SOCIAL HISTORY IN MUSEUMS

JOURNAL OF THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

VOLUME 23 (1997–98)

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

The Editor welcomes articles, reviews and notes on work in progress for inclusion of the next issue of *Social History in Museums*. A style sheet is available from the Editor to give guidance on the format of submissions.

Back numbers of *Social History in Museums* are available from the Editor.

© SHCG and Contributors

Front cover:
At the height of the Manx Fishing industry, Peel harbour was described as a 'Forest of Masts'. This formed the inspiration for a reconstruction of Peel queyside in The House of Manannan in the Isle of Man.

ISSN 1350-9551

Typeset, Printed and Bound by
The Charlesworth Group, Huddersfield, UK

Social History in Museums
Journal of the Social History Curators Group
Vol 23 (1997/8)

Nigel Wright,
Editor

THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

The Social History Curators Group aims to draw together all members of the museum profession, to promote social history in museums and improve the quality of curatorship. It aims to:

—work with those who are continually developing standards, to improve the quality of collection care, research, presentation and interpretation.

—stimulate and act as a forum for debate on issues affecting the museum profession.

—act as a network for sharing and developing skills.

—advocate the study and practise of social history in museums.

The Group is the largest of the specialist museum groups operating in the U.K. 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.

A *News* is issued several times a year and includes reviews of meetings and exhibitions, opinions on current issues and items of news. *Social History in Museums* is issued annually and features articles on various aspects of Social History, research, collecting, recording and interpretation.

The Group organises several seminars a year on a wide range of topics which are a useful resource for members' Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The Annual Study Weekend provides a forum for a fuller analysis of major subjects such as interpretation, evaluation and community outreach.

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 Museum and Galleries Commission, the Museums Association and other bodies. It will continue to reflect those interests and concerns as the importance of museums and the relevance of Social History grows.

CONTENTS

Editorial 5

ANNUAL STUDY WEEKEND PAPERS

Die Hard . . . with an Identity
David Fleming 7

Folk Devils in our Midst? Deviancy, Subcultural Identities, and Museums?
Nicola Clayton 11

One Community, One Identity? The Mirpuri Community in Birmingham
Victoria Emmanuel 17

SEMINAR PAPERS

What Museum Curators Could Be Collecting on the British Way of Death
Ruth Richardson 21

A Reading List on Death, Burial and Commemoration
Steph Mastoris 28

Don't Get Cold Feet about Death – the Experiences of Moyse's Hall Museum
Maggie Blake 29

ARTICLES

Views of the Past: Visions of the Future
Jane Sarre 32

Towards Inclusiveness in South Gloucestershire
Steph Gillett 35

The House of Manannan – the Latest Chapter in the Story of Mann
Kirsty Neate and Yvonne Cresswell 41

Archives on Parade: Providing Access to Military Service Records and Photographs through MODES Plus and In Touch
Angela Kelsall 46

REVIEWS

Mothercraft and Maternity: Leicester's Maternity and Infant Welfare Services 1900 to 1948, Shirley Aucott (Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Record Service, 1997)
Louise Connell 48

Follow the Banner – An Illustrated Catalogue of the Northumberland Miners' Banners, Hazel Edwards (Carcanet Press, 1997)
Nick Mansfield 50

Notes on Contributors IBC

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The alternative lifestyle of a Leicester couple.
2. The Mirpuri Community visiting *Home from Home*
3. An embroidery workshop in the Gallery
4. A local Mirpuri wedding
5. *Voices from the Past* exhibition at Moyse's Hall
6. A school workshop researching death in pre-history
7. How good is access for disabled people?
8. What would you like included in the displays?
9. How helpful are the labels?
10. Engaging with glass cases
11. Interacting with inter-actives
12. Peel queyside
13. An interactive map of Peel
14. Captain Harry Kinley meeting himself

EDITORIAL

This Journal contains an eclectic mix of papers, reflecting the activities of the Social History Curators Group and its members during 1997, including the Annual Study Weekend in Liverpool and a seminar on death in Bury St. Edmunds. The submitted articles provide some revealing contrasts, not least between a local authority looking to establish a museum service and a national heritage service which has just invested millions of pounds in a new 'visitor experience'.

The theme of the 1997 Annual Study Weekend in Liverpool was 'Collecting and Interpreting Identities'; how do museum curators collect and interpret the identities of people and places? This is a question that has long taxed social historians and will continue to do so in the future. Not surprisingly, the weekend did not throw up any new answers although it did provide some interesting discussion, albeit mainly on the Sunday morning after the Member's Papers when most people had gone home!

David Fleming opened proceedings by posing a series of questions about identity, sense of place and the different identities with which a single person can be labelled. As befitting the opening paper of both the Annual Study Weekend and this Journal more questions are raised than answered; indeed this is the sort of paper we should revisit from time to time, especially when we feel confident that we are beginning to understand any community.

One of the Weekends most entertaining papers was Nicola Clayton's on 'Deviancy, Subcultural Identities and Museums'; this paper examines how curators can collect the material culture of groups of people who are outside the mainstream and which museums often overlook, from a practical as well as philisophical point of view. Nicola is not afraid to point out the obvious conundrum when collecting from such groups – by putting objects and memories into a museum, by and large perceived as an establishment institution, are these subcultures not passing into the mainstream and thereby ceasing to be subcultures? The paper and subsequent workshop created a lot of interest and her article here includes a bibliography requested at the time as a reference tool.

Museum curators are often as guilty as anyone else of oversimplifying our views of communities. Victoria Emmanuel's casestudy of working with one such community, the Mirpuri community in Birmingham, reveals all sorts of tensions and difficulties even working with one clearly defined group. The way these issues were resolved and the resulting successful exhibition makes illuminating reading.

A large section of the Journal is devoted to probably the one subject which unites all cultures and communities, namely death. 1997 indeed was a year in which the death of one person had a quite extraordinary impact on the country and perhaps re-emphasises how crucial death is to our culture. It is ironic therefore, that as Ruth Richardson points out in her article, there is so little in our museums about customs of death, at least from our own communities as opposed to Ancient Egypt, for example. Why is this so and how do we begin to tackle this most sensitive of all issues? This paper points out that the potential for collecting is large and provides examples of the type of material all museums could collect.

Steph Mastoris has long seen the potential for using the subject of death as a way of getting under the surface of a community and he has contributed a very useful bibliography on literature we should all be aware of.

Although many of us may shy away from an exhibition on death, the experiences of Maggie Blake at Bury St. Edmunds reveals how it can be done. Despite limited resources and keeping one eye on the sensitivities of her local community, the resulting 'Voices from the Past' exhibition, proved popular with people of all ages.

I found Jane Sarre's article particularly fascinating, not least in that she explains a couple of 'ologys' which I, for one, have never come across before. The point made in this article is that, however much we as curator's may feel we are offering an unbiased view of a community and offering politically correct text and community involvement, the very choice of objects we collect and put on display is in itself a political statement. In the same way that a historian's choice of 'facts' is but one

interpretation of an event, so is the curator's choice of objects. At a time when we are all heavily involved in the day to day functions of our museums, it is refreshing to take a step back and consider some wider issues.

The idea of encompassing the identity of all sections of a community within a museum service is one that Steph Gillet has been tackling in Gloucestershire. How many of us have wondered what it would be like to start a museum service from scratch, indeed where do you start? Steph Gillet reveals how this particular issue is beginning to be addressed in South Gloucestershire, where there is no local authority museum provision. Starting on a small scale, Steph has asked sections of the local community often overlooked by many museums, for their views on what they would like to see in a museum: the project is at an early stage but the methodology and interim results are most interesting; it is also interesting that the person charged with the task is not a 'curator' but a 'community resources officer'.

1998 records two important anniversaries for museum curators, yet few will appreciate them because they are not in mainland Britain. 1998 sees the 60th anniversary of the opening of the British Isles' first publicly owned open air museum at Cregneash on the Isle of Man and the first recordings of the Manx Folk Life Survey, the precursor of many oral history projects, decades before oral history became generally accepted as a recording tool. In some ways the museum service on the Isle of Man is still breaking new ground: the article by Kirsty Neate and Yvonne Cresswell on the 'House of Manannan' gives a taster of a multi-million pound 'heritage centre' incorporating display techniques that many of us can only dream about. It is easy to mock such ventures with the derogatory terms of 'Mickey Mouse' or 'Disneyland', which overlooks the amount of curatorial work, including research and contemporary collecting, which underpins such displays – the image of Captain Kinley sitting next to his 'double' is particularly intriguing.

Angela Kelsall's article again focuses on one specific community, albeit the rather artificial one of a military regiment; in this article Angela reinforces the need for sound, detailed collection management to begin to untap the potential of the source material.

It is disappointing that we only have two reviews in this edition of the Journal, especially as the quality of the two we do have shows what we are missing. Unfortunately it has not been possible to continue the listing of Social History Publications in Museums and the Journal no longer has a Reviews Editor. It is important, however, that we continue to learn about publications which will be of interest to social historians and I would ask people who know of a publication to consider sending a copy to be reviewed, or even better review it yourself.

At this stage I would like to offer a vote of thanks to Jane Whittaker who has edited the Journal for the last six years; I can now testify that it is a thankless task and Jane has done remarkably well to keep producing quality Journals at a time when it is increasingly difficult to attract articles. This edition is very much a joint effort and I would like to pass on my personal thanks for her help in putting it together.

Finally, the perennial plea of all editors – we can only edit what you send us, so please send us your articles, reviews, of galleries and exhibitions as well as publications, or even ideas for articles which can be followed up by others.

Please send any submissions to me C/O Astley Hall, Astley Park, off Hall Gate, Chorley, PR7 1NP. (01257 515555)

Nigel Wright

DIE HARD...WITH AN IDENTITY

David Fleming

A paper presented at the 1997 SHCG Annual Study Weekend

This is a written version of a Keynote paper given at the SHCG Annual Study Weekend in Liverpool on 4th July, 1997, a significant date in the US calendar in terms of identity. The paper briefly considers the meaning of identity; a sense of place; the power of the past; the need for identity; the politics of identity; and, finally, popular culture and identity. The thoughts expressed here are of a preliminary nature, intended not to provide answers to questions, but to stimulate discussion during the Study Weekend.

The meaning of identity

'Identity' can mean many things, and each of us has multiple identities. We have a sense of self, the person we feel ourselves to be; and as we are seen by others. In both perceptions we have multiple roles. I, for example, am a son, father and brother; a colleague, a boss; a friend, an enemy; a heterosexual, male, middle-aged; a Yorkshireman, Englishman, Briton, European; working-class, socialist, a Leeds United supporter. I see myself in all these roles, and others share at least some of this imagery, depending upon their perspective.

It is possible that we have more identities in the modern, industrial/post-industrial and technological age than our pre-industrial forbears, because we have more opportunities to play different roles. We have greater leisure time, we do not usually have to work from dawn until dusk, and technology has opened up totally new and complex avenues for us. Our physical and intellectual horizons are wider today than ever before, and they continue to widen. However, the idea of multiple identities is not new – life has never been simple.

Our identities are mostly relational. If I have no children, I have no role as a father. If I know nothing of foreigners, I am not aware that I am English. We are each at the centre of a complex web of interacting identities, and if we are fruitfully to consider the role of museums in 'collecting and interpreting' identities, we have to recognise that we are dealing with a many-headed creature, a chameleon. The scale and scope of identities ranges from the close and personal to the large scale and communal, and may be based on place, or on the past.

A Sense of Place

Identity derives from 'place' in a number of ways, ranging from street, to estate or neighbourhood, city, region, country, even continent. Such attachments to place are what give rise to 'regional' or 'national' identity. However, place plays only a part in shaping identity, which is also based on kinship, ethnicity, race, religion and other 'cultural' issues, as well as the past itself. Again, we have complex interweavings here. In a street there will be some social conformity, of income levels, or perhaps of political outlook. In a neighbourhood there will be greater variations, including ethnicity, religion, use of shops and facilities, transport, and all this will give rise to some sense of commonalty. A city has huge variety, and by now the identity mix includes accents, sporting affiliations, work patterns (such as coalmining, shipbuilding or steelmaking), perhaps also a sense of pride, and certainly a definite sense of belonging.

As to regional identity, which I was asked to address in particular, what is it that binds a region together? In the pre-industrial centuries there was language, customs, trade, kinship, land ownership, even feudalism. There was tradition, and a sense of sharing a common past, which is quite intangible. In the North East of England, other defining characteristics may include its sheer distance from the capital city; its position as a border area with a hostile nation as a neighbour, the power of the Percy family; the strong dialect, almost a language; its role as the hinterland of what, by English standards, was a great trading port, Newcastle upon Tyne. More recently, we need to add the industries, especially shipbuilding and coalmining. It is interesting to speculate on what impact the extraordinary social and economic changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution had on regional identity. It is inconceivable that the sense of 'Geordie' identity around Tyneside was neither created by, nor changed fundamentally by, industrialisation, such

was the scale of migration out of the countryside and into the urban areas.

These have all been internal perspectives on identity. The external perspective of Geordies is that they are hard, friendly (as in *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet*), they have a distinctive accent, they are lively, probably working-class, unemployed, post-industrial: which brings us straight onto stereotyping, and the images we all carry around of Geordies, Liverpudlians, Glaswegians and others, all fed by the mass media. Nevertheless, all of these have a definite sense of place, of belonging, of sharing a common identity. Is this stronger when it is tied up with a sense of exclusion, even oppression? One of the closest parallels to Geordies and Scousers in the USA is the people of urban New Jersey, whose powerful sense of identity is certainly fuelled by their sense of opposition to the richer folk of neighbouring New York. And yet there are differences and hostilities within regions, an example of which is the ingrained rivalry between the cities of Newcastle and Sunderland, or Liverpool and Manchester, the origins of which often lie in distant trading rivalries. More recently, such oppositions are emphasised through football rivalries, but the oppositions predate these.

The Power of the Past

A sense of place is linked closely to a sense of the past, which is itself a powerful creator of identity, based on a shared history, and which can actually transcend issues of 'place'. So, we see the attachment of 'exiles' to the 'homeland', such as the New York Irish; the past lives on in customs, traditions, language, beliefs, foods, music, oral tradition. Such attachments are common features of Scots abroad, and, to a somewhat lesser degree, Geordies and Yorkshire folk.

The saga of the Lindisfarne Gospels is a current illustration of how the power of the past continues to exert its influence on identity in the present. Despite having ceased to be a recognisable entity over 1,000 years ago, the Kingdom of Northumbria is being reinvented, stimulated by a successful exhibition at Newcastle's Laing Art Gallery in 1996, *Treasures from the Lost Kingdom of Northumbria*. Having returned on a temporary basis to the North East, the Lindisfarne Gospels is now stirring an extraordinary debate between the British Library, which 'owns' the illuminated book, and people in the North East who want the book returned. Here are two letters, written to a Newcastle-based newspaper, which indicates the strength of feeling.[1]

Masterpiece belongs here

I fail to understand the argument put forward by Ms Payne of the British Library, as reported by *The Journal* on June 28.

As an academic, Ms Payne will be aware that the knowledge and understanding gained from any work of art is at its greatest when that work is viewed in the context of its creation – hence the study of art history.

The Lindisfarne Gospels should therefore be placed in the context of their creation – the Northumbria of St. Cuthbert and the Venerable Bede.

A land of tireless industry, great cathedrals, tiny churches, rolling countryside and deserted beaches represents the context of strength and openness in the Northern landscape and its people.

The Lindisfarne Gospels are central to our learning, our faith and our Northern heritage. The Gospels were written here and justifiably belong in their place of origin.

The context of the British Library in London is hardly appropriate.

This country is small enough for all its treasures to be placed in their social and geographical context. By encouraging travel and tourism, we will create a climate of growth and prosperity as well as regional pride in our history. Should the Gospels be returned, new pilgrimages will be made and people from all over the world will be welcomed to the North East with the true Northumbrian spirit.

It will take an Act of Parliament to release the Lindisfarne Gospels from London.

Please join me in writing my next letter. …Dear Tony Blair…

Ann Curtis, East Boldon

Return Gospels to ancient home

So the South is to hang on to our Lindisfarne Gospels. What a check! (*The Journal*, June 28).

Once again the North is treated like a colony of the establishment elite, based in London.

Northumbria was a kingdom long before there was an England.

When the Gospels were lovingly and painstakingly handwritten, the ancient land of the North – Northumbria – was the most culturally and spiritually advanced part of the island.

The Scots got back their stone of Scone and all best wishes and congratulations to them. Now let us make a bit of fuss and campaign to secure the return of the Lindisfarne Gospels to Northumbria.

Tyne and Wear, County Durham and the county of Northumberland formed the core of the ancient Northumbrian realm. This was a civilisation which brought light to the Dark Ages.

If the above territory has an elected assembly, it could supervise the display of our Gospels, perhaps moving them at intervals between sites including Jarrow, Durham and Lindisfarne. Home rule is commonsense politics.

Robert Taylor, South Shields

Part of the motivation behind these views is the potential value of the Gospels in attracting tourists to the region, but there is no doubting the very strong feelings which have been aroused. These are part devotional, part an undoubted sense of a deep-rooted regional identity, which has somehow survived the enormous identity shift brought about by the Industrial Revolution in the North.

The Need for Identity

What about the *need* to feel a sense of identity? In England, some regions, and cities, have a much stronger sense of identity than others. This sense is strong in the North, compared with, say, the East Midlands, but it is much weaker in York than it is in Newcastle, so the pattern is not simple or straightforward. Is the modern sense of identity linked to industrialisation? Certainly areas which had industries like shipbuilding and coalmining are often those with a powerful sense of identity (though not always). Is this, in Marxist terms, an industrial proletariat issue?

Today, with virtually unlimited access to the mass media, and with the same global influences affecting all of us, there are powerful pressures on us to lose our sense of identity, which makes global marketing more difficult. But we will always need identities. As we are pressured to be the same as each other, as technological advances drive social change ever faster, causing us to lose contact with our heritage and our influences, we will continue to look for comfort to our identities, to the past for individualism and variety. This is why museums are so important – to maintain links to something other than mass commercialism, and on a grand psychological scale. Perversely, the commercial sector will, to a degree, reinforce this, though purely for the profit motivation.

So, identities will be sought out, preserved, reinvented, rejuvenated. Identity will die hard. This process has been ongoing for several decades, as we place a higher value on the past in so many ways. Indeed, there is a growing obsession with the past as we look for solace, for refuge from a fast-moving world where nothing lasts for more than five minutes. Museums can and must help counter the drive to make us all the same, and the dislocation which this brings.

The Politics of Identity

This is a huge and complex subject which I have already touched upon, but let's consider again issues of pride, superiority, intolerance, exclusion, self-determination and fear. Here is a little parable entitled 'Sun Children and Winter Children':

Ting-a-ling...That's the bell. All of the children walk into the classroom and find their places. The teacher comes in. The children quickly take their places next to their seats. "The stars..." the teacher exclaims, "are always right", the children call out in unison. The lesson has started.

"Sun children are children who are born in spring, summer or autumn," says the teacher. "They are the best, the most beautiful and the strongest of all. It's in the stars, and the stars...?" exclaims the teacher "... are always right," answer the children. "But watch out for the winter children. They're the children who are born in winter between 21 December and 21 March. Just take a look at this."

Then the teacher turns on the school television. There is a professor on the screen. Using all sorts of equipment, he measures the ears, noses and heads of winter children. Using complicated sums, he explains that winter children are much more stupid than other people. And in addition, he says, they are dangerous, cruel and ugly.

Then there is a reading lesson. One of the children reads from the new book, "Why is there so much crime in our country? Why is there so much unemployment? Why are there not enough houses for everyone? It's all because there are winter people living in our country. They destroy everything the sun people have built up. They secretly want to take away all the valuable things. Let's get rid of the winter people!"

Some of the sun children turn round furiously. The winter children are sitting at the back of the class, separately. The teacher says they have to. The winter children pretend not to hear anything. If they argue, they will be sent away, or be given bad marks. The teacher hardly ever gives them a turn to answer questions. Most of the time, he treats the winter children as if they aren't there. The sun children no longer go round with the winter children. Some of them believe the teacher, and others may be afraid that they would also get bad marks.

The bell rings. Another school day is over. The winter children take their things and go home as quickly as possible. They don't want to bump into any sun children in the street, because they often tease them, kick them and call them names. Just because of those stupid stars. On their way home, the winter children see posters everywhere proclaiming: "Winter children bring us bad luck! Get rid of them!"

This is an extract from the *Anne Frank Journal*, a chilling observation on how the Nazis demonised Jews.[2]

A recent leader article in the *Independent* pointed out that:

'There is a distinction, subtle but vital,
to be made between nationalism and patriotism.
One is atavistic, inward-looking, foreigner-hating;
the other is relaxed, open to the world, keen to
share what is best in a country'.[3]

These extracts are comments on the dichotomy of identity, and warn us that identity has both light and dark sides. There is a narrow line between identity as a source of wellbeing and health, and as a negative and destructive force. Issues of identity, such as in the USA (which involve the majority white population, Latinos and Hispanics, African Americans, Native Americans, even Unionist Northerners and Confederate Southerners), or Spain (Catalans and Basques) or the former Yugoslavia (Bosnians, Croats Serbs), can be wrapped up in race, religion, language, customs and so on. These can all set peoples against each other. Identity and self-determination are not always, perhaps even not often, positive agents. Identity is a volatile, dangerous issue, whether it be national, racial, ethnic, religious or political.

Despite this, the politics of identity can also be good for museums. If museums align themselves with issues of identity, especially to help combat intolerance, hatred and misunderstanding, then they will be able to access finances which are available for social regeneration and restructuring – there is money in identity. What we have to hope is that this money is used for constructive purposes rather than merely 'celebrating' identity, whether it be local, regional or wider.

Popular Culture and Identity

The term 'popular culture' is just as difficult to define as 'identity'. But, if popular culture is the culture of:

- subordinate groups
- those in opposition to elites
- most people
- which is created *by* people, not *for* them
- which may be organised (of the 'community') or spontaneous...

...and if this culture includes:

- the written word
- the spoken word
- dance
- traditions
- behaviour
- beliefs
- customs
- 'heritage'
- sport
- etc....

...then it is popular culture which defines nearly all identities, not just regional ones.

Popular culture, in an industrialised society, is a class issue, a control issue, and an oppositional issue. If we accept that popular culture is that which has not been manipulated by elites, then we probably have to admit that popular culture does define identity, and that identity is, ultimately, a class, control and oppositional issue; as, I hope, we have seen. Some may say identity *is* popular culture, but only on a large scale – this definition does not cope with minority cultures which are also oppositional.

As to what museums do about it – that's for others to consider.

Notes

1. Both letters were published in *The Journal*, 3 July, 1997.
2. *Anne Frank Journal*, (1995).
3. *The Independent*, 25 June, 1997.

FOLK DEVILS IN OUR MIDST? DEVIANCY, SUBCULTURAL IDENTITIES, AND MUSEUMS?

Nicola Clayton

A paper presented at the 1997 SHCG Annual Study Weekend

'In the hierarchical language of the West, what is alien represents otherness, the site of difference and the repository of our fears and anxieties'.[1]

The identities which I wish to draw attention to in this paper, are ones which have been positioned within the context of 'otherness': subcultures for whom the choice of appearance, sexuality or lifestyle, has served to position them as different to and in opposition of, dominant values. Of particular interest here are those which have a strong sense of collective identity, expressed predominantly through material culture, such as youth subcultures and gay and lesbian subcultures.[2] However, the issues raised could also be applied to addressing the more extreme subcultural expressions such as those of so called 'Modern Primitives'.[3]

Subcultural identities have been fabricated as sites of difference and have often become the repositories of societies' 'fears and anxieties'. Through precedents set by the government and media, for example, the British government's continued refusal to recognise gay rights and the prevailing disparative and alarmist rhetoric of the popular press, which constantly induces moral panics through headlines such as "These people are the wreckers of civilisation" (The Daily Mail describing punks in 1976), subcultural identities have been labelled as folk devils or deviants in the national consciousness, and marginalised from 'normal' society.

Arguably museums have done little to challenge such perceptions of subcultures, for although the museums profession has begun to represent and celebrate the cultural identities of groups hitherto ignored, subcultural identities still remain relatively marginalised in museological theory and practice. There have been notable initiatives;[4] however, such efforts are infrequent and subcultural identities rarely feature in permanent museum displays or collections. One can question whether museums as traditionally conservative institutions are actually capable of addressing difficult or controversial identities such as those of subcultures, at all. In this paper, I thus wish to address the anomaly that might be apparent in calling for museums to celebrate subcultural identities, to discuss some of the challenges that documenting such identities may pose, and also to briefly suggest some solutions to issues that have been raised.

Why should subcultural identities be represented in museums at all?

An obvious answer is that museums as institutions are there to serve *all* the public;

> *'the museums primary role is to collect material and oral evidence of social experiences (ways of living, working and believing) in all their contradictions and contrasts. This approach makes no exclusions based on work, gender, class, ethnic origin, religion or period.'*[5]

(It is interesting, however, to note that here sexuality and age have been missed out of this list!) Membership of a particular group and the adoption of a particular identity *can* govern a persons whole life. For example, if a lesbian or gay man actively adopts a gay identity, this, even in the so-called enlightened 1990s, can still have far reaching repercussions; it may effect relations with ones family, ones education, ones career prospects, the city spaces one can and cannot enter into, and one can suffer from actual physical or mental abuse from school or work colleges, neighbours and even strangers in the street ('queerbashing' unfortunately does still happen). Thus it is important that museums do reflect all lifestyles and recognise the implications that adopting a subcultural identity can have.

Subcultures also do matter as their influence permeates all facets of contemporary popular culture and have had wide reaching repercussions in society in general. In a recent issue of *Time Out* Acid House was described as;

> *'the biggest musical revolution since Punk, the biggest drugs high since LSD. A decade later, it still affects what we watch, what we listen to, how we write, how we think.'*[6]

The visual, musical and social manifestations of the Acid House and Rave subcultures has influenced all aspects of the media for example, whether that be the tabloid moral panics over ecstasy related deaths

or House and Jungle providing the soundtracks to blockbuster films such as *Trainspotting* and *The Saint*. The jargon of the Rave subculture has now become part of everyday vocabulary and the media constantly uses lifted phrases such as 'sorted' for example. Club flyers are now considered 'Art', literature such as Irvine Welsh's *Ecstasy* classic books, and dance culture has become the topic of serious scholarly enquiry.[7] Acid House has instigated the 'revenge of the nerds' by making computers popular, and the decline of football violence has even been attributed to the rise in popularity of House and Rave. Free parties and raves have also united youth subcultures as never before, so much so that the Government even introduced a number of anti-rave measures, the most notorious of which is the Criminal Justice Act of 1994. Even the most 'extreme' subcultural manifestations have had a profound influence on 'mainstream' culture: the fetish scene can be seen reflected on the fashion catwalks, in advertising, films, pop videos and art galleries for example.

Thus, the extent to which subcultures are of importance both in terms of their existence as an entity in their own right, and in terms of their contribution to society as a whole, is significant. However, I would argue that this has not been truly reflected by museums. Given the disposable nature of our society and the implications on collecting and documentation which this has, failure to document subcultural identities now, does have serious repercussions. As this paper suggests, however, an association between subcultures and museums in not necessarily an obvious or easy one. The status of subcultural identities as 'deviant other' to hegemonic norms, does produce certain difficulties when attempting to collect and interpret them, and it seems that although museums are interested in this area, practicalities often mitigate against ideas being followed through.

The nature of the subject presents a challenge

A fundamental issue to address concerns how one actually makes contact, gains the trust of, and sustains a relationship with subcultures:

- Who are invariably suspicious of any authoritarian interest in them,
- Who in being constructed as in opposition to the establishment have often chosen to or been forced underground of mainstream eye, (for example it was not until 1967 that the Sexual Offences Act went some way to decriminalising male homosexuality).
- Whose resistance may be expressed through the tactic of invisibility, through 'rituals of disappearance'.
- Whose identities are based around coded and often transitory signifiers of allegiance so one needs to be in-the-know in order to decipher their significance.

As public institutions, how do museums approach groups who are guarded about mainstream exposure which they often perceive as threatening to their existence? For by exposing their underground world to the public, subcultural authenticity may be destroyed through mass acceptance and appropriation. Similarly, how do museums approach groups who do not necessarily need the legitimisation which museums can bring, and in fact may not welcome such acceptance at all given that a primary attraction of subcultural affiliation *are* the associations with rebellion and dissidence.

Given the perceived authoritarian and often conservative image of museums, how does one overcome their suspicions and persuade subcultural members to become involved with museums? Given the importance that they place on material culture how are they to be persuaded to part with items that might have sentimental value or that may still be in use? And in the event of successful collecting, how, if by their nature subcultures are positioned as deviant and subversive, do museums capture this without sterilising and sanitising it? How will the legitimisation which inevitably does comes with museum appropriation, effect the nature and perceptions of the cultures in question?

Although I refer to them as a defined group, subcultures also cannot be read as any one homogenous mass for although a collective identity may exist, this is not necessarily uniform throughout, (and I would argue that the term subculture itself is too monolithic). The ways in which sense of identity and community are constructed are complex and variants such as geographical location, class, age, gender, sexuality will all have an effect on an individual's response to any given group. Also, subcultural identities cannot necessarily be understood as 'fixed', but rather as 'fluid, unstable, complex and shifting'.[8]

In terms of what this implies for museums, it throws up a number of questions such as:

- What does one use as criteria for defining the features of any given group; style, music, mode of transport, sexual preference?
- How can museums classify and label identities which are constantly shifting?
- How does one collect from those who cannot necessarily be boxed into one specific subcultural group at all, but for whom their identities and lifestyles are of relevance?
- How do we collect and represent them without making over generalisations, tokenistic gestures or parodies of representation?

The customised clothes, van and 'rat' bike of this Leicester couple symbolise their alternative lifestyle. However, as they refute the imposition of any labels and do not affiliate with any particular subculture, the challenge is thus posed for any museum who would attempt to classify them. Photo: Nicola Clayton, 1996.

- How do we suggest these complex infrastructures of the different levels of hierarchy and authenticity operating within such subcultures?
- How do we reflect their complex histories of change and dialogue with the mainstream?

The challenge of legal, ethical and professional issues

There are also a number of legal, ethical and professional issues which can seemingly mitigate against efforts. Legal restraints such as Section 28 of The Local Government Act of 1988 which outlaws the promotion of homosexuality by local authorities is an obvious barrier, for although it has rarely been enforced, it arguably serves to create a climate of self-censorship within institutions. Similarly, the ignorance behind government initiatives such as the Criminal Justice Act, and Barry Legg's Private Members Bill, whilst again not directly causing legal problems for museums, serves to criminalise certain groups and their activities and helps to foster a climate of suspicion and intolerance. With such issues in mind, how do museums begin to address illegal activities such as drug taking, which are often such an integral part of subcultures? Forward thinking efforts such as the Museum of London's interest in acquiring an ecstasy tab[9], are met with a number of legal barriers, for example an application to the Home Office for a licence to hold an illegal drug and legal requirements concerning health and safety in regards to the storage and display of an illegal item.

This issue thus also leads on to another consideration; the ethical implications of collecting such material. What are the repercussions of an authoritarian institution discussing or collecting around traditionally taboo issues such as drugs? Who may one offend by such initiatives? May an institution be accused of promoting and encouraging illegal practices by involvement? Reputations can and do suffer through association with controversial issues, and British reserve and the associated role of museums as moral guardians has ensured that again an amount of self censorship has been exercised. Uncertainties about legal status and a desire to not offend, can take precedence over the integrity of representations.[10] In order to avoid such difficulties, museums have arguably given an apolitical and romantic or nostalgic account when representing subcultures, focusing on subcultural identities for which the passage of time has desensitised their subversiveness. How then do museums address subcultural identities and activities that are relevant now but may still be controversial? How do

museums acknowledge the less romantic side of subcultures and deal with the issues of racist and sexist politics that can be prevalent, for example?

There are also professional considerations that can mitigate against efforts to represent subcultural identities, for the normal problems associated with contemporary collecting such as shortages in storage space, budget, and staff time are all applicable, as are the problems associated with empirical research. However, there are also additional problems when attempting to collect subcultural material. Curatorial profiles in museums are not necessarily conducive to communicating with subcultures. The V&A's experience with *Streetstyle* illustrated that relations with marginalised groups such as subcultures are much more productive if the person instigating the contact and undertaking the research, can be seen to be familiar with or representative of the group in question. Thus, how can museums overcome the fact that curatorial staff rarely have anything in common, whether that be age, class or lifestyle, with subcultural members?

There are also problems communicating with groups who may not necessarily operate to normal working hours or that do not have any central point of contact or orthodox means of communication. For example, the V&A had difficulties maintaining contact with the Donga tribe from whom they were collecting, who live a nomadic lifestyle without telephones, postal address and so forth. Also, many British museums arguably do not have the appropriate framework to cope with the practical implications that collecting 'lifestyles' can entail. Is it appropriate for example, that in order to attempt to collect the Mod 'experience', artefacts must be disbanded into respective departments, or in the case of larger museum services, individual museums, so that the scooter is sent to the transport section, the parka and suit to costume, the records and record player to social history and so forth? There are also other issues such as how are subcultural artefacts related to more mainstream existing collections? Where are they placed? In the main collection or within a special section?

Recognising and collecting subcultural identities thus does have its implications. It can expose the inherent inadequacies of existing museum structures of organisation, and it can also provide a direct challenge to the arguably existing complacency of museums in regards to sensitive issues or difficult groups. A challenge can also be posed to ones own preconceptions and prejudices. Demands for controversial identities to be collected and exhibited call into question the museum's role in society as either passive onlooker or active participant in contemporary issues. Acknowledging issues such as the central role that drugs have played within subcultures, does provide museums with an active and positive role to play in the community, however, and in helping to establish forums where issues such as drug use can be discussed in a constructive and educational environment, museums may gain that contemporary relevance which they are arguably lacking.

Collecting subcultural material also presents a means to address the existing bias within collections, making them more representative of the cultural diversity of contemporary British society. Because of the authority museums are seen to hold, initiatives actually afford the opportunity to alter the status of such material culture and desensitise and legitimise attitudes towards it, but by failing to recognise difficult groups and their material culture then, one can argue that museums are thus guilty of maintaining prevailing misconceptions of such groups as deviant and insignificant. However, there exists an inherent paradox, for in attempting to be more open and sympathetic to marginalised identities museums may actually be subjecting said identities to attention they do not welcome or need. How do museums begin to represent identities whose essence is a celebration of alienation? Should museums respect subcultural wishes for anonymity at the expense of documenting their material existence for posterity? Should museums release knowledge which in threatening the exclusivity of subcultures, disarms their resistance and therefore alters and even destroys the identities which they are ultimately attempting to preserve?

I have intentionally raised here a number of questions because the issue of how to approach collecting subcultural identities is a complex one. The difficulties encountered are actually akin to those invoked by other marginalised groups such as ethnic communities; collecting material culture, for example, calls for both political and cultural sensitivity where issues of identity, community and ownership come into play, and good relationships between institutions and communities need to be carefully established and nurtured. In conclusion then, I would like to offer up some of the solutions that came out of the workshop that was held at the conference:

- A key aspect to successful collection and interpretation of subcultural identities is to establish a respectful relationship with the subcultures in question. To work in collaboration with members, providing the opportunity for them to become actively involved in the representations of their identity. Approach involvement with subcultures to some extent as one would other marginalised groups; learn from existing museum initatives which have addressed ethnic or religious communities, for example.
- Consider initial approaches to subcultures carefully, and select a researcher who is most

appropriate; consider how the researcher's *own* identity could act as a barrier for successful communication.

- Make use of the museum's volunteers, placement students and museum assistants or facilitators who may have more in common with subcultural identities than the curatorial staff. If one has good relations with local colleges or universities, could their students become involved through the incorporation of related practical projects into their syllabus?
- Find out about subcultures in the locality by consulting national magazines and fanzines that are directed at subcultural audiences. (They provide information on forthcoming gigs and events, shop and mail order advertisements and so forth). Local gig/club guides and free music papers are also useful. Visit shops and make contact with sales staff and customers, visit music venues and night clubs and talk with organisers, promoters, DJs and audiences, and be aware that flyers for other events are normally distributed in these places. Attend other relevant events such as custom car and bike shows. Contact university clubs and societies which may be appropriately subcultural (every uni. has it's Rock Society for example). National and local radio (Kiss FM for example) can also be a source of information.
- Remember that involvement need not necessarily be on any great scale. Document and collect in relation to the current resources available; begin initiatives to recognise subcultural identities by simply reassessing the museums existing collections for example.
- If the controversial associations of material mean that it cannot be displayed at present, or if one respects subcultural claims to the destructive consequences of public 'exposure' of their identities, consider collecting the material now and wait to display it once the climate is more favourable, or when the passage of time will no longer 'endanger' the respective subculture's identity.

Collecting and interpreting subcultural identities is challenging and the suggestions given here are in no way comprehensive, but they do illustrate that with thought the challenges presented by subcultural identities can be overcome. Identities of a deviant or oppositional nature may not initially seem compatible with the institution of the museum, but subcultural identities are more than simply 'revolts into style'. They are an intregal part of British society and a potential source of vitality and exploration for museums.

This paper stems from the doctoral research I am currently undertaking at the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, and I would welcome any comments or information concerning any initiatives which you may know of or that your institution itself has undertaken.

Notes

1. J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, (London, 1990), p. 10.
2. Although groups such as pigeon fanciers, train-spotters, 'Trekies' and so forth, can also be considered subcultural, in this paper, however, I want to restrict the focus of attention to subcultures for whom expressions of identity are primarily established stylistically, through visual and aural mediums.
3. V. Vale and A. Juno (eds.), *Modern Primitives*, (San Francisco, 1989).
4. The Victoria & Albert's major exhibition *Streetstyle* for example, *Bike Art: the Art, Craft and Lifestyle of the Custom Bike Movement* by Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery, *Sound and Fury: The Art and Imagery of Heavy Metal* by Bradford Art Galleries and Museums, *Glasgay* in Glasgow and so forth.
5. D. Fleming, C. Paine and J. G. Rhodes (eds), *Social History in Museums: A Handbook for Professionals* (HMSO 1993).
6. *Time Out*, 'Rave New World', June 11–18 1997, pp. 12–18.
7. See Redhead, 1990, 1993; Redhead, Wynne, & O'Connor, 1997; Thornton, 1995 and Evans, 1997 for example in the bibliography.
8. C. Evans, 1997, 'Dreams That Only Money Can Buy...Or, The Shy Tribe In Flight from Discourse', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, vol. 1, 2;6 (1997), p. 170.
9. The Museum of London had been interested in collecting the drug as part of an initiative to document the dance scene in London for a forthcoming exhibition on youth culture.
10. Brighton Museum staff, for example, were ordered to cover up a slogan painted on a Punk's leather jacket because it contained a swear word which had offended a City Councillor. The outfit illustrated how dress reflects social and political attitudes; however, the fashion gallery in which it was placed was only allowed to be reopened when a chain was placed over the offending word! Although this incident occurred some fifteen years ago, one could argue that the issue of exhibiting objects which display offensive or blasphemuos language is still as senstive today.

Select Bibliography

H. S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, (New York, 1963).

G. Bourne, *Invisibility: A Study of the Representation of Lesbian and Gay History and Culture in Social History Museums*, (MA Dissertation, University of Leicester. 1994).

M. Brake, *The Sociology Of Youth and Youth Subcultures* (London, 1980).

G. Clarke, *Defending Ski-Jumpers: A Critique of Theories of Youth Sub-cultures* Stencilled Paper, no. 71, (Birmingham, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982).

J. Clarke, *Skinheads and Youth Culture*, Stencilled Paper, no. 23, (Birmingham, CCCS. 1973).

P. Cohen, *Subcultural Conflict and Working Class Community*, Stenciled Paper no. 2., (Birmingham, CCCS. 1972).

S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: the Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, (London, 1972).

M. Collin, *Altered State: The Story of Ecstacy Culture and Acid House*, (London, 1997).

C. Evans, 'Dreams That Only Money Can Buy… Or, The Shy Tribe In Flight from Discourse', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*, vol. 1, 2;6 (1997), pp. 169–188.

K. Gelder and S. Thornton (eds.), *The Subcultures Reader* (London, 1997).

S. Hall and T. Jefferson (eds.), *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, (London, 1976).

S. Hall and P. du Gay, (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London, 1996).

A. de la Haye, 'Travellers' boots, body-moulding, rubber fetish clothes: making histories of subcultures', in Kavenagh, G. (ed.), *Making Histories in Museums*, (London and New York, 1996).

A. de la Haye and C. Dingwall, 1996, *Surfers, Soulies, Skinheads & Skaters: Subcultural Style from the Forties to the Nineties*, (London, 1996).

M. Healy, *Gay Skins: Class Masculinity and Queer Appropriation*, (London, 1996).

D. Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, (Methuen, 1979).

D. Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Carribbean Music*, (London, 1987).

A. McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen*, (London, 1991).

A. McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, (London, 1994).

G. Melly, *Revolt Into Style*, (Harmondsworth, 1972).

G. Mungham and G. Pearson, *Working Class Youth Cultures*, (1978).

T. O'Sullivan, J. Hartley, D. Saunders, M. Montgomery and J. Fiske (eds.), *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, (London, 1994).

T. Polhemus, *Body Styles*, (Luton, 1988).

T. Polhemus, *Streetstyle: From Sidewalk to Catwalk*, (London, 1994).

T. Polhemus, *Style Surfing: What to Wear in the 3rd Millennium*, (London, 1996).

S. Redhead, *The End-of-the-Century Party: Youth and Pop Towards 2000*, (Manchester, 1990).

S. Redhead, (ed.), *Rave Off: Politics and Deviance in Contemporary Youth Culture*, (Hampshire, Avebury, 1993).

S. Redhead, D. Wynne and J. O'Connor (eds.), *The Club Cultures Reader: Readings in Popular Cultural Studies*, (Oxford, 1997).

J. Stacey, 'Promoting Normality: Section 28 and the Regulation of Sexuality', in Franklin, S., Lury, C. and Stacey, J. (ed), *Off-Centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies*, (1991).

S. Thornton, 'Moral Panic, The Media and Rave Culture', in Ross, A. and Rose, T. (eds.), *Microphone Fiends*, (London, 1994).

S. Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, (Cambridge, 1995).

P. Willis, *Profane Culture*, (London, 1978).

ONE COMMUNITY, ONE IDENTITY? THE MIRPURI COMMUNITY IN BIRMINGHAM

Victoria Emmanuel

A paper presented at the 1997 SHCG Annual Study Weekend

On July 10th 1997 Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery opened an exhibition called *Home from Home; British Kashmiris and Pakistanis in Mirpur and Birmingham*. The exhibition was the culmination of a years research and liaison with the local community in which many issues arose, not least the complex issue of identity, hence the convoluted exhibition title.

Through photographs and oral history the exhibition focused on the Mirpur community living both in Mirpur and in Birmingham. Mirpur is a district of Azad Kashmir which, since Partition, has been indirectly governed by Pakistan. However, Azad Kashmir is a disputed territory and many Kashmiris are currently struggling for independence from Pakistan, strong feelings which are mirrored in this country. Mirpur is a district with a history of migration. Since the end of the last century men have left the area in search of work and the greatest influx of Mirpuri people to England took place in the 1950s and 1960s.

Why this community?

The Mirpuri community is the largest single ethnic minority community in Birmingham. To quote the 1991 Census there are 66,000 Pakistanis (there is no 'Kashmiri' category) living in Birmingham and the vast majority of these people are from the district of Mirpur. Therefore, this is a very sizeable community with which the Museum previously had no relationship and which was not represented in its collections.

Having already identified the Mirpuri community as a key community within the city, the Museum decided to take a touring exhibition compiled by the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit. The curator of this exhibition, Tim Smith, spent six weeks in Mirpur in 1996 recording the lives and the history of people living in Mirpur through photographs and Irna Imran conducted oral history interviews in Urdu.

We decided not only to take the touring exhibition but to add a section which focused on the Mirpuri community living in Birmingham. This was the ideal opportunity to link the two places and demonstrate the strong ties which are retained between the two areas through family networks and frequent visits home.

Working with the community

As I began to research and make contacts in the community I discovered that the question of identity is a very real issue to many Mirpuri people and one which needed to be handled sensitively. Most of the people I met were very keen that the Museum should represent the community in a way that they were happy with.

However, communities are not homogenous and it is neither possible nor desirable to generalise about this very complex community. One of the most deep rooted issues arose from feelings about the relationship between Pakistan and Kashmir. Some people were happy to call themselves Pakistani while others who felt strongly about the liberation of Kashmir would never refer to themselves in this way. Many Mirpuris born in this country viewed their identity as a mixture of Mirpuri and British. I was surprised by the number of older members of the community who proudly called themselves British. These were usually men who had been living in England for some 30 years or more.

The perception of the Museum by the community, our identity in their eyes, was also an issue which came to the fore in the early stages of the project. I was regarded by many primarily as an officer of the Council and this association, which was sometimes viewed in a negative way, had to be overcome by focusing on the importance of this project.

Since it was the first time the Museum had worked with this community we were very keen to establish a relationship of trust and therefore we were conscious that we would have to steer away from the political situation, represent the views of the majority and not be controversial. However, it is important to stress that we were met with a very positive response from people who took an active interest in the project and were keen to be involved.

It was clear from the outset that we were going to have a dialogue with the community.

What were we trying to do?

One of the key aims of the exhibition was to develop a relationship with the Mirpuri community which would continue beyond the life of this project. By hosting an exhibition which was directly relevant to this community we hoped to encourage new audiences who would gain confidence and interest in returning to future exhibitions and the Museum as a whole.

The exhibition was to be a celebration of the cultural heritage of the Mirpuri community and aimed to empower people through highlighting the importance and relevance of their past. In addition, many of the elder members of the community felt that the exhibition provided an ideal vehicle for younger generations to learn about the history of their homeland.

Besides serving the needs of the Mirpuri community we wanted to create an understanding among non-Kashmiri visitors of how this highly significant community came to live in the City and about the country they left behind.

The exhibition

The touring exhibition which came from Bradford used photography and extensive oral history quotations to portray life in Mirpur today, the context of why people have migrated from the area since the 1930s and the impact of the migrations on Mirpur. Themes included the *Early Pioneers, the building of the Mangla Dam, Leaving Home, Industry, Funerals, Weddings* and *Education.*

To complement this we commissioned a photographer to record the lives of Mirpuris in Birmingham and I undertook an oral history recording programme. We advertised the photographic commission widely in the West Midlands and received applications from a range of people from all cultural backgrounds. The person we eventually selected was a Sikh man who was a good photographer, who had experience of taking social documentary style photographs and a good understanding of the issues surrounding identity. He was well received by the community and only once, to our knowledge, was the fact that he was not from Mirpur called into question.

We will never know how things would have been different if the photographer had been Mirpuri. He may have had a clearer understanding of the complexities of the community and the divisions within it. He may have had contacts with whom he could reach a wide cross-section of the community to photograph. Alternatively, he may have been more strongly guided by the community or had his own agenda to pursue.

Local people from the Mirpuri community visiting the exhibition Home from Home.

When it came to recording the memories and experiences of people from the community I approached people through my initial contacts and made public appeals via radio and newspapers. The difficulty I faced was in casting my interviewing net wide enough to reach a cross-section of the community in the time available. There was a tendency for people I interviewed to refer me to associates who belonged to the same forums as themselves and it was important not to get too involved with one particular group.

The Birmingham section of the exhibition featured nine themes; *Early Settlers, A New Home, Childhood Memories, Links with Mirpur, Wedding Celebrations, Family Ties, A Place of Worship, Learning for Life* and *Working Life.* Most of these themes were identified at the beginning of the project and were drawn out in the photography and oral history. However, there were some topics which came through very strongly in the interviews and therefore we remained flexible about the content of the exhibition panels until the last moment. This is true of the section entitled *Links with Mirpur* in which the emotion that people felt about Mirpur was very evident, for example a 38 year old man recalled;

'The two months I was there [in Mirpur] I consider the best two months of my life. It's very peaceful, peaceful people, beautiful life. I will probably retire there.'

'Bridging the Past'

In order to give a small section of the community the opportunity to create their own part of the exhibition we produced a video entitled *Bridging the Past*. However, although we produced a thoroughly original and insightful film, the final product was not what we had envisaged for a number of reasons.

We commissioned a video worker to work with a group of young Mirpuri people aged 15 to 18 years to produce a video about an aspect of their lives that was important to them. The aim was to provide the young people with the opportunity to gain experience in front of and behind the camera.

I was aware that as a general principle those community projects which are successful have involved close work with one group at a fixed location. However, it was suggested by some community leaders that we work with a number of groups of young people across the city to avoid criticism that we were favouring one area of the city above the others. If we did not do this we risked getting involved in rivalry between local identities. As a result we tried to involve various groups on the project but it proved logistically impossible to arrange and to keep the momentum going.

Therefore, we adjusted the focus and produced a film which explores the experiences and views of a group of Mirpuri people aged between their teens and their thirties. In a series of interviews the issues addressed include the past, identity, racism, beliefs, leisure and the future. Through this film we were able to present the views of some individuals which at times conflicted with the dominant views of the wider community.

Regular consultation

We formed a Consultative Group to advise on the project and met four times over a six month period. The group originally comprised of six people; a Councillor from the Mirpuri community, a prominent community figure, council officers and Museum staff. Some of the people had worked with the Museum in the past while others were invited to join the group because of their interest in the project.

Working closely with these people had a number of benefits; we were able to build on our own in-house knowledge about the community, it was an ideal way to gain access to people with whom we could conduct oral history interviews or photograph and it provided an opportunity to advertise the exhibition within the community. I

An embroidery workshop in the Gallery.

An exhibition photograph depicting a local Mirpuri wedding.

was also hopeful that by inviting people from some of the prominent community groups we would ensure that a range of opinions was represented. It also allowed the members of the group to have an involvement in how the community was portrayed in the Museum.

Overall the group responded very positively to the project. Each member had ideas about what should be included in the exhibition and how it should be interpreted. My role was to inform the group of the processes involved in mounting an exhibition and I discovered that I needed to constantly emphasise the constraints of time and money. It was important to strike a balance between accommodating people's ideas if they were good and feasible and explaining why others would not be practicable. Over enthusiasm was a problem if anything.

The Consultative Group was also an arena for resolving disagreements before the exhibition opened. There are divisions within the community and this was something which the Museum did not want to get involved in. At the meetings we wanted to ensure that all parties agreed to the decisions made and would take responsibility for them. However, in practice, this was not always the case. Difficulties arose because as the project became more well known further people attended the meetings and questioned decisions which had already been taken, sometimes leading to a decision being changed. This occurred in relation to the use of the terms 'Pakistani' and 'Kashmiri' and we finally agreed to use both terms to prevent alienating any one group.

In the future when we work with a consultative group we may decide to establish a more contractual relationship with members of the group so that rights and responsibilities are clear from an early stage. Despite the fact that reversing decisions invariably costs time and money, it is important that the meetings have a degree of formality which ensures that individuals take responsibility for decisions.

Responses and the future

The exhibition succeeded in fulfilling many of our aims and this is best demonstrated through some of the comments we received:

> *'Its really good to learn about Mirpuri culture, the history of Mirpuris coming to Britain and how it felt to live in Britain as someone who has Mirpuri parents and grandparents.'*

and

> *'Very good. Important. I've been at school in Handsworth and not understood the situation at all but this has helped to show me where many Asians in Birmingham come from.'*

We are meeting the challenge of continuing our relationship with the community beyond the life of the temporary exhibition by touring the Birmingham section to local schools and community centres. In addition, a Resource Box of objects and photographs which was compiled at the same time as the exhibition is available for loan to schools in the area.

The dialogue which began with this community is continuing as one particular group of people are now developing their own exhibition. This can be seen on one hand as a criticism, the group feels they can do better, but on the other hand, it is a complement because members of the community feel empowered to relate their own history and culture to the wider population of Birmingham.

WHAT MUSEUM CURATORS COULD BE COLLECTING ON THE BRITISH WAY OF DEATH

Ruth Richardson

A paper presented at an SHCG seminar on Death at Bury St. Edmunds in March 1997

You are right to imagine that, as a historian of British death culture, I've probably been thinking about British museums for a considerable time. I can remember as a child, during a visit to the British Museum, looking at the mummies and the sphinxes and Chinese vases and Japanese prints, and gallery after gallery of marvellous old stuff from foreign lands and ancient times, at last beginning to wonder where the British exhibits actually were. I thought there must be a gallery somewhere which I had so far missed which contained all the British exhibits – a gallery which addressed my own culture. I never *did* find that gallery.

As an adult, I've felt the same doubt nudging away at me more insistently whenever I visit major British museums. The British way of life seems to be a non-subject in most of them. Even museums with good anthropological collections seem to have a blind spot when it comes to our own culture, and this seems to be compounded when it comes to our death culture. More is known – and shown – about the funerary practices of the Egyptian Pharaohs than about the British of any era. The Horniman, or the Petrie, or the Museum of Mankind, might all have funerary masks from obscure African tribes, or artefacts from the Mexican Day of the Dead on display, but nothing to speak of on the British culture of death.

The recent Reith Lectures on the subject of racism have brought home to me how very much our culture, influenced by our history as a colonizing power, has apparently bequeathed to us an easy ability to assume the right to objectify and classify other cultures, to study them, past & present in great detail, and yet to assume that our own culture is above such an interest – we do not need to look at *ourselves* with an anthropological eye. We are not 'natives', we are not 'primitive', *we* are the enlightened norm from which all other cultures differ. Not all of us now hold these attitudes, but the existence of such attitudes is often evident in existing museum collections. Our task now is to correct the situation.

So, at the end of this most death-ridden and most death tabooed century it is therefore a great pleasure to have been asked to speak at this seminar. I have been asked to give a background talk to help prompt ideas about what curators could be looking out for in a pro-active way, in order to build up collections in this area.

Well, there's good news and bad news, and in time-honoured fashion, I'll give the good news first. The subject is a rich one, and an important one. Once you start looking, death is everywhere. Medicine is concerned with it, health fanatics obsessed by it – indeed, Jonathan Miller once said he could see the Angel of Death behind every jogger he passed in the park! Death rears its head in every newspaper, almost every novel or film, every hospital, every town, every community, every church, every street, every family. We all have our own experience of it, and our own attitudes towards it. For all the talk about it being a taboo, the topic is really rather difficult to avoid. We are currently witnessing a significant resurgence of interest in the entire subject – the skeleton is at last coming out of the cupboard. Death is becoming a respectable subject of enquiry, so you should find it less difficult to persuade superiors (should you wish to) of the need for extra space or extra funding or the possibility of an exhibition.

More good news: you may already have collections of material in your own repositories – items you have been squirreling away because you have an interest, or perhaps *unknown* materials – in your own museum collections, and in local libraries and records offices. Material may not be catalogued as of any deathly use, but is nevertheless of value: I am thinking of places where shrouds are hidden away under 'Costume', tombs are counted as 'sculpture' and catalogued by carver, the commemorated individual or the place of derivation; funeral ballads might be filed under the name of the person commemorated, like Nelson, Horatio or Wellington, Duke of, or just under 'Military & Naval'; paintings or cartoons catalogued by artist but not by subject, and undertakers' materials indexed under the

company name, or under a general heading like 'local businesses'.

And now for the bad news. The bad news is that a huge amount of knowledge and material has already been lost through the operation of the colonial mentality I have described, and because looking at Death in the way we are now attempting has until quite recently been regarded by many as 'morbid', an unnecessary and rather distasteful preoccupation. This attitude, which seems to be based in a horror of, or feeling of squeamishness towards death, is thankfully now on the decline, but its past existence will be evident by the blanks in many museum collections. In addition, a great deal of older knowledge, passed on by word of mouth and by witness, may have been lost because no-one bothered to record it.

British death artefacts – a preliminary listing

I offer here a preliminary listing of some artefacts associated with the death culture of the British Isles which you might find already in your own collections, still be able to collect, or at least be able to record. The list is not exhaustive: there are sure to be things I've overlooked, and you are certain to be able to find curiosities which cannot be foreseen. One of the major problems of previous exhibitions has been that they have tended towards the eccentric and the bizarre, rather than trying to describe the ordinary. I think this is because museum curators in the past tended to collect or to be offered the unusual or the curious, because everybody knew about the ordinary, and that's what may have been preserved. But people *don't* necessarily know about the ordinary, and they certainly don't know about what was ordinary two, three or more generations ago. The finest major exhibition on the death theme was organised nearly thirty years ago by John Morley at Brighton Museum. It was a success for a number of reasons, mainly because it confined itself to looking in some detail at a confined geography and a limited historical period. Morley's book of the exhibition, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians*, conveys an excellent idea of how the exhibition was organised, and what was on display. If you haven't already done so, you should read it.

The field is actually very wide, so wide that the problem may become how to keep it manageable, and how to organise what is found. Personally, I would be in favour of erring on the side of caution and *over*-collecting, rather than the opposite, although I know that space and funds are always tight. As with other artefacts, good data on derivation adds value to every deathly item. Nevertheless, beggars can't be choosers, and I would far rather have an item *without* a good genealogy than to throw it out, or see it lost.

I have found with my own materials that the best way to organise them is the simplest. If you can imagine the process of dying as a chronology from life to death, disposal and decay, it would include attitudes towards mortality among the living; the anticipation of & preparation for death; through dying to the moment of death; the mode of death, and all that happens thereafter – the treatment of the corpse, beliefs in the spiritual afterlife, administrative niceties – certification and so on; the experience of the mourners; right through to the final disposal of remains and commemoration, and even, in the case of archaeological remains, their subsequent unearthing, storage and exhibition. Such a chronology allows most topics under the big heading DEATH a safe place. Anything which falls in two places can of course be cross referenced. If you have any difficulty in grasping what I mean, get hold of a copy of my book and read the first chapter, where I try to place the dead human body in its historical and cultural context in the early part of the nineteenth century, using this form of ordering.

In that chapter I write in some detail about the folklore beliefs and funerary practices of pre-industrial Britain, such as the distribution to guests of rosemary before a funeral, or of funeral biscuits, in willow baskets. Moulds for funeral biscuits still survive, as do their printed wrappings, in some localities. But a willow basket might easily be overlooked.

And this is something to which I particularly want to draw your attention. Some of the most important customs to do with death were associated with everyday objects – a sheet to wrap the body in, pins to arrange the wrapping round the face, perhaps a bible to prop up the chin, pennies on the eyes, a basin to take round neighbours' doors for a collection for a wreath or to avoid death on the parish, a clock to stop, a mirror to cover.

These items are so ordinary that they do not clamour for collection, nor can they readily be identified as having anything to do with death. And yet, if you wanted to mount an exhibition about British customs and beliefs associated with death, they could prove invaluable.

Other items can readily be assembled as props for exhibition from current sources – like funeral foliage: box, bay, rosemary – or feathers – either those which were used to diagnose death (held before the mouth to test for the continuance or cessation of breathing) or those in pillows which were believed to delay the moment of death.

By way of illustration both of the sacred connotations of ordinary objects and the ways in which older customs sometimes mutate, I recorded in the 1980s from an elderly lady living in central London (Islington) the information that – as well as

covering her mirrors when her husband died – she also covered over her telly. This story I hope reveals that many older customs are still current and developing, so even if you can't get much evidence of older observances, collect what you can of *now*.

I include in this list *records*, and other ephemeral and paper materials which might be more likely to belong in archives or records offices. If you come across them while collecting, they are worth saving, and if you are mounting an exhibition, it is worth considering them for display.

Materials associated with preparation for death

You should be on the alert for what used to be called the contents of the bottom drawer, a sort of burial trousseau, which might be a package assembled by many an individual (nowadays if any survive, probably in the possession of very old ladies) containing everything necessary to arrange for a decent funeral

- a sheet, a shroud, cap, footbands, socks/stockings (and do bear in mind that wedding dresses and particularly night-gowns, invariably *new* ones, are still often saved with this thought in mind),
- there might also be perhaps an insurance policy,
- or a nest-egg of money to cover the funeral costs,
- *rarely*, there might also be some object which the person wants buried with them (grave goods).

You may not be able to persuade an individual to part with such a precious exhibit, but should you locate one, you might at least be allowed to record it in detail.

- Published and unpublished works, often devotional, pictorial or poetic, which individuals would have used for the contemplation of their own mortality,
- burial insurance policies,
- materials generated by burial societies,
- wills,
- materials on healthy living to prevent heart attacks reveal attitudes towards death, as do adverts for horror films, etc.

Dying

- Between the 17th–19th centuries, some religious communities, particularly non-conformists, recorded the dying days/death beds of members. These records survive sometimes as manuscripts, or occasionally as printed work,
- memoirs, diaries, papers may contain valuable materials, especially those of doctors, vicars, charitable visitors, nurses,
- newspapers, especially 19th century local papers are often surprisingly frank,
- fictional accounts may be based in fact, and even when imaginary are also revealing,
- death beds were in the past a suitable subject for paintings and other images. For example, there is a famous image of Prince Albert's last moments, which though inaccurate, is revealing about what was thought appropriate at the time,
- materials on terminal care in hospital, hospice or at home.

Materials associated with cause of death

- lay materials for confirming death has actually taken place – hand mirrors, shards of glass, feathers – all to detect breathing,
- medical apparatus for diagnosing, confirming or reversing death, such as stethoscopes, electrical resuscitators. I have found cases in wills in which the testator has asked that their veins be opened after death in order to ensure death has really taken place, and thereby prevent premature burial. A scalpel therefore represents such a piece of apparatus,
- Bills of Mortality – printed sheets which, between the 17th and 19th centuries, recorded weekly mortality statistics,
- materials such as handbills or posters associated with plagues and other epidemics,
- parish records,
- police and coroners' records,
- doctors', hospital and workhouse records,
- death certificates,
- disease maps, and descriptions of localities which include notions of healthy or unhealthy neighbourhoods,
- artefacts and other materials associated with capital punishment, such as broadsheets & ballads, gibbets, reputed hangman's ropes, associated memorabilia.
- Places serve as records, too. Is there a gibbet or gallows hill or lane in the neighbourhood? or a local equivalent of the Red Barn (burial site of the victim in a famous Victorian murder)? Or a local assizes which generated public executions?
- materials generated by resuscitation societies, such as local branches of the Humane Society, the Lifeboat Institution, or other such organisations,
- materials revealing evidence of a fear of premature burial.

Materials composed of/associated with the body itself

There are ethical problems with this sort of material, and I am aware that museum curators are rightly ill at ease with it.

- body parts and/or the containers for them, which might get lost through repugnance,
- viscera chests – these were usually created when the bodies of aristocrats were embalmed, and were often buried separately from the coffin, and might turn up as a result of crypt clearances,

- relics of all kinds, including human hair. Milk teeth might be kept for sentimental reasons, especially after the death of a child,
- cauls – the membrane which encloses the foetus in the womb, in which the child is sometimes born. Dried, they were believed to provide a charm against drowning, and were greatly prized by sailors. They were often kept in a special case. Although cauls are not necessarily part of a dead body they are a dead body part, and they also express a common cultural attitude towards death. I have seen 19th century adverts offering them for sale to travellers/sailors,
- casts of the body, such as death masks, or casts of hands,
- prostheses such as dentures, spectacles or glass eyes which might be so closely identified with an individual as to have been buried with them.

Medicine and the dead body

- Hospitals often possessed their own medical museums, and recent changes in the NHS may have left them at risk. The specimens were often derived from the bodies of local patients, or in the days of bodysnatching, from those buried in local graveyards. These museums benefited generations of local staff and patients. It is important that local historians and museum staffs defend their contents, *including associated records*,
- recipes for the chemical preservation of body parts were often locally specific, handed down through museum keepers,
- anatomical and pathological specimens, models, prints, textbooks, notebooks, photographs etc.
- where may I find a bone boiler? In the 19th century these were a regular accoutrement of every anatomy room,
- is there a set of bodysnatchers' tools in any museum in Britain?

Materials associated with preparing the dead for disposal

- artefacts associated with the laying out of the dead – traditionally done by local women who would have assembled a simple kit containing sheets, strips of rag, scissors, pins, needles and thread, pennies, perhaps salt and so on. These would probably be difficult to locate today. Undertakers may have similar kits today, which would now contain other things,
- articles associated with embalming, which in the past was only an aristocratic interest, and is nowadays much less popular in Britain than in America.
- David Clark's fine book, *Between Pulpit and Pew* describes the gap between the theology of the church and that of the lay community in a small fishing village near Whitby. He records an old artefact called a *streeking board*. This was a special board used in the community on which to lay out the bodies of the dead ('streeking' is the old world for laying out or *stretching* the dead). It was available for public use, traditionally kept outside the local undertakers. It has since disappeared. I do not know if such special boards survive (or indeed existed) anywhere else in Britain,
- artefacts associated with places of storage for the dead: public mortuaries were often to be found in obscure places in the grounds of workhouses, hospitals and mental hospitals; do not forget modern 'chapels of rest' and 'funeral homes', too. Maps, plans, photographs or other records of the nature of these places,
- coffins, coffin furniture – these were (and still are to some extent) rigorously graded by financial status,
- coffin linings & shrouds, often sold as 'sets' by undertakers,
- cremation urns – bear in mind that modern ones are plastic, not what you would immediately think of as an urn at all,
- trestles, usually found in pairs, and used for the support of the coffin during storage of the body,
- trade catalogues, adverts, illustrations, photographs or records associated with any of the above.

Materials associated with funerals

- funeral invitations,
- funeral hymn sheets/orders of service,
- funeral tickets,
- funeral accounts,
- undertakers' accounts/receipts – remember that in many localities builders, especially carpenters, often served as the local undertakers,
- undertakers' costume and kit – they often used to use a staff or stave when 'conducting' a funeral (some still do), bearers had/have special shoulder pads, palls were hired out, and so on,
- hatchments – large (a square yard or more) wooden boards or frames stretched with canvas, hung as a diamond-shape, black edged, painted with heraldic insignia. These were hung outside aristocratic houses when a death had occurred, and many are still preserved inside churches. Undertakers copied the idea, with imaginary heraldry, for aspiring commoners.
- I have a particular interest in the front windows of undertakers' shops, their window dressing, artefacts and furnishings, are just as worthy of preservation as for other trades, but may not have been kept hitherto because of squeamishness,
- materials from stables or carriers other than undertakers who used to provide funerary transport,

- hearses, wheelbiers, stretchers and other modes of coffin/mourner transport; Nelson, for example, was carried on a black-swathed barge,
- artefacts generated by florists,
- workhouse and parish records concerning pauper funerals,
- broadsheets survive showing the order of procession for the public funerals of royalty or great public figures such as Wellington. Newspapers continue the tradition,
- evidence of any kind concerning funerary food & drink, eg: objects kept for funerals – loving cups, snuff boxes, etc.
- catering bills for funeral feasts,
- trade catalogues, adverts, photographs, records, and illustrations of any kind associated with any of the above.

Materials associated with the disposal of the dead

- Items associated with burial, such as burial registers, cemetery prospectuses, pricing structures, adverts,
- materials associated with cremation – generated by the cremation movement or by modern cremation facilities.
- Workhouses, hospitals & mental institutions often had their own burial grounds. These parish grounds often recorded the position of the dead only by a number – and the grave-markers were often cast iron spikes with a small area for the number as the only inscription. Such grave-markers would now be of great interest. What has become of these grounds now many of these institutions have been privatized? The process has occurred only very recently, so I would urge all those with an interest in local history to seek out information concerning this process, and to endeavour to recover whatever materials or information it is possible to recover about the old burial grounds (as well as the institutions) – including maps, sale programmes, and anything else available. This process will be understood in years to come as being not unlike the dissolution of the monasteries, and it is important therefore to record it in local detail where possible. Take some photographs!
- Old sextons' tools are rare, but are sometimes found in parish church sheds. Data on more recent grave-digging equipment could also be sought.
- Photographs, illustrations, maps or other records of graveyards/cemeteries, or of ceremonies taking place in them.

Materials associated with the protection of the dead

- mortsafes, heavy cages or other objects used to protect graves from bodysnatchers,
- patent coffins,
- any other means of protecting graves,
- materials generated by societies or clubs for the protection of the dead,
- local plans/maps/views of graveyard watchers' huts.

Materials associated with mourning and grief

- Artefacts expressing cultural attitudes – such as Landseer's famous painting *The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner*, a favourite picture in the 19th century, can still be found in old postcard collections,
- condolence letters/cards sent to comfort survivors,
- etiquette manuals, and books of household advice, which usually/often have a section on 'correct' behaviour and 'acceptable' clothing for mourners,
- artefacts associated with obtaining mourning wear – drapers' records, receipts etc.
- advertisements and prospectuses from mourning warehouses/other suppliers,
- examples of mourning fabrics, such as crape, bombazine, velvet, as well as fabrics for black veiling,
- mourning wear and other articles associated with survivors' mourning, for men, women and children, such as:
  mourning handkerchiefs
  mourning jewellery, including hat pins
  mourning cloaks, gloves, hoods, scarves, especially patterns for such things, or evidence of undertakers' provision/hire of such things (generally before the mid-19th century),
  weepers – long black scarves used to swathe top hats & hang down
  widows' weeds – specific headwear for widows – almost an insignia. There was no such garment for widowers
  half mourning – garments (usually well-off ladies') in shades of purple, mauve, grey and white,
  mourning underwear – threaded with black ribbons,
  evidence of token mourning – a coat with a black diamond on its sleeve, for example, or black ties
- Many poor people could not afford new clothes, and therefore dyed existing ones if they had to go into mourning. Dyes and blacking (for leather) sometimes made a feature of this on their packaging. Laundries sometimes offered a service.
- Mourning stationery (black edged) and associated items such as black sealing wax and visiting cards,
- mourning newspapers (ditto),
- mourning china – teapots, plates with a space for ribbon – these were often threaded with mauve or black ribbon in a mourning household,
- materials generated by the mourning reform movement, which in the 19th century opposed all the paraphernalia associated with death,

- evidence of court mourning, national mourning, or public mourning, for example: Shops often had a long black board which they would use as a mourning shutter, or would keep their own shutters in place when an important local funeral was taking place – and by *important*, I do not necessarily mean only the wealthy or aristocratic. There are a number of categories of people whose mourning would be missed if this was the only criterion for collecting – for example: in a market it might be a stall-holder; in a locality, a local character, a heroic fire-fighter, shopkeeper, vicar, or councillor. Great War or World War II losses may have been commemorated in very public ways locally. The funerals of victims of crime or of injustice are occasionally notable, too. There may well be photographs.
- Photos or other images of people wearing mourning, memoirs/letters mentioning it, or simply describing funerals, or grief.

Commemoration/memorialization materials

- In the past poorer people had wooden grave-markers if they could not afford a stone. Grave-boards, or 'leaping boards' were usually composed of two upright posts about 18 inches/50 cm high, holding vertically between them a long flat board perhaps a yard long, on which an inscription would have been painted and/or carved. Many wooden monuments have rotted away, but remains can sometimes be found in corners of old churchyards. Many grounds never permitted wooden memorials of any kind,
- tombs, tombstones,
- brasses & other church monuments,
- epitaphs. Books on epitaphs are not always entirely trustworthy, as they often re-cycle choice examples. But many epitaphs were originally adapted from stock rhymes by stonemasons. Some local recordings of epitaphs survive in manuscript, and even published ones often give names, locations and dates which, even if the gravemarkers have disappeared, offer the possibility of checking personal details against parish death registers.
- Materials used in marking & decorating graves,
- ditto for ash disposal sites,
- immortelles – ceramic flowers, usually in the form of a small wreath, and often under glass, and often also protected by a wire cage. The older (and much more beautiful) equivalent of modern plastic flowers. Plastic flowers are important, too,
- maiden's garlands – in some areas of the country, particularly East Anglia, when a young girl died in a village, a garland of willow, decorated with white paper gloves, flowers, hearts, initials and other symbols would be hung above her pew in the local church,
- memorial cards – printed or embossed small cards commemorating the dead, often kept in small collections, many of them very beautiful, often featuring verses or devotional passages, the name & details of the deceased, expressions of emotion from survivors, and often, too, details of burial place and grave plot. Many were framed and exhibited in Victorian parlours. Modern equivalents survive, particularly in Catholic communities.
- Memorial columns in newspapers,
- memorial collections – magpie assemblages relating to a dead person, or members of a family, which might include locks of hair, pressed flowers, personal objects, letters etc, for example, with postcards from the Great War,
- memorial ceramics – such as memorial cups and dishes,
- sculpted likenesses of the dead, such as Staffordshire figures, busts or statues,
- photographs of the dead, living or dead (but don't be misled – e.g.: some of those children might *really* be sleeping!),
- Family Art (see Pacey's fine book on this),
- family shrines, which often nowadays contain or are composed of photographs,
- more recently, programmes or other ephemera from memorial meetings, subsequent to disposal,
- other forms of memorial/commemoration, such as commemorative lectures, buildings, charity or other events,
- memorial plaques or other markers recording past events, lost buildings, inhabitation by well-known figures etc.
- war memorials, including memorial buildings,
- photographs or other forms of record of the above.

The afterlife

Beliefs about the spirit or soul and what might happen to it after death are very hard to chart, and equally difficult to exhibit, but there are artefacts which may be revealing, or which may be used to signify beliefs in an exhibition. For example:

- traditionally dishes of salt and vessels of water were often placed near the dead, windows were opened and mirrors were covered to assist the spirit/soul (for explanation see my book),
- spiritual diaries, religious diaries which might contain discussion of the subject,
- images of angels, especially guardian angels, which are frequently to be found framed for use in Victorian homes,
- Victorian and Edwardian picture postcards often feature images which reveal attitudes towards death & loss, and the afterlife,
- ghostlore, tales of haunting,

- verses and sentiments on gravestones, in memorial cards, and in memorial columns and adverts today, often address the dead person directly, as if they could actually read what has been said,
- materials generated by spiritualists, such as 'photos' of spirits,
- materials generated by rationalists or other non-believers.
- I would urge all museum curators with an interest in this field also to seek out folklore materials for your locality. My book lists a number of existing local studies in the bibliography, and discusses both their importance and their shortcomings.

Conclusion

The culture of death in Britain has seen important changes over time, significant regional variations in practice, marked social differences, and allows considerable scope for idiosyncrasy. Much of it has never been charted. Work on this area of study is still in its infancy, so there is considerable scope for detailed local studies, a great need for serious collecting, and also of interviewing, particularly men and women of the Great War generation which is now fast dying out.

There will of course be difficulty. The *morbid* attitude will undoubtedly prevent some people from talking to you or assisting your work. You may find yourself trespassing on emotions with which you may not feel fully prepared to deal. But the plus side is that you may well also encounter extraordinary generosity and willingness to help on the part of individuals who have never thought of an interest in death as morbid. Many people, especially older ones, are unafraid of addressing this subject, having reached the stage in their own chronology where it is possible to get a better perspective on things. Some of these people will have nowhere to leave family materials, or know of no-one who would value them. Your interest will be appreciated by them, just as their knowledge and/or collections will be by you. Your antennae will be up, and even apparent trivia will be understood as potentially significant.

I am quite confident that the more you search, the more you will find.

For further reading please see Steph Mastoris, *A Reading List on Death, Burial and Commemoration*.

A READING LIST ON DEATH, BURIAL AND COMMEMORATION

Steph Mastoris

GENERAL STUDIES

ARIES, Philippe, *The Hour of our Death* (Allen Lane, 1981)
CLARK, D, *Between Pulpit and Pew* (Cambridge, 1982)
DANIELL, Christopher, *Death and Burial in Mediaeval England* (Routledge, 1996)
ENRIGHT, D. J. (ed), *The Oxford Book of Death* (OUP, 1983)
GITTINGS, Clare, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (Routledge, 1988)
GORER, Geoffrey, *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* (Cresset, 1965)
HOULBROOKE, Ralph (ed), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (Routledge, 1989)
HUNTINGTON, R. & MEDCALF, P., *Celebrations of Death: the Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (2nd ed., CUP, 1992)
LLEWELLYN, Nigel, *The Art of Death* (Reaktion, 1991)
MAY, Trevor, *The Victorian Undertaker* (Shire, 1996)
MORLEY, John, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (Pittsburgh UP, 1971)
NOLAN, P., 'Death is a Family Affair', *Folk Life*, 29 (1990)
PACEY, Philip, *Family Art* (Polity Press, 1989)
RICHARDSON, Ruth, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (Routledge, 1988 & Penguin, 1989)
STANNARD, David, *The Puritan Way of Death* (OUP, 1977)
WHALEY, J. (Ed), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (1981)
WILKINS, Robert, *The Fireside Book of Death* (Hale, 1990)

FUNERALS

BLAND, Olivia, *The Royal Way of Death* (Constable, 1986)
BREARS, Peter, 'Construction of a Maiden's Garland', *Folk Life*, 21 (1982)
LITTEN, Julian, *The English Way of Death: the Common Funeral Since 1450* (Hale, 1991)
MITFORD, Jessica, *The American Way of Death* (Hutchinson, 1963)
PUCKLE, Bertram, *Funeral Customs: their Origin and Development* (Werner Laurie, 1926)
SPRIGGS, Gareth, 'Maiden's Garlands', *Folk Life*, 21 (1982)
STEVENS, Catrin, 'The Funeral Wake in Wales', *Folk Life*, 14 (1976)

COSTUME & MOURNING

CUNNINGTON, P. & L., *Costume for Births, Marriages and Deaths* (A. & C. Black, 1972)
BURY, Shirley, *Sentimental Jewellery* (1986)
MULLER, Helen, *Jet Jewellery and Ornaments* (Shire, 1980)
PENNY, Nicholas, *Mourning* (V&A/HMSO, 1981)
TAYLOR, Lou, *Mourning Dress* (Allen & Unwin, 1983)

TOMBS, MEMORIALS & GRAVEYARDS

BORG, Alan, *War Memorials* (1991)
BREARS, Peter, 'Heart Gravestones in the Calder Valley', *Folk Life*, 19 (1981)
BROOKS, Chris, *Mortal Remains: the History and Present State of the Victorian and Edwardian Cemetery* (Weaton, 1989)
BURGESS, Frederick, *English Graveyard Memorials* (Lutterworth, 1963)
CHURCH MONUMENTS SOCIETY, *Church Monuments* [journal] (1986-)
CURL, James Stevens, *A Celebration of Death* (Constable, 1980)
CURL, J. *The Victorian Way of Death* (David and Charles, 1972)
GREENHILL, Frank, *Incised Effigial Slabs...*, c.1100–c.1700, 2 vols (Faber, 1976)
KEMP, Brian, *English Church Monuments* (Batsford, 1980)
MANSFIELD, Nick, 'British War Memorials of WWI' [review article], *SHCG Journal*, 18 (1990/91)
NORRIS, M., *Monumental Brasses*, 3 vols, (1978)
ROBERTS, Warren, 'Tombstones in Scotland and Indiana', *Folk Life*, 23 (1984)

DON'T GET COLD FEET ABOUT DEATH – THE EXPERIENCES OF MOYSE'S HALL MUSEUM

Maggie Blake

From January to May 1997, Moyse's Hall, Bury St Edmunds, hosted an exhibition about death entitled, Voices from the Past. *This paper looks at why the topic was chosen and what the response to it was. Presented at an SHCG Seminar on Death, in March 1997.*

Moyse's Hall, in the heart of Bury St Edmunds, looks very much like the typical Victorian museum. For the most part it is an odd mixture of curiosities including a horse-head fiddle and a church covered in shells. However, what tends to attract most people's attention are the items connected with death. Many local history museums have items such as grave goods in archaeological collections and mourning jewellery in their social history displays. What makes Moyse's Hall different though, is the fact that objects connected in varying ways to death are slotted together in a haphazard manner. For example, the scalp and book covered in the skin of the murderer William Corder is displayed near a gibbet cage, a Romano-British coffin and "Charlie", the skeleton recently donated by the Red Cross. As objects are what makes museums different from other heritage sites, it was felt that this could be an important opportunity to highlight particular items in a different setting. Furthermore, it might make people look at them afresh.

Another reason for putting on such an exhibition was a personal fascination with the subject. Ever since I was a young child, I was in many ways surrounded with death. My birthday was the day before my maternal grandfather's death and so it tended to be a time for reflection on his untimely end. In addition, I spent many hours organising flowers for family graves and listening to all the personal connections of the people buried in that quiet country churchyard. Watching my mother die almost 10 years ago when I was 19 had a profound affect on me and made me reconsider the values in my life. What I remember being particularly noticeable was the fact that my friends did not feel that they could talk to me about her death but discussed the subject when I was out of the room. It is for all these reasons and many others beside that I am intrigued by death and feel that it is a subject that should be more readily talked about.

Although I was very enthusiastic to tackle the subject of death, my manager was very concerned that the topic be dealt with sensitively. Bury St Edmunds is a small market town in a rural area and I felt that a sensationalist approach would have been inappropriate. Instead, the general aim was to allow the topic to be aired and to get people to think about death in a more positive way.

In order to do justice to our fine collections, the decision was made to take a mainly chronological approach. The objective was to focus on the areas where the collections were the strongest but at the same time to use the opportunity to do some contemporary collecting to help build the collections for the future. Objects used in the display included items connected with the death rituals of prehistoric people, Roman cooking pots used to hold cremated bone and grave goods associated with the Anglo Saxons. The medieval section consisted mainly of images of death from church brasses and gravestones. Not surprisingly, the Victorian section was filled with a variety of objects including mourning jewellery and costume showing how a whole industry lived off death and the etiquette surrounding it.

The exhibition also provided the first opportunity to put on display a rare find of coffin, plates and other coffin furniture found in a country undertakers office in 1994. The East Anglian Film Archive made a video at the time and interviewed the various people who remembered when the business was a going concern. I was also able to take photos of the objects in situ and also organize some oral history to provide the objects with a context. Talking to Dr. Ruth Richardson, one of the foremost researchers on the subject of death, also equipped me with an understanding of the importance of imagery when looking at items connected with burial.

In the section on the present and future of death and the rituals surrounding it, the emphasis was very much on the current trend towards "greener" burials. For example, during research a colleague went along to a coffee morning where everyone was helping to decorate the owner's

Moyse's Hall Museum; Voices from the Past – *green burials.*

Voices from the Past – *a school workshop researching about death in pre-history.*

cardboard coffin. A company gave us a similar one for the museums's collection which was sprayed gold. In addition, we were also lent a beautifully made wicker coffin which turned out was actually required for use later in the year!

I very much wanted to encourage schools to use the exhibition to support their work in the classroom. Although death is dealt with as part of Personal and Social Development, it was felt that schools would not make a special journey to see the exhibition on account of this, as it could be difficult to discuss painful emotions in an unfamiliar setting. Therefore, a history workshop for Key Stages 2 and 3 pupils was devised which aimed, "to research beliefs and attitudes surrounding death from the Romans to the present day by looking at sources of historical evidence and comparing burial customs". This allowed pupils to think what it would have been like to have been a Roman etc and research "their" period from the exhibition. Each group gave feedback to the others and the museum staff helped by providing extra information. In addition, pupils looked at the reason for people being buried with objects and decided what they might like to be buried with. Back at school, the children could make their own epitaphs and design a suitable gravestone. Although we did not have a huge take up from schools, the work that was produced was of a very high quality and provided much interest for visitors.

I was very surprised at the positive response to the exhibition and I was delighted that it was featured in the Funeral Service Journal. Although some people (particularly older people who perhaps felt it was too close for comfort) were not interested in looking around, we had many people who made a special effort to come. In addition, there was a great deal of interest in the cardboard coffin and many people took away the various contact names that had been gathered during the research. The resource file that people could look through and request photocopies from also proved very popular. This is still available when people come in to ask for information that was available in the exhibition. The associated lecture programme was almost sold out and the period of research provided another opportunity to liaise with other public bodies such as the County Archaeology Unit and the Records Office.

I feel that the subject of death is an important one to be covered by local/social history museums. The way Moyse's Hall tackled it is only one approach and given extra time and resources, a more thorough examination of the present views and customs connected with death could have been tackled. What needs to happen is that death becomes a mainstream subject in museums rather than something which is ignored or glossed over. Only then will one of society's last taboos be broken in museums.

VIEWS OF THE PAST: VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

Jane Sarre

Museums are society's relationship with the past. They hold our collective memories, and are places we go to re-visit history and learn from it, but what sort of relationships do they foster? An individual can be defined by their past experiences and the patterns of action that this creates, but is this also true of a society? Does what we understand of the past influence how we act in the present or for the future? My research suggests that an understanding of the process of history is a defining characteristic of those who have a conscious vision of a different future. Those who choose to intervene in the writing of history first need the ability to relate to that process on an individual level. As a site which can give a view of the past, how does the work of the museum impact on this relationship?

Writing in the last issue of this journal, Helen Coxall used Stuart Hall's schema of 'hegemonic', 'negotiated' and 'resistant' readings to argue that '*writing narratives can sometimes be problematic*';[1] thoughtless text can be irritating, exclusionary or offensive. She suggests that these issues should be considered when discussing "politically sensitive issues"[2] and implies that this is the case particularly when dealing with gender or ethnic minorities. By problematising text in this way, Coxall does us an enormous service. She introduces the ways in which meanings are constructed, and highlights the significance of this to museums. Having studied the political implications of the museum visit, I would like to see this process of problematising extended to the visit as a whole.

Defining meaning

As we have seen, the writing of text, the constructing of narratives, is a potentially powerful position. It brings the ability to choose 'facts' and influence the way in which history is defined. To quote a more recent work of Hall's;

> '*Power it seems, has to be understood here, not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way…the exercise of* symbolic power *through representational practices*.'[3]

Through these representational practices objects in collections are held to symbolise – *represent* – the cultures from which they originate, and displays are constructed to *represent* the museum's interpretation of a culture or period or event to the contemporary viewing public. In both instances objects become something more than they originally were, they take on an added layer of meaning. This new meaning is laid over any older meanings, and in a museum context is frequently the most (or only) visible meaning. Rather than being in any way intrinsic, 'meaning' of the object is now a product of the museum's authorship. Using this symbolic power to design exhibitions, or construct narratives, museum staff manipulate objects, text and images to construct narratives. In doing so they also construct potential relationships with that narrative, implicitly constructing a position for the audience from which the narrative makes sense. By constructing this subject position the identity of the visitor is recreated on the museum's terms. The legitimacy of the visitors own self-definition is consequently denied.

By denying the histories of all other groups, museums assert their own reading as the correct one. What starts as merely one of a range of possible interpretations acquires the inevitability of 'common sense', and can be defined as 'truth'.

Ordering knowledge

Meaning can be defined at the level of the single unit – the meaning of an object, the true history of an event, but this is only possible if that unit of information has a framework of background knowledge to support it. So we need to consider not only what we know – ontology – but also how we know it – epistemology. This can be conceived as the way we arrange information, or construct a grid-like framework which can then be used to classify and order one fact in relation to another. Like all grids this needs axes which express values.

Museums manifest this view of the world through their classification of collections – 'Western/Non Western Art' – and reproduce the hierarchy of values: is a plate 'Decorative Art' or

'Social History'? In this way, museums order knowledge by the enforcing of discipline. They reproduce an epistemological framework in which some information attains a higher status, mirroring the dominant values and encouraging the hegemonic reading. Conversely, because of the arrangement of the boundaries of disciplined knowledge, the ideas and values that fundamentally challenge the hegemony do not fit into the grid, and become literally unthinkable.

This epistemological framework has been constructed differently at different times, imagine the difference between the earliest cabinets of curiosities and the modern museum.[4] As a consequence of these epistemological shifts, new things have become knowable, as for example in the transition from a religious to a scientific understanding of the world. This highlights the social construction of knowledge, demonstrating through historical change that knowledge is not neutral, but is a product of the culture that 'knows' it. Having this insight into the relationship between socio-political power and the construction of value judgements which frame an epistemology, we can no longer collude with the propaganda of 'neutrality'. By rigidly upholding a modern epistemology, the museum chooses to perpetuate a system which makes it impossible for the visitor to conceive alternate formulations of knowledge. Disciplining knowledge also disciplines those who would know.

Mediating experience

As material evidence of the past enters the museum and becomes set apart from contemporary experience it acquires a new symbolic position to which we are expected to respond to in certain ways.[5] Museums then become a means for mediating our experience of the past. As with all media, this entails the possibility of communication, but also the possibility for intervention. Given my original premise that the ability to relate to the past is necessary for informed actions for the future, any intervention in this relationship is by definition significant and political.

If, as Berleant argues the *'planned environment becomes in practice a planned experience'*;[6] how then do we reconcile this – symbolic and actual – power of the museum with the autonomous visitor's own reading? Is the symbolic power of the museum countered by the independent readings which can be made by visitors who may choose to negotiate or resist the dominance of the museum's narrative? For me, this question was clarified by considering the work of Foucault. He saw power not as a commodity to be possessed but as a medium through which events or relationships are expressed; unequal power relations are recreated anew through every interaction. So, visitors are kept separate from the objects they are asked to look at. They are excluded from the authorship of the narrative that gives those objects meaning. They may choose not to listen, but they are isolated from the ability to challenge or communicate a different narrative with other visitors. They become passive, consuming a view of the spectacular past which has no relationship with their experience of reality.

So, although this relationship and the meaning it produces are theoretically the outcome of joint negotiations, the museum holds all the trumps. By controlling the visit experience, they discourage the conception of alternate readings. Rather, the message of the museum experience are incorporated into people's understandings of the world, and then influences their actions.

Re-considering practice

What can this tell us about museum practice – current or ideal? Museums may have the symbolic power to define meaning through representation and the relative power to dominate interaction and communication, but does this matter?

By considering the role of the museum in a wider social context – a society in which certain elite groups have power over others – it is clear to me that it does matter. As cultural institutions, museums have been aligned with 'High Arts', they have been invested with cultural authority as the holders of the 'truth'. But this authority has been gained through the expression of a certain view. Museums then have not only symbolic power but also real social power, aligned with wider social hierarchies which enables them to tell the history of one particular group as if it were the only history. In so doing, this single narrative is constructed as 'truth', and further, through its application in the real world this hegemonic reading has the power to make itself become true. This partiality is then compounded by social iniquity between the individual visitor and the unquestionable authority of the institution.

When I first talked to a tutor about my ideas, their response was along the lines of: "hmm, interesting… politics was all the rage ten years ago, but there hasn't been much since…" implying to me that talking about politics had become an irrelevance. Indeed, this may be the case if, like many, you limit your definition of politic to the electoral process. However, I would argue that politics are central to the understanding of all unequal power relationships. Societies, like individuals, are defined by their histories and what they choose to learn from them. My research has quite clearly indicated that museum practice is heavily implicated in constructing particular views of the past. As we have seen, these interpretations gain dominance through the symbolic power of the

museum to define meaning. These definitions are in turn reinforced by the epistemological structure, the power asserted by the museum within the phenomena of the visit, and the alignment of the museum with other institutions of power and social hierarchy. As a result of the museum's monopoly of meaning the visitor is disempowered – symbolically, relatively and socio-politically.

Consequently, I would propose that we need to re-consider the purpose of the activities of museums. By taking the quality of the relationship between the visitor and their histories it is possible to reformulate museum practice and thus develop from an essentially disempowering experience to the opposite. It could be argued that many of the recent trends of good practice are addressing this issue. An emphasis on social history, interactivity, outreach, accountability in authorship, equal opportunities and multi-cultural sensitivity etc. have the potential for empowerment.

However, while these activities may accidentally achieve the desired effect on occasion, I do not think it is acceptable to leave such a serious issue to chance and serendipity. Rather, the visitor/history relationship should be used as a key criteria for evaluating the work of the museum. If this critical understanding is applied, many things may be achieved. Museum practice can counter people's alienation and encourage their ability to understand and participate in both the formation and the study of history. When people become able to 'do' history, to construct a meaningful view of the past to which they can relate, museums will have achieved their purpose, and will be part of a community which can compose and create a future according to their visions.

Notes

1. H. Coxall, 'Resistant Readings: It is what you say and the way that you say it' *Social History in Museums: Journal of the Social History Curator's Group* vol. 22. (1995–6) pp. 5.
2. Ibid.: 5.
3. S. Hall, 'The Spectacle of the 'Other'' in S. Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Sage, 1997) p. 259.
4. see E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (Routledge, 1992) for a fuller discussion of this ideas and the impact of Foucault on museological thinking.
5. See for example C. Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (Routledge, 1995) on the ritual behaviour of passivity and awe inspired by museum visits, and P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989) on the cognitive significance of these performative ritual experiences.
6. A. Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Temple University Press, 1992) p. 133.

A fuller discussion of these ideas can be seen in F. J. Sarre, '*Inventing the Future?: The Politics of Museum Theory and Practice*' (M.A. dissertation, University of Leicester, unpublished, 1997) and J. Sarre, forthcoming (Museological Review, 1998).

TOWARDS INCLUSIVENESS IN SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Steph Gillett

Introduction

South Gloucestershire Council, a unitary authority created under Local Government Re-organisation in 1996, has responsibility for delivering services formerly provided by Avon, Kingswood and Northavon councils to a population of 235,000. Amongst the Council's Guiding Principles are:

- *Recognising the diverse needs of individuals and groups within the community,*
- *Ensuring that people with disabilities have access to services and the Council's decision making process,*
- *Allocating resources fairly and on the basis of need, and,*
- *Overcoming unfair discrimination.*

No museums service as such was inherited from the predecessor authorities, but a developing voluntary infrastructure of independent museums and heritage groups provided a framework for future provision.

This article outlines the 'Museums & Heritage Centres – Access & Interpretation Project', carried out as part of the Council's Leisure & Community Resources Department strategy to develop an inclusive heritage and museums service.

Philosophy

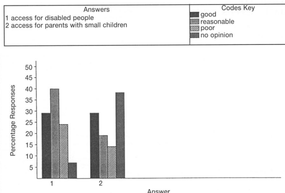
Whilst twice as many people visit museums in the UK than football matches and theatres together, it is generally acknowledged that this audience is not fully representative of the population as a whole.[1] Significant minority communities are under represented in the visitor profiles of many heritage sites and museums.[2] Disabled people and minority ethnic groups are especially under represented in museum audiences. Merriman has shown that a much higher proportion of socio-economic groups ABC1 visit museums than groups C2DE.[3] 'The first stage in developing wider participation in the...heritage...is to recognise that issues of inequality, ownership and access (both physical and mental) are vitally important to everyone, especially under-represented groups.[4]

The intention of the Council's emerging Museums and Heritage Service is that provision should be both physical and intellectually accessible. This is a philosophy gaining ground within the museum profession and sits comfortably with the community development approach of the department.[5] The project was developed as one way of sounding-out the views of a number of target groups on existing and potential future heritage provision.

Disabled people, older people, minority ethnic groups and others are often excluded from museums and heritage centres due to inadequate access and displays that fail to attract or address their perspectives or understanding. Yet the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in 1988 identified a UK adult population of 6.2 million with a physical, sensory or intellectual impairment; a significant 'minority' group to be ignored by providers of heritage facilities.[6] Perceptions of 'disability' are often misleading; of the 6.2 million cited above, less than 5% are wheelchair users. There are nearly one million visually impaired people, but, according to the RNIB, the majority have some residual sight, and 65% can read large print.[7] Assumptions by providers about how best to cater for the needs of disabled people in terms of access and interpretation, sometimes only as far as providing ramps for wheelchairs or Braille guides, can therefore fail to meet the real needs of disabled people. Displays and interpretative media need to be developed that respect the diversity of abilities within the community.

In terms of access, the Social Model of Disability was accepted as the basis for this project. 'The social model of disability is a rejection of the idea that disability is the necessary outcome of the physical, sensory or intellectual impairments rather it states that disability is a form of oppression, a form of discrimination generated by society which takes no or little account of disabled peoples' needs.'[8] This model can be extended to other disadvantaged groups within the community, for example parents with small children. In this case it is because buildings are not 'child friendly', for example inadequate provision for pushchairs, rather than a fundamental difficulty in providing accessible displays for adults with young children.

The 1991 Census revealed a UK minority



ethnic population of three million (6%), including African, Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and Asian. Within South Gloucestershire a small, but significant, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi community of six hundred was identified by the Census. The Department was keen to find ways of ensuring that cultural diversity in the community is addressed by heritage provision, whilst the impression gained locally was that most heritage groups reflected their white, middle-class membership in the programmes and collections that they presented. Heritage in this case was 'history', and did not extend to more recent additions to the community's population profile. But Morris contends that 'the more people know about their surroundings – about the historical connections with buildings, sites, street names – the stronger their sense of national identity and the greater their confidence about their part in society.'[9]

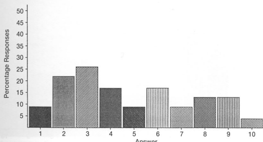
Methodology

Five target groups were identified: young people, older people, disabled people, Black people, and women. It was proposed to negotiate with existing groups or establish ad hoc groups via other agencies, to form a small working group of six to eight people for each target group. A programme of visits, in consultation with the target groups, of two or three museums per group was proposed.

A range of questions, to be addressed on each visit, was to be produced, which would establish success criteria against which each site could be assessed. On completion of the programme of 10 to 15 visits, feed-back from participants was to be recorded and incorporated into a draft report. It was intended that this report would be discussed with members of each target group. Findings from the project would inform future policy decisions on museum services and heritage provision. The desirability of discussing the groups' perceptions with museum staff at the end of each visit was acknowledged.

Initial approaches were made to a local authority youth centre; Age Concern, (a registered charity working for and with older people); Kingswood and District Council for Disabled People; Kingswood Asian Women's Group; and a voluntary organisation providing training and life-long learning opportunities for girls and women.

The response rate from targeted groups was variable, due to a number of factors, but especially because of staff changes and illness. The first positive response was from the Council for Disabled People and the Senior Community Officer (Heritage)



attended a meeting in September 1996 to discuss the project and invite volunteers. Age Concern responded at the same time, identifying five older people willing to participate. Protracted staff illness at the youth centre and young women's project led to both these approaches being abandoned. However, an approach to the local Women's Network led to a meeting with a small group of women, from several voluntary groups in November. Staff changes at the Asian Women's Group required a renewed approach, but resulted in a successful meeting with the group also in November. No young people were involved in the visits, due to the failure to identify dates for visits, although a small group had expressed interest.

The questionnaire

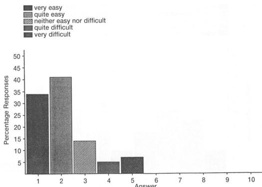
It was decided to develop a questionnaire that included both quantitative and qualitative elements. A number of sample questionnaires were reviewed, which provided a basis for some of the questions.[10] Others were drafted with the aim of encouraging participants to analyse the accessibility of collections and facilities. It was intended to take the draft questionnaire to all target groups before commencing visits, and so develop a final version that reflected the interest areas of all groups. However, the time scale between the first group meeting, (Council for Disabled People) and the last, (Asian Women's Group), resulted in only the former being able to influence the questionnaire content.

By December 1996 the four groups, involving 26 volunteers, had visited 7 museums and completed 50 questionnaires. All but one of the visits had been to museums outside South Gloucestershire, the exception being the volunteer run Thornbury Museum.

A mechanism for analysing the questionnaires was not fully explored before the exercise commenced, although it was originally envisaged that the results would be compiled manually. However, it soon became clear that to handle the resulting data effectively, access to appropriate computer software would be essential. After exploring a number of options it was decided to adapt an existing software package, designed for undertaking community profiles. As the questionnaire had been prepared without reference to the software, it was a considerable task to adapt the questions used to those in the menu.

Resources

Resource implications were identified at an early stage, and included staff time, museum admission



charges, transport costs, and other access costs. It was agreed to cover expenditure from departmental budgets as necessary, but to seek free admission at museums where possible. Two principles were established; one that volunteers out-of-pocket expenses, including child-care costs, should be covered, secondly that all access requirements would be accommodated.

A successful application was submitted to the Area Museum Council for the South West for funding to cover incidental expenditure. The final claim for £424 was made up of: hire of wheelchair accessible minibus (£274); volunteers' expenses (£96); museum admission charges (£54). The Senior Community Officer staffed the project, including driving the minibus.

Results

Responses to questions in each individually numbered questionnaire were analysed for each museum and for all visits combined. The package provided results in both tabular and graphic forms. Cross-analysis was possible; for example 14 out of 22 responses by disabled people indicated that there were restrictions on access or that facilities for disabled people were poor.

Whilst the number of questionnaires completed provides a very small sample, there is potential for further analysis of the results. However, because of the small sample and the variables presented by both participants and venues, it was not possible to draw firm conclusions from the results. The questionnaire results nevertheless do provide an indication of how the various target groups viewed aspects of several museum displays and facilities.

The results have yet to be shared with the participants or museums, but this next stage will help to refine the raw data into more meaningful statements about what hinders or encourages inclusive interpretation and access to museum collections.

Feedback sessions with museum staff at the end of most of the visits were also useful to the venue, and provided further insights into good and bad aspects of the displays and facilities. Physical access issues at several museums were highlighted, particularly concerning the location and size of lifts. The difficulties faced by dyslexics when confronted with labels full of text were related by a sufferer, who appealed for audio tape guides. At one museum members of the group expressed concern about the location of the shop, (visitors have to walk through it on their way into the galleries), and their disappointment at the apparent lack of displays relating to the city's history.

Even glass cases can engage; Kingswood Asian Women's Group at the Corinium, Cirencester, Gloucestershire.

Other outcomes

Although the results of the questionnaire have not yet been fully analysed, there have been some clear outcomes to the project. At one level it has demonstrated the potential for audience evaluation of displays and heritage facilities. In view of this the participating groups have been identified as focus groups for front-end evaluation of the displays for museum developments, and this has been written into the design brief for a current proposal. A further outcome has been the recognition that even non-museum visitors can enjoy the experience of museums, provided that there is the opportunity of interaction at some level, in this case the questionnaire. All nine questionnaires completed by participants who visited museums less than once a year indicated the visit to be 'very enjoyable' or 'quite enjoyable'.

Conclusions

The project has demonstrated the importance of, and potential for, involving representatives of under-represented museum audiences in evaluation of collections, displays and facilities. Certain aspects of displays would have been missed entirely without the first-hand input of disabled people themselves. The effort required by a visually impaired visitor's companion to describe exhibits, and the missed opportunities for providing truly tactile displays, could not have been guessed at.

The majority of participants expressed enthusiasm for the exercise itself and seemed genuinely pleased at being asked to contribute to the project. A further programme of visits for those who have already participated and others, especially young people, is being considered. A positive spin-off from the project has been the introduction to museum visiting of a number of non-visitors. There are also possibilities for involving, for example, the Asian Women's Group in establishing exhibitions or displays, which reflect their culture and heritage, as community events.

Although this approach to evaluation seems to be useful, it is important to clarify the role of qualitative and quantitative responses. Whilst the qualitative material is especially valuable it is, of course, much more difficult to analyse. McManus believes qualitative and quantitative data to be extremes of the same continuum, stating '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.'[11]

Interacting with inter-actives; South Gloucestershire Age Concern and Women's Network.

Designing the questionnaire in advance of identifying the methodology for analysis, i.e. computer software package, was a fundamental flaw, and a follow-up questionnaire will be designed around the SNAP package held by the Department's Marketing Section.

Carrying out effective evaluation of displays and accessibility is an essential element in seeking ways to meet the needs of museum audiences and potential audiences, and needs to be built into interpretative planning.[12] Accessibility is a vital element in ensuring inclusive interpretation; the most stimulating display will be wasted on significant sections of the community if they are unable to gain access to it. A holistic approach needs to be taken, which inevitably requires an assessment wider than the immediate environment of the museum. As a member of the Council for Disabled People pointed out at the first meeting, if there is no accessible transport to the museum, the inclusiveness of the displays within will make little difference to a person unable to travel to it.

Notes

1. Museums Association, 1997.
2. D. T. Herbert, R. C. Prentice and C. J. Thomas, (eds), *Heritage Sites: Strategies for Marketing and Development* (Aldershot, 1989).
3. N. Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case: The Past, the Heritage and the Public in Britain*, (Leicester University Press, 1991), pp. 73–4.
4. J. Agyeman, 'Environment, Heritage and Multiculturalism', *Interpretation*, 1 : 1 (1995), pp. 5–6.
5. L. Carrington, 'Power to the People', *Museums Journal*, 97:4 (1997), pp. 32–33; D. Flemming, 'The Regeneration Game', *Museums Journal*, 97:4 (1997), pp. 32–33.
6. M. Blockley, 'Rights of Access', *Interpretation*, 1:2 (1996), pp. 3–4.
7. Ibid, p. 3.
8. Art Shape Limited, *Equal Opportunities Policy Statement* (1994).
9. D. Martin, 'Working with Communities', *Museum Practice* 1 : 3 (1996), pp. 47–48.
10. C. Conybeare, *Museum Visitor Surveys: A Practical Guide*, (AMCSW, Taunton, 1991); S. Runyard, *Low-Cost Visitor Surveys* (M.G.C., London, 1994).
11. P. McManus, 'Approaches to Evaluation in Preliminary Assessment (Front End Studies), *Social History in Museums*, 22 (1995–6), pp. 14–17.
12. S. Fisher, 'The Role of Audience Research', Presentation by Susie Fisher at Museums Association 102nd Annual Conference, 1st October 1996; J. A. Veverka, *Interpretive Master Planning* (Falcon Press, Helen, Montana, 1994).

THE HOUSE OF MANANNAN – THE LATEST CHAPTER IN THE STORY OF MANN

Who are MNH?

Kirsty Neate and Yvonne Cresswell

This is a story from the Irish Sea about the Isle of Man. This is not a story about the Isle of Wight! The Isle of Man has a reputation for its Draconian laws against homosexuality (which incidentally have been repealed), TT Races and cats with no tails. Whilst the above are all distinctly Manx, the Island has a lot more to offer.

Manx National Heritage, funded by the Manx Government, are in the business of promoting the Isle of Man beyond such limited preconceptions and opening up the rich history of a fascinating country both to the native Manx population and visitors alike!

The Story of Mann is the title used by Manx National Heritage to describe the themes of Manx history. Visitors are encouraged to begin their journey at the Manx Museum in Douglas. From here they can choose which themes to pursue in greater detail with visits to real sites around the 227 square miles that the Island has to offer.

Recent visitors to Mann will have noticed that Manx National Heritage have added a new site to their repertoire. In May 1997 we launched the latest chapter of The Story of Mann with the opening of The House of Manannan to present the Celtic, Viking and Maritime history of the Island.

As with most aspects of the work of Manx National Heritage this project relied on an interdisciplinary approach from day one. The project team consisted of Social Historians, Archaeologists and Natural Historians. Working as one group enabled the project team to share their different approaches to history. The influence of the Social Historians can be seen in the displays throughout The House of Manannan where the emphasis is very much on the people who made Manx history.

The designers

The process for developing The House of Manannan began at least four years ago with a feasibility study and of course with the intellectual process of looking at exactly what we were trying to achieve with this new project.

The Manx Museum alone could not do justice to introducing the Celtic, Viking and Maritime stories. Therefore, a new forum was needed to present the stories in more detail and ultimately to encourage the public to embark on their own personal odyssey seeking out the real places around the Island where Manx history was made.

A new project like this also provided a perfect opportunity to employ the latest multi-media technology in the displays. MNH were not looking to repeat methods of communication and interpretation already used at other sites. Consequently we were keen to avoid written text and instead aimed to present the key messages in each area using a combination of film, reconstruction and computer interactives.

In the local press Manx National Heritage were frequently accused of the "Disneyfication" of history prior to the opening of the centre. However, the main objective for curators and designers alike was the exact opposite. The priority in research and design was to set the displays at specific moments in Manx history, inhabited by real people. The local press seemed unable to reconcile the use of multi-media technology with hard historical fact.

For each area a list of four to five key messages were drawn up which were central to the Celtic, Viking and Maritime themes. The key messages were vital to the success of the whole project. No matter how complex discussions became over the method of delivery the project team always came back to the original list of key messages so as not to lose sight of the overall aims of each display.

Haley Sharpe Associates of Leicester were the designers who had to turn our aspirations into reality.

What is the House of Manannan?

To begin with one needs a brief introduction to Manx Folklore. In early Manx mythology Manannan Mac Leir (to give him his full title) was originally one of the pantheon of immortal Celtic gods who ruled the sea but later evolved into the great magician-king who ruled the Isle of Man. As a figure so deeply enshrined in the Island's Celtic and Maritime heritage, Manannan was a natural choice for both the name of the centre and also as the visitor's personal guide through the displays.

At the centre Manannan welcomes the visitor

in a short film where he explains his role as guide and interpreter. He also provides an introduction to the displays and their messages.

The basic themes of Celtic life are illustrated by a series of large symbolic emblems. For example, a thatched circular hut and sheaf of corn symbolise Celtic farming and housing and a Roman soldier with a large cross over it indicates that the Romans never settled on the Isle of Man.

There are a series of walk-through exhibition spaces containing a mixture of audio-visual presentations and computer interactives set within contextual reconstructions.

The replica Viking longship *Odin's Raven* is the grand finale of the ground floor. She was sailed from Norway to the Isle of Man for the Millennium of Tynwald (Manx Parliament) in 1979.

Continuing the maritime theme on the first floor is the Irish Sea gallery. Visitors can explore underwater life, coastal marine life and economic uses of the Irish Sea. This gallery has a dual purpose in providing a conceptual link between the archaeological and maritime displays but also in providing a quiet relaxing area with seating and panoramic views over the harbour.

The maritime displays begin with a walk-through ships' chandler, sail-makers' loft and a reconstruction of Peel harbour. By looking through the windows of the Chandler's shop onto the harbour visitors can catch snippets of conversation between the Peel fishermen preparing their boats for the mackerel fishing off Kinsale [Ireland].

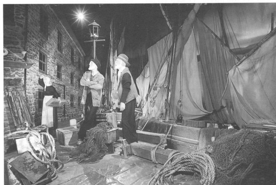
The combination of narrative, computer interactive and set reconstruction are designed to communicate the importance of the fishing industry and ancillary trades to the Isle of Man in the nineteenth century. The computer interactives allow visitors with a particular interest to explore the subject in more detail.

The visitor leaves the gallery through a cooper's workshop and walks out through the back streets of Peel onto a second more impressionistic reconstruction of Peel quay-side for "Maritime Encounters".

The Maritime Encounters take place in a series of three "mini-theatres" on the themes of Fishing, Trade & Smuggling and Naval Encounters. Each mini-theatre contains a group of characters from Manx history who are introduced by Manannan. Visitors are invited to select a character to tell their story.

A reconstruction of Moore's Kipper Yard leads the visitor from the first to the second floor past the smoking sheds and women gutting fish for the tenter hooks.

The final maritime display explores the history of the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company from



Visitors can catch snippets of conversation between Peel fishermen preparing their boats in the harbour.

1830 up to the present day. Through a combination of large ship models, objects from the company archives, photographic panels and computer interactives the story of the Island's lifeline is told.

This gallery provided an opportunity for close liaison with the Steam Packet Company and concluded in the return of two large models of Steam Packet vessels to the Island as centre-pieces in the display.

The visitor leaves the centre through the Peel Castle display where a short audio-visual presentation and a computer interactive give an introduction to the history of the Castle. The visitor is encouraged to continue their journey outside the centre to see Peel Castle in situ at the mouth of Peel harbour.

Why Peel?

Manx National Heritage knew that a development on the scale of The House of Manannan was bound to have a massive impact on the community both in the immediate vicinity and Island-wide.

The decision to locate The House of Manannan in the west coast town of Peel was made for a variety of reasons. Peel provided a natural historic setting for the centre and its themes. Peel Castle at the mouth of the harbour entrance was occupied by both the Celts and Vikings and Peel itself developed as a major fishing port from the eighteenth century.

The existence of The Leece Museum (a small independent museum displaying Peel-related material) and the Peel Heritage Trust confirmed that Peel residents were committed to the protection of their heritage. Therefore, a new history centre in their town would be a source of pride and would open up existing cultural assets to a wider audience. In addition a gallery space specifically dedicated to the history of Peel provided an opportunity for self-expression as well as encouraging visitors from elsewhere to explore the real town itself.

The Peel Gallery uses a combination of graphic panels, an interactive map which takes the visitor on themed trails through the streets of Peel, archival photographs, objects on loan from the local museum, census information and copies of The Peel City Guardian to tell the story of Peel and its people.

One of the most compelling devices used to encourage visitors to explore Peel is a short film produced by the multi-media centre at The Queen Elizabeth II Secondary School in Peel. Manx National Heritage commissioned the school to make a film, similar to a video diary, starring local people talking about what Peel means to them.

This space was designed to be flexible in order that requests from the community to hold exhibitions

An interactive map of Peel guides visitors through the town's historic streets.

and events could be accommodated. The Peel Heritage Trust recently held an art exhibition in the space and it is hoped that its success will encourage further enquiries from local people.

It was hoped that the siting of The House of Manannan would not only reaffirm the importance of the town's existing assets but would also stimulate further economic activity. The House of Manannan was deliberately built without a restaurant in order to encourage local activity in the provision of catering facilities. Indeed, since the centre opened several new cafés and restaurants have opened up along the harbour side and existing pubs and cafés have made a concerted effort to upgrade their facilities.

In addition Manx National Heritage were approached in 1996 by the new owner of Moores Kipper Yard, adjacent to the site of the new centre. The yard started producing the infamous Manx kipper in the 1880s. However, it had become redundant in the early 1990s. The new owner, inspired by the development of The House of Manannan, decided that his factory was of historic importance and visitors to The House of Manannan might also appreciate a tour around a working kipper factory. Initially he made contact to ask for advice on renovating the building and setting up guided tours.

We were delighted that The House of Manannan had acted as a catalyst for this project. However, there were further benefits when we discovered that the new owner of the factory had worked in the kipper-curing industry in the Isle of Man for over forty years and therefore was an invaluable informant. A partnership was swiftly established where Manx National Heritage gave support and advice on display and interpretation in exchange for first-hand information concerning the Manx kipper industry. Moores Kipper Yard re-opened in 1997 and began production of traditional oak-smoked kippers in conjunction with tours of the factory.

The local community

Nobody could accuse the Manx people of being complacent when it comes to their history. The development of The House of Manannan was no exception. Therefore, Manx National Heritage had to ensure that initial curiosity did not turn sour by involving the community in a constructive manner wherever possible. The maritime displays provided the perfect opportunity.

The displays required heavy set-dressing in order to give substance to the reconstructions. Taking the Ships' Chandlers as an example, many of the items came from the museum collections. However, there were occasions when the demands of reconstruction could not be met by the museum alone.

At this point we were able to harness the enthusiasm of the community. Specific requests were made in the local media. Crock pots, fish boxes, sail maker's equipment and fishing nets poured in. There were also unique invitations to "excavate" disused warehouses and to take away what we required at minimal cost. A bottle of whiskey seemed to be the going rate for a van full of herring barrels, tentering sticks and fishing nets.

A lot of the success in acquiring objects can be attributed to one man – Jonathan Bean. He came to work specifically on the maritime displays as a set-dresser and demonstrated a flare for making something out of nothing. The community network responded very positively to his hands-on approach. In addition, because the requests were for a specific display people were assured their items would be used and would not just be left to "languish" in the proverbial museum cellar!

The community were not only willing to part with their material culture they were also very amenable in providing personal and family histories. Their generosity was particularly valuable when putting together character profiles in the Maritime Encounters display.

Historical characters were pieced together through research using archival sources such as census information, personal letters and business documents. However, we were keen to avoid displays which focused exclusively on the nineteenth century hey-day of Manx fishing. Therefore contemporary histories had to be included.

A local fisherman and lifeboat cox was interviewed about the changes he had seen in thirty years of fishing. A descendant of a family of Peel sail makers provided descriptive information about his father's loft which had been in the same family for three generations. He was also willing to provide family photographs for visual reference and even gave the original sign from above his father's shop.

One of the highlights must have been meeting Captain Harry Kinley, now in his 90s, on a cold wintry day in February 1996.

We were searching for a suitable candidate to appear in the Maritime Encounters display alongside the likes of Peter Heywood, Captain Quilliam and Sir William Hillary.

After reading Captain Kinley's story in a local magazine we knew that he fitted the bill. Here was a Manx man with lifelong maritime connections, who served for the IOMSPCo during WWII and continued to work as Captain on the Ben-My-Chree ferry until his retirement.

Captain Kinley invited us to his home in Colby where we talked about his childhood in the Isle of Man, how he was determined to go to sea and

follow in his father's footsteps, his wartime experience and his subsequent years as a Captain with the Steam Packet and his strong affection for his last ship, the 'Ben'!

It wasn't easy trying to explain what we wanted to do with all the information Captain Kinley provided and things were complicated further when we turned up to take some measurements! Our recreation of Captain Kinley's story also entailed the sculpting and moulding of a life-size model of him.

It was difficult to achieve the exact information required by the model-makers. The facial details caused most problems. Mr. Kinley's head was moulded by a sculptor over 200 miles away in his London studio. Therefore the photographs had to show every nook and cranny of Harry's face as well as conveying some of his lively personality! Several trips and many pots of tea later our mission sadly came to an end, we finally had the shots required.

The sculptor set to work and a month later the completed model left London for The House of Manannan.

The most satisfying moment came when we collected Captain Kinley from home and took him to meet his double. The likeness was quite incredible and for the first time since I'd met him the Captain was almost speechless. He eventually managed to say "A good likeness, but don't you think he looks a bit old"!

Captain Harry Kinley of the Isle of Man Steam Packet Co. meets himself at the House of Manannan.

Conclusion

The power of using real people in displays such as this has really made an impact on Yvonne and myself. There is a certain distance between the researcher and subject when the main sources are archival. However, you cannot pick up and put down a real person like a book. Although this kind of research can be a lot more demanding it is also extremely rewarding when the end result allows the audience to feel that much closer to the stories being told.

Although The House of Manannan might be hailed as a new departure for Manx National Heritage in its use of modern technology to present the history of the Isle of Man the basic premise remains that without real people there would be no story!

ARCHIVES ON PARADE:

Providing access to military service records and photographs through MODES Plus and In Touch

Angela Kelsall

From approximately 1973 until 1995 the regimental records and photograph albums of the 9th Queen's Royal Lancers and the 12th Royal Lancers were on loan to the National Army Museum (NAM) in London where they were available to researchers in the museum's Reading Room. A review of their loans policy in the 1990s required institutions with material on permanent loan to the NAM to either donate it or have it returned.

It was decided by the Regimental Museum Trustees to have all the material returned to the Museum. Not only would this assist us in providing answers to the many genealogy enquiries we receive, but it would also contribute to information on the Museum's collections.

The size and scope of the material is considerable. There are 75 bound archive volumes, over six boxes of loose documents and 34 photograph albums. In date they range from the early 1700s to just after the Second World War. Not surprisingly there is a mixture of manuscript and typescript documents, and they include marriage registers, soldiers' records, regimental diaries, medal rolls, as well as items representing aspects of the social history of the army such as sports records, and mess minutes books.

Having decided to have the material back we found storage environment facilities to keep the archives and albums in an environmentally controlled and secure environment. The next problem to be faced was how to maintain public access to the collections. Like many museums, Derby Museum and Art Gallery has no reading room or public research facilities. A further consideration was that the age and delicate condition of some of the albums and archives meant that we were keen to avoid damage through frequent handling.

The solution to these problems was to provide access through an alternative medium, and a number of options were looked at in order to do this;

A **microfilming** service was available at a price through the County Record Office and I discussed depositing the finished film at the nearby Local Studies Library where it could be viewed by members of the public under supervision. However, we concluded that as the microfilms could not be accessed in the Museum the curator would find it difficult to view the copies. Furthermore, microfilming only allows for very basic indexing, and so creating even alphabetical or chronological lists would not be possible.

The second option was farming the archives out to a commercial company which would **image scan** selected records, page by page. The majority of our records are in manuscript form and therefore would have had to be scanned as an 'image', rather than a piece of 'text' which could then be indexed. We expected image scanning to give a good representation of the original documents, but in practice manuscript pages proved particularly difficult to read on screen. A further difficulty was that each page as an 'image' took up considerable space on the computer. Again, only a basic form of indexing was possible.

Both microfilming and image scanning were relatively expensive solutions as we would have had to employ external companies in both cases. The archives would necessarily have to be loaned out to be copied, and this in itself proved a problem as it was felt that it would need to be supervised by the curator. The final problem with both proposals was that in order to carry out the work it would be necessary to unbind some of the volumes. This imposed not only extra expense and time, but also the added ethical worry of potentially damaging the integrity of unique individual items.

The third and final option was to transcribe the records onto **MODES**. This appeared to be the best solution since:

1 the Museum already uses MODES for accessioning and cataloguing

2 it allows for the creation of complete indexes, alphabetical, chronological, but also by troop, or squadron, or by geographical location.

3 Information stored on MODES is easy to read and print-outs can be produced for answering enquiries.

4 As the Museum already used MODES the

option would prove low cost, and easy to use if some experience was gained in using the programme.

5 Public access would be possible through InTouch, an add-on program which runs with MODES records.

6 MODES can be transferred to other formats if required in future.

The disadvantages in undertaking such a project, although few, had also to be considered;

1 The original document format would be lost, as information from the records were fitted into TEMPLATES.

2 Human error can creep into the transcription process, especially as the originals were not easily legible.

3 Work carried out in-house would require a great commitment of time normally dedicated to other areas of museum work.

Project practicalities

Once the decision was made to proceed with the work in-house, advise from Derby City Council's computer suppliers CFM was sought and recommendations were made that we purchase a PC with a high specification monitor, an image scanner and CD-ROM writer. After estimates were supplied for the equipment, the Museum turned to the Regiment and to the East Midlands Museum Service for funding.

The equipment was ordered and installed by CFM under Derby City Council's service agreement. This did not give the cheapest solution, but, it does include full support in the event of any problems.

The project targetted 12 archive volumes which are the most frequently referred to in answering enquiries regarding the service of 9th and 12th Lancers. We considered creating a temporary part-time position to undertake the work, the funding coming from the Regiment and EMMS, but in the event we decided against it, mainly because of the added expense it would involve.

Consequently, six months of the curator's time was set aside to transcribe the volumes, and we were fortunate to have the assistance of a trainee archivist who volunteered to work three days a week for two months. At the end of the allotted time eight volumes were completed with about 10,000 records on the database. It was decided to add the rest of the archives when possible through the use of volunteers and at present, the number of records on the database exceeds 12,000.

Invaluable practical support and direction was given by Richard Langley, Documentation Officer at Derby Museum and Art Gallery, and MODES advisor for the region. On his advise I used the MODES OBJECT format for transcribing the records, mostly using the ASSOCIATION PERSON field. The alternative MODES ARCHIVE format was available, but use of the OBJECT format allows direct cross-referencing between the archive project and the museum collection records, which would not be possible using mixed formats.

The original records are mainly tabulated lists of names, dates and places. We have made a record for each entry in each list which has the effect of splitting up the lists – but we have attempted to keep the original order by allocating record numbers based on volume – page – entry. We are also scanning representative pages from the archive documents so that researchers can get a feel for original style and layout.

The photograph albums

The 34 photograph albums contain approximately 20,000 photographs. Like the records, scanning is selective. Initially probably only 10% of the images will be copied since many are snapshots, or poor quality photographs. Scanning photographs has two aims; one is making a copy for security purposes in case the original is lost or damaged. The other purpose is to link named portraits and groups to the related records in InTouch. This will particularly meet the needs of the 'Researchers' and genealogists. Beyond this, we intend to link anonymous representative portraits to records which have no named photograph. We hope this will make rich informative records of interest to the 'Browsers'.

Photographs have therefore been selected along the following lines:

- named groups from the 1860s to 1900s
- portraits of named individuals
- representative subjects
- particular uniforms and equipment sets
- particular activities (eg sports activities, watering, grooming horses etc).

Evaluation

We haven't yet got public access although it is hoped the 9th/12th Royal Lancers project will be up and running by the end of 1997 through the MODES InTouch system. In the meantime, the computerised archive is very successful and is in daily use to deal with enquiries. The ease of access raises the issue of whether information should be freely given out – there is a commercial value in relation to certain activities connected with military records, such as medal collecting. The potential to expand the project to include objects from the collection is being considered, but most significantly for the 9th/12th Lancers Museum, the intention to provide greater access to regimental records and photographs without damaging the originals, or imposing too much on the curator's time is about to be realised.

MOTHERCRAFT AND MATERNITY: LEICESTER'S MATERNITY AND INFANT WELFARE SERVICES 1900 TO 1948

Shirley Aucott (Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Record Service 1997)

Louise Connell

One of the duties of social historians is to reclaim the histories of people whose experience and influence on events has gone unrecorded or undisclosed. Shirley Aucott's study of the maternity provision for women in Leicester in the first half of the 20th century looks at the impact of the service, based on anecdotal evidence and detailed historical research.

Aucott's account is not a straightforward eulogy on the contribution of middle class female campaigners and their run-in with the predominately male health establishment. She demonstrates the careful balance of relationships based on class as well as gender, of the middle classes doing what they felt was 'right' for the working class women of the town and the resistance of some women to 'interference' from the healthcare establishment. Aucott also points out the naivety of some of the reformers, men and women alike, who had no real idea of the depth of poverty that some women experienced.

On one level, Leicester's healthcare officials were pioneers, attempting to improve the lives of women with young children through education and welfare. However, some of their activities reflected the social mores of the time, in particular attitudes towards contraception, nursery care and services for unmarried mothers. Reforming initiatives could be created or blocked depending on the prejudices of the people in power.

A key personality in the period 1900 up to his retirement in 1934 was Charles Killick Millard, Leicester's Medical Officer of Health. Millard was a complex character, a progressive reformer with conservative tendencies. He was influenced by Malthusian theories and was a keen advocate of birth control, particularly for working class women. For a while he was a member of the Eugenists, a group alarmed at the rise in working class births at the expense of healthy middle class babies. He lectured widely on the subject of contraception to non-medical audiences and he corresponded for many years with Marie Stopes after the publication of *Married Love* in 1918. At one point he wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury urging him to discuss the issue with the bishops at the next Lambeth Conference – not surprisingly the bishops condemned birth control as unnatural and called on married couples to practice abstinence. Probably mindful of his reputation within the medical profession, Millard resisted pressing the argument home in medical journals where the mood was distinctly anti-birth control. Finally, in 1929, Leicester opened a municipal birth control clinic, restricting its advice to married women. Nevertheless, it was one of the first of its kind in the country.

The Boer War confirmed fears about the nation's health and responsibility was partly laid at the door of working class mothers who lacked basic child-rearing skills. Leicester set about recruiting health visitors and by 1918 the local authority had six, with additional voluntary helpers made up of middle class women from the town. Led by Millard, Leicester Board of Health set up 'Schools for Mothers' from 1909 where women were taught how to make baby clothes and cots out of banana crates, and could learn the importance of nutrition and weighing babies. In 1915 Leicester New Walk Museum even opened an exhibition about 'Mothercraft'. Whilst this information was probably of benefit to the mainly working class women it addressed, at the time it did little to alleviate the root cause of distress such as poverty, overcrowding and poor sanitation. It was cheaper to blame the mothers' lack of care for their children's ill health.

Millard was concerned about environmental effects on children's health and carried out important research into the high incidence of summer diarrhoea in Leicester. This was one of the main causes of infant death at the turn of the century and was virtually eradicated by the introduction of water sanitation into homes. He was also behind the Infants' Milk Depot which was set up in the most deprived area of Leicester in 1906. Milk was delivered for a small fee to families unable to collect it themselves, while the depot offered twice weekly medical inspections. Bonny Baby competitions were held to encourage mothers to attend, and poorer families could receive financial support from the Board of Guardians and local charities.

Nevertheless, Millard was only part of a

network of influential Leicester people concerned at the health of women and children in the town. Aucott is good at identifying local middle class women who provided the means for change through financial contributions and tireless voluntary work. Women such as Marina Peach, ironically who died giving birth in 1913, founder of the Leicester Health Society which promoted Mothercraft teaching and coordinated the activities of the health visitors. With Margaret MacDonald, wife of the Leicester MP Ramsay MacDonald, she helped launch the Leicester branch of the Women's Labour League. Marina Peach was also a member of the National Union of Women Workers, a campaigning organisation that gave disenfranchised women a platform to push for reform. The Union advocated affordable nursery care for working women, an issue resisted by Millard and Leicester's medical establishment who believed that women should remain at home with the children in spite of overwhelming evidence that many poorer women had no choice but to return to work. Another concern was the lack of trained midwives, and women such as Fanny Fullager, Leicester's first woman Poor Law Guardian, and Rosalind Paget were instrumental in bringing this lack to public attention.

The 'Midwife Question' had the biggest impact on childbirth. In spite of new legislation on midwife training introduced in 1902, the tradition of using untrained 'handywomen' continued well into the 1930s. Aucott resists the assumption that the medicalisation of childbirth was simply an intervention by male doctors into traditional female territory. Middle class women were anxious to offer ordinary women affordable services administered by trained professionals and throughout the 1920s and 30s the N.U.W.W. and trained midwives campaigned for more maternity wards as an alternative to home deliveries. Most working class women appeared to be grateful for the care they received although some like Mabel Pepper who gave birth in the 1940s resented the interference of the health visitor:

> *'...when I had my third child myself and my neighbour locked the entry door if we knew she (the health visitor) was about. I didn't need to be told what to do any more. Besides, if I wanted any advice I preferred to ask my mother.'*

Aucott interviewed over fifty people during her research, many of whom have since died. These women's voices bring the text to life. Their accounts demonstrate the importance of oral history testimonies that disclose the *quality* of people's lives not always discernable in the historical text. Dora Greaves, a nurse at Leicester City Hospital in the 1930s, describes how 'waiting mothers' (destitute pregnant girls) were brought to the maternity ward from a separate part of the hospital if they went into labour at night:

> *'You stood outside the maternity block with a flashlamp and waved it backwards and forwards. The night sister would then set the patient off from hospital in a wheelchair, pushed by the relief night nurse...if you got a foot of snow it was difficult and the wheels of the wheelchair frequently got stuck in the ruts in the road'.*

Another demoralising effect was the return of the doctors after the Second World War. Competent nurses such as Phyllis Tate saw their skills devalued:

> *'After the war that team spirit was no more, the nurses were again the handmaidens and the doctors were the 'bigwigs'. They couldn't understand why people, like myself, resented it.'*

The chapter on the development of the Family Planning Service in the 1930s and 40s uses the anecdotal to good effect. The women's accounts shed light on a subject that was shrouded in ignorance and taboo as well as tragedy. Unrestricted birth control advice was ad hoc, given out through midwives and occasionally through enlightened doctors. The nearest Family Planning Association clinic was in Nottingham – Leicester didn't set one up until 1954, possibly due to resistance from the Medical Officer for Health and Maternity in Infant Welfare, Dr Berenice Humphries. Consequently, 'birth control was a matter of trial and error for many people' and back street abortions were not uncommon. Even setting up the first F.P.A. clinic was beset by problems. Gladys Inglesant from Leicester's F.P.A. Committee comments on finding a suitable room for meetings:

> *'When the people who owned the room which they were going to meet found out what they were about they cancelled the bookings'.*

As in the earlier Millard experiment of 1929, the service was restricted to married women. The rest had to '*bring a letter from their vicar saying that he was going to marry them and a letter from their fiancé saying that they were going to be married*'. (Mrs Ann Kind, worker at the first F.P.A. clinic).

These comments, as well as other accounts gathered by Aucott, show the struggle that women faced to gain the basic healthcare rights that are taken for granted today, and the efforts of a few women to overcome the prejudices of the healthcare establishment. In 'Mothercraft and Maternity', Aucott balances her sources of information in a way that is both readable and instructive. It is a telling reminder of the necessity to record real people, particularly women, talking about their history.

FOLLOW THE BANNER – AN ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND MINERS' BANNERS

Hazel Edwards (Carcanet Press, 1997)

Nick Mansfield

Even for someone who saw his first coal mines in the Pas de Calais this splendid new banner book raises strong but mixed emotions. That the Woodhorn Colliery Museum's collection is able to be illustrated in full colour is the result of the fact that the 200 odd proud pits have dwindled to one. The heroism and optimism of the Northumberland Miners Association and *Close the Coalhouse Door* have been superseded by R. J. Budge and the Gateshead Shopping Centre.

In addition to the illustrated banners, the introductory chapters to the Woodhorn catalogue have an immense value. The author traces the banner tradition from the 1830s with the flags carried by Tommy Hepburn's pitmen, although her assumption that banners emerged after the repeal of the Combination Acts may be questioned by evidence that urban trade societies displayed their regalia on local civic and political occasions well before this date.

The design and iconography of the banners is skilfully analysed. She pays homage to writers like Tony Lewery and Emmanuel Cooper, who place it within a tradition of 'People's Art', even when the work was executed by commercial banner workers like George Tutill, whose story is also summarised here. She adds to the fascinating but fiendishly difficult to research subject of local banner-makers (usually sign-painters or gifted members). Local banner-makers used the biblical imagery as favoured by the mainly non-conformist miners. They often adopted older friendly society forms. Sometimes this literally happens as banners were over-painted, as exampled here by the North Worbottle branch which used a redundant Ancient Order of Foresters banner. This causes havoc for both textile conservator and social historian alike. Even post-1945 she points out that the end product was often a partnership between local amateur designers and Tutills, or other professional makers.

Unique research, taken directly from union records, is used in the chapter on purchasing and parading banners. The author reveals the intense debates in the lodges about iconography; the members being acutely aware of the image they were projecting. The attention to detail and concern for value for money shown by the miners can be endorsed by any curators who have had work sponsored by organised labour.

The banner's unveiling was accompanied by a blessing and dedication from coalfield chaplains or Methodist ministers. After nationalisation, these ceremonies also usually involved local colliery managers. The banner was then paraded around its local village for all to recognise. Hundreds of banners would be paraded as part of the Northumberland Miners' Pic-Nic, first held in 1866. The author discusses some particular banner traditions associated with this day; the six banner-men paid the equivalent of a shift, the black crepe in memory of these killed or injured and the connection with music. The day, a mixture of political rally, brass band contest, 'family fun day' and heavy drinking session, was central to the working class culture of industrial Northumberland.

And so to the banners – illustrated in colour from the oldest (Ashington c1920) to recent products from the 84/85 strike. Despite the moderate political posture of the Northumberland men, the banners often proclaimed radical ideas. The Ashington Group invoked 'A Plea for Nationalisation' with the imagery of the 'dragon of profit and private ownership' being slain by the 'spear of state control'. Nationalisation was then seen to have a modernising ethos; typically on many banners symbolised by a rising sun greeted by a family in 1950s dress. The 'Vesting' day itself is depicted on the Pegswood branch banner, with a jubilant crowd cheering the raising of the NCB flag, and is still appealing to the modern cynical eye.

An even older radical tradition – the commemoration of the gibbeting of William Jobling for the murder of a magistrate during the 1832 strike is recorded on the Whittle branch banner. Even those names redolent of Empire, chosen by the developers of the new coalfield communities, were given a radical twist. So the Bomarsund branch banner (named after a Crimean War naval victory) not only celebrates the victory of nationalisation but its symbolism makes an appeal for nuclear disarmament.

Modern banners are featured alongside the more 'traditional' Tutill products, with Oliver Kilbourn, pitman painter and part of the 'Ashington Group' of working class artists, beautifully decorating his home colliery banner with the contrasting housing of 'past dreariness' with 'future brightness'. The latter, along with similar efforts from Tutill production line artists, always remind the viewer of Welwyn Garden City.

Some minor criticisms can be made of the author's arguments. The assertion that 'the miners have undoubtedly been the chief banner bearers' may be questioned in the light of, for example, enormous NUR and TGWU collections. A discussion would have been welcome of the puzzling way NUM regions like Northumberland had a strong carrying tradition whilst others (e.g. South Wales) had a patchy and late one. A map and a brief description of types of mining within the county, would have been useful too for us non-Geordies. Otherwise Hazel Edwards' well written and entertaining catalogue is a role model for any banner collection, which deserves emulation.

The future for banners may be as weak as the current NUM, but the author gives some guidance to other curators faced with probably the most difficult social history object to collect, conserve and display. She provides a useful, cross disciplinary bibliography and her suggestions for preserving the tradition outside museums in conjunction with their historic owners are realistic and to be applauded. Sadly the 'heritage' establishment seem disinclined to regard banners as proper art and view them as a slightly superior version of the naff plates that are advertised on the back of union magazines. But with a few more books like this we may yet change their mind.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Maggie Blake was awarded an MA in Museum Studies at Leicester University in 1994 before job-sharing the position of Assistant County Museums Officer based at Trowbridge, Wiltshire. Maggie was then appointed Keeper of Local History for St Edmundsbury Museum Service before being promoted in 1996 to Manager of Moyse's Hall Museum within the same organisation.

Nicola Clayton is a PhD student with the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester. She is a lecturer at De Montfort University and also undertakes consultancy work for Leicestershire County Council's Museum, Arts and Record Service.

Louise Connell joined the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston in September 1994 as Documentation Officer, becoming Keeper of Social History in March 1996. Prior to this she worked at the Castle Museum, Norwich and Warrington Museum and Art Gallery.

Yvonne Cresswell and Kirsty Neate are Assistant Keepers of Social History at Manx National Heritage in the Isle of Man. Yvonne has worked in her current post since 1987 and Kirsty came from the Harris Museum, Preston in 1994. In their time with the organisation Yvonne and Kirsty have accessioned two mediaeval castles, the 'world's largest working water wheel' and most recently have acquired a Victorian iron pier.

Victoria Emmanuel is the Community History Curator within the Community Museums Section at Birmingham Museums. Besides working on community based projects, she is responsible for the City Sound Archive.

David Fleming is currently Director of Tyne and Wear Museums, formerly at museums in Hull and Leeds. He is responsible for the teams which created the Old Grammar School (Hull), *Great City!*, *A Soldier's Life*, *Fashion Works* etc (Newcastle), *Made in Gateshead*. One-time Chair of SHCG. Still considers himself an urban historian.

Steph Gillet is currently Senior Community Officer responsible for developing museum and heritage services within South Gloucestershire Council's Leisure and Community Resources Department. He was formerly a community worker with Avon County Council and has previously worked for youth and children's play projects. He is also a part-time student at the Ironbridge Institute, undertaking a Master's Course in Industrial Heritage.

Angela Kelsall, after graduating from Teeside Polytechnic in 1989, she worked briefly for the MGC and then the National Army Museum until 1993. She is Curator (Military Collections) at Derby Museum and Art Gallery which houses the 9th/12th Royal Lancers Museum.

Nick Mansfield is Director of the National Museum of Labour History. The museum has just received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a national banner survey and has recently acquired the John Gorman collection of banner images.

Steph Mastoris has been Curator of Snibston Discovery Park (Leicestershire Museums, Arts & Records Service) since 1995. For nine years before this he worked as Keeper of the Harborough Museum. A long standing member of The Social History Curators Group, he edited its journal for six years. His main curatorial interests are in contemporary collecting, printed ephemera and the social history of death, burial and commemoration.

Dr Ruth Richardson is Wellcome Research Fellow in the History of Medicine in the Department of Anatomy & Developmental Biology at University College, London. She has published widely in the field of cultural approaches to death in the UK, and in the use of the dead to the living. Her work ranges from a study of British folklore associated with death and dying to the parallels between bodysnatching in the past and organ procurement in the present day. Her book, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* was published by Penguin in 1989.

Jane Sarre has just completed an MA in Museum Studies at Leicester and is now working for Kent County Council as the Assistant Museums Advisor. She has wide-ranging experience in the field at a number of museums in Sussex and the People's Palace in Glasgow.