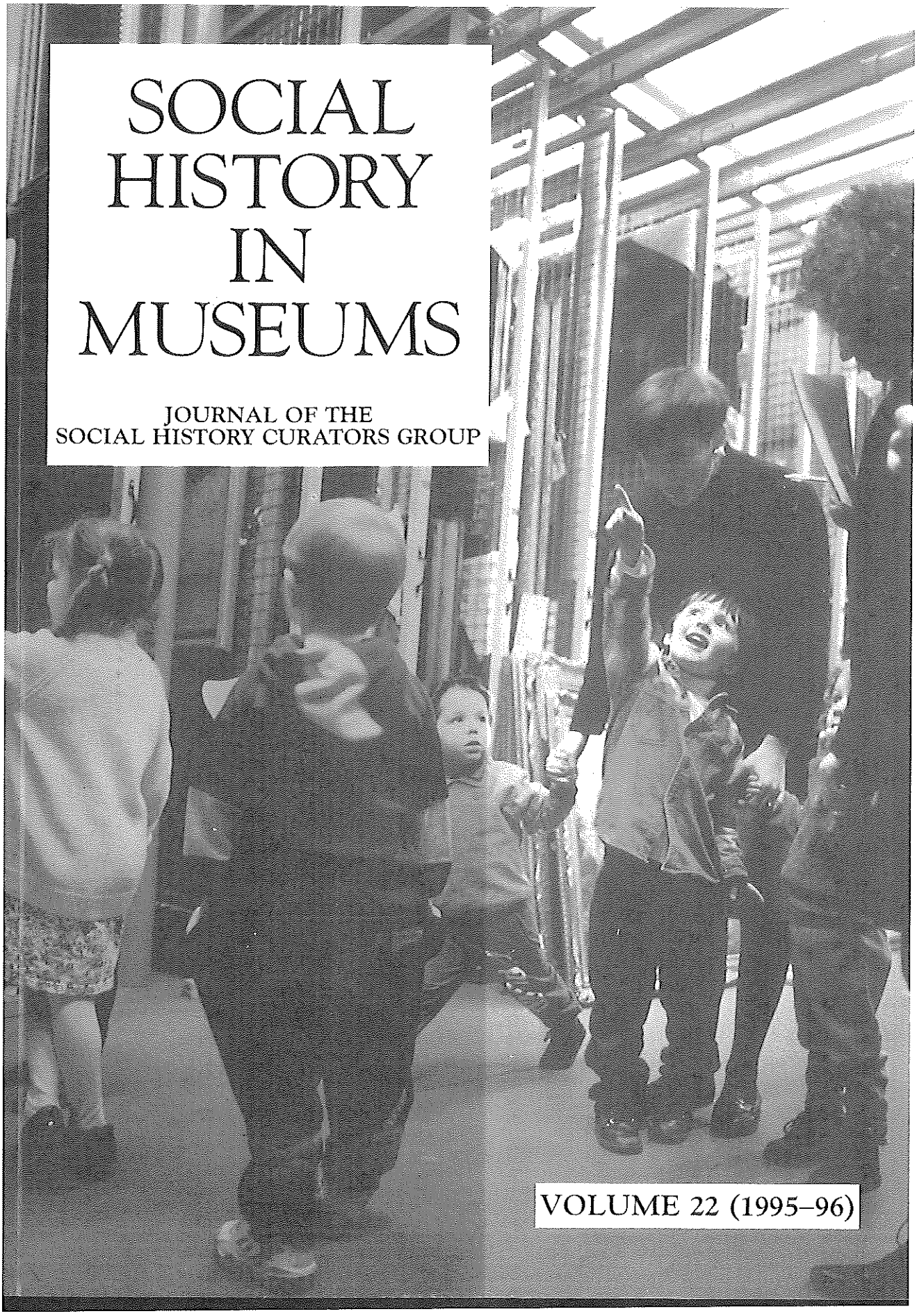
SOCIAL HISTORY IN MUSEUMS

JOURNAL OF THE
SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP



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The Editor welcomes articles and notes of work in progress for inclusion in the next issue of *SHCG Journal*. Contributions should be typed, double spaced, on one side of A4 paper and may be accompanied by line or monochrome illustrations.

All reviews should give full details of cost, postage and packing, date and place of publication.

Front cover:
Children from Ashfield Nursery choosing pictures in the Laing Art Gallery Store, Newcastle, as part of the From the Vaults *project.*

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THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

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

In common with other specialist groups SHCG's primary role is to help raise standards of curatorship. A *News* is issued several times a year. This includes reviews of meetings and exhibitions, opinions on current issues and up-to-date items of news. *Social History in Museums*, the Journal of SHCG, features articles on various aspects of social history, on research, collecting, recording and interpretation.

The Group's reputation for encouraging debate influenced the foundation of the WHAM specialist group in the 1980s and, in June 1985, a special edition of the *Museums Journal* which featured articles arising from an SHCG meeting on twentieth century collecting. Members of the Group also brought about the compilation *Social History in Museums*, published in 1993.

The Group organises several information and training seminars a year which cover a wide range of subjects. The Annual Study Weekend provides a forum for a fuller analysis of major subjects such as Interpretation in Social History and Collections, Collecting and Disposal.

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

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EDITORIAL

In the past two years the Social History Curators Group has turned its attentions to communications and evaluation in history museums today. Communications and Interpretation were the two themes underlining the 1995 Annual Study Weekend in Carlisle, under the title "It's not what you do, it's the way that you do it" while the 1996 Annual Study Weekend in Edinburgh looked at targeting audiences and evaluating the effectiveness of exhibitions and displays. Moreover, in the last year, the Social History Curators Group has commissioned a research project which is being undertaken by Stuart Davies of Leeds University and Tim Caulton of Sheffield University. Two of its key aims are to identify best practice in communicating history in museums to visitors and to produce guidelines to enable curators to evaluate the effectiveness of their own museum exhibitions and displays. In a questionnaire sent out to members in 1996 as the starting point for their research, Davies and Caulton asked respondents to name three museums which they considered to be examples of best practice. Some of the museums highlighted will then be used in case studies to develop their research. Members can, I think, look forward to an illuminating and useful study which deals with two fundamental aspects of museum work to which the answers and possibilities are endless. The problems of knowing what our audience wants and of getting it right intrigue us with each new project. The research project will be the first of its kind to point the way towards finding practical solutions in history museums and helping to avoid costly mistakes.

The contents of this volume of *Social History in Museums* largely reflect the subjects above. Half of the papers are from the last two conferences; the others illustrate a range of interests and subjects covered by history museums in the last couple of years. Examples of best practice or not, they show the versatility of the medium of social history and the ways in which it crosses boundaries from one subject to the next, for example sports history and military history. John Rumsby's contribution on medals for social historians may sound like something from a training seminar for the social history practical as was; indeed it is an extremely useful summary of this confusing field for younger members of the profession as well as older ones who need refreshing, but it also illustrates the importance of military artefacts and photographs for the social historian. The recently opened military gallery in Newcastle Discovery Museum broke the mould of so many others by concentrating not so much on the military encounters in the history of the 15th/19th The King's Royal Hussars and the Northumberland Hussars but as Lloyd Langley explains in his review, on the lives and experiences of its recruits. Its success is partly due, no doubt, to its interactive features which amuse younger and older visitors alike.

Participation for audiences is seen by many curators planning a new exhibition as being a fundamental part of the final result. Indeed, it will be interesting to see from the outcome of the research project whether or not 'best practice' depends on it. Certainly with the increased availability of computer technology and the rise in recent years of hands-on, interactive exhibits, curators may feel that they cannot afford to exclude these from their displays as they are what the museum audience has come to expect. Tim Caulton's paper asks whether hands-on *is* the key to a successful exhibition or gallery and cautions us to consider whether they *really* do the job better than the object. John Millard describes the ultimate in hands-on; groups choosing their own exhibits from the store as part of the *From the Vaults* project at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. As the face of the excited youngster on the front cover shows, this was a hugely enjoyable and participative experience which spanned the generations.

A North East Childhood, the exhibition devised and described by Helen White also spans the generations in its scope and deals with a wide range of issues. Although the marketing of the exhibition was very much child-oriented, with a competition and a large gingerbread man as a 'mascot', some of the messages communicated by it were sober – childhood isn't always the happy, carefree experience we would expect. Unfortunately the darker images of the exhibition find parallels in the 1990s.

Two papers came from an SHCG seminar on the interpretation of sport in history museums. Jayne Tyler's *Sporting Life* exhibition in Hull propelled visitors into the excitement and competitiveness of the game. Local people in particular, were invited to relive a 1980 Cup Final between two local teams while at the other extreme, they could even get on an exercise bike for a mini workout! The way we communicate sports history is the subject of Professor Wray Vamplew's paper. He urges curators to take a holistic view of sports history, to seek the "social, economic, political and cultural significance" of sports artefacts, oral histories, documentary and photographic evidence. He examines some of the key oversights in research in this field and considers the broader implications which museums with an interest in this subject should address.

Work done by Paulette McManus looks at the collection and evaluation of qualitative and quantitative evidence as groundwork for the preparation of new displays. She focuses on one recent gallery, *Transatlantic Slavery: Against Human Dignity* at Merseyside Maritime Museum, while Helen Coxall gets down to brass tacks with her scrutiny of museum text and labels, the very words we use to communicate our message. Her thought-provoking and informative paper is a lesson to us all to think carefully about what we set down for public consumption and review what we really have to say.

We don't *have* to go as far as Lucy Harland in our search for inspiration and ideas but comparison with other countries *is* useful, particularly if we get to work alongside staff and collections there. If an exchange is just what you need, turn straight to Lucy's article for some tips and an account of work experience down-under!

In our constant search for new ideas and methods of interpretation and evaluation we have much to draw upon in museums today that is encouraging and of high quality. Continued debate at seminars and conferences, through the pages of journals, newsletters and research projects, will ensure that we thoughtfully listen and learn from them and each other, so that our audiences have exciting museums to enjoy.

Finally, may I please make a plea for comments and suggestions for future journals. They can be sent to Nigel Wright, Astley Hall, Off Hall Gate, Chorley, Lancashire, PR7 1NP (Tel: 01257 515555) or Jane Whittaker, Cannon Hall Museum, Cawthorne, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S75 4AT (Tel: 01226 790270).

Jane Whittaker

RESISTANT READINGS: IT *IS* WHAT YOU SAY, *AND* THE WAY THAT YOU SAY IT

Helen Coxall

A paper presented at the SHCG Annual Study Weekend, July 1995

> *If a museum is about giving information, the labels do most of the work.*
> *If a museum is about keeping mysterious secrets, the labels do most of the work.*[1]

Writing narratives is a common way of linguistically representing past experiences. However, narratives are exploitative of that design feature of language called 'displacement' – the ability of human language to be used to refer to things or events that are removed in time or space either from the writer or the reader. It is with such narratives that the stories of objects and events are told in museums.

However, sometimes writing narratives can be problematic. Anything that is from the past is potential material for constructing stories of the past, but 'the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be narrated'.[2] Faced with lack of available information or collected objects, limiting classification systems, restrictive briefs or politically sensitive issues, the texts reflect the curator's dilemma. In this article, by analysing the ways that language constructs preferred readings, I will focus on possible resistant readings that may be made by disparate audiences in order to discover alternative ways of saying.

I would like to start by recounting Stuart Hall's categories of reading from his essay, 'Encoding Decoding', in which he outlines three ways that different people interpret the same text.[3] This concept of the possibility of differing readings of the same text was very influential when it was originally written. Inevitably the notion of three different ways has now become symbolic for as many different ways as there are people to make them.

Hall divided audiences into three types. The first type was, those who were comfortable with the dominant ideology which he called 'the dominant hegemonic position' and would agree with the preferred reading (that intended by the writer). This group would decode (interpret) the message, say for example of a news broadcast, in the way that it had been encoded (intended by the writer). The second type was those who would produce a negotiated reading that would accommodate their own social position and views: as Hall puts it: 'decoding within the negotiated version contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements.'[4] He suggested that the majority of people were in the category of negotiated readers. The third type was those whose social position placed them outside that of the dominant ideology and who would produce an oppositional reading. He offers as an example someone who 'reads all mention of national interest as class interest'.[5]

Oppositional or resistant reading does not confine itself to oppositional interpretation due to social factors. It is also closely related to issues of education, race, age and gender. For example, when Nelson Mandela was jailed for what the then current South African authorities saw as crimes against the state – he was said to be a terrorist. However, there were many people both in South Africa and across the world who saw him as a freedom fighter – a resistant reading of the word terrorist as someone opposing racial oppression.

Similarly, when I read the text of the exhibition '*Oh Mrs Porter – Women at work on the Railways*' during one of the workshops at the SHCG study weekend in Carlisle, I had to smile when I came across the heading 'women power'. How often have I been told that the term 'manpower' did not actually only refer to male staff! The writer's need to specify that she was talking specifically about women made it quite clear that I was not the only woman who makes resistant readings of such gender specific terms as 'manpower', 'mankind' and the general use of the pronoun 'he' to refer to humankind in general. The use of male gender-specific language to refer to both sexes has been so 'taken for granted' in our society that many people still fail to notice it. My 'post**man**', for example, is actually a woman.

Faced with accounts of the 'History of Mankind' in natural science museums, I can't help but wonder how on earth all these men managed to reproduce themselves for so long without the presence of women! This reading was further reinforced by the

section on the origin of the species in the Museum of Science and Industry in Paris which actually used to demonstrate it's evolution from the original ape-like figure, through various progressions right up to homo sapiens, entirely with artist's impressions of males. To which a minority of my readers may make a resistant reading of my attitude and dismiss it as evidence of feminist terrorism! (But hopefully not many). To me, and many others (both male and female) my objection to exclusive gender-specific language is 'common sense'...But, just a minute – surely the concept of *common* sense is a contradiction in terms... surely it would depend on who is making the sense?

Helen Clark, curator of *The People's Story*, Edinburgh made the interesting observation that when her exhibition *The People's Story* was opened some people complained that the display was biased in favour of women.[6] In fact there were exactly the same number of women featured as men, proving that the norm has always been biased in favour of men as their equalisation had the effect of favouring women.

Attitudes to 'others', to race, gender and class can be unconsciously articulated with naming devices, evaluative language, quoted speech and straight-forward omissions. (I will illustrate this in a moment). This occurs because, as Edward Sapir explains: 'we see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation'.[7] I would add to this that it is precisely these unconscious choices of interpretation that are generally taken for granted as so-called 'common sense'. There cannot be a unified *common* sense because the sense depends on who is making it, and as Sapir pointed out, this will clearly vary with the learned habits of particular communities. In a multi-cultural society such as Britain's, there will inevitably be many varied predispositions to choices of interpretation and therefore many potential resistant readings.

Language is not just a means of communicating: it is a source of power that contributes to ideological domination. Implicit in this premise is the understanding that language is also a potential site for the re-negotiating and emancipation of meanings by readers. The issues that are central to this premise are audience accessibility, linguistic evasion and the ideological construction meanings.

The accessibility of language and its relevance to different audience groups contributes to encouraging or deterring museum visitors. The register used to address audiences, whether it is personal or impersonal, formal or informal, technical or in everyday speech, bears a direct relationship to the visitor experience: as does its style of delivery and degree of complexity. Consider this opening panel from the *Peopling of London* exhibition at the Museum of London.

> London today is a multicultural, multi-faith city with a population from all over the world. How long has it been like this? 50 years? 100 years? 200 years? Or longer?
>
> This exhibition shows that London has had a cosmopolitan population from its very beginnings – not just since the Second World War as some people believe.
>
> The first Londoners were from all over the Roman Empire, and since then the energy and skills of people from overseas have strongly influenced the city's developments.
>
> Your visit begins with a panorama of London's post war diversity of populations, then goes back to a time before London existed. From this point it traces the long history of settlers from overseas in the capital. Finally you are brought back to where you began: the vibrant and diverse city of today. Enjoy your journey!

This text is written in conversational language which makes it easily accessible. Visitors are engaged in a dialogue with the text. A question is posed in the first paragraph with the implicit understanding that it will be dealt with by the exhibition. Visitors are addressed personally with the use of the pronoun '*your* visit' and set on their way with the exclaimed wish 'enjoy your journey!' But what is perhaps less obvious is that the language has been chosen very carefully. At no point does the text suggest that it addresses a particular section of the population, which is actually quite unusual. The naming device settlers is used, the implication being that all Londoners (another neutral naming device) were settlers originally. I say it is unusual because the 'taken for granted' norm in this country is Eurocentric – which warrants some further exploration.

Just as gender-specific language like 'mankind', 'manpower' and 'his/he' referring to people in general is a reflection of a male dominated society that often passes unnoticed, so Eurocentric language that treats the 'norm' as white European and anyone else as 'other' generally passes unremarked. Eurocentric attitudes regard Europe (which includes white America) as the centre and all nations that do not fit into this category as peripheral. For example, some art collections (fortunately not many) are still labelled as 'Western' and 'Non-Western Art'. Here is an example of an exhibition text from an exhibition about the Kuna Indians which should clarify this.

> The Kuna Indians live on the mainland and islands of eastern Panama and also in parts of north-western Colombia. They are related to the ancient Cueva, encountered by the first Spaniards to colonise the area in the early

> sixteenth century. The Cueva suffered gravely at the hands of the conquistadors, who enslaved them in an obsessive quest for gold. Hatred for the Spanish was inherited by the Kuna.
>
> The first references to the Kuna as such date from the early seventeenth century. An excellent account was published by Lionel Wafer, an English buccaneer ship's surgeon who, in 1681, spent several months among them recovering from an injury. The Kuna were happy to support any Europeans opposed to the Spanish, and developed a good relationship with Wafer, who was able to cure their chief's wife of an illness.

Clearly this remarkable text has been written entirely from the point of view of Europeans in that the Kuna are only seen in relation to their encounters with them; only seen as recipients of patriarchal beneficence; only seen as victims without a voice. Edwin Ardener used the term 'muted group' with reference to women, but it is just as applicable to the way the Kuna have been positioned here. This is a Eurocentric perspective, which simply means that European and American ideologies regard the West as the reference point from which to measure everyone else as 'other'. Admittedly, this is an extreme example, however, it serves to illustrate my point when contrasted with the following text from the Museum of Mankind taken from an exhibition about the peoples of the North Western Territories in Canada. It is a quote from a declaration by a spokesperson for the Dene Nation.

> We the Dene of the NWT insist on the right to be regarded by ourselves and the world as a nation. And while there are realities we are forced to submit to, such as the existence of a country called Canada, we insist on the right to self-determination as a distinct people and the recognition of the Dene Nation.

This text seems startling, if not amusing, because it articulates the unaccustomed idea that all things white and western are not the centre of the world, and in so doing, it foregrounds the 'taken for grantedness' of Eurocentrism.

Certain ways of saying can close down meanings by the use of the 'authorial, declarative voice' that defies any challenge to its anonymous authority. The reverse of this is the self-consciously identified voice that acknowledges its position and the practical limitations of exhibition construction. Some ways of saying utilise such linguistic devices as the existential subject, the passive construction and particular verb choice to avoid discussing issues that are sensitive or difficult for various reasons.

Consider this text about the history of women's work on the railways from the '*Oh Mrs Porter*' exhibition already mentioned.

> On 4 August 1914, Britain declared war on Germany. By September nearly 100,000 railwaymen had left for war and the transport of war supplies was threatened.
>
> Meanwhile 250,000 women had lost their jobs due to cuts in the production of non-essentials and the reduction in the number of domestic servants. As the movement of war supplies and troops was stepped up the railways reached crisis. It was suggested that women might perform 'railway work proper'. Many thought this absurd, but women performed most railway tasks over the next three years, with the exception of driving trains and firing engines. These required too lengthy a training period.

This text, and indeed the whole exhibition at the National Railway Museum, was clearly produced to increase the profile of women in a male dominated industry. However, the language used (which was possibly a reflection of the source documents) was telling another story.

The choice of verbs is particularly interesting. '100,000 railwaymen *had left* for war'. Left is a dynamic verb expressing direct action by the men. The men are the 'actors' in this action. However, '250,000 women lost their jobs', implies that the women were on the receiving end of circumstances beyond their control. Indeed, it is explained as follows: 'due to *cuts* in non-essentials and *the reduction* of the number of domestic servants'. The actors in this case are absent because the active verbs 'to cut' and 'to reduce' have been transformed into the nouns 'cuts' and the 'reduction'. Thus the women are victims of the anonymous cuts (which sounds familiar seventy years on!). Of course, the men were victims too, I don't expect many of them actually *wanted* to go to war – however, the language used belies this.

> It was suggested that women might perform 'railway work proper'. Many thought this absurd but women performed most railway tasks over the next three years.

'It was suggested' By whom? This is an 'existential subject' – a non-existent one – an example of the irrefutable voice of authority. (The existential subject is often used in emergencies to allay fears, for example 'There is no need to panic' which almost begs for the response: Who says so?) In this case the suggestion probably came from the government or the managers of the railway, but it does not appear to be a suggestion made by women, otherwise their ownership of the idea would have been claimed. Again 'many thought this absurd' is probably an indication of male attitudes. But whether it is or not, it is certainly placing women as passive recipients of others' initiatives again. It is not written from their point of view, just as the

Kuna Indian text was not written from theirs. The use of the verb performed here is very revealing – literally. Performance denotes the presence of observers: 'Women worked on most railway tasks' would have acknowledged their active participation, deleted the observers and placed the women back in their own work.

Using source documents, especially old ones that reflect an outdated ideology, can be misleading to writers. It is always useful to ask whose point of view you are trying to put across and to check the 'transitivity' of the verbs you are using: that is – ask who appears to be doing what to whom.

> If a museum is about giving information, the labels do most of the work.
>
> If a museum is about keeping mysterious secrets, the labels do most of the work.

In view of the texts examined so far, this observation would appear to be quite astute and to have far-reaching implications. I would like to test this claim further by looking at some texts from a completely different source – from the history of the second world war.

The documentation at the Imperial War Museum about the Second World War itself is extensive, and includes a large section devoted entirely to the Relief of Bergen Belsen Concentration camp by the British at the end of the war. However, there is very little information indeed about the dropping of the atom bomb which ended the war. The large exhibition on the Second World War closes with the following text (italics are author's own).

> Although devastated by the Allied bombing offensive, Japan's defences threatened to make an amphibious invasion extremely costly. *It was therefore decided* to use the recently developed atomic bomb to force the Japanese to surrender.
>
> On 6th August 1945 an atomic bomb *was dropped* on Hiroshima, and three days later, a second *fell* on Nagasaki. The cataclysmic effect of the new weapon forced the Japanese on 14th August to accept the Allies demand for unconditional surrender.

As with the Railway text, the passive and the existential subject are used. However, the implications of their use are rather more disturbing. It was decided this existential subject avoids identifying those who made the decision. The passive 'an atomic bomb *was dropped* on Hiroshima' avoids the necessity of naming the initiator of this action. Personal involvement is even further removed from the activity in the second part of this sentence through metaphoric language that attributes power to the bomb itself which just *fell* on Nagasaki.

The writers acknowledged that the bombs had *cataclysmic* effect, an evaluative adjective that has an unmistakable meaning. However, no details about the after effects or the death toll are forthcoming. In fact it is the only word in the entire text that acknowledges that any destruction took place. Perhaps because a history exhibit about the Second World War could not ignore these cataclysmic effects, a photograph of a woman having her wounds examined on October 1946 is included. The dates make it clear that people were still suffering after effects over a year later. However, this is the only victim referred to. Not only was she still alive but her injuries had not disfigured her, unlike thousands of others who do not feature in this version of events.

The last sentence of the text panel states quite clearly that the effect of the bomb was to force the Japanese to accept the Allies' demand for unconditional surrender, which implicitly acknowledges that talks about the conditions of surrender terms were already in progress before the drops took place, but no explanation or comment is made available. Now compare the gaps in this narrative with a text from the Hiroshima Peace Museum on the same subject.

> The B-29 'Enola Gay' of the U.S. Airforce arrived over Hiroshima city at an altitude of 8.500 metre (255.00 ft) from the northeast and dropped the atomic bomb.
>
> At 8.15 on the morning of August 6, 1945, the world's first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Almost the entire city was devastated in that single moment, at the tremendous cost of thousands of human lives. For the survivors, too, there were physical and mental scars that would last a lifetime. That suffering lingers for many, even today.
>
> Each of the materials and documents of the bombing on display at the Peace Memorial Museum unfolds the misery of those who fell victims to the bomb, as well as their testimony ascertaining the meaninglessness and inanity of atomic weapons.
>
> The peace that we enjoy today was established because of the giant multitude of Hiroshima's sacrifices. That is something that none of us can ever afford to forget.

The use of the active instead of the passive construction in the first sentence means that those who dropped the bomb have to be identified. In other words the text actively describes the action that took place not just the anonymous result. The text then goes on to use the passive to describe the result in the next paragraph: 'was dropped'...'was devastated'.

Clearly, the interest of a city that had suffered the effects of an atom bomb are going to be much more focussed on the event than a city like London, which did not (which explains the Imperial War Museum's considerable coverage of the Blitz). However, topics referred to and then passed over

in silence are both misleading and leave themselves open to hostile resistant readings by the diverse audiences that visit such museums. But before you start to become defensive about my implicit criticism of a British Museum, consider one last observation. At no place in the Hiroshima Peace Museum's display or text was there any reference at all to the atrocities committed in the concentration camps of Germany and Poland by Japan's allies... Perhaps we all need a more global perspective on the issues around war itself to avoid such nationalistic gaps.

Many of us are familiar with Judy Rand's useful guide to writing exhibition text: 'Why do we want to say this? Who do we want to say it to? What do we want to say? How are we saying it?' I would like to add these two further questions: How will our audiences re-read what we are saying? and What have we left out and why? For as Rob Pope points out:

> The words we speak, write or otherwise record are never wholly our own. And yet crucially in the moment of use they are turned towards our own ends, whether these ends are overt or covert, conscious or unconscious.[8]

Notes

1. Beard, M. and Henderson, J., *?Exhibition? – The Curator's Egg*, exhibition catalogue (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1992).
2. Hutcheon, L., *The Politics of Postmodernism* (Routledge, 1989), p. 75.
3. Hall, S., 'Encoding, Decoding', in During, S. (Ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader* (Routledge, 1993).
4. ibid., p. 102.
5. ibid., p. 103.
6. Clark, H. and Warwick, S., 'The People's Story: Moving On', *Social History in Museums: Journal of the Social History Curators' Group*, Vol. 19. (1992), pp. 54–65.
7. Sapir, E., in *Language, Culture and Personality: Essays in Memory of Edward Sapir*, Spier, L. (Ed.) (Menasha, Wisconsin: Sapir Memorial Publication Fund, 1941), pp. 75–93.
8. Pope, R., *Textual Intervention: Critical and Creative Strategies for Literary Studies* (Routledge, 1994), p. 188.

HANDS ON OR HANDS OFF?

The role of interactive exhibits within traditional museum galleries

Tim Caulton

A paper presented at the SHCG Annual Study Weekend July 1995

Introduction

In recent years, the rise of the interactive museum gallery or science centre has been one of the more remarkable aspects of the museum and leisure industry. The growth in the number of hands on attractions, and the visitor figures at existing centres, would suggest that the public's appetite for interactivity is currently insatiable in the UK. Some have achieved remarkable success: for example, Eureka! The Museum for Children received one million visitors in little more than two years from opening in 1992. The inevitable outcome of the success of the hands on centres is that traditional museums are increasingly incorporating interactive techniques within their own displays. Indeed, 25 out of 85 museums in Yorkshire and Humberside with collections relating to science, design and technology claimed to have interactive exhibits in 1994.[1]

The rationale for introducing interactive exhibits is based on two assumptions: firstly, that interpretation will be enhanced and; secondly, that consequent improvements in visitor numbers will bring in much needed revenue. However, hands on exhibits are expensive to develop and maintain, causing a quandary for the traditional museum faced with ever-expanding collections, diminishing resources from public funds, and a public demanding the highest possible standard of facilities. This paper considers in more detail the issues surrounding the dilemma faced by traditional museums – that is, whether interactive exhibits can be successfully introduced into an object-rich environment.

An overview of the growth of the hands on movement

The hands on movement owes much of its origins to the Exploratorium in San Francisco, which opened in 1969 and was followed by a wave of successful science centres throughout North America. In the UK, the first stand-alone science centres were at Techniquest in Cardiff (1986) and the Exploratory at Bristol (1987), whilst Launch Pad at the Science Museum (1986) was the first interactive gallery within a UK museum (albeit in a gallery devoid of objects). By the end of the decade there were twelve dedicated hands on centres in the UK, but now the number has more than doubled. It is no longer straightforward to list all the hands on galleries in the UK, which have embraced history, archaeology and art in addition to science.

Interactive centres are popular with visitors: a recent report *By Popular Demand* measuring the popularity of museums has identified that the ability to interact with exhibits, and activities which are attractive to children, are two of the key factors attracting people to visit museums.[2]

One third of museum visits are made by children, and children in family (not school) groups represent the most significant market segment.[3] With the post-war 'baby-boom' population now producing a 'baby-boom echo' of its own, family attractions catering for these growing segments of population can continue to look forward to a growing target audience until the end of the century.[4]

Children's museums are one of the fastest-growing sectors of the museum industry in the world.[5] Many have a much longer history than science centres and many are based on traditional museum collections (Brooklyn Children's Museum dates back to 1899). A hands on approach was adopted after experiments at Boston Children's Museum (which has 40,000 objects) proved successful in 1964. As a result, whereas some children's museums (such as Brooklyn, Boston and Indianapolis) successfully integrate interactives and museum objects, others (such as Denver) have no artefacts at all. Children's museums are an integral part of the USA museum community, and can successfully achieve museum accreditation. In contrast, in the UK a children's museum without traditional artefacts is not recognised as a museum at all, and Eureka! The Museum for Children was unable to achieve museum registration in 1993.

The purpose of this article is not to challenge the use of the term 'museum' to describe an institution without objects. More important is to consider the elements that make children's museums so popular, and which are causing them to challenge

and redefine the boundaries of the traditional museum world. They are client-centred, targeted at the intellectual and physical needs of child visitors and their adult helpers. They are also designed to appeal to a wide range of interests, and to stimulate different areas of learning with physically attractive exhibits and graphics. In the children's museum, it is the process of learning and not the end-product that is important. The exhibits are often multi-sensory, frequently work at several intellectual levels, and are designed to stimulate participation and conversation. The emphasis is on contextual interactive exhibit strategies rather than the more traditional focus on conservation, research and glass-case presentations. This may involve the use of artefacts, but they are just one tool in the interpreter's tool-kit. Objects primarily serve as tools to motivate learning and address the developmental needs of children, and are therefore not necessarily collected for their intrinsic value.[6]

The difference in objectives between museum types

There is, therefore, a clear distinction between the objectives of traditional and children's museums. To use marketing terminology, in the children's museum the emphasis is on meeting the requirements of the visitor, which is customer-orientation. Conversely, in the traditional museum, the emphasis is primarily on safeguarding the collection, which is product-orientation. Material objects are at the heart of traditional museum operations – whilst we 'exhibit and interpret our objects...for the public benefit', and we may even actively involve the public in evaluating and even creating our exhibitions, a museum is essentially 'an institution which collects, documents, preserves...material evidence and associated information'. In other words, this product-led approach is enshrined in the accepted definition of a museum in the UK.

In practice, the boundaries between traditional museums, heritage centres, interactive museums and science centres, and leisure attractions are blurring. As one component in a complex array of cultural and leisure industries, museums can no longer be certain of their role or identity innocently engaged in the process of the collection, conservation, classification, and display of objects.[7] Indeed, it has been suggested that in twenty-five years museums will not be recognisable as they are currently defined: many will have incorporated attributes associated with organisations quite distinct from museums, and will rely less on collections and more on multimedia to become vast archives of objects, databases, videos and sounds. Some may never be visited by the public, with their collections made accessible from the comfort of our homes and schools. The inevitable outcome of this process is that we will collectively agree upon a new and expanded definition of museums embracing these emerging hybrids.[8]

Not everyone is convinced that investment in the latest technology will reap rewards for museums in the future. One commentator has noted that the increase of high-tech software on the retail market, and its imminent influx into our homes, may result in a full circle return to original artefacts and first-hand museum displays. Museums are in direct competition for visitors with the commercial leisure industry, but the authenticity of their collections can provide competitive advantage. Children, it is suggested, may already find special effects exhibits almost passé.[9] If this trend, which is not yet supported by published research, is indeed widespread and long-lasting, then it will add another twist to the already complex debate on the primary purpose of museums.

The problem, therefore, for traditional museums is whether to divert scarce resources to the development of interactive exhibits, or to concentrate on their obvious market strength in the interpretation of artefacts. Hands on exhibits are expensive to develop and maintain, and take up valuable display space, so museums need good reason to justify directing resources away from their core work. The popularity of hands on learning centres has called into question their educational effectiveness, and although the available evidence indicates that interactive exhibits can aid effective learning, more research is unquestionably needed.[10]

Whilst educationalists may worry about the educational effectiveness of hands on exhibits, it is likely that the marketing manager will remain enthusiastic as long as visitors are voting with their feet through the museum doors. In the Science Museum, the visitor flow in the different types of galleries varies considerably. Launch Pad receives 500,000 visitors a year, in 700 sq.m. This gives a density of 714 visitors per sq.m. The entire museum receives 1,400,000 visitors a year, or 44 visitors per sq.m. If the Science Museum converted all its floor space to interactives, and if the same density of visitors could be obtained as in Launch Pad, the theoretical capacity of the museum would be 22 million visitors, indicating why there is a strong marketing argument in favour of interactives.

Trends from the USA (where there over 200 science centres) are, however, disquieting: recently opened science centres have not fulfilled their visitor targets, and in existing centres, figures are plateauing (indeed, a 10% overall decline has been reported in 1993/4).[11]

While interactivity remains a demand of visitors, the next decade will see museums worldwide increasingly endeavouring to define what is their key role and the specific function of this approach

within it. However, the fear of interactives 'taking over' and banishing the collections to the stores is unfounded: apart from losing its unique nature by abandoning its collections, the Science Museum would have an immense maintenance and renewal problem. The rate of use is so high that a lifetime of five years is generally considered a maximum, while a traditional gallery can well last ten years without major refurbishment. Interactives in general have a more rapid rate of obsolescence than object displays, as well as more considerable health and safety problems. The problem for the museum is thus not to increase without limit the amount of interactives, but to define what is the specific place of both objects and interactives and decide how they can both be put to best use.

The introduction of interactive exhibits into traditional galleries

The inclusion of hands on exhibits within museum galleries (or in stand-alone galleries within a museum, like Launch Pad or Flight Lab) is not necessarily incompatible with the other core museum functions of conservation and documentation. There are, however, many areas of potential conflict: for example, if the interactive gallery directs scarce resources away from conservation or documentation; if the safety of original artefacts is threatened by the hands on approach; or if the presence of interactives encourages inappropriate behaviour in adjoining galleries.

One danger of the interactive approach is that if interpretation is reduced to the 'do-able', only a very selective and superficial storyline may be presented which distorts historical or scientific fact. For example, whereas physics is ideally suited to interpretation with interactive exhibits, other scientific phenomena that are not reversible or repeatable, or that happen too slowly or too fast, or on too small or too large a scale, are simply not appropriate to be interpreted by interactive exhibits. Thus, although the hands on exhibit is an extremely attractive medium, it alone cannot tell the whole story.[12]

The real issue is not so much whether museum objects and interactives can co-exist in harmony, as to whether interactive exhibits can be designed which play to the strengths of the museum by improving understanding of museum objects. Many museums have converted best museum education practice into 'discovery rooms'. Brooklyn Children's Museum has an exhibition called *The Mystery of Things* which is specifically designed to demystify museum objects. One of the new galleries that opened in 1995 at the Science Museum (also called *Things*) similarly aims to use hands on techniques to interest primary age children in museum objects, and will form a new introduction to the museum for visitors of this age. As part of the development work for this gallery, a study was carried out to identify what sort of museum objects interest children.[13] The objective of the study was to discover the qualities of objects that appealed to children which can then be used as a guide in the choice of objects to form the focus of the activities. These included:- bright, contrasting colours; lustrous, highly reflective, surfaces; complex and intricate patterns; irregular, convoluted shapes; mysterious, weird, unusual, funny, and not identifiable objects. The desire to operate or play with the object and to find out how it worked were also cited. One surprise was the relatively low priority given to new, recognisable objects, which were often described as boring, with nothing to find out about, dull in colour, or simple in shape. In this survey, children seemed to be rejecting the modern in search of either the old or the futuristic. This is significantly different from the experience at Eureka!, where research showed that children were more interested in access to the adult technology of today (such as the fax machine or cash dispenser) than in old or even futuristic technology (such as the video phone, which was alien to children's conceptual understanding at the time of the research in 1991).

In short, evaluative research has given Eureka! and the Science Museum valuable insights into children's thinking, which has informed the selection of objects, activities and interpretation used in the galleries, and is a key component in helping both museums provide services oriented at their target markets. It is only through the use of evaluative research that a museum can determine the juxtaposition of artefacts and interactives that will enhance visitors' understanding of museum artefacts, and which will enable visitors interacting with a limited range of 'hands on' exhibits to take away a 'minds on' understanding of the museum gallery as a whole and the objects it contains.

Conclusions

The success of the hands on movement in the UK and the rest of the world, coinciding with the introduction of new multimedia technologies and increasing competition, has caused a dilemma for many traditional museums, with marketing pressure to introduce interactive exhibits. The challenge, therefore, for the future is to learn from the hands on galleries of today on the design of sturdy exhibits, on the use of visitor-centred evaluative techniques and on the successful role of enabling staff, and to implement these techniques within mixed galleries of objects and interactives. Far from conflicting with the traditional purposes of the museum, well-designed and thoroughly evaluated interactive exhibits can help to ensure that museums are able to compete in an increasingly complex visitor attractions market, but poorly-designed exhibits will

simply result in the museum appearing as a second-class passenger on the interactive bandwagon.[14]

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APPROACHES TO EVALUATION IN PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT (FRONT END) STUDIES

Paulette McManus

A Paper presented at the SHCG Annual Study Weekend, June 1996.

Introduction

It is tempting to think that quantitative and qualitative forms of visitor study investigations are oppositional, 'black and white', in character and outcome. However, as with most things, there is a large grey area in the middle where quantitative investigations can have a largely qualitative outcome. This paper looks at broad definitions of quantitative and qualitative work; at the way attitudes to the application of statistical analysis affect the design of studies; at ways of opening up questionnaire surveys undertaken at the start of projects so that visitor opinion, understandings and feelings can be taken into account in the preparation of exhibitions and ends with a case study where these principles were applied.

Differences between qualitative and quantitative forms of investigation in visitor study work

Qualitative

Most of our prejudices, preferences and reactions to situations are not 'pure' – they consist of an intertwining of rationality, gut feelings, emotions and socially accepted points of view. In general, we can say that qualitative forms of investigation are concerned with the in-depth exploration of the texture of such complex responses.

In the museum world, qualitative investigations may take the form of focus group discussions with from around eight to twelve people, structured interviews with individuals who form part of a small selected group or panel, formative evaluation observations or interviews with users of exhibits and even freewheeling informal, general discussions with individual visitors.

As the individual investigator must describe the parameters for reporting such investigations they are sometimes accused of being selective and subjective in nature. Detachment on the part of the researcher and rigorous recording of all original data in reports can go some way to diffuse such criticism.

Quantitative

Some of our personal characteristics, responses and behaviours in certain situations are more black or white. We are male or female, of a certain age, tend to turn right on entering a gallery, bring our children to museums for educational, social and cultural reasons and so on. In groups of people, these sorts of characteristics lend themselves to counting and the variation in them can be expressed in numeric, percentage or statistical terms. That is, the data collected lends itself to analysis, providing objective results summarised in descriptive statistics. Quantitative forms of investigation are concerned with such situations. They are objective if the samples are appropriate and if the situations are black and white, 'yes or no' in character. If a query can be met with a multi-layered response (that is, is qualitative in nature) investigator subjectivity, usually in the form of questionnaire design, can creep in.

Quantitative studies usually have quite big samples. The classic examples in museum work are the demographic study (which may need a sample of 600 to 700 in a large museum), used to see who comes to the museum and why and some forms of summative, or final, evaluation of exhibitions which often use samples of 100 to 150. However, when used in preliminary assessment work, say when you want to assess ideas for a new exhibition, they can use much smaller samples – I have used samples varying in size from 70 to 260 for such work. For a discussion of sample sizes see McManus, 1991.

There are two main advantages in quantitative forms of investigation. Firstly, because they work from a representative sample of the population under investigation you can describe variation in response across the width of your sample as if you are describing the variation in the entire population (in our case, a museum audience). Secondly, their reliability, derived from adequate sampling, means they should always measure that population when repeated on a number of occasions under similar conditions. This means that they may give consist-

ently similar results for some population characteristics, for example on the balances of the sexes or the spread of age groups, and that small changes over time in such characteristics can be described as trends.

The complementary nature of quantitative and qualitative work

Quantitative and qualitative forms of investigation are complementary – they can shine light on situations from different points of view and, so, they should often be used together.

For example, I used a variety of investigation techniques in the summative evaluation plan for Gallery 33 at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (Peirson Jones, 1993). Similarly, explorations of the character of the Museum of London, the desired contents of its new introductory gallery, the scope of a proposed post-1945 gallery and the preferred atmosphere in exhibitions were simultaneously conducted through a qualitative focus group with museum friends, qualitative structured interviews with a panel of individual non-users and a quantitative survey of visitors. The plan I devised for the current evaluation of the development and reception of 'St. Kilda Explored' at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum is similarly multi-layered in techniques and respondents.

The approach to be taken might depend on the level of information needed, the generalisability sought (that is, most of the audience think this etc.), the target audiences for the information, and for the exhibition, and the cost and effort involved in the undertaking.

Statistics and their presentation and interpretation

As I am, later, going to discuss exploratory investigations at the early stage of project design I wish to make a case for quantitative investigations which have a qualitative bias, in that they also investigate prejudices, preferences and reactions while collecting 'yes or no' type responses. To do that I am first going to make a diversion into a discussion of statistics.

The discipline of statistics is concerned with useful ways of summarising, presenting and interpreting numerical data. A statistic is a figure derived from more basic figures called data (for example, average duration of visit). In museum work, the statistics we are most likely to be dealing with are percentage figures.

Statistics can help in making decisions when uncertainty prevails, for example when determining the audience for a museum. They also help in influencing opinions in an orderly way, for example, in informing interpreters about what the audience knows or cares about a topic.

Uses of Statistics in Museum Evaluation and in Research

Museum evaluation, like all evaluation, is always context specific and so does not look beyond itself when describing its findings – it describes a particular situation. On the other hand, research projects seek to describe findings which can be generalised to other situations. Both forms of investigation can use the same methods of investigation and statistical analysis to reach their differing ends.

It is important to remember that the ends *are* different. In museum work we are often content to describe the general drift of a situation – so the tolerances within which we are content to sample and analyse will be much wider than for the usual research project. In museum work we don't always want precision, or to pay for it. As we want reasonable grounds for making decisions we can tolerate a certain margin of error if we know what it is. It is a mistake to think that a quantitative museum evaluation project is as rigidly statistical in character as, say a medical epidemological survey. This is where the two classical approaches to statistical analysis come into the story.

Two approaches, or schools, in the use of statistics

The first school, 'Frequentists' believe in an objective world. That is, they believe that the real world is governed by parameters which can be estimated but never known exactly. Here statistics, often probability statistics, are used to estimate the parameters. Frequentists commonly use experiments to test their hypotheses as this is a deductive school of thought where data is collected starting from a theory position. In the museum world, a theory could be the proposition that people learn more from interactive exhibits. Examples of experimental evaluations in museum work are Eason & Linn (1976) and Feher & Rice (1985). The classic demographic survey, which describes an entire audience from its sample, gains its authority from the frequentist approach.

The second school, 'Bayesians', believe in a subjective world. That is, they believe that what we think about the real world affects our behaviour – not the world as it 'really' is. The idea is that data from the real world modifies those beliefs in a rational way. For example, data showing that many people use words from labels in their conversations in the museum can modify the belief that 'people don't read labels' (see, for example, McManus, 1989). This is an inductive school where the researcher starts from a collection of data and practices data reduction and exploratory analysis on it in order to produce a description.

The Bayesian approach is particularly fruitful when investigating audience behaviour, views and

opinions. If you have a prejudice against evaluative, quantitative survey work being conducted in your museum it is quite likely that you may associate it with the frequentist approach rather than the Bayesian approach.

Usually in preliminary assessment visitor study work the evaluator starts from data and then explains it – the process is exploratory in the Bayesian sense. This is the key to introducing a qualitative dimension to quantitative survey work. With a reasonably large sample of from 60 to 100 people which can be described in a quantitative manner so that the demographic profile can be seen to reflect that of the general audience, open ended questions can be explored. The responses to such questions can be categorized (that is, data reduction can be done) and the findings can be described both numerically and in the words of the visitors. Where appropriate, pre-categorized questions with a free choice option attached can also be used. This broad survey approach can have advantages over a focus group approach, particularly with some 'hot' topics where one or two convinced members of a focus group might be expected to sway the responses of the whole group.

Opening up preliminary assessment surveys

The degree to which you can adopt a Bayesian approach to a quantitative questionnaire survey depends on your willingness to give the visitor freedom to respond to questions which are multi layered in nature, rather than black and white. Giving the visitor freedom to respond in an individual way to some questions means that, for that question, you forego the collection of standardised data which can be coded numerically and analysed by computer. This means that part, or all, of the responses to that question will need to be analysed 'by hand'. This is why many survey companies will not introduce open ended questions into surveys. However, if you go ahead you can gain a great deal of detailed insight into the complex and often contradictory ways people think about issues.

Introducing a Qualitative Dimension

At the frequentist end of the spectrum you can ask 'Are you interested in late 19th century family life?': Yes/No/Don't know. The question defines the analysis in a top (from the question) down manner.

If you open up a little you could ask visitors to place, say, the topics '19th century Family life, working life, cultural life and leisure life' in order of preference. You will get a relative response but it will not tell you if the visitors are really interested in any of your topics. However, you will be able to say things like which sex or age group is most, or least, interested in any of the four topics.

The next stage is to ask people to rank each topic on the level of interest they hold in it. This means that for each topic a score can be calculated which takes into account all levels of ranking given to it. The scores for each topic can themselves be ranked to give a subtle indication of levels of overall interest in a subject and the topics within it. It can be that lots of second and third rankings for a particular topic can illustrate a wider level of interest in it than for a topic which gets quite a few first choices. Also, a topic score can be compared to a possible absolute score to show the depth of interest in it.

The last stage is to ask a completely open ended question such as 'What topic related to the late 19th century is of interest to you?' or 'What do you feel about x?'. This is about as qualitative as a question in a quantitative survey can get. There is a need to be careful in leading up to some open ended questions like these because if they catch the visitors unawares, or require the visitors to marshal their thoughts too quickly, they can seem threatening.

Case study: *Transatlantic slavery: against human dignity*: Merseyside Maritime Museum

In 1993, a preliminary assessment questionnaire survey was made of one hundred visitors to the Merseyside Maritime Museum regarding proposals in the brief for the *Transatlantic Slavery* exhibition (McManus, 1993). Many people had contributed their ideas to the brief so that it had become very complex and detailed. Before going ahead with the detailed development and design of the exhibition it was desirable to take the views, understandings and interests of a representative sample of the museum's ordinary visitors into account as they would be the major audience for the exhibition communication. Eighteen questions were asked. Five questions were closed demographic queries, three asked visitors to respond in predetermined categories, two asked them to rank topics according to levels of interest and eight were completely open ended so that personal responses were invited.

The first category question established that 94 per cent of the visitors were very or quite interested in seeing the proposed exhibition. This was very encouraging for the curators, especially when they had to work through the varied responses to their other questions.

A completely open ended question about how the visitors would define or describe slavery was asked. The bottom up analysis of the responses threw forth ten themes which could be identified in their definitions, so indicating the complexity of the

concept of slavery as it is generally understood today. Some people used several themes in their definitions. The themes were reported statistically and with verbatim exemplars. They were: denial of personal freedom; condemnation; working or being taken against the will of the subject; working without pay; being owned or bought and sold; receiving brutal treatment; being taken to a foreign country; exploitation; being used to do other's work and subjugation. The interpretive problem for curators was to deal with any differences in the definitions of slavery used by the exhibition team, its advisors, 19th century abolitionists and the ordinary visitors.

Other open ended questions included requests for definitions of the slave trade; for the destination countries of enslaved Africans; for descriptions of work done by the enslaved, for topics of interest not mentioned on the survey and for oral history stories of slaves and slavery in Liverpool.

We also asked paired category and open ended questions such as whether Liverpool was in any way connected with the slave trade and, if so, 'In what way?'; whether any other European countries were involved in the trade, and if so 'Which ones?'.

The two ranking according to four levels of interest questions were about eleven topics in the brief for inclusion in the exhibition and interest in three academic areas of debate about the Atlantic slave trade.

By means of this variety of questions it was discovered that only one third of visitors could give a description of 'The Slave Trade' as being in some way synonymous with the Atlantic Slave Trade as the curators described it and only four per cent gave an orthodox description of the path of the triangular trade as being to Africa with goods, to the Americas with enslaved Africans, to Europe with cotton and sugar. It was also discovered that knowledge of the history and geography of European countries other than Britain was not very high and that visitors had a poor understanding of the geography of the north and south Americas and the Caribbean. Clearly, the exhibition would have to start with something in the way of a geography lesson, which, in fact, it does.

Fifteen per cent of the sample gave accounts of slaves, slavery and the trade which were tied to Liverpool but only eight stories came from Liverpool residents. The verbatim reports allowed the team, in the exhibition, to deal with any misconceptions.

The responses to the ranking of topic questions showed that the range of interest between topics was very low. This meant that particular topics would not need development at the expense of others; that topics could stand alone without support from others; that topics did not need to be presented in chronological form as indicated in the brief and, so, could be presented in clusters if so wished. If there had been wide disparity in interest in the topics the designers would have been advised to place topics of high interest in particular locations on the exhibition floor and been given warning of topics which would need high levels of interpretation and display in order to interest visitors.

Around a third of the sample mentioned further topics of interest. These responses reflected a general interest in people and their life and times and were mostly related to the effects of slavery on the life of the enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Americas and Africa.

Conclusion

Qualitative and quantitative forms of investigation and analysis are not poles apart but, rather, points on a continuum. When studies are at the extreme ends of the line they can answer a question in different ways and so can be complementary to each other. It is possible to conduct surveys which have a dual quantitative and qualitative nature. Such surveys are particularly useful in preliminary analysis, before a project begins, and in summative evaluation.

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ART HISTORY AND HALF-BAKED GIMMICKS

John Millard

A Paper presented at the SHCG Annual Study Weekend, July 1995.

Think that art is elitist? Well, perhaps you have been put off by art galleries. As a social historian you may think that pictures are only useful because they give the odd clue to how people used to live and think, or you may have dismissed art as totally irrelevant to your concerns. Maybe what you are really dismissing are the cabalistic rites of art history and the art market. So give art another chance – if you take pictures out of traditional art gallery displays, you should find that they can communicate powerful social, emotional and intellectual messages to your museum visitors.

'Why?', asked a Museum Studies Student from Taiwan on a visit to the National Gallery of Scotland – 'why do so many artists paint your God being born in such a dirty place with so many animals around? Surely this is disrespectful.'

If you're lucky the displays and the labelling describe the literary sources of imagery and the paintings' place in the history of European Art – they entirely fail to consider this basic, simple and much more relevant question.

Obedient visitors to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam begin their journey round the displays of paintings with the earliest pictures, and progress laboriously through displays which are organised to describe the development of art in various centres in the Netherlands over three centuries. The arrangement is enormously clever but it is impossible for most visitors to follow and, let us admit, there is no reason why most visitors should be interested in the historical development of art. No-one would be expected to be interested in the detailed development of agriculture and horticulture between the 15th and 17th centuries, and social historians have, on the whole, long ago given up trying to present this sort of story. But art historians persist in believing that displays of paintings should be arranged according to the dullest of discourses on the history of art.

What is worse – the way that this story is presented is extremely dull – not just in the Rijksmuseum but in art galleries all over the world. Walls are uniformly white; the picture labels are uniformly small; even the doors and walls have been reduced to highly designed blandness in order not to interfere with the purity, one might say aridity, of the presentation. At the Rijksmuseum, even Rembrandt, one of the most emotional artists of all time, is rendered tedious. The enormous themes in his work and his power to communicate feelings are stunted by the display.

The *Art on Tyneside* display in the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, attempted to break this mould by borrowing techniques from other sorts of museums. It uses scenics of, for example, an eighteenth century coffee shop and a Victorian art gallery, and enlivens them with models of characters in costume, sounds, and smells, all of which give the artworks on display a context. Key target audiences for the display were 8–12 year olds and people with disabilities, so the whole display is designed for access, with interactives, audio-visuals, non-reflective glass in key cases and paintings, and a floor track with sculpted versions of pictures and an audio guide for blind visitors.

It was severely criticised by an art critic:

> 'If some visitors are so unimaginative that they need half-baked gimmicks to make history come alive, then by all means let them have them... but not in an art museum.'

There are those who believe that art and art galleries should be protected for the use of an educated elite. However it is they, not those involved in the *Art on Tyneside* display, who suffer from 'half-baked gimmicks' – they are hidebound by the 'half-baked gimmicks' of traditionalist art history. The display of art in *Art on Tyneside* is just one of any number of ways of displaying art, some historical and some new, which are as available to non-art specialists as art curators. The experience of art is not the sole prerogative of a trained minority; pictures can communicate with much wider audiences.

The Laing is one of a group of museums run by Tyne and Wear Museums and pursues a committed access policy. Over the last few years the audience for museums run by Tyne and Wear

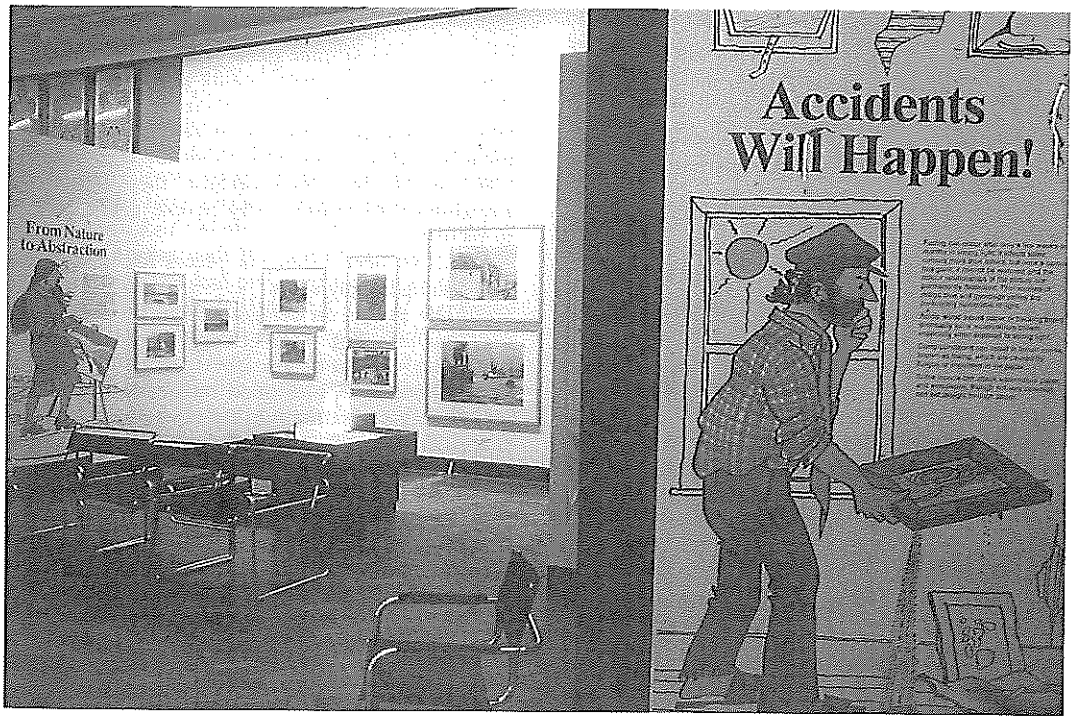
Museums has doubled to over a million visits a year; displays, including 'Art on Tyneside', have won numerous awards and confidence in the museums' performance has risen.

At the same time as its audiences grow and confidence in Tyne and Wear Museums' achievement rises, the Laing is continually being criticised for its populist approach by art insiders. An exhibition of *British Watercolours* at the Laing broke the rules of art display, and attracted criticism from a few diehards and praise from the majority of visitors for the garish colours on the walls and for grouping the pictures in themes with large explanatory cartoons and interactives.

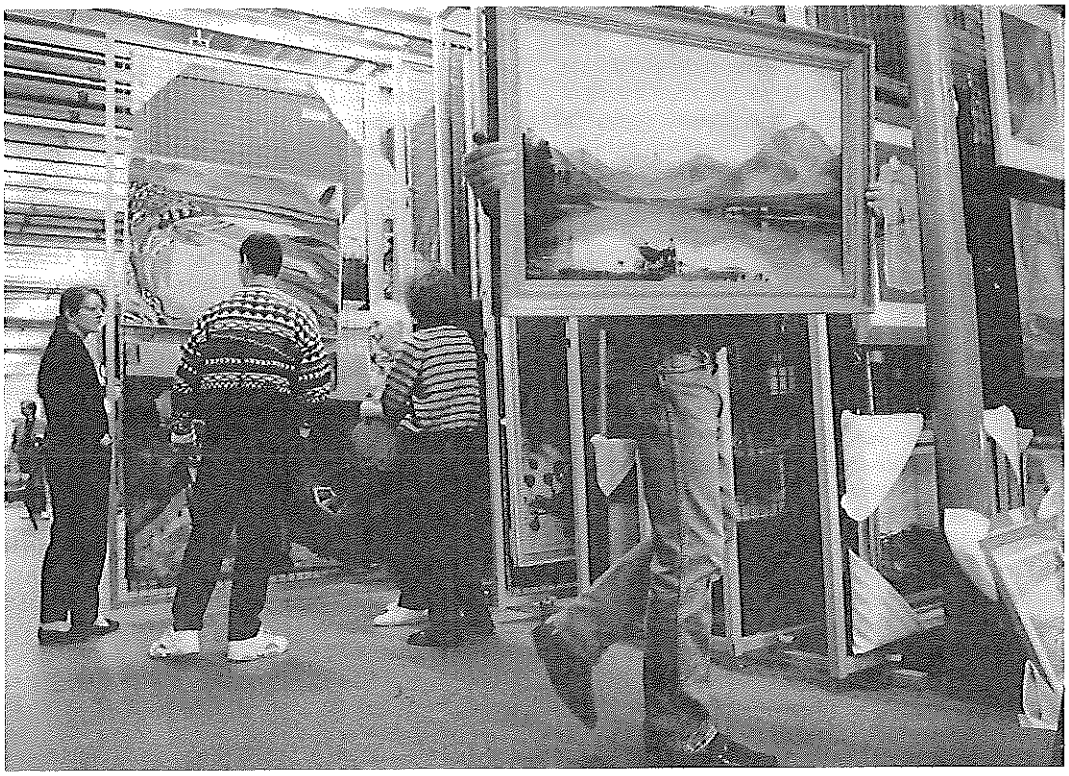
Exhibitions *Cats* in 1995 and *Knights* in 1995/6 took easily-recognisable themes and treated them in a non-academic way with large, bright and clear graphics, and with simple interactives. The criteria for inclusion in the exhibition was – 'does it have a cat in it?' or 'does it have a knight in it?'. Tyne and Wear Museums staff at the Laing were amazed and pleased to discover that, with a few notable exceptions, galleries were prepared to lend to these exhibitions even though they patently did not pursue an art historical discourse. The Tate Gallery took a lead in agreeing to lend several major works to each exhibition. A minority of galleries which refused to lend are clearly operating an editorial control on exhibitions they are asked to lend to – they would not lend unless they felt the exhibition had a strong art historical base. Art history is used as a precondition and an impediment to access to paintings rather than an asset. The *Cats* and *Knights* exhibitions accept that most people are not art historians and attempted to present pictures in a more friendly and accessible way for non-specialist viewers.

More radically staff at the Laing Art Gallery have handed over editorial control of exhibitions to others. For the *Unleashed: Images and Experience of Disability* exhibition held at the Laing in 1995, the curator and the artists all had direct experience of disability and took responsibility for the exhibition. Tyne and Wear Museums staff took on the role of advisers on presentation. The exhibition sparked lively debates in the regional and disability press and recently won a commendation in the BT North East Museums Awards.

From the Vaults displays are handed over entirely to non-specialists. Groups taking on 'From the Vaults' exhibitions have so far included five residents of Byker, a suburb in the east end of Newcastle, 105 pupils of Ashfield Nursery in the west end of Newcastle and young people brought in by a community group from Meadow Well in North Tyneside.



Big graphics and interactives mix in with exhibits in the Laing Art Gallery's 'BRITISH WATERCOLOURS' exhibition.



Five people from Byker in Newcastle select their 'FROM THE VAULTS' exhibition in the Laing Art Gallery store.

The basic format for carrying out a *From the Vaults* exhibition is simple, though the details vary. The first step is discussion between staff and group representatives about the project timetable and the participants, followed by a familiarisation visit to the Laing.

Next, the group makes visits to the storeroom at the Laing to choose pictures. Helpers note their comments and staff are briefed to offer no opinions or information which is not specifically requested. Members of the group are free to choose whatever they wish for whatever reasons they wish.

Then, about a week later, the pictures are taken to a gallery and the group visits to arrange the exhibition however they want. Gallery staff hang the pictures and, finally, the group is encouraged to use the exhibition however they please. For some there will be an opening attended by friends and neighbours – for others activities in the gallery and children's parties.

The *From the Vaults* display is introduced by a large colourful graphic panel with a photograph of some or all of the participants and labels next to the exhibits say who chose them and why. These labels are a great source of interest and encouragement for other visitors sometimes for their remarkable insights but often because they reflect the straightforward reasons why people get interested in pictures.

> '...I've been fishing in places like this. I like fishing it's my sport'
>
> 'The glasses on her nose make her look like a seagull... She looks grumpy, her mouth looks cross – might be a teacher'
>
> 'It looks like sun lotion on her arms. I think she's got children – I don't know why.'

Clothes From the Closet tried a similar approach with costume collections in 1996. These experiments take art out of the exclusive preserve of arts aficionados and art critics and put them in the mainstream of ideas. People, even social history curators with no art specialism, can put aside the arcane rules of art history and art display and access art for themselves.

KIDS – WHAT CAN YOU DO?

A North East Childhood at Tyne & Wear Museums

Helen White

At first glance, presenting children's history in museums looks like a soft option. It's a universal subject: everyone has had a 'childhood' which will have left them with a fund of memories which the eager-to-please social history curator can tap shamelessly. There is nothing like a bit of childhood nostalgia to get the visitors cooing appreciatively.

However, as the SHCG Annual Study Weekend of 1988 made apparent, this is no longer enough.[1] Most people, if they are honest, do not have unequivocally happy memories of childhood: for some, it is a very painful time to recall. No history of children's lives can ignore the fact that so many of them have been blighted and curtailed.

A North East Childhood, planned and opened in 1995, started out with the best of intentions. Tyne & Wear Museums had prepared touring exhibitions on *The World of Dolls* (1990), *A Day at the Seaside* (1992), *Be a Sport! Sporting Lives in South Tyneside* (1993) and *The World of Toys* (1993). Having established large audiences for social history exhibitions by focusing on easy, accessible subject matter, it was time to start a more serious and challenging series of exhibitions, in which *Childhood* would be the first. It would be an account of childhood with the bad bits left in, which would nevertheless appeal to children themselves as well as to adults.

The literature on the history of childhood has of course developed since SHCG last focused on the subject in 1988. Notable additions have been Eric Hopkins' *Childhood Transformed*, which brings together a wide range of material about working class children in nineteenth century England, and *The Children of the Poor* by Hugh Cunningham, which examines changing concepts of childhood over the past 300 years (2).

The subject of childhood has remained a focus of public debate. Children's rights have at last been recognised in a United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN in November 1989. The trial in November 1993 of two ten-year old boys for the murder of two-year old James Bulger in Liverpool led to a wave of press and public outrage which demonised children and put shoplifters in the same category as children so disturbed that they kill. Children's behaviour and how to control it was big news. 1995 was the 150th anniversary of Dr Barnardo's birth, which generated a substantial body of newspaper and television journalism on children in trouble, both past and present. Revelations about the systematic sexual abuse of children – some of it in children's homes, of all places – have forced their way ever more insistently into the public consciousness.

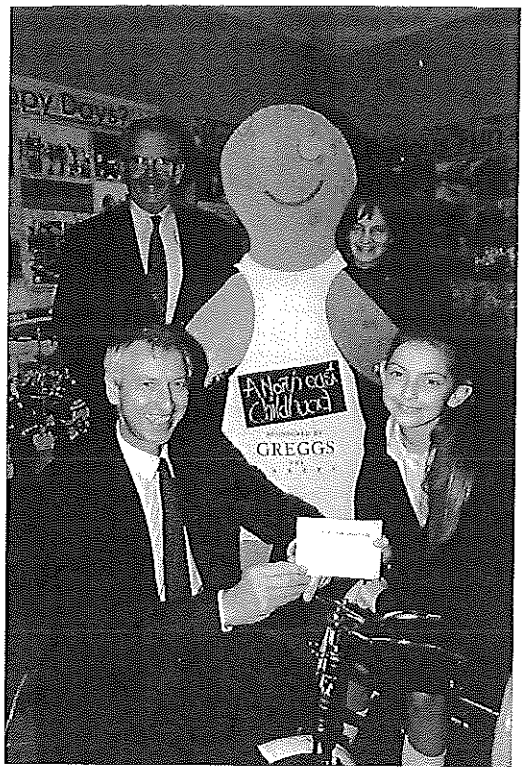
I hoped to deal with both the material and emotional aspects of a child's well-being. I hoped to avoid looking at children solely as victims of their circumstances, and to regard them as people in their own right with a subversiveness which can often be disruptive of adults and their institutions. I hoped to encompass both adult concepts of 'childhood' – childhood as a construct – and the opinions of children themselves.

These were intellectual ambitions. Mainly I hoped that children visiting the exhibition would find stimulation and enjoyment and that adults would be touched in some way, perhaps by being reminded of some powerful memory from their own childhood, so that they might for a while give more attention to the children with whom they come into contact.

The exhibition was required to tour four venues within the Tyne & Wear Museums area: South Shields Museum, the Shipley Art Gallery, Gateshead, Newcastle Discovery Museum and Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery. Therefore it had to be relevant to local visitors in all these four places, with a geographical spread of images and information.

Time and budget were, needless to say, restricted – to four months dedicated preparation time and an initial cost limit of £5,000. We were able to increase the budget by taking the exhibition proposal to the locally-based bakery company, Greggs. They were supportive of the serious elements of the exhibition and provided substantial additional funding. The time shortage was more difficult to offset. Despite some volunteer help with research, it was not possible to do much new oral history gathering, much to my regret.

The exhibition was planned thematically around a number of themes: A Start in Life; Staying Alive; Home and Family; Serious Fun; Happy



Smug gingerbread man with proud sponsors, curator and prizewinner Emma Bailey at South Shields Museum.

Days?; Children at Work; Angels or Devils? and Going to School. Each theme was treated using at least one graphic panel, carrying text, images and quotes from local written or oral sources; (usually) a setting; and (usually) paintings and objects. Ambient sound, lift-up flaps and a video were also used.

Bringing out the personal as opposed to the institutional history was one of the more difficult challenges. As suggested by the 1993 SHCG Annual Study Weekend, *Private Lives – Public Access*, this is the part that museums often find hardest to reach. I had read so much about the history of childcare – industrial schools, 'rescue' organisations, enforced emigration, official attitudes towards the maternal bond, and so on – that it was hard to see the individual child amongst the serried ranks of faces staring out from the photographs, let alone gain an insight into his or her thoughts or feelings. In imparting this official history, which *is* important for the impact it has on so many lives, I suspect I have been guilty of slipping into the 'field of discourse' of the official sources, and of letting their impersonal and authoritative language influence the tone of some of the text (3).

However, there are a number of ways in which the exhibition attempts to engage on a personal level with its visitors. The highlighted, most prominent piece of text on each graphic panel is a quote or quotes. With the exception of Oscar Wilde's succinct analysis of parent-child relations (4), all the quotes are from local sources, whether drawn from oral history recording or published memoir. Many of the photographs used have an individual, direct appeal, and I made sure that plenty of 1970s children were included, since these are the parents of today's children. The intimacies and difficulties of family relationships are hinted at through paintings of mother and child, father and baby, brother and sister. A series of lift-up flaps recount the (constructed) experiences of Elizabeth in the 1830s and Michael in the 1960s, told in the first person and present tense. It was important that the exhibition be relevant to today's children. In the 1960s schoolroom at the end, children are asked to fill in a questionnaire about their own likes and dislikes, clothes, pocket money and recreational habits. In South Shields, where the questionnaire was linked to a prize draw, about a thousand of them did so. The results are interesting and will repay further analysis. For example, to the question 'What do you like doing best when you're not at school?, 'playing out' was by far the most popular response: watching television was barely mentioned in answer to this question, although virtually every child was able to name their favourite television programme. Was this because they still prefer playing out, or because they regard watching television as a passive pastime, rather than something you actively 'do'?

The most striking single feature of the exhibition is a mock courtroom, complete with judge's chair, where you stand in a dock and press a button to select a child's name and date. A judge's voice booms out telling you what offence you have been found guilty of and your sentence. The examples, which are based on real cases, provoke a variety of reactions – from amazement and horror at the sentences meted out, to a degree of enthusiasm for the reintroduction of flogging. The courtroom is a successful device for focusing on the tricky issue of juvenile crime, engaging and entertaining both adults and children.

Other, simpler interactives are primarily aimed at children. They can crawl along a 'coalmine' tunnel or step inside a chimney, with a view to sweeping it. These activities are necessarily more enjoyable than the exploitation they are meant to represent, notwithstanding a frisson of fear in the darkest part of the tunnel! Relying on written information to communicate what exhibits are really about is ineffective where young children are concerned, but adults are often on hand to explain.

A device with a more direct impact is a simple wooden frame with a nine-inch square hole, showing the size of chimney flue children were required to climb: children put this over their heads but, thankfully, can't get it any further.

Care was taken not to market *A North East Childhood* simply as a toddlers' day out. However, Greggs, our sponsors, baked a giant six-foot gingerbread man as the exhibition mascot, and its arrival inevitably dominated some of the early publicity. The gingerbread man suffered minor nibbling at South Shields, his replacement was definitely being eaten at Gateshead, and in Newcastle Gingerbread Man 3 lasted less than a week. Meanwhile, 'Childhood' had won a British Telecom North of England Museums Award for Attracting New Audiences, and was inspiring more serious journalism, highlighting the content of the exhibition rather than its logo.

The new audiences attracted by the exhibition to South Shields Museum were Key Stage 1 school groups (the under-sevens) and childcare trainees.

Two children found starving in Newcastle in 1892, from the archives of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

The exhibition linked well with certain aspects of Key Stage 1 (History) of the National Curriculum, which emphasises everyday life in the past through topics that children can relate to. Childcare trainers were enthusiastic about the exhibition's approach and used it as a study visit for several groups of student nursery nurses. At Gateshead attendances generally were boosted: two unaccompanied regular Saturday morning visitors (boys of about eleven) told me they had been looking forward to the exhibition for weeks – fortunately they seemed quite satisfied when it finally appeared. At Newcastle, *A North East Childhood* ran in the People's Gallery alongside community exhibitions focusing on children.

Does the exhibition succeed in dealing adequately with difficult issues surrounding children? The starkest image of child abuse is over 100 years old, a studio portrait of two naked emaciated children found in Newcastle in 1892 by the NSPCC. Should I have found an image of an undernourished 1990s child? The video playing is *Woodbine Place*, a fly-on-the-wall film of children at play in a street in Bensham, Gateshead, filmed over several weeks in 1982. It shows tension and conflict as well as absorption and imagination. Modern images in the exhibition include a burnt-out classroom, the work of a child arsonist in Gateshead.

My biggest dilemma was how to handle the question of child murderers. Long before the Bulger case, Mary Bell, aged eleven, from Scotswood, Newcastle, had strangled two small boys who lived close by. In the end I decided not to include her image or her name, but discussed children who kill and are labelled 'pure evil' in the text. Newcastle Discovery Museum is close to where Mary Bell grew up and just over two miles away from the places where she had committed the murders. Museums in general, and this museum in particular, are very public arenas and much more dangerous places for the presentation of information and opinions than the pages of a book or Sunday magazine, with their self-selecting audience and intellectual assumptions. The attention I could have given to the case of Mary Bell would at best have been token, at worst gratuitous and counterproductive.

As I write, children are again at the forefront of political debate, with Jack Straw's announcement that Labour would encourage local initiatives to get children under the age of eleven indoors and off the streets by an agreed time at night. This has been seen on the one hand as an authoritarian repressive measure, and on the other as an attempt to get communities, indeed *society*, to take responsibility for the welfare of the children in our midst. Whether or not such an idea is workable remains to be seen; what is certain is that children will remain a crucial matter for society and social historians.

Notes

1. See Social History Curators Group *Journal*, No. 16 (1988–89).
2. The two books are compared in Anthony Burton's review of *Childhood Transformed* in *Social History in Museums*, Volume 21 (1994), pp. 61–2.
3. My reading of my own text was illuminated by Helen Coxall at the SHCG Seminar, *Writing Exhibition Text*, Liverpool, 3 June 1996.
4. 'Children begin by loving their parents; after a time they judge them; rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.', *A Woman of No Importance* (1893).

A Select Reading List on Childhood

This reading list is intended to update the one by Anthony Burton in Social History Curators Group *Journal*, No. 16 (1988–89), p. 11.

Bean, P. and Melville, J., *Lost Children of the Empire* (Unwin Hyman, 1989).

Burnett, J. (Ed.), *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (Allen Lane, 1982).

Central Statistical Office, *Social Focus on Children* (HMSO, 1994).

Cunningham, H., *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Blackwell, 1991).

Drake, M. (Ed.), *Time, Family and Community: Perspectives on Family and Community History* (Open University/Blackwell, 1994).

Holland, P., *What is a child? Popular images of childhood* (Virage, 1992).

Hopkins, E., *Childhood transformed: Working-class children in nineteenth century England* (Manchester University Press, 1994).

Humphries, S., *Hooligans or Rebels?: An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889–1930* (Blackwell, 1981).

Humphries, S., and Gordon, P., *A Labour of Love: The Experience of Parenthood in Britain 1900–1950* (Sidgwick and Jackson, 1993).

Humphries, S., Mack, J. and Perks, R., *A Century of Childhood* (Sidgwick and Jackson/Channel Four, 1988).

James, A. and Prout, A., *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (The Falmer Press, 1990).

Miles, R., *The Children We Deserve: Love and Hate in the Making of the Family* (Harper Collins, 1994).

Parker, R., *Away from Home* (Barnardos, 1990).

Rose, L., *The Erosion of Childhood* (Routledge, 1991).

Sherrington, C., *NSPCC: the first hundred years* (NSPCC, 1984).

Sereny, G., *The Case of Mary Bell: A Portrait of a Child who Murdered, with a new preface and appendix about the death of James Bulger* (Pimlico, 1995).

Strange, K. H., *Climbing Boys: a study of sweeps' apprentices 1773–1875* (Allison & Busby, 1982).

ALL MUFFINED OUT: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Lucy Harland

In 1995, Lucy Harland, a social history curator at Birmingham Museums, spent 3 months in New Zealand on a work exchange with the Curator of the Petone Settler's Museum, Wellington. Here are some impressions of her experience.

Cappuccinos, café lattes, espressos, flat whites and long blacks – the delights of New Zealand are many and varied. When the self-respecting Kiwi has dismounted from their mountain bike, finished their game of canoe polo or detached themselves from a bungy rope they will head off to the delights of their nearest caffeine haven, artfully decorated, full of vibrant primary-coloured crockery and complete with the gleaming chrome beauty of a state-of-the-art Gaggia coffee machine. Bliss. But woman cannot live on caffeine and muffins alone (believe me, I've tried).

> "A New Zealand curator with experience of working in a small community-based social history museum seeks a short-term work exchange with a like-minded museum".

In August 1995, almost two years after this small ad appeared in the Noticeboard section of Museums Journal, I found myself at Wellington airport on a cold winter's afternoon at the start of a three month work exchange. The exchange, between Birmingham Museum and the Petone Settler's Museum, was one of two arranged by David Mealing, Curator/Director of a small museum located on the foreshore of Wellington harbour on the North Island of New Zealand. Having spent three months exchanging with Brian Haigh of Bagshaw Museum, Batley, David worked in Birmingham during the summer of 1995 while I spent the antipodean winter working in a museum housed in a former 1930's bathing pavilion on the beach in Wellington.

The cultural delights of New Zealand can be both expected and surprising. I anticipated mountains, sea, the wind of Wellington and the cliché that life in New Zealand is like Britain in the 50's. I found earthquakes and volcanoes, café culture, multicoloured wooden houses, weird modern skyscrapers and a feeling that I really *was* at the other end of the earth. The full stop. Go any further and you start coming back round the other way. And what of Britain in the 50's? Well, in places, maybe more like the 70's. But at other times, there is the adventurous and pioneering style of a young country which picks and chooses the cultural traditions by which it will be influenced.

Perhaps more than stepping back in time, being in New Zealand is like following Alice through the looking glass – just when something appears to be the same, it turns out to be different. Just when I geared myself to find something different, it turned out to be the same. From parking meters, Coronation Street and magpies (black with white rather than vice versa, apparently) to city council politics and museums.

Museums in New Zealand

To contextualise: there are about 450 museums in New Zealand and c.450 professional museum staff (roughly the size of SHCG's membership). However, in a country with a population of 3.5 million nothing is on a very large scale. Spread this population over a country roughly the same size as Britain but on two islands and with mountainous landscapes, add the fact that this is *not* the land of the dual carriageway or the Intercity and the distances become much greater.

Many of New Zealand's administrative and museum systems are based on, or influenced by, those developed in Britain so there are many striking similarities between the organisational structures of the two countries. Museums are financed either through local or national government or are volunteer-run. Many professional staff work in small institutions with few staff and even fewer resources but there is a sense of energy and enthusiasm from many people and some interesting work is going on.

In New Zealand, the political and economic environment is right wing with high levels of privatisation, little trade union presence and decreasing social security (eg no paid maternity leave...). Museums need to advocate their role in society but suffer from the lack of a unified museums body – three main membership organisations exist but only

one can afford to employ (three) staff. This situation appears to be changing and the last conference of the Museums Association of Aotearoa New Zealand proposed the creation of a federation of museum organisations to provide a national voice on museum issues and to develop a registration scheme modelled on those in the UK and Australia. Otherwise, two key issues are affecting the current development of New Zealand's museums – the changing relationship with the indigenous Maori population and the creation of a new national Museum of New Zealand in the capital Wellington.

Bi-Culturalism

12% of New Zealand's population is of Maori descent. There has been a flourishing of Maori culture and identity in the last 10 years with the relationship between Maori and the dominant European culture being reassessed in legal, economic and social terms. There has been a linguistic revival and an increasingly strong Maori presence in the cultural scene. Legally, Maori rights are being asserted in reaction to the land deals made with previous generations of European settlers and many tribes are involved in land claims against the New Zealand government.

Among Maori there is a strong voice demanding the restitution of cultural property held within museums, property which has been divorced from its spiritual and historical identity by being kept in a museum – the Maori have a belief that treasures (taonga) need to be kept 'warm' in a spiritual sense and many people feel that this is lost when an object is in the museum's care. However, opinion within the Maori community is divided and there is an argument, put forward by a leading Maori politician, that the reassertion of social and economic parity with non-Maori is a more pressing issue than the return of treasures to the people, which would be a costly and time-consuming process.

Whatever the future of Maori taonga, it is certain that many museums are taking steps towards greater consultation and collaboration with Maori, exploring the relationship between museums and the tangata whenua (the people of the land, as the Maori refer to themselves) to ensure that Maori material is cared for and presented in a culturally sensitive manner. This includes establishing new ways of working ranging from the treatment of objects in storage and display to the creation of a bi-cultural management structure in the new Museum of New Zealand.

Although not providing a direct parallel with Britain, there were many similarities between the situation in New Zealand and the redefinition of the relationship between museums and the communities that they serve currently taking place in Britain. Museums in Britain are increasingly committed to working with people from all sections of society and to ensuring that people will find their culture and concerns represented in museums. As in New Zealand, this will inevitably mean an increasing commitment to empowering local communities to guide the museum's activities. It will also mean analysing traditional attitudes to collections and collecting and to exploring new ways of sharing access to and ownership of material culture. Both in New Zealand and in Britain, it is essential that museums gain community support in order to ensure that they continue to be culturally representative.

Museum of New Zealand Project – National and Local Museums

The new Museum of New Zealand, being built in Wellington, is attracting a great deal of attention and comment from New Zealand museum professionals. Due to open in 1998, the creation of the NZ$298 million (£124 million) museum is seen on the one hand as an exciting opportunity to define a New Zealand identity and on the other as a huge concentration of resources on a single project that can never represent the diversity found within the country.

There is obviously a huge discrepancy between the scale of this project and the level of activity possible in most other museums in New Zealand. At first, it was anticipated that the new museum would be able to provide a national lead role for the development of new working practises and policies which can be applied within other museums. However, this has not proved practical and as a consequence, a new organisation has been set up to provide these services. 'National Services' hopes to develop partnership projects to promote museums and to encourage enhanced performance but its aims are still in development and in late 1995, the organisation had not distributed any of its annual grant fund of NZ$1.8 million (£750,000).

At the time of my visit, the Museum was a huge concrete shell sitting on a prime harbourside location in downtown Wellington, accessible only to those wearing hard hats and the ubiquitous kiwi gumboots, so it is hard to say what it will feel like or how the history of New Zealand is to be told. For a waterside city, Wellington is surprisingly cut off from its harbour. In the past significant areas of waterfront land were reclaimed and covered with dockside warehousing and railway goods yards. The creation of the Museum is a key step in opening up the city to its harbour location and the building alone represents a significant statement in size, scale and location.

The key architectural concept is that the building is divided into two areas of unequal size, with the main entrance and orientation area running

through the building from front to back. One of the key features will be a Maori meeting house or marae which has been constructed on one of the upper levels of the building and which will be used for meetings, celebrations and events. The main staircase into the Museum will lead visitors up to this point, creating a sense of procession and ceremony. The new Museum is a grand statement in its physical presence alone and it will be interesting to see if the size and scale remain as intimidating once the displays and facilities have been installed.

The most obvious casualty of the new building project is the former National Museum and Art Gallery, situated about 3/4 mile away, up the hill and overlooking the new harbourside development. Housed in an older building, the Museum has the look and feel of many British municipal museums, with a strong presence for Art, Natural History and Maori collections but little in the way of context or social historical interpretation.

From my understanding, the new Museum maintains the traditional subject-based divisions and is physically divided according to its main themes of Art, History, Natural History and Maori culture, each being broken down into 3 or 4 main sub-themes. Each of the exhibition areas is being developed by a team of interpreters, curators, educators and designers, guided by a Project Leader who is a leading figure in their own field but not necessarily from a museum background. Significantly, many of those involved did not previously work for the former National Museum and Art Gallery and most seem to be working on temporary contracts which will terminate soon after opening. This presents an interesting situation where the plans made by the development teams for the continuing development of their gallery spaces and temporary exhibition programmes may not come to fruition, despite the fact that those plans have influenced the design and interpretation of the Museum. Despite this fact, the Museum is an extremely significant and ambitious project which should ensure that museums in New Zealand remain at the centre of the debate about the country and its national identity.

Petone Settlers Museum

On the other side of Wellington harbour from the new Museum of New Zealand, a 20 minute drive from the city centre, sits a tiny museum built within the walls of a 1930s bathing pavilion. Perhaps rather surprisingly or maybe just pragmatically, this was the way in which local residents chose to commemor-

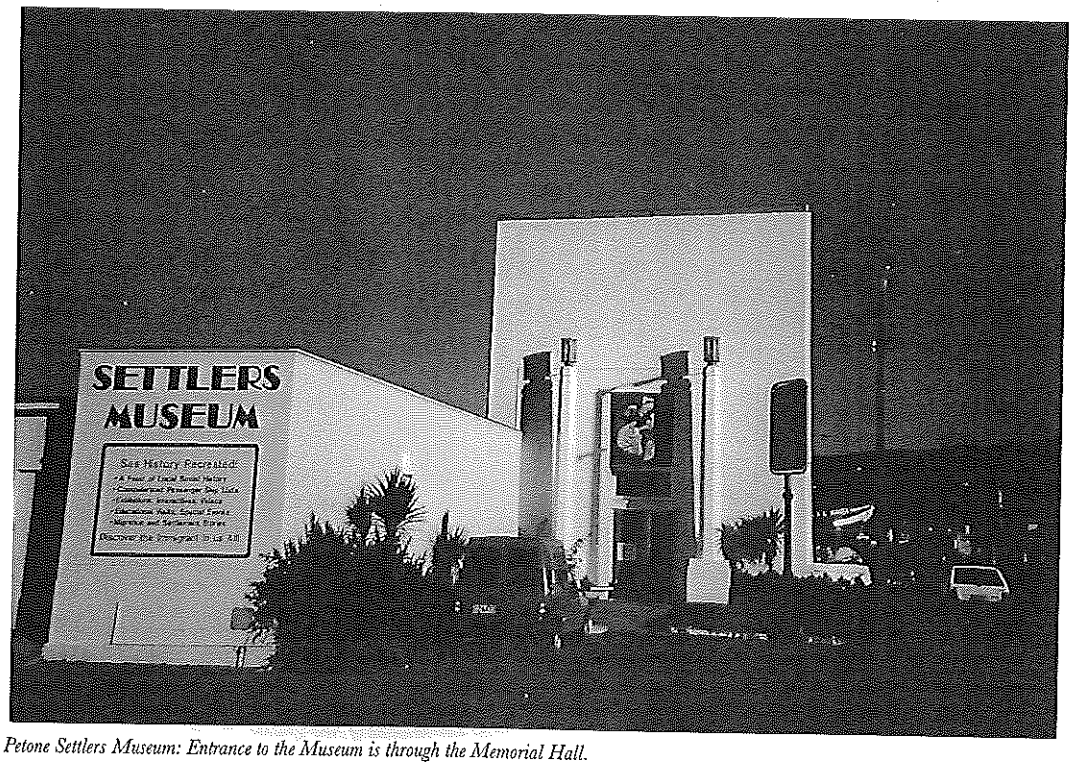
The Old National Museum and Art Gallery, Wellington. With the creation of the new Museum of New Zealand, this building will eventually close.

ate the spot where the first settlers landed in New Zealand back in 1830. With some imagination, it is easy to see why the captain of the first settler ship chose this site. The harbour is a wide open horse-shoe shape and opposite the entrance lies a flat valley floor, reaching up to distant hills some 30 miles away. On all other sides, the harbour is ringed with steep-sided hills and this was the only hospitable place to land. However, it soon became apparent that the valley was prone to flooding and the settlement was relocated to the current site of Wellington, on the bottom edge of the horse-shoe. Petone, the site of this first landing, developed as both a residential area and as the site of Wellington's market gardens, which later gave way to the small scale manufacturing industry which predominates today. The geography of this location still causes problems with occasional flooding and frequent chilly winds which blow straight in from the South Pole, through the harbour entrance and on to the beach at Petone.

The Petone Settlers Museum is somewhat akin to a tardis. Housed in three small rooms, it contains a huge variety of exhibits and mini exhibitions, both temporary and permanent. Visitors enter via the Memorial Hall, complete with restored murals and a marble map of New Zealand set into the floor. The first of the three rooms contains the glazed ticket booth of the former bathing pavilion which doubles as a reception desk and the Education Officer's office. Off each side of this room, a ramp leads into a further small gallery. Throughout the Museum, every available surface is used for displays and interpretation but the effect is not visually overwhelming. Each section reflects some aspect of the social history of the area: a comparison of life in Britain and New Zealand in the 1830s, the key industries in Petone, local sporting heroes and the experiences of recent immigrants. Models, low-tech interactives, graphics panels, large photographs, cased displays, a video player with choice of videos and an automated tape-slide presentation are all available to visitors.

As well as having a sophisticated level of display for such a small institution, the Museum is best known within the New Zealand museum profession for two key initiatives – a sophisticated computer database and a record of working with local settler communities.

Housed in a tiny room, designed to look, feel and sound like a cramped ship's cabin, is a touch-screen interactive computer database of the settlers who landed in Wellington between 1839 and 1899. Compiled by Registrar, Charles Callis, who designed and created the database in conjunction with IBM, the system allows visitors to search for details of



Petone Settlers Museum: Entrance to the Museum is through the Memorial Hall.

their ancestor's arrival by family or ship name. A huge amount of information has been input into the system direct from primary sources held in the National Archives. This now makes several week's worth of research accessible in a few minutes. The level of detail available from the archive, and therefore the database, varies according to the period of arrival but this is a unique system which provides useful information to the genealogy-hungry New Zealand population.

What marks the system out is that it has been designed to be enjoyable and easy to use, to a level beyond that which we might normally expect from a database – the system uses attractive graphic design and a nautical theme prevails, for example portholes are used for navigational commands. Searches are made easier by the use of an image of an old fashioned typewriter for visitors to type in search criteria and a voice which explains the system. Enquirers can print out information and images for a small charge per sheet (the printer is in the Museum's offices so staff can control this) and there is also a small charge for usage after a period of 3 minutes free access. While this serves to generate revenue, a certain amount of staff time has to be spent supervising the system, explaining the charges and collecting money. Further development of the database is continuing including the collection of family histories, supplied by members of the public, and the scanning of more images on to the system. This is an impressive resource, particularly for a small institution, and presents a good example of how primary source material can be made available to the public.

The other key focus of activity within the Petone Settlers Museum is a series of community based exhibition projects which have taken place over the last few years and which have involved close collaboration with the Greek, Polish and Italian communities. Through a special system of community contacts, the Museum has developed a close working relationship with each community in turn. Contact has generally been made through one person identified from within the ethnic minority community who has acted as a focal point for collecting photos, oral history contacts and objects which are all used in the displays. Each project has produced a publication, the last of which was co-financed by the Italian community about whom it was written. As each exhibition takes place, it provides a talking point for developing relationships with the next community group and an understanding of what the Museum can offer. The Museum is now receiving approaches from other groups who would like to be represented. The projects create close relationships and there is a high level of ownership of the exhibition and related events. Naturally this is happening on a smaller scale, both in terms of exhibition size and the size of the individual ethnic minority community involved, than would occur somewhere like Birmingham, but it is an interesting way of working. The Museum has generally chosen to work with one key community organisation within each ethnic minority and this also raises questions about how these organisations may represent only the more vociferous members of a particular ethnic group. However, the projects have been of lasting value and present a good example of what can be achieved by developing close working relationships with local communities.

Work Exchange: Setting Up

As museums operating on opposite sides of the world, the Petone Settlers Museum and Birmingham Museums present an interesting set of contrasts and comparisons both in philosophy and practise. However, when the exchange was initially agreed both curators only had a certain amount of knowledge about each other's institutions.

As there have been very few work exchanges undertaken by museum curators in this country, the framework for agreeing the terms and conditions of the exchange was created as the process developed. Once initial contact had been made, both curators exchanged extensive information about themselves and their organisations, including cv's, statements of professional philosophy and reasons for undertaking an exchange. In Birmingham, the idea was approved by museum management before being submitted to the Leisure Services Committee. Essential to getting approval was the support of my manager, Liz Frostick, and the fact that the exchange involved no additional expense for the City, as David and I received our normal salaries from our own employers.

For my part, the exchange was only made possible through the receipt of grant funding covering the cost of travel to New Zealand. A grant received from the British Council in Wellington helped to attract matching funding from the Museums & Galleries Commission's travel fund which now covers worldwide travel. David had a greater level of additional support from his employer but in a place where foreign travel is so expensive, financial support for this type of professional development is more common.

A whole range of practical issues had to be dealt with by each curator in relation to accommodation, visas, travel arrangements and banking details.*

*Footnote: This does not seem to be the appropriate place to provide specific advice or details but I would be happy to advise anyone undertaking an exchange.

Work Programmes

Work programmes were developed by each curator/museum before the exchange began and were discussed during a two week briefing in Birmingham prior to my departure for New Zealand. It was hoped that the work programmes would utilise existing skills in a new context and that the work carried out would be of direct use to the host museum.

Both David and I had a particular interest in developing ways of working with ethnic minority communities – the Petone Settler's Museum focuses on stories of migration and settlement and Birmingham Museum's current aim is to create new relationships with local Asian, Afro-Caribbean and Irish people.

My work at the Petone Settler's Museum had two elements. Firstly I became a full member of museum staff, participating in the broad range of activities taking place. Working closely with the museums staff (the Acting Director/Registrar and Education Officer), I carried out the full range of front-of-house functions from working on public programmes to answering queries and talking to visitors. Secondly, I was asked to develop research into the stories of post-War British migrants from Birmingham who had settled in the Wellington area. Working on this project presented interesting opportunities for understanding the experience of migration and settlement on a personal level – having made the journey to New Zealand from Britain, at least on a temporary basis, I felt a strong sense of empathy and understanding with those I was talking to.

During his time in Birmingham, David was asked to work on establishing the department's latest community project, working with Asian people living within the inner city area of Aston. David chose to develop a methodology which he had used with success in New Zealand of appointing (voluntary) community-based liaison officers who created contacts and collected information for the project.

In three months it was not possible to finish a substantial piece of work so we have both continued to develop the project started by our exchange partner. In the light of this, we both felt that it was important that our work was of direct relevance to the host museum's priorities.

A review session took place in Wellington at the end of the exchange, focusing on the work programmes which had been undertaken. It emerged that to avoid confusion, a detailed written outline of the work programme should be prepared for each exchange partner and that this should be made available to all those who are working with the exchange partners. This should provide a broad framework for the work undertaken but should also itemise details such as contacts which each person will be expected to make.

Networking

The exchange provided extensive opportunities for networking with colleagues in Wellington and beyond. The extent to which each exchange partner was involved in networking and visiting other museums was a personal choice but each host museum agreed to allow time for this as long as commitments in the museum were not affected.

I was able to attend several seminars and conferences and to present a variety of papers in different professional environments. Making contact with one of New Zealand's Museum Liaison Officers (effectively a one-person area museum service) created many opportunities to meet colleagues and to discuss current issues.

Within the host museums themselves there were many opportunities for sharing ideas and opinions. From my experience, I felt that the exchange had a significant impact on my two colleagues in Wellington both as a result of having a new colleague and as they gained personal development opportunities such as covering the absent Director's responsibilities.

Different Approaches

While an exchange is likely to be planned between two like-minded individuals, there are bound to be differences in working styles and personal preferences. I found that David and I both approached our assigned tasks in different ways than our exchange partner had anticipated. Each of us had to accept and work with the other person's methodology as we returned home to pick up on the project being developed. This also applied to networking opportunities – I chose to explore the wider museum context in which I was working, developing professional contacts and seeking out opportunities to attend conferences and visit other museums, while David preferred to concentrate wholly on the project on which he was working. This seems to be the key to a successful exchange – that the time and work is structured but that there is enough room and support for the individuals to pursue their own priorities for the exchange.

Was it worth it?

The exchange was a unique professional and personal development opportunity – it offered exposure to a new set of ideas, opinions, colleagues and working practises. Working with a different set of opportunities and problems in a contrasting environment provided a chance to evaluate my own work, philosophies and practises. I met a range of professional colleagues who were interested in talking about their museums and in sharing ideas,

providing me with a perspective on the context in which they work.

Travelling to the other side of the world alone is in itself an adventure and an exercise in self-reliance. I had the chance to get to know another country in a way that is not possible for the average tourist. I learnt about the ways of life, culture and national identity of a place that has been heavily influenced by my own culture but which has adapted and redefined that culture in response to the needs of the social, economic and cultural environment of the southern hemisphere. I found it particularly interesting to learn about a nation which is still in the process of defining itself, reconciling the needs of an indigenous population, established settlers and more recent immigrants.

Although the exchange partners benefited most directly, I feel that all those involved enjoyed the process and gained something from it. I would recommend the experience to anyone who wants to test their ideas in a new context and who is prepared to leap into the unknown.

SPORTS HISTORY, SPORTS MYTHS, AND SPORTS MUSEUMS

Wray Vamplew

The score in the 1883 Cup Final – Old Etonians 1 Blackburn Olympic 2 – is basic sports history but 'good' sports history should venture beyond match results. In this case it should be noted that a public-school Old Boys team had been beaten by a side which included a plumber, three weavers, a spinner and an iron-foundry worker: Blackburn's victory signalled that at the elite level the game was being taken over by working-class players. It also marked a geographical shift: the Cup had come North. Both factors were to lead to professionalism.

In arguing that sports history includes, but is more than, goals and batting averages, I would also stress that a major function of the sports historian is to set straight both the sporting and the historical record. Most forms of history develop myths but perhaps none moreso than sports history which, scorned for decades by academic historians, became the province of journalists and folklore.

One of the major beliefs in popular sports history is that sometime in the past there was a golden age; an era of gentlemanly amateurism in which the umpire's decision was accepted, the (few) professionals knew their place, crowds behaved themselves, and drugs, violence and sharp practice were non-existent. Modern sport, with its emphasis on money, is seen as changing all this. Yet what many forget, or more likely were never aware of, is that British sport was commercialised a long time ago: indeed gatemoney sports events were one of the economic success stories of the late nineteenth century.

Not only was sport commercialised over a century ago, it also faced problems and criticisms at the time because of its involvement with money. In soccer, clubs from less densely populated areas were sacrificed by their colleagues in order to raise aggregate attendances in the cartel known as the Football League. Professional sportsmen sometimes became more concerned with pay than play: in the most serious incident the Professional Footballers' Association threatened a national strike in support of the abolition of wage control. Bringing vast numbers of spectators together also led to crowd disorder: indeed the seeds of football hooliganism were sown well before the First World War.

We should also note that the 'Golden Age' was an era of class discrimination and sexism. Certainly the definitions of 'amateur' and 'professional' were social not economic concepts. You were not classed as a professional if you were a gentleman who rode (or rowed) against other gentlemen for high stake wagers. Wages, however, were another matter and the Amateur Rowing Association did not mince its words when it defined an amateur as not including anyone 'who was or had ever been by trade or employment for wages a mechanic, artisan or labourer.' And, of course, half the population of Britain was excluded from participation in sport simply by virtue of their gender.

Although a major role of sports historians is to challenge the myths associated with sport, there are many other items on the research agenda, particularly when it is acknowledged that sports history should venture beyond a concern with 'who won what, where and by how many'. Whilst still appreciating the value of such 'sportifacts', we should be seeking social, economic, political and cultural significance in our data.

A starting point is to note that sports organisations do not merely play games and, like more conventional businesses they are involved in purchasing equipment; renting or buying premises; recruiting, training and paying staff; promoting their product and, of course, generating revenue. Hence club histories could be approached as business histories and, more generally, the application of economic and business concepts to the markets for sport and sportspersons could develop a new view of sports history.

Greater recognition should be made of the typical sports experience: losing. Let's have histories of the also-rans, the fourth-place getters, the defunct clubs, and the apprentice jockeys who never lost their weight allowance. Such a collection would provide a counterbalance in a world generally obsessed with winning.

We need more mass biographies of sportspersons to assist the discussion of how class, religion and race influenced sports participation. We have an understanding of how access to sport was restricted via wealth, time and dress requirements, but religion, apart from Rangers versus Celtic and

the athletic aspects of Irish nationalism remains relatively untouched. Class and religion come together in muscular Christianity but we require an historical evaluation of whether the practice matched the rhetoric. For British sports historians, unlike their American counterparts, race remains an event not an ethnic concept.

Sport, as a highly male domain, has been a major method of gender fixing in Britain. Although some work has been contributed on women in sport, we have little on the creation of working-class masculinity and nothing on why some men rejected sport altogether. Violence, often seen as the distinctive male contribution to sport, has been well covered as regards the crowd, but the historical roots of on-field aggression remains to be documented.

Research on the spatial aspects of sport, in particular its socio-political geography, is required to put sport in its local, regional and national context. What could be more local than the club which, from the participant's point of view, is far more significant than elite level sport. Here we need less of the 'Barnsley's Best One Hundred Goals' genre and more on the club as a social institution, the site of much masculine voluntary work. Local sports history can have more than local relevance for, as sports historians develop their hypotheses about the nation's sports, the local level is surely the place to test their universality. At a broader geographical level it is a matter of concern that we have so little on sport in the great industrial cities, or on the urban/rural dichotomy in sporting matters. Jumping even wider we need analytical historical studies of sports nationalism. Here I mean not just the works on the Tartan Army but an examination of whether nationalism is a white male concept, an assessment of whether it is politicians, entrepreneurs or the media which sustain the idea, and an evaluation of how important sport is to Britain's (and England's, Scotland's, Yorkshire's...) self-image.

Sports museums clearly have a part to play, an opportunity yet to be fully grasped. Both Halls of Fame and commercial, club-oriented museums tend to emphasise ludic history to the exclusion of social history and generally eschew the controversial. Champions are presented without warts and championships without political context. Rags-to-riches examples abound but rarely the aftermath of the descent into poverty, alcoholism and social dysfunction. Curators may well argue that the fact that a star player was a wife-beater is no concern of theirs unless it affected his on-field performance, but this attitude reinforces the 'sport breeds good character' mythology. Such history with omissions may cater for the celebratory, nostalgic market but it is not 'good' history, sports or otherwise.

Sports museums could expand their client base if, in addition to presenting their exhibitions, they established themselves as research centres, hopefully developing a symbiotic relationship with sports historians. This has occurred in Australia where the Australian Gallery of Sport is located at the Melbourne Cricket Ground along with the Melbourne Cricket Club's vast library.

The Australian Gallery of Sport also provides a lesson for those in this country who shy away from the idea of a national sports museum on the grounds that we already have such institutions for tennis, golf and horseracing. There were existing halls of fame in Australia and no nation suffers more from interstate squabbles. Yet political difficulties can be overcome if there is sufficient drive, enthusiasm and, dare one add, money.

Sport is a significant aspect of Britain's social, political and economic activity. As historians, be we amateur, professional or curatorial, we should want to discover the origins of these links between sport and the wider community. In doing so, however, we need to prevent myths becoming conventional wisdom; to ask the 'whys' as well as the 'whats'; and, above all, to try not to lose the excitement and drama associated with sport for that is its great appeal, something sports historians occasionally forget when they turn from the reality to the record.

SPORTING LIFE

Jayne Tyler

An edited version of a paper given at the SHCG Sporting Life Seminar in Hull, October 1995.

Sport is a vital aspect of past and contemporary popular culture. Yet despite its popularity and importance in many people's lives sport is a relatively new theme for museum displays. This paper looks at some of the national developments of sports museums and exhibitions focusing largely on a major temporary exhibition, *Sporting Life*, recently opened in Hull.

Sports history and sports studies have only recently become widely accepted and recognised as academic disciplines. Museums have also been slow to incorporate this aspect of social history into their displays and exhibitions. Early museum collectors of the 19th century were uninterested in collecting material culture from Britain's sporting life apart from the traditional trophies and more valuable objects of local or national civic pride. It wasn't until the 1950s that sports museums began to develop in Britain and these were dedicated to one particular sport for example the MCC Museum at Lords Cricket Ground (1953), the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum (1977). Later museum developments included the Rugby Football Union Museum at Twickenham (1982) and the recent British Golf Museum at St Andrews (1990).

Alongside these developments have been the establishment of club museums and 'halls of fame' type displays in a variety of sports clubs from football and rugby clubs to boxing and athletics clubs in Britain. The Manchester United Museum was one of the first club museums of football to open in 1986 and there have been a succession of clubs opening their own museums since. The motivations for these museums are often very different from local authority, national or registered social history museums in that they are set up to present very positive, uncritical views of the club and a great emphasis is placed on maximising the profit and best PR for the individual club.

Temporary exhibitions on sport and sport sections in permanent social history galleries have increased in the '80s and '90s as the discipline of sports history has gained wider acceptance and social historians have recognised the popular appeal of presenting the theme of sport in a museum context. The *Sporting Bodies* exhibition at the Livesey Museum (1988), *More than a Game* football exhibition at the National Museum of Labour History (1991), *The Story of Sport* exhibition at Stevenage Museum (1992), *It's All in the Game* exhibition at Northampton Museums (1994) are all examples which have placed the subject of sport in a social context. The 'Museum of Liverpool Life' is a rare example of one social history museum which has deemed the subject of sport important enough to be included in its permanent displays. The reconstruction of one of the Grand National fences is one of the memorable features of the gallery which greets you as you turn a corner of the displays along with sections on Liverpool's rival football teams.

The presentation of sports history and interpretation of its material culture has therefore been approached in a number of ways by both registered and non-registered museums and sports clubs in Britain to date. In the '90s a number of developments have emerged to establish the first National Football Museum and the first National Museum of Sport in Britain although neither have been established as this goes to print. There has emerged particularly in the setting up of the first national football museum something of an overlap in the clubs/museum services aiming to gain national registered status. Developments are currently being progressed at The Football Museum in Preston, The British Museum of Football in Carlisle, Glasgow's Scottish Museum of Football as well as in Sheffield. Museums seem to be undergoing a unique period in their development where there are a number of groups all seeking to establish a national museum covering identical subjects and the outcome is very uncertain. Whether it will be a race to be the first open or whether agreed collecting areas and a code of ethics can be set up between these very diverse organisations remains to be seen.

The *Sporting Life* exhibition at the Old Grammar School Museum is the largest and longest running temporary exhibition on sport to be displayed in

Britain to date. It focuses on sport in Hull and nationally through a number of issues and themes including women and sport, sports fans, local heroes, sport and controversy, money and sport, sport and injury, sport and disability and champions. The exhibition uses a wide range of objects, photographs, fine art, oral history, simple interactives, video and audio interpretation to present the impact and importance of sport on people's lives. The objects displayed range from a local 1936 Olympic water polo player's swimming costume, a row of personalised seating from the old Craven Park Rugby League ground, Ryan Giggs' Manchester United football shirt and Clive Sullivan's (top Rugby League player who died in the 1980s) 'This is Your Life' book.

The theme of sport fitted in to our long term plan to research material for phase two of the *Story of Hull and its People*. It fitted our criteria in terms of the audience we were trying to attract. We felt that sport was a theme that touched everybody's lives whether it was as an international sports champion, active amateur, ardent fan or armchair spectator. It may be a cliche but sport is 'a great leveller' and certainly in terms of a museum display, it broke down many barriers which other exhibitions fail to do; it appealed across the age range, socio-economic background, cultural and ethnic divides, between disabled and non-disabled groups.

The research for the exhibition started with a massive press appeal for objects, photographs and experiences and a network of all sports clubs, centres and organisations in the area. The early securing of the loan of the 1948 Olympic Torch (the year the Olympics were last staged in Britain) and Linford Christie's spikes (when he broke the world 100 m sprint record in 1993) ensured a high profile for the exhibition and it encouraged other people to loan their treasured items. Sports memorabilia is very valuable and collectable material amongst sports enthusiasts and people needed to feel confident before they would lend their gold medal, cup final ticket or early sporting costume to us.

A key aspect in the structure of the exhibition was that it was issue-based rather than individual sports-based. *Sporting Life* was more interactive than a basic chronological or sports based exhibition and it positively encouraged people to think about sport and the issues involved. The introduction to the exhibition was at first a problem: we couldn't think how we could quantify, condense or sum up what sport was or meant. So instead we posed the question to the visitor, 'What is sport?'. We illustrated and expanded the range and breadth of the subject

"The Cyclone" – Barry McGuigan's Dressing Gown from one of his big fights in the 'Champions' section.

by asking questions, challenging presumptions and being delibrately provocative. For example, "Sport is an outlet for our natural aggression?" or "Sport has to be competitive?". One technique was stating a number of comparative sporting achievements in terms of distance, speed and costs. For example, "24,871 people took part in the 1990 London Marathon, 1,000,000 people play soccer in Britain every Sunday morning, 2,500,000 people watch the New York Marathon live, 1 person reached the South Pole in 1993 after a 50 day trek." We concluded by asking the visitor if their perception of sport had changed by the end of the exhibition. We felt it was important to make the visitor think and question first before they were swamped with the amount of objects and information in the exhibition.

One of the sections of the exhibition looks at sports fans, an important area of sports history and displays that is often missed out. Every sport has its fans whether it is packed crowds of cheering football supporters, tennis fans queuing overnight to secure a position at the Wimbledon final or dedicated loved ones standing on the sidelines of Sunday league football. One of my favourite quotes from fans interviewed in Hull was from the 1980 Rugby League Cup Final when, on a unique day in history, the two Hull teams met at Wembley:
"The 1980 cup final between Hull FC and Hull Kingston Rovers when Rovers beat Hull at Wembley was fantastic. It wouldn't have been so fantastic if they'd got beat, but being with the wife, a Hull supporter, made it all the sweeter! I left my feelings to the end, everything went up in the air, my hat, my scarf, everything." Hull KR Supporter. The popular myths surrounding this particular sporting event in Hull were and still are rife, it is said there were so many coach loads of fans leaving Hull on that Saturday that there was a big sign at the Humber Bridge saying, "Last one out switch the lights off". A video diary of the day's events, which played in the exhibition, includes a shot of the supposed last two men left in Hull on that day.

The interactive elements of the exhibition have proved particularly popular although they are very low tech and simple. There was an activity area with an exercise bicycle and other hands-on sports equipment and games; an information centre where local sports activities are advertised and a newspaper cuttings file on local and national sportsworthy events which was constantly updated. A video of regional sporting action played in this area, illustrat-

Hull FC, 'The Airlie Birds' and Hull Kingston Rovers, 'The Robins', Hull's two rival rugby league teams, sit side-by-side in the displays.

ing anything from the national Mini-Olympics held in Hull, and Judo gold medallist Karen Briggs training for the Olympics, to old black and white film footage from Hull City AFC players in the 1960s. Oral history handsets, quotation and notice boards, boxing, lift the hammer and drugs interactives and a touchy feely box, all helped to involve the public more actively in the exhibition. Distances measured out visually from when you entered the exhibition illustrated the world long jump and high jump records so the visitor was able to visualise physically the distance in front of them.

The main problems we encountered putting on *Sporting Life* were that we couldn't represent every sport in the area due to lack of contacts or material coming forward from sports such as climbing, squash and power boat racing. We made an early decision to exclude pub sports and games because we felt they would diversify the exhibition too much and space was limited. One area we didn't develop as much as we could have was the presentation of sports people with learning difficulties. The sport and disability section concentrated mainly on athletes with physical disabilities although one of the videos focused on the Mini-Olympics.

We received some criticism from a few sports historians and local collectors who wanted to see individual sports treated separately. Although this may have resulted in more in-depth detail on one particular sport, it would not have challenged the visitor in any way by putting objects from the same sport comfortably sitting together in one case or panel. By juxtaposing different sports and objects in themed areas the result is a more engaging exhibition and one which is more likely to attract a wider range of visitors.

A major problem with this exhibition was the quantity of objects and information which had to be confined to the display area and 150 words maximum per panel at a basic reading level of age 12. We overcame this to a certain extent by including Fact Files at the bottom of every panel with interesting facts and figures relating to the subject of the panel which pleased sports enthusiasts interested in scores and prices. Supplementary Fact Sheets are available for the major clubs in Hull to provide additional information which could never be fitted onto a panel but which local club fans and historians expected.

Despite the inevitable problems which every exhibition raises, *Sporting Life* has been extremely popular. Visitor figures are up and the comments book and quotations board are full of interesting and, on the whole, positive feedback on the displays.

People in Hull are proud of their sporting achievements, and an exhibition like this has helped to reinforce community identity. Sport is such an important part of people's culture and lives that the exhibition did help to give the local visitor a sense of their own history. Sports history is a very accessible part of people's lives and a subject which many people feel confident about as they have a good knowledge of the subject. The exhibition attracted a new and wide ranging audience and has hopefully encouraged these new visitors to return to the museum to see other exhibitions or activities which we present. The range of visitors *Sporting Life* has attracted is highlighted in two comments from the visitor book.

"Informative, well laid out and very nostalgic, Hull City and Hull FC made me proud and Clive Sullivan left a lump in my throat."

"It is very interesting and useful, also enjoyable and good fun I liked Giggsy's shirt and the exercise bike."

These comments indicate two very different audiences who were attracted to the exhibition with two different levels of interest. Overall we concluded that sport is an important part of popular culture and unlike many traditional museum displays in the range and diversity of the material culture it presents. Sport and sports history reveal colourful scenes and touch a range of human emotions – excitement, enjoyment, achievement, aggression, obsession, dedication, mourning and a sense of belonging.

MILITARY MEDALS FOR SOCIAL HISTORIANS

John Rumsby

Military history is not fashionable amongst social history curators. At the 1995 Museums Conference one of the panelists was hissed, I suggest only half in jest, when he confessed to working at the Imperial War Museum. I can remember during my Museums Diploma days a museum designer complaining bitterly that he had to design a display for the local regiment's collections, which he regarded as a "load of old military relics". To betray an interest in things military is often to be tainted by the suspicion that one is a militarist, a fascist, or a Blimp. This is a little unfair; Roman archaeologists are not automatically labelled as imperialists, nor the staff at the Nottingham Courts of Justice as criminals.

It must be admitted that too many regimental museums, especially those on MOD property, are still old-fashioned and depressing shrines, concentrating on The Regiment whilst the men who made up that Regiment (with the exception of a few high-ranking officers and VC-winners) remain invisible. The information contained in such museums cannot even be relied on for accuracy, since they often purvey unit legend unquestioningly. I recently saw in a regimental museum a 1796-pattern sword that was supposed to have been owned by James Wolfe (died 1757).

Over the last 25–30 years matters have improved, with many local authority museums taking over their local regimental collections, with the encouragement of the Army Museum's Ogilby Trust. In most of these, the traditional chronological, campaign-by-campaign approach has been retained, the main improvements being in display technique, security and, one hopes, in accuracy of information. In only a few cases, notably in the Museum of the Manchesters and the recently-opened displays of the 15th/19th Hussars at Newcastle [see the review article in this volume], has a social history approach been used, the regiment being interpreted as a community of people in much the same way as a town, city district, class or other sub-division of humanity might.

This new approach is extremely important. Most regimental museums were established at a time when the services were much more a part of everyday life: the armed services were much larger, two generations had served in World Wars and the next as National Servicemen (the last conscripts left as the Beatles arrived). A background knowledge of service life could therefore be assumed which has now disappeared. The collection and interpretation of artefacts and other contextual information about this disappearing, or at least fast-changing society, is therefore surely a legitimate part of the curator's task.

It is of course not only service museums that contain military artefacts. There can be very few local history museums that do not contain a miscellaneous collection of First World War bayonets, rifle volunteer buttons, 'souvenir' firearms and medals. "Home Front" material is usually well integrated into the social history collections, but objects illustrating the military service of local people are often curiously neglected.

Some of this neglect may be due to lack of interest, some is certainly the result of ignorance. Military artefacts are seen as a specialist subject, but this does have the advantage that there are many excellent reference books on the market. (The number of titles available also shows the level of public interest in the subject). Weapons, uniforms and medals, by their very nature, are standardised and easy to identify and document if the correct source book is available. This is not to say that the context should be ignored when acquiring such items.

Kirklees Museums contains two swords which can be identified, using the standard work on British army swords,[1] as 1796-pattern light cavalry sabres, of the type used by Yeomanry (volunteer cavalry) regiments. However, they entered the collections as part of the regalia of the "Weavers' Glory" Friendly Society of the local village of Skelmanthorpe, an interesting example of beating swords into ploughshares. A less happy example from the same collection is a rare other ranks uniform of the First World War. Identification of the insignia shows it to have been worn by a Corporal of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, a Lewis-gunner who served overseas for four years and was wounded three

times. What was not recorded at the time of its acquisition, and cannot now be extracted from the artefact itself, is the name of the original wearer.

Amongst the most neglected of military objects in local collections are medals. Even Stuart Davies, in his otherwise very useful article on numismatics and the historian,[2] dismissed military medals:

> "Few social historians have occasion to deal with military medals because their usefulness outside regimental displays is limited."

He does however, also make the point that curators should acquire some basic knowledge, if only to deal with public enquiries.

I would contend that there are a number of reasons why social historians should concern themselves with military medals. The first of these is that, like it or not, most museums have medals in their collections and that they need to be properly curated. A typical example might be Hull City Museums, with about 150 war medals.[3] At first glance this appears to be a haphazard accumulation. However, it includes many medals directly related to the Museum Service: a group awarded to a descendant of William Wilberforce, a George Medal awarded for saving Wilberforce House during an air-raid, and a number of medals awarded to museum staff. There are also several medals associated with local volunteers, territorials, ARP and Police, as well as an Albert Medal awarded for service under fire during the "North Sea Outrage".[4] Such a collection can shed local light on national or even international affairs, and deserves to be properly curated.

Medals and the Local Museum

Most museum visitors will be able to recognise a medal when they see one, but beyond that are likely to need some information or interpretation to enable them to appreciate what they are looking at. Medals are in fact very attractive objects, usually produced by the leading designers of their day, and these qualities should be highlighted in display. Long rows of medals with tiny labels underneath, the traditional method, does not inspire further interest. Display of a group or single medal, within an established context and with personal details of the recipient, is much more likely to spark a reaction in the viewer.

There are however, other museum users to be catered for. There is a large body of medal-collectors and other military enthusiasts in the country (and indeed world-wide). This group of users is likely to be very knowledgeable and have precise needs i.e. they will wish to know the name and all other available details of the recipient. Ex-service personnel will have their own special view of military displays, but will not necessarily be particularly knowledgeable about medals. Veterans can often be seen on memorial parades wearing their medals in an "incorrect" way; the meaning of the medals to a veteran is of course very different to that of the collector.

Local history has been revolutionised in recent years by the advent of the family historian. As colleagues in local history libraries can tell us, genealogical researchers often work to a very high standard, albeit within a narrow band, and they demand very specific information. Most family trees have some servicemen (occasionally women) amongst their branches, and the identification of medals (either the actual medals or from photographs of the recipient) is a useful skill to acquire.

These are direct demands that may be made on a museum's collection. But medals can be used to illustrate many aspects of local history and local people. Local regiments (militia, volunteers, yeomanry, territorials and service battalions) can take a significant place in local history. For example, a study of volunteer regiments of the Napoleonic War period shows that these can be divided into those raised to ward off the menace of French invasion, and those formed to suppress "riot and tumult" amongst the discontented working classes.[5] Artefacts for these early volunteers are rare, but often include silver marksmanship medals. Local Volunteer regiments reflected the socio-political enthusiasms of the classes from which they were recruited, and a study of them can be very informative.[6]

However, medals above all represent an individual's role in great events, whether it was an obscure campaign on the North West Frontier of India, or the mass slaughter of the Somme. Such an individual may be represented in the museum collection only by his or her medal, but they existed beyond their military service. For example, a medal may have been awarded to a man who was by trade a weaver, who joined the army during a trade depression, became a police constable after being discharged, and finished his days as a workhouse inmate.[7] For such people their service life continued to have an importance in shaping their lives. The Second World War Commemorations of the last two years have demonstrated that for many veterans this is still the case.

I hope that these remarks have demonstrated that military artefacts and medals in particular, do have a place in social history collections and local history museums. What follows is a guide for the non-specialist curation of medals in such a collection.

Collecting policy

It is essential that any museum contemplating collecting military medals should enter into an agreement, formal or informal, with their local regimental museum, to avoid unnecessary rivalry, and confusion amongst potential donors. There are,

generally speaking, enough medals to go round. The regimental collection should have first refusal of rare and important specimens; Victoria Crosses are the obvious example, but there may be others, such as the only medal awarded to the regiment for a particular campaign, or a medal associated with an artefact or historical resource already in the collection. Medals awarded to a local man serving in a non-local regiment pose a particular difficulty. Here the wishes of the donor (as long as they concur with the museum's own collecting policy) should of course be taken into account. In any case, it is a good policy to send a list of medals held to the relevant service museums; this helps researchers, and will often result in the exchange of useful information on the recipients.

A collecting policy should include provision for the collection of medals associated with local volunteer units, which may include Napoleonic volunteer units of all arms, rifle volunteers, yeomanry and territorial regiments. As has been already remarked, the study of such regiments can throw light on many local events, attitudes and individuals. Here, one must be wary in researching background information; old published local histories are often at their least accurate in dealing with military matters. Many original sources, such as muster rolls, correspondence about the raising of regiments etc., are still extant in local archives and the Public Record Office, and these can be used to check secondary accounts.

Some limit will normally have to be placed on the collection of medals awarded to local people, if only to avoid accumulating thousands of First World War medals. A representative collection of types of medal and local regiments, outstanding awards to local people and awards to people of local fame, should provide a framework. Special effort may be made to acquire medals to particular groups, such as women and ethnic minorities. A useful counter to the "My father didn't fight in the war to allow a bunch of foreigners into this country" attitude is to display an impressive group of medals awarded to a local immigrant from the Indian sub-continent who fought in the British-Indian army against European fascism or Japanese Imperialism.

As with any social history artefact, it is important to collect background information from the source of the donation. A group of medals will stand on its own, but gains greatly from a photograph, a cap badge or a pay-book. If the recipient is not still alive, a descendant may be willing to record their memories of him/her for the sound archive. The Liddle collection of the First World War at Leeds University is a good example of this "total" collecting, providing a superb resource for exhibitions, in-depth research and publication.

Documentation

The description of most military medals is extremely simple. Most have a standard name, and therefore a description such as "India General Service Medal 1895" is quite sufficient, obviating the need to describe the design of each face, colour of ribbon etc. However, anything that is unique to that medal does need to be noted. This may be the clasps denoting the campaigns or battles the recipient served in. The most important detail, which makes each medal unique, is the "naming" i.e. the rank, name, unit and sometimes number or other details, engraved or impressed around the rim of the medal, or in some cases, on the reverse.

This naming is normal with British military medals (other countries have developed nothing comparable). As well as giving details of the recipient, whose career can then be researched from other sources, it provides an important security check. No two medals should be named alike, and it is therefore extremely important to have a record of the exact text, type and method of naming, for example when tracing stolen medals.

Some British medals, notably some early Victorian campaign medals, and all Second World War medals, were issued un-named. Here it is of course especially important to note the recipient, if known at the time of acquisition. All groups should be kept together; some may contain both named and un-named medals. Beware the common practice of fraudulently adding naming to genuine un-named medals, in order to increase the market price. This may need an expert to spot.

Non-official military medals will need a more detailed description. These include early volunteer awards (usually for marksmanship), sports medals etc., which may be unique or issued only in small numbers. Many museums have examples of often beautifully engraved medals awarded to members of Napoleonic War period volunteer units. It is now recognised that many of these are Victorian forgeries, often using silver cut from old plate so that they bear 'genuine' hallmarks. A detailed provenance for the piece, or the opinion of an expert on Georgian silver, may be required to judge such pieces.

Marking and Security

As with coins, it is not normal practice to mark the accession number on medals, although sometimes the backstrap on a clasp may provide a suitable unobtrusive location. This lack of marking of course makes it especially important that a description that will uniquely identify the medal is included in the documentation.

Also in common with coins, medals present special security difficulties. It is obvious even to the casual visitor that medals are valuable. Most British

military medals are made of fine silver so that they have a meltdown value. They are therefore a target not only for specialised theft to order, but for the casual opportunist thief. Like all collectibles, they can provide an irresistible temptation to the most honest-seeming enquirer. A researcher should never be left alone with even a small group of medals. The value of comparatively common and otherwise identical medals can vary greatly with the recipients' careers (high rank, death in action, unusual regiment, etc), and this can provide a motive for substitution if the curator is unwary.

Good locks, toughened glass and all the normal high-security provisions should form part of the design brief for medal displays. This may dictate that all medals are concentrated in one case, but this also concentrates the target for a thief, and may not fit with the aims of the overall display concept.

Storage

The majority of British military medals are made of silver, but most other metals may be represented, such as gold, a wide variety of copper alloys, iron and steel, as well as enamels and the silk of the ribbon. The materials used for storage should therefore be incapable of interacting with any of these materials. Guides to coin storage are applicable to medals. Woods such as oak and cedar must be avoided, as well as composites such as chipboard, and textiles such as most dyed felts. Mahogany cabinets can be made to order, but are expensive, and the supply should be from sources which are subject to replanting.[8] Less traditional are ranges of plastic trays that build up into cabinets. The trays can be supplied with a wide choice of tray inserts, for all kinds of collectibles.[9] These are generally cheaper than wooden cabinets, and are claimed to be free of harmful compounds such as chlorines, acids and sulphurs. Medals are often supplied by dealers in individual plastic envelopes. These are useful for protection during transit, but should be avoided for long-term storage as the composition of the plastic is unknown and can build up harmful micro-climates.[10]

Identification

There are a number of standard reference books available, in many editions, on British military medals, so primary identification is not usually a problem.[11] Occasionally the nomenclature of these works varies slightly, so one should be picked to provide a list of conventions that can be used for documentation.[12] Different types of "medals" need to be recognised, although the exact definitions often overlap.

Orders are awards given (usually by the sovereign) for meritorious service which may or may not be of a military nature. They originate in Orders of Knighthood and usually have different "divisions". Some orders have both civil and military divisions (e.g. the Order of the British Empire).

Decorations are generally given for bravery in action (e.g. Victoria Cross, Military Medal) but some are given for bravery not in the presence of an enemy (e.g. George Cross, Air Force Cross). A repeat award of a decoration is shown by a Bar mounted above the suspender.

Campaign Medals are awarded to all who take part in a particular campaign. They may bear Clasps (bars mounted above the suspender) giving the names of particular battles or theatres of operation in which the recipient participated.

General Service Medals are intended for award in areas subject to frequent minor campaigns, such as India and Africa, or to particular services. The medal was not awarded alone, but always with a clasp; other clasps could be issued later. Thus an "India General Service Medal 1895" (there were four IGS Medals issued in 1854, 1895, 1908 and 1936 due to the frequent North West Frontier Campaigns) might bear clasps for 'Relief of Chitral 1895', 'Punjab Frontier 1897–98' and 'Waziristan 1901–2'. The most frequently-worn medal today is the all-services 'General Service Medal 1962', sometimes called the 'Campaign Service Medal' from the legend on the reverse. This may bear a number of clasps for small campaigns such as 'Borneo' (1966) or 'Dhofar' (1976), but the most common clasp is 'Northern Ireland', awarded from 1969 onwards. Meritorious conduct meriting an official "Mention in Dispatches" (MID) is denoted on 20th century medals by an oak-leaf insignia sewn to the ribbon of the relevant campaign medal, in bronze for the two World Wars (different patterns) or in silver for other medals.

Service Medals are awarded for long service and good conduct (or for "eighteen years of undetected crime" as army legend would have it). Different branches of the services have or had their own e.g. Volunteer Long Service Medal, RAF Long Service and Good Conduct Medal.

Foreign Medals are often found in British groups, awarded by allied nations. These are almost always un-named, so care must be taken not to separate them from the group.

Miniature Medals are replicas, approximately half the size of officially-issued medals. They are worn by officers and senior non-commissioned officers with Mess Dress (military evening dress). They are usually un-named, and so care should be taken not to lose any associations with a recipient. Miniatures are not official issues, being supplied by medallists or military tailors, and a recipient may own more than one set.

Ribbons

Ribbons can provide a quick identification for a medal, using colour charts found in several of the

reference books. However, some medals share the same design of ribbon e.g. several early Indian campaign medals share the so-called "Indian" ribbon of red, yellow, blue and white, supposedly symbolising the rising sun.

Medals for the two World Wars were sent out in boxes with the ribbons unmounted, and, despite instructions being included, many veterans mounted the ribbons wrongly, and wore them thus. It is an interesting question as to whether such medals should be displayed "as worn" even when this is officially incorrect!

The design of many ribbons is symbolic e.g. the Africa Star (1940–43) has stripes of red (army), dark blue (navy) and light blue (air force) on pale buff (desert sand).

It should be noted that many medals awarded by the United Nations are only differentiated by their ribbon, indicating the area of operations where the recipient served.

Where an original ribbon is in poor condition, it can be replaced for display, but the original should be kept. Replicas of all ribbons are available from medal dealers, and the more recent ones from military tailors as well. The weave and dimensions on these replacements may not exactly replicate the original however.

Memorial Plaques

These are common artefacts to find in museum collections or as enquiries from the public. They consist of a flat circular bronze plaque 120 mm in diameter, with a design in low relief of Britannia standing on the left holding out a wreath, with a lion in the foreground. Around the edge is the legend "He (or she) died for freedom and honour". The name of the deceased appears in a plain rectangle; the full name is given, but no rank or unit.

These plaques were given by the government after the First World War to the next-of-kin of every person in the British forces to have "fallen in the War". It included those who died of disease or accident as well as those killed in action. It is estimated that anything up to 1,355,000 were produced, of which about 600 commemorate women.

These plaques are often accompanied by the medals of the deceased serviceman/woman, and occasionally all are mounted in a frame with a photograph, badges etc. Alternatively, the plaque may be in its original brown cardboard wrapping, 'OHMS' envelope and accompanying memorial scroll and letter.[13]

Research

Once the medal itself has been identified, the naming provides scope for research in two main directions, the regiment and the recipient. Identifying numbers for individuals were brought into use in the early nineteenth century, but were not generally used on medals until the 1850s. They are, of course, very useful in distinguishing between common names. The naming of Officers' medals do not include their numbers. The number is followed by the rank, although this is often omitted where the rank is Private or its equivalent, especially in the earlier campaign medals.

Bronze Memorial Plaque as presented to the next-of-kin of all men and women who died in the First World War. Private Frank Horsfall was born in Marsden near Huddersfield, and served in the 2/5th Battalion, Duke of Wellington's Regiment. He was reported missing, presumably killed, on 3 May 1917. (Tolson Museum collection).

The name follows next, including full forename in earlier medals. This is followed by the unit (regiment, corps, ship or service). Abbreviations of units can cause problems, but the standard books on medals usually contain enough information to identify them. It is however, worth noting here that the majority of infantry regiments were numbered consecutively, often with subsidiary titles, up until 1881. In that year reforms led to the loss of numbers, the "pairing" of regiments and sometimes an alteration to titles. For example, the 68th (Durham) Light Infantry and the 106th (Bombay) Light Infantry (the latter so called from its origins as a regiment of the Honorable East India Company) were paired in 1881 to become the 1st and 2nd Battalions Durham Light Infantry.

Research into the role of the unit in the campaign represented by the medal can be pursued through the appropriate museum. These are listed in Terence Wise's book.[14] Bibliographies of British and Imperial regiments have been published[15] and these provide useful guides to sources.

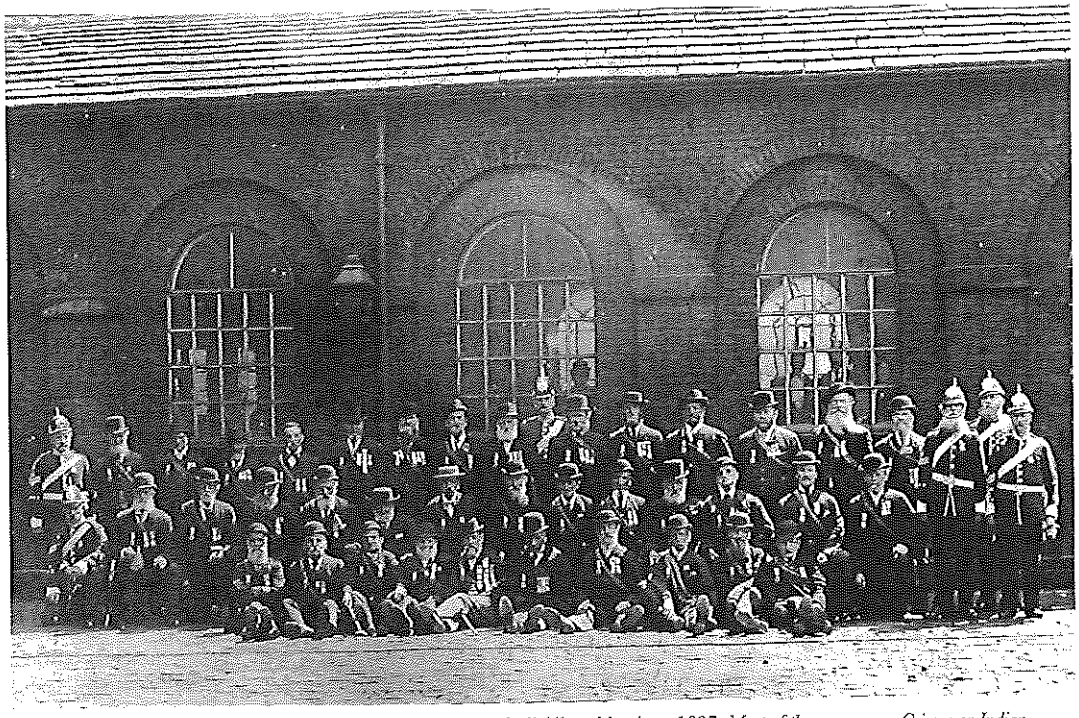
The growth in the pursuit of family history over the last few years has meant that there are a large number of guides to sources for research into individual medal recipients.[16] Some of the best of these have been published by the Public Records Office, which houses the most important primary sources. Snippets of information about a recipient may be scattered through many documents, and only the three main sources will be mentioned here.

Entitlement to a medal can often be checked by reference to the Medal Rolls held at the PRO (WO.100 for the Army, ADM.171 for the Navy, WO.329 and ADM.171 for the RAF and RNAS). These occasionally give a few other details such as a date of discharge or death. Some rolls for particular campaigns or regiments have been published.

The second source is the Muster Rolls, compiled quarterly and bound annually as a record of pay due to the servicemen. The Rolls record when a man joined the unit (often with some background details of age, place of birth, etc), where he was each month (with the unit, in hospital, prison, on detachment, etc) and when and why he left the unit. Promotions, demotions, fines, desertions and family details are noted, where these affect the man's pay. The task of following a man's career through the Muster Rolls is slow and laborious but can be very rewarding.

A quicker but less sure method for the army is through the "Soldiers' Documents" (PRO Reference WO.97). These were assembled at the time of the soldier's discharge for the use of the board of officers who decided what pension the man would receive. These documents exist for only about 60% of men (the rate being higher later in the nineteenth century as the soldier's lot improved), but provide a great mass of detail. They sometimes include the man's original enlistment papers, and always include a full list of service, units, promotions and demotions, a medical report, character, number of times entered into the Defaulters' Book or court-martialled, and a full personal description (age, height, hair and eye colour, complexion, distinguishing marks and sometimes even chest size!). Sometimes noted are next-of-kin, and place of intended residence, useful pointers for research into the recipient's post-service life.

Such details can add life to a display of medals, and have been used with great effect for example at the Durham Light Infantry Museum in Durham.



Huddersfield Veterans, photographed outside the Cloth Hall during the Jubilee celebrations, 1897. Most of these men were Crimea or Indian Mutiny veterans; many of their medals are identifiable from the photograph. The man seated to the left of centre at the front was a fraud, who was not entitled to the medals he wears. The uniformed men are from the local Volunteer Battalion; the long service medal worn by the officer at the back is now in the Tolson Museum Collection. Note the apparent range of prosperity in these veterans (Tolson Museum Collection).

Publication

Publication is obviously an aid to researchers, who will be aware of the major medal collections in the national and regimental museums, but will have no knowledge of smaller collections in local museums, especially when these are not on display. Publication can also prevent fraud. There have been cases of un-named medals being fraudulently named to recipients who are on the official medal roll but whose genuine, named medal is in a museum collection and therefore not likely to come onto the market. The publication of a note in the relevant journal, or of a complete catalogue of the collection, can help to expose such deceits.[17]

Admittedly such a catalogue is unlikely to be a best-seller, and may have to be produced in a cheap format. Alternatively, publication in the Journal of the Orders and Medals Research Society is a possibility, and will certainly reach a large proportion of the specialised medal audience.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this article has demonstrated that military medals do have a useful place in local history collections, and that they deserve to be curated properly. No curator can expect to be an expert in every field, so the above notes have been offered in an attempt to provide sufficient reference material to enable the non-specialist to cope with those annoying little bits of silver on gaudy ribbons lurking at the back of the stores.

Societies and Journals

Orders and Medals Research Society. The main society for medals, based in Britain but with an international membership. Publishes a quarterly Journal with research results, news of new medals, etc.
Secretary: NI Brooks
21 Colonels Lane, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 8RH

Society for Army Historical Research. Publishes a quarterly Journal with scholarly articles on all aspects of military history, including a few on medals.
Address: c/o National Army Museum
Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, London SW3 4HT

Military Historical Society. Publishes a quarterly Bulletin, concentrating on collecting badges and insignia, but with some articles on medals.
Secretary: JWF Gaylor
30 Edgeborough Way, Bromley, Kent BR1 2VA

Naval Historical Collectors and Research Association
Secretary: David Rolfe
Flat 3, 19 Royal Crescent, London W11 4SL

Medal News. A popular journal, available on subscription, published monthly with news and views as well as articles on all aspects of medals and their collection.

Notes

1. Robson, B., *Swords of the British Army: The Regulation Patterns, 1788–1914* (1975).
2. Davies, S., "Numismatics and the Historian in Museums" in *SHCG Journal*, Vol. 11 (1983).
3. Rumsby, J. H., *Catalogue of British War Medals* (Hull City Museums, 1981).
4. On 21–22 October 1904 a Russian fleet, on its way to fight the Japanese, mistook the Hull Trawler fleet for a squadron of Japanese gunboats and opened fire, sinking several.
5. Rumsby, J. H., "'Attentive Soldiers and Good Citizens': Militia, Volunteers and Military Service in the Huddersfield District 1757–1957", in Haigh, E.A. (Ed.) *Huddersfield: A Most Handsome Town* (1992).
6. See for example Beckitt, I. F. W., *Riflemen Form: A Study of the Rifle Volunteer Movement*, 1859–1908 (1982).
7. A quarter of the veterans who formed the Huddersfield and District Army Veterans Association in 1897 lived in local workhouses.
8. Peter Nichols, 3 Norman Road, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN37 6NH Tel: (01424) 436682, offer a range of cabinets and can make to order.
9. The most common make is Lindner; details available from Lindner Publications Ltd, 26 Queen Street, Cubbington, Leamington Spa, Warwicks CV32 7NA Tel: (01926) 425026.
10. Various references to coin storage, applicable to medals, are available e.g. MacDowall, D. W., *Coin Collections: their preservation, classification and presentation* (UNESCO 1978); *Manual of Curatorship* (1984) Chapter 39; and for a useful quick guide Green, L. R., "The Storage of Coins and Medals" *Spink's Numismatic Circular* (May, 1991) Reprinted in *Medal News* (February, 1992).
11. The two most useful are: Joslin, E. C., Litherland, A. R., and Simpkin, B. T., *British Battles and Medals* (6th Edn, 1988). This itself is a completely revised edition of Gordon, L. L., *British Battles and Medals* (5th Edn, 1979), which is still useful; Spink's *Catalogue of British Orders, Decorations and Medals* (1990). An excellent general guide is Purves, A. A., *Collecting Medals and Decorations* (3rd Edn, 1978). Other more specialised works include: Hieronymussen, P., *Orders, Medals and Decorations of Britain and Europe (1975)* – excellent colour illustrations; useful for identifying foreign orders awarded to British subjects; Abbott, P. E., and Tamplin, J. M. A., *British Gallantry Awards* (2nd Edn, 1981) – the standard work; Buzzell, N., *The Register of the Victoria Cross* (2nd Edn, 1988) – a complete list of VC-winners, giving dates of birth and death, unit, memorials, town/country connec-

tions, account of dead and photograph; Douglas-Morris, K., *Naval Medals 1793–1856* (1987) and *Naval Medals 1857–1880* (1994); Cole, H. N., *Coronation and Royal Commemorative Medals 1887–1977* (1977).

12. The author will be happy to supply copies of the conventions used by Kirklees Museums Service.

13. See articles by McInnes I., and Tamplin, J. M. A., in *Journal of the Orders and Medals Research Society* 16(3) (1977), pp. 162–165.

14. Wise, T., *A Guide to Military Museums and other places of Military Interest* (1992).

15. White, A. S., *A Bibliography of Regimental Histories of the British Army* (1988); Parkins, R., *Regiments and Corps of the British Empire and Commonwealth: A Critical Bibliography* (1994).

16. See for example, Fowler, S., *Army Records for Family Historians* (PRO Readers' Guide No: 2, 1992); Watts, M. J., and Watts, C. T., *My Ancestor was in the British Army: How can I find out more about him?* (Society of Genealogists, 1992); Farrington, A., *Guide to the Records of the India Office Military Department* (nd); Roger, N. A. M., *Naval Records for Genealogists* (1988); Watts, C. T., and Watts, M. J., *My Ancestor was a Merchant Seaman: How can I find out more about him?* (Society of Genealogists, 1991); Holding, N., *The Location of British Army Records: A National Directory of World War I Sources* (Federation of Family History Societies, 1984); Holding, N., *More Sources of World War I Army Ancestry* (Federation of Family History Societies, 2nd Edn, 1991); The Public Record Office also has available a number of guides and free leaflets, including: *British Army Records as Sources for Biography and Genealogy, Records of Medals and First World War: Indexes to Medal Entitlement.*

17. 'A Barrister', "A Medal Fraud", *Journal of the Orders and Medals Research Society* 16(3) (1977) – supplement; Rumsby, J. H., "Kelat-i-Ghilzle Medal", ibid., 27(4) (1988) p. 275.

A SOLDIER'S LIFE

A Review of a regimental gallery at Newcastle Discovery Museum

Lloyd Langley

"What I remember about it was not having enough to eat, the food being blooming awful and not really knowing why I was there". Roy Cook, 15th/19th The King's Royal Hussars, 1957.

Introduction

On the 18th May 1995, H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester opened the new display *A Soldier's Life* at Newcastle Discovery Museum, situated in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This is one of a new breed of Regimental displays which attempts to make Regimental History more accessible to existing and potential audiences. It is also a good example of what can be achieved when a Regimental Museum and a Local Authority Museum enter into a constructive partnership.

The display features the history of two regiments; The 15th/19th The King's Royal Hussars and The Northumberland Hussars. Recent changes in the army have seen the former amalgamate with the 13th/18th Royal Hussars to form the Light Dragoons and the Northumberland Hussars become part of the Queens Own Yeomanry.

Regimental Museums have traditionally appealed to a specialist audience, rather than to a broader general public. Until recent times this did not seem to unduly alarm regimental curators. Ministry of Defence cuts, however, pose a potential threat to such collections. The Museum and Galleries Commission (MGC) report 'Museums and the Armed Services' in 1990 highlighted the issues. The report looked at the activities, organisation and development of armed services museums and looked at how they could be improved to reach their full potential. The report recognised the important part such museums play in educating the public about the role of the armed services in society.

It recommended that such museums should try to broaden their support by seeking help from other museums in order to share expertise. The final conclusion of the report was that such museums make an important contribution, not only to maintaining the traditions of the armed services, but also to scholarship and the communication of knowledge.

The need to re-evaluate interpretation has become paramount. It is no longer sufficient merely to appeal to serving soldiers, veterans and their families or even to people with an interest in military history as a hobby. *A Soldier's Life* seeks to resolve this problem by taking a social history approach rather than concentrating on campaigns or the hardware of war. It is both an explanation of the role of the soldier and a commemoration of regimental achievements.

Presenting Arms

Alisdair Wilson, Principal Keeper of History at Tyne and Wear Museums, was faced with the daunting task of managing, not only the physical transfer of three thousand objects to a new venue, but also negotiating with the Regiment over the new interpretation of those collections.

The situation that existed prior to the move is perhaps all too familiar to social history and regimental curators alike. The collections were housed on split sites, several miles apart. The geographical separation and limited space at both venues hampered cohesive explanations. Physical access to the buildings was difficult, one part being housed in a working military barracks, the other in a seventeenth century building cut off by major roads and a network of rather threatening subways. The displays were also on the first floor of each building, accessible only by stairs. Ironically, this would have excluded wheelchair-bound war veterans from visiting! Despite these drawbacks and much to the credit of those concerned, the collections attained registered status, reflecting the high standard of care. Unfortunately, visitor figures remained inadequate.

Preliminary research was carried out by Alisdair Wilson and his colleague Ian Whitehead, Assistant Keeper of Science and Industry. The first step was for Wilson and Whitehead to look closely at the current state of interpretation in similar museums. They visited twelve Regimental Museums in four days, looking specifically at gallery layout and visitor reaction. They concluded that in many respects Regimental Museums appeared irrelevant to non-

specialist visitors. Galleries which included more recent conflicts tended to attract greater interest. People could relate more easily to the Second World War, rather than to the Napoleonic or Crimean wars.

Displays which concentrate on rows of weapons, uniforms and medals often fail to hold the attention of the casual visitor. Whilst it was considered important to appeal to a broader public, it was also essential not to lose the existing audience which could be very traditional in its tastes. Although the emphasis would be on a social history approach to a soldier's life, it was necessary that the honour and pride of the regiment should not be compromised in any way. Despite these many problems it is believed that a fair balance has been achieved.

The Preliminary Bombardment

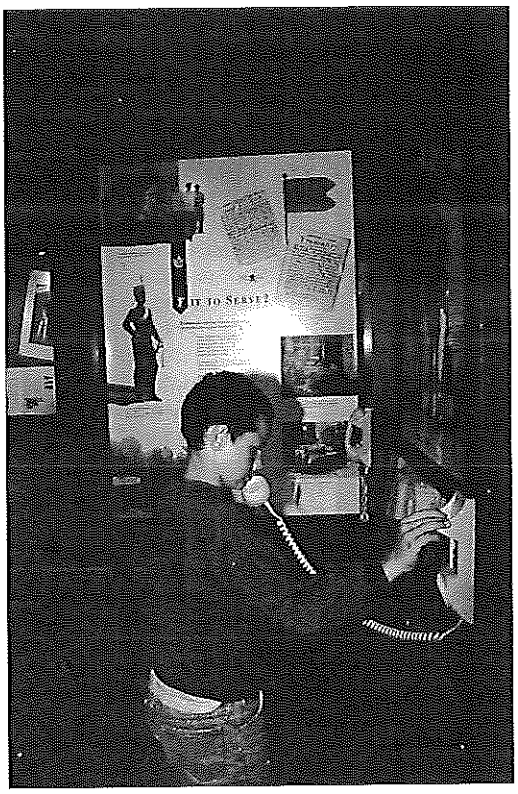
A Soldier's Life is located in Blandford House, a former C.W.S. Warehouse and office building built at the turn of the century. Together with Industrial, Social History, Maritime and Costume and Textile collections this forms what is now known as Newcastle Discovery Museum.

It is possible for the disabled, elderly or merely lazy person to use a lift to gain access to all floors of the building, thus immediately improving access to the collections. The visitor is made to feel at home in the regimental section with a tastefully designed foyer area. Here there are comfortable chairs for children and adults, large jigsaw puzzles and magazines. Around the walls are paintings which depict army life, such as 'Passing the Doctor' or 'The Veteran' by a famous north eastern painter, Ralph Hedley (1848–1913). The labels have a good point size and are readable and informative.

Having entered into this area the visitor is confronted with a mock barrack gate. Beyond the gate can be glimpsed an array of hussar uniforms, drums and flags. An olive green carpet with rank stripes pointing in the direction of travel entice the visitor to venture through the gateway. The sounds of a regimental band and parade ground commands engage the curiosity. Finally, the words 'Fall in and find out!' written on the wall draw the visitor through the gate.

A Surprise Attack

What lies beyond the gateway may come as a surprise to the visitor. There are no trench re-constructions, helmets with bullet holes in them or bloodied rags. Instead the display focuses on the soldier as a human being, as an individual within the military establishment, someone who has a family life, enjoys hobbies, or a drink with his fellow soldiers. These are areas that are seldom touched on by the more traditional regimental museums which will tell the visitor about the calibre of a gun, but very little about the individual who carried it.



A visitor to the gallery listens to accounts of their experiences from recruits.

The display area is 125 square metres and the exhibition was designed by Redman Design Associates. Long and narrow in shape, wall cases zig-zag in and out so that the element of surprise is sustained. In the centre are two large island display cases clad in timber to give the effect of wooden barrack huts. The passageways are broad enough for wheelchairs and allow visitors to stand back and look at the displays.

The Strategy

The displays follow the careers of soldiers from recruitment to death or retirement. Each subject is dealt with in a way which allows the visitor to make comparisons. For example, under the heading of education we learn that numeracy and literacy were not essential in the early nineteenth century army, whereas they obviously are in the army of today. Links are also made with changes in Victorian education which led to a more educated working class. Whilst the emphasis is on the twentieth century, earlier periods of the regimental history are not neglected. The main headings include; 'Goodbye to Civvy Street', 'Specialist Training', 'Life in

Peacetime', 'Marry me Marry the Army', 'In Aid of the Civil Power', 'Foreign Field', 'For Valour', and 'Death or Retirement.' There are a number of tableaux which include a talking horse; a mess scene; the story of Northumberland Hussar, Armorer Patterson and his fiancée, Daisy Barrasford and a barrack room bed with kit, set out according to Army regulations.

All of the interpretive panels are well illustrated and informative, but despite efforts to condense the huge amount of information available, it could be argued that there is still too much to read. Nevertheless, the text manages to be objective, yet thought provoking. Sections on Northern Ireland and Bosnia bring the displays up to the present day. Newscuttings giving news about the regiment today are pinned up on a board.

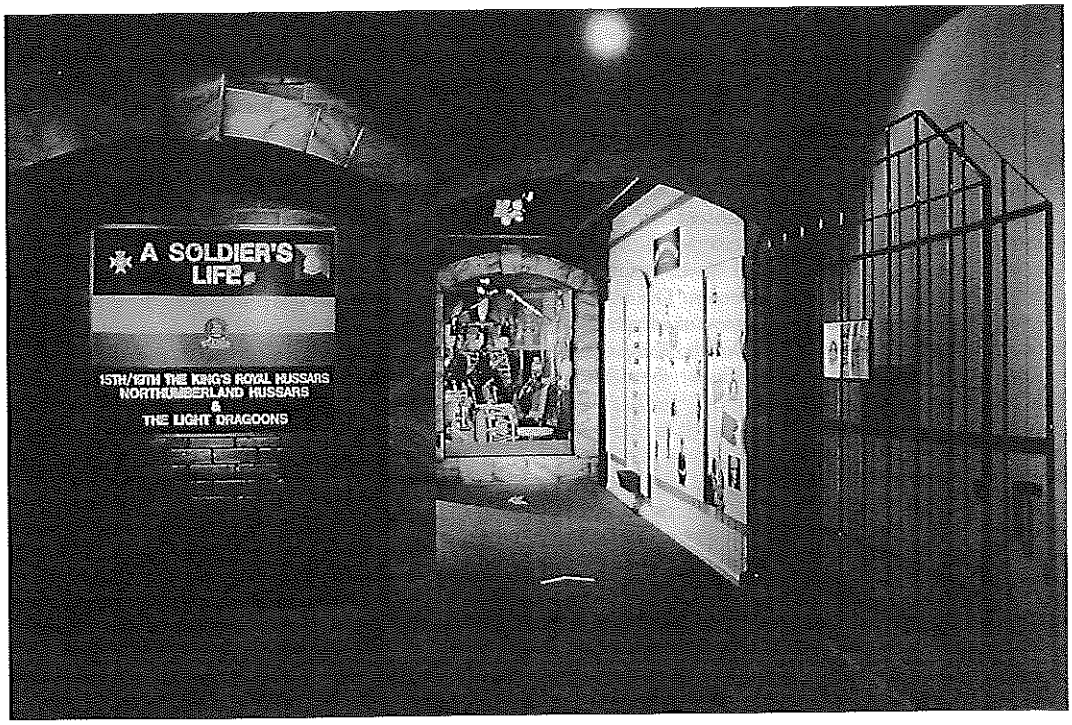
Quotations from written and oral sources which relate individual experiences are encapsulated in different coloured flags or guidons as the cavalry call them. This physical separation from the main body of the text allows the script to flow more easily and adds additional colour to the panels.

Running throughout the gallery are a series of interactives aimed at children, but unashamedly enjoyed by adults too. There are magnetic boards on which to assemble figures of soldiers, peepholes, flaps to lift or panels to slide. There is even a game to play for up to four players. Visitors may stand in front of a mirror and listen to the orders of a drill sergeant. A listening post allows the visitor to hear the accounts of three soldiers. We learn for example, that a certain Samuel Taylor Coleridge joined the 15th Hussars to escape his debtors using the inconspicuous name of Silas Tomkin Comberbache!

The 'talking horse' is perhaps the most surprising exhibit. Standing in the stables on the day of his last parade in 1938 after which horses were replaced with tanks, it tells the visitor that there is more to army life than killing and introduces some of the themes that will appear in the gallery. It ends with a rendition of the regimental song! All this without moving its lips! Odd though it may seem, the visitors seem to accept it as perfectly normal. The important thing is that it engages their interest in the subject from the outset.

Perhaps all of these activities seem a little trivial? War is not, after all, a frivolous matter. However, the serious side of military life is not neglected.

There is a re-creation of a First World War hospital scene telling the story of two real people, Nurse Daisy Barrasford and Lieutenant Armorer Patterson. This features an audio-visual display which touches on the feelings Daisy had after Armorer went missing in action. Elsewhere panels



'A Soldiers Life'. Entrance to the gallery at Newcastle Discovery Museum

deal with disease, brutal army punishments and death.

In some respects the gallery seems almost too clean, a far cry from the mud and blood of Flanders or the Napoleonic, Crimean or South African battlefields. There are however, plenty of military museums that deal with this aspect of a soldier's life. This alternative approach allows for diversity in interpretation.

The opportunity for in-depth research is afforded by the research library attached to the gallery. Here Ralph Thompson, a former sergeant in the 15th/19th The King's Royal Hussars, is available to answer enquiries. The collection of medals can also be seen here on request. Thompson is the physical presence which links regiment and Tyne and Wear Museums. He also features on one of the oral history recordings in the gallery. There he states that his first reaction on seeing the barracks as a new recruit was "My God what have I let myself in for here!"

Evaluation – Beating the Retreat or Sounding the Charge?

To date evaluation of the gallery has been largely positive. A group of Social History Curators, who visited it shortly after it opened last year were generally pleased with the finished result and thought that it was a refreshing new approach. Among the negative comments were that it dealt with some subjects in insufficient depth and that perhaps the horrors of war had been under emphasised.

However, the curators involved in setting up the gallery have tried to tackle a wide range of subjects and it would be impossible to give equal depth to everything. If it encourages the visitors to do their own reading or to visit further museums then perhaps that is all one can expect.

On the whole the Regiment's response has been the most surprising. Despite initial scepticism, members of the Regiment have given it their seal of approval. The regimental collection has come through a metamorphosis with its integrity in tact!

Having informally observed the public in the gallery it does seem as if they spend plenty of time looking at the exhibits and using the interactives. A formal evaluation involving visitors themselves would no doubt be beneficial. The comments in the visitor book have so far been very positive. They include; 'interesting and revealing of what life was like for a soldier', 'Brilliant. Plenty to see and do', 'evoked many memories' and 'poignant thoughts'. Other comments reflect similar attitudes to the display.

On the whole the partnership between the Regiment and Tyne and Wear Museums has been very constructive. A continuous dialogue has produced a gallery which is more than just a mere compromise. Whilst not pretending to be the definitive word on interpreting regimental collections, it does illustrate that when opportunities arise for reorganisation the results can be very positive. Permanent displays like *A Soldier's Life* may not appeal to the bloodthirsty or to those who are fascinated by the technical data of military hardware. However, the gallery can help introduce new and old generations to a more objective, rounded and challenging understanding of what it meant to be a soldier.

A Reading List

Beresford, C., 'Soldiering on', *Museums Journal*, Vol 91, number 11 (November 1991), p. 27.

Forty, G., 'The Tank Museum; A case history', *Museums Journal*, Vol 87, number 2 (September, 1987), pp. 73–75.

Hudson, K., 'Letter from the museum of the Army', *Museums Journal*, Vol 91, number 11 (November, 1991), p. 17.

Museums and Galleries Commission, *The Museums of the Armed Services, Report of A Working Party* (M.G.C., 1990).

Newton, P., 'Military Museums and the Army Museums Ogilby Trust', *Museums Journal*, Vol 87, number 2 (September, 1987), pp. 67–69.

Preece, G., 'The Museum of the Manchesters; A Social and Regimental History', *Museums Journal*, Vol 87, number 2 (September, 1987), pp. 71–72.

Richards, D., 'Soldiering on', *Museums Journal*, Vol 91, number 11 (November, 1991), p. 24.

Robertson, I., 'Soldiering on', *Museums Journal*, Vol 91, number 11 (November, 1991), p. 26.

Tod, A., 'Soldiering on', *Museums Journal*, Vol 91, number 11 (November, 1991), p. 25.

Wilkinson, S. and Hughes, I., 'Soldiering on', *Museums Journal*, Vol 91, number 11 (November, 1991), pp. 23–28.

Wilson, A., 'Interpreting Regimental History', *Heritage Development* (September, 1995), pp. 43–45.

Wood, S., 'Military Museums: The National Perspective', *Museums Journal*, Vol. 87, no 2 (September, 1987), pp. 65–6.

TALKING SHOP: AN ORAL HISTORY OF RETAILING IN THE HARBOROUGH AREA DURING THE 20TH CENTURY.

Sam Mullins and David Stockdale. (Alan Sutton/Leicestershire Museums. 1994.)

Mark Suggitt

We all do it don't we? We have to, it's an integral part of modern living. For some a pleasure, a ritualised performance, for others a pain, a necessary waste of time. Let's go SHOPPING! In this case, let's go to Market Harborough in Leicestershire, a small market town in the middle of fox-hunting country, surrounded by rolling ridge and furrow, woods and small villages. Not the most obvious place for a detailed look at the retailing revolution of the 20th century you may think. Why here? The immediate answer is that since its opening, just over ten years ago the Harborough Museum has enjoyed enlightened curatorship in the (differing) shapes of Sam Mullins and Steph Mastoris. The result has led to a focused view of recording life in the town through a research led approach to the collection of artefacts, documents and memories, usually leading to a linked exhibition or book.

After looking at Housing and Domestic Service, I suppose retailing was next on the list, for the obvious reason that buying and selling is what made *Market* Harborough, and what keeps it going today. The authors also see the work as a case study, and the fact that there is little published work on retailing, especially since the 1930s, makes it a potentially important study. The decision to examine the 20th century experience also allows the authors to record the process of change within retailing and the rise of the multiple store. This also presents the opportunity, as museum people, to look at the relationships between people, either as shoppers or staffers, and things. So much for the shopping list, let's go out and examine the goods... This book is sub-titled "an Oral History" and follows the now established format of introductory text by the author(s) and extensive use of quotes from interviewees, whose thoughts and words are woven into the narrative. This always raises the question of control and manipulation by the "professionals", armed with the power of editorship. Few published oral histories preface the answer with the question, and most quotations are answers to the historian's leading questions. The Oral Historian has to be aware that whatever they ask of their interviewees helps create a key part of their evidence, which is later subjected to the processes of selecting and interpreting to construct narrative and meaning. *Talking Shop* treads this path carefully, allowing lengthy quotations when needed, and often linking them with contemporary documentary and photographic evidence. All the interviewees are named within the text and the bibliography. What emerges is a dialogue between the authors, who, as historians, have come to get the information, and the people who want to talk shop.

Their talk is divided into three sections. The first is *Serving the Town*. In 1900 Market Harborough was a small market town with some manufacturing; it still is today. Unlike many places, the 20th century has been relatively kind to it. There are some physical changes, of course, but what this study reveals are the greater social changes. In 1900 it had a mixture of large and small shops, most of which were owned by local people, who, if they did not live over the shop, lived nearby. Some of the wealthier shopkeepers played an active role in the political and religious life of the town. For some shops there were strong links with the local country houses. Where you shopped depended on a number of things apart from income; namely class, religion and the level of service. The shops were mainly counter-service, with a hierarchical staff structure geared to making the customer feel both special and comfortable: "*That was the first thing I had to learn, how to be pleasant.*"

Other incentives, especially for the working class population were clubs and credit. In a rural area delivery was also important. To maintain customer loyalty, shops competed on service rather than price.

The second section looks at life "*Behind the Counter*" contrasting the world of the employee with that of the small shopkeeper. What is helpful is that in all the chapters each story is taken up to date, and equal weight is given to shop-workers from the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s, including managers, check-out operators and Asian shopkeepers. The testimony records varying wages and conditions, long hours and indifference to trade unions. It also charts the decline of local "trade" influence on the social and

political life of the town, as shopkeepers gave way to short stay career managers who reported to distant head offices. The social status of the shop-worker has also changed, earlier in the century it was often seen as a profession, with higher status than factory or farm work. The final section, "*The Trades*" takes a closer look at the people and processes involved in the local Co-op, Grocers, Butchers, Bakers and Clothing shops.

The result of these deeper case studies is to see a pattern of shopping responding to social and cultural change. The independent shop, be it clothing or food, competing with the emerging multiple store, and either surviving or going under or being taken over. Market Harborough was never in the vanguard of events, but saw local multiples arrive, only be taken over by larger, national ones. The oral testimony charts the loss of some skills that have taken place, as well as the new ones that have to be learnt. Butchers may not kill their own locally grown meat, but they have to master computer based stock-taking.

The book ends rather abruptly. I was expecting Mullins and Stockdale to draw some threads together and place Market Harborough within a regional or national context. Perhaps they intended to, but due to the long gap between the research (1986) and the publication, (1994) never did. Perhaps they did not want to appear judgmental. We are left with the messages of the Harborians, a mixture of cautious optimism for the future and regret for a world which only John Major thinks will ever come back. Nevertheless, the central theme of change remains, some of it quite uncomfortable, with a few bankruptcies and unhappy take-overs along the way. This is one of the strengths of the book. By taking on a subject like retailing the authors have entered a dialogue with people whose ways of working have been profoundly effected by the social and cultural shifts of modern Britain.

This then, is a valuable case study. Although a little parochial at times, in many respects Market Harborough could be anywhere, a witness to what some would call the "Decline of the British High Street". Small towns are prone to it; a homogenised line of national multiples, shoe-shops, clothes-shops, chemists, at least half a dozen estate agents and charity shops, the boredom occasionally relieved by a real butchers or a junk shop. Throw in a by-pass and an out of town mall and even that could go. Late 20th century Market Harborough is like many other towns, it has its mix of the above, and is fighting to keep going. Smaller specialist shops carry on many of the traditions of the forebears, albeit modified for today's tastes; deli counters and wholesome breads. In an age when so much is the same, regional delicacies survive so long as they have a niche market. *Talking Shop* also shows that although Harborough is typical in many respects, there are, thankfully, local variations and personalities which do give it an identity.

Shopping today relies on cars, price, image, marketing, and interestingly, a return to higher levels of service. In his postscript, Steph Mastoris notes that Harborough's recent Sainsbury's and its companion shopping centre, "St Mary's Place" is built on the site of the old livestock market; "*Market Harborough has indeed become 'Supermarket Harborough'*". As I read of the growing on-line 24 hour Internet shopping services with 24 hour delivery, I wonder whether "Supermarket" Harborough will have as long a run as "Market" Harborough. That will be something else to "talk shop" about in a few years time.

PRESENTING ARMS: MUSEUM REPRESENTATION OF BRITISH MILITARY HISTORY, 1660–1900

Peter Thwaites (Leicester University Press 1996. H/b, 175 pp, 20 illustrations.)

John Rumsby

On a recent trip to Oxford, I saw in a publicity leaflet on "discovering the treasures of Oxfordshire" a section on a regimental museum. The facilities looked fine: car park, toilets, guided tours, even disabled access. The opening times, however, were listed as "Weekdays by telephone appointment". What, I thought, is such a museum for? Obviously it was not for the general public; only a really determined enthusiast, or an ex-member of the regiment on a personal pilgrimage is going to actually make an appointment to visit a museum. One of the advantages of Peter Thwaites' excellent and much-needed book is that it addresses this problem of who military museums were, and are, for. Early in the book he traces their history, and in so doing examines the original, often mixed, motivations for their foundations. Many regimental and national collections were formed after the First World War, and no doubt that war to end all wars was an incentive to see each regiment's part properly and proudly recorded. The same motive led to a tremendous outburst of publication of regimental histories in the 1920s. Other motives included the display of trophies, the proper care of haphazardly-acquired regimental mess collections, and the instruction of new recruits, to instil regimental pride. This last incentive is one which I feel Thwaites underplays. One of the strengths claimed by the British army (and one which good commanders have tried to encourage since Caesar's Tenth Legion) is the sense of belonging to a recognizable "family", which is of course superior to any other similar grouping. Many of the artefacts and associated customs found in military museums relate to this sense of a unit being different from, and better than, any other: the back-badge of the Gloucesters, the wreath of immortelles on the Colours of the South Wales Borderers, the rifle regiments fixing "swords" instead of bayonets, every unit has its cherished eccentricity. In battle this loyalty translates into not letting your mates down even in the worst and most dangerous situations.

So the military museum had and often still does have a role in instilling this sense of "family" in past and present members of the unit. Those interested in military history or some technological aspect of it (weapons, uniform, badges, medals) can also be easily catered for. But museums of this old style usually offer little to the general visitor with no background knowledge or link to the regiment. Such an approach catering only for the specialist and enthusiast is not unique to military museums, of course. Transport museums especially often follow the same line, providing technical information for the car or train buff but with little background "social history" context.

Despite some efforts to abolish the concept of the supremacy of the object, most museums still base their interpretive approach on the collections they hold, seeking to fill gaps where possible by further acquisitions or the use of other sources such as oral history. Differential survival of artefacts is a problem that all curators face, and Thwaites' chapter on the nature of military collections examines this problem and the reasons for it in telling detail. We are all familiar with the costume collection heavily biased towards late nineteenth century female middle class wear, with little to represent the working class. In military collections this translates into a preponderance of officers' uniforms, with little for the other ranks. Officers' clothes were of better quality, and they could afford to keep them after use for sentimental reasons; other ranks wore theirs until they wore out, as is illustrated by a print in George Walker's "Costume of Yorkshire" depicting a miner wearing an old regimental jacket at the pithead.

This patchiness of military collections Thwaite sees, in his final chapter on The Way Forward, as a particular handicap in developing new roles for military museums. However, I feel that he is being unduly pessimistic here, since, as has been remarked, this same patchiness is apparent in many social history collections, and if anything has acted as an incentive to new interpretive techniques. Indeed, one of the most valuable lessons of this book for the non-military specialist is how much of the experience of military museums can be paralleled in other social history collections. If read with an open mind the book should help to bring military museums into the mainstream of historical studies. Indeed it

could be argued in one sense at least that military history leads the field, since as well as regimental museums, the equivalent of local history museums, there are several national military museums, whereas there is no national museum of social history. Of course, each of these "national" museums has its own specialist field and, as Thwaites points out, there is no museum one can visit that explores such questions as the relationship between the national economy and the cost of the armed forces, or the use of those forces to maintain the political status quo. The civil/military interface is, however, starting to receive examination at a local level, such as in the Museum of the Manchesters.

Asked to describe a typical regimental museum display, many people would conjure up a picture of miscellaneous old cases, handwritten labels (often in-accurate), and displays crammed with repetitive relics meaningful only to the cognoscenti. There are still such displays, just as there are in other branches of the profession, but military displays run through the whole range of techniques up to the latest styles. Often this reflects their status as army-run or local authority supported. Thwaites covers this variety of display rather briefly, although it is perhaps asking too much for a book covering such a wide field to include a comprehensive critique of displays in over 200 national and local museums. In this sense, the book was published too soon (though in every other sense it is long overdue), since its author could not include a discussion of the displays of the new Royal Armouries at Leeds. These are an interesting amalgam of old-style object-in-case with technical label, and imaginative video and live re-enactments. Although this dichotomy probably reflects contrasting attitudes within the Armouries' staff, the result solves the problem of providing both for the knowledgeable specialist and the general, family visitor towards whom the Armouries' publicity is apparently aimed. The Armouries provide a lesson not only for military collections, but for all other subject museums as well.

As the author points out, and has been seen in the pages of the Museums Journal recently, the future of those military museums still in Ministry of Defence hands is precarious. It is ironic that the "peace dividend" of cuts in defence spending should threaten a major educational resource, touching on local, national and international history. The approach of the Army Museums Ogilby Trust must surely be correct, to bring the smaller museums, often without even a recognizable local regiment due to defence cuts, into local authority care on a county by county basis. The entrenched attitudes that hinder this approach are by no means all on the military side; the loss of the York and Lancaster Regimental collections from Sheffield is a case in point. Peter Thwaite's knowledgeable, understanding and readable book is a most useful tool in the breaking down of such prejudices and barriers, and should be read by all who regard themselves as curators of social history.

SOCIAL HISTORY PUBLICATIONS IN MUSEUMS

Nigel Wright

This Listing is an attempt to catalogue and publicise material published by museums with a social history theme. Information is supplied by individual museums in response to a request form distributed with the Social History Curator's Group Newsletter. The Listing is intended to bring local history, site-specific material and collections based publications to a larger audience. Such material can be interesting in its own right but can also prove useful from a methodological viewpoint. At the very least the information in the Listing will provide curators with some idea of what their colleagues in other parts of the country are publishing. For the first time this year we have had information on publications from colleagues in the Netherlands.

Publications are listed under the Museum Service and includes information on whether the publication has an index or bibliography as well as an indication of the target readership. Unless otherwise indicated the publisher is the same as the Museum Service and the readership is for a general adult market. For more information on any of the publications please contact the Museum Service in question.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Waiting for the All Clear: Life in Birmingham during the Second World War.
Pack; 26 pp; £5.00
Readership: Primary KS2 (but also KS3)
A history resource pack looking at life on the Home Front: 29 A4 photos, 30 minute compilation audio cassette; pupil question sheets and teacher's notes.

Dundee Art Gallery and Museum

Dundee at Work (Scotland in Old Photographs)
Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd.
Book; 128 pp; £7.99
Dundee's industrial past (food production; textiles; engineering and shipbuilding; street life; local military; social and public services; mass production and retail) through photographic collections.

Cultures of the World
Book; 156 pp; £14.95; Index; bibliography
Illustrated catalogue of Dundee Museum's world history collections (over 2,500 items).

Gwynedd Museums Service

Amgueddfa Lloyd George Museum
Beric Tempest
Booklet; 32 pp; £3.00
Outlines the history of the Museum and Highgate, his boyhood home and introduces Lloyd George and the Lloyd George village.

National Museums of Scotland

Bairns: Scottish Children in Photographs
Book; 152 pp; £9.99 pb £14.99 hb; bibliography
A themed history of Scottish childhood in photographs (roughly 1870–1980).

Spinning and Weaving
Book; 84 pp; £4.99; bibliography
Textile production from the earliest times to full scale industry in Scotland.

Sporting Scotland
Book; 96 pp; £4.99; bibliography
Scotland's sporting life, from country sports to Highland Games.

Fishing and Whaling
Book; 88 pp; £4.99; bibliography
The vital contribution of fishing to the life and culture of Scotland.

Farming
Book: 88 pp; £4.99; bibliography
Stone age farmers via 18th century change to modern day mechanisation in Scotland.

National Museums and Galleries in Wales

The Great Western Railway in Wales
Book; 76 pp; £3.50; bibliography
Photographic portrait of GWR in Wales.

Welsh Steel
Book; 60 pp; £4.00
A pictorial history of the Welsh steel industry 1862–1994

Welsh Ports of the Great Western Railway
Book; 63 pp; £4.40
A photographic record of the Welsh ports owned by the GWR (1923–1947).

Sailors and Ships
Pack; 70 pp; £5.00
Readership: primary
National Curriculum pack on museum resources relevant to the history curriculum on ships and sailors. Contact Museum Education Service, Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum.

Transport
Pack; 60 pp; £5.00
Readership: primary
Education pack includes children's worksheets and teacher information sheets, highlighting the museum's transport collection (Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum).

Wales in the 1930s
Pack; 25 pp; £2.00
Readership: primary
Pack produced for KS1 and 2 pupils in conjunction with a temporary exhibition.

Communications
Pack; 30 pp; £3.50
Readership: primary
Use of historical material and museum artefacts on the subject of communications.

Coal
Pack; 60 pp; £5.00
Readership: primary
Education pack to act as an introduction to the life and times of coal miners in the valleys of South Wales.

North Somerset Museum Service

(Woodspring Museum service at time of publication.)

Weston-super-Mare – A Pictorial History
Book; 126 pp; £12.95
Phillimore
181 B&W photos of the town of Weston-super-Mare from 1866–1967 plus a 10 page brief history of the town.

National Museum of Labour History (Pump House People's History Museum)

Women's Suffrage
Pack; 20 pp (plus 15 source sheets and 2 posters); £7.50
Readership: KS2 and 3
A resource pack with material from the archives and displays for use in the classroom. National coverage.

The Banner's Booklet
Booklet; 20 pp; £3.75; index
General background information on banners with information for ideas for classroom activities.

Care of Trade Union Banners
Booklet; 8 pp; £1.50
Reasons why banners deteriorate, how to store, pack, handle and look after banners for non-museum professionals.

Rotherham Museums Service

The Building Stones of Rotherham – a Geological Guide
Book; 31 pp plus Appendix; £3.25; bibliography
A guided walk with information about stones used in historic buildings of Rotherham and general geological information.

Rotherham 1945 – A Time to Remember
Book; 60 pp; £5.25; bibliography
Reminiscences of local people's wartime experiences in their own words, with photographic illustrations.

Scottish Museums Council

Earth Art: Case Study 1
Book; 28 pp; £5.00; bibliography
A Museums Education Initiative project on creating a teaching resource for Art and Design based on a travelling exhibition of contemporary studio ceramics.

In Touch with the Past: Case Study 2
Book; 40 pp; £5.00; bibliography
Museums Education Initiative project on activities and workstations relating to an archaeological exhibition, providing for the Environmental Studies curriculum.

5-14 at Grampian Transport Museum: Case Study 3
Book; 36 pp; £5.00; bibliography
Museums Education Initiative project to create teaching resources and structured school visits and follow up work relating collections to Environmental Studies and Mathematics.

Hands-on at Marischal Museum: Case Study 4
Book; 32 pp; £5.00; bibliography
A Museums Education Initiative examining the effectiveness of object handling work, especially in the context of the Environmental Studies curriculum.

A Wider World: Collections of Foreign Ethnography in Scotland
National Museum of Scotland
Book; 96 pp; £17.95; index; bibliography
Findings of a survey project funded by the ESRC with discussion of the history of Scottish ethnographic collections, their future use and project methodology.

Science and Technology in Museums – A Resource Pack
Book; 33 pp; £5.00; bibliography
A discussion and annotated bibliography of science and technology display techniques and special projects in museums.

Welwyn Hatfield Museum Service

Hatfield at War
Book; 102 pp; £4.95
Bel Publications, St. Albans
How WWII affected ordinary families in Hatfield; what happened when evacuees arrived in local homes and how they rallied to 'Dig for Victory'.

Hatfield: A Pictorial History
Book; 125 pp; £12.95
Phillimore and Co. Chichester
The book illustrates the history and changes in Hatfield and its parish

The Netherlands

City Museum, Rotterdam

Rotterdamse Meesters uit de Gouden Eeuw
Book; 363 pp; DFL 49.50; index; bibliography
Waanders (Zwolle)
Rotterdam painters in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Werken met Voowerpen
Book; 52 pp; DFL 19.50
Dutch adaptation of 'Learning from Objects' (English Heritage), written together with the Amsterdam Historical Museum and the Historical Museum of The Hague.

Heeren in Zaken; de Kamer Rotterdam van de VOC (Gentlemen in Business; The Chamber Rotterdam of the Dutch East India Company)
Book; 112 pp; DFL 29.90; index; bibliography
The role of the Rotterdam Chamber in the Dutch East India Company in the 17th and 18th centuries, together with the history of a collection of portraits of its members, housed in the City Museum, Rotterdam.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Tim Caulton is course tutor on the MA in Arts and Heritage Management programme at the University of Sheffield. He was formerly Head of Education and Interpretation at Eureka! The Museum for Children, and Keeper of Extension Services for Sheffield City Museums. He also works freelance advising on the development of interactive galleries.

Dr. Helen Coxall teaches at the University of Westminster and works as a freelance museum language consultant. She can be contacted on 0181 995 2602.

Lucy Harland is the Birmingham History Curator within the Community Museums Section of Birmingham Museums. Among other community development projects, she is currently working on a major exhibition and collecting initiative relating to the post-war history of the city.

Lloyd Langley, LL.B., B.A., M.A., is Keeper of Social History at Beamish, The North of England Open Air Museum; and Chair of The Social History Panel of Museums North. He began work with Tyne and Wear Museums as a volunteer in 1983 and was later appointed as a Museum Assistant working in several museums within the service. He was appointed Assistant Keeper of Social History at Beamish in 1988 and Keeper in 1995.

Dr. Paulette McManus works as a visitor advocate. She concentrates on all matters related to communication with the public, including qualitative and quantitative studies of all kinds, exhibition development, public services management, feasibility studies and staff training. She has worked for many local and national museums and heritage sites in Britain and abroad.

John Millard manages museums in Newcastle for Tyne and Wear Museums, including the Laing Art Gallery. He has updated the Laing and broadened its audience, so that it attracted over 200,000 visits in 1996, with exciting exhibitions and a new entrance.

John H. Rumsby B.A., A.M.A., has maintained a lifelong interest in military history whilst working at Hull Museums and with Kirklees Museums, where he is Senior Officer (Museums), based at the Tolson Museum, Huddersfield. Although a graduate in Archaeology and Geography, his first post was in a regimental museum, that of the Durham Light Infantry.

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