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THE SOCIAL HISTORY CURATORS GROUP

SHCG 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 collections care, research, presentation and interpretation.
- stimulate and act as a forum for debate on issues effecting 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 UK. Founded in the mid-1970s as the Group for Regional Studies in Museums, the diversity of interests of its members was clearly recognised in 1982 by the Group's change of name and its subsequent growth.

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, Libraries and Archives Commission (MLAC) and other bodies.

The Group organises several seminars a year on a wide variety of topics which are a useful resource for member's 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. 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 is issued to all members. Back issues of *Social History in Museums* are available from the Editor. Articles, reviews and books for review should be sent to the Editor at Astley Hall Museum and Art Gallery, Astley Park, Chorley PR7 1NP. SHCG does not accept responsibility for the opinions expressed by the contributors.

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SOCIAL HISTORY IN MUSEUMS

CONTENTS

INTERPRETATION, EVALUATION AND SOCIAL HISTORY IN MUSEUMS

STUART DAVIES

INTRODUCTION

In 1996/97 Leeds University Business School carried out a pilot study on behalf of the Social History Curators Group (SHCG), the broad aim of which was to investigate the most effective methods of presenting history, through an evaluation of best practice at museums and other heritage sites. The study hoped to identify best practice in communicating history to museum visitors, to inform both the development of exhibitions and the amendment of existing displays. The pilot study reported in this article was effectively a scoping study of the issues identified in a review of the existing literature and a questionnaire sent to SHCG members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is not always easy to identify where to find reliable research about the effectiveness of communication in a museum context, although the emergence of 'visitor studies' as a recognised discipline in the UK has helped to provide a home for a wide range of studies. A great deal of museum visitor research has been carried out in the USA, mostly in art museums, science centres, zoos and acquaria. Relatively little has been done (either in USA or UK) in history museums. Generally speaking, British history curators have shown greater professional interest in content and educational potential rather than in audiences or indeed interpretive methodologies, although those have certainly not been completely neglected. (Kavanagh, 1989).

One reason for the large amount of studies in the USA is that it has long been established practice for funding agencies to demand project evaluations as a condition of making a grant (Falk and Dierking, 1992). Evaluation has slowly become accepted as an important part of museums work in the UK. The Heritage Lottery Fund — since 1995 the most significant source of funding for museum projects — has introduced (particularly in its Museum and Galleries Access Fund) a greater emphasis on

evaluation. A lot of evaluative research is currently being carried out in the UK by consultants commissioned by museums or by students on museum or heritage courses. Most of this is (and will probably be) unpublished. There is therefore a need to co-ordinate and publish existing research.

As pressure increases from stakeholders to see evidence that museums (individually and collectively) are achieving clearly articulated targets, visitor research is likely to become an increasingly important part of many curators' work plans. There is a need to empower museum curators to conduct this research, but very much taking into account the realities of resource constraints. There is no one right or wrong way to evaluate museum displays or activity if data is collected in an orderly and systematic manner to solve an identified problem. Many experienced researchers advocate the combined use of different methodologies to give greater rigour, reliability and depth to their work (Bicknell, 1995). Small-scale research is valid, particularly where it is informed by a major demographic survey, or can be triangulated by different research methods to build up a holistic picture.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

In May 1996 a previously piloted questionnaire was sent to a sample of 300 museums, subjectively selected on the basis of their recognised social history collections. Seventy-three questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 24%, not high enough to encourage sophisticated statistical analysis of the returns. Many questionnaires did however include data on more than one museum or site under the same governing body of an organisation. The responses need to be interpreted carefully. The response rate was low and those responding are likely to include the more innovative and forward thinking professionals. Positive results may therefore be exaggerated and negative ones understated.

TYPES OF MUSEUM RESPONDENT

Respondents were asked to indicate from a list of eight opinions, which most appropriately described their museum. The 92 responses included multiple-site returns and a few instances where the respondent felt their museum included 2 or more of the types offered.

The 'other' museums classed themselves as Folk Museum, Historic Fort, Maritime Museum, Motor Museum or Transport

Table 1. Types of museums

Description	Number	Percentage
Local/social History Museum	36	39
Social history galleries/department within a multi-disciplinary museum	18	20
Industrial Museum	12	13
'Period' historic house	10	11
Other Museums	8	9
Industrial site (single type — e.g. watermill)	4	4
Heritage Centre	3	3
Archaeological site or interpretation centre	1	1
Total	**92**	**100**

Museum. There is no benchmark or total population data available for the whole local/social history sector against which to compare this sample. What is apparent — if this sample is reliable — is that while four categories account for over 80% of history museums in the UK, there is a significant 'tail' of specialised museums who do not want to be classified more broadly.

Where the responses to this question proved the most interesting was in a comparison between the description ticked by the respondent, the brief description of 'permanent' history displays given in response to another question, and the information given in guidebooks or publicity leaflets. Looked at separately each did not always confirm the description given by the other sources. For example one museum describes itself as a 'Folk Museum', obviously unhappy with the option of 'Social History Museum' offered and yet describes its displays as social history collections. Others describe themselves as 'period' houses or industrial museums and yet clearly local and social history interpretation and collections form a large part of the displays. Some describe themselves as 'Local/Social History Museums' and yet admit that displays contain little local or social history context.

The above responses beg the question, what element of a museum defines its category — the site, the building, the collections, the way they are interpreted or the way that the staff and public perceive them? In the context of this project it is important to know what the differences between museums actually are, (and if they are significant), how curators present them and how

the public perceive them. It is also important to discover what barriers, if any, are created by the way in which the public perceive particular museums, and if these can be removed by changing the museum's image through its displays and in its publicity.

PRINCIPAL METHODS OF INTERPRETATION USED IN PERMANENT AND TEMPORARY DISPLAYS/EXHIBITIONS

Table 2 below shows quite clearly that the approach to interpretation in history museums remains generally conservative. Over 60% of museums principally use a basic combination of labelled exhibits in cases, interpretative panels and exhibits on open access. About one third seem to rely heavily on interpretative

Table 2. Principal methods of interpretation used in permanent and temporary displays/exhibitions

Method	Permanent Displays Percentage ($n = 73$)	Temporary Exhibitions Percentage ($n = 62$)
Labelled exhibits in cases plus associated interpretive panels	74	71
Exhibits on open access (not cased)	71	52
Labelled exhibits in cases	60	60
Film/video/slides integrated into display	42	35
Interpretive panels with some exhibits	34	31
Objects available for touching/handling	33	24
Interactive display (non-computer)	33	35
Oral history evidence integrated into display	30	35
Replicas/reproductions used	27	21
Interactive display (computer)	23	8
Working exhibits integrated into displays and working regularly	21	3
Listening posts/audio tours	12	3
Integrated panels with few or no exhibits	10	15
Costumed interpreters every day	8	2
Storage areas visible/accessible	8	2
Regular guided tours (at least daily)	7	2

panels with some associated exhibits and nearly 10% say they principally have panels with few or no exhibits — even in their 'permanent' displays.

Five more possibly user-friendly methods do make an impact, being used by about one third of museums. They are:

- objects available for touching/handling (33%)
- working exhibits (23%)
- interactives (low and high tech) (33%)
- oral history material (30%)
- film/video/slides (42%)

All of these methods are tried and tested. They have been widely practiced and used for many years. They have all been advocated in publications, on museum studies courses and at conferences. It has to be asked why they are not more common place. Is it a resources issue or is there resistance to acknowledge and adopt these practices?

Comparing the frequency that different methods are employed in permanent displays and temporary exhibits is interesting although reveals nothing which practitioners will not already be familiar with. The practicalities of mounting temporary exhibitions may explain why there are fewer occasions when exhibits are on open access or available for touching/handling, why other media are used less, why there are fewer interactives and fewer working exhibits. At the same time labelled exhibits in cases and interpretive panels are equally popular in both. You are also more likely to find interpretive panels without exhibits in temporary exhibitions — the '2D' displays' which make both popular space — fillers and convenient vehicles for touring to non-museum venues such as libraries and community centres. The overall impression is that — in social history — temporary exhibitions tend to be the poorer relations of the permanent displays, a situation in marked contract to the world of visual arts. A comparison of the status of visual arts and social history in many of our museums might encourage some reassessment of the role of temporary exhibitions, though the financial arguments — the importance of investing in a core infrastructure — will always be strong ones.

As Heritage Lottery Fund schemes are completed it will clearly be interesting to compare the interpretative approaches used with the (albeit rather crude) baseline indicated by this pilot research. As to the future, there does not yet seem to have been much serious thinking in respect of whether traditional displays are in

fact the most appropriate medium for both enjoyment and learning in a museum context, or indeed for collections in or out of a museum.

The drive for greater accessibility to museums in general ought to encourage more radical thinking.

NON-EXHIBITION METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

The questionnaire explored two of the most common methods of interpreting history in a museum context (other than exhibitions) — publications and events.

The modern history museum seems to be well endowed with three things: postcards, information for teachers and worksheets for children. The latter are not as much in favour with museum educationalists as they once were, but there is evidence here that 80% or more of history museums have at least given some serious thought to schools' audiences. Furthermore, most of the other types of publications listed are available in nearly one half of the respondent museums. No detailed assessment of range, content, relevance, quality or authorship was attempted, but the general picture is one of publications playing a substantial role in active and passive interpretation.

While 80% of history museums provide teachers' information packs and worksheets for children, only 66% appear to provide training sessions for teachers to — presumably — help them get the most out of a school visit to the museum. However, 60% arrange object handling sessions, probably mainly for school visits and a similar number organise holiday activities with an historical theme, again mainly for school-age children. Taking the data from Tables 3 and 4 together suggests a significant investment in resources by history museums with the objective of trying to maximise the educational potential of their collections.

Activities for both adults and children (out of school hours) are modestly represented in the survey results. Small scale living history events seem to have established themselves quite well (41%) and one in three museums run short courses in historical subjects. The latter is anecdotally reported as being an important growth area in those museums with appropriate facilities. Musical performances (with an historical theme assumed) have reached a similar status in history museums. Large scale living history enactments will always be the domain of the few because of the space, facilities and resources required.

Table 3. Supportive publications used in history museums

Type	Number ($n = 74$)	Percentage
Postcards	67	91
Teachers' education packs	61	82
Worksheets/activity sheets for children	60	81
Background histories in book/monograph forms	38	51
General guide book to the displays	35	47
Information sheets on particular exhibits	34	46
Museum trails	31	42
Other	11	15

Table 4. Educational events and activities

Type	Number ($n = 68$)	Percentage
Training sessions for teachers (specifically on history themes)	45	66
Object handling sessions	41	60
Holiday activities with an historical theme	40	59
Living history events (small scale)	28	41
Costumed interpretation for school parties	25	37
Short courses on historical subjects	20	29
Musical performances	20	29
Living History re-enactments (large scale eg Sealed Knot)	5	7
Other	11	16

EVALUATION

An important aspect of the questionnaire survey was to produce data on the degree to which exhibitions and history museums in general were being evaluated.

No attempt was made in this pilot study to ask any sophisticated in-depth questions. We therefore have to assume that the answers being offered refer to current or recent experience. On that basis about two-thirds of history museums have carried out visitor/user surveys, though we do not know how frequently they do so or if they do so regularly, using the same questions

Table 5. Evaluation methods used in museums

Method	Number ($n = 74$)	Percentage
Visitor/user survey	48	65
Analysis of visitors' comments (written or verbal)	43	58
Self-filling questionnaires (in the museum)	34	46
Analysis of visitor figures (ie more than just monitoring)	33	45
Non-visitor market research	26	35
Evaluation of proposed exhibits at the design stage	13	18
Focus group study	11	15
Observation study	10	14
None	10	14
Analysis of media coverage (ie more than just monitoring)	9	12
Other	6	8

and building a time series of data. Comments contained in the questionnaire responses and anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that the latter is very rare. It would seem that many of these museums use self-filling questionnaires as the basis for their visitor research. Although not highly regarded as a technique, they may be adequate if a small number of unsophisticated questions are being asked. Only one third of museums claims to have done any 'non-visitor' surveys which, given the importance attached to them in the literature (Hood, 1983), is disappointing. A relatively high number of history museums claim to analyse visitors' comments (58%) but disappointingly few seem to regularly analyse their visitor figures (45%). The analysis of visitors' comments is perhaps surprising given the lack of profile this technique receives in the literature.

Respondents' comments add some helpful qualitative information to the questionnaire data. Two thirds of the respondents claimed to use visitor/user surveys but in many cases they are clearly not carried out on a regular basis. As one admitted, "... last study carried out in 1991; now rather out of date". The scope and quality of questionnaire surveys vary enormously. Some are very focused, linked, for example, to specific activities and perhaps consisting of only three or four questions. Others are professionally

conducted omnibus surveys. More common, though, appear to be surveys conducted by in-house staff or using students looking for a dissertation topic, using small samples not statistically tested for their validity. A few also draw on other people's surveys notably those prepared by Regional Tourist Boards. However, the overall picture does not inspire confidence. While the message that "doing visitors surveys is a good thing" may have got across, the practice is still patchy and the application evidently often poor, despite the availability of both baseline statistics (Davies, 1994) and some sound advice on what to do (Runyard, 1994). The recently formed Visitor Studies Group has much to do.

The use of Visitors' Comments Books was an unexpected finding. Many curators see these as an important source of qualitative information about their visitors. As one museum, for example, "we keep a visitors comments book which is read and signed by us each week". In local authority museums this may be the result of campaigns to improve responsiveness to customer comments (as part of wider customer care initiatives). Allied to the comments book was the occasional formal acknowledgement of the contribution that attendants can make. They are at the sharp end of visitor reactions and comments (good and bad) but are often an under-used source of intelligence. One museum did, however, have a system whereby attendants were encouraged to diligently record verbal comments made to them (or overheard).

Self-filling questionnaires were widely used. They are a cost-effective way of getting a lot of basic information, usually of a qualitative kind. In many museums they combine a way of collecting visitor comments and suggestions, a complaints system, a visitor profiling method and a marketing tool (building a mailing list). They can also be used to help evaluate visitor reactions to an exhibition or activity, or indeed to the whole museum. Provided the limitations of the self-filling methodology are recognised and understood, they can be a very cost-effective way to compile almost instant feedback on an aspect of the museum's work.

There were relatively few comments on other methods. Three museums were enthusiastic about the benefits of analysing media coverage. While much of this can be manipulated, it does provide a simple means of demonstrating 'public' reaction to what the museum is doing. Visitor figures are analysed to identify seasonal trends but also to assess the possible benefits of changing opening hour patterns. Focus groups and observational studies are seemingly only used by the larger museums as part of front end evaluation for major changes in presentation.

Table 6. Evaluation techniques considered the most important

Technique	Number ($n = 69$)	Percentage
Finding out who the visitors are	64	93
Visitors' reactions to different types of exhibit	48	70
Visitors' likes and dislikes	41	59
Visitors' preferences for future developments	40	58
Visitors' perceptions of history before and after visiting	28	41
Visitors' behaviour in the gallery/exhibition	26	38
Visitors' understanding of individual exhibits	21	30
Visitors' sum knowledge before and after visiting	5	7
Visitors' retention of detail after visiting	2	3

The questionnaire went on to ask respondents which (up to three) of a given list of nine evaluation techniques did they consider the most important (see Table 6 above). Most of the options on offer found some measure of favour with respondents, except those which require the evaluation of knowledge acquired as a result of visiting a museum, this despite the importance attached to it by museum educationalists (Jackson and Hann, 1994). Least popular of the rest — interestingly — were those which had an educational evaluation element or evaluated visitors' behaviour. Resources may of course be perceived as a significant barrier to using at least some of these techniques. The most popular forms of evaluation — visitor profiling (92%), visitor preferences (59%) and reactions to different exhibits (70%) were significantly biased towards planning the future.

On this evidence it would appear that social history curators are more interested in assessing the reactions to exhibits (as a measure of satisfaction or approval) rather than exploring the learning value of what they do. If further research confirmed this hypothesis then one might speculate that social history curators are more interested in engaging with their communities as a process than in longer term education and learning objectives.

INFLUENCES ON THE HISTORY CURATOR

Two questions (see Tables 7 and 8) attempted to explore what might be some of the important influences which shaped a history curator's approach to history interpretation. The results

Table 7. Most important factors in shaping approach to historical interpretation

Factor	Number ($n = 64$)	Percentage
Visiting 'best practice' museums	32	50
Someone whose work/ideas have impressed/ influenced	13	20
Attending conferences/seminars	8	12
Attending a museums studies course	7	11
Literature in museum exhibit evaluation	5	8
Reading the Museum's Journal	4	6
Other	7	11
(Some respondents identified more than one.)		

give an incomplete picture — much more sophisticated research would be needed beyond the pilot stage. But there are nevertheless some useful pointers to the possible value of future research.

One interesting observation was that history curators appear to put much more faith in 'seeing' good practice at a museum (50%) or being personally inspired by someone else's work (20%) than in more formal methods of learning or acquiring expertise such as conferences, seminars, courses or reading the Museum's Journal.

Curators were also generally loyal to museums as vehicles of historical interpretation, considering that only television documentaries were more effective than museums when it

Table 8. Most effective methods of historical interpretation

Methods	Number ($n = 67$)	Percentage
Television documentaries	52	78
Museums	49	73
Human inter-actives (eg lectures; guided tours)	33	49
Films and videos	24	36
Costumed drama	10	15
Non-fiction books	9	13
Formal education	9	13
Literary fiction	7	10
Live performance arts	6	9
(Respondents invited to tick up to three of the methods.)		

came to historical interpretation — and then only narrowly so. Human inter-actives and films/videos also scored well but books were surprisingly poorly regarded as an effective means of historical interpretation.

QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE

The quantitative sections of the questionnaire yielded some interesting data which ought to prompt debate among history curators, although this plot survey was not sufficiently statistically rigorous for its results to be used as the only basis for policy or strategy.

More useful, in some respects, are the qualitative elements of the questionnaire. Respondents were invited to give their views or provide information on a range of issues. These are difficult to convert into quantifiable comparable information but do offer the opportunity to express perceptions and subjective opinions which may reflect, among other things, the culture as well as the practice of history museums in the late 1990s.

RENEWAL OF DISPLAYS

Respondents were asked to describe the permanent history displays/exhibitions in their museums and state when they had last been renewed. This revealed (from a sample of 50 'dated' displays) that 70% had been renewed at some point during the previous ten years. (There appear to have 'peaks' of activity in 1991 and 1996 but these are unlikely to be statistically significant.) The fact that 30% of the displays are more than ten years old — and some are more than twenty years old — should give rise to concern.

MUSEUMS CLAIMED TO REPRESENT 'BEST PRACTICE'

Respondents were invited to name three UK museums which they felt best reflected social history museum 'best practice' in the UK and also give their reasons for their choice.

In all, 57 museums — or parts of museums — were recommended but only 19 of these registered more than one vote. These are tabulated below:

Croydon Clock Tower ('Life times')	11
Newcastle Discover ('Great City')	6
Tullie House, Carlisle	5
People's Story, Edinburgh	5

Imperial War Museum	5
Museum of London	4
Blists Hill, Ironbridge	3
Grange Museum, Brent	3
Hull: Old Grammar School *et al.*	3
Museum of the Moving Image	3
Coventry ('Godiva City')	3
Beamish	2
Jorvik	2
Kelham Island	2
Market Harborough	2
People's Palace, Glasgow	2
Museum of Lynn Life, King's Lynn	2
Glasgow's The Open Museum	2
The National Heritage Fishing Centre	2

The limited nature of this pilot survey and the size of the sample means that this list cannot have any credibility as an authoritative statement about actual best practice. The most that it can do is give us some pointers as to which places are perceived by SHCG members as being examples of best practice. And even their views are hardly objective. Three respondents were so totally loyal to their own museums that they named it among their list of three. One might also observe that the list is heavily influenced by where SHCG has held recent Annual Study Weekends, the geographical distribution of the membership, informal networks (voting for friends) and peer group influences (if you are told enough times that a place is wonderful . . .).

Leaving aside such cynicism, what were the key reasons for the choices and how may they illuminate curators' preferences for particular interpretation and evaluation techniques? The responses reveal — as might be expected — a range of possible factors or influences.

- deals with real things rather than replicas or reconstructions
- people-orientated approach
- thematic rather than chronological
- good design
- information vertical and accessible at any level
- object-rich displays
- mixture of communication media/mix and balance of techniques
- use of interactive techniques

- imaginative approach to interpreting objects using oral history
- good research
- integration/range of techniques used
- effective graphics and texts

This summary of respondents' views is a useful commentary on curatorial preferences. It will be noted that 'best practice' is not perceived as simply being about good techniques. It is as much as anything about an attitude to interpretation (and all the comments were exclusively about interpretation) rather than variables which can be reduced to a simple formula. However, if this survey were looking to identify key interpretation techniques, then the following are clearly highly valued by many history curators:

- interactive technologies (low and high tech)
- oral history
- use of a range of techniques (rather than relying on one)

This list is unlikely to be authoritative. Most respondents make vague references to 'good' or 'excellent' displays without articulating what they mean by it. However, we can probably assume that excellence in interpretation is generic — in other words not particular to history museums.

If that is so, we may ask — what is distinctive about 'best practice' in history museums? The answer to this seems to be:

- use objects wherever possible even if 'telling a story'
- be people-orientated (rather than institutional orientated)
- be 'ordinary' people orientated (rather than the rich and famous)
- use oral history
- be thematic/analytical rather than chronological/descriptive

It is a moot point how much further forward this actually gets us. The respondents from within SHCG have given us some pointers but a great deal more objective research is required to establish the value or impact of these techniques and values. And, of course, respondents almost entirely neglect evaluation — other than the occasional reference to market research or marketing.

Respondents were also asked to indicate where they felt best practice in historical interpretation could be found outside of museums. This produced some rather eclectic comments. Interestingly, places which were listed by some as good practice

museums also appear among these responses — Jorvik and the National Fishing Heritage Centre, for example, and most places were heritage sites. There were some differences in the reasons given for best practice here from those given for museums. A selection of key words used included: 'imaginative interactives'; 're-enactments'; 'sense of energy and creativity'; 'creating the atmosphere of a working railway'; 'it really engages visitors'. Overall, the combination of good information and energy seemed to be the magic ingredient. One might conclude that the reaction of curators to non-museum heritage is more emotional than their cooler professional appraisal of museums.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Respondents had the chance to give their general observations on any of the topics covered by the questionnaire. Again, this naturally resulted in a number of disconnected comments, perhaps the most interesting of which are reproduced below:

- We put greatest faith in a free ideas team approach; the team that works in-house understands the collection and audience — designer — panels done remotely are deader than exhibits ....
- ... the important thing in interpreting and presenting historical subjects is to start with the basis of the real thing, rather than the re-created ....
- My own personal attitude is that people want to visit a site to look around the building, look at objects (now and again reading the label) and in general avoid being 'taught' (obviously school visits being the exception). Many 'flavour of the month' ideas on interpretation originate from academics who do not relate to the general public and are incapable of doing so (and often unwilling to do so). Their ideas are of use only in the realm of museum academics who I avoid wherever possible.
- Museums ... have what everyone else wants — the authenticity and authority of the collections, but interpretation in museums is still hampered by the exclusivity of the object overpowering those other associations that give the interpretation depth and human interest.
- Museums are unique because of their collections, but their ability to tell stories in an appealing manner is not.
- However good the displays are, there are many other factors which affect the public's enjoyment of and education from

displays — good atmosphere, relaxed state of mind, good welcome, sense of where you are and where you are going within the museum, good toilets and coffee shop, clear labels, booklet to take away, good lighting etc.

- Broadening access is the major problem we face. Social History Museums are uniquely placed to appeal to a broad cross-section of our communities. To me the challenge is how to open up the resources, collections we hold to local people (whether through formal education, life-long learning, outreach, drama and so on). To combine the dormant skills memories held by the community with the artefacts and collections we hold in trust. This does not mean abandoning professional standards but it does mean breaking down false barriers of pseudo professionalism erected to protect museum/curators' status. If social history museums are to become more than dull repositories of dead artefacts or theme park reconstructions of Victorian life, we need to rethink our priorities.
- Museums can be very effective if well done and try to include hands on activities; audio-visual presentations, costumed interpreters — people are more likely to remember 'history' (facts etc) if it is presented to them in a lively way.
- This survey is very building based. We have also set up information panels around the city, shared our curatorial skills with teachers in schools, taken objects to groups and festivals etc. We also do small displays, usually with material from private collectors and enthusiasts. The assumption of one homogeneous group/audience is difficult to deal with — 'best practice' can and does vary according to target group.
- In many ways it is better to go to non-professionals for their appreciation of historical interpretation exercises .... The gap between what we think and what we do is perhaps more prevalent than many professionals would care to admit.

These comments capture a selection of cultural assumptions held by social history curators at the time of this survey. Rather like much of the other information collected it is highly subjective and not necessarily representative. But from it can be distilled some of the key cultural beliefs and values of social history in museums which have developed during the 1980s and 1990s — real things, ordinary people and making them accessible to each other. The purpose of social history in museums should be about integrating the museum into the community and the community into the museum.

The election of a new Labour government in May 1997 has offered a wonderful opportunity for social historians in museums to take a leading role in articulating new government policies in a museum context. There is a double dividend to be earned. The central plank of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's policies is access. Social history collections can be among the most accessible in any museum and the inclination of most social history curators to be interested in reaching the widest possible spectrum of society make them natural champions of access. Secondly, this government's determination that all publicly funded bodies should contribute to combating social exclusion (in all its forms) and to supporting community and economic regeneration is particularly challenging for many museum directors and governing bodies. But once again this ought to be an area where the social history curator can shine and make a real contribution. The policies published so far by the new government reflect the policy objectives in many local authorities and so should not come as a shock to those in the public sector. Museums must change in order to respond positively to this generous spirited agenda. Social historians in museums are uniquely equipped to take the lead.

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PARTNERSHIPS IN PRACTICE

STEPH MASTORIS

PARTNERSHIPS AND MUSEUMS

Partnerships make the world go round, and certainly in the 1990s' world of museums partnerships are talked about with an almost missionary zeal. The reasons for this are not hard to find. On the strategic level, partnerships are fundamental to the policies of the current and last governments and this has shaped museum thinking for at least the last decade. On the practical level, the plural resourcing which all museums must now pursue has heightened the stakes for productive partnerships. Often the situation is, "no partners, no project".

In fact, of course, the "P" word has been fundamental to good museum curatorship long before it became a buzz-word for politicians. Many museums owe their establishment to strategic partnerships between several organisations and interest groups. Friends and volunteers, so essential to the smooth running of the majority of museums, are a fine example of long-term operational partnerships. Likewise, so many of the dynamic, community-orientated research, documentation and interpretation projects that have given social history curators such a central role in museums over the past thirty years have only been possible by very judicious pooling and sharing of resources. In fact, for at least a generation social history curators have been at the forefront of partnership working.

Given the importance of partnerships in our work as history curators it is surprising to find how casual and unplanned many are. And the disastrous results of this are recounted at almost every occasion when two or more curators are gathered together. This is because partnerships are very easy to talk about and begin, but hard to do well and harder to sustain. Their failure can be very damaging to all parties and create a lasting feeling of bitterness and resentment. In fact the analogy with personal relationships is too strong to avoid: "marry in haste, repent at leisure". Perhaps this is because partnerships are essentially about *people*, and like other aspects of human relationships, partnerships can work on many levels at once but have inherent contradictions built in. Partners have to share a common aim, but frequently have differing agendas and require different

outcomes from a project. Partnerships require planning and working together, but different contributions from each member. Partnerships come about to use each member's strengths, but account has also to be made of each other's weaknesses. Partnerships are created at a certain point in time, but will subsequently evolve in many ways. Finally, partners have to trust and rely on one-another, but each will have some contingency plan ready at hand for self survival if the partnership breaks down.

We can help reduce the risk of these contradictions disrupting our partnerships by ensuring that we work with our partners in a clear, honest and planned manner. How this may be done in practice is outlined in more detail in the appended checklist designed to help curators both establish and sustain partnerships. Many of these action points were highlighted during the presentations, workshops and informal discussions at S.H.C.G.'s 1998 Annual Study Weekend, where a wide variety of partnerships undertaken by history curators was examined. Also discussed were the most frequent problem partners encountered by curators. For it was felt that an awareness of the failings partners attribute to each other when things start to go wrong could help curators rectify these problems more readily.

SOME PROBLEM PARTNERS

The *imposed partner* is often the most common problem partner we deal with. The imposition usually comes from the fact that one or more of the partners are providing a significant amount of money to make the project in hand possible, usually through grants and challenge or match funding schemes. Although some would say that no true partnership exists when one party has such a disproportionate financial clout, never-the-less the plurality of funding now essential for many museum projects means that curators have to learn to maintain an effective relationship with such organisations. The key factor for the museum is to understand and agree to follow in some detail the aims and objectives of its imposed partners, and this must go beyond weaving phrases from their mission statements into the initial application form. Without this two further problem partners can arise, the *partner with differing agendas* and the *partner with over-zealous advisers*. The former is especially prone to develop after major policy changes by the funding partner which can result in projects commenced under an earlier regime being no longer deemed eligible or forced to have their general thrust re-directed. With the latter problem partner issues and practicalities, hitherto

not discussed with the funding partner, can be added to the project's outputs with no allowance made for additional funding or re-structuring the delivery plan. Although mid-project re-negotiation is often the only recourse in these instances, the drawing up of a written statement of principles and detailed delivery programme is a fundamental pre-requisite of any partnership and will at least help provide a benchmark for monitoring how circumstances have changed from the initial agreement.

A second group of problem partners is engendered by an *inherited partnership*. Here the typical scenario is that the curator takes over an existing partnership all of whose originators are no longer involved. In the absence of a clear written agreement of obligations this type of partner will soon be questioning the responsibilities and commitments made earlier and frequently a major re-appraisal of the partnership will be required before all parties are happy. Without this re-appraisal two further problem partners can arise, the *disgruntled partner*, who does not opt out of the relationship but continually feels hard-done by other players, and the *selfish partner*, who will take an increasingly passive role but still claim a full quote of the kudos for participation in the partnership. Key to avoiding these problems is the establishment of some form of partnership forum for all involved which meets regularly to monitor progress and air differences of opinion before they cause deep and lasting bitterness.

The making available of resources is a key factor that brings partnerships into being, and the failure to deliver all of what is promised puts a partnership in danger of dissolution. The *partner who cannot deliver* is frequently found when working with large corporate bodies which have a variety of departments, sites or branches that are financially independent of one another. An example of the common type of problem that can arise here is that the section dealing with intellectual rights does not have the same liberal view of free access to material offered by the marketing section which frequently engages in the partnership with museums. The result can often lead to bureaucratic stalemate just when project deadlines loom large. On the side of museums, there are many which could be considered as *over-enthusiastic but under-resourced partners*. Such museums frequently do great damage to the image of the profession by not undertaking a full assessment of the resources required to maintain a partnership with a private-sector organisation. A common mistake is to ignore the considerable input required from the museum's support staff necessary for the success of many projects. As with the partner who cannot deliver, there needs to

be an honest and detailed assessment of all the resources required for the partnership and this to be codified within the initial agreement.

When museums enter into partnerships with large, complex organisations it is crucial to gain a clear understanding of where the centres of power lie and the hierarchies that must be negotiated to get things done. Frequently the decision maker is not the doer and without ensuring that each is satisfied with the partnership with the museum there will be either a lack of resources or effective work done on the ground. Getting both to undertake what has been promised is the art of dealing with these large, *independent partners*. A related problem of understanding arises with the *absent* or *changing partner*, who is frequently encountered by museum freelancers brought in to do a specific task within a tight time-frame. The person who has set up the contract then goes on long-term sick leave or a secondment and leaves the freelancer to perform on schedule with little or no briefing or assistance. Again, a written agreement drawn up before the project begins which outlines the resources to be made available by all partners is essential if this problem is to be avoided.

Appreciating and managing the long-term benefits of partnerships are central to dealing with the last two problem partners. Without reviewing regularly the workings of long-term and strategic partnerships some of those involved can reduce their involvement and come to rely inordinately upon the other participants. These *over-reliant partners* are often found amongst the committees of local amenity societies when their hitherto privately-run museum is transferred into partnership management with a museum service. There is a natural inclination to leave things to "the professionals", but this can easily move from just matters curatorial to all aspects of the society's work. Within a few years the society can become just a cipher of its former self and in fact becomes an encumbrance to the museum service.

The *short-sighted partner* can be found in all partnerships when the opportunity is missed to realise the full potential of the relationship. Many short-term partnerships, established with much work, could be extended into much deeper or wide-ranging relationships with relatively little extra effort but for the reluctance of those involved. The fault often lies with the failure to establish a "partnership culture" at all levels of the participating organisations. As a result the benefits of joint working are appreciated by too small a number of the organisation to encourage further relationships.

Indeed, the fostering of a culture of partnership should be the primary aim of all museum curators who wish to benefit fully from this type of joint working. Not only does it make possible the maximisation of time, resources and involvement with the wider community, it also has far-reaching benefits for the operational performance of the museum as a whole. The thought, planning and activities required for working in partnership with other individuals or organisations cannot fail to improve the clarity of the museum's sense of purpose, together with the skills of forward planning, effective budgeting and team working amongst its staff. The material rewards of working in partnership may be very great but effective partnership in practice will also beget quality curatorship.

A CHECKLIST FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING PRACTICAL PARTNERSHIPS

KEY CONCEPTS FOR ANY PARTNERSHIP:

- Clarity of purpose
- Openness and honesty
- Mutual trust
- Understanding and mutual respect
- Willingness to negotiate problems
- Sustainability of both project outcomes and partnerships
- A dynamic *partnership culture* should be the goal for each organisation

ACTION BEFORE ENTERING INTO THE PARTNERSHIP:

- Clarify the aims and objectives of the project and partnership
- Choose and get to know your partners:
  - *understand the organisation and culture of each partner*
  - *understand the power of each partner*
  - *assess the personalities of the members of each partner organisation*
  - *foster mutual understanding*
  - *foster mutual respect for the different skills of each partner*
- Make an honest appraisal of resources needed to undertake the project and sustain the partnership (especially quantify inputs and outputs)
- Establish the perimeters of the partnership:
  - *aim (to achieve its purpose to the satisfaction of all parties)*
  - *objective (project-centred or more general?)*
  - *duration (short term or long term?)*
  - *contributions (money, resources in kind, political or moral support)*
  - *partners (their agendas, motivation and experience)*

- Draw up a written memorandum of understanding to be agreed by all partners:
  - *state the mutual benefits of the partnership*
  - *establish a clear and firm timescale for partnership delivery*
  - *set finite tasks*
  - *take account of local conditions and various agendas*
  - *designate a lead partner for administration and financial control*
  - *possibly use of facilitator to clarify aims and roles*
  - *content of the written memorandum to include:*
    statement of aim
    definition of duration of partnership
    statement of partners' responsibilities
    description of quality and levels of contributions by partners
    appeals procedure
    work plan
    marketing plan
    exit strategy
- Establish a partnership forum
- Establish a contingency fund and a plan for dealing with problems
- Prepare your museum colleagues for the partnership

ACTION DURING THE PARTNERSHIP:

- Deal only with those who have the power to deliver at different levels of the organisation (such as movers & shakers; advocates; doers)
- Diversify your contacts to ensure continuity if people leave the organisation
- Break down complex projects into simpler tasks and establish milestones/review dates
- Test partnership with 'warm-up' tasks
- Undertake regular reviews of progress through the partnership forum
- Be flexible in response to problems
- Promote the partnership amongst all members of your museum
- Involve partners in all other aspects of museum work, if possible

ACTION AT THE END OF THE PROJECT:

- Undertake a detailed debrief with an honest analysis and assessment of the project
- Rectify problems where practical
- Celebrate and publicise successes
- Explore further partnership projects

IT'S THE COMPANY WE KEEP: PARTNERSHIP WORKING AT THE MUSEUM OF LIVERPOOL LIFE

JANET DUGDALE

THE MUSEUM OF LIVERPOOL LIFE

The Museum of Liverpool Life opened in 1993 and five years later, at the time of writing, we are awaiting the results of a major bid by National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside (NMGM) to the Heritage Lottery Fund to extend our public display areas. The new galleries will cover the themes of 'Home and Communities' and the 'King's Regiment'. During the last year, as curator of Social and Community History, I have been working with local people and organisations to develop projects which will have a contribution to the new permanent displays and temporary exhibition areas.

The four projects, which are the subject of this paper on partnership working, are in various stages of development. They include reminiscence and recording projects as well as temporary exhibitions. Partnership working has provided the opportunity for the museum to become involved in important developments and initiate others. In all cases the museum has made sure that the projects with which we become involved meet NMGM's corporate objectives. It is important that any curator who takes on the responsibilities of the museum becoming a partner in a project has the full backing of their organisation.

The advancement of social history becoming a focus for community involvement in museums has meant that social history curators are generally willing to work in partnership with other organisations. This type of activity gives opportunities to work with other agencies providing a forum for the development of advocacy for the museum and bigger, more involved projects. By working in partnership, projects can often secure access to different funding bodies; a variety of skills; increased human resources and contacts for future progress. The value of advocacy in raising the museum's profile with supporters, funders and visitors, means that partnership working can be vital to a museum's development. In a climate of urban regeneration the museum's role as a catalyst for interpretation and understanding of the past can be significant for other agencies working within a

city. With the presentation of four diverse projects I hope that I can show some of the potential value of this approach. Not all of the projects are visual or have been led by the museum (perhaps not surprisingly the only one which is museum led is the exhibition *A Caribbean Garden*). For each project I will discuss the background to the project, its partners, the benefits of working in partnership and the anticipated/planned outcomes.

BLACK ELDERS PROJECT

The Black Elders Project is a reminiscence and recording project which encourages older people to become involved in preserving aspects of their own history. The project works with active older people, who act as volunteers and receive training to use up to date recording equipment. Over an eighteen-month period a series of one to one interviews will be recorded to create an oral history archive.

THE PARTNERS

The partners are the Rialto Neighbourhood Council, Age Concern Liverpool, Black Sisters, a Race Equality advisor and NMGM (Museum of Liverpool Life). Thus the project is a partnership of organisations from the local community. The development of a partnership was necessary to support the Rialto Neighbourhood Council to apply for funding. The Black Elders Project received support from Granby Toxteth Partnership (through their Community Chest scheme) and Comic Relief (working with older people). The partnership enabled the project to establish the contacts necessary for local credibility. It also allowed the project to use the skills of the various partners — for example in working with older people, organising reminiscence and oral history projects and providing the technical advice on using recording equipment. As well as local credibility and access to funding perhaps the greatest value of working together means the availability of skills and resources to support the work.

LIVERPOOL SHANGHAI COMMUNITY SURVEY

In 1997 a partnership of three organisations joined together to work on an oral history project to record Liverpool's Shanghainese community. Liverpool has one of the oldest Chinese communities in Europe and because of its maritime links with China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries some people who have settled in Liverpool have come from the Shanghai

region. The experiences of those who had worked for the Blue Funnel Line were crucial in recording the diversity of the Chinese presence in Liverpool. So far there has been little research into Shanghainese seafarers, with most of the limited research being about those of Cantonese origin. Due to an ageing population it was vital for the project to start in 1997 so that it could record those who came to Liverpool before 1945 (this helped us select fourteen former seafarers to interview for the first phase of the Survey). The project has been set up to run between 1997 and 1999 and over this period two phases of oral history collecting will record the stories of thirty Shanghainese migrants.

THE PARTNERS

The project has been run by the partners, in collaboration with the Chinese community. The three main partners are the University of Liverpool (through the Pacific Asia Research Institute), the University of Shanghai and NMGM (Museum of Liverpool Life). The advantages of this diverse partnership meant access to different types of funding and a wider range of expertise. The partnership combined experience in academic research and oral history collecting for the scope of the project. The partners were able to share some of the costs and apply for funding as a joint venture. However, the skill with the most relevance, was that the two sociologists from Shanghai University were able to interview the respondents in Shanghainese.

OUTCOME OF THE SURVEY

The Survey will produce a well-documented oral history archive, which will be held by all the partners and at Liverpool City Library (thus making it available to the community and researchers). The cassettes have been transcribed and translated making them available in both Shanghainese and English. An academic study will be published and some of the people who took part in the Survey will feature in the new gallery at the Museum of Liverpool Life. In the long term the Museum of Liverpool Life would like to initiate a joint exhibition with a museum in Shanghai.

LIVERPOOL LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

In 1998 Liverpool City Council and the Regional Government Office approached the Museum of Liverpool Life to join a

steering group to organise a photography project. The eleven Liverpool Pathways Partnerships were offered the opportunity to become involved in recording aspects of individual's lives in June 1998. Over 160 disposable cameras were circulated with the chance to gain some basic training in photographic techniques from a community arts organisation: Artskills.

THE PARTNERS

Liverpool City Council through its Central Policy Unit was the lead partner. The Unit works with the eleven Liverpool Pathways Partnerships to promote community involvement in the areas of Liverpool which receive European funding for regeneration. Other partners provided advice, support in kind and sponsorship — these partners included Kodak (cameras), Artskills (photography training), Open Eye Gallery, English Partnerships, Merseytravel, Merseyside TEC, ACME (Arts, Culture, Media and Enterprise), Littlewoods and NMGM. In some ways the steering group was unusual because it involved both those interested in supporting the projects in kind (with advice etc) as well as those who were business partners/project sponsors.

OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

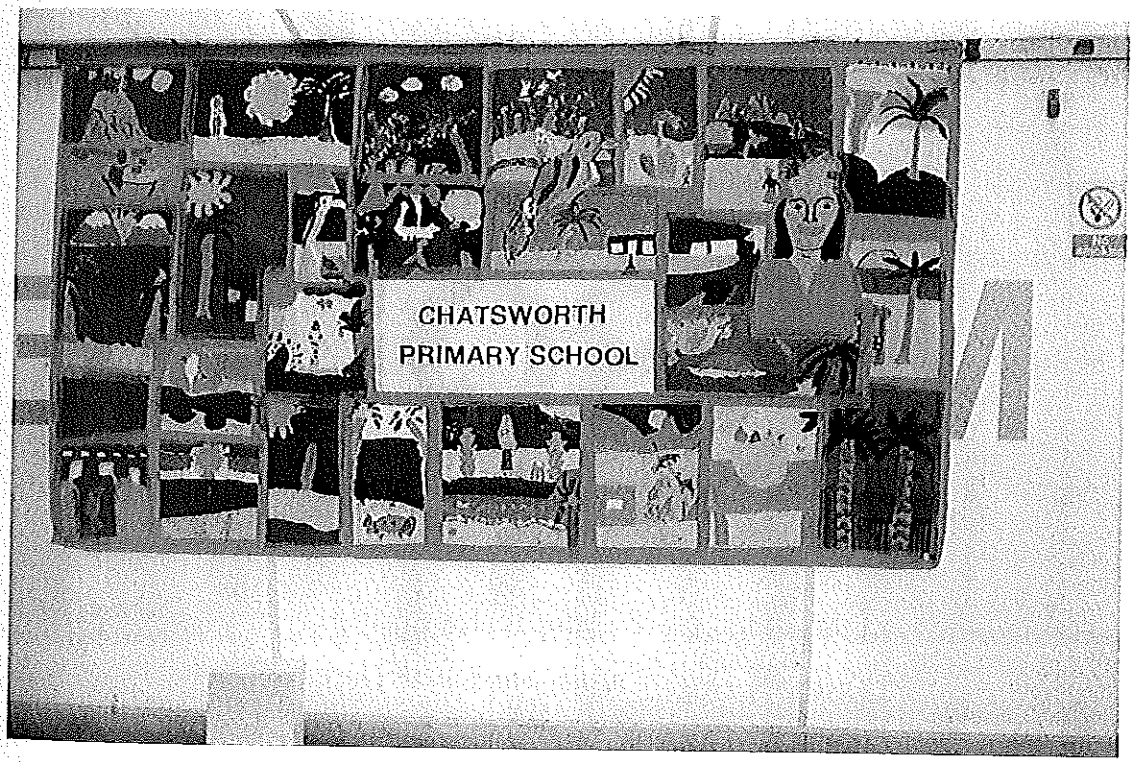
The project aimed to produce a photographic resource created by the community and available to be used by the eleven Liverpool Partnerships. The photographs could also be collected by the Museum of Liverpool Life to record a snapshot of life in 1998. Because of the promotional use of the images by the City Council and the Partnerships the importance of community participation continues to be recognised. Over one hundred photographs were used for a smart touring exhibition which was launched in the Museum and then toured the Town Hall, Libraries and the Partnerships. The project itself could not have existed without community participation and the support of the steering group members but the community involvement was the key to its success. The Museum has gained by working with the City Council (NMGM is funded by Grant in Aid from the DCMS), and by involvement with different organisations who could support the Museum in future projects. The exhibition, and its launch by Mike McCartney, meant the profile of the museum was raised through subsequent publicity. As well as an exhibition (with no hire fee etc) we also have the opportunity to collect

the photographs. They might not be the best photographs because they were taken on disposable cameras but they did provide an insight into Liverpool in 1998: a snapshot of life in the city. This would not be easy to capture by commissioning a photographer.

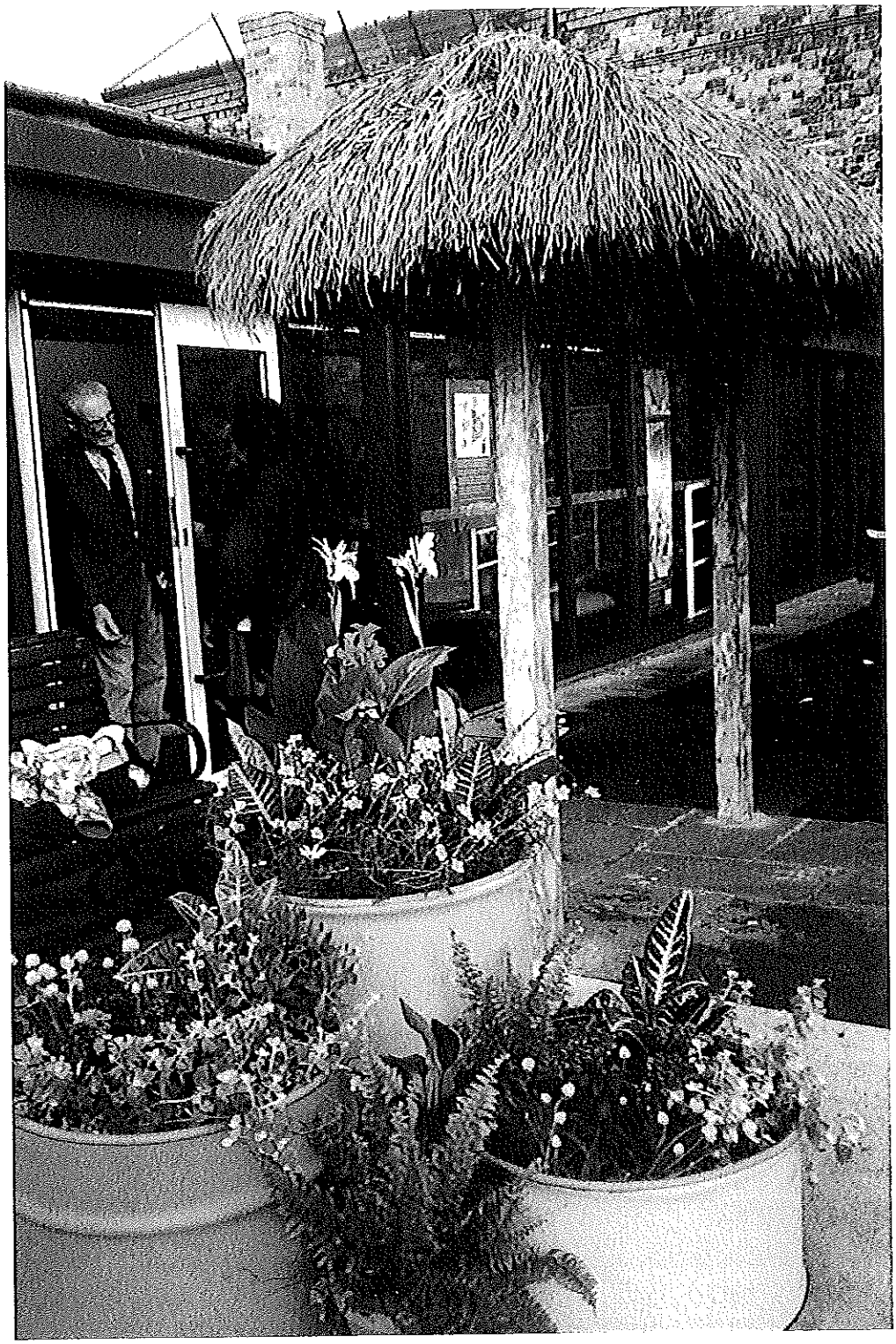
A CARIBBEAN GARDEN

A living garden was created in the courtyard of the Museum of Liverpool Life to commemorate the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* bringing 492 West Indians to Britain in June 1948. The project also included a small supporting exhibition in the foyer and an extensive programme of events which began with the launch on 26 June 1998.

A Caribbean Garden involved NMGM in the national 'Windrush' celebrations, coordinated by the BBC. From Liverpool's point of view it was important for the Museum of Liverpool Life to show that Caribbean people had been living in the city for generations. As well as in the accompanying exhibition this was done through the work with local schools which culminated in a performance on the opening night.



Banner made by local school as part of the 'Windrush '98' celebrations.



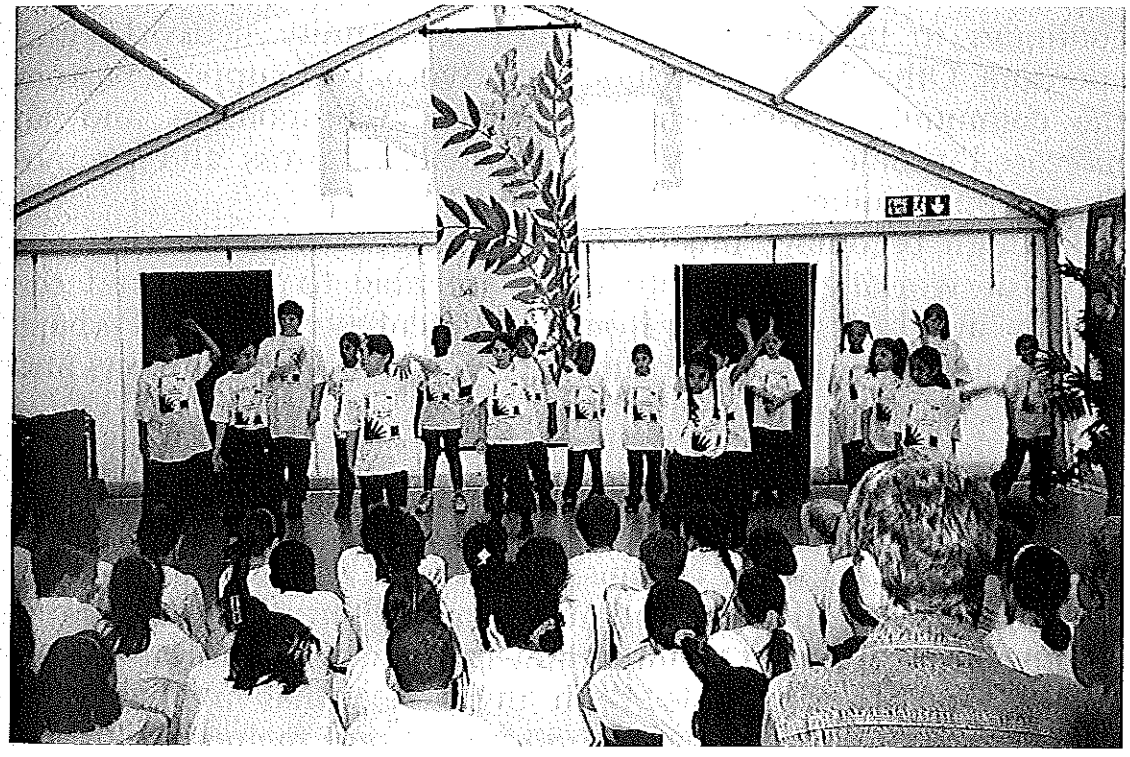
'A Caribbean Garden' at the Museum of Liverpool Life.

PARTNERS

The project was an internal partnership of staff from different NMGM sites. As well as community and business support the main human partners who made the whole garden possible were the Friends of Merseyside Maritime Museum (aka 'The Garden Gang'). The Friends worked hard to paint, plant and maintain the garden. Community support, through the work of NMGM's Outreach Officer, meant that local people took part in selecting the plants, which were grown in the greenhouses of Liverpool Museum. The Greenhouse Multi-Cultural Arts and Play project worked with older people from the Caribbean community and five local schools. This intergenerational project resulted in a photographic exhibition and a performance which was co-ordinated by our Events Officer for the garden launch and then performed again at a local arts festival.

BUILDING ON THE PARTNERSHIP

The Museum has continued to build on links made with the community and some of the partners. In particular the Greenhouse Multi-Cultural Play and Arts Project, who have received a grant from the Millennium Fund for work at the Museum in



The Greenhouse Multi-cultural Arts and Place Project performed at the launch of 'A Caribbean Garden'.

2000, are intending to pilot a project with young people in summer 1999.

VALUE OF PARTNERSHIPS

The 'company you keep' can have a strong impact on the direction of the Museum and its profile within the community. By working with other organisations there are some good opportunities for museums. I feel that the only way to achieve a diverse and relevant programme of collecting, exhibition, events and educational work is by community involvement. I have been positive about what I believe can be achieved by briefly outlining some recent projects which can be used to illustrate the positive side of partnership working. However, be warned, the reality can be very different. It is still easy to point out the positive, when an in depth analysis and evaluation might reveal difficulties. All in all the recent projects with which I have become involved have meant that the Museum has benefited. The opportunities illustrated by these practical examples of projects include sharing skills, resources and contacts.

The skills which have been made available include knowledge, experience and expertise. Resources can be human or funding (either in kind or through more formalised sponsorship links). The value of contacts for the future work of the Museum continues to be invaluable through community networks and sponsors. Other benefits include the advocacy of supporters from the community, organisations/agencies and sponsors and an increased profile given by more formalised press and promotional opportunities.

Through becoming involved with different organisations and ways of working, as curators we are able to understand the locality in which we work from a different perspective. Perhaps we can also gain the opportunity to work on bigger projects and be able to achieve more with less.

THE REALITY

The reality is that other organisations have different perspectives and agendas to that of the museum. When the museum is leading on a project it is important to maintain editorial control if necessary or appropriate. With any project that involves partnership working it is imperative to set up and maintain effective communication. Through the lifecycle of a project not everyone will have the same level of commitment. Inequality of resources

can lead to differences in commitment and also the ability to maintain involvement. A good and understanding working relationship is often required as success for the museum and other partners will rely more on the enthusiasm of the people than on formal written contracts.

Being practical does help. The museum should always be clear about its own aims and business plan and ensure that projects offered fit into that plan. From the beginning always state how the museum can be involved in the project. It can also help to have a written agreement between organisations so that the commitment is not just made by the individual. When a partner is a sponsor, the terms of their support should be clear. Try to make sure that one organisation is the project manager with the responsibility for planning. Finally, for social history curators the most important requirement is for the museum to communicate. The Museum of Liverpool Life has found this to be the key to partnership working.

MUSIC MAKERS: People and Music and Walsall

ELEANOR MOORE

This paper takes the form of a case study of a temporary exhibition project by the Community History Team at Walsall Museum and Art Gallery in 1997–1998. The exhibition explored the performance of music in Walsall from the medieval period to the present day and opened up the experiences of musicians working in Walsall today through a series of short films. Loans of musical instruments accompanied displays of programmes, flyers and posters, many collected for the exhibition. The story of recorded sound from the Edison phonograph to the Sony walkman was told through displays of objects from the collections. To mark the opening of the exhibition, a gig featuring five local bands was held at an independent local venue.

This paper outlines the context and background to the exhibition, its aims, the collaborations through which those aims were achieved, some of the practical and technical issues that were faced as part of the project, and draws some conclusions about the project.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Walsall Museum and Art Gallery is the central museum service for the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall, the other services being Walsall Leather Museum (a museum of Walsall's leather industry which has temporary displays of contemporary leather craft and products), Birchills Canal Museum, Willenhall Museum, and the Jerome K. Jerome Birthplace Museum. The Museum and Art Gallery houses the Garman Ryan Collection of artworks and has a programme of temporary exhibitions as well as a Community History Gallery. The Community History Gallery houses an exhibition about the histories of Walsall and its people, which is where 'Music Makers' was shown.

Walsall Metropolitan Borough has a population of some 265,000 people, with higher proportions of young people and older people than the national average. The Borough is culturally diverse: people from ethnic minorities account for just under 10% of the population. The Museum and Art Gallery's mission is: 'to

make known to as wide an audience of possible the world of art and the many histories of the people of Walsall and their roots world-wide through collection, conservation, education, exhibition, interpretation and research'. During the 1990s attempts have been made to nurture a less traditional audience, in particular a younger audience, through an innovative approach to programming and interpretation. This drive has been supported and taken forward through seed-funded posts by the Arts Council of England: the Art Gallery now has staff responsible for exhibitions, interpretation and audience development. These posts are now funded by Walsall M.B.C.

The trigger for 'Music Makers' was a comment made by a visitor to the Community History Gallery at Walsall Museum and Art Gallery. The Gallery contains a small range of interactive elements, including handsets for listening to extracts from oral histories, questions within the text, puzzles, clothes to try on, exhibits concealed behind sliding doors and finally a comments area which promises to display all comments left by visitors. On one of the comments slips the visitor had drawn attention to the lack of facilities for performing music in the Borough and asked if local bands could perform in the Community History Gallery.

The suggestion was impractical, not least because of terrible acoustics and lack of space! However, it did point to an omission within the Community History Gallery. Despite the fact that Walsall can lay claim to being a birthplace of glam-rock (Slade's Noddy Holder was born in the Borough; Roy Wood, of 'Wizzard' fame, performs regularly with the local Jazz orchestra) the Museum's displays made no reference to this musical heritage or the much longer history of live musical performance in the Borough.

Why was this the case? The Gallery at this time included displays about the Borough's inns, alehouses and pubs, about its cinemas and theatres, about its clubs and societies, but not about the music-making which went on in these contexts. This was partly because the Museum's collections held few objects relating directly to the subject. The material evidence associated with music-making was often too personally precious to be given to a museum, or perceived as too specialised to make its way into a mixed local history collection (this was often the case with musical instruments). Other material evidence might be too transient and fast-changing to survive long enough to be collected, and the subject itself had scarcely been written about, particularly from the perspective of the local band.

The visitor's comment also touched upon an important debate taking place within the local community, about facilities for arts activities and particularly for performance. In 1991 support for a new and valued public service, the Garage Arts and Media Centre, was withdrawn by the Council following a change in its political make-up. The Council's position was therefore not seen as neutral in this debate about facilities: any display about the history of Walsall's venues would need to show awareness of this.

AIMS

Having taken on board the difficulties inherent in the subject, the challenge presented by the visitor's comment was taken up. If the Museum was to try to represent this subject, what did it hope to achieve by doing so?

New collections

An obvious aim was that of making some additions to the Borough's collections. The Museum's collections related almost entirely to the consumption of recorded sound in this century, rather than the experience of writing, rehearsing, performing or hearing music live. The Borough's Local History Centre held collections of ephemera relating to music halls and concerts, but these effectively stopped in the late 1950s, just at the point when popular music began to change the face of the local live music scene for ever. These holdings also told little about the experience of creating or listening to the music at concerts. The Borough had almost no relevant oral testimonies.

Illustrating diversity

Together, the existing holdings were weighted towards the classical and choral, concert-based end of the musical spectrum, and showed little about more informal live music performances in pubs, clubs and homes. Another aim of the project was therefore to collect to illustrate the diversity of music-making in Walsall past and present. The image of music-making in the Midlands post 1960 is dominated by the spectre of rock and heavy metal and more particularly in Walsall's case, glam-rock. Initial research quickly showed that this monolithic image was only part of the picture and we set about to collect to show that a much wider range of styles were part of Walsall's music-making history.

Many voices

A further aim of the project was to try as far as possible to include as many voices and perspectives as possible within the display and to avoid reliance on one authoritative curatorial voice. The project was bound to depend on an informal information network — local people involved in the live music scene — not least because of the paucity of published research material on the subject. Because of this, this aim took on an even greater importance. The project also aimed to raise the profile of the current debate about the quality and extent of provision for live musical performance in the Borough; because the Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council was not perceived as neutral within this debate it was even more important to ensure that many different voices (and points of view) came across as part of the project.

Involvement

The desire to avoid the over-dominance of a curatorial voice led us to formally adopt the aim of involving community groups in the preparation of the exhibition, and especially younger people. It was hoped that this would make the exhibition itself attractive to a local, young audience.

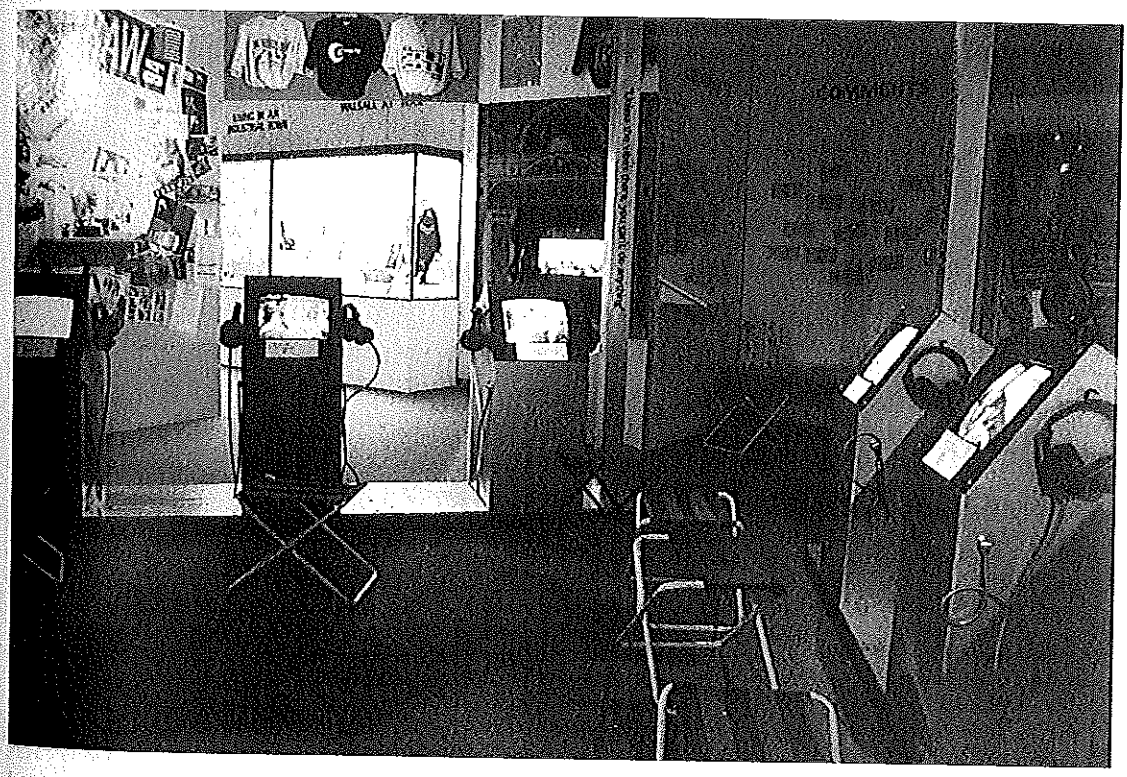
Young people

A focus on young people as the main target audience for the project was obvious. We wanted the end result to appeal to as many people as possible (older people are as active in their consumption of live music as younger ones, if less visibly). However, it was felt that because music is often a key area of interest for young people, in a way that many other local historical subjects are not, it would be a good subject through which young people might become more interested in the work of the Museum. This aim immediately led us to consider presenting the subject through a wider range of media than that traditionally adopted in the Museum's display, including video accompanied by soundtracks. This would necessitate looking outside the Museum for assistance in creating displays.

A permanent place for music at the Museum

The final aim of the project was to attempt to give the subject a permanent place within the Museum's displays and the Museum a permanent place within the group of local agencies involved in providing information for local musicians and in debating the facilities available for live performance.

Displays of musical instruments and ephemra collected and loaned for 'MusicMakers'.



A view of the 'Music Makers' exhibition showing the video monitors.

COLLABORATIONS

The project was achieved through a range of different collaborations both internal and external, commercial and non-commercial. Together these different collaborations gave the project a higher profile locally, provided contacts within local music-making networks, led to creative partnerships which shaped the final displays, gave access to technical expertise and facilities to achieve these displays and the right technologies through which to present them. Without these collaborations, the final exhibition would have been very different. It might have resulted in collections and told some of the more prominent stories of Walsall's live music venues past and present, but beyond that its impact would have been limited. The collaborations were what made it possible to produce an exhibition that was relevant to its target audience and representative of the true diversity of music-making within the Borough.

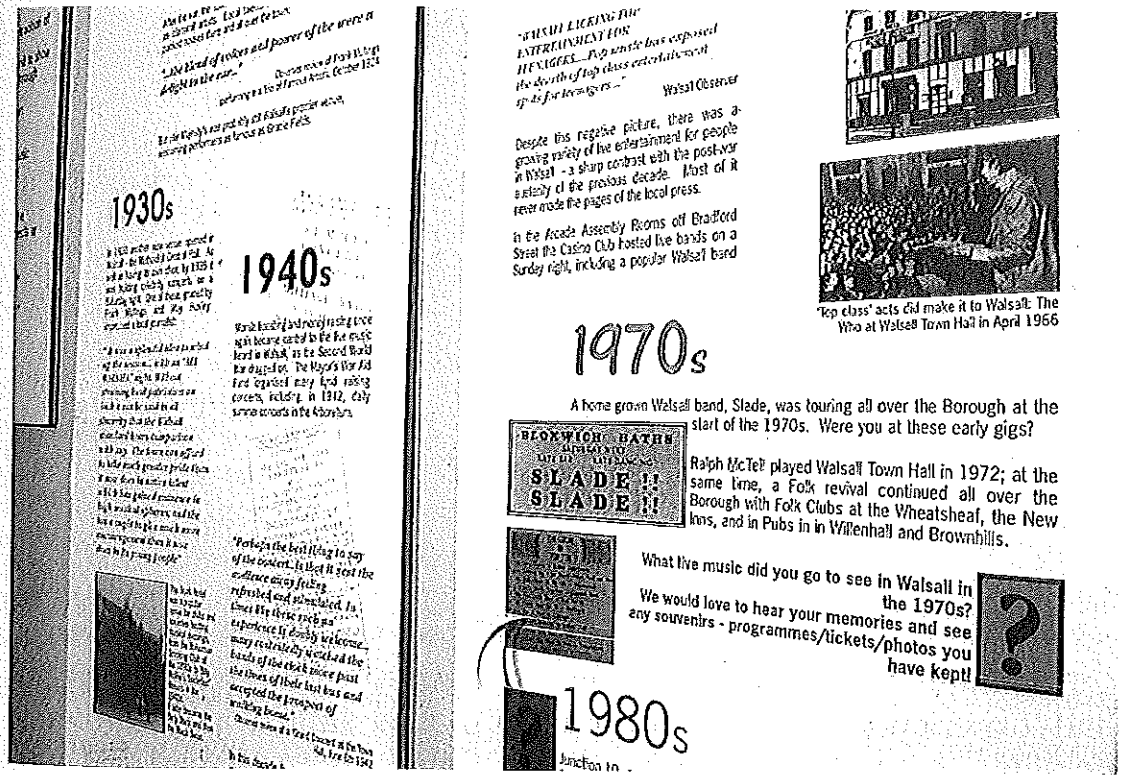
Internal collaborations

The Community History team collaborated with the Exhibition team at Walsall, led by Deborah Robinson. The exhibition programme was to include a touring exhibition about the art and imagery of heavy metal music, developed by Bradford Art Galleries and Museums, called 'Sound and Fury'. The theme of this exhibition had particular resonance for Walsall as a Midlands town and it was hoped that links could be developed with local metal fans to coincide with the show. The audience development aims and the target audience for this show therefore had overlaps with those of the 'Music Makers' project; as a result of meetings with the exhibition team, the two projects were programmed to coincide with each other and to share the same opening night. This collaboration ensured a higher profile for 'Music Makers'. Furthermore, certain publicity costs were shared and a small amount of funding was secured from the exhibitions budget towards filming local musicians.

External collaborations

As planning progressed, it became clear that making contacts amongst Walsall present-day musicians was undoubtedly going to be the most time consuming aspect; however, without this, the project would neither reflect or be relevant to the project's target audiences. Collaboration with local organisations involved with music — Walsall Youth Arts, Walsall Community Arts and Walsall Music Support Service — ensured that we made contact

A local band T-shirt collected as part of the project.



The history of live music in the Borough is now represented in the Museum's permanent exhibition.

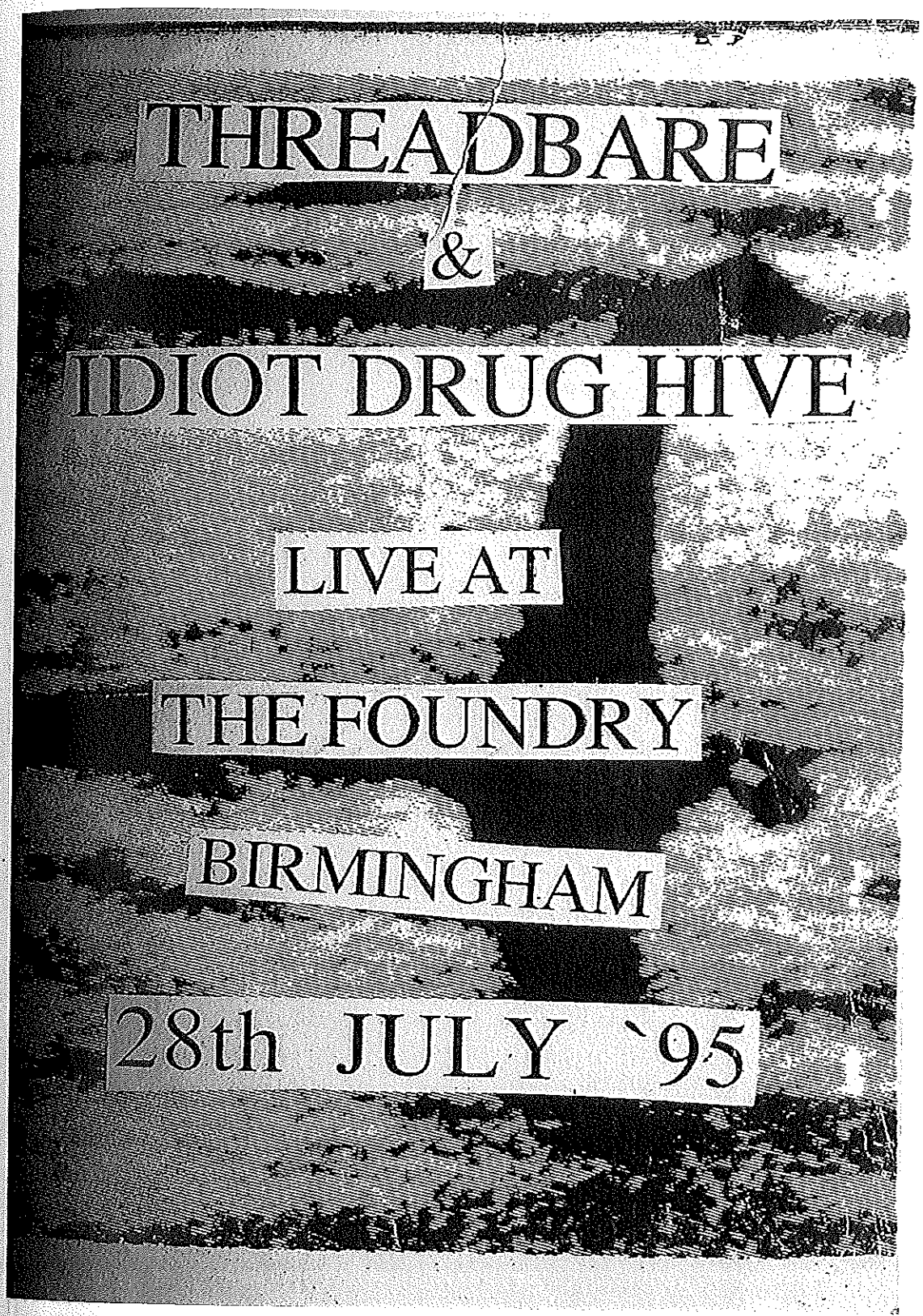
with a broad range of contemporary musicians both amateur and semi professional, who were involved in a broad range of musical genres, and also with people who had important memories of Walsall's music scene in previous decades. These collaborations were successful because these organisations were sympathetic with the project's aims; they saw the final exhibition as a way of providing a positive experience for some of the amateur musicians with who they had worked. They also saw it as a means of raising the profile of their services.

As well as sharing information and contacts, the Museum and these organisations worked together to produce a flyer targeted at young people with a questionnaire asking for their views on local musicians and venues and for offers of loans of music memorabilia. This proved to be a crucial form of consultation with the target audience about what they expected to see in the exhibition, and helped the Museum as it set out to profile local musicians past and present. The partner organisations valued the opportunity which the flyer gave them to publicise their services to potential young users.

Commercial collaborations

The success of the commercial collaborations which were part of 'Music Makers' similarly relied upon both the Museum and the commercial partner feeling that their individual key aims could be met through the collaboration. The Museum required expertise in, and facilities for, editing sound and video film; museum staff wished to work alongside the editor and wanted the final films to be sympathetic to their subjects, the local musicians. The Museum also required high quality equipment for presenting the exhibition through the media of film and sound, to a quality which would satisfy the needs of an increasingly sophisticated visiting audience; it was seeking to obtain these facilities at a subsidised cost.

The aims of the commercial partners were sympathetic to these aims and with the overall aims of the project. The first partner was with a freelance editor, Kaush Patel, who worked using editing facilities at Walsall Youth Arts. Kaush had experience of creating short films in an arts context, but was also concerned to raise the profile of amateur musicians working in the local community. His background in community arts meant that he had experience of collaborating with less skilled partners and helping them to interpret their aims. He warmed to the Museum's project and managed the process of editing the material collected by the Museum into short films.



Poster advertising a gig at which Walsall metal band 'Idiot Drug Hive' performed in 1995. Produced on a photocopier. Collected for 'Music Makers'.

The Museum's other main commercial partner Black Box AV, a Cardiff based company providing audio visual equipment and services. This company were beginning to consider the heritage sector as a market for their product and therefore valued the opportunity to meet the Museum's need for a high quality, reliable means of showing films with soundtracks. Their sympathy with the aims of the project as a vehicle to raise the profile of local music making, as well as the opportunity it offered to showcase their equipment, led them to subsidise the cost of their service to the Museum. This enabled the Museum to meet its aim of delivering the exhibition via new media to a high quality level. The company has gone on to supply equipment for the galleries of the new British Library.

Creative collaborations

The Museum also set up creative collaborations which were crucial in shaping the content of the final exhibition. Music Makers relied on many collaborations of the kind which will be familiar to anyone curating a local history exhibition: those with knowledgeable individuals with a desire to contribute information, often undocumented elsewhere. This information often forms the backbone of the content of exhibitions dealing with local subjects. These were crucial to the success of the project. Another kind of collaboration, which was a new experience for Walsall's Community History team, was between the Museum and a group of local teenagers and young people who made three video diaries about music festivals The aim of this part of the project was to ensure that the perspective of music fans, as well as musicians, was part of the final exhibition. The collaborations were on the whole successful because the young people involved felt that they could gain something from the experience.

Through local community organisations, contacts were made amongst young people who served on a local youth forum. Further contacts were made through appeals in the local press. The group came together at the Museum to learn basic filming skills from Kaush, before being despatched with the Museum's camcorder — and encouraged to film the event they were covering from their own perspective. Further filming sessions and follow-up interviews followed before the groups spent time with Kaush, contributing ideas to the final edit of their 'festival video diaries'. The three diaries covered two local festivals — Walsall People's festival and the Caldmore-Palfrey Festival and a Walsall group's experiences at Glastonbury 1997 (yes, a

Sampling and mixing activity for youth groups which accompanied the exhibition.

muddy one). The most successful diarists were those who wanted to gain new video-related skills from the experience, or who were passionate about local music facilities and wanted to voice their opinions (this was not the case with all the diarists). Those who had joined the project confident of the chance of fulfilling personal goals through it contributed enthusiastically.

PRACTICAL AND TECHNICAL ISSUES

Involving young people in providing content for the exhibition required a lot of planning; these are some of the issues which the Museum faced in setting up this project:

- Introducing young people to the work of the Museum and to the project, and providing training, required a much greater time commitment than first anticipated. Lack of briefing on our part meant that the group was perhaps unprepared for the time commitment expected of them; as a result the Museum was sometimes naively optimistic about the possibility of thee busy 18–22 year olds fitting the Museum into their schedules!
- Insuring and safeguarding equipment whilst it was off council property, and making sure that there was enough equipment to deliver other aspects of the project while the young people's project was going on were issues faced as part of this project.

Presenting the exhibition through a range of different media raised some new technical and practical issues which needed to be resolved. Some of these are outlined below:

- When creating profiles of local musicians, it was important to consider the kind of technology being used to make sound recordings and video films. It quickly became clear that when recording sounds and images together, the best option was a good quality microphone attached to the video camera; the built in microphone on a standard camcorder never produced a good enough quality recording for reproduction in the Gallery. Recording images and sound separately meant that they had to be used separately, as synchronising them at the editing stage would have been very difficult. External advice helped to guide the Museum in these matters. Musicians were understandably anxious for very high sound quality in the reproduction of their music in the Gallery.
- When creating the final films, setting the right sound level was crucial to the enjoyment of the audience accessing the films in

Live music in Walsall, decade by decade: a text panel from 'Music Makers'.

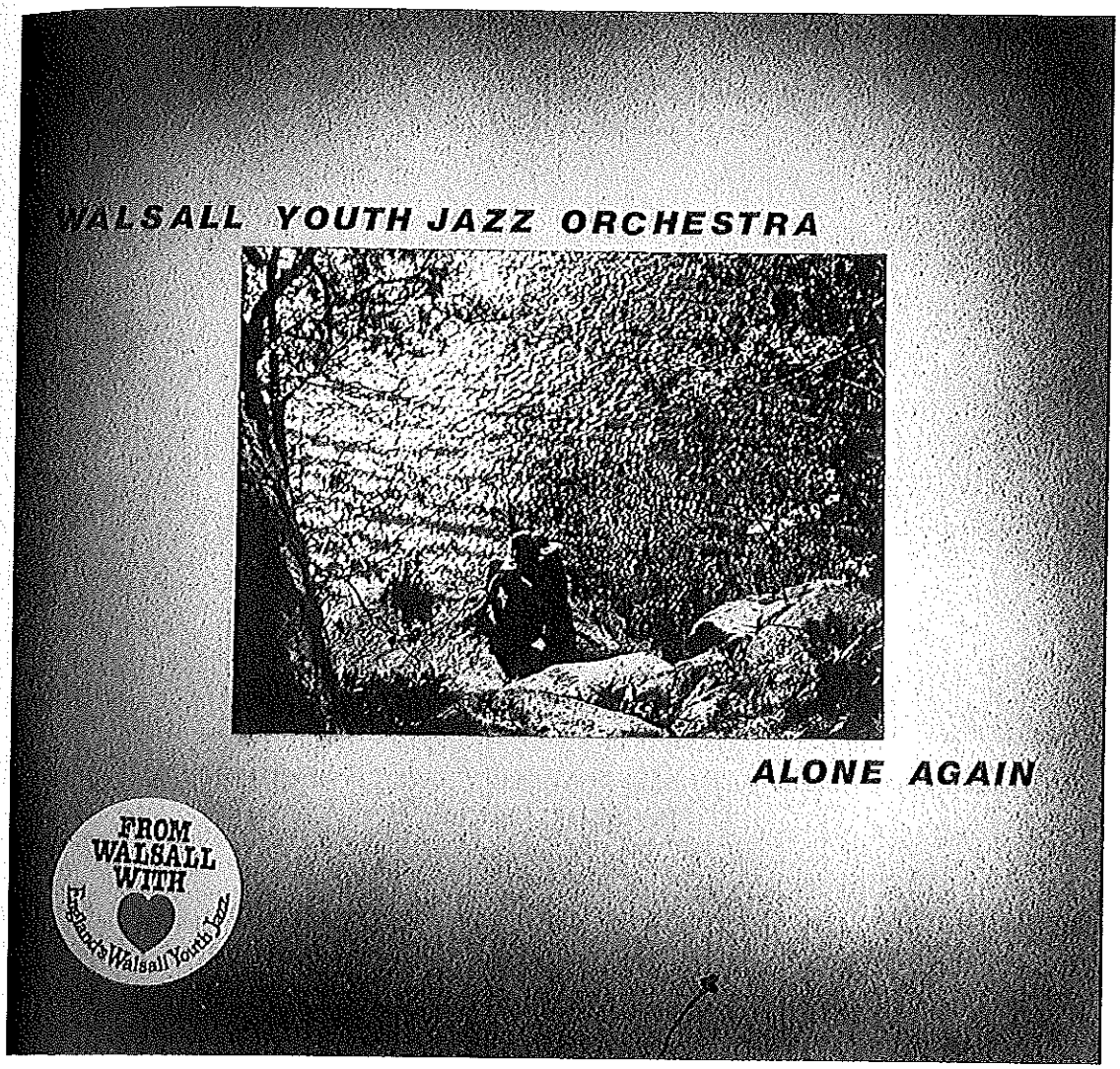
the Gallery. Despite taking external advice, the sound levels were probably not set high enough for the needs of some older visitors, which did reduce their enjoyment of the exhibition.

- The Museum decided to solve the issue of 'sound bleeding' in the Gallery by providing two headphones for each video screen for audiences to listen to.
- The technology chosen for playing the films reflected the funding available for the project. It was good quality VHS, which played and then rewound tapes in the conventional way, during which time a computer graphics screen gave information about the exhibition. Visitors had to wait for their favourite profile. Recent advances in CD-based technology mean that this would undoubtedly now be a better choice, especially since this medium can be interactive, allowing the visitor to select film clips from a menu.
- The positioning of the video screens was decided with the needs of both younger visitors and visitors who were wheelchair users in mind. They were therefore set low, 70 cm above the ground. Low stools were positioned in front of them for visitors to sit on.
- The Museum chose not to censor two instances of difficult lyrics and swearing which were part of the final exhibition. No complaints were received; however a certain amount of spontaneous censorship was required during visits by younger school parties to the exhibition.

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

The project resulted in twenty four films featuring local musicians rehearsing, recording, and performing and talking about their involvement in local music and three festival video diaries. Displays of ephemera, band T-shirts, musical instruments and fans' memorabilia complemented these films. The history of local venues was told through posters and programmes, the earliest dating from the late 1700s. Activities led by a musician, targeted at young people ('sampling' noises and mixing their own tracks from these) accompanied the exhibition.

New collections of demo tapes, CDs, interviews with musicians films of rehearsals and performances, photographs and musician's clothing (sadly not yet Noddy Holder's hat, however!) were one of the most important outcomes of the project. Care has been taken to secure copyright clearance for as many of the holdings covered by copyright as possible.



Album cover for 'Alone Again', a compilation of tracks recorded by Walsall Youth Jazz Orchestra in 1980–1981. Collected for 'Music Makers'.

The displays succeeded in showing the diversing of musical activity in Walsall, past and present. A band fusing American blues styles with traditional South Asian instruments such as tabla, a senior citizens classical orchestra, an internationally renowned bhangra band, and a Gospel choir singing barber's shop harmonies, were all featured. Responses given during the evaluation of the project, (which took the form of self completion questionnaires) confirmed this was something appreciated by many:

"I didn't realise there was such diversity as appeared in the exhibition — I think they must hide away somewhere"... "I didn't realise the vast talent we had here in Walsall"

The exhibition succeeded in attracting young people to the Museum and involving them in its work. In the first month of

Beechdale Gospel Chorus performing at Walsall People's Festival 1997. Documented for 'Music Makers'.

the exhibition, the number of younger visitors rose substantially. The crucial question is the Museum's ability to sustain this trend; the project was labour intensive, involving the Community History Officer and Museum Assistant practically full time over several months. Not everyone involved felt that their aims were met through the project:

"I had not benefitted financially — or my co-workers"

The Museum has, to a limited extent, given itself a place amongst those agencies providing information and contributing to debates about music locally. The exhibition itself raised the profile of debates about local facilities for music by showing musicians and fans expressing their views on the subject. Aspects of the 'Music Makers' displays are now part of the Museum's permanent exhibition in the Community History Gallery. Evaluation showed that, following the project, there is some expectation that the Museum should contribute services to local musicians: a folk festival and a sheet music service were among the suggestions made! Again, this presented for the Museum the issue of fulfilling expectations raised amongst a particular target audience through this project in the longer term.

The Museum aims to maintain a place for music within its programme in future; in March 1999 it will host a performance event for local musicians, celebrating Commonwealth Day 1999, which takes the theme of music. Cum on feel the noize....

A SETTLING EXPERIENCE? REPRESENTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN PRESTON

LOUISE CONNELL

"The house I first moved into was dirty and scruffy. I lived in a shared house, I had to cook then go straight to my room. I was not allowed in the front room — the landlord did not like coloured people. I had a few people telling me to go back to the country I came from. I wanted to go back to Dominica but I did not have enough money. Some people were nice and friendly, others were nasty. I was the first one to have a Black child born in Preston. It was murder, called names and bring you down 'Sambo child with no socks and shoes'..."

"As I was very young, I did not understand English, but I could see there were big buildings and chimneys. I remember a river in Preston that looks and reminds me of one similar in Ghala [Gujarat], it is River Ribble."

Moving Stories: a history of settlement in Preston was the culmination of three years planning and preparation. The exhibition took place at the Harris Museum and Art Gallery in Preston between May and September 1998. Dozens of people lent their precious possessions for display, took part in oral history recordings and shared their stories with museum staff and researchers; school children produced colourful and challenging work; and photographers worked with local community groups and schools to produce a series of poignant and thought-provoking images. The result was an exhibition with a wide appeal to all ages and cultures. It was equally a challenge to the museum, to produce a fair and balanced exhibition that wasn't afraid to confront sensitive issues.

Moving Stories was the most recent development in a series of projects targeted at Preston's South Asian community, which makes up around 8% of the town's population. Previous exhibitions, such as *Preston Asia* (1994), *Diwali — Festival of Lights* (1995) and *Azadi — Freedom* (1997), were all part of this strategy. The exhibition set out to consider the history of settlement in Preston by people from all over the world, and their contribution to the life of the town. We aimed to create links with groups who had previously had little or no formal contact with the

museum, as well as to build on relations already established with Preston's South Asian communities. The project was conceived by Sally Coleman, who, as the then Senior Keeper at the Harris, worked tirelessly to prepare researchers' briefs, draft contracts and generally get the project off the ground.

A grant of £8450 was received from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in February 1996. Further grants totalling £4000 were received from North West Arts Board and Lancashire County Council Arts Unit, specifically for the photographic commission. In a new departure for social history exhibitions at the Harris, it was decided to commission a series of pictures by art photographers working outside the documentary tradition. Roy Mehta and Clement Cooper were eventually selected after visits to Autograph (the Association of Black Photographers) and AAVAA (African and Asian Visual Arts Archive) in London and contacts with various photography galleries around Britain. Both photographers made several visits to Preston; the results of their work reveal a deep understanding of the nature of identity, of alienation/assimilation which were among the exhibition's underlying themes. Part of the commission also involved Clement Cooper as artist in residence at a local junior school, which further reinforced his links to the local community, and provided the inspiration for his work in the exhibition.

PREPARING THE GROUND: CONSULTATION

A key to the success of *Moving Stories* would be a thorough process of consultation. With over thirty different community organisations in Preston, we decided to employ two freelance researchers, Heather Paris and Kusminder Chahal, both of whom had experience of working with ethnic minority groups in Preston. They provided the initial contacts with community leaders and raised awareness of the exhibition generally.

Regular consultation meetings were held at the museum between researchers, museum staff and community representatives. Membership of these meetings was fluid as we drew in people with particular contributions to make at different stages of the research: academics, community leaders, a local photographer, as well as members of the R.E.C. and the Borough Council's equal opportunities department. The meetings gave us a forum to test our ideas about the exhibition's structure and content. How, for instance, could we draw together all the threads that we and our researchers were gathering? Would

we have discrete areas of the gallery devoted to Preston's various ethnic groups, or would we look at the *shared* experiences of migration and settlement, using artifacts as emblems of a culture that we are trying to maintain, or to remind us of the country of our birth? We decided to opt for the latter course, with a series of themed areas looking at arrival, attitudes and home, social, working and religious lives. After all, within each 'community' there may be geographical, religious and cultural differences that resist categorisation. A person who is 'African Caribbean', for example, is also Jamaican, and may have little in common with somebody who migrated from Trinidad or Dominica. However, the experiences of, say, anticipation, excitement, pride, homesickness or rejection are ones commonly felt by anybody who has taken the life-changing decision to emigrate.

In addition to broadening our knowledge of the culture and experience of the people that we met, we had to be sure that every statement made in the exhibition had a basis in fact, not assumption. To this end, we visited people's homes to talk to individuals on a one-to-one basis, as well as community centres and associations where we approached small groups. One of the most rewarding elements of our research was the discovery of aspects of the town's history that had never previously been documented. Oral history recordings were central to this process: through them we learned people's poignant stories of settlement in Preston, and gained access to family albums and personal possessions. One of the researchers on the project subcontracted four local women, Rekha Mistry, Trinder Jit, Nila Patel and Jan Sethi to interview friends, relations and colleagues about their experiences. This information, gathered in the form of questionnaires and oral history recordings, meant we could capture the memories of ordinary people who had settled in the town over the last forty years, and their children. All of the information that we gathered is now part of an archive stored at the museum.

We were determined to collate the histories that we had gathered into a form of publication, and the grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation gave us the resources to be able to do this. The book that we produced in conjunction with *Moving Stories* explored the local history element in greater depth than the text panels in the exhibition, which we kept deliberately brief and accessible. The catalogue was designed to complement the exhibition rather than duplicate it, although it included many of the photographs and stories contributed by local people, and

several copies of it were placed around the exhibition galleries for people to read.

Without the support of local people, there would have been no exhibition. A large portion of our budget was spent ensuring that all our researchers were fairly paid. However, as with most social history exhibitions, we rely on a degree of goodwill and assistance from people who received no payment, including lenders, oral history interviewees and community contacts. Some people, however, considered that they should be paid for helping, and that rather than sharing their culture with the museum, they were offering it for our consumption. Most people, however, understood our objective to bring awareness and understanding of the diverse cultures of Preston to a wider community and were extremely generous with their time and support.

We were acutely aware of the need for sensitivity when approaching people for help. Ultimately, we were criticised after the exhibition had closed by a small minority of people who had declined to be involved in the consultation process, but who felt that their culture had not been sufficiently represented. In some cases, this resulted in belated — although welcome — loans after the exhibition had opened. On the whole, however, the reception to the exhibition was overwhelmingly positive.

WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

From the outset, *Moving Stories* aimed to make people, in particular the younger generation, aware of cultural diversity in Preston. Working with local school children seemed a valuable way of gaining an insight into the different influences that shape children's lives. We approached the Ethnic Minorities Achievement Project at Lancashire County Council Schools Department, a group of teachers who work specifically in schools with a high percentage of ethnic minority pupils. They showed enormous enthusiasm for our ideas, which resulted in six local schools coming on board. Young people, ranging from infants to secondary school students, explored and developed the themes of *Moving Stories* in a classroom-based project spanning an eleven week period from January to March 1998. The topics complemented the National Curriculum core story unit Britain since 1930 and the supplementary study unit based on local history, as well as overlapping into related subjects including art, technology, geography and English.

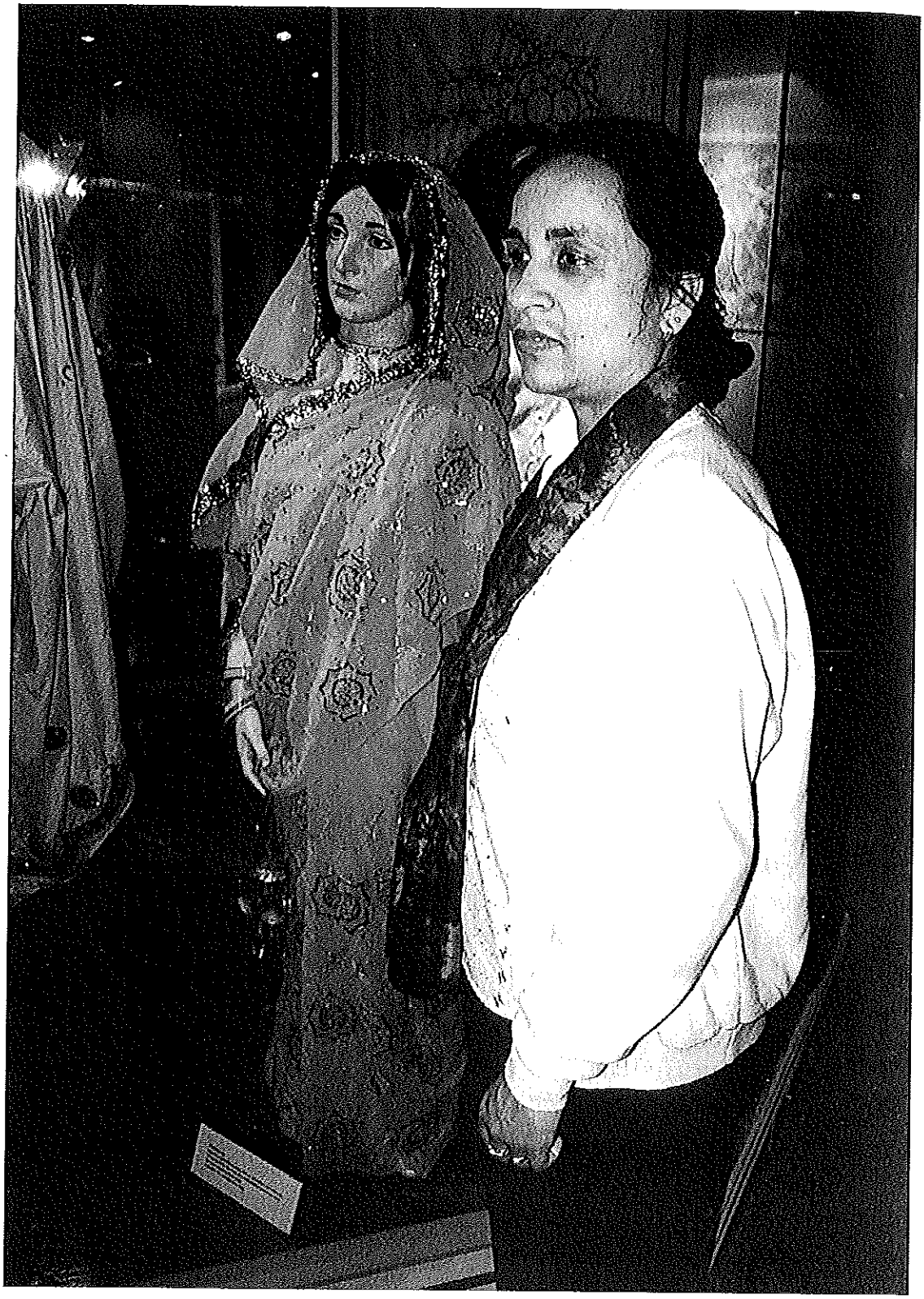
The schools used a variety of strategies to explore the notions of displacement and identity. Children were encouraged to look at how their part of Preston had grown, using old maps and photographs, and to interview people who had moved to Preston to work. Some classes kept diaries around the time of Eid and Diwali which led to classroom discussions about differing lifestyles and the contrasts between home life and school. One class produced challenging work focusing on the racism and rejection faced by many settlers to the town. Another put together a patchwork quilt made up of different squares, each one representing an aspect of that child's family background against a patchwork hand. Clogs, bobbins, churches, temples, mosques, elephants and even a kangaroo were painstakingly embroidered by the children with stunning results — as one visitor to the exhibition commented, "Brilliant work by Ribbleton Ave School — I could find each person's hand!"

There was too much material to exhibit solely in the exhibition galleries, so a large proportion of the work hung in the museum's community gallery. The rest was displayed alongside Clement Cooper's haunting portraits of local children taken during his residency.

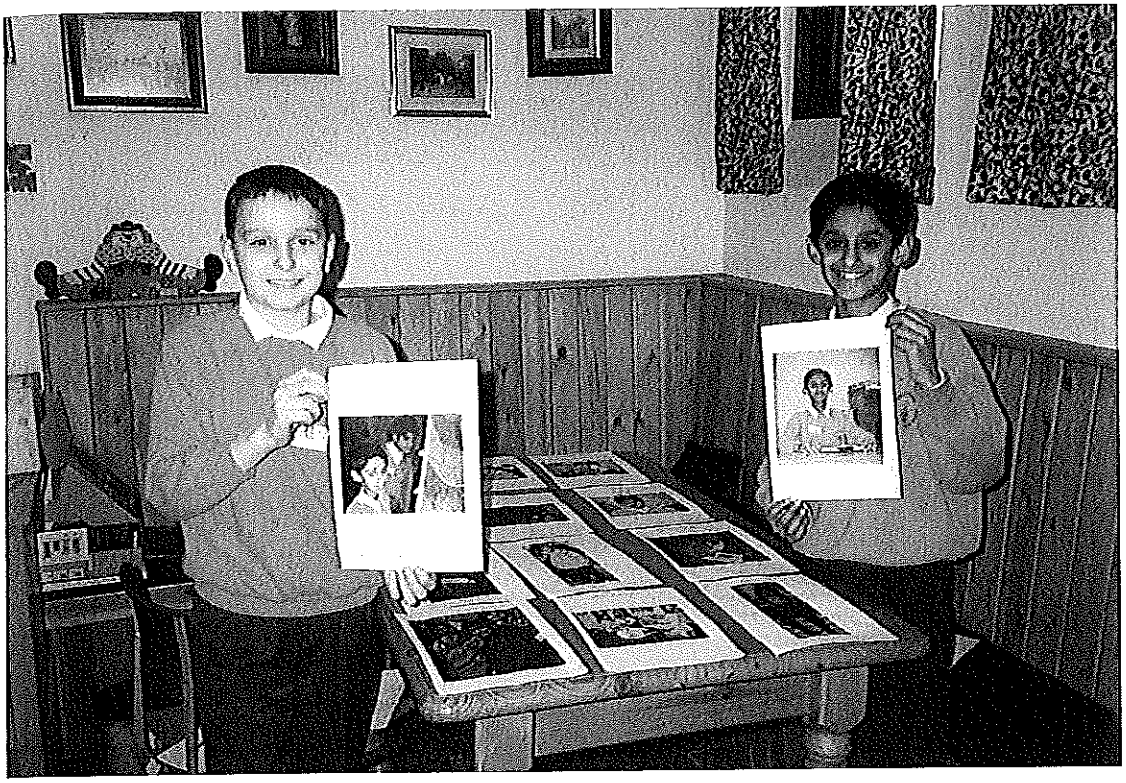
THE EXHIBITION

Moving Stories was divided across four principal galleries on the second floor of the museum. Maintaining coherence between the rooms and drawing together the various themes was a particular challenge. The visitor entered the exhibition through a gallery illustrating different costume worn by people living in Preston, past and present. This gave an impression of the many cultures that have contributed to life in Preston, from Mary Platt's Irish dance dress to Devinder Kaur Singh's wedding dress worn in Delhi in 1973. An adjacent gallery described the growth of the town from the time of the Roman occupation, evidence of Saxon and Viking settlement in place names and burial sites, the Jacobite rebellions, Preston's dependence on the slave trade, and the transformation of the town during the Industrial Revolution. This context was absolutely necessary for the visitor to appreciate the historical precedent of migration and settlement, as well as Preston's investment in British colonialism.

The main body of the exhibition considered the 20th century experience of settlement using the themes decided at the



Devider Singh with her wedding dress. (Guild Community Healthcare.)



Children display the results of their work with the photographer in residence.

Hindu wedding in Preston, February 1998.

Portrait from photographic commission. (Clement Cooper.)

consultation meetings. Exhibits were displayed in freestanding glass cases, with some costumes on open display. One wall was dotted with photographs copied from local people's family albums, described in their own words; quotations from local people were printed large onto the walls of the gallery; extracts from recorded interviews were available for people to listen to and to read; a video showing a compilation of local cultural events, from Carnival to Navratri, was playing; and banners, quilts and the commissioned photographs hung on the walls. Copies of the catalogue were placed around the gallery for people seeking more in-depth information about specific communities and translations of the text panels were available in four South Asian languages spoken in Preston.

The final room featured the schools project. We included a number of games — including a very popular carrom board from

Sonia Sampson in Preston, c.1960.

the Gujarat Hindu Centre in Preston — instructions on how to wear a sari, a quiz and costume colouring templates for younger visitors; children's artwork was displayed on boards in the gallery and an information table containing books, a press cuttings file and further reading was available for people to dip into.

EDUCATION AND EVENTS

The *Moving Stories* opening event was our chance to thank all the community groups, schools and individual lenders. Over three hundred people were invited; food was supplied and served by ladies from the Polish, South Asian and African Caribbean communities, followed by displays of Bhangra, Dandya Ras and traditional Irish dancing by local children.

During the course of the exhibition, the museum organised a number of free family workshops over the school holidays. These included a series of English and Urdu storytelling workshops, a demonstration of Viking crafts, introduction to African culture, henna handpainting (mehendi), tabla drumming workshops and Italian accordion playing. Towards the end of the exhibition, we organised a symposium for the public to discuss issues raised by the exhibition with a researcher, an academic and a lender.

Moving Stories also coincided with *Windrush '98*, the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the S.S. Empire Windrush from Jamaica to England. The museum hosted a dramatic performance which told the story of the Windrush settlers to an audience largely attended by people from the local African Caribbean community. The Seventh Day Adventist Church choir sang gospel songs in the lofty vaults of the Harris rotunda — an inspiring experience for the drop-in audience of Saturday shoppers, library users and museum visitors!

LEARNING FOR THE FUTURE

Although the exhibition was very well-attended — around thirty thousand people visited between May and September — it was important for the Harris not to become complacent. Visitors were encouraged to leave their comments in a book in the main gallery, and a pin board for people to post their comments was also placed in the schools project gallery. In addition, self-completion questionnaires were placed strategically around the galleries. This information was supplemented by a telephone survey of visitors after the exhibition had closed. No museum considering putting on an exhibition of this sort should underestimate how hard it is to satisfy the expectations of each community. Some groups complained that their particular history was not included in sufficient depth; others that there should be more to touch or smell. Some wanted displays that studied the lives of individuals in more depth — although those who helped us research the exhibition had not wanted that degree of exposure.

Post-exhibition evaluation was based on the information in the self-completion questionnaires and the telephone survey of people who had left their names and addresses — a total of around seventy people. On the whole, the quantitative results were positive. While 61% of visits were made by people who described themselves as White British, Irish or East European, 16% of visits were made by people describing themselves as African, Black British, Jamaican or African Caribbean. 11% of the

sample were of South Asian heritage and 2% Chinese. This compares favourably with Preston's demographic composition, where over 89% of residents are White, approximately 1.2% Black and 8.3% South Asian. The high proportion of Black visitors could be attributable to both the *Windrush '98* celebrations and Carnival, which was well-represented in the exhibition.

Moving Stories was a complex exhibition that relied on contributions from many different sources. Reception to the exhibition has been positive, with 29% of our sample rating it good and 67% excellent. To sustain the momentum created by this project, the Harris Museum and Art Gallery has created a new post of Audience Development Officer, based at the museum. This opportunity means that we can continue our work towards an inclusive service that reflects the needs of different audiences.

The Moving Stories catalogue is available by mail from the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, price £4.50. Please make your cheque payable to Preston Borough Council.

LIVING HISTORY UNIT, LEICESTER

ANGELA CUTTING

The Living History Unit was established in December 1992 as part of Leicester City Council's Art & Leisure Department. The focus of our work is the more recent social history of Leicester and we have two fundamental but related aims. One is to bring the history of Leicester to the attention of a wider audience, both within the city and beyond. The other is to encourage the people of Leicester to record and share their own history: their memories and experiences, and the results of their own researches.

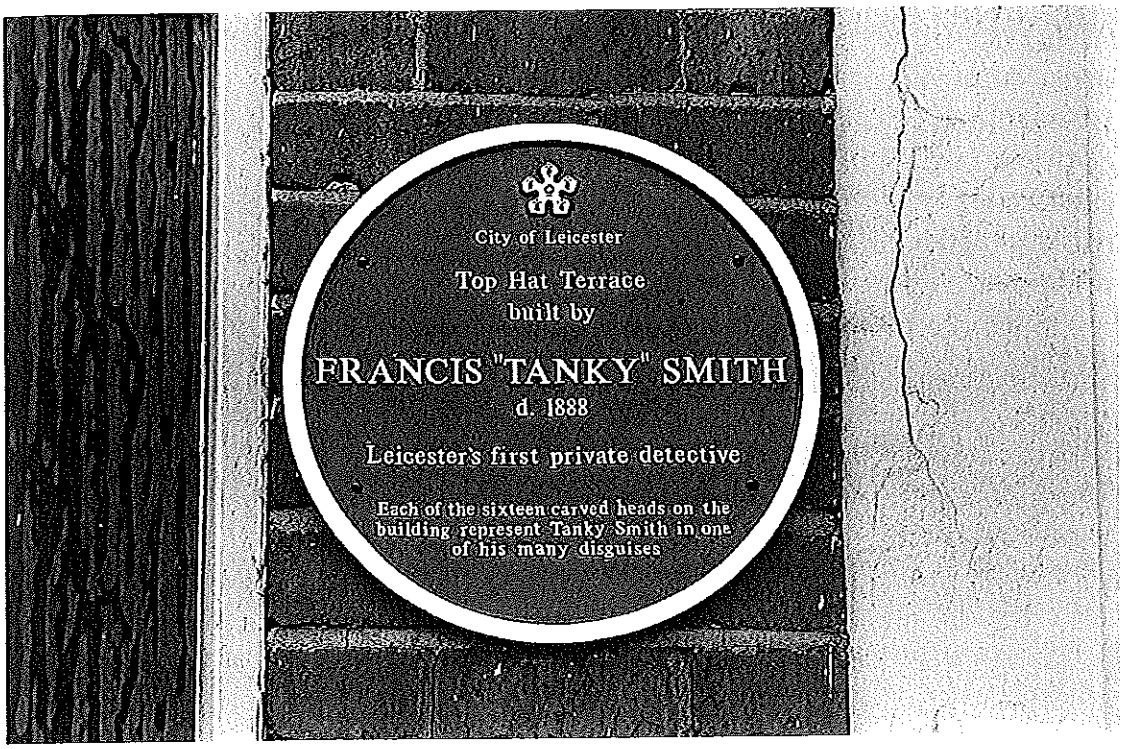
In pursuit of the first aim, we have made live broadcasts for local radio, frequently at the crack of dawn and in sub-zero temperatures! We have taken part in a "What's My Line" event at a local school (no one guessed our line!), and dealt with a bewildering barrage of local history enquiries (what DID Cardinal Wolsey die of?).

More commonly, my colleague Joyce and I visit local historical organisations, schools and community groups of all kinds to talk about the Unit's work, and about different aspects of the history of Leicester — often taking with us items from our collection of photographs and memorabilia. Some of the most popular are souvenirs of the Leicester Pageant of 1932, still vividly remembered by its cast of hundreds and audience of thousands.

Our contact with the local community is very much a two-way process, and we are constantly learning and gaining new perspectives on the city's history. Local historians, both amateur and professional, contribute to our Newsletter, which is published quarterly. In 1993 we established the "Living History Network" which is open to anyone with an interest in local history. Meetings are held every two months and provide an informal point of contact for members to share their knowledge and enthusiasm.

From time to time we hold exhibitions, which also rely heavily on contributions from individuals and local organisations — among them, a D-Day anniversary exhibition at which wartime veterans generously gave their time and personal memories, as well as photographs, uniforms and other material. In 1993, in conjunction with a local photographer Stuart Hollis, we contributed to a unique exhibition at the City Gallery, Leicester. Entitled

Les Harris, Normandy veteran, at D-Day exhibition, June 1994.



A Blue Plaque for 'Tanky' Smith, Top Hat Terrace, London Rd.

"Double Exposure", this combined photographs of Leicester dance groups and audio tape interviews with their members, undertaken and edited by the Living History Unit. A wide variety of dance groups was interviewed, ranging from Polish, Irish and Asian dancers, to Morrismen and dancers with physical and learning disabilities. As well as providing insights into the culture and traditions of different communities in Leicester, this was also in keeping with a view of "living history" as recording the present for the interest of future generations.

The Blue Plaque scheme, for which we are now responsible, covers exhibits of a more permanent nature, marking sites of historic significance. Initially, lacking a complete list, we spent a lot of time playing "spot the plaque". Once located, however, we discovered that many were fixed at such a height that passers-by would need binoculars to read them! As well as re-siting these existing plaques at a more user-friendly height, we now have a rolling programme of new Blue Plaques, based on suggestions invited from the public.

A large part of our work involves the collection of oral history. Our first experiences of this, as raw beginners, was not encouraging! But we are fast learners — we soon discovered that the quality of a recording is infinitely improved by releasing the pause button on the tape recorder, and to ensure that the room is free of loudly ticking clocks, not to mention pets (particularly budgies!). A few years on, and with an ever growing collection

of taped interviews, we are far more confident and relaxed. We are often approached for advice by students and local researchers, and we can provide basic oral history training courses on request. Most of our interviewing is targetted towards particular projects, usually with a view to integrating oral testimony into our publications, which are another means of giving wider access to the history of Leicester.

To date, we have published twelve books and a variety of educational materials, many of them incorporating oral history in some form. We have also produced three videos using archive film of Leicester, together with interviews of local people recalling their past. The videos would certainly not have been possible without the help and co-operation of the community. Over 400 reels of film were found, following media appeals, much of it now lodged in the Leicestershire Record Office where it too will be accessible to a wider audience.

When we talk about our "local community", we are very conscious of the diversity that this embraces — and of our responsibility to provide a service to all its members. This means trying to ensure that exhibitions and publications are accessible to people with disabilities. It means not restricting our activities to the older age group, in the mistaken belief that only they have a "history". It also means including and involving those people who have so often been ignored by conventional history — women and minority ethnic groups in particular.

In partnership with the Royal Leicestershire, Rutland and Wycliffe Society for the Blind, we have recorded two of our books on audio cassette. The first was a taped edition of the very first book we published, "The Diary of Ada Jackson 1883", a diary written by a local woman offering a new perspective of Victorian Leicester, and rare insight into the lifestyle of a young upper working class woman. Our most recent talking book is an audio version of "The Pantry Under the Stairs" by local author Valerie Tedder. This book — one of our bestsellers — was first published in 1994, and gives a vivid personal account of her childhood in Leicester during the Second World War. Due to popular demand, we have now made this available on cassette, read by the author herself.

Also in 1994, we published an oral history of Highfield Rangers, a predominantly African Caribbean amateur football club in Leicester. The book goes beyond the football itself to record the experiences, hopes and achievements of its members, and makes a significant contribution to the wider history of the African Caribbean community in Leicester. The Highfield

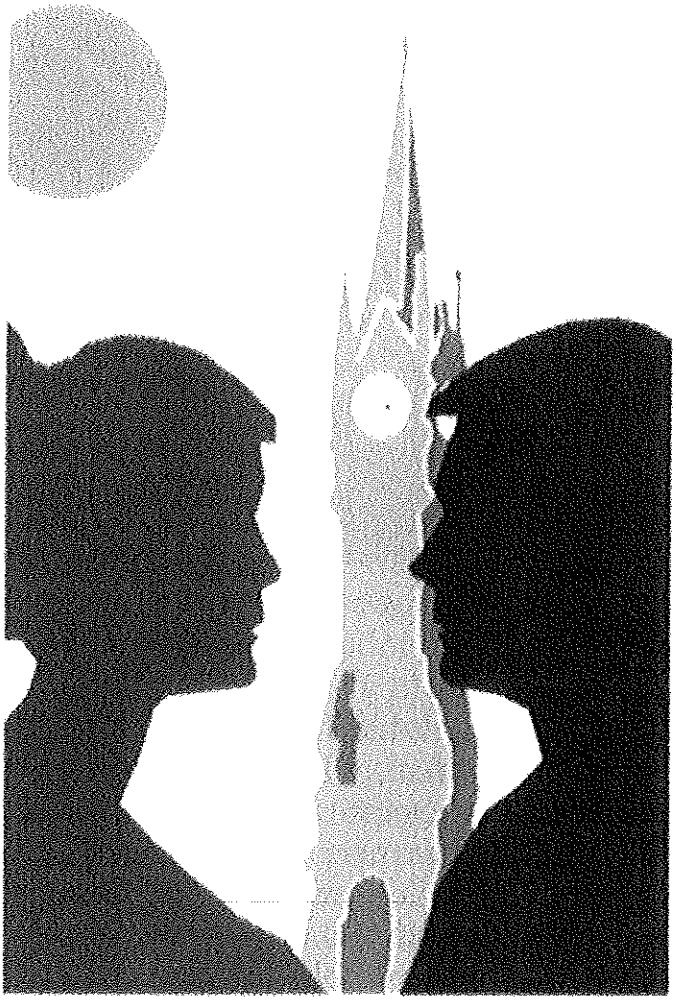
Launch of 'Highfield Rangers: an oral history'.

Rangers Oral History Group, which produced the history in conjunction with the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research at the University of Leicester, has subsequently won a National Outstanding Adult Learners' Group award from the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education.

Other publications have included "Leicester Celebrates", a study of festivals which embraces the whole range of religious and secular festivals celebrated in the city, past and present, including those of the other forgotten white minority groups such as the Poles and the Irish. Another, "Parampara", is an oral history of Indian dance and music in Leicester over the past thirty years, produced in conjunction with the Asian Dance Development Officer at Leicester City Council, Nilima Devi. We are currently working on a project to collect oral testimony of Jewish refugees who came to Leicester in the 1930s from Germany and Czechoslovakia. Unless we integrate the experiences of different communities and acknowledge their contributions to the life of the city, the history of Leicester will always be partial and incomplete.

Our latest publication is a history of the Saffron Lane Estate, compiled by some of its residents. "The Story of the Saff", it draws on oral histories, written records and photographs to create a real "living history" of Leicester's first large-scale municipal housing estate.

LIVING ■ HISTORY ■ UNIT



LEICESTER

A PLACE IN HISTORY

The identity of the Living History Unit.

Early in 1994, the Living History Unit was asked to provide some advice and support to a group of residents who wanted to record the history of the "Saff". The estate has always had a strong sense of identity, but the Boot House rebuilding scheme was altering the old road pattern and breaking up settled communities. Housing Associations were taking over from the City Council in some parts of the estate, and people wanted to capture something of its earlier history before it slipped away. This was how the "Saffron Past and Present" group came to be formed. The Living History Unit helped the group to identify sources of information, to set up oral history interviews, and to make a successful application to the National Lottery Arts for Everyone fund for money to produce a publication and exhibition. Over 40 individuals or organisations contributed to the book, and it was edited by Cynthia Brown, a former member of the Living History Unit who worked closely with the Saffron Past and Present Group from the beginning of the project. "The Story of the Saff" was published by the Unit in September 1998 and has already sold over 600 copies.

The people of Leicester have been invaluable partners during the past six years of our Living History enterprise. Nor should we forget our colleagues within Leicester City Council, who have not only given us great support and encouragement, but have also endowed us with innumerable useful items: council minutes and reports, aerial photographs, Pageant programmes, even fifteen rolls of Civil Defence training film.

Since gaining unitary status in April 1997, Leicester City Council has run its own museums and library services — both within the Arts & Leisure Department — and the Living History Unit has just become part of Leicester City Libraries. So, as a new year begins, we are looking forward to working even more closely with our colleagues in museums and libraries and, with them, continue developing our fascinating and rewarding partnership with the citizens of Leicester.

Notes for Contributors

The Editor will be pleased to consider articles for inclusion in *Social History in Museums*. The article should be typewritten, double spaced, on one side only, with reasonable margins. Articles should be in the region of 2–3000 words, but longer articles will always be considered. Illustrations should be of a high quality, either black and white or colour photographs, or colour transparencies. Two copies of the article should be sent.

References (Footnotes)

Contributors may use either of the standard conventions:

(a) in text citation of sources (b) citation in footnotes

(a) in-text citation. Give author's surname, date of publication and page references (if any) in parentheses in the body of the text, e.g. (Falassi, 1980, 114). Where a second or subsequent work by a particular author in the same year is cited, references should be distinguished by letters (a, b, c, etc) placed after the date. A complete list of references cited, arranged alphabetically by author's surname, should be typed double-spaced at the end of the article in the form:

Falassi, A. 1980, *Folklore by the Fireside: Text and Context of the Tuscan Veglia* (Austin, Texas)

Give place of publication, not the publisher. Titles of books, articles and journals should be in the form of the examples in these notes.

(b) citation in footnotes

References should be given in notes, numbered consecutively through the typescript with raised numbers. Type the notes double-spaced on separate pages at the end of the article. Full publication details should be given at first mention, a short form thereafter:

John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the landscape: the Rural Poor in English Painting*, 1730–1840 (Cambridge, 1980), p. 89.

D. Kramer (ed), *Critical Approaches to Hardy's Fiction* (London, 1979), pp. 17–18

B. Reay, 'The last rising of the agricultural labourers: the battle in Bossenden Wood, 1838', *History Workshop*, 26 (1988), pp. 81–2

Short forms:

Barrell, *Dark Side*. p. 90
Kramer (ed), *Hardy's Fiction*. pp. 175–6
Reay, 'The last rising', p. 82

Quotations

Quotations should be in single inverted commas, with double used only for quotations within quotations. Quotations of more than five lines should be set off from the text and indented. Type double-spaced.

Tables and illustrations

These should be provided on separate sheets. Contributors should provide full details of the illustration source and obtain permission to reproduce copyright material.

SOCIAL HISTORY IN MUSEUMS

CONTENTS

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