria of success is measured in the number of visitors who attend, and if unrelated gimmicks can attract the visitors then all the better. This particular gimmick was a caricature of a preacher - his words must have confirmed their original cynicism of nineteenth century religious life, but the burlesque performance was entertaining. Why is religion, even in a non-influential, objective museum setting seen from a negative standpoint by the public? During secularization it is inevitable that previously accepted symbols, doctrines, and institutions lose their prestige and influence. Disenfranchised authorities, especially if they had a stern influence on the way people lived such as the chapels had, always arouse cynicism and suspicion, especially if those criticising consider themselves to be living in more enlightened times.

Yr Hen Gapel is primarily but not exclusively concerned with the visual communication and interpretation of a particular theme. It is therefore, to a large extent a specialised museum. The theme itself is not particularly inspiring considering the nature of the predominantly Nonconformist manifestation. The tendency is to cover this up by emphasising those aspects of religious life which are more conducive to arouse public interest, such as the aspects of social life associated with religion - Sunday School trips including action photographs, singing and music with appropriate sound effects. But such aspects, although necessary, are really peripheral to the core of meaning. An accompanying booklet may be produced which might well suit the interested public or specialist. This might well help to reduce the amount of text required in the exhibition. To the majority of the public who do not wish to buy the book, the exhibition itself must be able to hold its own. A booklet may fill in the details but its role must be to aid interpretation and not to be the sole interpretive medium. The theme of the museum as well as not being 'particularly inspiring' is a very ambitious one considering its comprehensive character, and the limited exhibition area. Perhaps a more apposite testimony could be obtained by using the panel display area for temporary exhibitions on individual topics within the chronology, and have these appear in rotation. Perhaps not; the vagaries of thought that ensue on this point are based ultimately on expediency and very often this is where interpretation is sacrificed.

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AN ENCHANTED HOUSE? THE FREUD MUSEUM, LONDON

David L. Newlands & Steve D. Neufeld

At a symposium to celebrate the opening of the Freud Museum in London, a distinguished social historian ended his presentation with the words:

> Looking at the museum I opened today, I can see that he (Freud) deserved . . . what he now finally has: a house literally pervaded with his spirit, confirming in its human way, what he had scarcely to hope: the conquest of our mental world.

This eloquent eulogy to Freud would not receive universal acceptance, for there is, undoubtedly, no more controversial intellectual figure of the twentieth century. Indeed, establishing a museum in his London home might be seen as premature, in that a museum in someone's honour can be construed to signify a broadly-based consensus on the importance of that person's legacy. Such a consensus on Sigmund Freud has yet to emerge. Early in this century, there developed around Freud a small group of dedicated disciples. In the midst of the acolytes, Freud could rightly feel uneasy. 'I am not,' he told Jung in 1909, 'suitable as a cult object.' But as the decades passed, Freud did become just such a cult figure to psycho-analysts, artists, film directors, photographers, and many scholars in the humanities and social sciences. To develop a Freud Museum in 1986 was, therefore, a great challenge. Questions had to be answered about the goals and objectives of the new organisation. Was the Museum to become a shrine, to instill reverence for Freud's legacy? Should it celebrate a scholar who devoted his life to uncover a fragment of the truth, or should the focus be on the contemporary assessment of Freud's life and work? In this paper I will present a brief history of the Museum, and introduce some of the disputes that have affected the Freudian legacy and influenced the development of the Museum. Finally, based on our experiences of the first year, I will suggest that in order for the visitor to benefit from the museum experience, it is crucial that their emotional and psychological needs be met.

A Brief History

Sigmund Freud, a Jew and the founder of psychoanalysts, arrived in London in June 1938, a refugee from the Nazis. He moved into 20 Maresfield Gardens in September 1938, after his housekeeper and son had arranged the large collection of antiquities, the carpets, books, furniture and other personal effects brought from Vienna to make Freud, who was critically ill with cancer, feel 'at home' in his adopted country. After Sigmund Freud's death in September 1939, the house became the home of his daughter Anna, who kept his study and library very much as it was when he was alive. The desk remained with rows of antiquities and Freud's large writing case on top, its drawers filled with Freud's calling cards, pens, London address and telephone book, and many unpublished letters. On a shelf behind Freud's armchair were the manuscripts of his published works. Lining the walls were the books Freud chose to bring with him, those he considered worthy of preservation. The room had six glass showcases filled with Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Oriental antiquities, some 1,800 in total. Most important of all, was Freud's analytical couch, draped with an oriental carpet and covered with plush cushions. The couch was Freud's tool to investigate the psyche of his patients, such as the Wolf Man, the Rat Man and Dora, and uncover the potent feelings of their childhood.

Miss Freud followed in her father's footsteps, working for almost her entire life as a psycho-analyst, specializing in child therapy. Her clinical work provided evidence as proof of her father's theories on the psycho-sexual development of children, while her theoretical contributions helped to pioneer the field of child psycho-analysis. In 1980 Miss Freud made arrangements to create a museum at 20 Maresfield Gardens as a memorial to the life and work of her father. A registered English charitable trust was set up to receive the building and contents, and when Anna Freud died in 1982, the process of establishing the Museum began. Every room was photographed in detail, a hand-list was prepared of the contents of the house, and the collection was put in storage while the building underwent major renovations to meet the requirements for a museum and a public building.

The Freudian Legacy and its Critics

Throughout his life Freud struggled constantly to advance his theories and methods of treating neuroses. Freud admitted in a BBC interview in 1938 that 'People did not believe in my facts and thought my theories unsavoury. Resistence was strong and unrelenting'. Miss Freud spent much of her energy promoting her father's intellectual ideas and their application to the mental life of adults and children. She saw his work become well-established and

Plate 1: Sigmund Freud's study at 20 Maresfield Gardens, London, as restored in 1986 (Freud Museum, London).

respected, nowhere more so than in America, where university students of the humanities and social sciences studied Freud's works assiduously. In the 1950s and 1960s, Hollywood took Freud to heart, and produced a steady stream of popular films with psycho-analytical themes, from the musical *I'm goin' to dance my cares away* to the murder-mystery *Psycho*. The popularization of Freud's ideas was not welcomed by orthodox psycho-analysts, and most definitely not by Miss Freud. Simplifying the complex theoretical concepts could easily make them appear trivial or result in a distortion that promised a therapy to rid society of its ills in the same way as individuals were relieved of their neuroses.

In the 1970s the pendulum began to swing in the opposite direction. Freud's critics became more prominent, especially in the popular press. Attacks on Freud, regardless of the grounds, were newsworthy! Questions were raised about the therapeutic value of psycho-analytic techniques and its scientific basis. Freud was accused of hiding the medical malpractice of his friend and confidant, Wilheim Fliess; of being a cocaine addict; of being a plagiarist, abortionist, paedophile, and adulterer; of manufacturing case histories; and of intellectual dishonesty in refusing to acknowledge that his female patients were not fantasizing seduction by their father or close relative, but had in fact been sexually abused.

Most of the new criticism of Freud's work is based on the analysis of the significance of certain events and relationships in his life, as interpreted from Freud's correspondence with friends and colleagues. However, much of the personal correspondence and papers of Freud and his followers remain unpublished. The bulk of these letters, collected by the Sigmund Freud Archives, Inc., of New York, are deposited at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., some under restrictions that make it difficult, if not impossible, for investigators to gain access. It was the zealousness of the Sigmund Freud Archives, who are also the trustees of the Freud Museum, that had put these letters and manuscripts out of the reach of Freudian scholars and Freud's critics alike. Two thousand letters remained at 20 Maresfield Gardens in London, but these were also to be transferred to the Library of Congress, and not immediately released, thus perpetuating the adulation and homage that Miss Freud and her associates gave to Sigmund Freud, while frustrating the efforts of critics to find evidence for the assault on the Freudian empire.

The Development of the Freud Museum

It was in this charged atmosphere of suspicion and forboding that a Curator was appointed, to be a museologist who could oversee the development of the Museum. The first task was to develop goals by which the institution would be guided. The goals approved by the Trustees were:

> To commemorate the life and work of Sigmund Freud and to present his contributions to modern society, and to present the history and development of psycho-analysis.

To achieve these goals, a number of objectives were set for the development of all areas of museum activity: collecting, conservation, research, and interpretation. Of special concern in the early period were the plans for interpretation, including the use of exhibits and displays, guided tours, special events, publications, and the Museum's sales area. The interpretation plan established that the Museum was to be a place for the general public, not just psycho-analysts or mental health professionals. It was necessary to take into account different levels of interest and background knowledge. No visitor would be ignorant about Freud, but many would be misinformed. An overall theme, 'Freud and the Archaeology of the Mind', was chosen as Freud's psycho-analytic technique of uncovering layers of past experiences was related to his collection of antiquities, which had been excavated from archaeological sites. He explained to one patient, the 'Rat Man', that conscious material wears little away while what is unconscious is relatively unchanging. 'I illustrated my remarks by pointing to the antique objects about in my room. They were, in fact, I said, only objects found in a tomb, and their burial had been their preservation.' With this theme, a story-line could be developed to provide a context for isolated facts which would otherwise soon be forgotten.

Three basic decisions in the interpretation plan affected the overall development of the Museum. First, the Museum had a mandate to present different views on Freud's work; in short, it had the right to be controversial, but not provocative. It could present ideas of schools other than those endorsed by Miss Freud, and could address contemporary mental health and social issues. This mandate was to provide the Museum with the freedom to present Freud's ideas to people who had no personal contact with psycho-analysts, or no professional commitment to Freud or psycho-analysts. Second, the Museum's displays and tours would assume that the visitor was not a mental health professional, with a formal education equivalent to having passed O-level examinations, but not necessarily in psychology. Information would be presented in different levels of complexity assuming that visitors would have varying degrees of interest in the subject. It is not an easy task to take Freud's complex ideas and develop an interpretive programme to meet these expectations. Third, the Museum should, as much as possible, restore Freud's study and library to the way it was in 1938-39, while other rooms would be a combination of restored room and didactic display, or just display space. The entranceway and central stairway reflect the compromise between restoration and display, while rooms on the first floor are devoted primarily to displays. The restoration relied on the advice of many of Miss Freud's associates, who continued to live with the memory of the house as a 'home' and not a public museum.

We knew that the reaction to the Museum would be strong, by the volatile and emotive nature of people's feelings about Freud and the profession he founded. Indeed, media coverage of the Museum began before any member of the press had set foot inside. A German magazine wrote a scathing attack on Museum staff, calling them ignoramuses, and described the Museum as a desecration. They had conveniently combined anti-Freud sentiments with anti-Americanism, assuming that the staff were American (which they were not). A London tabloid wanted a photograph of Freud's couch in use, but we did not think the couch would benefit from the publicity of a page three photograph. Brazilian TV arrived, complete with a commentator dressed in white (shirt, tie and shoes). German TV, not wanting to be outdone by the German language magazine, made much of our poster in the London Underground and the spotlights on the front lawn (part of our security system). An irate psycho-analyst tried to convince us that it was a sacrilege to open the Freud family home to the public - to welcome people whom the Freuds might never have had in their home. A South American psycho-analyst arrived a few days before opening, when we were very busy completing the restoration of the rooms, and would not leave. We were unable to persuade her to come back after the opening date, and finally relented when she made it clear that she would not leave the property. Tears filled her eyes when she saw the couch, covered with the quite ordinary oriental carpet. Other comments recorded in the visitors book, such as 'Evocative', 'Thank you', 'Engrossing', 'Fascinating', 'Enlightening', 'Atmospheric', 'Stimulating', 'Illuminating', 'Captivating', 'Magnifico', 'Maravilloso',

Plate 2: Freud's desktop as he arranged it during his stay at 20 Maresfield Gardens (Freud Museum, London).

'Emouvant', testify to the same type of emotion aroused in people from across the world. The variety and intensity of responses to the Museum make it clear that the Museum serves the psychological needs of the visitors as well as the function of educating people about Freud and his work.

The Need for Enchantment

Museum curators and social historians would like to think that museums provide a chance for visitors to learn through displays and tours, or through personal encounters with the objects on display. It is, I believe, unlikely that people fully understand what the Museum attempts to convey, certainly far less than is taken for granted, because of emotional and psychological barriers. These barriers are created by the discontinuity between the reality in which the visitor lives and the world of the museum, and the realization that the historical past is only accessible through the psychological present. Both issues were faced in the development of the Freud Museum, and led to the decisions, mentioned earlier, to combine restorations with didactic displays.

Visitor needs are often quite the opposite from the modern designers' preoccupation with display cases, plexiglass covers, track lighting, restaurants, and sales areas. Modern 'high tech' exhibitions can alienate rather than entice, providing a setting familiar to the 'outside' world, but hostile in the museum. That world 'outside' is cluttered with fragile relationships to things and places, fraught with turmoil and anxiety, resulting in confusion and disorientation. This certainly contributes to the rate at which visitors to our 'high-tech' museums develop signs of fatigue, irritability and tension. The visitor's first encounter should not be an orientation gallery, orientation lecture, structured tour or didactic display. Rather they should be presented with familiar everyday things in an environment which produces a sense of security, and the assurance that the visitor has entered, what Alvin Toffler, in *Future Shock* calls a 'stability zone', a place that gives the assurance that the museum is a safe place in which to examine our modern predicaments using evidence from the past. The creation of 'stability zones' in a museum does not rule out experimental learning, but this does require that a sequence of experiences are used to combine historical consciousness and fantasy. Just as commercial products are designed to provide psychological satisfaction as well as utility, so too the museum has to create a psychologically attractive atmosphere, using light, colour, sound and smell (if possible), to convey a sense of familiar historical space and permanence. Creating psychologically satisfying zones in the museum may attract visitors for reasons that they do not comprehend. The ability of a museum, or an exhibit, to create this sense of enchantment enables the museum to communicate to the mind of the visitor, both child and adult alike. The difficulty in evaluating this may be the reason why so little research has been done on this aspect of museum design.

The experiences with visitors to the Freud Museum during its first year of opening indicate that much of the attractiveness of the room settings and displays is derived from the sense of enchantment. This may be associated with the subjects of psychology and psychiatry, but it is unlikely that this alone could sustain a visitor's interest for more than a few minutes. Familiar objects, such as a couch, books in the library, and carpets do not in themselves attract visitors, hold their attention and spark their imagination. It is the context in which these ordinary everyday things are placed, the use of lighting, the softness of texture of the finishes of the rooms, the feeling of privacy and security - all combine to convey a sense of psychological well-being. The museum must foster the effect of enchantment and encourage the visitor to learn, beyond the sense of 'wonder' and the comforting atmosphere which certainly add to the expérience of the visit. The sales area at the Freud Museum tries to stock items that will augment the visitor's overall impression. A good example is the Freud Musuem ring, made of sterling silver with the Museum's logo stylistically portrayed around the band. The significance of the ring is explained to the visitor by the fact that Freud gave rings to his closest disciples, members of 'The Committee' formed to safeguard the development of psycho-analysis. While the Museum did not replicate the original design, it developed the link between the historical past and the psychological present by decorating the band with the Museum's logo, which is taken from a mystical symbol woven into the Turkish carpet covering Freud's couch. For other visitors, whose imagination and curiosity has been sparked, the Museum offers the writings of Freud, over ninety percent of which are in print in paperback.

The Role of Enchantment in Personality Museums

Visitors to museums are far more psychologically trapped in the present than the social historian or curator may realize. The visitor must first be given the chance to phantasize about the past, with its high romance, so that they can come to terms with the problematic nature of reality in the didactic displays and lectures that are certain to follow. Presenting the past should not be preoccupied with the accumulation of great events, overshadowed by great persons. It is often these great individuals themselves who can best appreciate the value of their contributions in the context of human history. As Freud himself wrote in his *Autobiography*

> Looking back, then, over the patchwork of my life's labours, I can say that I have made many beginnings and thrown out many suggestions. Something will come of them in the future, though I cannot myself tell whether it will be much or little. I may, however, express hope that I have opened up a pathway for an important advance in our knowledge.

Social history is the record of how individuals and groups were able to give new meaning to life by meeting the challenge of overwhelming odds. Museums must entertain the use of 'enchantment' as a prerequisite to convey this message, without promoting delusions or creating idols.

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1. Lecture by Peter Gay, 28 July 1986, p. 8.
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IDEOLOGY AND THE MUSEUM – THE CASE OF IMPERIAL PROPAGANDA

John M. Makenzie

The rise and fall of ideologies is often represented in museums but seldom explicitly noted or commented upon. A favourite example of mine is in the town museum at Kendal. A local landowner and military man, Col. Edgar Harrison pursued a long-standing interest in big-game shooting. He made a large collection of animal heads and trophies, stuffed and mounted specimens, as well as many other memorabilia of the Hunt in various regions of the globe. In the 1930s he decided that the good burghers of Kendal would like nothing better than to have these representations of both natural history and the elite bloodlust of the day on public display. He donated his collection, together with a new extension to the museum, and opened it himself in 1939. There it remains, recently refurbished, containing not only his dead zoo, but also information on his firearms, the taxidermists he used, and examples of his bullets (which he carefully preserved as a study of ballistics) revealing different types of distortion as a result of impact with various parts of his quarries' anatomy. In an adjacent area of the Museum there is a modern display of the natural history of the Lake District. At the entrance to this there is a prominently displayed sign informing visitors that all animals appearing in the exhibit died of accidental or natural causes. It is a bewildering juxtaposition lacking chronological or social explanation. It represents, of course, the replacement of one dominant ideology by another. Col. Harrison got rid of his collection just in time. Public fascination for and acceptance of big-game shooting was on the wane. Within thirty years a different approach to natural history, sentimentalist, conservationist, was in place.

As it happens my example also symbolises the transition from an imperialist to a post-imperialist world. Col. Harrison was an imperial soldier who combined campaigning with big-game shooting as so many of his contemporaries did. His shooting symbolised the dominance of the natural world by Europeans with advanced technology. His collection is global. The Lake District display represents a withdrawal to locality, a retreat to home. One is a statement of power, intimidating and grand; the other is gentle, almost unobtrusive. If you visit the museum in Kendal you will see that the very layout and lighting convey these contrasting atmospheres. So the ideological change exists on more than one level. Hunting was a crucial part of what I have described as the dominant ideology of imperialism. This dominant ideology, in my view, was in place from the 1870s to at least the 1930s, possibly even the 1950s. During this period it infused almost all cultural forms. Let me offer a few examples of items which can all be found in museums of one sort or another.

Advertisements and packagings are increasingly being regarded as a useful route into social history. Many examples can be seen at Robert Opie's museum at Gloucester. Following Colonel Harrison, hunting can often be found in advertising. An advertisement for *Sensation Soap* featured a tiger attacking a man in colonial dress. Sensational indeed: it produces that frisson of fear induced by Blake's 'Tiger!-Tiger! Burning Bright', the limerick 'There was a young lady of Riga' or the famous 'Tippoo's Tiger' in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Quite how it sold soap is more obscure. But it is arresting and it is certainly imperial. Other sporting images in advertising include the elephant-borne tiger hunt and the polo match; imperial personalities, Henry M. Stanley for example, are often featured, as well as imperial icons, animal and human, the lion, the bulldog, Britannia and John Bull. A poster for the 'All-British Shopping Week' brings the lion and Britannia together into a formidable partnership.

In the 1920s and 30s this association of advertising with Empire was brought to a propagandist peak by the Empire Marketing Board. The Board was concerned to reveal to the British public the importance of the Empire to the British economy and to persuade that public to think in imperial terms when making their purchases. It was a complex message. One poster featured the problem of the balance of payments and the significance of shipping to imperial exchange. Another highlighted the developmental process, 'jungles' transformed into 'gold mines', a curious juxtaposition of the above and below ground which is in any case geographically inaccurate. In another, two colonial products are identified, both vital to the British diet, Ceylon tea and Canadian salmon (the latter for Sunday high tea at least). It demonstrates the phenomenal growth in production and sale which was supposedly a feature of imperial enterprise. Empire was also about modernisation, the extension to the world of European technology, so one poster showed East African transport old-style, demonstrating for contemporaries the primitive character of human porterage in pre-colonial times. In East African transport new-style we have the river bridged and

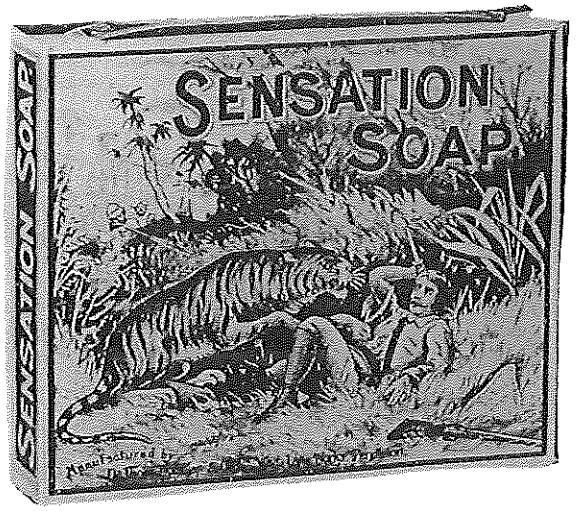


Plate 1: Packet for 'Sensation Soap'.

conquered by the lorry. We also have the relationship between the European overseer and the African labourer. The artist of this poster (Adrian Allinson) originally placed a whip or riding crop in the hand of the European. The Publicity sub-committee of the E.M.B. thought this unwise and it was replaced by that classic imperial appendage, the pipe, redolent of British restraint and temperamental calm, indicative too of supervisory ease. And in that pipe, of course, you would smoke Empire tobacco. In another poster the relationship between supervisors and workers, symbolic of imperial rule itself, is carefully established. In yet another, however, something has gone wrong. There has been a curious reversal. The European holds the spade, the African the tobacco leaf. Perhaps the E.M.B.'s sub-committee (chaired incidentally by Frank Pick) thought that too much avoidance of manual labour would give the British working classes the wrong impression. All of these E.M.B. images celebrated a particular economic system, world-wide integration on the basis of a dominant economy capable of securing its ends by political, military, and technological control. To coin a word we might call this 'economicist'.

Throughout the period of the dominant ideology there was a vast children's literature which reflected its values, symbols, and human relationships. These have now made the transition from libraries, school shelves, and children's bookcases to museums of childhood and other institutions of social history. Their illustrations and covers form a compendium of imperial icons. The Ward Lock *Wonder Books of Empire* were produced annually and contained a fascinating series of frontispieces. One featured 'Brothers Across the Sea', all European of course. A few indigenous people are shown in the background or are depicted, as in the West Indies vignette, in a subordinate labouring position. In 'Sons of the Empire' the emphasis has shifted slightly to match the change of family relationship. The Europeans stand at the front, leading a great tail of imperial followers, all protected by the British naval vessel in the bay. The Indian lancer and the Red Indian are given prominence both because of the striking nature of their costume and their important roles in the lore of Empire. In 'Under One Flag' the racial relationship is represented by a pyramidal structure, surmounted, interestingly, not only by the flag itself but also by an elephant and a camel. The covers of these Wonder Books are equally wonderful. In one Britannia's shield is covered with the flags and

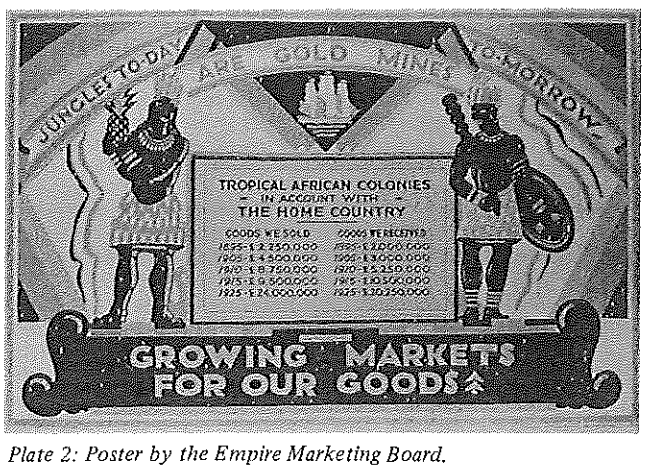


Plate 2: Poster by the Empire Marketing Board.

Plate 3: Poster by the Empire Marketing Board.

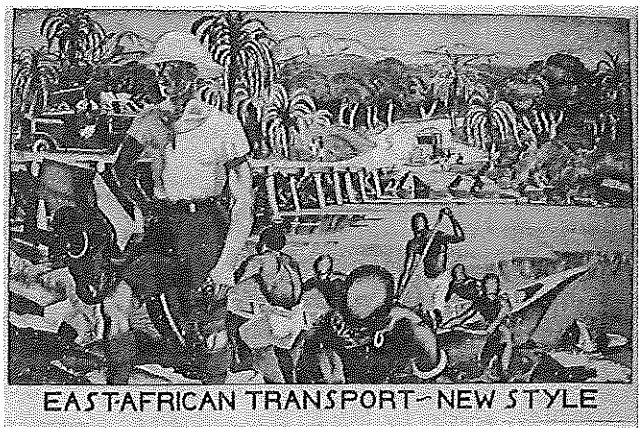


Plate 4: Poster by the Empire Marketing Board.

orders of Empire while an airship and British seapower, commercial as well as naval, watch over all. In another the cavalry and the colours supply a romantic image. The association of different imperial peoples is interesting and unusual. All of these images are intensely masculine, as was most imperial propaganda, perhaps a feature of many dominant societies. Simplified but equally powerful images appeared on the covers of books which were, as surviving bookplates reveal, the staple of the prize and present market. The death of General Gordon and the archetypal Scottish soldier, colourful, fearless and formidable feature frequently. In one the Scottish soldier rescues the women and children of the imperial race during the Indian Mutiny, while in another the noble European confronts the wily Arab, a common theme of children's stories and Saturday morning cinema clubs from the 1920s to the 50s.

All these book covers, frontispieces, and illustrations represented a continuing popularisation of images that have their origins in the early nineteenth century. This is a very large subject and a couple of examples will have to suffice to illustrate some points. Sir David Wilkie's painting, an impressively large canvas dating from 1839, of General Sir David Baird discovering the body of Tipu after the taking of Seringapatam in 1799 can be seen in the National Gallery of Scotland. The light falls on Baird, a commanding presence, his hand raised partly in surprise partly beckoning to a civilising imperial future. Some of the light is inevitably carried by the Scottish soldier. The body of Tipu Sultan, shorn of its finery, lies at a lower level in semi-darkness. It represents a barbaric and obsolete past. Engravings constituted the prime route to both popularity and substantial earnings for most nineteenth-century artists. Many of them from Edwin Landseer to Lady Butler secured more than half their income from engravings. It is not surprising then that artists shifted their attention from flattering a single patron to flattering the entire nation. In 1839 Wilkie succeeded in doing both (the painting was commissioned by Lady Baird). As the century progressed all the national symbols and icons appeared in engravings becoming increasingly nationalist and imperialist as they did so. This conjunction of nationalism and imperialism was for European powers an essential conjunction in the period, paradoxical as it seems to us. Classroom walls were adorned with St. George and the Dragon, itself a powerful symbol of light versus darkness, 'civilisation' v. 'barbarism', imperial rule v. indigenous 'anarchy', as well as Britannia, the lion and royal and militarist images. So, increasingly, was the popular press. The *Illustrated London News*, the *Graphic* and others were full of imperial images which often heightened the effects of the eye-witness war artist. This is illustrated by two representations of the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir of 1882. Melton Prior's eye-witness sketch of a charge by a Highland regiment was worked up for publication as a woodblock by Richard Caton Woodville. In the latter, the viewer's standpoint has changed. The enemy has all but disappeared. The collapsed figures are behind rather than in front of the charge. An exploding shell adds drama. The whole effect is to produce greater immediacy, increased determination in those kilted limbs, a sense almost of participation for the onlooker.

Finally the programmes of the native villages which were a common and popular feature of exhibitions and displays at seaside resorts in late Victorian and Edwardian times illustrate attitudes to non-European peoples. The tamed citizens of Empire, brought to heel by colonial campaigns, were exhibited for the entertainment of their imperial masters. It was the modern equivalent of the Roman triumph. Their buildings and occupations were intended to demonstrate the cultural and technical gap which justified imperial rule; their appearance seemed to confirm the radical ideas of the time. On the cover of the programme for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 the various nationalities of Empire are grouped around Britannia looking at her admiringly. The programme of the Senegal Village at the Franco-British Exhibition of 1908 shows a simple image of an alien profile. African characteristics are manufactured or exaggerated to produce a near-neanderthal effect. In a more complex one from the Dahomey Village at the Imperial International Exhibition of 1909 a Dahomeyan amazon stands in threatening posture in a wild environment, crudely though interestingly attired.

These are but a few examples of the vast quantity of images and artefacts produced in the period. Children's alphabets and games, bric-a-brac of all sorts, packagings, postcards, and cigarette cards are other examples that I could illustrate. In an age fascinated by newly available illustrations through cheap photography and engraving, an era in which marketing, commercial advertising, and propaganda were finding their feet for the first time, the dominant ideology is in my view everywhere, not just in materials relating directly to Empire, but in those which purport to display the Ancient World, the Middle Ages, or other contemporary characteristics like technical developments. All of these show human relationships and 'civilised advance' that are essentially about imperial rule.

What are we to make of all this? I return to my starting point, the rise and fall of ideologies. It seems to me that it is in this area of ideas and the social systems related to them that museums still require to be developed. After all, the notion of rise and fall is very common in museums. In archaeological displays we are familiar with the rise and fall of cultures in the past, often over-dramatised, too clear-cut, creating clean breaks and dramatic transformations where a sort of historical fudge and mudge would be more appropriate. The rise and fall of transport systems and technologies has become a common theme of museums, canals, steam railways, and tramways. Maritime museums in effect catalogue the rise and fall of British sea power. We are now increasingly obsessed with the rise and fall of the industrial system itself.

But museums have been traditionally chary of ideologies. Ideology is a dangerous area, subject to controversy. And the stimulation of controversy is not the best way to keep political or private masters and mistresses sweet. Funding for displays, other developments, even salaries might be at risk. Hence ideologies in museums have generally been unconscious or at least socially imposed by dominant contemporary ideas. Thus nationalism, cultural superiority, great men in history, and almost unarguable national modes like monarchism and militarism have predominated. Indeed much of our museums service derives its origins from this very period of dominant ideology, and owes its existence to many of its values.

While on the Continent of Europe museums often celebrate revolutions, struggles for national freedom, romantic or aristocratic figures of revolutionary and military activity, or historic justifications of the existence of the state within specific geographical boundaries, the British have been more concerned with the symbols of world-wide authority, the booty resulting from colonial campaigns, the national and civic pride which were the instigators of imperial self-confidence. For Britain the revolution was more distant, its role in the development of parliamentary democracy confused and indirect, and in the end less relevant to contemporary concerns. Nationalism seemed to have deeper roots, in Tudor and Stuart times. The museums whose very architecture so often symbolised imperial pride, were more concerned with the dominant ideology than with justifications for national existence or reminders of a domestic heroic past. For Britain, never invaded since 1066, the heroic past could best be located in an overseas context. Even the Napoleonic wars could best be depicted as ultimately about Anglo-French rivalry for sea power and world domination whereas for the French they were about the survival of

the revolution and the extension of French ideas through French arms to the rest of Europe. As a result the British prided themselves on having a less insistent, less overt message about national origins and objectives. They assumed a set of apparently unanswerable values and the message of exhibits was thought to be subservient to aesthetic values.

In the 'Symbols of Power' exhibition at the Edinburgh Festival in 1985 emphasis was placed less on aesthetic appreciation of our technical admiration for metalwork, stone building and the like, more on the ideological message of these artefacts and structures. They were examined as symbolising social separation, the emergence of an elite, and the establishment or at least underpinning of authority through display and sumptuary laws. Aesthetic and technical mastery were subsumed under a recognition of the emergence of more or less tyrannical rule. The artefacts were viewed less as triumphs of the human spirit, as they might have been in the past, more as salutary reminders that the flip side of such splendours is often human subservience and misery. The one need not of course obliterate the other, but the recognition of both is essential to a well-rounded understanding. 'Symbols of Power' showed the way. Yet the pitfalls in the path of the explicit recognition of ideologies and their removal from the area of implicit acceptance to explicit exposure as ripe for questioning or rejection are great. Implicit acceptance represents non-controversial acceptance, however slanted that consensus may be. An explicit critique is often represented as political bias.

This is one of the great problems facing us in the educational world in general. As a school governor I am aware of the fact that the 1986 Education Act specifically enjoins governors to ensure that academic disciplines in school are taught without political bias. As a historian I know that such an injunction is not of this world. It is either a fantasy in the minds of Keith Joseph and Kenneth Baker or, more likely, it is their code for saying that the attempt to break the consensus of the right is unacceptable. For political bias, read leftwards slant. Recently I encountered the full *reductio ad absurdam* of this position when the son of a Tory County Councillor, a pupil in my local school, complained to the Education Authority that the Peterloo Massacre was being taught with a left-wing bias. The teacher had apparently demonstrated too much understanding for the cause of the demonstrators, too much sympathy for the killed and injured. In these respects we live in dangerous times. The very notion that the humanities can be approached in a manner free from political bias is itself a form of thought control. In responding to these new legislative symbols of power we have to be very clever. We have to break one long-standing bias without appearing to create a new one.

In the case of imperialism I think it is time that the images and artefacts I have considered above were brought together in a few appropriate museums. At the moment they are scattered. They are laid out for aesthetic appreciation and the message is confused. We need an assemblage of materials that illustrate an ideology. Imperialism provides the perfect opportunity for the display of the rise and fall of an ideology in all its physical richness and cultural manifestations. Surely we need to be explicit. In Kendal they need to say that Col. Harrison's dead zoo represented a dominant ethos in a particular age while a local natural history display carefully using animals that died of natural causes represents another. Somewhere at least we need to display the nationalist and monarchical, militarist and expansionist, economicist and racialist aspects of imperialism confronting the problem that values which may seem negative to us could prove positively religious and idealist in another age. To do that would surely be to do a service to the right as well as the left. This would have a number of salutary effects. It would demonstrate that consensus is just another way of saying dominant ideology and that images and artefacts that seem neutral or at least acceptable to one culture or class are distinctly propagandist for another. It would get us past the argument that some materials with, say, a racialist content should not be displayed at all. It would reveal that one generation's consensus is the next generation's controversy, that the idealism of one age can be the repression of the next, that the perspective is very different in any political system, national or imperial, when the standpoint is from below rather than from above.

WHOSE HISTORY?
RACISM AND CENSORSHIP

Rachel Hasted

We are working with history at a time when the concept of History is under attack. An increasing number of groups which have previously been defined as outside the main focus of interest for historians (the working class, women, minority ethnic groups) are criticising the methods and intentions of traditional historians. Many new views on the relative importance of past events and experiences are being offered. There is a strong pressure for 'history from below' as opposed to an account of the deeds and concerns of culturally dominant groups. There is a political dimension to this. Women involved in feminist politics have discovered for themselves how necessary and empowering it can be to reclaim our history and to interprete all history afresh in the light of our understanding of oppression. This kind of politically empowering knowledge of the past has played a part in many movements of liberation. Black people are well aware of this, and they want their history back. The recent spate of publishing and exhibitions on black heritage themes testify to a desire to reclaim that history as part of a struggle for equality. Len Garrison of the Black Cultural Archive has written:

> One of the problems . . . is that the early history of Black people in Britain is largely unrecorded . . . As a result there is a commonly held view that people of African descent have no worthwhile history. The Black Cultural Archive is aiming to arrest this mistaken view and show how Black people have made a long and impressive contribution to the British way of life.

The increasingly sophisticated critique of historical method from many sources challenges the status of long accepted concepts in history. What can we really know about the past? When is a thing proved? How good is the evidence? This leaves a wide area for alternative interpretations or variations of emphasis on past events. This process, which is an integral part of a period of social change, has met with a reaction of nostalgia and protectiveness towards what is, for some sections of the community, a safer and more familiar version of history; the story of Our Island Race. I do not intend to ridicule this, or pretend to dissociate myself from it. Speaking as someone who grew up watching films like *The Four Feathers* and *Kartoum*, I retain a childhood nostalgia for images like this myself. The existence of the images is in any case a part of our history, and I am not arguing that we should turn our backs on them, but that we should look more closely.

My personal nostalgia for the *Child's Book of Heroes* approach to history, however, is a purely private matter. It is the effects of such a reaction, as we see them embodied in the call for a national school curriculum, or in attacks on the education policies of various councils that makes this such a serious issue. I would suggest that while the 'traditional' approach to history that is being championed in some quarters may be safe, comforting and satisfactory to the dominant cultural group, it is also propagandist, and censors out the experience of other groups in society. For example, according to the National Portrait Gallery, a painting described as being a portrait of Louise de Kerouaille, Duchess of Portsmouth shows two sitters, a white woman and a black girl. The National Gallery catalogues another portrait as being of William Fielding, 1st Earl of Denbigh yet it shows two figures, an Asian boy and a White man. Censorship, we can see, is already in play here. Two out of the four sitters in these pictures are un-persons whose existence can be ignored. That is a very damaging conclusion if you happen to be Black and looking for your history; it is also damaging to us as Whites. Our potential for understanding the world is diminished too by these racist assumptions.

I would argue that it is a much greater piece of historical bias for the picture in plate 1 to be considered simply as a portrait of Queen Victoria (the NPG does not know the identity of the African or even if he really existed), as for me to include information on Black history in my local history displays. There is plentiful evidence, if we wish to look for it, that Black people, (and Asians, and Jews, and Irish men and women, Flemings, Dutch, Hughenots and many others), lived here and played a part in shaping British history. Such people were a part of the ordinary life of the country, and it is their *exclusion* from the historic record which should arouse comment, not their *inclusion*. However, it would be naive to ignore the fact that there are particular reasons for attending to this issue now. We are living in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society at a time when previously accepted values of the dominant cultural group are proving increasingly oppressive to, and being challenged by, minority groups defined by race, class, culture, gender and sexuality. This is no longer an issue that can be ignored; and I am not just speaking of those areas that have already seen violent conflict touched off by racist attitudes.

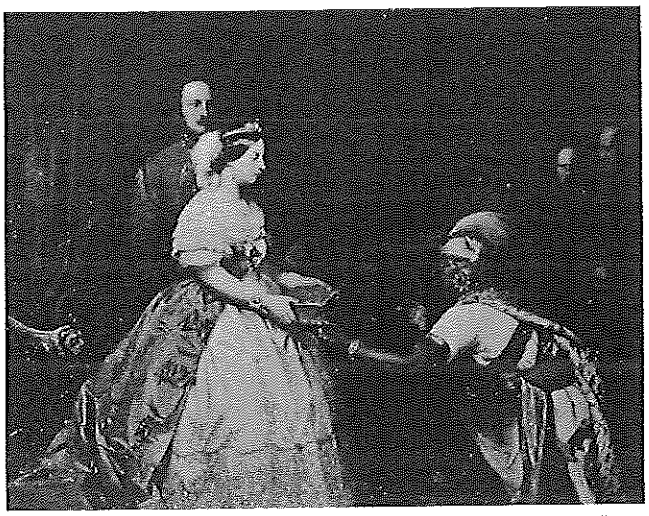


Plate 1: 'Queen Victoria presenting a Bible at Windsor', by T. Jones Barker, c.1861 (National Portrait Gallery, London).

In museums we have a part to play in explaining to people how we arrived in this situation, and in helping to build up a positive awareness of cultural diversity as a source of pleasure and pride rather than fear and insecurity. I would like at this point to make a few comments about the nature of racism itself, because unless we have an analysis of this, our best attempts to combat it will, I think, be useless.

Firstly, racism is a subject that sometimes raises powerful feelings of personal guilt. As White people we may feel implicated. This has certainly been so for me, because I happened to be born in the then British colony of Nigeria. Those of us who have no direct links to Empire still benefit from the privileges of being White in a racist society. Feelings of unease are often accompanied by a helpless feeling: what can one person do about it all? There is, however, very little value in personal breast-beating. I would rather offer the idea that racism is institutionalised within our society, and that we all learn, often painfully, what institutional racism expects of us. I do not in any way mean to belittle the oppression experienced by minority ethnic groups, but I do believe that we are all hurt by racism. Knowing this, we can be clear about the positive gains for us in combatting racism, and we can begin, with the support of others, to act in a way which will challenge racist institutions and stereotypes.

Secondly, I would like to re-state the well-known definition that racism is not just personal racial prejudice, but prejudice backed by power. Tackling racism means tackling the unequal distribution of power in our society. In the case of museums this will mean giving up some control over the interpretation of history, and the type of material we present, to people from minority ethnic groups - whether as staff members or outside bodies. In the process of doing this dilemmas about power are bound to arise. We have to ask ourselves whose history it is we are working with, and decide what our rights and the rights of others may be. Issues of editorial control and censorship will come up, and there are no easy answers to these. As an example, I would like to talk briefly about the Haringey Museum Service for which I work.

The borough of Haringey is the sixth most deprived borough in Britain. The unemployment rate has risen over the last 7 years at well over twice the national rate; unemployment among the Black community being disproportionately higher than elsewhere. At the same time, Haringey is a diverse, multi-ethnic community with about 30% of the population born overseas. In spring 1986 there were council elections in the London boroughs. Haringey's ruling Labour group fought on a manifesto which made equal opportunities for all, regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation, its main plank. Despite a very intensive campaign of opposition in the national and local press, Labour won Haringey with an increased majority. The council has, therefore, a very convincing claim to popular support in introducing its policies. These policies are very clear on some issues which other authorities choose not to discuss in detail. Not content to write 'Haringey is an equal opportunities employer' on its job adverts and let the matter rest, the council is committed both to equal opportunities in its role as an employer and as a service provider. The Labour group manifesto states a specific commitment to:

- Challenging sexism in all its forms.
- Eradicate racism within the Council's structure, its employment practices and in its service delivery.
- Oppose heterosexism in all its forms and work to ensure that lesbians and gay men have an equal position in society.

If these are not simply to be pious hopes, the manifesto goes on to argue, efficient means of monitoring what is actually happening are needed. How many people from minority ethnic groups does the Council employ? Is the ratio consisitent with the representation of each group in the borough? Are minority groups getting a fair percentage of service provision? These things are now carefully audited in each council department.

I don't know how often museums feature in local government manifestos, but Haringey Labour Party included a clear commitment on Bruce Castle Museum:

> The Council's review of Bruce Castle Museum will aim to eliminate the cultural bias in the collections and expand displays and exhibitions, particularly touring exhibitions which will illuminate the social history of the community.

The acceptance of this policy by the local electorate; (unknown as it probably was to most) means that the museum has received clear directives from its funding authority on what kind of work it should be doing:

> That we should direct our efforts to researching and collecting among the Black and minority ethnic groups, and other groups at present under-represented in the collections.
>
> That the museum should become a service to the whole borough, not something exclusively based at Bruce Castle.
>
> That we should concern ourselves with the social history of the community.

In response to these directions, the museum has just brought out a Five Year Plan outlining its work programme in great detail, and this has been accepted by the Community Affairs Committee. Part of the follow-up to this will include setting up methods by which progress can be monitored, under the Council's Performance Review requirements.

To some people this may sound like unwarrantable interference in the creation and content of museum displays. On the other hand, some may find it enviable to have so much active interest and involvement by councillors in the working of the museum. I should point out that while the Council has clearly indicated its intention to concentrate museum resources on certain priority tasks, there has been no interference in the presentation of material. For example, the recent exhibition, 'Local Herstory' which dealt with women in local history, caused some controversy with councillors, but no-one suggested that we should not have been allowed to choose our own line of interpretation. Of course, I went to work for Haringey because I knew what their policies were. I am interested in trying to work out the implications of looking at history in ways that will include the perspectives of many groups within a diverse society. This seems to me to be one of the crucial concerns for museums now, and it remains to be seen whether our existing structures and ways of working can accommodate this fundamental change of approach.

I certainly find it helpful to have an employer that encourages me in attempts to find anti-racist approaches to my work. It helps me to have access to a departmental Race Equality Officer, and a team of five Community Librarians representing minority ethnic groups in the borough, as well as the Language Resource Centre and the Multi-Cultural Curriculum Development Centre of the Education department. At the end of the day, it helps me to know that my employer has a clear commitment to take disciplinary action against any employee who consistently behaves in a racist manner. I know that many curators will not be in a comparable situtation. Many people working in museums obviously recognise a need to tackle racism in their working practice and to offer a service to minority ethnic groups: attendance at WHAM study days shows this to be true. How can we all; regardless of our employers' stance on racism; move towards this? I have only been asking myself this question for a short time, and my answers tend to reflect that. If I am covering old ground please forgive me.

The first thing that we need to do in museums concerned with local social history is to know our patch. How much do the museum staff really know about the ethnic make-up of its area, historically and in the present day? This information is the basis of collecting policy and service provision. I stress the need to take a long view on this subject, firstly because the past is very obviously our concern, but also because the history of minority ethnic groups and their impact on British life in the past has an enormous amount to tell us about the present. Documenting communities in history can help to give a perspective on contemporary events. I should like to look at two examples in some detail.

Before the expulsion of all Jews from England by Edward I in 1290, the Jewish community was perhaps the most important and clearly

defined minority cultural group in this country. Originating in the early years of the Norman conquest, and increased by Jews fleeing from the continental massacres before the First Crusade in 1096, there were soon Jewish communities in London, Lincoln, Winchester, Cambridge, Thetford, Northampton, Bungay, Oxford and Gloucester. By the time of the expulsion, the Jewish population had risen to about 16,000, scattered over about 27 centres. England shared in the common European Christian race hatred for the Jews - an uncomfortable fact which I have rarely seen discussed. One author writes that:

> For the Jew, England was perhaps the most dangerous and insecure land in which he (sic) could find himself.

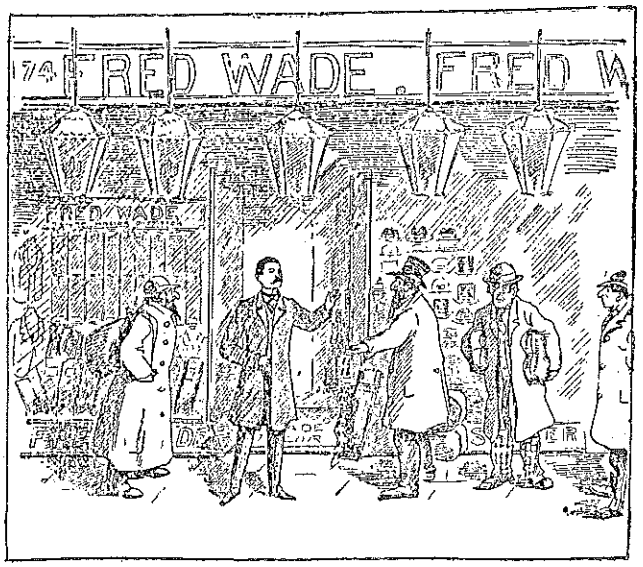
I am not going to tell horror stories, or make facile comparisons, but perhaps it is worth considering the facts. England witnessed the regular recurrence of anti-Jewish violence in which whole communities were attacked, their property destroyed, and many killed. Popular prejudice about Jews included the recurring story of ritual murder of Christian infants by Jews; most notoriously in the case of St. Hugh of Lincoln, a boy whose death led to the wrongful arrest, torture and execution of many innocent people, and incited many anti-Jewish riots. In Church law Jews were forbidden to own land, to employ or have authority over Christians, or to carry arms. This left money-lending as one of the few professions open to Jews; usury being nominally forbidden by the Church, but nonetheless useful to Christians. Anglo-Jewish financiers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries did make fortunes and were a power in the land. They were expected to under-write the Crown's expenses; acting as unofficial tax-collectors in return for some royal protection. Cecil Roth wrote of this convenient arrangement:

> The Jews were like a sponge sucking up the floating capital of the country, to be squeezed from time to time into the Treasury; while the king, high above them and sublimely contemptuous of their transactions, was in fact the arch-usurer of the realm.

Scape-goating of Jews in religious and economic terms increased prejudice to hatred. In 1275, faced with a ruined, demoralised, and hated Jewish community, Edward I issued the Statutem de Judeismo, which forbade Jews to lend money at interest, restricted their places of residence and ordered that every Jew wear on their clothes 'the badge of shame'. Deprived of their chief source of income the Jews were no longer useful to the crown as financiers. In 1290 Edward ordered the expulsion of the entire community on pain of death.

No Jews were again allowed to settle in this country until the Commonwealth period, when Cromwell allowed some merchants to return. A further impetus was given when Charles II married Catherine of Braganza, who was followed to England by many Portuguese Sephardic Jewish merchants. (Catherine, incidentally, brought as her dowry to Charles the port of Bombay, and a trading alliance in India which favoured the mercantile activities of the Jewish community in London.) Cromwell House in Highgate, Haringey was the first property to be legally bought by a Jew in this country since 1290 when it was sold to Alvaro da Costa of the East India Company in 1684. In the late nineteenth century, pogroms in eastern Europe led to massive Jewish emigration to western Europe and America. These were mainly the poorer Ashkenasi Jews, and their arrival at a time of trade depression led to conflict with the indigenous population. This culminated in the passing of the Aliens Act, 1905. The way in which this immigrant group was greeted by English society makes a fascinating comparative study to modern events, and can be traced in many local areas. Plate 2 for example, is an advert from a Tottenham local paper which shows the economic and racial antagonism against local Jewish tailors.

The history of Irish immigration to England as seasonal or permanent workforce has affected the population patterns of many urban areas, and the working patterns of the countryside. Lancashire agriculture was entirely dependent on Irish labour in the late nineteenth century, and many of the navvies who built the canals and railways were Irish. Irish immigrants were predominantly female, and many Irish women worked as servants or in factories in England. Anti-Irish prejudice has a long, inglorious history in England, like anti-semitism; a fact not entirely unconnected with Ireland's status as England's oldest colony. By the nineteenth century this had been given a pseudo-scientific respectability, as the English happily 'discovered' that the Irish were an inferior breed, somewhere in the supposed evolutionary hierarchy between the lowly negro and the perfection of the Anglo-Saxon. Here, for



FRED WADE AND THE ALIEN QUESTION.

Alien Tailors: Mr. Vade, will you gif us some vork?

Fred Wade: I pride myself that none of my work is done in sweating dens, and all is turned out by British labour.

Plate 2

example, is *Punch* in 1848:

> Six-foot Paddy, are you no bigger -
> You whom cozening friars dish -
> Mentally, than the poorest nigger
> Grovelling before fetish?
> You to Sambo I compare
> Under superstition's rule
> Prostrate like an abject fool.

Both the examples of the Anglo-Jewish and the Irish communities can be examined to show that while much current racism focuses on differences of skin colour, the components of racist behaviour can be practiced on any group. This raises useful questions about what racism is, and why, historically, it has occurred.

Other groups can be examined too from an anti-racist perspective. The Romans, Saxons, Normans and so forth have all brought 'foreign' influences to this country and changed it. Some came as colonial conquerors of the savage native British, to exert a civilising influence. How did this process work? What evidence of it can we see locally? How does it affect our understanding of what it means to be British? It may seem at first sight that your own local area does not offer much scope for such an approach. I think we need to look carefully at that, and consider whether our own definitions of our area of study may be excluding some possibilities. For example, the economic influence of Britain's slave trade from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century was huge and widespread. It financed house-building, industrial development and research, the availability of raw materials, and the growth of cities. If we work in an industrial area we can no longer afford to ignore Black historians of the Industrial Revolution who stress the essential part slavery played in its economic basis. If we work in rural areas we need to look at the fortunes made in slavery and in the East India Company that were invested in land; at protectionist taxes on imported goods; at migrant labour and so forth. There is also a link to be made over the question of raw materials and markets for local industries. Where did the sugar, rubber, timber, cotton and so on come from, and where were the finished goods exported too? Trade and the growth of Empire were vital forces in the lives of White workers in Britain, and of Black workers in the colonies. How does this link show itself in our area? What were its effects?

This approach of making links between local, national and world history clear can be pursued into many traditional subject areas in museums, from the military collection to the decorative and fine arts. It works because it is not an artificial construct: the links did and do exist. I wouldn't want to suggest that this kind of research takes the place of documenting the history of local minority ethnic communities, but it is a necessary complement to it, challenging as it does the myth of Britain as an isolated entity without a history of connections to the rest of the world. Returning to practicalities, it is probable that most social history collections already contain, or collect, material which is relevant to this kind of approach. I'm thinking in particular of advertising material, products of local firms, records of local churches, military items, comics and newspapers, educational material and so forth. All these can be used as evidence of the social history of racism and the impact of Empire.

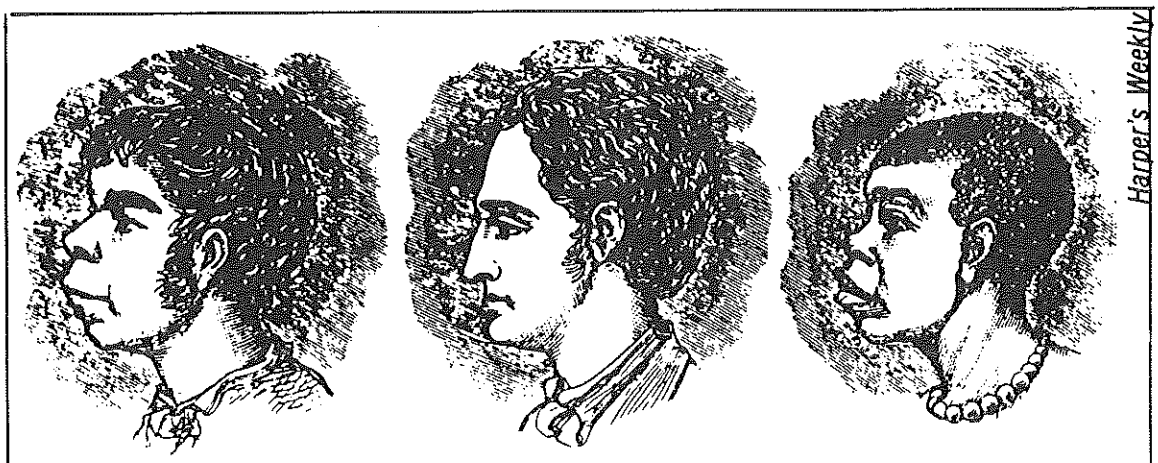


Plate 3: 'Scientific' racism as portrayed in Harper's Weekly.

An eye-opening introduction to the collecting possibilities is contained in Chapter 1 of Dr MacKenzie's fascinating book, *Propaganda and Empire*.

Having looked at the historic background, what about documenting the presence of minority groups in your area now? Once again, I think the key lies in doing our homework. We need statistics on who is in our area. These may be available from other council departments, such as the Economic or Community Development Unit, the Planning Department, or from the nearest Community Relations Council. Beware, however, the 1981 census, which will tell you only where residents were born, making it impossible to chart accurately the number of British-born members of minority groups, or households of mixed origins.

Once we know what it is we need to known, there are two parallel courses of action to follow. One is to do our own work: resentment has often been caused in the past by White people expecting to be educated for free by minority group members. Our basic ignorance is our problem, and there are plenty of good books available for background reading. However, this is not likely to be an area in which we as White people are going to become 'experts'. We are going to need a lot of help. We all have skills and we all have limits. I don't speak any languages relevant to minority communities in my area, for example.

The only way around this, as we want to acquire oral history material from older community members, is going to be by co-operation on a basis of equality with local people. Nor do we expect to use those language skills for nothing. Minority ethnic groups suffer disproportionately from unemployment and the devaluation of their skills; so we will budget for translators, interviewers, transcribers etc., and try to structure work in a way that enhances the career prospects of volunteers or temporary workers. We will also need to rely on our community librarians to monitor the quality of language skills carefully. Many second generation Turkish Cypriots for example find it hard to communicate with elderly community members who speak dialects now unknown even in rural Cyprus. The whole question of access to local minority groups may raise the wider issue of employment within your museum. It is more than regrettable that a museum such as ours, situated in Tottenham, does not have a single Black member on the professional staff. Training and recruitment may be key issues if we are serious about including minority groups in our work.

Having carefully researched our target groups, what about collecting? For example, at Bruce Castle we collect domestic equipment for cooking and washing. We think it would be appropriate to extend our collection to include contemporary examples of such items used by different local communities. We are now requesting local community members to take us shopping for such items, and record their comments on the choices they made. We do not attempt to acquire items in use in people's homes, especially where these have been brought from overseas. Lovely as it would be to have some examples, these are in fact a live cultural force linking past and present, the old home and the new. It would, we feel, be inappropriate to attempt to take such things out of circulation just yet, even if we could persuade people to part with them.

Borrowing items for temporary exhibitions is, we feel, no substitute for acquiring material which goes straight into the mainstream of the museum's permanent collections. We collect costume for the costume collection and so on: there are no ghettos for 'ethnic' material, this is all part of the local history of Haringey. (However, we do feel justified in creating SHIC classifications marking items as of special significance to anyone interested in one or other particular group, as a cross-reference. This is something which Hackney Museum have been working to develop, and I hope will soon publish.) While on the subject of collecting and documentation, I think we should not forget that part of the history we are recording is that of contact between minority groups and the majority culture. This may involve charting the availability of Chinese take-away food in your area. It may mean documenting the activities of the National Front, but this need not deter us. Looking at white racism also means investigating white anti-racists, from the Anti-Slavery movement onwards, and uncovering the history of Black/White co-operation as well as oppression.

I am sure that much of what I have said sounds extremely impractical to implement for many of us, because in the last instance we are not independent. We work for employers who have views on what we should or should not be doing, and perhaps that is a good thing to remember when we suspect other people of bias. It goes on all the time, some of it is just more visible because it is less generally accepted. However, we are not helpless and we need not be alone on the issue of racism. I would suggest that we might start some work along anti-racist lines and be brave enough to wait for a reaction rather than anticipate it. Nothing will change if we are too ready to censor ourselves without waiting to find out whether, and how, the Powers That Be will object. In reality it may prove harder than we imagine for anyone to oppose a well-argued case for such action, especially if it is supported from outside by a local group. I would also suggest that we look for support to the educational sector. Many things may be done indirectly through liaison with local teachers, and surprisingly the H.M.I.s and even the D.E.S. are way ahead of us in accepting the need for multi-ethnic, multi-cultural education in schools. Look at the H.M.I. report *History in the Primary and Secondary Years* (1985), or the national criteria for G.C.S.E. in History, Social Sciences or Religion. There is already a growing demand from schools for service on a multi-ethnic basis, which we can use as a lever to introduce new ideas into our work generally.

The Daily Telegraph, a newspaper which takes a close interest in both Haringey's museum and education services, recently characterised the borough's anti-racist strategies as being 'used to make non-White pupils conscious of their race and imbue them with hatred and resentment of the indigenous people of this country.' I do not think myself that it would require any such effort to achieve that. Indeed, it is my argument that concepts such as 'non-white' and 'indigenous' are based on a censored reading of history which we can no longer afford to perpetuate. In museums we have an opportunity to challenge the cultural apartheid inherent in these concepts; what alternatives are we ready to offer?

EMIGRATION - A HUMAN APPROACH TO ITS INTERPRETATION

Michael Hall

Merseyside Maritime Museum's 'Emigrants to a New World' gallery opened in March 1986. Liverpool is a most appropriate home for this development as between 1830 and 1930 over nine million emigrants from Britain and many European countries came to the port to seek the ships to take them to a new life in the United States, Canada or Australia. For much of this period Liverpool was the main European departure point for emigrants. Emigration was one of the port's most important 'trades' and a large number of local people were employed in the emigrant hostels or by the numerous passenger ship companies. Despite the significance of emigration, the subject was grossly under-represented in the museum's collections. Unlike so many museum exhibitions, the emigration gallery was not based on the strength of an existing collection. It was developed because of the importance of the emigration story. It is not surprising that the museum's collections were weak in this area, emigration does not have an easily definable material culture. It has no physical product. The emigrants' personal possessions, if they survive, will be many thousands of miles from Liverpool. The museum's entire holdings on the subject consisted of several tickets, a poster, a couple of emigrant diaries, several models and paintings of emigrant ships and a small number of objects recovered from emigrant shipwrecks.

The easiest option would have been to concentrate on the emigrants' voyage as this is where the museum's collections are strongest, although still weak in proportion to the significance of the subject. Instead it was decided to provide a historical context, explain why people emigrated, their preparation and journey to Liverpool, their stay in the city, the voyage, arrival and the new lives that they found. This incorporated aspects of the social, economic, maritime and political history of three continents. Topics included the Irish famine, Russian pogroms, emigrant hostels in Liverpool, conditions on board ship, Ellis Island, pioneer farming in the American west and the Australian gold rush of the 1850s. This broad approach to emigration spread the museum's available collections very thinly. A scheme was adopted which tried to maximise the available material and to devise alternative means of interpretation to compensate for the lack of objects. An example of the former approach involved displaying an original emigrant diary which was difficult to read next to a telephone system allowing visitors to listen to recorded extracts from the diary. The author described his three month voyage from Liverpool to Australia in 1854:

> Saturday 30th April. Strong breeze springing up and very high sea, the ship was rolling very much. This caused great upset in the berths, breaking most of the crockery ware, upsetting the forms.

An adjacent case displays a model of the ship in which the diarist sailed.

There were no objects at all in the collection relating to the emigrant's stay in Liverpool. Taped extracts from the diary of a Dutch emigrant, film of emigrants in Liverpool in 1923 and two commissioned paintings were used to overcome the problem. A walk-through reconstruction of passenger accommodation on an 1850s sailing ship gives visitors an insight into the cramped conditions on board. The reconstruction is based on contemporary descriptions, illustrations and measurements taken from an emigrant

Plate 1: Emigrants leaving a Cunard hostel in Liverpool to join the linear LUCANIA for the voyage to New York, c.1900.

Plate 2: Emigrants making their own entertainment in the steerage accommodation of a sailing ship in the mid nineteenth century.

ship wrecked in the Falkland Islands. No objects are displayed in the 'Arrival' and 'New Life' sections of the exhibitions. Early film of Ellis Island (a bargain acquisition at £30 from the Library of Congress), photographs, and taped extracts from emigrants' letters home are used to tackle the variety of emigrant experience. Despite the lack of objects this section was felt to be important to complete the story. There was a conscious attempt to personalise the exhibition by using particular emigrants to illustrate general themes. It would have been easy to lose sight of the people behind the faceless statistics of mass emigration.

Over the years the museum has received many enquiries from people attempting to trace their emigrant ancestors. Although no passenger records survive in Liverpool we were able to direct enquirers to other sources and provide information about ships and Liverpool as an emigrant port. When the museum embarked upon research for the exhibition several hundred of these family historians were contacted, to ask how their research had progressed and to try to obtain case studies of particular emigrants and copies of photographs or diaries. The response was good and some of this, often unpublished, material has been incorporated into the displays. To bring the story full circle the final section of the gallery uses computer programs and information packs to advise visitors interested in tracing their emigrant ancestors.

The gallery has proved popular. Some British colleagues have commented on the lack of objects, but this does not seem to concern visitors or American and Australian curators. It should be remembered that museum collections are not always representative of local, regional or national historical trends. Take the case of the Musee de Bretagne where the strength of the collections indicated that a nineteenth century gallery should consist largely of the development of local female head-dresses![1] It has been suggested that the museum should have produced a book rather than an exhibition about emigration, however it is very unlikely that a book would have reached the 500,000 people who have so far visited the exhibition. Could a book give readers the same impression of conditions on board an emigrant ship that the reconstruction of the ship provides? Would stills have the same impact as archival film? A booklet has now been published to accompany the exhibition[2] By affording emigration a significant gallery space, the true historical importance of the very human story of emigration has been recognised, despite the paucity of the museum's object collections.

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2. M. A. Hall, *Emigrants to a New World* Merseyside Maritime Museum 1986.

CELEBRATORY HISTORY

Elizabeth Willis

In 1985, Victoria, Australia, celebrated the 150th Anniversary of permanent white settlement. There was a plethora of celebrations - local, regional and statewide - with a reasonable share of historical re-enactments, plaque laying ceremonies, book launchings and exhibitions. The 150th Board supported a number of projects aimed at increasing Victorians' understanding of their history. A three-volume history, *The Victorians,* was commissioned and written by historians seconded to the University of Melbourne. A series of seminars on local history was held throughout the state; three Local History Resource Centres were established; and an index to *The Argus* was compiled. Many of the State's major institutions organised displays to illuminate different themes of our past. The State Library mounted '1934, A Year in the Life of Victoria' to highlight aspects of Victoria during the celebrations fifty years ago. The Melbourne City Council prepared an exhibition, 'Melbourne Celebrates' with displays arranged around the theme, Melbourne from A to Z - E. for Dame Edna, G. for Gardens, Z. for Zoo. The La Trobe Library and the National Gallery of Victoria produced a comprehensive exhibition, 'Victorian Vision', bringing together painted images from the first years of white settlement to the present; and the State Insurance Office sponsored a large display of ephemera and nostalgic memorabilia at the Museum of Victoria.

In May 1984, I was employed by the Museum of Victoria to research two new galleries, the 'Story of Victoria' exhibition. This display was another one of the long line of celebratory activities during this year of celebrations. It was largely funded by the 150th Board, and some funds also came from the Council of the Museum of Victoria. Unlike the others, the display was envisaged to have a life beyond the celebrations: it is to be up for at least three years.

First, some comments about the context in which the display was mounted, I was a relatively new arrival in Victoria - and to me, the whole 'feel' of the sesquicentenary in Victoria was different to that of Western Australia in 1979. There was more self-doubt, less rhetoric about continual progress, some questioning, and more emphasis on the options for the future. The first 150th Board included members who considered that the sesquicentenary should be 'designed not so much as to celebrate as to take stock'; and this philosophy continued after the election of a Labour Government. We were fortunate that there was no direction of any kind from the 150th Board as to what form the Museum's galleries should take. The Museum Council, too, did not interfere. We outlined our general concept at one meeting of Council. Council members suggested a couple of topics for consideration, but took no further interest in the content of the display. Because of the Museum's state of flux at the time, no member of management took any detailed interest in the display's contents either. So we had entire curatorial responsibility for the themes we covered, the bias we followed, and the overall message of the new galleries. But, despite this great freedom, there are still constraints to be considered and responsibilities to be addressed. I will be mentioning some of these later.

The resultant galleries are not perfect by any means - the lack of time for adequate original research, and the paucity of staff resources are evident. Despite that, there are some interesting display innovations, and we tried not to be too predictable. The display is proving to be popular with both school groups and the general public. By 1988 probably one million Victorians will have been exposed to our version of their history.

What is the historian's responsibility in a celebratory display? The Story of Victoria has a distinct though subtle bias towards Aborigines, the poor, women and the less successful. The bias there is an emphasis on conservation against exploitation, in a constant referral to 'the European Invasion', in discussions of shepherding and the exploitation of cheap labour, of Aboriginal expectations and visions for the future, and on the experience of 'ordinary' Victorians, including a number of recent migrants. The overall mood is not one of unthinking celebration, but we have tried to emphasise both high and low spots, light and dark in our past. One of the display themes is indeed 'Hopes and Fears'.

How well does this approach meet visitors' expectations? Most visitors probably approach a commemorative display in a 'positive' frame of mind - they expect to be encouraged by what they are told, not threatened by what they learn. Because of the mood of self-questioning which I've described, a 1985 display in Melbourne has the potential to be less 'patriotic', less positively celebratory, than a 1979 display in Perth, and certainly than an 1888 Centennial Exhibition. But the high level of expectation - towards celebration, rather than merely commemoration, remains.

We as historians may think we have a mission to change our audience's attitudes to the past. As we publicise recent research, we may instill doubts about the received wisdom, and raise questions about past events and the implications for the future. In the face of our audience's expectations, where does the responsibility of the historian lie? To what extent should we try to find a balance between what our public expects, and what we as historians want to do? We are, after all, using public money - often vast sums of public money - to communicate to the innocent public our version of the past. How didactic, how revisionist should we be in our displays?

There are many areas where our visitors' expectations may conflict with what we may want to do. Three examples from our experience may begin to illustrate this. First, for most of our visitors, it seems, History is still largely about Great Men. Even historians may not appreciate too great a focus on the ordinary, the everyday, on trends, rather than individuals, in a commemorative display. It was a fourth year history honours student, a member of Graeme Davison's History in the Field Unit at Monash University, who first asked Where was Ned Kelly? in the Story of Victoria. (We also left out Burke and Wills, Squizzy Taylor and Henry Bolte). If we decide to leave the Great Men out altogether, what is our justification? Second, what do we do about the myth of 'the upright pioneer'? One member of the Museum staff disagreed strongly with our label dealing with the shepherds' place in the pastoral industry before 1860. I'd talked about convictism, loneliness, drunkenness, despair on the frontiers of settlement; her image was of solid Scottish crofters establishing homes in the bush with their wives and families under the kindly care of their Presbyterian masters. To be fair, some shepherds in the Western District were more fortunate than others. Does it matter if one type of experience is emphasised rather than the other? Third, Aboriginal expectations about commemorative displays are another issue. We were advised by an Aboriginal Sub-Committee of the Museum Council, representing Aborigines from several areas in Victoria. Some groups did not want to have anything to do with the sesquicentenary - what did they have to celebrate? - while others wanted to exercise close control over the content of the 'Aboriginal Experience' theme modules. We resisted most aspects of this. Sometimes the information we were asked to impart was misleading or unprovan (for example in the perennial debate over whether the Aborigines migrated to Australia or whether they have always been here). Sometimes we were asked to present information in such a generalised form that there was conflict within the advisory group itself.

It is often then, neither possible nor appropriate to try to reconcile all the often opposing expectations of the general public towards an historic celebratory display. I am not suggesting that we allow our public's expectations or existing knowledge to determine what we say. But if we are to communicate and to change people's attitudes, there are some principles to follow. I've idenfied three - there are doubtless more.

Establish your credentials

Before we can do much to change people's attitudes about or perceptions of the past, we have to establish our credentials. 'Shocking' statements on panels or on labels will not be heeded unless the public perceive that the Museum Curator is an expert. Unsupported generalisations, especially when they contradict folk memory, will be discounted. Anything which too obviously challenges 'What grandma said' will be rejected - 'who do they think they are?' Academic articles will not establish our credentials to the general Museum visitor: We possibly need to begin with what they think they know and spell out the stages in our argument in great detail.

Be honest about the process of making history.

It may be appropriate to leave some work for the visitor to do. Historical interpretation is a dynamic process, following fashions and shaped by cultural preoccupations like many other activities. Some hint of our professional uncertainties, of the process of 'making history', is not out of place in our displays. It doesn't hurt to use words like 'might', 'perhaps'; to write open-ended sentences, even to pose a question in the text panel. Emotive language and direct statements have a place, of course - but in a commemorative display we would be wrong to give the impression that *all* the research has been done and that the final truth has been arrived at. Surely our whole training teaches us that historical truth is an elusive thing!

Consider the visitor's learning processes.

It is very difficult for the Museum visitor to learn new facts. Museum displays have been shown to be notoriously inefficient in the transfer of hard information. Recent literature on evaluation of museum displays suggests that the level of the visitor's 'mindfulness'

- alertness, involvement, sense of surprise and interest - affects the amount of learning which occurs. How do we increase this mindfulness? If the visitor is to have his or her attitudes about the past changed or challenged, he must first be convinced that there are some benefits to him in this changed attitude. We who deal with the past suffer a disadvantage here. Visitors may want to know about contemporary issues, and be willing to submit to having their attitudes changed. But is anyone going to care when treasured interpretations of the past are challenged in a museum display? As historians, we have to do more than de-bunk for the sake of it!

In our display, we didn't set out to celebrate so much as to describe some events in Victorian history; to raise some questions about the past experiences of the poor, Aborigines, migrants, women, while not ignoring the considerable material achievements of Victorian society. In the event, as we planned the Story of Victoria gallery, there were areas where we held back from being too obviously 'trendy' in our interpretations. In the absence of any obvious censorship, our subjective sense of responsibility towards our public perhaps tempered our wildest plans. This is most clearly seen in our discussions about how to talk about 'women' in Victorian history. While agreeing that women should appear as actors throughout the Story of Victoria, it was decided to have a special section, Women in Victoria, as well. We asked several historians - including Marion Aveling, Marilyn Lake and Patricia Grimshaw - to a meeting to discuss the form this module could take. After some discussion, they suggested a display on family size and contraception - nineteenth century backyard abortion clinics, cures for pregnancy, patent medicines, early contraceptive devices, the work of Bettina Smythe who publicised contraceptive methods among the poor of Collingwood - all fascinating stuff. But we thought again about our general audience, and its age range, and the number of school groups which come to the Museum; and we decided to talk about Women's Trade Unions and the fight for female suffrage instead. This is not to say that there isn't a place for a display on contraception - but an open access, well publicised, and publicly funded commemorative display might not be that place.

The process of producing commemorative history in a publicly funded Museum display is an interesting one. We were fortunate to be spared any attempt to censor our interpretation. We were also fortunate not to have any private sponsorship - and so we avoided the pressures for a rose-coloured view of our past which could have come from that source. But, while we spoke about Hopes and Fears, and tried to raise questions about the quality of everyday life for everyday Victorians we consciously or unconsciously considered our audience's expectations, knowledge and taste and the way the museum audience learns, and we modified what we finally decided to say. How right were we?

REMINISCENCE WORK AND EDINBURGH CITY MUSEUMS

Helen Clark

Invariably discussions on oral history tend to concentrate on recording techniques, the organisation of the project and the theory and validity of the practice of oral history. The involvement of the interviewees and the effect that an oral history interview has on an individual is an area that is mentioned far less frequently. At one end of the spectrum of oral history are the questions about the reliability of information, the relationship between individual and collective memory and the nature of bias in an interview.[1] At the other end are questions about the social and therapeutic aspects of recall and the value that these have for the participants. In this paper I will describe the recall projects and reminiscence work that is currently being undertaken by Edinburgh City Museums and the Worker's Educational Association.

In 1984 the newly elected Labour Administration of Edinburgh District Council included in its Leisure plan, the proposal to establish a museum of labour and trade union history. The term, labour history has been taken in its widest sense to include all aspects of the lives and work of ordinary people. The name of the museum, 'The People's Story' will be exactly that, for by the use of oral history, autobiographical accounts and reminiscence the story will be told as far as possible in the People's own words. The museum was due to open in April, 1988 in the Canongate Tolbooth, but due to financial constraints, the opening has now been postponed until November 1988. In Spring, 1986 a project was set up with the Worker's Educational Association called *'Memories and Things* - linking Museums with the Community'.[2] Two specific aims of this were to explore ways in which memories could be integrated with the collections of the museum to give a new dimension to the presentation of history and to develop ways in which the city's museums could be used to stimulate older people to reminisce about the past.

Handling collections

Community history and Reminiscence groups were invited to the museum and given the opportunity to handle and discuss objects which were brought out of store. The sessions were led by two W.E.A. tutors Liz Beevers and Susan Moffat and myself. The types of object were everyday items relating to the home and it was quite illuminating to hear the way that an object would trigger off other memories:

A stone hot water bottle -

> We didn't need a piggy, we all kept each other warm. There were five in our bed. The oldest ones were eighteen and nineteen and we were only six and seven so we slept at the bottom between my brothers' feet. I was on the edge.

A wash board -

> Everything was done the hard way. Your mother never went out to work. She was always there. She took the whole day on Monday to do her washing. When we came home from school she was scrubbing the kitchen floor.

These sessions were taped and transcribed and the transcripts given back to the participants. The sessions were so successful that we created four handling boxes. It amazes me that the notion of loans to schools has been around for decades, but that of lending objects as trigger material for reminiscence is very recent. The boxes are on 'Keeping Clean and Healthy'; 'Going out'; 'Cooking, Lighting and Heating', and 'Wartime'. The boxes can be carried by one person, they contain about ten objects, five large photographs and guidelines and sample questions for the group leader on how to use the objects and run the session. The Museum of Childhood has created three boxes on 'Schooldays' 'Streetgames' and 'The Baby'. The response to these boxes has been overwhelming. Recently a meeting for those who borrow the boxes was attended by 50 people from old people's homes, occupational therapy departments, geriatric wards, day centres and lunch clubs. These staff said that the boxes were an invaluable resource for elderly people who are confused or withdrawn. Anyone who has carried out an oral history interview with an elderly person will perhaps have seen how much clearer the act of recall is for events which took place a long time ago compared to those which occurred in the recent past. Objects which were in common use sixty years ago can trigger memories which a normally withdrawn person may wish to share with the other members of the group. This can help reduce the sense of isolation which many elderly people feel.

When I talked of this work at the 1987 Annual Study Weekend some questions were raised as to the danger of upsetting people by using objects which trigger off distressing memories. The problem is that even the least expected object or photograph can upset someone if it has personal associations especially of someone who

has died. The people who take the groups have training and experience and they *do* know their group members. We therefore leave it up to them to handle a reminiscence group with sensitivity and awareness of how their members are affected. This issue was discussed at the meeting with group organisers and the response from some was that there need not be anything wrong with group members having a cry about the past. For our part, we would advise a group leader not to start off with the 'Wartime' box, but with one of the other boxes on a 'safer' subject.

Reminiscence Groups

In October 1986 three Reminiscence Groups were set up to share memories on the themes which are being covered in the museum. At this time one met every week in Huntly House Museum while the other two met in their local community centres, one in Abbeyhill in central Edinburgh and the other in Oxgangs on the outskirts of the city. In October 1987 these local groups came together and now meet each week in Huntly House. The two groups are quite different in their overall character. The members of 'The People's Story' Group I, which were always based in Huntly House, were invited from existing groups and came from various parts of the city. The members of 'The People's Story' Group II came from either Abbeyhill or Oxgangs and this geographical concentration has been very useful for comparative purposes. Each week the groups discuss a particular theme such as, budgeting, customs, a day out, unemployment, health, food, living conditions, shopping and so on. Usually some trigger material is used to get the discussion going. Sometimes group members take home questionnaires to write more detailed replies.

We see the project as being a two way process. The groups have met various members of museum staff. They have seen how decisions are made about the content and presentation of displays and the kind of problems that can arise. They are asked to think about the question 'What makes a good museum?' and have visited many museums in and around Edinburgh and followed this up with a critical look at their visit. Their comments are then sent to the Museum and appear to be taken seriously. All the sessions are taped and transcribed and the transcripts are returned to them so they can build up a file on the memories which have been discussed. We will be using the transcripts to form some of the text in 'The People's Story' displays and publications. The transcripts are also going to be used as basis for the script of a play concerning movements of people within the city which is to be produced by 'Winged Horse Touring Productions' in 1988. The work of the groups and the other oral history interviews will also provide the basis for 'The People's Story' video which will be shown in the museum and will be loaned out to members of the public. In May 1987 we produced in conjunction with Lothian Health Education an exhibition called 'Health for All - Public Health in Edinburgh 50 years ago'. This consists of panels of photographs with quotes from the groups and from M.O.H. reports of the 1930s. It has been displayed in community centres and libraries and is fully booked until June, 1988. The W.E.A. has produced an exhibition on the work of the Abbeyhill and Oxgangs group and a publication called *Friday Night was Brasso Night*.[3] This was launched in October and has sold 750 copies in six weeks! The title came from the following quote:

> Friday night was Brasso night. You didn't get out to the dancing 'til the brasses were done - candlesticks, even the taps. Blackleading was done on Friday night too.

A slide-tape programme along the lines of Age Concern's 'Recall' packs has been recently launched by the W.E.A. It is to be used as a trigger for reminiscence groups. The 'Recall' packs had been found by many groups to be too English based so the slide-tape, which uses Edinburgh material, was produced to meet this need. The sound track consists of some reminiscence but also songs, music and sound effects. A Calendar made up of photographs and reminiscence from 'The People's Story' Group I has just been produced.[4] To coincide with the opening of the Museum an address book has been planned.

As a result of these products and their involvement with 'The People's Story' the members of the groups have developed a great sense of pride in themselves and their own history. When one was interviewed by Scottish Community Action News she said:

> When you retire you can become really old or go out and do something. There is a definite purpose to this group and we are going a lot deeper into each subject. It is a nice feeling that we are leaving something for the next generation, something after we have gone.

One advantage of discussing issues in a group is that there can be a constant check for a consensus of opinion. Obviously group dynamics will affect the natural level of consensus reached and some group members may remain silent which could mean all sorts of

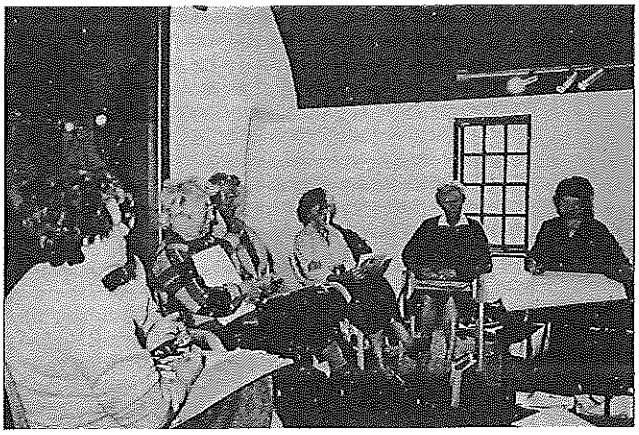

Plate 1: 'What Makes a Good Museum' A brainstorming session at the Huntley House Museum.

things. Some of the most interesting sessions have been where the group has been divided. For example the comment 'every weekend you put stuff into the pawn shop to get money because you had none' resulted in some murmers of assent and cries of 'Oh no, you would never go to the pawn shop'. Feelings were running high and quite an argument broke out. What did we conclude at the end? - Some people used the pawn shop, others would have to be near destitution to go there and some people went but never told anyone. An in-depth study on attitudes to the pawn shop which would disclose factors such as occupation, class, tenement politics and geographical area would be an interesting study sometime.

What we are looking at here is a question of attitude, one of Paul Thompson's big 'no no's' on the grounds that it cannot be cross checked against other sources. However the attitudes held are as valid a part of 'The People's Story' as a 'fact' that could be cross checked such as the wages that were received each week. The problem with attitudes is that they are subjective and varied and take us a long way from a notion of historical truth, whatever that is. The most important aspect of the work with the reminiscence groups is not whether we are getting a clear, true picture of what life was like in the past, but the pride and involvement that these people feel in the museum. One of our aims is for local people in Edinburgh to feel that it is their museum and that it is about them. It is this feeling that will be spread via their families and friends and through the exhibitions, booklets and media to many other people and will hopefully make the museum a success.

Gareth Griffiths, in the last edition of this journal, maintains that the practice of oral history in the museum works in opposition to its original claims to give history back to the people in their own words. The curator remains in control, alters the interview to fit into a framework decided by the curator and decides how and in what form the information will appear in the public realm.[5] This need not be the case if the people are involved in making the decisions as to how the information is presented and are given the opportunity to comment on the form and the words which are used. For example, with 'The People's Story' calendar, the group selected the photographs, commented on the suitability of quotes and decided themselves on the way this should be presented and the form the calendar should take. Yes, we were ultimately in control, but a project like this does go some-way towards transforming the power relations between the museum and the public and towards the democraticisation of their history.

References

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2. A methodology of this work will be available in 1988 from the W.E.A. Riddles Court, 322 Lawnmarket, Edinburgh. Tel No. 031-226 3456.
3. *Friday night was Brasso night*, W.E.A. 1987 (address above), price £1.00.
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5. Gareth Griffiths, *op.cit.*

AND WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING?

AN EARLY RESPONSE TO THE 'HISTORY MUSEUMS IN BRITAIN' SURVEY

Gaynor Kavanagh

There are areas in life where you sometimes encounter 'no-win situations'. I long ago came to the conclusion that museum studies research might very well be one of these. There appears to be such a delicate balance between the impressionistic and the factual in the gathering of any form of evidence about museums that extra-ordinary care has to be exercised . . . or plain bloody-mindedness. The surveys were something like that.

Having completed an in-depth study of museums during the Great War, I am very aware of the type of evidence that museums leave behind them about their activities and the curators' intent, and popular reaction to what goes on. Indeed if my Great War research exposed anything, it was the gap between what curators thought they were doing and what was actually achieved in real terms. The diameter of this gap says an awful lot about the purpose and worth of museums in our society and the relevance and use of curatorial skills.

Being conscious that students' questions about museums were rarely answered by reviews which might appear about them in the *Museums Journal*, and with the prospect in view of preparing a volume on history curatorship in Britain, for the Leicester University Press' *Museum Studies Series*, I thought it was time to ask some questions. After all, as critics of the Department point out my colleagues and I do not live in the real, rust and guts world of museums. We observe from the sidelines, where I can tell you, the view is fascinating.

The only way to get answers is to ask questions. The choice available is to phone, visit or write. Working on the theory that the questions I was asking were fundamental to curatorial practice, further defined in the local or regional setting (what are you doing and why are you doing it) I was hopeful that the responses would be well rehearsed and easily available. To ensure some form of country-wide coverage, I elected to use a standard survey approach.

Building on the experience of my colleagues' surveys of education provision in museums, and archaeological curatorship, I chose to issue not one survey, but two. One was directed to specific museums or history departments of larger multi-disciplined museum services. The other was on attitudes to the practice of curatorship. This was much more open and was made available to anyone who was prepared to respond. Because of the personal opinion sought in the latter, respondents did not have to sign the forms and no list was kept of the individuals to whom it was sent. This was in contrast to the survey on museums, where lists were kept and hurry-up letters sent as and when necessary. Museums where I knew there were recent staff changes, maternity leave or illness were not pressed for the material, nor were those who had recently published information on their museum likely to answer most of the questions.

The drafting of the surveys was carefully done, although a few of the respondents complained that it was not. It had been tested by a number of museums before it went on 'general release'. The form of open-questioning employed rather than, for example, a series of choices of most appropriate statements, gave rise to some comment. From an early stage, I had taken the decision *not* to use a multiple choice approach, as I wanted curators to explain things as they saw them, without words being put into anyone's head. In the event, it has been extremely useful to read and see how curators argue and justify their activities and intentions. This would have been lost if everyone had been ticking boxes.

The responses were well up to expectations. There was a sixty-five percent return to the survey on history museums. On the scale of things, as far as surveys generally go, this was not bad at all. A *big* 'THANK YOU' must go to all the people who took the time and trouble to fill them in and were considerate enough to enclose all sorts of reports, policy statements, articles on their museums and other material of interest. I can ensure them that this was effort that was by no means wasted. The surveys in themselves now form a quite extraordinary and important archive.

Similarly the survey on attitudes also generated a good response. Curators from museums assistant to national directorship level filled them in. It is not possible to quantify precisely the percentage responses to this element of the survey, because, as I have said, lists were purposefully not kept. At a rough guess I would say if anything it was slightly higher than that of the other survey. However, it is possible to be certain that the response was both helpful and revealing. People were candid and thoughtful in their views and I have found this part of the survey particularly striking and illuminating. I am particularly grateful to all those who took part in this and were prepared to articulate and declare their convictions.

At this stage I cannot present a digest of the survey responses. Indeed it was not intended to be a survey where neat conclusions based on statistics could be drawn. One of the characteristics of curatorial practice in the history field is its diversity and room for innovation: any general conclusion runs the risk of being 'reductionist'. However, I do hope to prepare a more detailed paper on the survey returns for the next *SHCG Journal* (subject to the Editor's approval). At the moment the *Journal* deadline is too close for me to do anything other than this preliminary response and note of thanks.

In the meanwhile the returned forms are by no means gathering dust in some remote corner of my room. They are being used in a number of ways. Research and post-graduate students working under my supervision can have access and can draw on the material, subject to any conditions laid down by the respondents. In this the museums might find themselves relieved from answering the same questions again in the near future.

Further, I am drawing on some of the material contained within the surveys for the book on history curatorship. Besides the very useful background that the surveys provided, especially in terms of the development of history museums to date, I am preparing a number of case studies for the book based on certain of the responses, with the permission of the museums concerned. In this the survey has proven invaluable in that I can use material straight from museums and their curators.

Should anyone who has not taken part in this survey like to make a contribution, I still have some blank survey forms available and will be happy to send them out. I would be glad to receive any further material, for example revised collecting policies, from those museums that have taken part so that the archive can be up-dated.

I have to confess that I entered this exercise with some trepidation, knowing full well the pitfalls and problems of using a survey as a research tool. I am glad and grateful that the enterprise was treated with professional interest and good humour by most of those involved. There were a very small number of odd and occasionally offensive responses. But in a 'no-win situation' you would expect that anyway, wouldn't you?

SHEFFIELD INDUSTRY AND SOCIETY

U. P. Sarah Craggs

A brief account of the growth of the City from the early 1700s to the early 1900s.

In 1700 Sheffield was a small, clean, rural town, well placed geologically and geographically for industrial development. Local ironstone, although of poor quality, was suitable for use as an ore whilst the sandstones of the Coal Measures sequence were suitable for edge-tool grinding and the local fireclays and ganister for use in refractories. The wooded hillslopes provided charcoal for iron smelting and for the production of blister steel whilst the five rivers, the Don, Loxley, Rivelin, Sheaf and Porter provided water for power, the Don later becoming an important transport route. Although coal was mined in South Yorkshire as early as the thirteenth century it was principally for domestic use. It began to gain importance industrially towards the sixteenth century and was in general use by 1700, wood no longer being an important fuel. For the first half of the eighteenth century water power was predominant and most Sheffield craftsmen lived and worked in healthy, well ventilated rural areas their forges and workshops often being attached to their living quarters. Until the early 1700s many craftsmen were un-specialised, some forging their own blades and springs, marking, hardening and tempering them in their own homes and grinding the blades at a rented *trow* (trough) at one of the water-powered grinding wheels. Grinding did not become a specialised trade until the 1740s, and in consequence, early Sheffield cutlery tended not to be of an especially high quality, grinding being a particularly skilled operation. This lack of specialisation was, however, probably of some benefit socially as grinders' asthma does not appear to have been a particularly serious occupational disease until well into the eighteenth century. Although possibly not prone to asthma in the early 1700s, grinders were always at risk from the effects of the shattering of defective stones turning at speed. It was known for craftsmen to have been decapitated by the flying pieces.

A forge of the early eighteenth century would have been roughly built with walls of undressed stone, generally plastered over with clay or swarf from grinding wheels. The floor would have been of earth or mud and the windows would have been unglased but possibly covered with paper well saturated with boiled water. The fireplace might be opposite the door with a forger's hearth at either side and the bellows in the corner. The forger's *stiddy* (anvil) would be bedded into a stock with horse droppings, the stock being formed from an oak tree stump of about 5ft height and let deep into the ground to leave a stump of about 2ft 3ins projecting from the floor. One corner of the workshop might serve as a warehouse whilst work-boards on either side of the room would be provided with vices for hafting and assembling knives.

The earliest types of cutlery to be made in Sheffield were knives, scissors and sickles. Files and razors were made in the area from about 1640 onwards and spring-knives with iron handles from about 1650. Awl-blade smiths were admitted to the Cutlers' Company of Hallamshire in 1675-6 and file-smiths and scythe-smiths in 1681-2. Cutlery in the early seventeenth century was made either of wrought iron or 'German Steel', a modification of wrought iron produced by adding fresh cast-iron to the 'finery' furnace shortly before the wrought iron was ready for removal. 'German' steel was produced in Austria but imported into Sheffield via the Rhine Valley, hence its name. By the early eighteenth century, cutlery in the Sheffield area was being made from shear steel and double shear steel, the latter being of the higher quality. Bars of blister steel were broken into lengths of about 18 ins and a bundle of about 10 to 12 held together with strong wire, the bundle then being heated up and forged into a single bar to produce shear steel, a metal combining flexibility with the ability to hold a sharp cutting edge suitable for the production of cutlery blades. Double Shear steel, a superior metal, was formed on cutting a bar of shear steel in two whilst still hot and welding the two pieces together under a hammer.

The most important technological development prompting the growth of Sheffield, in the mid eighteenth century, from a small rural town to an important industrial one was the invention of crucible steel by Benjamin Huntsman. Huntsman came to the Sheffield area from Doncaster early in the 1740s as a clock and watch maker, his intention being to develop a steel suitable for watch springs. The result was crucible steel, a uniform material of high quality produced by melting bars of blister steel in crucibles of fireclay. The crucibles were lowered into furnaces containing burning coke, the high temperatures required (considerably higher than previously used in other metalworking processes) were achieved with the use of a plentiful supply of air from a large cellar below the furnace and a strong draught prompted by a tall chimney. The furnace chimneys could be easily identified, being 30 - 40 ft high and built in batches with three to six flues in a single stack. The blister steel required for Huntsman's process was produced in a converting (or cementation) furnace recognisable by its tall, conical chimney reaching from 35ft to 60ft in height. Alternate layers of charcoal and Swedish bar iron were built up inside the two inner 'chests' of sandstone slabs or firebrick, set either side of a central flue. Once the chests were completely full, the charging holes were bricked up and sealed with clay before the coal fire was lit below. Firing took between seven to nine days altogether, after which the fire was raked out. After a further week the furnace was opened and the bars removed, now very brittle and covered with small 'blisters', to be heated to a bright red and either forged or rolled.

By 1751 Huntsman had developed his method for production of crucible steel to a stage suitable for commercial production and by 1772 he had established works in Attercliffe. Gradually other craftsmen took up the process although production increased only slowly, records showing that furnaces in Sheffield in 1767 were capable of converting only 2 or 4 tons of blister steel at a time. Between 1800 and 1850, however, well over 200 crucible furnace shops were built in the Sheffield area and in 1843 Sheffield was producing 90 percent of the total British steel and almost 50 percent of the European output. Up to about 1750 the Sheffield area had been a producer of iron but, on the whole, an importer of steel.

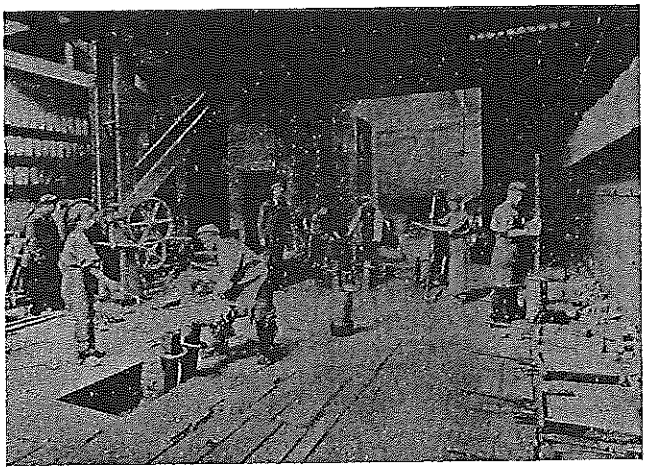

Plate 1: Interior of a crucible steel melting shop at Cammell's Cyclops Works, Sheffield, c.1905.

Sheffield had by now begun to develop into an industrial town. Writers of the eighteenth century such as Horace Walpole and the Reverend E. Goodwin remark that by the 1760s the Sheffield air was heavily polluted by smoke and that even the newest buildings were being rapidly discoloured. The streets of that period were apparently 'in a rude state in every respect' and were badly lit by a few dirty, dull oil lamps spaced far apart augmented by the occasional candle in a window. Street lamps are first mentioned in 1734 and even in 1809 they were being lit only in the winter months. Paths in the late eighteenth century were flagged with stones of assorted sizes and spouts discharged water from house roofs in streams into the street or onto the heads of passers-by. Pigs rooted amongst the garbage in the gutters running down the middle of the street.

In the eighteenth century Sheffield grew only slowly, one of the major influences speeding its growth being the introduction of steam powered grinding wheels to the town in 1786, prompting a gradual drift of industry away from the valleys and towards the centre. The first was erected by Proctors on the River Sheaf and for a considerable time no grinders could be found to use it, some predicting ruin to the innovators and disaster to the workmen. (It is said that the mother of the first grinder to work there, having been assured by her son of the safety of the steam boiler and finding her kettle unusable, corked up a bottle of water and popped it into the oven to heat up). Canalisation of the River Don, begun in 1727 and completed by 1819, prompted a further concentration of industry around that river, some of the larger steel-producing firms such as Vickers and Cammells erecting new works at Attercliffe in the 1830s and 1840s.

Living accommodation naturally had to move with the sources of work and by the 1800s, the typical house of a factory worker was a back-to-back in the town. Each house usually contained a half cellar, a general living room 12ft square and 8½ft high, a chamber (or main bedroom) 12ft square and 8ft high and an attic 7ft high, the rooms being situated one on top of another. The front house faced into the street and the back into a common court, as many as 20 houses possible sharing one court. In Sheffield a craftsman's

family would normally have an entire house to itself, it being rare in Sheffield for two families to share. By contrast, in Manchester in the early 1800s nearly 12 percent of the population lived in cellars and in Liverpool there were 7,862 cellars inhabited. In 1831 in Sheffield the average number of occupants per house was 5 and in 1841, 4.87.

Although between 1838 and 1841 the manufacturing industries in Sheffield suffered a depression and numerous families left for other parts of the country, 1358 new houses were built (partly on speculation) in the township, and 2537 in the Parish, in some cases rows of cottages being left barely tenantable whilst the streets serving them remained in the form of footpaths of inferior flags. Such streets were allowed to remain neglected and according to Calvert Holland, Physician to the Sheffield General Infirmary, they exhibited an accumulation of rubbish and filth of every description and also stagnant pools of water which in summer were injurious to health. The town was not liable for the upkeep of such properties. Sheffield cellars in 1874 were described as being remarkable for their offensiveness, housing every conceivable lumber, whilst poultry, pigeons and other animals contributed a quota of filth and stench.

Nevertheless, Sheffield craftspeople in general enjoyed a higher standard of living than their counterparts in many other northern industrial towns and whilst trade was good were well fed, insisting on the prime joints of meat and having cooked dinners including some form of meat every day. For the less well off such as cutlers and labourers the main food was home-made bread with polony (a type of sausage), meat being eaten only for Sunday dinner. Steel-workers and engineers tended to be amongst the better paid. The explanation for the comparative affluence of the Sheffield work-force lies in the 'Little Mester' system. Many of the products of Sheffield were suitable for small-scale production on a limited capital, each branch of the tool and cutlery trades having its self-employed craftsmen, each speciliasing in a particular process. As many of the tool trades were based on this system of small businesses rather than on large factories, the wealth of the town tended to be spread over a greater proportion of the population than in other northern industrial towns such as Manchester, Bolton and Liverpool. This system had been firmly established by the early eighteenth century, a 'Little Mester' requiring no more capital than would provide an anvil and a few tools, the materials for production and a modest rent for a shed with a hearth in the corner. The Master Cutler and Town Trustees of Sheffield were from much the same class as the 'Little Mesters' and spent their working days in aprons with the shirt sleeves tucked up.

Benjamin Huntsman had firmly established Sheffield as a steel centre and with the introduction of the bulk steel processes in the 1860s, further industrial expansion took place. Henry Bessemer announced his invention of a method for the manufacture of mild steel in 1856, but Sheffield steelmakers were reluctant to take up the new process, the cheaper Bessemer steel being more a replacement for wrought iron and being unsuitable for the manufacture of cutlery and edge tools. Bessemer therefore moved to Sheffield himself and set up works in Carlisle Street in 1858-9. Firms such as John Brown and Charles Cammell soon became interested and Bessemer steel was produced for such items as railway lines and general railway furniture, crucible steel still being used for cutlery and edge tools and any products where quality steel was required. At about the same time the Siemens Open Hearth method was being perfected for the production of high quality steel. In this process cast iron was melted on an open hearth with scrap, under a slag to which iron ore was added, the effect being to 'boil' out the carbon from the metal. Although slower than the Bessemer Process (which involved the blowing of air through liquid pig iron) it was more easily controlled and gradually became the chief method for the provision of ordnance, engineering forgings, ship shafting and power transmission etc.

Firms already specialising in large scale steel manufacture expanded further to cope with production and use of the new steels, the Attercliffe, Brightside and Don Valley areas becoming the regions in Sheffield for the production of heavy engineering, armaments and large scale forgings and castings. By now, many of the major firms owned their own collieries and the north-east section of the town along the Don Valley was heavily smoke polluted. As all the heavy smoke-producing works were situated in this area, the worst effects of the pollution were confined to a comparatively small part of the town, Sheffield spread over its seven hills and five valleys comparing favourably with other industrial towns for hours of sunshine. For the years 1905 to 1909, Manchester received 23 percent of available sunshine, Bradford 25 percent, Leeds and Birmingham 27 percent, Edinburgh 29 percent and London 30 percent whilst Sheffield received overall 31 percent. Another indication that Sheffielders appeared to be more healthy than their counterparts was the low incidence of rickets compared with other towns as shown by hospital records for operations performed on deformities caused by the condition.

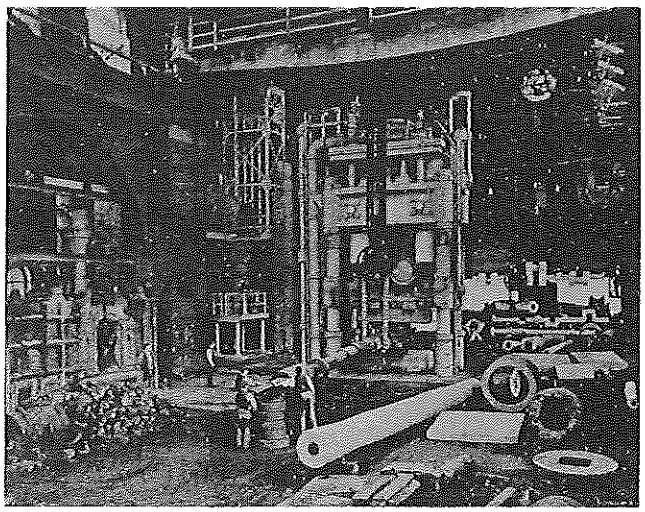

Plate 2: 6,000 ton hydraulic forging press at Cammell's Grimesthorpe Works, Sheffield, 1905.

Small tool and cutlery firms which had not taken up large-scale steel manufacture in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries tended to remain small, some even in the 1900s still operating on their original sites, these tending to be distributed around the central areas of the town as in the late eighteenth century. Sheffield now had two main aspects to her industry: traditional relatively small firms producing high quality cutlery and hand tools and large firms specialising in the production of special steels, heavy engineering components and armaments. Some of the large firms, particularly those which had originally specialised in a particular cutlery or tool trade, produced both heavy engineering components and hand tools, saws, files and edge tools such as for instance Thomas Firth's.

From about the middle of the 18th century, Sheffield had been doubling its population roughly every 30 years. In 1736 the town had only 14,105 inhabitants whilst by 1801 the number had risen to 45,755 and by 1910 to 478,763. From about 1800 until 1875 very little attention had been paid to public health, the passing of the Public Health Act in 1875 giving the Local Authority a great deal to do. The original system of drainage in the back-to-back courts had been by a system of surface channels which had brought the discharge from the sinks to the gutters at the sides of the streets, the waste travelling down until it reached a catch-pit. This system was still in use in some areas of Sheffield as late as 1910. Rubble sewers were still being constructed as late as 1888, several miles of these sewers still being in use in the early 1900s. The building of back-to-back houses was finally prohibited in Sheffield in November by the first set of bye-laws for New Buildings. (Other towns such as Leeds continued to erect them for some years.) By 1910, however, there were still about 16,000 of them in use, representing between one sixth and one seventh of the total number of inhabited houses in the town. Privy middens were in use until 1890, a sewage disposal works having been opened in 1886. In 1890 powers were acquired to require the conversion of the privy middens into water closets, the Corporation having to contribute one third of the cost, and from 1894 onwards all new houses were provided with water closets. By 1908, the commonest type of house for the craftsman was the four or generally five-roomed terrace house.

As late as the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, most factory owner/managers in Sheffield were socially close to their operatives, the founders of many of the major steel firms having served their apprenticeships as craftsmen themselves, the first Daniel Doncaster, for instance, being by profession a file maker. As the size and wealth of these firms increased, so did the social gap between management and work-force, this being further widened as, towards the second half of the nineteenth century, it became fashionable for the sons of the moneyed classes to be educated at public schools rather than in their own home towns, training immediately for management rather than starting on the shop-floor to learn the trade as a skill. By 1900 the gulf between management and operatives was almost complete, exceptions being some small, family firms dependant on the manager's own technical contribution on the production line. A far cry from the early 1700s when there was little difference between the Master Cutler and the Little Mester.

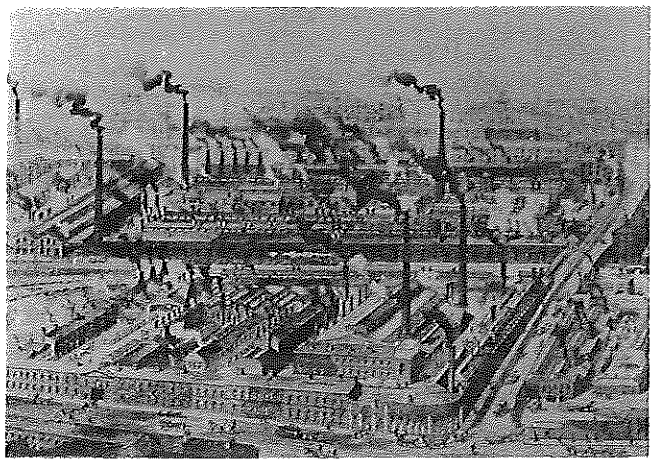

Plate 3: The Cyclops Steel and Iron Works, Sheffield, c.1895.

A READING LIST ON STEEL AND STEEL MAKING

P. G. Smithurst

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PLASTICS IN MUSEUMS

Susan Mossman

Currently I am working on the collection of plastics in the Science Museum, preparing a catalogue of the museum's collections for eventual publication. This work was begun in January, 1987. The cataloguing is planned for completion in 1988. The Science Museum's collection of plastics contains about 1500 objects, ranging from the earliest man-made plastics of the 1850s to contemporary plastics of the 1980s. The purpose of this paper is to help the curator who deals with the practical aspects of plastics in museums. I wish to discuss various problems which I have come across in this museum which will, no doubt, apply to many of your own collections, and also to outline some of my solutions to these problems. This paper will be divided into three main sections. The first covers plastics in museums, *i.e.*: the objects themselves. Naturally, since I have been concerned mainly with the Science Museum, I will concentrate on the plastics within this museum, but refer to other collections as necessary. The second section deals with the method which I am using to catalogue these collections. The third deals with the storage and conservation of plastics.

Plastics in Museums

Plastics are now becoming ever more frequent in museum collections. In the Science Museum, the collection has been built up with an emphasis on the material itself - what we call 'plastic'. This term is understood to refer to man-made substances, which are usually based on organic polymers, are amazingly versatile, and can be shaped into a variety of forms, functions and colours. Attempts have been made to collect those plastics which represent a significant break-through in polymer technology, such as nylon. Significant associated equipment for the production of various plastics has also been collected where possible, for example for the production of Celluloid and casein. The injection moulding machine currently displayed in the Plastics Gallery at the Science Museum, London, is particularly important since it demonstrates the method which is most commonly used to mould modern plastics.

In the early days of this century, there were only a small range of substances known as plastic: the natural ones such as shellac and gutta percha, and the man-made plastics including cellulose nitrate-based materials such as Parkesine and Celluloid, and the phenolics, the best known of which is 'Bakelite'. This term, in scientific terms, refers to one particular type of phenolic plastic: phenol formaldehyde. However, in fashionable parlance, the term 'Bakelite' is now used loosely to describe many different types of early plastics, including: Catalin, and urea formaldehyde. Many objects are acquired, having been listed under the trade name 'Bakelite', when, in fact, this is an inaccurate description.

How does the innocent curator identify the plastics which he or she looks after? There is no simple solution to this problem. One method is experience. Handling large numbers of plastic objects gives the curator a 'feel' for the different types of plastic. In some cases it is very straightforward, particularly in the case of 'Bakelite', with its characteristic dark brown appearance, often imitating wood such as walnut. You will probably remember the old-fashioned type of dark brown 'Bakelite' plug. The adoption of this material for electrical fittings (due to its excellent insulation properties) contributed largely to the commercial success of this particular plastic. Decorative laminates such as Formica (melamine formaldehyde or MF) are also familiar to the general public. These were marketed as a boon to the modern house-wife in the 1940s and 50s, the emphasis being on their easy-care wipe-down surfaces. Laminates were not restricted to the home, but could and were used in the office as well. A pair of 'Wareite' (MF) doors, dated to 1936, are on display in the plastics gallery at the Science Museum, and were obtained from the offices of the Bakelite factory at Tyseley.

There are also other aids to the identification of plastics. On occasion, one is helped by the material's or manufacturer's name being stamped on the base, as is often the case with 'Beetle' ware (urea or thiourea formaldehyde). But what can one do if this is not the case? One solution is to look in the literature for help. I would recommend the two larger books by Sylvia Katz (cited in the Reading List) as very useful tools for the plastics' curator. The coloured illustrations are useful references, and a parallel might well be found and a sensible identification made. She recommends various tests in her book *'Classic Plastics'*, many of which involve either setting the object alight or immersing the object in soapy water! This advice is directed much more towards the collector rather than the conservation-conscious curator. Apparently one can become very skilled at using this burning technique to identify plastics. However, I cannot say that I would recommend it to the

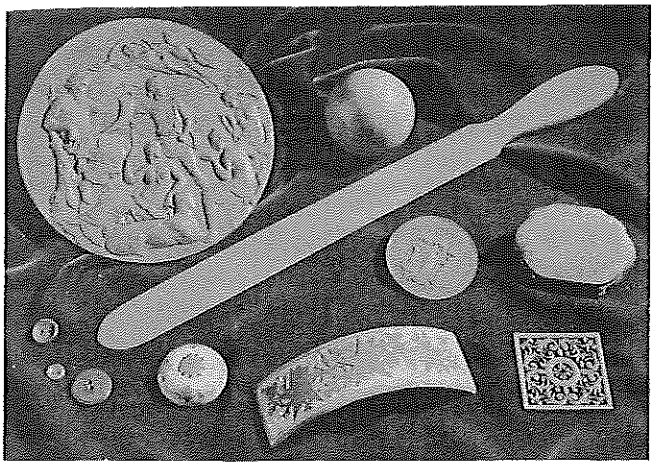

Plate 1: Parkesine objects, 1855-1868 (Courtesy of the Trustees of the Science Museum).

museum curator. It could be potentially disastrous in the case of an flammable plastic such as cellulose nitrate (Celluloid). The D.O.E. produces a guide to the identification of different plastics. This is currently being updated. This is a very useful guide for modern plastics, but does not deal with the older plastics which many of you will be collecting, such as the early phenolics, the cellulose-based products or the natural plastics: shellac and gutta percha. Its strength lies in the samples of plastics which it provides, which can be handled and compared with each other. The same might be said of Dietrich Braun's book on the identification of plastics (also cited in the Reading List). However, this book is particularly useful for the straight-forward identification chart for plastics which it contains.

A useful alternative is to seek expert advice. A list of useful addresses is given at the end of this paper. One society which would be worth joining is the recently formed Plastics Historical Society. The membership of this group is very varied, and includes curators, people who have worked or are working in the plastics industry, and collectors. This society is a fund of useful information and help for the inexperienced curator of plastics. When all other methods have failed to identify your plastic, scientific analyses may be the answer. Infra-red spectroscopy can make a major contribution in identifying what a plastic is. Fortunately for the Science Museum, the V & A conservation laboratories hold such equipment. In the long-term, I hope this technique will be used to identify positively any of this museum's plastics which have not been identified with absolute certainty as yet. Eventually it is planned to set up a reference collection of plastics in the store at Blythe Road, West Kensington (which the Science Museum shares with the V & A and the British Museum). The intention is that this should be accessible to other curators and members of the public who wish to look at the various types of plastics, with a view to identifying those objects in their own collections.

Cataloguing the collection

When the plastic object has been acquired, it must be catalogued. Obviously many museums have their own systems for cataloguing their acquisitions. Many of you will be familiar with, and indeed use the M.D.A. (Museums Documentation Association) system for your collections. This is the system, in a slightly modified form, which I am using to catalogue the plastics in the Science Museum. I will not go into detail as to how the M.D.A. system has been adapted for use at the Science Museum since it has been well-publicised elsewhere in the professional literature. Suffice it to say that this system is useful, because not only does the Science Museum's adapted M.D.A. card provide a full record of the object, but after the object has been entered onto our mainframe computer, all the vital details can be quickly accessed. Objects can be sorted, and printouts obtained, of all items of a certain plastic, date or manufacturer. Alternatively they can be sorted according to function, style or even colour. This means that all the objects in the Science Museum plastics collection can be studied from several different points of view: the industrial historian will be interested in what they are made of, who by and how. You yourselves, as social historians, are likely to be more interested in their function. Many of our enquiries come from students of design, and designers may well be interested in the style of the object, for example the Egyptianising influences seen in many items of the 20s and 30s. Once again, such detail will be retrievable using this system.

I will also be adding S.H.I.C. (Social History and Industrial Classification system) numbers to the cards, so that those of you who use this system will be able to apply it to the Science Museum's plastic objects. Some of you will be aware of the so-called S.T.O.T. (Science and Technology Object Thesaurus) system being set up for science and technology collections. Again, the intention is that the terms used to describe these plastic objects will dove-tail with the new system. The practicalities of cataloguing large numbers of plastic objects mean that some system of abbreviations is necessary when describing the materials used in certain objects. There is no need to reiterate endlessly words of the length of phenol formaldehyde or polymethylmethacrylate for example. How much simpler to refer to them as PF or PMMA: the British Standard abbreviations, and I am using this system as a form of short-hand for cataloguing the various plastics. One might ask how is the ignorant enquirer going to know what all these letters mean or how to find those plastics which they want? Again, this is not a problem. A pointer file can be supplied on the computer which explains the various terms and cross-references the full names of plastics with their abbreviations and relevant trade names.

Plate 2: Objects made of Xylonite and Ivoride, manufactured by D. Spill and Co., c.1870 (Courtesy of the Trustees of the Science Museum).

Storage and Conservation

Once the plastic object has been acquired and catalogued, now it must be stored safely and conserved if necessary. Very little is known about the conservation of plastics at present. Why this neglect? It is only recently that plastics have become 'collectible' items. They are even becoming fashionable and, hence, more expensive. It is becoming understood that they are worth preserving. How do we preserve objects that were never intended to last? The Marks and Spencer plastic bag of today was never intended to be the museum object of tomorrow.

The news is not good. Plastics are susceptible to a number of degradation factors, the most important of which are: light, heat and oxidation. The deterioration of the plastic is often due to the lethal combination of two or even three of these factors. Lack of ventilation can also cause severe problems. All of these factors present serious problems for the curator who wishes to display or store plastics in a museum. One important factor to bear in mind is that it is not just 'plastic' objects that are at risk. Many modern objects in museums combine plastic with other materials such as metal. This can be a very dangerous combination as has been found at the National Maritime Museum where certain scientific instruments, made of both plastic and metal, were stored in cupboards. When these were looked at recently, they were discovered to be in a dire condition - the plastic parts of the instruments had literally dripped away from the metal, and had to be replaced with another plastic, perspex (PMMA) since it was impossible to carry out any conservation on the original plastic. In the long term it is not known whether this 'restoration' will be any more stable than the original. The Science Museum and many other museums which preserve modern scientific instruments are likely to have similar problems in the near future.

There are also problems in museums of art. The Tate Gallery recently put on a display of sculptures by Naum Gabo. Gabo used plastics (including cellulose nitrate and acrylics) in many of his sculptures, sometimes combining different plastics together. This is a sure recipe for problems when such an object is encased within a sealed museum case, since many older plastics such as cellulose nitrate and acetate give off gases, and if there are more than one type of plastic in the case the gases from one plastic may attack the other, resulting in degradation of the object. Indeed, this was found to be happening to one of the sculptures from the Gabo exhibition. The solution found at present is for such plastic works of art to be displayed in well ventilated environments, preferably

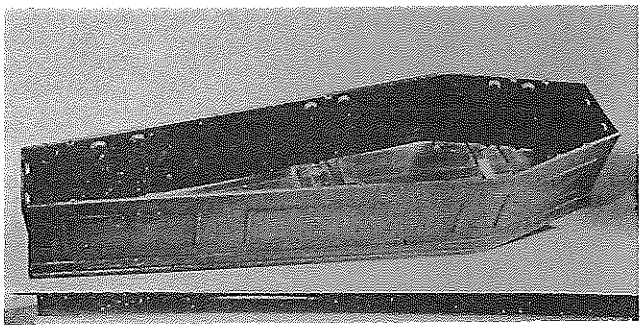

Plate 3: A Bakelite coffin, 1938. Claimed to be the largest phenolic moulding ever made (Courtesy of the Trustees of the Science Museum).

with air able to circulate freely around them.

The decorative arts should not be forgotten in this summary of potential pitfalls for museums which collect plastics. The conservation department of the V & A was given the impossible task of conserving/preserving a PVC belt. This had been stored folded over. The passage of time had resulted in the folds becoming brittle and finally cracking. The belt was in such a poor state it could not be straightened out. This cautionary tale suggests that similar articles should be stored flat, never folded. Similarly, no doubt, all of you at some time will have experienced the deterioration of a polyurethane foam chair - suddenly the stuffing tears and often becomes a sticky mess. The V & A have had many problems preserving furniture upholstered with modern synthetic materials. One of the examples which appears in Sylvia Katz's book, *'Classic Plastics'*, no longer exists due to problems of conservation. Cellulose-based materials, e.g. Celluloid, are a major headache. They can self-destruct over a period of time. First they turn yellow, shrink and become brittle, the final stage is reached when the object totally crumbles away. Some curators have experienced the horror of unwrapping a cherished and historic example of Xylonite (cellulose nitrate) only to find a totally unconservable crumbled mess inside.

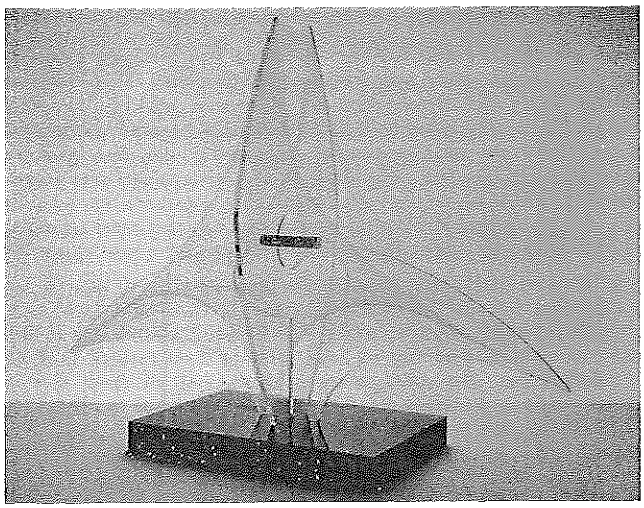

Plate 4: 'Arion', by Frederick Hughes, c.1973, Acrylic and plyamide (nylon) sculpture. This mixture of plastics could cause conservation problems in the future (Courtesy of the Trustees of the Science Museum).

What has been done to resolve or prevent such problems? I regret to say very little as yet. However, I hope that this will change as curators nationwide realise the difficulties which they may have to face in retaining their plastics in a reasonable condition. What work has been done so far? In the main, the conservation departments of the national museums have been carrying out an uncoordinated programme of work on plastic objects - as problems have arisen, they have been dealt with, or abandoned as irredeemable, as has tragically happened in some cases. The work which has been carried out has concentrated on cellulose nitrate, mainly with regard to cellulose nitrate film. It is fairly common knowledge that the National Film Archive faced severe problems coping with a stock of rapidly deteriorating film which had to be transferred very quickly onto more stable materials. They are now in the middle of a major research programme into the conservation and preservation of film. Some work has been carried out at the Institute of Archaeology on Cellulose nitrate objects, including Xylonite. Unfortunately this is still unpublished. More work has been carried out with regard to adhesives, including cellulose nitrate and epoxy resins such as Araldite. Velson Horie, of the Manchester University Museum, is currently preparing a book on adhesives. Many of these again are cellulose-based, and can cause serious problems in museums from the point of view of display, repair and even manufacture of objects in some cases. Cellulose nitrate glues are still used in model-making (frequent in museums), and are subject to the problems of discolouration and eventual degradation. To illustrate this point, it is only necessary for curators to recall occasions when they have had to peel sticky labels or yellowing, sticky and brittle sellotape off objects, leaving a mark behind which is very difficult to remove. Phenolic plastics such as Bakelite and Catalin are considered to be fairly stable. Once more, this area needs more research.

The major problems which are going to occur in the near future are with the cellulose-based plastics. It had been thought that objects made of cellulose acetate would have proved to be more stable as well as less flammable than cellulose nitrate artefacts. Sadly, this has not proved to be the case. Many of the more modern plastics, e.g. polypropylene, are potential time bombs since they contain inbuilt inhibitors (antioxidants and u.v. light retardents) which maintain their stability. These are often added to give the object a certain life, after which the plastic is designed to break down. Objects made of this kind of plastic will deteriorate very suddenly, with little or no warning.

So what can the individual curator do to preserve the plastics in his/her care? There are a few basic guidelines which can be followed until more information is available.

1. Plastics degrade in light, and this process occurs even faster if they are in the open air. Within a museum environment this process can be controlled to some degree, and the photo-degradation slowed down by using low light levels of 50 lux or less. It must be understood that the photodegradation process will continue however low the light levels are. The process can only be slowed down, not stopped. A solution might be not to display plastic objects at all; however this is not usually practicable in a museum. A reasonable compromise would be to keep the light levels as low as possible. Ideally two examples of each type of plastic object should be collected: one for display, the other to be maintained in ideal conditions in store.
2. Individually wrap each object in acid-free tissue. However, regularly inspect cellulose nitrate objects in particular since they will actually attack the acid-free tissue as the plasticisers migrate out of the object during the degradation process. Cellulose acetate objects were once thought to be more stable than those of cellulose nitrate. Unfortunately this has not proved to be the case, so items of this material should also undergo frequent inspections.
3. Store different plastics separately, and in well-ventilated cupboards, so that destructive gases do not have a chance to build up. Store the flammable cellulose nitrate plastics well away from others. The store itself should be dark, cool, and as stable as possible.
4. Too little is known at present as to how different humidities affect different plastics. Some plastics such as the milk-based casein will take up water if the humidity levels are too high. Others may become brittle if the levels are too low.
5. It is probably best not to subject the object to any radical changes in temperature, such as freezing, since this may affect the item adversely. Due to the flammability of plastics such as cellulose nitrate, it is not wise to overheat them either.
6. It is well worth handling plastic objects wearing gloves, preferably cotton since the disposable plastic kind are uncomfortable to wear as well as slippery. Some plastics are resistant to the organic acids present on the fingers, however, others such as some phenolic laminates, are easily marked with ineradicable finger-prints.

As described above, cellulose-based objects begin their degradation process by yellowing, becoming brittle and shrinking. Danger signs to watch for are when a plastic object 'sweats', either when handled or on its own, often perceived as being greasy to the touch. This could be due to the plasticiser coming out of the object: camphor in the case of objects made of cellulose nitrate. The objects should be immediately separated from other plastic objects in case this process spreads, and these symptoms should be investigated promptly by a conservator. This stage can be swiftly followed by the next stage in which the object cracks, giving an impression of crazy paving, and may then blister or crystallise. The acid-free tissue in which the object is stored can also give tell-tale signs of the object's imminent decay: visible signs are slight staining on the paper which also becomes very dry, cracked and breaks up. It is being attacked by the object it wraps. Plastics curators should be on the alert for any such symptoms and seek aid when they are noted.

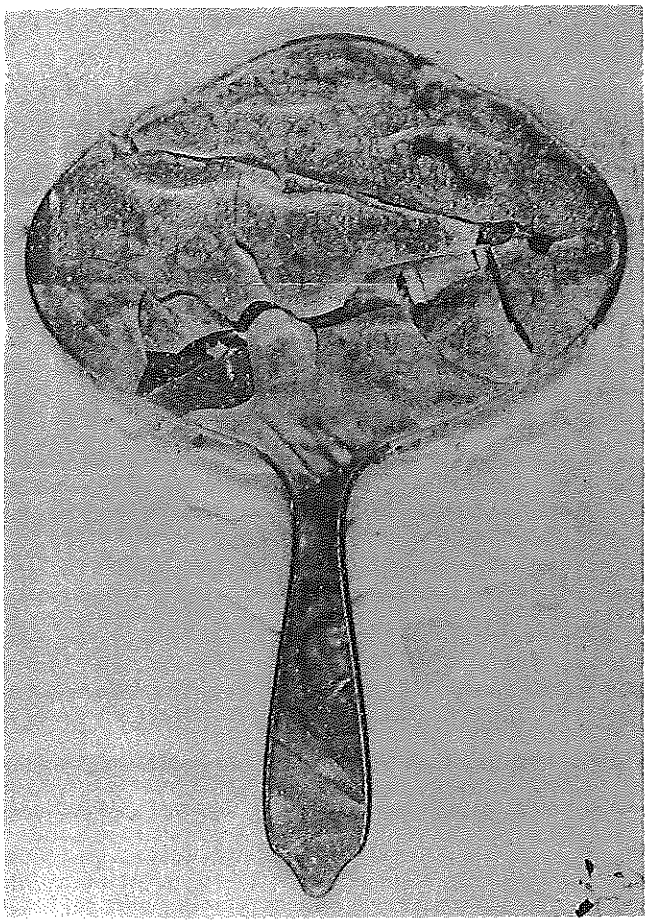

Plate 5: Hand mirror made of cellulose nitrates by British Xylonite/ Halex, c.1930. This is in an advanced state of degradation, being crazed, cracked and swollen (Vestry House Museum, London).

So what can be done in the future? It is clear that an organised programme of research into the conservation of plastics should be implemented. It is urgently needed. Since many of the national museums do have/or will soon have severe problems with the conservation and preservation of their plastic or plastic-containing objects, it may be that they can take a lead in the organisation of such a programme, as well as ensure suitable funding. This is for the future. But I hope, for the sake of our collections throughout the country, it will be the near future.

Postscript

This paper was given to a meeting of the Social History Curators Group as part of a training seminar entitled 'Plastics', held in the Science Museum, London on 15 June, 1987. Since then things have moved on and more interest has been aroused concerning the care and conservation of modern materials. This paper is already somewhat out of date and will be more so by the time it goes to press. The field of plastics' care and conservation is very active at present and I hope that there will be a number of interesting developments in the near future which will be worth communicating to the museum profession. One method of displaying unstable plastic objects currently under investigation is the holographic image. No doubt there will be more ingenious solutions to the problems which I have detailed above concerning plastics in museums. Watch this space . . . .

A READING LIST ON PLASTICS

Susan Mossman

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USEFUL ADDRESSES

Rubber and Plastics Research Association of Great Britain,
Shawbury, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY4 4NR.
TEL: 0939 250383.

ESPI (Education Service of the Plastics Industry)
University of Technology, Loughborough,
Leicester LE11 3TU.
TEL: 0509 232065

The Plastics and Rubber Institute and *Plastics Historical Society*
11, Hobart Place, London SW1W 0HL
TEL: 01 245 9555

The Plastics and Rubber Advisory Service
5, Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PH
TEL: 01 235 9888

A SHORT HISTORY OF GLASS PACKAGING

Janice Murray

The first glass bottles were produced by the Phoenicians and Egyptians who wrapped molten glass around a core made of sand. Mouth blowing techniques were introduced before the birth of Christ and glass containers are commonly found on Roman sites. In medieval Europe, glass bottles were known, if comparatively rare. Surviving examples tend to be made of pale green glass in the shape of a tapering cylinder. In the seventeenth century, the window glass industry became well established in Britain and the glass bottle industry developed as an offshoot of that. By the end of the seventeenth century, there are known to have been 88 glass houses in Britain, 39 of which were involved in making bottles. Surviving bottles from this period are of three main types, apothecaries' vials (examples of which can be seen in the V & A) dark green bulbous bottles, thought to have been used for chemicals, and wine bottles.

Wine Bottles

Before the glass wine bottle became common, wine was kept in bottles made from wood, leather or earthenware. Glass bottles were initially used only for the serving of wine, not storage. The bottle was not intended to be laid on its side and had instead a wide base and bulbous shape. Similarly, because they were meant for serving, many of the earliest bottles bear the seals of the owner or family for whom they were made. The use of these seals continued throughout the eighteenth century but had died out by the reign of Victoria. Early wine bottles can be very easily dated by their shape and there are many books which deal with the subject, notably those by Geoffrey Willis. Broadly speaking, about 1660 the shape is like a flattened onion with a long neck (shaft and globe). From 1680-1715 the neck becomes shorter and the bottom more domed and from 1750, with the beginning of bin-storage, the shape slims down considerably. The wine bottle shape we are familiar with today was established about 1800 and thereafter you are largely dependent on details of manufacture for dating.

Beer and Mineral Waters

Beer was first bottled along with wine in the seventeenth century (prior to that, leather or stoneware were the most usual containers) but, partly because of the comparative costs, stoneware continued to be used into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nineteenth and twentieth century beer bottles are usually brown or dark green colour to exclude light which caused the contents to deteriorate. Beer bottles, along with mineral water bottles, probably form one of the largest categories of museum enquiries. Mineral water bottles, do not and cannot pre-date 1800. Artificial mineral waters were first invented in 1772 by a clergyman, Joseph Priestley, but it was not until 1814 when William Hamilton patented his egg-shaped corked bottle, that the problem of escaping gas was solved. The contents of the bottle, which was stored on its side, kept the cork moist and expanded, preventing the gas from escaping. Even so, the Hamilton bottle wasn't produced on a large scale until about 1840, remaining in production until the First World War. The Codd, olly, stoney or marble bottle was patented in 1875 by Hiram Codd and remained in use until the 1940s. The original patent used only a single neck aperture but a host of modifications and types followed. For identification and dating, the best source is E. Fletcher, *Non-dating guide to bottles, pipes and dolls' heads.* Dozens of other bottle inventions date from this time, including the swing stopper (a cork or china stopper wired to the bottle neck), patented 1875; the internal screw thread, patented 1879 and the crown hip closure (a crimped metal cap) which was patented in 1892 but which did not become common in the U.K. until the 1920s.

Food and Milk

In the nineteenth century, milk was sold by the jugful from churns. It was first sold in Britain in bottles in the 1880s, but bottling did not become the norm until the 1920s with the introduction of heat treated milk. Swing-stoppered milk bottles of the 1890s are seen, but the most commonly-seen milk-bottles are the wide necked bottles sealed with cardboard lids which were in use from 1929. In 1949 as a result of legislation about contamination of food, the familiar foil overlapping lip was introduced and the bottle shape became thinner, lighter and less wide-necked.

Food was first commercially packed in glass by both French and English inventors during the Napoleonic wars. The food was heat-treated to preserve it and the jars were sealed with a cork-stopper. The screw-top jar was first invented in 1858 but failed to catch on because the cost of commercial packaging material remained prohibitive until the twentieth century. Most food bottles and jars produced prior to the First World War tended to be either for domestic use (such as the Kilner jar) or for foodstuffs such as pickles and sauces which did not require a fully airtight seal. It was only after the First World War, with the development of automatic bottle making machinery and air-sealed closures, together with a growing concern for the public hygiene that pre-packed foods became more widely available.

Jars and bottles produced from the 1920s onwards are usually clear, prior to that they have a pale green colour known as 'acqua'. This colour came from impurities such as iron which were present in the melt. The addition of minute quantities of selenium or cobalt oxide 'decolours' the glass to the colourless form we are familiar with today. Bottle glass is typically made up of Silica (69-75%), Calcium Oxide (9-13%), Sodium Oxide (13-17%) and Alumina (0.5-2.5%). Coloured glass bottles are produced by the addition of small amounts of other chemicals such as Amber (brown), Cobalt Oxide (blue), Iron or Manganese (green), Flouride (opal) or Selenium or Cadnium Sulphide (red). The earliest bottles were freeblown, but from the mid-eighteenth century some standardisation of capacity was obtained by blowing the molten glass into metal moulds, usually made of brass. Throughout the nineteenth century, this remained the standard method of producing glass containers.

The raw materials were placed in large individual pots and placed in a furnace at the centre of the glass cone. The furnace was lit and the melt took place over twenty-four hours. When the melt was completed, blowing teams worked non-stop in ten hour shifts until the glass in all the pots was used and another melt could begin. A number of teams worked around one furnace. A blowing team consisted of five men, a gatherer, a blower, a wetter off, a finisher and a taker-in. The gatherer collected molten glass on the end of a blow pipe. He passed it to the blower who rolled the glass on a marver stone. This created a skin of cooled glass on the outside of the gather known as the 'parison'. The blower then blew the bottle into a hinged mould until the shape was blown and passed it, still on the pipe, to a 'wetter-off' who dropped water onto the neck of the bottle causing it to crack and separate from the blowpipe. The finisher then added the rim or collar to the neck and the bottle was passed to the taker-in who carried the bottle on a forcet to the annealing coves. The knowledge of how to (at least partially) automate bottle production existed from the middle of the nineteenth century, but was only slowly taken up, partly because of strong trade union opposition until the 1880s. Semi-automation did not require mouth-blowing or a skilled team. A single operator dropped a lump of molten glass into the mould and by pressing a lever the shape of the bottle was blown. Wide-necked containers such as jars were produced by a two-part method known as 'press and blow' in which the neck was pressed in one mould and then the container was removed to another mould where the body was blown. This development allied to other technical improvements such as the changeover to the tank furnace which allowed round the clock working, meant that glass container production levels soared in the 1890s.

One of the main centres for bottle production at this time was the town of St. Helens in Lancashire. Better known for its plate and window glass, bottle production grew steadily from the mid-nineteenth century, until the town became one of the major centres in Britain. St. Helens - made bottles turn up all over the country - here are some of the manufacturers most commonly encountered.

Nuttall and Company

Founded by Francis Dixon - Nuttall in Ravenhead in the 1850s. New works were opened at Ravenshead in 1872 under the name of Nuttall and Co. Bottles and marked on the base 'N & Co. Ltd' or 'Nutall and Co'. The firm became part of United Glass bottles in 1913.

Forsters Glass Co.

Founded in 1900 by John Forster who had bought the British rights to the French 'Boucher' semi-automatic machine. The firm quickly expanded from its original site at Atlas Street, taking over a site at Pocket Nook. Bottles usually marked FGC. The firm was taken over by Rockware in 1970 and was best known for cheap drinking glasses. It closed in 1982.

Cannington-Shaw and Co.

Founded in 1806 by John and Edwin Cannington and John Shaw at Ravenhead in St. Helens. The firm expanded onto a new site at Sherdley in 1877. Cannington-Shaw was one of the first firms in the country to install tank furnaces in which the raw materials were fed in at one end of the tank and molten glass was drawn off at the other. The tank furnace, allowing round-the-clock production, produced better quality glass and less wastage. With this economic advantage, Cannington-Shaw was able to undercut its rivals and by 1892 was the largest bottle manufacturer in Britain with almost

1200 workers. Bottles are marked 'CS & Co' or 'Cannington-Shaw and Co'. The firm became part of United Glass Bottles in 1913.

United Glass Bottles
Fully automated production was first developed in 1903 when Michael Owens patented an automatic rotary machine which sucked up molten glass and dropped it into a mould. The first machines had six arms picking up molten glass, but by 1914 fifteen-armed machines had been developed which could produce the equivalent output of 50 hand-operators. The Owens machine was patented in the U.S.A. and the only way British manufacturers could compete in production was by banding together to lease the patent. In March 1913 four companies, Cannington-Shaw, Nuttall and Co., Alexander of Leeds and Robert Cavendish and Sons of Seaham Harbour, Durham amalgamated to form United Glass Bottles. UGB (later UG) dominated the glass container market in Britain from the First World War, today still occupying a sizeable segment of the market. At first the moulds of the four participating companies continued to be used, so it is entirely possible to find a bottle marked 'CS & Co' on the base with a mineral water manufacturer's name who was not in business before 1913. During the 1930s the company moved into the production of cheap table glass, many patterns of which are still in production, although bottles remained their principal manufacture.

Technological advances in production continued with the development of gob-feeding which used the principle of gravity to deliver the molten glass to the forming machines, and a constant speeding up and increase in production. The basic shapes of containers have changed little, except that the thickness of the glass wall has become progressively thinner and changes in shape and design have taken place to counteract areas of weakness. The early 1980s saw the development of bottles made of glass, bound with a protective plastic coat (which doubles as the advertising label) which has enabled even thinner containers to be blown.

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THE VICTORIAN WINE SERVICE

Roger Dodsworth

One of the most noteworthy developments in nineteenth century glassmaking was the emergence of the large matching service of glass for use at the dinner table. This was known as a 'wine service' since most of the items were connected with the serving of wines. The unifying element in the wine service was the decoration, which was identical on every piece and was either cut, etched or engraved. Different shaped glasses with identical decoration had been made in the eighteenth century, but it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that manufacturers and wholesalers took the logical step of bringing these glasses together, adding new items, and marketing the whole as a matching set. The idea quickly caught the public imagination, so that by the end of the century it was *de rigeur* for every well-to-do household to own a matching wine service for use at formal dinners.

The classic late Victorian wine service contained the following items: separate glasses for sherry, hock, claret, champagne, port and liqueur; quart, pint, and claret decanters; water sets (a jug with two goblets), carafes with tumblers, half pint and pint tumblers, finger bowls, and custard and jelly glasses. Oval and round dishes, sugar bowls, celery vases, butter dishes and pickle jars were also used at dinner and were available as part of a matching service, but it was probably not essential that they should match the rest of the glass. As far as quantities were concerned, middle class families were recommended to have twelve each of sherries, hocks, clarets, champagnes and ports, six liqueurs, two pint and two quart decanters and one claret decanter, one water set, four carafes with tumblers, twelve half pint tumblers and four pint tumblers, twelve finger bowls and six custards and six jellies. This alone amounts to a service of 122 pieces, excluding the oval and round dishes, sugar bowls etc. which could also be matching.

The emergence of the fully fledged wine service in the mid nineteenth century, with its emphasis on different glasses for different drinks, may have been connected with a change in dining habits that occurred about this time. The dining fashion in the first half of the nineteenth century was to have several large courses containing many different dishes, followed by dessert. Each course was laid out on the table in its entirety to be dispensed to the guests by the host and hostess. The wine would be on the table in a number of small pint decanters so that the guests could help themselves. Around the middle of the century a new method of dining came into vogue called *a la Russe*, the main difference being that most of the food and wine was now served from a sideboard and was handed round to the guests by waiters. The effect of having servants to do the waiting was that dishes which previously had been jumbled together in one large course now began to be separated into a number of smaller courses, brought to the table in a steady succession, so that by the end of the nineteenth century there could be as many as eight courses at a formal dinner. Separate courses encourages the habit of serving different wines with each course, and different wines required different glasses. *A la Russe* brought two other important changes. First the dining table was no longer clogged with food and so there was space for elaborate table decorations of flowers and fruit, and, second, the food was at least hot when it came to table, whereas under the old system it would go cold while it sat on the table waiting to be served.

Factory and wholesale catalogues are full of illustrations of wine services, and they show particularly clearly the relative size and shape of the different wineglasses, but to see how the wine service was actually used at dinner one has to turn to the various books on Household Management, which appeared in great profusion in the late Victorian period. The most famous of these was Mrs. Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, first published in 1861 and reprinted many times, but there were others such as Cassell's *Book of the Household* issued in four volumes in the 1890s and Katherine Mellish's *Cookery and Domestic Management* of 1901. These authorities go into great detail about how to organise a formal dinner, but they quite often disagree with each other on points of detail. The truth is there was probably no single way of conducting a dinner party. Fashion changed from year to year, and the procedure would also vary depending on the cost and formality of the dinner, the number of guests invited, and even the time of year it was held. With these reservations it might be worth trying to describe a 'typical' Victorian dinner and show how the wine service fitted in.

For a formal dinner containing up to eight separate courses, it was customary to lay three or four glasses to each person, namely sherry, claret and then either champagne or hock or both. The port and liqueur glasses were not put out at the start of the meal, but were handed round later, and Mrs. Mellish is quite adamant that tumblers should not be placed on the table either. The latter were

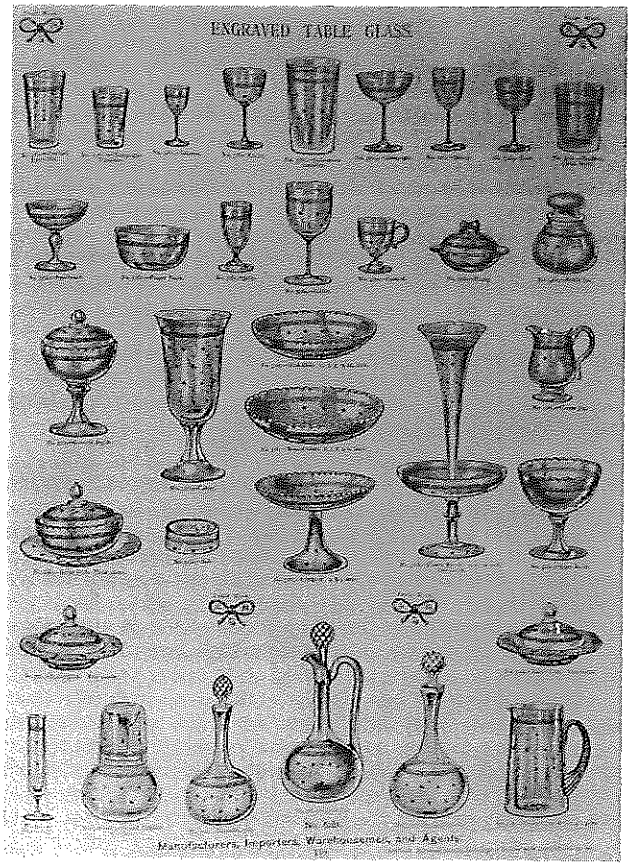

Plate 1: Engraved wine service from a catalogue by Silber and Fleming, importers and wholesalers, c.1890.

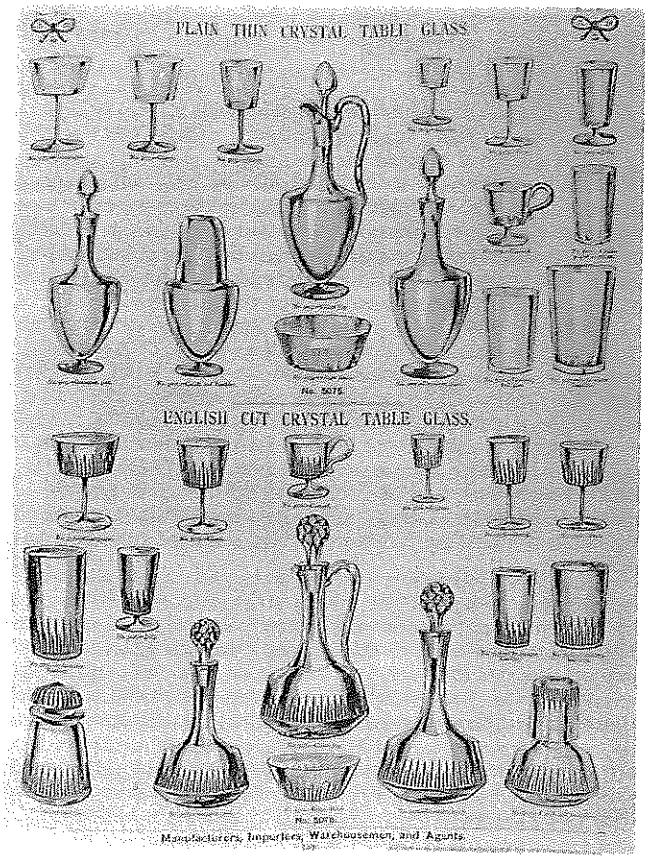

Plate 2: Plain and cut wine services from a catalogue of Silber and Fleming, c.1890.

used for water or aerated water, and would have been kept on the sideboard and handed to guests during the meal as required. Mrs. Loftie, author of *The Dining Room* and in fact an opponent of the matching wine service, says 'it is a great mistake to lay too many glasses. Many people, especially old men, are fidgeted by finding five or six glasses at their elbow, all liable to be overturned'. With dinners *a la Russe* there was plenty of space on the table, and quite often part of the dessert - the final course - would be set out on the table from the beginning, for example, fresh and dried fruits and nuts arranged on glass comports and dishes. A carafe and tumbler in each corner of the table would complete the effect.

The first course was normally soup, after which sherry would be served. Next would come the fish course, accompanied either by sherry or hock. Hock glasses are interesting in that they were the one wine glass which did not have to match the rest of the service. When not matching they usually had plain red or green bowls set on clear glass stems and feet, the idea being presumably to introduce some colour and variety into the wineglasses, and perhaps to conceal any cloudiness in the wine. Traditionally the fish course was followed by entrees (small, made-up dishes such as cutlets, scallops, curries, and game hashes known as *salmis*), which in turn were followed by the main course of the meal, the joint, in which saddle of mutton was a perennial favourite. However by the end of the nineteenth century a fierce debate was raging in domestic circles about the order of these two courses, and some people felt that the joint should come before the entrees on the grounds that dinner guests would have no appetite left for their joint if they had had to eat entrees first. The argument, however, seems slightly immaterial because if the guests had managed to survive their saddle of mutton by having it before the entrees, they certainly would have been defeated by the fifth course, which consisted of roast poultry or game. Burgundy and claret were the traditional accompaniments to the meat courses along with champagne, which, according to Mrs. Beeton, was introduced with the joints. The standard mid nineteenth century champagne glass had a shallow saucer-shape bowl, which was not ideal since the drink would quickly lose its effervescense. Sometimes the bowls were made hollow all the way down the stem, which would have helped to preserve the bubbles. In the early nineteenth century the narrow champagne flute was the normal shape, and this began to make a comeback at the end of the century. Surprisingly enough, champagne was also served in small ruby glass tumblers. Champagne was served directly from the bottle, buth other wines were generally decanted. Decanters came in three types: pint, quart and claret. Pint decanters were more popular in the first half of the century, when there was less waiting and a number of small decanters would be placed on the table so that guests could help themselves. Quart decanters were used throughout the century, while claret decanters, or claret jugs as they are sometimes called, began to appear c.1830/40 at the same time as the individual claret glass. Claret decanters have handles and stoppers, usually in glass, but sometimes they were mounted in metal. They are amongst the most highly decorated pieces of Victorian glass, and the explanation for this is that they did not necessarily have to match the rest of the service.

The first sign that this marathon meal might be drawing to a close came with the arrival of the sixth course, the sweets, which included dishes such as jellies, creams and tarts. According to Mrs. Beeton, liqueurs were served with the sweets. Up to this point the glasses with their decanters would have been kept on the sideboard, perhaps in a special wooden stand. After the sweets came the cheese course during which port would be handed round, and ale in tumblers. Cheese was often accompanied by celery, which helps to explain the frequency with which celery vases were encountered in nineteenth century glass. At the end of the cheese course there was a lull in the proceedings, much appreciated by the guests no doubt, while the table was cleared prior to the arrival of the final course, the dessert. This would consist of fresh and dried fruits, nuts and dessert biscuits. Some of the dessert dishes had been on the table since the start of the meal, but the remainder were now brought on. Each guest was then supplied with a dessert plate (ceramic) with a d'oyley on it, a finger bowl, a dessert knife, fork and spoon, and fresh wine glasses for the dessert wines, which were decanted and placed on the table. If ices were being served, the finger bowl was brought to the table on a glass ice plate with a d'oyley in between. Water sets were usually put on the table at this stage, one set going either side of the flower decoration in the centre according to Cassell's. Like the claret decanter, the water set did not necessarily have to match the rest of the service. More elaborate rituals surrounded the use of the finger bowl than any other glass. According to Mrs. Beeton it should be filled to within two inches of the brim, using cold water in summer and tepid water in winter. Scented water such as rosewater was recommended, but the height of delicacy was to have one or two flowers such as carnation or oleander tied up with a sprig of scented verbena or geranium floating on the surface. The idea was for the guests to touch their lips with the wet flowers and then wipe their mouth dry with a serviette. All this gentility was a far cry from the raucous days of the late eighteenth century when gentlemen would use the finger bowl to swill out their mouths.

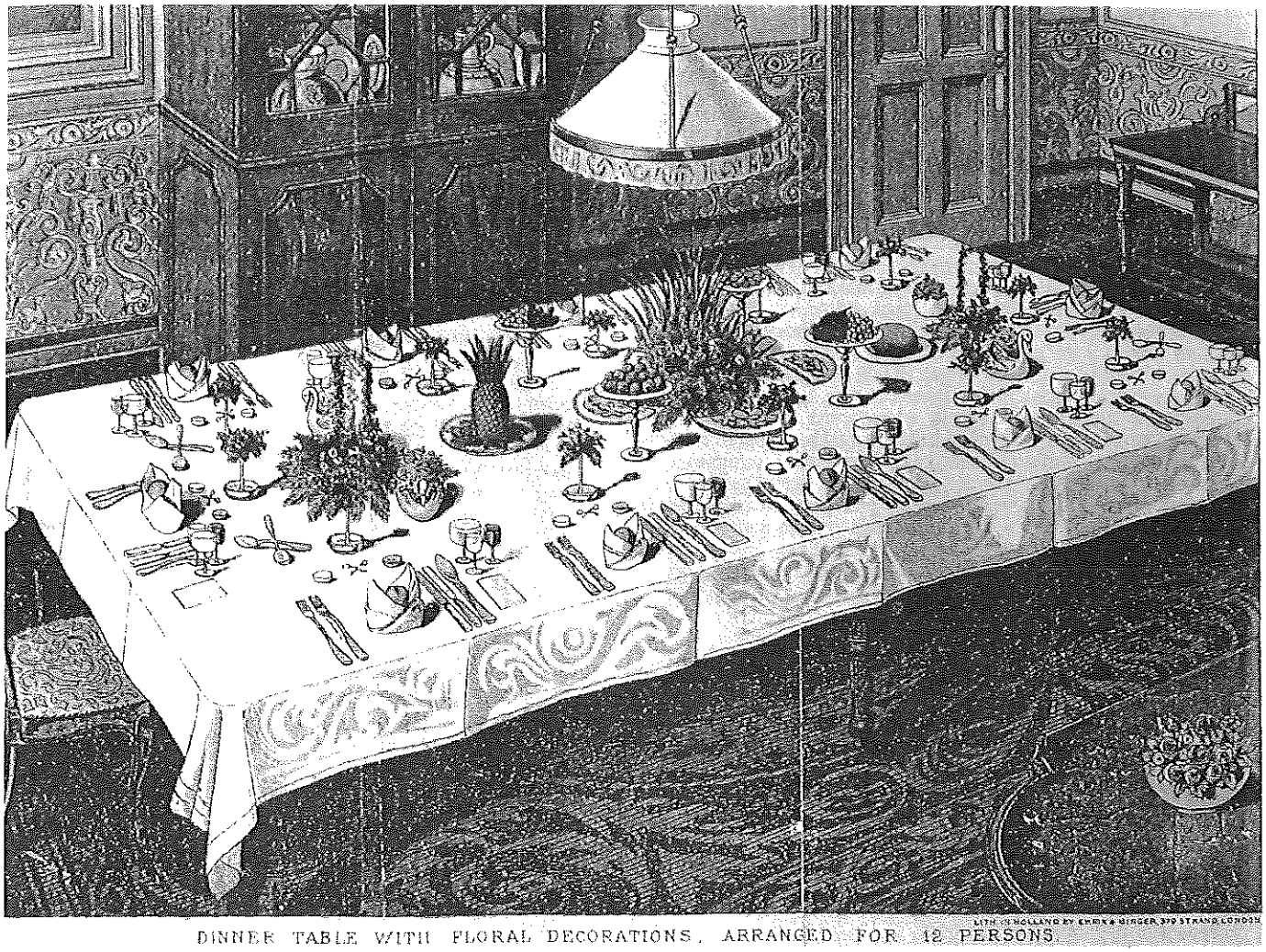

Plate 3: Dinner table from the 1901 edition of Mrs Beeton's Household Management.

Dinner was now over. The custom at the end of the nineteenth century was for the ladies to retire to the drawing room where coffee would be served, while the gentlemen had their coffee in the dining room and smoked cigarettes, said to be an 'aid to temperence'. Having battled our way through the Victorian dinner, it comes as something of a shock to find in the 1901 Mrs. Beeton a splendid colour illustration of the supper table, laid out just as elaborately as the dinner with three wine glasses to each person and decanters and a range of cold meats and sweets on the table. We are assured, however, that supper was an alternative to dinner, and guests were not expected to start on another full-scale meal only an hour or so after having finished their dinner.

BENNION, Elizabeth. *Antique Dental Instruments.* Sotheby's 1986, £19.95.

For whatever reasons, gruesome or otherwise, dental relics and the subject of dentistry have found their way into museums. Personally, I like to think that the growing number of period settings and publications concerning dentistry take us into an important, if neglected, area of social history. As the title suggests, *Antique Dental Instruments* is an attempt to portray the history of dentistry through dental instruments, the tools of the trade. 'Without their instruments the dental practitioners could have achieved nothing' is a clear statement of the author's intent. Yes, an objects book. Taking the functionalist approach, Elisabeth Bennion looks at particular instruments and traces their development and use from the Early Middle Ages to the late nineteenth century. Extractors, elevators, (for digging out the bits of tooth that get left behind) filling materials, artificial teeth, anaesthetic equipment and oral hygiene form the structure around which other information is provided. The beautifully illustrated book is densely packed with dates, personalities, techniques and the development of technology, and provides a substantial introduction to the subject of dentistry. The survey includes the eighteenth century practice of transplanting teeth, the fact that George Washington had only 2 teeth when president in 1789, and how false teeth still reflect low social class. The book also includes a very useful directory of instrument makers in the UK, Europe and North America and a fool's guide to principal surgeons, dentists and scientists.

Perhaps one of the most interesting parts of the book is the introduction in which Elisabeth Bennion looks at the fascinating and considerable wealth of folklore associated with the tooth. From early civilisation the tooth has been regarded as immortal, supernatural, as divine, under the protection from the sun; it has been used, moreover, as a weapon, a tool, a charm, an adornment and in modern society as a means of identification. We are reminded of common expressions, 'to grit one's teeth', 'long in the tooth', and 'to set one's teeth on edge' as lasting tributes to this curious appendage. The tooth even has its own saint in the figure of St. Appollonia! Common to all societies has been toothache and Elisabeth Bennion traces the various efforts, successful or otherwise, to overcome this, whether by removal or by repair.

For such a professionally produced book, however, I found the referencing very disappointing. In terms of its usefulness to curators, the 'cut off' point in the 1870s is a seriously limiting factor as most collections include twentieth century material. As a social historian there is much about dentistry that I cannot learn from this book but as a museum curator it might be a very good place to begin.

Elisabeth Frostick

CONNOR, R.D. *The Weights and Measures of England.* Science Museum/H.M.S.O., 1987, £30.00.

Few history museums which have been established for some time do not possess some example of official weights or measures. Too often these artefacts - essential to understanding the history of the marketing of basic foods and raw materials - are neglected in cluttered display cases with little or no interpretation. The curator cannot be totally to blame for this; the laws governing the creation and use of these objects date back well into the medieval period and have undergone many subsequent changes. Even the measurement systems essential to their use are complex and represent to many an arcane corner of knowledge. Hopefully this situation will be somewhat reversed by the appearance of this important book.

In breadth and depth of learning this work is a major contribution to the study of official weights and measures and metrology in general. It takes the form of an historical account of units and systems of measurement from the earliest times to the present. Both surviving standard weights and measures and documentary evidence are used to tell its story. One chapter is devoted to the development of the physical standards and will help curators to understand the many changes and re-issues of these items which have occurred over the past few centuries, although more photographs of these artefacts would have been very welcome. Another chapter discusses the all-important assizes of bread and ale. Here, the author's usual thoroughness not only explains the workings of the medieval and early modern assizes, but also the twentieth century legislation affecting bread, including wartime rationing. The book concludes with an account of British metrication and a sketch of the development of the whole metric system. Appendices provide information on the legislation and official bodies which have enforced standardised measurement. There is a useful glossary of terms and an essential bibliography. Although the author's style combines fact and anecdote this work is no light read. Each chapter discusses the technical and legal aspects of its subject in detail and the index does not do justice to the amount of information in the text. However, this book is bound to become a standard work and as useful to the social historian as R.F. Zupko's *Dictionary of Weights and Measures for the British Isles.*

Steph Mastoris

EVANS, George Ewart. *Spoken History.* Faber and Faber. 1987, £9.90.

The East Anglian Film Archive has a piece of footage that was taken in the tiled bar of the Ship Inn at Blaxhall in East Suffolk. It shows farmworkers, men and women, stepping, singing and performing the candlestick dance. The date is 1955, but for the costume it could be 1855, or 1755, or earlier. Three decades later the only sound in the bar is from the space invaders machine making a similar noise to the F-111s at nearby Bentwaters. This change is symbolic of so much that has happened in the countryside since the ending of the last war, both in farming and in the culture of those that live there. But not all has changed. I spent a holiday in Blaxhall four years ago and I took my children to see animals, (pigs and goats mostly) still kept by farmworkers in their 'Yards' (allotments) on odd pieces of common land or even on roadside verges. I was conscious that a friend of mine, nearly forty years before had done exactly the same thing there. 'Mr Evans', the schoolteacher's husband is still remembered with great affection by the Savages and Frenchs of Blaxhall, and it is to all our benefit that he was coincidentally on hand to chronicle traditional village life before it was swept away.

This book is, in a way, the product of a series of coincidences. The author's parents, shopkeepers in a South Wales mining village were elderly, and talked to their youngest son of generations and customs gone before in such a way as to give him an abiding interest in the past, and the ability to look for history in ordinary people's speech. He graduated from University College Cardiff at the height of the depression and was unemployed for four years. He spent the time learning how to write well, mainly short stories, and talking to other unemployed people. (We would call it a job club today). These were miners, and although he wanted to talk to them about politics, they often talked about their work, and it was through them that he appreciated the skill, pride and self reliance of working people. After wartime service in the R.A.F. he began to go deaf, making it impossible for him to return to the schoolteaching by which he had been earning a living. This paradoxically made him a good listener, once fitted with a hearing aid, and gave him a slightly vulnerable air, which made people talkative yet relaxed in his company. His wife, also a schoolteacher, was appointed to a job in a remote part of Suffolk, and George brought up their children and did a little writing. His main inspiration he found in his neighbours whose dialect language and local world view, were about to be blasted apart by big money, the internal combustion engine, and television. The result was *Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay*, the first book in a series which together are an unrivalled description of the rural poor of any region of this country.

Spoken History consists of essays, some amplifying themes in his earlier books, others on the theory of oral history which he did so much to pioneer, and more on describing the author's role in all this. It is illustrated with apt vignettes, full of character by David Gentleman. Here are the bellringers and the village fair at Blaxhall, the teamsmen who had 'the know' to control horses, and who might be members of the shadowy 'Horsemans Word Society' (a cross between the masons and an early trade union, still active in Aberdeenshire in the 1960s). The author concludes that their 'frog-bone' ritual had more to do with the psychological effects on the participants themselves rather than in magic or in the substances used. There are sections on migratory labour including the Burton/Suffolk maltsters whom he rediscovered after a chance remark in a 1960s interview, on fishing and fish curing, and on the dockers of Ipswich, one of whom recalls the last outbreak of bubonic plague in Britain in 1918! There are chapters on the state of oral history in Ireland and Wales which underline that some of his best work has been done outside East Anglia. I was pleased to see a chapter on the travelling threshing gangs, the independent minded refuge of machine wizards, hard drinkers, traditional singers, and agricultural trade union activists. There is a fascinating interview with Douglas Kennedy, an early propagandist of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, the only one of Cecil Sharp's 'young men' to survive the Battle of the Somme. There is a hilarious account of Kennedy's first dancing session in his London Scottish uniform with kilt and army boots, and the motivation of the early E.F.D.S.S. that comes across confirms my prejudices about morris revivalists. He prefaces a chapter on women and farmhouses with an apology on the male domination of the subjects that he has covered.

The author talks about the techniques of oral history; dealing with

people, using the silences, and making full use of the subject's digressions: 'In collecting this kind of personal history one realises on what precarious grounds the material exists at all'. George had a gift of uncovering, recording, and making important the trivia of life. It was his ability to create beautiful prose, blending oral history with other sources, that makes his books so valuable. Added to this was a deep egalitarian respect (bordering on humility) towards a subject:

> not so much as a purveyor of information but as a long standing acquaintance or friend, a man you were able to give actual sustenance and encouragement by your constantly visiting him. And you, for your part, receive cooperation and sustenance in return, as well as a reassuring conviction . . . that you are adding a few bricks to an enduring structure of our past.

The author writes about the growth of folk life studies and the explosion in oral history in the early 1970s: 'At that time I felt a bit like the Frenchman in Moliere who had been speaking prose for most of his life without knowing it'. With typical understatement he makes light of the lack of interest in oral history on the part of professional historians, and the dearth of official support for his own work. The neglect of oral history and material culture studies in schools and universities has left social historians in museums in an isolated position, which is emphasised by the comparative strength of the archaeology 'industry'. Much of George's work in the 1950s and 1960s was done for the old Third Programme, and he is more polemical about the squeezing out of serious features, the decline of broadcasting standards, and the shabby treatment of people like Charles Parker by the BBC.

This is George's last book, for he died earlier this year (January 1988) aged 78. He was a courteous, modest man with a great inner peace. He overcame enormous handicaps to leave a body of work which is a model for any regional social history, and a methodology for a new way of looking at the past which leaves us all in his debt.

Nick Mansfield

EVERETT, Peter. *You'll Never Be 16 Again: an Illustrated History of the British Teenager.* B.B.C. Publications, 1986, £4.95.

'I didn't realise I was a teenager you see. That's the funny thing, you know. There weren't teenagers in those days.' It is an interesting fact that there are an increasing number of 'Museums of Childhood' in this country at the moment. They usually deal with infancy, education, work, lots of play and those 'hobbies' which act as precursors to the world of work and the road to adulthood. Museums have yet to discover the adolescent world, and you can't really blame them. The fact is that this particular stage in a person's life has only been seen (and made to be seen) as separate in the past forty years. The teenager may seem to have always been with us but the species is definitely a post-war creation. America got there first as usual, their teenager being a creation of the post war economic boom, with James Dean as a brand leader, backed up by magazines like *17* and *Madamoiselle*. The Marketing Men were quick to spot and enlarge a target market.

Post-war Britain did not have it so good. This is where *You'll never be 16 again* begins. It is an unapologetic pop history of the British teenager from the early 1950s to the mid 1980s. That story is briskly told, using a combination of oral history extracts, newspaper and magazine reports and the writer's own observations. It charts the zigzag course of youth culture as it mutated its way through the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s. From George Raft lookalikes to Teds and Rock n' Roll, through Mods, Amphetamines, Hippies, Protest, Politics and Punk to the current plateau of Designer Boys and Material Girls.

The book's style and pace comes from the fact that it is a companion volume to the BBC Radio programme of the same name. Being short, (158 pages) it is more of a guide, having no pretensions to being the last word on the subject. It could have been very superficial, using, as it does, 'shock, horror, outrage' pieces from the major dailies and rather familiar photographs from large libraries and agencies. What gives it an edge and elevates it from the dopey nostalgia peddled daily by the BBC's Radio One are the quotes from the 'ex-teenagers' interviewed for the series. These memories of clothes, pop groups, fights and parties deliciously de-bunk the very serious posing that emanates from the photographs. Here is an interviewee recalling part of the late 1960s.

> I think everybody wanted to try this dropping out thing, but very few had the nerve. You operated within your local circle and you were just sufficiently weird in the local circle; that was enough, certainly for most people.

What is so annoying is that there are no credits for these sources. Who were they? How old were they? Where did they live at the time? It is ironic that what gives the book credibility is also given undeserved anonymity. It is also tempting to think that those who were interviewed could have probably found excellent photographs from their own albums.

The main feature that this oral testimony captures is the emotion attached to clothes, pop stars, objects and magazines. Here lies the problem for museums. As Oliver James noted in his review of *14: 24 British Youth Culture* at the Boilerhouse in 1986, TV and books are hard to beat when attempting to communicate through commodities. I feel that Social History Museums could get round this. With this recent area of study they have the chance to do the recording first and the collecting later. An oral history project would pinpoint both the attitudes and the objects that could then be collected and decently interpreted in the museum context. A serious attempt would hopefully stifle the cries of 'trendy' aimed at those who think the subject has some importance. Whatever your view, you may want to pursue it further, or you may just want to put that recent donation of platform soled boots into context. Either way, *You'll never be 16 again* is as good a place to start as any.

Mark Suggitt

HEWISON, Robert. *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline.* Methuen, 1987, £6.95.

It is a rather sad and singular fact that the post-war growth of museums and their attendant popularity was, until recently unaccompanied by an informed criticism from both within and without the profession. Had the allocation of increasing resources devoted to re-inventing the past been a good thing or a symbol of national decline and fear of the future? This book is the latest of a growing number that are beginning to take museums seriously, (as opposed to the fawning 'Treasures of' type) following in the footsteps of David Lowenthal (*The Past Is A Foreign Country*), Patrick Wright (*On Living In An Old Country*) and Donald Horn (*The Great Museum*). All have considered the use the past is put to in contemporary society. So, what, we ask ourselves, is Robert Hewison's *The Heritage Industry*?

Well, when the going gets tough, the tough go . . . SHOPPING. Shopping for a tangible chunk of the past that gives a sense of place and comfort in an unacceptable present. 'Heritage' can be anything you want. Hewison sees the vast array of historic houses, museums etc. as a real industry - 'Instead of manufacturing goods, we are manufacturing heritage, a commodity that nobody seems able to define, but everybody is eager to sell.' His intention is to survey this 'heritage culture' and sow the seeds of a 'critical culture'. He perceives the 'heritage culture' as an informal conspiracy which threatens to sell us a false, filtered version of 'our' history. The *past* and *history* are two separate things but most of us see the amnesiac past as history. If the heritage peddles the past they hope it is received as history, the truth.

In his analysis of this 'truth' Hewison begins his tour at Wigan Pier. This new development has put Wigan on the tourist map but has yet to break even and local unemployment is still above 18 per cent. He then considers the Country House as a symbol of Englishness, the argument owing much to Patrick Wright's recent work on the National Trust. He charts the survival of the country house against the odds with particular reference to the elitism of the National Trust's Country House Scheme and the sinister, autocratic James ('How I detest democracy') Lee-Milne. Despite this the Country House is marketed as a central part of 'our heritage' and its influence affects fashion, interior design and architecture. Next for consideration are museums, which 'smooth away the nightmares' of yesterday. He ignores the problems of the small independent museums, and the Local Authority mainstream, preferring to concentrate on the rise of the large industrial and open-air museums. Their total re-creation of an environment that can never ever hope to be what actually existed is criticised. Here we enter hyper-reality, a world that is perversely, but obviously, selective. It is here that we also confront the problems of such criticism. Hewison does not talk to the visitors of such sites to find out if they feel they are 'living in a museum', not does he talk to grass roots curators. The fact that museums are communication systems ought to suggest that it would be interesting to see what's happening at the receiving end. It could be that visitors can easily differentiate between serious interpretation and 'Historicism Ltd'. It could also be that they too are concerned that museums move in as industries close: Undertakers to Industry. Hewison also looks at the problems of museums with regard to funding, the artificial heritage employees of the MSC and the fact that there are too many museums chasing too little funding.

Moving from museums to the arts Hewison proceeds to give the Arts Council a slap in the face from a different direction. Often seen as a 1960s style free-loader pushing contemporary art on an unregenerate public, Hewison perceives a change in political control which the Conservative Government has exercised over the Arts Council. The result is a body that promotes the art of the past, the unadventurous institutions of opera, ballet and mainstream theatre, consolidating old values rather than developing new ones. A Tory bargain, as Government spending on the Arts is the lowest in Western Europe, less than a quarter of one per cent of total Government expenditure. This picture is not totally accurate as the Arts Council is concerned with promoting contemporary work, especially within local authority galleries. Nevertheless, this pathetic funding leads both museums and the arts into the arms of the private sponsors and the world of 'who's using whom'. Sponsors may not risk the new, so bodies charged with the nurture of contemporary culture support the old and the demands of the sponsors and marketeers produce goods that become 'more and more spurious and the quality of life more and more debased'. This decline is fuelled by cuts in all sections of education and library provision, a culture becoming devoid of criticism.

The book concludes by offering a future for the past, an antidote for the post-modern, post-industrial age - 'post modernism is modernism with the optimism taken out'. The pivot is that we have abandoned our critical faculty for understanding the past, we no longer know what to do with it except obsessively preserve it as a national palliative in the face of industrial collapse. Hewison cites three conditions for facing the future in the arts - a critical culture which could disconnect the function of artists (he does not mention museums here) from wealth creators to creators, with their imaginations focussed in the present, thus enabling them to penetrate the screen of the past to unmask the present. In short, replace the miasma of nostalgia with a fierce spirit of renewal. All very well, but one person's renewal is another's hell on earth. The conservation movement that is analysed in this book grew out of the mistakes of the 1960s renewal programme, now seen as an infection in some quarters. Others view the free-for-all of Docklands and the Thatcher Revolution in the same light. It is interesting that Hewison's book has come out at the same time as the Conservative Political Centre's *Arts - the Next Move Forward* a parallel work from a very different perspective. Hewison gives a useful summary of recent thoughts on this subject but leaves a fundamental problem. The change to a critical culture needs to be accompanied by increased resources for *bona fide* museums and galleries, which should be seen as valuable cultural and economic investments. There also needs to be investment in the home economy, a return to producing things and a faith in the future.

Hewison's criticisms are strong and often accurate, but his conclusion is weak and rather ill informed. By paying so little attention to the Local Authority and smaller Independent sector he has failed to see how weak this industry is. The Thatcher Government's attack on Local Authorities affects the majority of Britain's museums, who rely on their support. The Government must realise that there will never be large numbers of truly independent museums; the 'Heritage Industry' cannot support itself, let alone the country.

All of us in museums and galleries are workers in this industry. An industry that is small, under-funded and incapable of creating large scale employment for those with neither work nor leisure. It does attract considerable income from local and foreign tourists however, (much of it spent outside the attracting museum). Here lies the real problem, Heritage is seen as a way to make serious money, it is a symptom of a political and economic climate that has successfully legitimised greed. In this Britain is it any wonder that 'Heritage' is so attractive, there is so much of it out there, just waiting to be (ab)used. Now, we all know that real museums and galleries can and indeed strive to be cultural and economic assets, responding to different local or national needs. We also know that this takes realistic funding and political support. These are the things we need to achieve, never losing track of why we're here. If we wish to work in a *real* profession capable of producing popular, exciting and critical work then it's our move.

This is a book that should be read (if not enjoyed) by all museum workers. It is a useful, highly accessible guide to much recent thinking. It is by no means the last word on the subject and one looks forward to future work from people such as Patrick Wright.

Mark Suggitt

RICHARDSON, Ruth. *Death, Dissection and the Destitute.* Routledge & Keegan Paul, £19.95.

Occasionally a book appears that actually lives up to the bold claims adorning the dustjacket. Ruth Richardson's *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* is one such book. It is a painstakingly researched and scholarly work, yet also shocking, passionate and eloquent. Appearing at a time when so-called 'Victorian values' are in the ascendancy, it provides a harrowing case study of one application of those values the first time around. The book explores the background, passage and consequences of the 1832 Anatomy Act, which laid down that the 'unclaimed' bodies of the dead poor should be made available for dissection in the anatomical schools. In the context of popular attitudes towards death, medical science, and political ideology, this Act assumes a shocking significance - surprising, perhaps, given that it seems hitherto to have been neglected by historians of nineteenth century Britain. Reading Ruth Richardson's book, one begins to understand all too well why the fear of the workhouse, and, above all, a pauper's death, exercised such a profound influence on the popular imagination. Death in the workhouse brought with it dissection, a final degradation for the already humiliated sick and poor.

The fear of dissection can be partly understood in terms of popular customs and beliefs relating to death. The author points out that it was widely believed that a strong link remained between the dead body and the soul in the period between death and burial. Widespread practices included watching the dead, wakes (the noisier the better to scare off evil spirits), viewing and even touching the dead. In the East Riding food and drink were customarily placed beside the corpse in case it woke. Elsewhere, there is evidence of 'sin-eating', which involved the ritual consumption of food and drink which had been in direct contact with the corpse by a person who undertook to assume the sins of the deceased. Combined with a belief in the possibility of actual resurrection, there was a strong presumption against dissection as a sacrilegious violation of the spiritual integrity of the dead.

This revulsion was exacerbated by the fact that, traditionally, surgeons were legally able to dissect only the bodies of convicted murderers. This practice had been established by Henry VIII in 1540 when he granted the Company of Barbers and Surgeons the annual right to the bodies of four hanged felons. Following dissection, the opened bodies were publicly exhibited, so that the punishment inflicted on the murderer's corpse should be seen to transcend that already inflicted on the scaffold. By the eighteenth century the supply of murderers had become pitifully inadequate to the needs of the anatomy schools. Surgeons turned to the black market buying corpses from gangs of 'resurrectionists' who exhumed recently buried bodies from graveyards. As this did not constitute theft - a human body did not constitute real property, according to the law, and could not therefore be stolen - robbing graves was a relatively safe occupation. As one bodysnatcher admitted in 1828, 'a man may make a good living at it if he is a sober man, and acts with good judgement and supplies the schools'. The prominent surgeon Sir Astley Cooper boasted that there was 'no person, let his situation in life be what it may, whom, if I were disposed to dissect, I could not obtain'. In the eyes of the resurrectionists and the surgeon-anatomists the human body had become a mere commodity which, as Ruth Richardson remarks, could be bought and sold, touted, priced, haggled over, negotiated for, discussed in terms of supply and demand, packed-up, manhandled and delivered. Where there was a physiological abnormality the corpse would be correspondingly more expensive to obtain. In 1783 for instance the body of a seven foot tall man known as the 'Irish Giant' cost the prominent surgeon John Hunter £500 in bribes and other expenses. Inevitably, the trade in human bodies led eventually to 'Burking' - murdering the sick and unfortunate for profit.

Where there was an anatomy school in the vicinity local graveyards were under constant threat. In many areas lamps were erected to light the graveyards by night and watches were organised. In some Scottish parishes dead-houses were erected in which coffins were stored for weeks before burial, ensuring that the bodies were useless for dissection from putrefaction. When the Patent Coffin, designed to frustrate the resurrectionists, was introduced in 1818 it caused a public sensation.

Despite such attempts at security thousands of graves continued to be robbed each year, causing great anguish to the families of the deceased. The discovery rate was small, but when a case occurred public disgust could quickly turn to violence. In January 1832, following the discovery of human remains behind an anatomy school in Aberdeen, 20,000 people arrived to dispense popular retribution. The school was burnt to the ground as the police, militia and fire brigade watched on, conscious of 'the feelings of

the public'. Three months later, three resurrectionists were apprehended in Greenwich with the bodies of two elderly men. The *Times* reported that:

> a crowd of several thousand persons soon assembled . . . and commenced an attack upon them with stones, bricks and missiles of every description . . . the police had the utmost difficulty to prevent their prisoners being sacrificed to the indignant multitude, which was most anxious to inflict such punishment upon them as it thought they deserved.

These and other incidents suggest that public feeling in defence of the dead was easily roused, strongly held and broadly based. As Ruth Richardson remarks:

> Those who robbed the graves of the dead were the agents of a social injustice, and their trade in corpses made a mockery of the meanings and values popularly invested in customary death practices. The body-snatchers were the living exemplars of innovative market logic - they had betrayed the deepest sentiments of their own class by their ruthless trade in human flesh. The bitter verbal and physical assaults on these people constitute in part an expression of a deep frustration with the order of things in a society which permitted the triumph of such a pitiless example of free trade. (p. 90)

Surgeon anatomists, highly sensitive about their associations with the bodysnatching trade, sought alternative sources of supply for their dissecting tables. Evidence suggests that the illicit appropriation of the dead hospital poor was widely practised, with the aid of corrupt personnel including even hospital chaplains who would first collect the fee for conducting a mock funeral. Surgical incompetence and a lack of respect for the poor (who constituted the vast majority of patients in the charitable hospitals) ensured that there was a suitably high death rate. Significantly, the surgeons themselves did not consider that their own bodies constituted suitable material for dissection. Sir Astley Cooper ensured that he would be safely buried under a massive stone sarcophagus so that he personally would not undergo dissection.

In a letter to Robert Peel dated 1826 Jeremy Bentham suggested that all patients in the charitable hospitals 'should be deemed to have given consent to the dissection of their bodies in the event of death'. Bentham's 'utilitarian' suggestion formed the basis of the eventual Anatomy Act. A Parliamentary Select Committee was set up in 1828 to examine the problem. It was packed with Benthamites and 'pre-selected' witnesses and unwelcome views were simply not heard. Its Report recommended that the 'unclaimed' bodies of paupers should be appropriated for dissection; but the word 'unclaimed' was defined in clearly economic rather than emotional terms - poverty was to be the sole criterion for eligibility for the anatomist's scalpel. A Bill based on the Report was withdrawn in the face of strong opposition from old fashioned paternalists in the House of Lords who asserted the right of the poor to a decent burial and objected to the principle of interfering with the bodies of non-criminals. A further factor was the Duke of Wellington's fear that the passage of such a contentious Act would be politically unwise during a period of agitation for parliamentary reform.

A second Bill was introduced in 1832. It was much shorter than the first and deceptively simple, but its intentions were the same. In place of the word 'dissection' the phrase 'anatomical examination' was inserted, as if renaming the process somehow altered its meaning (shades of Windscale). Supporters of the Bill included Benthamites and free trade Whigs and Tories. Opponents included traditionalist Tories and radicals such as William Cobbett and 'Orator' Henry Hunt. Despite the strength of popular feeling against the measure, opposition was circumvented largely by sleight of hand. There were a series of late night sittings and deferred discussion and the press gallery was closed during debate. Misleading statements were given to the House, opponents were not called to give evidence and sophistry was given free rein. For instance, it was argued that the repeal of dissection for murderers would remove the stigma of the gallows; yet the Bill's sponsors would have known full well that dissection would retain its association with the hangman in the popular imagination for generations. Significantly, the counter-suggestion that the stigma would be more effectively removed through the use of the bodies of the clergy, judiciary and civil service could not even find a single proposer in Parliament. All the evidence suggests that the Bill's aims were primarily social and political rather than medical. The influence of Jeremy Bentham loomed large throughout the whole exercise. It was he who had described the objectives of framing legislation as 'partly to prevent information being conveyed to certain descriptions of person; partly to cause such information to be conveyed to them as shall be false, or at any rate fallacious; to secure habitual ignorance, or produce occasional misconception'. (Sir Robert Armstrong would be hard pressed to come up with a better guideline for being economical with the truth). Despite assertions of social equity it was transparently clear that the Bill singled out the very poor alone for dissection. As William Roberts, a London surgeon, pointed out:

> One of its main objectives was to victimise a certain class, and it accomplishes its purpose without naming that class . . . the poor and the destitute, and all that immensely numerous class just above the poor and the destitute, who, by honest industry, and in the sweat of their brow, earn their bread, and subsist upon wages. The Bill of 1832 is directed against them, covertly, but none the less specifically and exclusively.

The Bill contained no clause relating to grave robbery. It did not forbid the sale of dead bodies. It did, however, create the very first national inspectorate, a prime Benthamite aim. It was given the Royal Assent on 1 August 1832. Once the Act was in force, its opponents were powerless to prevent its operation. Although some parish authorities refused to co-operate, the inducements offered by the anatomy schools for 'exclusive rights' to the bodies of the workhouse dead ensured a steady supply.

In many respects, the Anatomy Act was a precursor of the New Poor Law, which followed in 1834. In singling out the very poor as society's scapegoats, suggests the author, 'it paved the way for the systematic dismantling of older and more humane methods of perceiving and dealing with poverty'. In a socially mobile community there was limited sympathy for the very poor, even among the relatively poor, and it was easy to depict them as somehow morally responsible for their own poverty. An appeal to the self-interest of those (the majority) not affected by the Act ensured acquiescence on the part of society at large. At the same time fear of a pauper's death provided a powerful incentive to the majority to ensure that their own remains were adequately provided for. The Anatomy Act was clearly one major reason for the importance attached by working people to death insurance. To avoid death on the parish families would adopt any available expedient, subscribing towards burial insurance even when they could not afford health insurance or schooling for their children. Significantly, the membership of friendly and burial societies expanded rapidly in the decade following the passage of the Act. Other expedients included funeral raffles, neighbourhood collections and 'friendly leads' (benefit evenings for the deceased and their families, usually held in a pub). As Ruth Richardson points out, the poor knew they must provide for themselves - or face the consequences:

> Dissection after death became one of the darker elements in the terrible stigma of the pauper's funeral, and one of the props with which fear of the workhouse was supported. So potent was fear of 'the House' that people were induced to starve, to emigrate, to turn to prostitution, even to commit suicide, rather than enter the workhouse portals . . . fear of death on the parish infected and afflicted the entire working class in the Victorian era. Women faced with the prospect of having to find the price of a funeral became sick with anxiety. Funerals . . . were acquired by hire purchase. Any and every means by which the poor could raise money was pressed into service in the defence of decent burial. (p. 279)

Incredibly, the Anatomy Act remains unrevoked, although the demand is nowadays supplied by voluntary donations. Why has it been ignored by historians? Ruth Richardson suggests that several factors have been at work. The silence of complicity on the part of the medical profession, the silence of compliance on the part of the community as a whole, and the silence of taboo. The conclusion of her remarkably wideranging and compassionate analysis is that 'the memory went underground of a fate literally unspeakable'.

Ian Lawley

WILLIAMS, Ned. *Shop in the Black Country*. Uralia Press, 23 Westland Road, Wolverhampton, WV3 9NZ, 1986, £4.95.

Retailing is one of the most dynamic and successful sectors of the British economy, today employing one-eighth of our working population. Since the Second World War alone the pace of change has been phenomenal. The rise of self-servive, the supermarket and the shopping precinct, the steady erosion of the small family-run business and most recently of all, the creation of massive out-of-town hypermarkets and leisure complexes, for a highly mobile society, have affected the lives of everyone. In the high street familiar businesses such as fishmongers and cooked meat shops have almost entirely disappeared, whilst others such as the regional Co-op societies have been forced to adapt or die. Their place has been taken by newly successful specialist shops such as the health food store, occupying a precise market 'niche'. These changes are all

reflections of wider changes in society - changing fashions and tastes, changing mobility and changing levels of income.

Shop in the Black Country examines these and other changes in the four West Midlands Boroughs of Walsall, Sandwell, Dudley and Wolverhampton. For reasons which are not entirely clear the Black Country region is a remarkably rich area for the retailing historian, and the small family run shop has survived into the 1980s, to provide Ned Williams with fascinating material. The book looks at each of the major types of retailer in turn, ranging from chain stores, grocers, butchers and clothiers to bike shops, post offices and pawn brokers, taking most of its evidence from fieldwork in the area. As a result it avoids too many generalisations and contains much personal testimony and humour, including some remarkable individual life histories. I particularly enjoyed the story of Antonion Amoroso, former Italian P.O.W. and since 1950 the singing barber of Wednesbury.

Combining more than 200 photographs with extended captions, Ned Williams has been unusually successful in showing shops to be not just physical structures with changing appearances and layouts - vitrolite fascias and enamel advertising signs - but also places of work and sources of livelihood. The result is a most attractive and informative book. It should prove a revelation to any social historian currently considering yet another 'Kirkgate' pastiche. At £4.95 with many photographs in colour it is also extremely good value.

CONTRIBUTORS

HELEN CLARK, BEd AMA
Keeper of Social History, Huntly House Museum
Edinburgh City Museums and Art Galleries

SARAH CRAGGS, BA
Assistant Keeper, Industrial Collections,
Sheffield City Museums

ROGER DODSWORTH, BA AMA
Keeper of Glass and Fine Art
Broadfield House Glass Museum, Dudley

DAVID FLEMING, MA PhD AMA
Principal Keeper of Museums
Hull City Museums and Art Galleries

ELIZABETH FROSTICK, BA
Keeper of Social History, Wilberforce House
Hull City Museums and Art Galleries

CHARLES HAJDAMACH, BA AMA
Senior Museums Keeper
Dudley Art Gallery

MICHAEL HALL, BA AMA
Assistant Keeper
Mersyside Maritime Museum

RACHEL HASTED, BA
Keeper, Bruce Castle Museum
Haringey, London

CHARLES HORIE, BSc DipCons
Keeper of Conservation
The Manchester Museum

GAYNOR KAVANAGH, MA M Phil AMA
Lecturer, Department of Museum Studies
University of Leicester

IAN LAWLEY, MA AMA
Keeper of Social History
City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke on Trent

SARAH LEVITT, MA AMA
Assistant Curator, Applied Art
City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

JOHN MAKENZIE
Lecturer, Department of History
University of Lancaster

NICK MANSFIELD, BA BPhil
Curator
Cyfarthfa Castle, Merthyr Tydfil

STEPH MASTORIS, BA CertEd AMA
Keeper, The Harborough Museum
Leicestershire Museums, Art Galleries and Records Service

SUSAN MOSSMAN, BA
Science Museum, London

JANICE MURRAY, BA AMA
Keeper of Human History
Dundee Art Galleries and Museums

STEVE NEUFIELD
Assistant Curator
The Freud Museum, London

DAVID NEWLANDS
Curator
The Freud Museum, London

P.G. SMITHURST, MRIC CChem AMA
Principal Keeper, Industry and Technology
Sheffield City Museums

MARK SUGGITT, BA AMA
Assistant Director (Curatorial)
Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council

TECWYN VAUGHN JONES, MA
Research Assistant, Department of Cultural Life
Welsh Folk Museum, Cardiff

ELIZABETH WILLIS
Curator of History
Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

STEPHEN WODD, MA FSAScot
Keeper
Scottish United Services Museum, Edinburgh